



EPISODE 24 - The Power of Functional Nutrition

Transcript

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Life was really rough several years ago. So many things were happening outside my control. I felt like I was in the middle of a storm with no clear direction, no exit, and no where to anchor myself. The ground felt super weak and I felt super vulnerable - which can be hard for me. At the time, I worked with a dietitian who's one of the calmest people I know. I use to think if she was an animal, she'd be a deer. She walks gracefully and nothing seemed to bothered her. Such an incorrect assumption because of course she was stressed and overwhelmed by life from time to time - who isn't. It's part of the human experience. But, everyone handles and deals with stressful and overwhelming situations differently. One Monday morning, we were all in the dietitians office (and let me tell you, this office was small - like you really got to know each other because you borderline had to share chairs with each. In fact, I definitely had to do that many times). But this one morning everyone was talking about what they did that weekend. One of the dietitians was so excited to share that her and her husband learned transcendental meditation over the weekend. I listened but didn't put too much thought into it. That's when my really calm dietitian friend, the one who'd be a deer if she was an animal said, "I've been doing transcendental meditation since I was 5. My dad taught me". I was super surprised and asked, "Is that why you're so calm". While I'm sure her underlying personality is to be calmer and more chill, she said without a doubt, meditating her whole life has absolutely helped her cope with stressful situations. At that point, I wanted and needed to know more. So I looked into transcendental meditation, found someone local who teaches it, and made an appointment to go to a free class. That's where I learned more about it and what the next steps were to officially learn transcendental meditation. It's called TM for short. I was really surprised and learned that many creative people use TM to help clear their mind and allow their creative juices to flow. But not only that, it helps them stay calm and focused with a busy and overwhelming schedule. I was in. At that time in my life, I was desperate and willing to try anything natural to help me feel calm and less overwhelmed. Well, not anything. Drugs, alcohol or anything that altered my mind were out. And I thought, "What's the worst that can happen? I have some quiet moments with my thoughts?" Didn't sound so bad to me especially since the biggest turn off for me with meditation was the idea of having to completely silence my mind. People who can completely silence their mind amaze me. That's impossible for someone like me. I always feel like I have thousands of thoughts running through my mind at any given time. But with TM, you're allowed to have thoughts. I figure if I can still have thoughts then count me in. So I learned and let me tell you, meditation has had a huge impact on me both my mental health and physical health. That is when I do it. Full transparency...finding time can be hard especially when I'm constantly working and run a tight schedule but even a couple minutes has a huge impact.

While it was a new practice for me, there's nothing new about meditation and functional medicine. Meditation has been estimated to be used since 5000 BC but only recently in the 1960's was it recognized to have medical benefits and started to be researched in the Western world. The point here is that meditation has been around and has been known to have numerous health benefits - both mentally and physically. And we continue to see more and more traction on how complementary and integrative therapy have a valuable role in managing our health and fighting disease.

[Music and Intro]

Well, hello there. I'm so excited for this episode because it's super near and dear to me. This episode is gonna be a little different because I have a story to share. This story is one of determination, dedication, and a serious fight to live.

I want to give a huge shout out to another amazing new RD. Analia Garcia. She just passed the RD Exam and is a new RD in this fabulous community. Analia took her time studying and did things at her own pace. She was the last person in her internship cohort to take and pass the exam. She didn't let that pressure influence her. She knew she needed to study and take the exam at her own pace. So if you're like Analia and feeling like you need more time or need to do things at your own pace, give yourself that space. Everyone has their own journey and their own story. A huge congratulations to Analia who can now use those hard earned RD (or RDN) credentials and did it at her own pace. So happy and proud of you.

Ok. So in this episode, I want to talk a little about functional therapies because for one, it's gaining traction and growing in popularity and two, I've seen and FELT the positive benefits personally so I want to share what I know with you. As a dietitian and a human being, I've used and experienced the healing benefits of nutrition. The Western world is known to focus on symptoms. Kind of like an "I have a pill for that" approach. You have a symptom, and we treat the symptom. We don't always look at the cause of symptoms. The mentality is to quickly fix the symptom so you can move on with your life. Except that doesn't fix the root of the problem.

Functional medicine looks at the whole person instead and tries to get to the cause of the symptoms or the underlying disease, not just managing the symptoms with a prescription. Instead of just looking at one symptom, this approach looks at the many symptoms someone might be having and what the root of all the symptoms is. Functional nutrition looks at how nutrition - how certain foods and the nutrients they provide - help address symptoms and promote optimal cell functioning. So again it's looking at the body as a whole instead of dealing with individual symptoms and systems. There might be imbalances in the body that could be improved and

managed with nutrition. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health is under the National Institute of Health and recognizes many different approaches and strategies to promote health from using herbs and meditation, yoga and traditional healing practices. There's free trainings available which I recommend you check out. I'll put a link in the show notes. It not only will help you learn more about this topic if it pops up on the exam but is helpful information to have as part of your toolbox.

