



Episode 262: Dr. Weil on Integrative Medicine,  
Reducing Inflammation & Most Important Factors  
for Health

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Katie: Hello and welcome to the "Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from [wellnessmama.com](http://wellnessmama.com). And in this episode, I go deep with Dr. Andrew Weil about his multi-decade career in integrative medicine, what he's learned along the way, things he thinks are changing in integrative medicine and how to maintain lifelong health in a constantly changing world. If you are not familiar with him, Dr. Andrew Weil, M.D is a world-renowned leader and pioneer in the field of integrative medicine combining a Harvard education with a lifetime of practicing natural and preventative medicine. He's also the founder and director of the Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson where he serves as Clinical Professor of Medicine and Professor of Public Health and also as the Lovell-Jones Professor of Integrative Rheumatology.

He is the bestselling author of 15 books on the topics of healthy living. He's the editorial director of his own website, [drweil.com](http://drweil.com), founder of the Weil Foundation and founder of a restaurant you may have heard of, True Foods Kitchen as well as the company, [matcha.com](http://matcha.com) which we will have a discount code in the episode for. So all that to say, he is extremely qualified and has more experience than almost anyone else in the industry and I think you'll find some interesting gems and advice in this episode. Dr. Weil, welcome to the podcast. Thanks for being here.

Dr. Weil: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

Katie: I'm so excited to speak with you today because you have been a pioneer in the field of integrative medicine for years. In fact, you were one of my early influencers when I started trying to find my own path back to health after being diagnosed with Hashimoto's. And I feel like you were a voice of natural and integrative medicine before it was nearly as popular as it is today. So I'm curious, what sparked your early interest?

Dr. Weil: You know, I think I had that interest before I went to medical school. I have a lifelong interest in plants. Something I got from my mother that she got from her mother that led me to be a botany major as an undergraduate and started a career interest in medicinal plants. As long as I can remember, I was interested in the mind and how the mind interacted with the body. I began reading about alternative medicine while I was in college. Then I went to medical school and when I finished my clinical training, I felt they really didn't wanna practice the kind of medicine I'd learned because I saw it do too much harm and also I learned nothing about how to keep people well.

So I always thought it was the main job of physicians. So I dropped out of medicine for a number of years, made my living as a writer and found ways to travel around the world and look at healing practices in other cultures. Settled in Arizona in 1973 and put together my own system, which at first I called Natural and Preventive Medicine and then I came to call Integrative Medicine.

Katie: Yeah. Like I said, you were one of the early pioneers there. So I'd love to kind of just go through some of the basics. I think a lot of people like I mentioned are pretty familiar this idea, but for anyone who isn't, what are some of the core principles of the idea of integrative medicine?

Dr. Weil: First of all, it does not reject conventional medicine. You know, if I were in a serious car accident, I wouldn't wanna first go to a chiropractor or a shaman or an herbalist. I would go to a trauma center and get put back together. But as soon as I could, I would use other methods to speed up the healing process. So we use conventional medicine when it's appropriate. But integrative medicine, first of all, emphasizes the body's innate potential for healing. I think that's missing from conventional medicine. There's very little about health and the healing system of the body. And I think many people have little confidence in that. Also, integrative medicine emphasizes the whole person, not just the physical body. Also, you know, the mind and spirit.

We really think that the physician-patient relationship is very important to healing. That's one of the problems with medicine today is that there's so little time allowed for that. And then we are willing to use any treatments, wherever they come from as long as they're not gonna cause harm and show reasonable evidence of efficacy.

Katie: That makes sense. And I think like it's exactly the solution to a lot of the things we are seeing in society. I know, for me personally with Hashimoto's, it took me years and a number of doctors before I got a diagnosis because they were just looking at lab results or looking at very specific numbers. And it seems like integrative medicine really addresses this in a different way.

Dr. Weil: Yes. And I think we have far more to draw on than conventional doctors have, many treatment options, many ways of analyzing health and illness. I think one of the reasons we're in such a crisis with healthcare is that we're trying to manage these chronic diseases that are often rooted in lifestyle choices with methods that are just not appropriate for them. And this is why our costs are so high.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And at the same time, it seems like there's no denying that we're just objectively facing a lot more negative inputs than even our grandparents did with just what we're facing in our water supply, our food supply, and our environment. So it makes sense to me that we do need to start taking a proactive approach. I'm curious, your take on that in general, just even how much that's changed since you started practicing.

Dr. Weil: Well, I think there are so many things that are different. One that you didn't mention is how devices affect us. You know, people spend so much time on devices and screens and I think that is really undermining mental and emotional health. There've always been environmental issues, but I think there probably are more environmental pressures on us today. I think the body has tremendous resilience, but you also wanna learn how to take as many precautions as you can.

In terms of stress, people have always experienced stress, I think it's always important to learn methods to...and practice them regularly to neutralize the harmful effects of stress. There are diseases that are epidemic today that simply weren't there when I was in medical school things like ADHD and autism to the extent that it is diagnosed today. Chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, you know, none of these really existed when I was studying medicine.

