



Episode 309: How I Overcame Trauma
(and Lost 50 Pounds)

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This podcast is sponsored by The Ready State. If you're at all like me, you might have perpetual stiffness and pain in your neck and shoulders from years of working, carrying kids and all of the demands of parenting. Or sore hips from too much sitting or multiple pregnancies. I found a great way to relieve my aches and pains and improve my fitness and flexibility. It's from someone I highly respect... Dr. Kelly Starrett at The Ready State. If you don't know Kelly, he's a Mobility and movement coach for Olympic gold medalists, world champions, and pro athletes. He's the Author of two New York Times bestselling books, including "Becoming a Supple Leopard", which has sold over half a million copies. He has over 150,000 hours of hands-on experience training athletes at the highest levels. A Doctor of Physical Therapy who helps top companies, military organizations, and universities improve the wellness and resilience of their team members. He created a program called Virtual Mobility Coach. This program is easy to do from home each day, making it ideal for me, and for most moms. And I can do with my kids. Every day, Virtual Mobility Coach gives you fresh, guided video exercises. They show you proven techniques to take care of your body, relieve pain, and improve flexibility. And you can customize your videos in three ways. If you're in pain, you can pull up a picture of the human body and click on what hurts. And from there, Virtual Mobility Coach will give you a customized pain prescription to help you find relief. Second, you can find a library of soothing recovery routines in the daily maintenance section. They're a great way to wind-down and practice self-care from the comfort of your home. And third, for athletes, Virtual Mobility Coach also has an entire section of pre- and post-exercise routines for more than four dozen sports and activities. They help you warm-up before your workout so you can perform your best with a lower risk of injury. Right now, you can try Virtual Mobility Coach totally risk-free for two weeks without paying a penny. And after that, you can get 50% off your first three months. Just go to thereadystate.com/wellnessmama and use code WELLNESSMAMA at checkout. That's half-off your first three

months when you sign up for a monthly plan. And you'll get personalized techniques to relieve nagging pain and improve your fitness and flexibility.

Hello, and welcome to "The Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com. That's wellnesse.com, which is a new line of completely natural personal care products that I'm so excited to share with your family. This is a much-requested episode and one that took me a long time to be able to formulate just because it's a tough topic.

And today, I'm opening up and sharing about my own inner journey over the past year and how that led to some pretty dramatic physical changes without focusing at all actually on diet or exercise any more than I normally would have. And I'll explain some of the details of that in this episode. Of course, and I'm happy to answer follow up questions if you guys reach out to me on the show notes of this at wellnessmama.fm. But if you told me a few years ago that something like the transformation I've experienced in the last year was even possible, I would not have believed you. My journey this year involved realizing first-hand just how connected the mind and body are and addressing the mental and emotional aspects that I had ignored for a really long time. In this episode, I'm going to share what worked for me and the resources that helped me along the way and those will also be linked in the show notes at wellnessmama.fm. But before I jump in, I also really want to emphasize that I think that even more important in the physical aspects of health, dealing with the mental and emotional side like this is an extremely personalized process and what works for one person might be ineffective or potentially even problematic for someone else.

And in my experience, it also was extremely important to find the right resources and practitioners that I could trust and to help me work through these things and I think that is extremely personalized and varied. I also want to say before I jump in, that in this episode, I talk about some pretty tough topics that might not be appropriate for children of certain ages. And there's one specific topic that I'll explain in an analogy related to Christmas that young children don't necessarily need to hear. So, I would encourage you to stop listening now if you have kids with you or at least pre-screen this episode to make sure that it's not going to create problems if you have kids listening.

So, I started this process last year to try to deal with my weight and ironically, the weight loss is probably one of the smaller benefits that I've experienced from doing this work. Even though it was the one I thought I needed the most and the one that took up such a huge amount of my mental energy for so long. At the beginning of last year, I vowed that I would figure out how to finally conquer my struggles with losing weight, not just for myself personally, but also for my daughters. I had the realization one morning when looking in the mirror that...and I was noticing all these things that I didn't like about my physical appearance and it was a script in my head and I realized I had been doing that without even actually noticing it or paying attention to it my entire adult life. In fact, I had been focusing on finding my flaws and physically, especially since I was about 12 years old and since puberty pretty much. And at that moment I realized I have a daughter who's almost 12 and while I remember feeling so grown up at that age and already feeling the weight of responsibility in a lot of ways, I couldn't imagine her struggling through some of the same things I did.