We're learning more about more about how the gut microbiome not only affects the way we feel in our abdominal area, but also impacts our mental health and could be the cause of many other conditions. For most of my life, I've had a sensitive stomach. I was the kid who got tummy aches on the regular. Sometimes they were legit tummy aches but often times, they were uh-oh pains. You know that uh-oh feeling that somethings just not right. I'd be worried about something, scared of something, or would think back and beat myself about something I said or maybe something I did that day I wished I hadn't done. So I'd sit and worry and get tummy aches. My mom eventually learned whenever I told her I had a tummy ache to ask, "are you worried about something". Often times I was but many times, I just ate something that didn't agree with me. I remember as a little girl, we'd go bike riding as a family to a local dairy farm for fresh, farm made ice cream. Sounds delicious right. I mean fresh ice cream made right on the farm is delicious.

My siblings and parents would excitedly order their ice cream and I'd ask for a bottled water. Without fail. EVERY. SINGLE. TIME. They'd look at me then look at my mom and she'd say, "yep, she wants a water". Or when they'd say, "You sure you don't want the cookies and cream ice cream. It's my favorite", I'd simple say, "No thank you. Just a water please". Inside I'd be thinking "It sure does look good" but I knew if I ate the ice cream, I'd pay for it. My stomach would cramp right up and I'd be in misery for the rest of the day. As I've gotten older, I'm able to tolerate small amounts of ice cream. I also learned I have Irritable Bowel Syndrome and some foods don't work for me. I also carry the gene for celiac disease so I've cut gluten out of my diet. Very hard and painful for me. I'm a proud carbaholic but not all food works the same for everyone. I've gone to gastroenterologists who brush off the idea of leaky gut and are quick to offer me medication to help manage the symptoms of my IBS but after receiving the same approach, I decided I wanted a different approach. So I went to a Naturopath and decided to see what they had to say.

I truly believe there's other ways to look at health and nutrition than to just take a prescription and manage a symptom. But I'm not gonna lie. At times, the thought of taking a pill to make all my symptoms go away is so much easier than making dietary changes.

So let's talk a little about complementary and alternative medicine, which is also known as CAM. These complementary approaches look at how lifestyle plays a big role in not only disease development and progression but also disease prevention. This approach looks beyond symptom management and gets to the underlying reason and cause of symptoms and also recognizes that the mind, body and spirit are connected.

They must be treated as such when managing and promoting health. And it incorporates treatment that a lot of people use on a regular basis. Chiropractic treatments and acupuncture are examples of CAM. They're pretty mainstream. But they can be used for things other than what they're typically thought of by the general public. So what do I mean by that? Well, let me give you an example. I'll talk about the lactation world for a minute. Some babies are born and have a very tight latch or struggle to breastfeed on one side. It could be due to how they were carried in utero. Chiropractors have been able to do a slight adjustment which significantly improves how the baby breastfeeds. As a lactation consultant, I'm not trained in the area of chiropractics but it's an alternative treatment and approach, that may significantly help.

So I mentioned a little bit ago about how functional nutrition uses nutrition to improve cell functioning and to manage many symptoms that could all be tied to one condition instead of just managing each symptom individually. Years ago, I was asked to give a presentation to a group of managers and healthcare workers at my work. The subject I was supposed to focus on was nutrition and health. Super huge topic and really vague. I took a slightly different approach and focused on longevity by discussing the Blue Zones. Now, I'm not gonna talk too much about the Blue Zones because that talk was a hour long and is something I also talk about in one of the courses I teach. I love it and find it so fascinating. But to summarize it, there's 5 Blue Zones on the planet. A Blue Zone is where there are a large number of centenarians - or people who live to 100. So amazing isn't it. And these people aren't just surviving. They're LIVING to be 100 years old and beyond. Which is really remarkable. As of the time of this recording, the average life expectancy in the United States is around 79 years old. Females tend to outlive males. So living to be 100 years old is incredible. When I think about functional nutrition, the Blue Zones always come to mind. Because...these communities have used this approach to live to 100 before we put labels and names on it. So the 5 Blue Zones are Ikaria, Greece, Okinawa Japan, Sardinia Italy, Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica and amazingly, there's one place in the United States which is Loma Linda, California. Each of these areas are unique but there are some commonalities amongst them all which are: moderate alcohol consumption, regular physical activity, stress reduction, having a life purpose, engagement in spirituality or religion, and strong social and family engagement. And they largely follow a plant-based diet. When you look at this and analyze it further, each of these address the mind, body, and spirit. If you don't know much about the Blue Zones, I highly recommend you learn more. Check out the show notes. The stories from people living in the Blue Zones are really fascinating.