Katie: Yeah, for sure. And all the statistics seem to indicate that these things are still very much drastically on the rise. And I know that integrative medicine very much looks at the whole person and the very specific case. In general, are there things that tend to be beneficial across the board like blanket advice that almost anyone could benefit from?

Dr. Weil: Well, with nutrition, I think the most important piece of advice is to stop eating refined, processed, and manufactured food. It's that simple. That's what's really doing us in. That's simple steps. Second, you wanna be physically active throughout life. It doesn't necessarily mean running marathons or working out with trainers, but you wanna move your body and you may change the form of physical activity at different stages of your life. I think it's really important to get good rest and sleep, to learn and practice methods of neutralizing harmful effects of stress, to not engage in harmful habits, smoking being the number one.

I think having fun and having relationships that are rewarding and being socially connected, using selectively, the best of preventive medicine in terms of screening for diseases and tests and making sure you're okay in that area. That's some very basic information. And also, I put a great deal of emphasis on breathing. I think many people have never been taught how to breathe or how important breathing is to general health.

Katie: Yeah, that's a great point. I love that you brought up community and that social engagement aspect because to circle back to devices, I worry that that's one of the largest things that we're losing through our overuse of devices and this false feeling of connectivity through them is we're losing actual social interaction and connection. I mean, you could probably speak to it much better than I could, but the research I've seen is that truly that is one of the most vital things we need in life. It's more important than exercise. Human interaction, in general, is more important than so many other factors and we're losing that.

Dr. Weil: You know, some years ago the MacArthur Foundation did a study of what they called successful aging. They identified a population of old people who they felt had aged successfully to see what they had in common. And the two factors that stood out overwhelmingly were maintenance of physical activity through life and maintenance of social and intellectual connections. And they overshadowed, as you said, things like whether people, the diet that they had or whether they took nutritional supplements.

Katie: Wow, that's really staggering. But I mean, it makes sense and I love that that's what you consider a core part. Also on the note of breathing, that seems so logical because in general, we take in more air than we take in water or food. And you're right, most people never give it a second thought because it's an automatic process. But what does that mean? How do we breathe correctly?

Dr. Weil: Well, there's a whole science of breath work and I think the simplest advice I can give you is you wanna make breathing deeper, quieter, slower, and more regular. So whenever you think about it, you wanna move it in those directions. And then there are specific ways that you can use the breath to regulate emotional states, for example, to nip anxiety reactions in the bud to help you sleep, to deal with physical stress. There's one breathing technique that I teach, I call the 4-7-8 breath and if you just Google "4-7-8 breath," you'll find it. There's YouTube's of me demonstrating it. It's in all of my books and website. Very simple. It takes no time, no equipment and remarkable effects both physically and emotionally.

Katie: Yeah, I found your video of that actually years ago and it's my go-to if I have trouble even falling asleep.

Dr. Weil: Great, me too.

Katie: Yeah, it's awesome. I also wanna go deep on the subject of diet because I know that that's only one part of a lifestyle and I have become much less dogmatic. When I first was trying to heal, I had to be relatively strict with food until I got better and so I was largely just vegetables and protein. But I love your approach to the anti-inflammatory diet and I love that it kind of flies in the face of all of these very trendy dogmatic diets of you know, getting rid of entire macro groups. So talk us through the anti-inflammatory diet and why you think it has so much value.

Dr. Weil: Sure. Some years ago I really became interested in the hypothesis that chronic low-level inflammation is the root cause of most of the serious chronic diseases that kill and disable people prematurely. That's true of cardiovascular disease, which begins as inflammation in blood vessels, of neurodegenerative diseases like Parkinson's and ALS. Also and Alzheimer's and also cancer because anything

that upregulates inflammation also stimulates cells to divide more frequently and increases the risk of malignant transformation. So the good news is that if all these diseases that we used to think had nothing to do with each other have a common cause, then there's a common strategy for dealing with them, which is to contain inappropriate inflammation.

There's many influences on inflammation, but diet is a big one and that's one that we have potentially total control over. The mainstream North American diet is proinflammatory. It gives us the wrong kinds of fats, the wrong kinds of carbs and not enough of the protective elements that are mostly found in fruits, vegetables, herbs, spices, beverages. So I designed an anti-inflammatory diet. I based it on the Mediterranean Diet because we have so much evidence of that being a very healthy way to eat. And I tweaked it by adding Asian influences such as green tea, mushrooms, turmeric, ginger. And I have an anti-inflammatory diet pyramid. This is not a difficult way of eating to follow. It allows a lot of pleasure in food. I believe that eating fundamentally is a source of pleasure and you don't wanna take that away.

Katie: Yeah, that's such an important point. And as we're speaking, I'm actually sitting here drinking a tea with turmeric, Chaga and Cordyceps. I'm a big fan of the superfood mushrooms as well and I know those have gained popularity a lot in recent years. I'm curious, what medicinal types of mushrooms and superfood mushrooms you integrate and what you use them for?