And I also realized that while I had always made it a priority to talk to her and create a safe space and make sure that she felt like she could talk to me at any time, I knew that she needed an example of having a good relationship with one's body, not just me telling her that that was important or trying to help her facilitate a good body image and self-image. So, for that reason, one of my goals for last year was to do whatever I had to do to get past those body image issues and finally make peace with my body. I vowed to figure it out no matter what and that I would not enter another decade with that issue still taking up so much of my mental and emotional energy and I would not pass on that pain of just always being so self-critical to my children.

And at the time, I thought that in order to do that what I needed to do was lose weight and that then I would be happy. And ironically, the complete reverse is what made it possible. So, the irony is I have a background in nutrition and I actually probably got into that in hindsight, because I was trying to solve my own weight struggles. I had been researching different aspects of health and wellness for years. When I say I had tried everything, I mean it. I had tried essentially every diet and plan imaginable. I had taken all the supplements, worked with all the doctors, literally dozens and maintained a really clean diet for pretty much the past decade. I had lifted weights and tried running. I did CrossFit, pretty much every other possible plan. And I did put on muscle and I got healthy and my blood levels actually were great. My labs were always perfect. Even my Hashimoto's was now in remission, but at the same time, I knew that none of these things were working for weight loss. And so, I set out to figure out why.

And of course, a couple of factors were obvious. I had received a diagnosis of Hashimoto's thyroiditis in the past and I had six pregnancies in nine years and any of those things on their own can make weight loss difficult. And when combined it made sense. And that's what I had always, I think mentally defaulted to as my excuse. But I also started to realize, even though that was my excuse, I didn't think it was the reason and my youngest was two at this point. And I knew that I couldn't just default to it being post-partum anymore. I knew that it had to be possible to work through these issues and that the things I was doing weren't working. So, I needed to really delve deep and explore and figure out what would work.

So, in the first week of last year, I did what I always do. In the past few years at least we start the year, my husband and I with a water fast, which physically is great. There's a lot of benefits I've written about and talked about in podcast before. But also mentally, it's great because there's a level of clarity that comes with removing something that is so core and so important to daily life like food. And also, during this time I tried to really get self-reflective, reflect on the lessons of the past year and any goals for the new year. And also, to reread some books that I find personally important. So, every year I reread Viktor Frankl's "Man's Search for Meaning." I reread "The Four Agreements" and last year I also read "The Body Keeps The Score."

Those first two books are great for perspective shift at the beginning of any new year, but "The Body Keeps The Score" set some things in motion that I now realize in hindsight were the beginnings of major shifts for me. I would recommend the book to anyone, not just those of us who know we have a major trauma to deal with. For me, I realized that some of the problems I seemed to be experiencing seemed to stem from a couple of specific things. Specifically, and I feel like this is something difficult, but I feel like important for us to talk about anyone who's been through it so that it's okay to talk about it. I experienced sexual trauma, I was raped in high school and I hadn't ever really dealt with it or faced it internally or emotionally at that time. In fact, I

remember in that moment being in such a place of pain and shock that I shut down emotionally as a way to protect myself. And I made a decision and internally at that moment that I would put up walls and I would never let myself be hurt again. And I built metaphorical walls that over time translated into physical walls.

Looking back, I can see just how powerful that mental decision was and that when we make a decision like that, the body and the brain line up to protect us. And I thought if I ignored the pain that I could protect myself from being hurt by it. So, I pretty much completely shut down and decided I was not going to feel that pain. I was not going to be hurt and I was going to power through. And looking back, I think at least an element of that excess weight was protective mechanism, a physical armor of sorts that helped me feel safe in my body for those years. Every attempt to lose weight in the past had been fighting a subconscious need for safety and the body and mind are wired and excellent at protecting us when we need them to. And in that moment I did need them to, I ignored the emotional side and I was relatively unemotional for a lot of my adult life, I think, as a way to keep that protection in place. I think I thought that by ignoring the pain and the emotion, I could protect from it, but it wasn't until I was willing to face and experience that pain that I could work through it. In fact, it wasn't until I recognized the pain, let myself finally feel it and experience all the emotions of it that I could get to a place of thanking my mind and my body for keeping me safe for all those years and then I could release the connection and the pain and to be free of it. And that said, that sounds like maybe a short process, but it wasn't. I didn't know actually how to do that. And so, the entirety of last year was a journey of trying to figure that out.

There were also other things that I worked through that I had never really even paid attention to. Like beliefs from early in life that I wasn't good enough and always having this internal desire to prove that I was through achievement or being good in school or always like following the rules and being a good kid. And I was worried that when I started working through these things that I would lose my edge or that if I dealt with those things, I'd be less motivated or less productive. And what I've realized now is that when I was able to process and integrate those experiences and get to a point of being grateful for what they taught me, even though I, of course, wish they hadn't had to happen, I still had the ability to use the beneficial aspects and lessons of those without having to hold onto the walls and the pain. And I found a place of much more peace and actually more productivity and more ability to work through things.