The whole concept that food is healing and medicinal is nothing new. Hippocrates first said in 400 BC, “Let medicine be thy food and let food be thy medicine”. My dear friend Michelle certainly knew this and is an amazing example and proof that food is medicine. Food heals. This is a story of determination, dedication, and a mother's serious fight to live. And I dedicate this episode to my dearest friend Michelle. I first met Michelle in 2001 when I moved to California from Canada to study nutrition. We went through the program together and were immediate friends. It was organic and so easy being her friend. And whenever things got rough, I called Michelle. She always and I mean always knew exactly what to say. Never judgmental, always logical, practical and would kindly correct me if my mind was taking me in the wrong direction. And as an empath, that's a regular thing for me. I knew on Friday nights she'd be folding laundry so I could definitely catch her on Friday's for a good, uninterrupted conversation. One day in January 2011, she shared some news that is a permanent and core memory for me. Like in the movie Inside Out. The memory ball is there and is still bright. She'd been diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. No family history and the genetics testing was negative for a breast cancer gene. I felt instantly sick. How could this happen? She was so young and healthy. She had young children. There's just no way this was happening. We talked and she shared what the action plan was. First step was to meet with her oncologist and start chemotherapy. Now, Michelle knew about nutrition. She got her bachelors degree in nutrition and believed nutrition and food are medicine. So she got to work and did her research. She bought a juicer and filled her fridge with fresh, organic fruits and vegetables. And she started juicing. I asked her to show me what she did and how she juiced. She came over with her juicer, had some delicious recipes with her to share and showed me her method. I was hooked and started juicing too.

I asked her if I could share her story. She said of course but told me I need to emphasize two things. First, I need to make sure everyone understands that juicing is not a cleanse - at least not for her purpose and 2), each juice has to have 2 vegetables and 1 fruit. She was juicing for the health and medicinal properties in food. And she'd be the first to tell you juicing is not a meal replacement. There's no fiber or protein in juice. So you have to eat food too. And just like she was getting traditional medicine like chemotherapy and eventually surgery, she used food as a form of medicine. Functional medicine - to help her boost her immune system so she could fight the cancer that invaded her body. Uninvited. Ugh. I hate cancer. And the treatment for cancer, chemotherapy in particular, is hard on the body. It kills good cells too. And she got all the ugly side effects.

She had a burning, excruciating gastric ulcer. She did her research and learned that cabbage was helpful for healing the gut. So she juiced cabbage and almost instantly, the pain was gone and so was the ulcer. She'd tell you it was the nastiest juice she ever made but it worked. Her ulcer was gone.

Another time she went to the doctor for a check-up before getting chemotherapy and they told her she couldn't get chemo as scheduled because her platelets were too low. She asked the doctor what would help raise her platelets. They said time. That wasn't an acceptable answer to her. She was determined to get her scheduled chemo treatment. So again, she researched foods that could help her platelets and came across beets. And that's what she did. She juiced beets everyday and showed up for chemo. They checked her levels and sure enough, her platelets were high enough to get her treatment. The doctors were confused and asked her what she did. She told them she juiced beets. She had an incredibly supportive team but she knew they didn't quite believe in the juicing thing. But it was working for her and the levels were good. It was helping her.

Now, I juice when I can. Not everyday. It's hard to juice everyday. And it's time consuming. But this girl juiced 3 times a day. Every. Single. Day. I mean, that's serious dedication and determination. Many times, she'd be told, "Well Michelle. Whatever you're doing is working so keep it up."

And she continued to do so for 8 1/2 years. She not only studied nutrition, she believed that nutrition was healing and medicinal AND she defied all odds. She showed cancer what's up and proved how incredibly important and healing food and nutrition is. Nutrition kept her immune system strong so that she could fight the cancer that took over her body. Unfortunately, my dear friend left this world after her 8 1/2 year battle with cancer and not a day goes by that I don't miss her or think about her. She was an amazing mother, wife, daughter, sister, niece, and friend and I'm SO incredibly lucky our paths crossed. I got to really know her and she has forever impacted my life. And she had the BEST, I mean, the BEST laugh. I can still hear it. I hope it never fades. She had the most positive outlook and truly believed and had faith she'd win the battle until the very end. While her life was cut way too short, she stood up to cancer with every single juice she made and was able to spend many more years with her loved ones than she would've if she hadn't juiced. I truly believe that and so did she.

Food is medicine. Food is healing and I've been hearing more and more about people combining traditional treatment with complementary and alternative medicine approaches with really incredible outcomes. Thanks so much for listening. If you're getting ready to take the exam, I wish you the absolute best on the exam. You got this my friend. You can do hard things. Get plenty of rest. Drink lots of water and give your body the nutrition it needs. Stay on top of your study game. There's no limits to achieving the success you so deeply desire. Until next time.

[Music and Outro]