Dr. Weil: Well, I often recommend that people take some of the mushrooms that have cancer protective effects and increase resistance to infection. And that includes things like Reishi, Maitake, Shiitake, Oyster mushrooms. Lion's mane is one that I recommend frequently. It has a unique nerve growth factor in it. And I think anyone that has nerve damage, nerve issues and may also increase cognitive function. Reishi has an anti-inflammatory effect that's very useful. So I think many of these Asian mushrooms are worth experimenting with taking, probably best in combination. There're many products on the market. You can also add some of these to your diet.

Katie: Yeah, and I mean, on the note of diet, I think we also have to mention that you believe so strongly in these principles that you've actually founded restaurants that are wildly successful because people I think are starting to understand the importance of true real foods. But you have an entire line of restaurants now. Is that right based on this diet?

Dr. Weil: I came up with a concept for a restaurant based on the anti-inflammatory diet. It's called "True Food Kitchen." I partnered with a restaurateur in Arizona and we now have 29 of these around the country and they're very successful. And the food is delicious and you know, it is first and foremost delicious visually attractive food that happens to be healthy for you. And I think one reason it's successful is there's something there for everyone. So people who are gluten-free, who don't eat meat, people who are vegans, meat eaters, you can all find something there. And the food is just delicious and it follows the principles of the anti-inflammatory diet.

Katie: I wish there was one close to me. I've eaten at True Food Kitchen before and it's amazing.

Dr. Weil: Where are you?

Katie: I'm in Florida on the Panhandle, so not in a very populated area, unfortunately. But I travel a lot.

Dr. Weil: Well, the closest one to you is Jacksonville.

Katie: Okay, that's not terrible. I can definitely make that trip. I'm curious, I'm always just fascinated by especially people who have had as much education and experience. What does your actual diet look like on a daily basis?

Dr. Weil: It's exactly what I teach. I eat mostly fish and vegetables. I don't eat other animal products except for...I eat some high-quality cheese and occasional yogurt. I eat omega-3 rich fish. I like Japanese food a lot and Mediterranean food. I do not avoid carbohydrates, but I try to be moderate about them. I don't eat much bread. I eat a lot of vegetables. I eat fruit moderately when it's in season. I don't drink any sugary beverages. My preferred drinks are water and matcha green tea and sometimes red wine or sake.

Katie: I love that. That seems very balanced and I guess kind of the complete opposite end of the spectrum as eating a good diet. I'm curious what your take is on fasting because various forms of fasting have become very popular in different ways lately. And I'm curious if you see it as having a place in preventative or integrative medicine.

Dr. Weil: I do. And I think especially now, there is so much interest in and research on intermittent fasting. I think there's a lot there. I think a problem is to find a way of doing it that works for you, whether this is a couple of days a week or you compress eating within a certain number of hours. So there's many styles of doing fasting, but I think it's really worth experimenting with. And especially for people who have metabolic syndrome, who have weight issues, who may have high risks for diabetes. I think that intermittent fasting can be very, very helpful and may also extend life and reduce risks of disease.

Katie: Got it. And on the topic, I know like that they have had some studies showing positive, for instance, microbiome changes both from a clean diet and from fasting. And I know you've written about and spoken a lot about the microbiome. So I'm curious kind of being on the front line of this research and just always being involved in this for so many years. What do you see as the latest research when it comes to the microbiome and how do we practically implement that?

Dr. Weil: Well, this is, I think one of the greatest revolutions in medical thinking. When I was in medical school, I was taught that the colon has a lot of bacteria in it, which help in digestion, but really nothing beyond that. Anyone who ate yogurt for health reasons or took acidophilus supplements was considered a health nut. And now we are realizing that the population of microbiome, a population of microorganisms that we have in our GI track really seem to determine our interactions with the environment and not only are critical to physical

health but also to mental and emotional wellbeing. And I think it's very important to understand that the human gut microbiome in our population has changed drastically in the past 50 years because of four factors.

One is the use of antibiotics which wreak havoc on microbiome and should only be used if they're absolutely necessary. Second is the shift to eating industrial food the refined, processed, manufactured food that I mentioned earlier, which promotes the growth of other kinds of organisms than the ones you probably want. Third is the incredible rise in cesarean delivery. Now one in three births in this country, which I find horrifying and most of these are not done for medical reasons. When a baby is born vaginally, the organisms that colonize the gut at birth come from the birth canal. When a baby is born by c-section, the organisms come from the mother's skin. A totally different population. And the fourth factor is the declining breastfeeding. Breast milk contains unusual carbohydrates that are indigestible and you wonder why are they there. They're there because they're prebiotics that promote the growth of desirable bacteria at the expense of others.

So if you look at those four factors together, I think it's obvious that the microbiome, gut microbiome in our population has changed drastically. And I would bet money that that will turn out to be the cause of the rise in allergy, rise in lack of immunity, in ADHD, in gluten sensitivity, probably a great many other conditions. So research interest here is like just hot at the moment. In terms of what you can do to maintain and promote optimum health of the microbiome, I think the first is to eat foods that are rich in the prebiotics that feed the desirable microorganisms and that's things like fiber-rich foods particularly. And secondly is to eat fermented foods on a regular basis. Things like sauerkraut, kimchi, pickles, fermented dairy products, fermented soy products. And these are often very easy to make at home. They're cheap, they're easy, they're tasty and I think they're much better for your gut microbiome than taking probiotic supplements.