So, like I said, this was a very long process and it's one that I'm still working on. I suspect that this is a lifelong journey that we all walk in some way. On the practical level, for those who wonder, I lost about 60 pounds in the last year and I'm still slowly and naturally losing weight without really trying to. So, for the first time since having children, I could easily button a size six pair of pants and that's a new experience for me. I also found a new appreciation for my body and I feel like I have become a much more present wife and mother with the ability to connect deeply with the people I love the most. And the weight loss was a by-product of the much more important inner work. And I would gladly do all of this work again, even if the weight loss had not happened because of the inner shifts and the ability to connect more deeply that has come from this.

I, also, like I said, I wanted to talk openly about this trauma because so many of us have experienced similar things and it's still so taboo to talk about. And I get it because having been through this, I know the pain and the shame and all the layers that go with this. And of course, Brene Brown has written some great books

about vulnerability and shame and working through that. But my hope here is that I can provide a forum for this conversation to become more acceptable and especially focused on results and for those of us to be able to support each other and finding ways to work through these things instead of getting stuck in the trauma like I did for so long.

So, to start to walk you through my process, it started with recognizing that there was a problem. Like I did it in the beginning of the year and having a motivation strong enough to make me want to face it. It became more important to me to resolve this for the sake of being a better mother to my children and especially to my daughters than it was to protect myself from the pain anymore. And I also, it also took realizing that while I had done a lot of the "right physical things" in the past to try to address the problem, I had ignored a really large and important part of that, which was this whole inner journey.

And as a result, I was literally fighting my body and my brain in a losing battle because no matter how hard I tried to lose weight, willpower is not stronger than those internal protective survival mechanisms that keep us alive and keep us safe in that we're wired for because there was very much a purpose for that. And so, I had this internal protective belief that it wasn't safe to lose weight, which physically also kept me most likely in a state of fight or flight all the time and made it to release weight as it's not something that happens naturally when one's fighting for one's life, your body's not worried about digestion and sleeping well and all the things that go along with that when it feels like you're fighting for your life. And I had gotten stuck in that process.

So, to explain it a little bit more, the process was very multifaceted and it kind of started with reading that book "The Body Keeps The Score" last year and here's why. The book is written by Dr. Bessel van der Kolk and it summarizes his four decades of research on the impact of trauma on childhood brain development and emotional regulation. He's definitely qualified to talk about this. He was a researcher at Harvard and a clinician. He published hundreds of academic papers and led studies on the effectiveness of many types of modalities to deal with trauma, including EMDR, different types of neurofeedback, MDMA-assisted therapy and just many others. In short, I would say he's probably one of the most qualified in the world to talk about this topic.

So, in the book, he explains that trauma doesn't just include major trauma like the one I had. Statistically and sadly, many of us do have this type of trauma, especially women. And this type of trauma is defined as acute trauma in the book. So, that would be things like rape and physical abuse, assault, domestic violence, being through a war. And sadly, while this is common, the numbers are one in five were sexually molested as a child. One in four was beaten as a child. One in eight have witnessed a parent being assaulted as a child. And depending on what statistics we look at, roughly one in three women have been sexually assaulted. These numbers are awful. And based on the statistics, there are a lot of us who are walking around facing the aftermath of acute trauma. And I was one of those. So, but it also is important to know that's not the only kind of trauma. I know many people who work through a lot of these problems as adults and they actually feel guilty because they don't have an acute trauma. And they think like, my life was actually pretty good and my parents really did love me and they worked hard and my parents were the exact same way. So, they feel guilty of feeling like there's trauma because they feel like they shouldn't feel like there's trauma but, there is.

And what was really interesting in the book, so researchers looked at something called adverse childhood experiences or ACE and the numbers were much higher than they expected. In fact, only a third of participants didn't report some kind of childhood trauma when they use this kind of mechanism of gauging trauma. They also expected that acute types of trauma, like the one I experienced, would be the worst ones, but it turns out that wasn't the case at all and it wasn't necessarily the most difficult adverse childhood experience to work through. For instance, emotional withdrawal from parents ranked as one of the most profound long-lasting impacts and that's slow and continued child experiences like that led to the same types of long-term issues as acute trauma. They found that when a child, for instance, is regularly ignored by caregivers, that child learns to anticipate that and compensates by blocking out emotion and acting like it doesn't matter. And so, that can lead to a lot of the same types of problems even if there was not an acute actual assault or trauma. But for many of these types of trauma, the body still knows and it remains in a state of alert to be able to handle that abandonment or neglect or abuse. And this carries into adulthood, it can manifest in a lot of different ways as lack of self-respect or self-love.

In brain scans, people had increased activity in the brain, specifically an area called the insula, which integrates and interprets information from sensory organs and transmits fight or flight signals to the amygdala when necessary. This part of the brain should only be firing during acute situations but can end up firing all the time when there's either of these types of trauma, which leaves the body always on alert. From a physical standpoint, this makes it tough to ever enter a parasympathetic state and could mess up stress hormones. From an outward perspective, this can express in a variety of ways depending on the person and the coping mechanism. So, it could be things like disassociation and disembodiment like kind of being disconnected from one's body to hypervigilance and panic attacks or anything in between. And I could tell from reading the book that I was dealing with some of the effects of acute trauma from that assault in high school and more subtle traumas from childhood that I'd actually largely forgotten or ignored until I started working through them. So, in the book, he talks about kinds of several different silos and types of treatment first being a more common one that we have all probably heard of, meaning top-down. So, this is like talking, talk therapy, connecting with others, allowing ourselves to know and understand what's going on while processing the memories of the trauma.

There's also the option of taking medication to shut down inappropriate alarm reactions or by utilizing other technologies that could change the way the brain organizes information and he makes the case that there is a time and a place for this and for some people, that is part of the equation. And then lastly, kind of bottoms-up approach by allowing the body to have experiences that deeply and viscerally contradict the helplessness, rage or other things that resulted from the trauma. For me, personally, I wasn't comfortable taking medications and I didn't think I actually needed medication, but I committed to working through my own inner struggles in any other way possible. I made it a priority to find safe places to process those feelings of those experiences and to focus on creating relationships where I felt safe and could process. Realizing the physical component of healing and that whole bottoms-up approach, I also committed to trying a lot of physical modalities that worked in that way to help the body during this time.

So, I'll go deeper on all of these, but on a practical level, I tried a lot of things including, I did a lot of traditional talk therapy with a psychologist and psychiatrist. I used a method called tapping or emotional freedom technique. And I'll link to these in the show notes if you want to read more about them. There's a book called "The Tapping Solution" and an app that goes along with it that has specific tapping protocols for different things. And then also, I worked with someone named Brittany Watkins who does body image specific tapping. I tried hypnosis. I tried supporting the vagus nerve, which is connected to that fight or flight response. On the physical level. I tried to things like myofascial release and Rolfing, which I'll talk about in more detail later in the episode. But realizing that, in "The Body Keeps The Score," he talks about how the body physically stores trauma and how things like that can help actually release the trauma. And then I also focused on physical activity to help me reassociate with my body but not exercise. So, this was things like play, singing, which was something I was terrified of, which ironically, singing stimulates the vagus nerve and I started taking voice lessons last year. Things like that. So, I tried a whole wide variety of practice, all kinds of therapy, all kinds of mental work, all kinds of physical work.

As a key of this though, I want to talk a little bit more about the vagus nerve. So, vagus nerve starts in the regulatory center of the brain and it's essentially connected to the muscles of the face, the throat, the ears, etc. It's connected to our facial expressions and the emotional correlations that they make. So, interesting fact, people who aren't able to smile for physical reasons, even temporarily like paralysis or too much Botox, whatever it may be, are actually more at risk for depression. And there seems to be a two-way correlation here. So, not triggering these movements actually makes it harder to be happy and to empathize and connect with others. Interestingly, the data also shows that people who can smile and laugh, even if they are upset, it can help pull them out of that.

So, it's really interesting the research that we're seeing on that right now. The vagus nerve also sends signals to the heart and the lungs, which is connected to things obviously like heart rate, heart rate variability, respiratory rate, and deep breathing. So, when this response is working properly, we feel calm and relaxed, we feel centered, etc. When it isn't, we can feel disconnected or on alert, which is great. That's why it's there. The vagus nerve is there to kind of take in sensory information. And if there is a threat, make sure that we are properly alerted to that threat.

So, when we're threatened, this leads to changes in heart rate, breathing, voice, things that would signal other people to help us. And it helps us prepare for fight or flight if we need to do that. If the threat continues, something called the dorsal vagal complex is stimulated and that even affects things like digestion, hormones, reduces metabolism, leads to shallow breathing and impairs sleep because when you're fighting for your life, you don't need to sleep or digest or meditate. So, the body shuts those things down to keep you safe. But understanding this, the vagus nerve offers insight into why these physical bottom-up approaches might work better for healing for a couple of reasons. And this was kind of paradigm-shifting for me to realize because I, even though I think I like logically knew better, I kind of viewed the body and the mind as disconnected or at least like mind as something I could more easily control and I didn't realize that the body, like the physical types of therapy could actually affect the mind in a two-way stream.