Katie: Yeah, I agree. Do you think with all of these, like you mentioned those four factors and then of course everything that we're facing in the environment and in food every day, do you think it is actually possible to undo that damage if there's a child who maybe came into the world without the best gut bacteria and was on antibiotics? Do you think it's undoable at this point?

Dr. Weil: No, I don't. I think everything is doable. First of all, for babies born by c-section, I think there are products now available that you can give an infant at birth or shortly after birth orally that can provide the desirable microorganisms. And secondly, I think by avoiding antibiotics whenever possible and shifting diet in the direction that favors the growth of the beneficial microorganisms, I think you can make changes.

Katie: Yeah. I mean most of the people listening are moms and I think antibiotics are a tough issue. I have six kids and none of them have ever actually needed antibiotics. So I know it's possible to largely avoid them, but I also know for parents that's a really tough thing. If your child is sick, you wanna just give them a solution. But at least on the research I'm seeing the majority of things kids have, and you can speak to this as a doctor, will resolve on their own. And certainly things like ear infections, they're not even recommending antibiotics anymore. Is that right?

Dr. Weil: No, I totally agree with you there. And I would say my gut estimate is that antibiotics are not needed in about 90% of the instances in which they're now prescribed. I think that information is beginning to get



around to physicians. I hope it's getting around to the general public. There certainly has been enough publicity about it. You know, and other issues associated with that is the antibiotics that get into us from animal foods, from animals that are raised on antibiotics and antibiotics are also used on the soil in growing agricultural crops to promote growth. So they get into us in a lot of ways and you really wanna be careful about them. They wreak havoc on the microbiome.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I've written about that, not from the doctor's perspective, but just from the mom's perspective. And I think as moms become more aware of this, hopefully, society will change because we're the ones on the front lines making that choice for our kids. So I think moms have a lot of power here. I wanna circle back to something that you mentioned before about the influence of Asian foods and especially green tea because Japanese culture has a special place in my heart. My husband's a black belt in a form of Japanese martial arts and it's on my bucket list to get there. I know you've been there and you've studied it and you have a unique perspective on the benefits. So talk to us about the influence of Asian foods and specifically about green tea.

Dr. Weil: Well, I've been to Japan many times. I'm very impressed with the diet there. The Japanese have had the highest longevity on the planet and very low incidents of hormonally driven cancers, which I think is dietary related. You know, the traditional diet is very high in vegetables, land vegetables, sea vegetables, great many fish, high in omega-3 fatty acids, low in sugar, low in meat at least traditionally. All that's changed greatly. High in the use of whole soy foods. Green tea is the preferred beverage there. And Japanese green tea, ordinary brewed tea called Sencha is delicious. And most of the green tea that I see served in this country comes nowhere near the quality of Japanese green tea. There's one form of green tea, matcha, which is the powdered tea that traditionally was used in tea ceremonies, but now has become very popular here.

I first met up with this when I was 17 and went to Japan. This was in 1959 and lived with Japanese families. And on the second night I was there, the host mother of my family took me next door to her neighbor who was a practitioner of tea ceremony. And I was captivated by first of all the color of this powdered tea. It was such a brilliant, vibrant green. And then the bamboo whisk that's used to whisk it into a froth in a bowl, I thought was just a marvel of craftsmanship, not to mention the taste and flavor of the stuff. So when I came back to the states, nobody had ever heard of matcha and it was unavailable here. And whenever I went to Japan I would bring it back and turn people onto it. And you know, I'm quite surprised to suddenly see it gaining popularity here in the past eight, 10 years.

But so much of the matcha that's available here is a very low quality and many people have never tasted good matcha and think it's bitter, not very appealing. So I started a company, got the URL [matcha.com](http://matcha.com). The company is Matcha Kari and I import very good matcha from a town called Uji, which is outside of Kyoto and is the region that's considered to produce the best matcha in Japan. And we have a number of different qualities and accessories, so I would urge people to go to [matcha.com](http://matcha.com). And we can offer your listeners a discount. There's a discount code that they can use if they go to the website, which is Wellness 15.

Katie: That's awesome. Thank you for the discount. I've become a huge fan of matcha as well and certainly like you mentioned the color is brilliant, but also it tastes so good. And I know in America we drink typically more coffee than tea, but I feel like at least it's worth switching up even if you're a coffee drinker because you can

get the caffeine. Matcha does contain a decent amount of caffeine, right? But it also has all these antioxidants. What are some of the other properties that you feel are so beneficial in matcha?

Dr. Weil: The stimulation from matcha is very different from that of coffee. And I think some of the reason is that matcha has an amino acid in it called L-Theanine, which has relaxing effects. So I think the combination of L-Theanine and the caffeine in matcha produces a state for most people of alert relaxation, very different from the jangling stimulation of coffee. I think that is a big plus for matcha. Also, the health benefits of green tea in general and matcha, in particular, are very well documented. There is research showing that coffee has health benefits also, but I think we have much more information on improved cardiovascular health, reduced risk of cancer, many other beneficial effects of green tea. So I really recommend getting to know good green tea and matcha in particular.