So, as an example, traditional talk therapy just addresses what a person has conscious access to and is willing to work through. So, just talking about the problem might not always be enough to fix it. And some researchers think that talking without using another modality to change the trauma expression could actually make things worse. There's a really sad study on dogs that illustrate this. Basically, researchers shocked dogs who were locked in cages and they could not escape. And they called this inescapable shock, which sounds absolutely horrible. And the result was something called learned helplessness in the dogs, which this means that when the cages were opened, the dogs didn't even try to get out.

In fact, that fear have rendered them so helpless and they were so afraid of the unknown, they wouldn't even lead the leave the cage. The only way to undo the damage was to physically drag the dogs out of the cages repeatedly until they saw that there was a pattern of how they could get out. And in "The Body Keeps The Score," van der Kolk explores how this also applies to humans. The correlation here is that humans who went through a similar type of inescapable trauma like rape or assault or war, they learned similar states of helplessness because often in those experiences, as was my experience one of the most difficult parts is that helplessness and not being able to get away or to fight or to flee and all those things that we're so wired to do.

And they often got stuck here and had trouble being able to work through it. So, his theory was that one way to get through this was using physical action that counteracted the helplessness. So, these types of interactions basically interrupted that fight or flight cycle that we get stuck in when we have that helplessness and the stress hormones and they let us start working through trauma. So, in other words, not being able to protect oneself during trauma, whether it be acute or chronic, led to this helplessness and restoring a physical way to engage and connect the body or to flee or defend oneself can help counteract it. So, on a personal level, I found in several of these therapies that I had the physical reactions that I had likely shut down during the acute trauma.

For instance, at some points, I had the desire to yell and fight or at different times to run away or hide. And to my surprise, this is why the somatic and physical therapies seemed to work much more effectively than talk therapy ever had for me. Because since I had shut down those emotions, in talk therapy, I could easily like dance around them and not have to go too deep and not actually work through them. And because of that, I thought I could just wire my body and get it to do what I wanted or make a system to fix it like I could do in every other aspect of my life. And it turns out as I found that you can't hate yourself, then you can't force yourself happy or healthy. I had to learn how to be in my body again and to feel safe there and to send that signal to my mind so that it would let go of that protective mechanism.

And ironically, once I did that, the body stuff started shifting immediately without any other dramatic changes. So, I found that some unexpected situations had a big impact. In hindsight, I don't think these exact same things would work for everyone and I don't think that you it even necessarily would have worked for me in the past until I was ready to face them. It was very much kind of a when the student is willing, the teacher will appear scenario and so I think there are probably a lot of other things even that would've worked as well. It was just also that I was willing, but I'm sharing the ones that did help me in case they might be helpful to you as well.

So, for me, the cascade of events that led to this included some bizarre and unusual things starting with a trip to Finland. And I talked about this on the podcast before, but I had the chance to visit Lapland in Northern Finland with Four Sigmatic last year. And this is in the Arctic circle. It was incredibly cold and it was an amazing trip. In hindsight, it had a very lasting and profound impact, but not in the ways I expected. So, as an example, I knew that we would be doing a sauna and cold plunge while we were there. I was nervous for the cold because I hated cold water at that point. But also nervous because, and it sounds silly now, but I dreaded the idea of wearing a swimsuit in public, especially when there were cameras around because of all my body image issues, that was actually one of my biggest fears at that point. And on that trip, I conquered the cold and the fear of wearing a swimsuit. And I also started to value my body for what it could do instead of what it wasn't. So, ironically at that point, despite the fact that my body had grown six healthy babies, I was always focused on its deficiencies and its stretchmarks and what it did or didn't look like.

And Finland was the first step in starting a shift towards appreciating what it could do, which was lasting in cold water as long as the toughest guys on the trip or hike through waist-deep snow or handle extreme cold for a week or sled downhills. Even though I was terrified, I didn't know it at the time, but that shift started a much longer year-long process for me that I'm still in. And so, just kind of facing that and the littlest shift into valuing my body for what it could do instead of just focusing on its physical deficiencies started, I think to crack the walls a little bit.

And the next step for me involved tapping, which is a physical modality that stimulates the vagus nerve like I mentioned and make use of acupressure points. And I had tried this in several ways. I'll link to the ones that I've used personally. There's a lot of options out there. I used "The Tapping Solution," which there's an app and a book and that was from a previous podcast guest, Nick Ortner. If you guys want to listen to his interview, it's phenomenal. And the app walks you through tapping for different scenarios and goals and I love that it's easy to use and can go anywhere with me and I still use that pretty regularly. I also worked with a tapping expert in another previous podcast guest, Brittany Watkins. You can listen to her episode as well, but directly to see if there were any underlying issues with emotional eating or related to the trauma that I needed to address. And I also worked with a psychologist who specializes in trauma as I started bringing things up through tapping and through all the other work I was doing.

Another shift happened for me in an unexpected way when I tried the mixture of Acroyoga and Rolfing. And it sounds bizarre and I would never have guessed that this could have had an impact, but it absolutely did. In fact, I didn't go into it with the idea at all that it was going to cause a shift. If you aren't familiar, Rolfing is a deeper soft tissue work that is designed to improve posture and body positioning. It can affect fascia and soft tissue, which is probably what made it effective for me because as he talks about in "The Body Keeps The Score," trauma can actually store in memory physically in the body, in places like fascia. And so, things like Rolfing can help release it and combined with Acroyoga for me this meant that I was, in that situation involved, trust involved not being on the ground because you're held in the air by another person while this happens.

And so, I wasn't in control, I wasn't on the ground. Then I also brought up a lot of like body image issues because I was being held up by another person and I was worried about my weight and was worried that I was too heavy and that I was going to hurt this person. And so, I realized as soon as we started that I had some trust issues that I had obviously not dealt with and that I did not at all like the feeling of not being in control and not on the ground. And this practitioner used Rolfing as I was balancing in the air and then as I was doing certain movements and during the process, I felt physical shifts as he worked on areas of fascia and muscle groups, especially my shoulders and even just moving to my hips because through having a C-section, and I think probably all those years of carrying babies there were just a lot pent up there.

It was a strangely mental and emotional experience, too. As memories of some of these past things came up and I felt like I was experiencing them again in real-time and processing them. And so, afterward, once I was finally on the ground, it was a bizarre thing. I don't know if you've ever seen an animal show, for instance, on TV where an animal narrowly escaped death and then the animal goes through an involuntary kind of like shaking episode where all that adrenaline and all those emotions release and they just kind of shake to get it out. And that happened to me after this treatment. In fact, I shook uncontrollably for two hours and I couldn't stop it. And I think, in hindsight, what was happening was that I had shut down in the actual time when I should have processed the trauma. And so, in reliving it a little bit, that all came out and I finally was able to like process the emotions and the adrenaline and all of the things that went along with that experience. And so, this was essentially like a somatic therapy that helps me, I think in that moment, reconnect with my body and process that trauma.

So, this guy was on my podcast before and he had a quote to never waste a trigger, speaking to the idea that when something brings up a strong emotion or makes us angry or upset, it's a chance to look internally and figure out why. And so, like starting to see in that moment that mind and body connection was stronger than I thought I had realized before. I started paying attention to that idea of not wasting a trigger and realizing there were quite a few things that were triggers for me and that kind of led to a spotlight and an insight into where these triggers maybe came from and how I could then start to process them.

So, that was kind of my internal work that was very quiet and calm for quite a few months. And I would notice like anger come up from something or fear or insecurity and I could then start to look at, like I said, fighting that emotion, thank it for being there and see what it could teach me and that sort of really providing insight into those walls that I had built and into the things I was doing to protect myself that were actually not serving me at all. And so, I started to work through those things internally and with therapists. A few months later, I met a woman named Erin and she will be on the podcast as well. I attended one of her sessions at this conference and I'll link to her website in the show notes as well. But her session at this conference was called dealing with entrepreneurial head trash. I did not expect it to be anything that was going to help with anything I was processing. I thought it would be about productivity or organization or dealing with procrastination. What ensued was a 90-minute mental exercise that I did not expect and that I was not prepared for. So, she and the other presenter, Rhonda Britten, who has several great books on this that I will link to in the show notes. They started talking through the idea of filters and the subconscious. And as they started talking, pieces just kind of started clicking into place in a wonderful and terrifying way.

So, they explained that only a small part of our brain is managed by our conscious thoughts and that much of what motivates our actions is actually controlled by the subconscious. This is the reason that talk therapy isn't always very effective as we can only work through the things we can consciously access and such a small percentage of what we can access within our conscious thought. So, long-term, we have to figure out how to deal with the subconscious and to work through these things, which is tough because a lot of this is formed by early childhood experiences. We may not necessarily have words or frameworks for this and it can be tough to activate the subconscious because we, of course, can't consciously control it. And what really resonated with me in that session was the idea of filters and it was truly paradigm-shifting for me when this clicked into place. So, I had always assumed that since I had some difficult stuff to work through, that it would be a long and complicated process and that had been my experience to this point. They explained a lot of how we perceive and interact is controlled by our filters. So, as an example, if person has a filter that he or she is not lovable or that people don't like him or her, that that person will see examples of that everywhere.