Katie: Yeah. And another thing you mentioned in passing is that you love the ritual of the matcha and how it's made in such a beautiful way and it's consumed consciously. I haven't been there like I said, but I wonder if that's something else that's a good lesson to take from Japan is from what I've read at least they eat much more consciously, slowly, not in a car, not on the go. Do you feel like that's part of the health benefit as well?

Dr. Weil: I do. And you know, that's also something that you see in countries like Italy and France where people linger over meals and take great pleasure in them and they don't approach the table as if it's a minefield where you make one mistake, you go to nutritional hell. You mentioned earlier the kinds of restricted diets that people are on today. I remember a cartoon in "The New Yorker" several years ago by Roz Chast that was called "The Last Thanksgiving," which was kind of a parody. We've all seen images of the first Thanksgiving of pilgrims and Indians sitting around the table that's heaped with all this wonderful food from the new world. This cartoon showed 12 people with very glum expressions sitting around a completely empty table and over each head was a balloon one was marked doesn't eat sugar, gluten sensitive, vegan, can't tolerate dairy and there was nothing to eat.

About a month ago I was in Okinawa. This is the fourth time I've been there. And I went there originally to study the longevity there because Okinawa has the highest number of centenarians in the world. And this time, I sat around with a group of centenarians and people I was with, asked them about their secrets of long life and all of them, the first words that all of them said were, "Eat everything." Now, I don't think they meant eat fast food, which is becoming more and more popular in Okinawa. But I think the idea of eating everything and not throwing a macronutrient under the bus is very sensible. And I really worry about the kind of crazy dietary restrictions I see people following today.

Katie: Yeah. And interestingly, one of the foods you mentioned that they eat commonly there is one that gets thrown out pretty often here, which is soy. And I know that in the U.S. it's often grown in pretty poor ways and a lot of things are sprayed on it. But I'm curious your take on soy in general because it's certainly a controversial thing when it comes to nutrition.

Dr. Weil: I think there's a great deal of misinformation and disinformation about soy. I think it is very desirable to eat moderately and regularly whole soy foods. Whole soy foods are edamame, soy nut, soy milk, tofu,

tempeh. I'm not talking about fake hotdogs where the first ingredient is isolated soy protein. I'm not talking about soy supplements. I'm not talking about functional foods that have elements of soy in them. We have no information about the safety or benefits of that. But I think the epidemiology of soy consumption in China, in Japan, Korea is very reassuring. In those countries, people eat whole soy foods really every day from infancy to old age. And the rates of hormonally driven cancers are much lower than they are in this country and I think that's the protective effect of soy.

I think the earlier in life that whole soy foods are introduced, the greater the protection against breast cancer in women and prostate cancer in men. And your concern about unhealthy aspects of soy, you know, if you get real lucky enough to live in a country where an organic label has meaning. If soy products have an organic label on them, there's no concern about pesticides or GMO.

Katie: Yeah, that's a great point.

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Katie: You also mentioned sea vegetables. Do you think those come into play and serve an important protective part of that diet as well?

Dr. Weil: Well, they're highly consumed in Japan also, almost at every meal. I did see one study that suggested that the Japanese have as a result of the different microbiome are able to digest and process sea vegetables in ways that many of us can't. So they may be getting more nutrition from them than we can. Nonetheless, I think it is desirable to get to know them and experiment with using them.

Katie: Got it. Okay. So to circle back to something you mentioned earlier, we talked a little bit about mental health when it came to the gut and its role there. But at least from the group that I hear from, which is largely moms, it seems like mental health struggles are on the rise for sure, especially things like anxiety. What do you think are some of the other factors that really contribute to that and what can people do? Because certainly, I have friends who have been there. It seems like a very difficult thing to break out of.

Dr. Weil: Well, there are so many factors that can influence anxiety states. A very big one today is listening to news or paying attention to news, which makes people very upset. And there's a simple fix for that, which is to just not let as much of it into your life. I think we talked earlier about the effect of devices on us. I think these also often promote anxiety. Overuse of caffeine is a factor. Lack of sleep. If you spent time in the company of people who are anxious, you are likely to be more anxious. I think it is desirable to practice methods of counteracting anxiety and I can't think of anything more effective than the 4-7-8 breath.

You asked about microbiome and I think there is... A lot of these microorganisms in our digestive tract actually make neurotransmitters that affect brain function. And we know that there's a constant two-way conversation between the brain and the gut. The gut has been called the second brain, but it is very possible that the microbiome influences emotional states. And as I said, I think that some of these conditions that have become very common like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, depression, these may have a connection with the microbiome and that by improving the health of the organisms living inside us, we may do very good things for our mental, emotional life.

Katie: That's a great point. Another aspect I wonder, just from the research I've seen, and to touch on another controversial topic is I wonder if vitamin D and sun exposure are playing a role because that's another thing that we've largely...like sun exposure, something we've largely reduced over the last several decades. And I mean, there's some controversy there as far as, you know, skin cancer is still happening and there's, like I said with the skin cancer sun controversy. But I'm curious if you think there is a role with vitamin D and just from your take, how important is sun exposure, not just for the vitamin D but for all of the biochemical reactions to go along with it?

Dr. Weil: I think it's important and I would say sensible sun exposure, which means simply paying attention to the position of the sun in the sky and when it's at a high angle in the sky at times of year or places on the Earth or times of day you wanna take precautions. But otherwise, I think it is good to get exposure to sun and sun exposure is only one aspect of I think exposure to nature. As you know a relatively new concept that's come to being is nature deficit disorder. Not yet an official, you know, psychiatric diagnosis, but I think it's very real. And I think that the disconnection that many people, many young people especially have from nature today is one factor that undermines mental wellbeing.

Katie: I would agree completely. I think it sounds so simple, but one of the best things I've done for my health was to start implementing...just going outside relatively soon after waking up and spending time outside, whether I'm drinking tea or coffee or just having conversations with my kids or my husband, but just being outside in the morning seems to lift my mood so much and it's so simple and it's free.

Dr. Weil: I have two big dogs, Rhodesian Ridgebacks who take me on walks in the morning and I'm in the desert and five minutes away from my house there's a big wild, we call it a washier and usually quite early in the morning is when I did the bell 6:00 a.m. I went to take them off leash and go down there. There's many things flowering at the moment and the temperature is delicious and does very good things for the start of my day.

Katie: I love that. We have a dog as well. And I'm curious, they're wonderful just for their being great companions and for the joy they bring. But I've also seen studies that having pets improves the bacterial balance in your home because they're interacting with other things outside and bringing them in. I'm curious if you have seen that data or what your take is on the benefits.

Dr. Weil: I have seen that data, I believe in it, but here's something you may not know. If you exchange saliva with a dog, I won't go into how that happens, but it happens, that does very good things for your microbiome and in particular, might protect against obesity.

Katie: That's fascinating. Especially for the parents listening because I know that's something like your dog licks your kids' food and you're like, "No, don't eat it". There might actually be...like let the kid eat the food. Don't freak out about it.

Dr. Weil: I'm sure you're aware of the hygiene hypothesis, which I very much believe in. This is the idea that if kids are raised in too clean an environment their immune systems do not get to engage in the kinds of struggles with germs that they need in order to become robustly defensive. So kids raised in too clean environments there're higher rates of asthma, allergies, whereas kids that grow up on farms, who grow up with pets seem to do much better. So I've never believed in the five-second rule or whatever it is. I'll eat anything that drops on the floor and I have no problem with kissing my dogs.

Katie: I love that. I've taken heat before for writing about the fact that I let my kids get dirty, run around barefoot, play in the dirt, play with animals. And I mean certainly, obviously you wanna be sensible about it just like with sun exposure, but I'm totally with you on that. And on that note, just on the note of kids getting sick, I know so many parents who view it as maybe like a failure when their kids get sick. And my thought has always been kids' immune systems are learning how to be immune systems. So, of course, they're gonna have some trials of that and that's good for their immune system. And maybe I'm off on that, but I've always figured mild childhood illnesses are actually a good thing, right?

Dr. Weil: I agree with you and I think that's certainly true for the ordinary kinds of childhood illnesses, you know, colds, ear infections, stuff like that. But you know, there are also childhood diseases that are potentially very serious and I'm not so sure it's a good idea to you know, let your kid get those.

Katie: Oh, for sure. Yeah, that's an important caveat. And it's interesting because I think a lot of the people listening are parents like I mentioned and I would love to hear any other guidelines you have for our kids. Because part of the reason I even started Wellness Mama was that I read in 2006 that statistic that for the first

time in two centuries, the current generation was gonna have a shorter lifespan than their parents. And I was holding my newborn when I read that and I just...like this is not okay. And I know a lot of parents listening, especially those of us who have had health problems and had to recover, we wanna avoid that for our kids. So what would you say are the most important things we can do to give our kids that healthy foundation?

Dr. Weil: Well, I think start with good nutrition and I would breastfeed as long as is possible or comfortable. I think that builds immunity and builds good gut microbiome health. I would give appropriate supplements, for example, vitamin D or omega-3 fatty acids. I think you wanna expose kids to nature, to fresh air, to sunlight as much as possible. I think growing up with pets is desirable. And I have to say a word about immunization here given the current controversy.

I think the idea of immunization is very sound and the risk, although there are risks to it, the risks of the diseases are much greater. Having said that, I think there are questions that are legitimate about how many vaccines we're giving at one time, the age at which we give them, the schedules of them. I think those are all things that can be questioned. But I think the principle of vaccination is very sound and I think it is unwise not to immunize kids against these diseases which are going to reappear if more people stop immunizing.