So, for instance, if it was me and that was my belief that no one liked me or that everyone was out to get me, I would read into people's facial expressions. Or if someone walked by without smiling, I would take that to mean that they didn't like me. Or if there was a tone of someone's voice, I might take it to mean that that person didn't like me, even if it was just meant that they were having a hard day. These filters are often formed by very early childhood experiences.

So, as a personal example, I had an underlying filter that I was not good enough and that I was not lovable. And I had mentioned that a little bit in the beginning, but as a result, I spent a lot of time and energy trying to prove to myself and others that I was good enough and worthy of love. On the one hand, this was an advantage because it made me very motivated and probably borderline neurotic, which was great for our work and for business and productivity. I also always tried to help others as a way, I think, to prove that I was lovable and instead that people would like me. And this led to some great relationships. And I don't actually think either of those things is objectively bad, but the degree to which I did these things wasn't healthy. And it led to me, I think at times ignoring some personal needs and becoming rundown and resentful. And it led to some relationships that were not balanced. And so, at this point in the session, I'm trying to figure out how to deal with these filters. Like I said, thinking it must be a long process because they were so deeply ingrained and they were formed some of them before I even had conscious memory.

And Erin and Rhonda explained, they used a really great analogy called the Santa Claus analogy. So again, if you have children listening this is an important topic so I would encourage you to stop listening right now. But what they explained was that as a child who believes in Santa, there's a filter that Santa Claus is real and this child will through that filter, see proof of it everywhere. So, the child will see that the cookies are gone the next morning or the presents are there or whatever it may be like they write a letter and they can receive a response, whatever is a child believes that's their filter, that Santa Claus deeply exists. And if you ask them, this is a firmly held belief, they absolutely believe it. And they see proof of it everywhere because they're looking for proof of it everywhere. And they explained that when a trusted person helps them rewrite the framework and explains, then tells them at that point that Santa Claus does not exist, that it undoes that entire filter. And then that child never defaults to that filter again. They never forget that they don't believe in Santa. They don't revert to previous ways of believing.

Once they receive proof that shows them a different light of all of those things they thought they saw that proved it, it takes away that filter, instantly and permanently. So, in other words, once trusted person, like a parent explains that Santa is no longer there, they realize, "Oh, it was mom and dad who ate the cookies." Or "Oh, the presents came from mom and dad." Or "Oh, that wasn't really Santa at the mall." Or whatever it may be. And so, the filter is completely gone. And so, they said that basically the same thing works for adults. And that when we're able to identify the core reasons of these filters that we build as children to protect ourselves and see where they might actually have come from, then we no longer are bound by that filter because we have a new narrative for why it exists and we have the ability to then consciously deal with it and choose our response. And so, that's how I worked through the idea of not being good enough or not being valuable or not being lovable. And it made sense at the time in their session, but I didn't fully believe it till actually worked with Erin and that filter was and is gone and has not come back. So, that was another kind of pivotal moment for me.

Another theme throughout the past year that was really instrumental in the process was the idea of play. So, another thing that shifted for me is I started changing my perception of my body from what it wasn't and how it looked to what it could do and appreciating it is that I rediscovered the idea of fun and play. I realized I had gotten to the point of thinking as exercise as a chore or a punishment and I hated it and felt like it wasn't effective. When I shifted this perception, I found ways to incorporate movement that felt like fun and play, including walks alone or with my kids and my husband, or jumping on a trampoline, learning how to do a handstand, which ironically was extremely scary process for me because I didn't like being upside down. Even things like now trying pole vaulting with my kids or things like hot and cold therapy, which helped me feel very much in my body or running for fun and not just for exercise. And so, the idea of play was something I started really incorporating. And over time especially, it really made a dramatic impact of how I related to my body. And I think it helped. Like those forms of movement also helped somatically and maybe be able to work through a lot of the things I was going through.

I also had a theme last year of kind of consciously breaking through comfort zone barriers for myself. And, some of these were instrumental to the process and some them were just kind of, I think expressions of having worked through some of these things. So, as example, I think, like I said, I had built these walls as a protective mechanism that had built a lot of other walls around those to keep myself safe. And once I was able to start really addressing the core wall, I was less afraid to address a lot of these other walls as well. So, I mentioned that I started taking voice lessons and learning how to sing. And this was one of my biggest fears in life because I was pretty sure I was not good at singing, which was true when I started for sure. And the idea of singing, especially in front of people was terrifying, especially at the time because of that narrative of not being good enough and the judgment that would come with that and what if I failed at something.