Katie: Yeah, like you said, it's definitely a somewhat nuclear topic to talk about. And I definitely will never publish an official position in any way and I will never judge parents for their decision. But I will say, I think you're right. I think the conversation falls apart when we don't take into account two things can simultaneously be true. They can both be effective for what they do and also have side effects or be problematic when you get to too many or the body is stressed too much and it's like I looked at that economic idea of diminishing marginal returns. Like is the first one as effective or is the 70th vaccine as important as the first? And I hope, just as a parent, I hope that's what we start studying and those are the questions we start answering. Because like you said, I think it's an important question of our time certainly and one that parents, of course, feel the pressure of very strongly.

Dr. Weil: One consideration that I think many of the anti-immunization people don't realize is that it is much more dangers to get these diseases at older ages. I don't know if you've ever seen an adult with measles or an adult with chicken pox. It's not a pretty picture. And the risks of very serious complications are much greater. And also what are these kids gonna do if they wanna travel to countries where these diseases are still prevalent where there's still a chance of getting polio, for example, a devastating disease. So, you know, as I said, I think there are risks to immunization. I think there're ways of minimizing them in terms of how we give vaccines, how we schedule them and so forth. But I think the principle of immunization is very sound.

Katie: On that note, I know people will probably ask as a follow-up question, what do you think in general about some of these alternative schedules of spacing or...I know that there's a lot of theories on the best way to do that. Do you have any guidelines you're willing to venture?

Dr. Weil: I don't. I'm not an expert in that area and I think there may be many different ways of doing it, but I think it is important to discuss that with people who are knowledgeable to figure out what schedule might be right for your particular situation.

Katie: Got it. I'm curious also because you have, like I said, kind of pioneered this whole integrative medicine movement and are still very much involved and have the pulse of that. What do you see as the future, like the next 10 years, things that we're gonna see as both trends and important things to focus on?

Dr. Weil: Well, I think our healthcare system is gonna collapse totally. It's actually unsustainable. We're spending more per capita on healthcare than any people in the world and we have worse health outcomes than the people in developed countries. The World Health Organization ranks us 38th on par with Serbia and that's any way you look at it, infant mortality, longevity, rates of chronic disease. So something is really wrong with that picture. We're spending more and more, less and less to do for it. I firmly believe in integrative medicine as the way of the future because conventional medicine simply can't manage these epidemics of lifestyle-related diseases and the methods that it uses are dependent on expensive technology. And I include pharmaceutical drugs in that category. I think over medication is one of the greatest problems in our society today.

So I think as the financial constraints on medicine become unbearable, the wisdom of integrative medicine will become more and more apparent into the great promises that we can improve health outcomes and lower costs in two ways. One is by really focusing on prevention and health promotion through sound advice about lifestyle. And secondly, by bringing into the mainstream treatments that are not dependent on expensive technologies such as that breathing technique that I mentioned.

Katie: Such an important point and I think you're right. I hope that these things will continue to seem less fringe and less...I hate the word, but less quack. I'm sure you have heard backlash when you've recommended these things for years. Has it gotten less so? Are people getting more on board with these ideas?

Dr. Weil: Definitely. I mean, there are still dinosaurs out there and you still see some of the stuff, but you know, there are now I think more than two-thirds of the nation's medical schools have joined a consortium for integrative medicine. And this is deans and chancellors requesting membership in this group and the institution has to demonstrate that it's got movement in two of the three areas of clinical care, education, and research. There're textbooks in integrative medicine. The term "integrative medicine" is accepted in academic discourse. So I think it's happening. It's rapidly becoming mainstream.

Kati: Yeah, and I think as much heat as the healthcare system takes in the doctors take for our whole situation, I also would say from patient or the consumer side myself not being a doctor or a practitioner, another important part of this change is that we all need to start being better about taking ownership of our own health and taking responsibility and not expecting a doctor to solve our problem. Do you have people come in that expect you to just fix their problems with a pill?

Dr. Weil: Well, one of the advantages of practicing integrative medicine is that you draw to yourself a selected population of patients who are highly motivated and they just want information. They know what they wanna do. They wanna take responsibility for their own wellbeing. And it's a joy to work with motivated patients. I feel very strongly that health is your personal responsibility. You wanna become less dependent on

practitioners of all sort and be more and more independent in matters of health. And that means being informed, having access to good information. I think my job as a doctor...the word doctor by the way literally means teacher is to teach people how to live in order not to get sick in the first place and if they do get sick, how to really draw on the body's innate healing capacities with as little external intervention as possible.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I'm curious your take on just some of my other controversial topic and I'll give myself as an example first. I'm just curious if your view on anything has changed or if you like at some point realized maybe you weren't fully right about something in the beginning or you've shifted focus. Because I know for me, like I said, when I was really sick I couldn't eat any grains without having a reaction and so that was my stance. And now I am able to integrate them no problem as long as I'm maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle. So I'm curious, have you shifted your focus on anything over the years?

Dr. Weil: Absolutely. And I pay very close attention to research and evidence and you know, I change my recommendations based on that. I don't know, 20 years ago or more, I recommended very high doses of vitamin C based on what Linus Pauling was saying. And I began to see evidence that the body simply can't use more than about 215 milligrams of vitamin C a day. So I changed my recommendations on that. I've changed my own personal diet for a number of years. I was a lacto vegetarian. I did not eat fish. And then I found that made life very difficult, especially traveling to Japan. I began reading research about the health benefits of fish and so I changed my own diet and changed my recommendations about that. And I will continue to change my views and recommendations as I learn more.

Katie: Yeah. And hopefully, as all of us can I think, at least from my own journey, questioning yourself is one of the most valuable things you can do, to always be asking questions and challenging yourself. You mentioned vitamin C, so I'm curious...and that's a debate I hear often in the health world of do we need supplements or can we get everything from food? So what's your take on that?

Dr. Weil: Well, I think dietary supplements are not substitutes for the whole foods that contain them because at best they're partial representations of what nature gives us in foods. And I also don't think that taking supplements excuses you from eating a good diet. But having said that, I think that supplements can be useful as insurance against gaps in the diet. I cook for myself. I'm a very good cook. I'm a careful shopper. I grow a lot of my own food and I take a daily multi-nutrient supplement because there are some days for one reason or another where I don't eat the vegetables and fruits and other things that give me my micronutrients and the body needs these in the right doses every day for optimal functioning.

And also I think some dietary supplements, vitamin D is an example in higher doses than you can get from food, have specific therapeutic or preventative effects and it's very worth knowing about that. Now, having said that, I think we're living in a time when there is an incredible drumbeat of negative publicity about dietary supplements even to the extent of saying that they're gonna kill you. And this has had enormous influence on positions. I know many of my physician colleagues say that they no longer take vitamins. They tell their patients not to take them.



The Wall Street Journal a couple of years ago had a front page article saying a daily multivitamin will kill you. This was based on a study, an editorial in The New England Journal of Medicine. It was very poorly designed research. Never should have been given that prominence. You know, we can speculate about what the motivation for this negative stuff is. But I think you have to weed through all that to find and learn how to use these things in the right doses and for what purposes.

Katie: I agree. The question I love to selfishly ask toward the end of episodes. I know that you've written many books yourself, but I'm curious if there are books outside of your own, which will, of course, be linked in the show notes, but that have really influenced your life and that you would recommend.

Dr. Weil: Well, I thought about that question. I'll tell you one that I remember. When I was pretty young, I was entranced by a book called the "Complete Book of Marvels" by a writer named Richard Halliburton. He was a writer, photographer, adventurer who died quite young, tried to sail a Chinese junk across the Pacific Ocean. And I think this book was published in 1941. I was born in 1942. And it had two sections, one on the Orient, one on the Occident and each chapter was about some wonderful place that he visited with photographs. And there was one on San Francisco and the great bridge is there, the Grand Canyon and the Pyramids of Egypt.

I mean, I just would trip out on this book and it really motivated me to travel and see these kinds of wonders and I have seen most of them since then. Travel has been a really important part of my life. When I've traveled, I've learned so much from living in other cultures about...first of all, it's given me a perspective on our own culture, but learning things like how people eat in different countries like Japan, discovering matcha, learning about the healing techniques. I think travel has been such an important part of my life and that's the book that I think of, Richard Halliburton's book, "Complete Book of Marvels," still available.

Katie: I love that. And that's a new recommendation and I 100% agree with you about travel. That's something we've prioritized with our kids over a fancy house or over having physical...because I think it's the best teacher. It also has innate challenges and I think kids learn from challenges. You're not gonna make your kids' life difficult on purpose, but travel does it for you, which is lovely. Also, I'm curious if you have any parting advice. I know just from this conversation I could echo so much of, you know, breathe correctly and don't freak out about what to eat all the time and go outside and you know, drink some green tea. But I'm curious if you have any parting advice that you wanna leave with the listeners.

Dr. Weil: I just would say have greater confidence in your body's ability to take care of itself. You know, I think a great problem I see is most people have just no sense of how remarkable the body's healing system is. And you wanna learn how to take care of that and protect it and draw on it. Your body is a wonderful thing and is capable of repairing most of the things that go wrong.

Katie: Wonderful. Lastly, what is in the future for you? What are you excited about? You've had such an amazing career already and it doesn't seem like you're slowing down anytime soon.

Dr. Weil: I'm still interested in traveling. I'm still interested in good food and discovering new, you know, wonderful things out there that can benefit our health. I really wanna help as much as I can advance integrative medicine till it becomes, you know, very solidly established and I think the day is not far off where we'll be able to drop the word "integrative" and it'll just be good medicine.

Katie: I hope so. That's an exciting concept and I know just how busy you are. I'm so grateful that you took the time to share with us today and I'll make sure that all the links to the things you mentioned will be in the show notes at [wellnessmama.fm](http://wellnessmama.fm). So you guys can keep learning even after this episode is over. But thank you so much for your time.

Dr. Weil: I enjoyed talking to you and I hope you get to Japan soon.

Katie: Oh, thank you. And thanks to all of you for listening and for spending your time today. We're so grateful that you did, and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the "Wellness Mama Podcast."

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