So, to face this, I started taking voice lessons and I think there's also a correlation here, like I mentioned, singing being really good for the vagus nerve and for stimulating the vagus nerve, it was something I had never really done. I think also singing can be very beneficial in speaking, and there's a metaphor here for me of throughout the last year, finding my voice. So, my whole life people had always told me like, you're so quiet, you can talk, like talk louder, don't be so quiet. And I think a lot of it actually went back to some of those

traumas and like holding myself back or censoring myself. And so, in singing and then it kind of translated into speaking, I feel like I found my voice last year. And so, I actually ended the year by doing karaoke in New Orleans in front of people, which was I thought the scariest thing I could ever do. And like form of immersion therapy, I faced it. And ironically now, so many things that I used to think were scary don't scare me at all because I faced the one that I thought was the scariest.

Another example of this is stand-up comedy. So, this one sounds simple and funny and kind of bizarre maybe, but I never thought of myself as funny. And I don't even think I knew how to be funny or it wasn't something that was even on my radar, but as I sort of breaking my comfort zone and trying to find things that I was scared of, this was one that came up. And so, I started taking a class in the stand-up comedy and at some point this year I'll actually be performing stand-up comedy onstage in a relatively popular place for stand-up comedy, which is another way I think of finding my voice and learning to break through comfort zone.

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This podcast is sponsored by The Ready State. If you're at all like me, you might have perpetual stiffness and pain in your neck and shoulders from years of working, carrying kids and all of the demands of parenting. Or sore hips from too much sitting or multiple pregnancies. I found a great way to relieve my aches and pains and improve my fitness and flexibility. It's from someone I highly respect... Dr. Kelly Starrett at The Ready State. If you don't know Kelly, he's a Mobility and movement coach for Olympic gold medalists, world champions, and pro athletes. He's the Author of two New York Times bestselling books, including "Becoming a Supple Leopard", which has sold over half a million copies. He has over 150,000 hours of hands-on experience training athletes at the highest levels. A Doctor of Physical Therapy who helps top companies, military organizations, and universities improve the wellness and resilience of their team members. He created a program called

Virtual Mobility Coach. This program is easy to do from home each day, making it ideal for me, and for most moms. And I can do with my kids. Every day, Virtual Mobility Coach gives you fresh, guided video exercises. They show you proven techniques to take care of your body, relieve pain, and improve flexibility. And you can customize your videos in three ways. If you're in pain, you can pull up a picture of the human body and click on what hurts. And from there, Virtual Mobility Coach will give you a customized pain prescription to help you find relief. Second, you can find a library of soothing recovery routines in the daily maintenance section. They're a great way to wind-down and practice self-care from the comfort of your home. And third, for athletes, Virtual Mobility Coach also has an entire section of pre- and post-exercise routines for more than four dozen sports and activities. They help you warm-up before your workout so you can perform your best with a lower risk of injury. Right now, you can try Virtual Mobility Coach totally risk-free for two weeks without paying a penny. And after that, you can get 50% off your first three months. Just go to thereadystate.com/wellnessmama and use code WELLNESSMAMA at checkout. That's half-off your first three months when you sign up for a monthly plan. And you'll get personalized techniques to relieve nagging pain and improve your fitness and flexibility.

Music has also been a thing for me in the last year. So, I mentioned voice lessons, I've also been trying to learn guitar and there's an emotional component here that I'm still learning and I see glimpses of it and I now start to really understand why people love music so much and how it can touch like inner parts of us that just speaking can't. But, there was this interesting correlation with anything musical, whether it was singing or guitar or anything. When I first started, I was relating to music very much the way I related to life where everything was very calculated and systematized and I wanted a process for everything and I didn't even understand the concept of just kind of feeling the music and learning to feel the music. And so, slowly, I have started to be able to like feel the notes and to feel the music and to actually let the emotion come out through it. And I think that's been an interesting part of the therapy that I wouldn't have necessarily expected but that's been kind of really deep and metaphorical. I've also started just getting back to things like painting. So, I loved art when I was younger and I would do all different kinds of painting and drawing. And I've been getting back to that just, not that it breaks my comfort zone, but just as a place, like a release and a place that I can go and have quiet as I'm working through stuff. And I've been doing that with my kids, which has been also a really fun way to connect with them.

And then lastly, when it comes to the comfort zone breaking, I've started letting myself be visible in photos. And this is something that I did not do for pretty much all of my adult life. And sadly even with my kids very much. I have lots of pictures of my kids. I don't have very many pictures of me with my kids because I was so insecure with my body that it was hard to look at those photos. And in hindsight, I really wish I had taken more photos because that was part of the journey. And I now can look back at the person who would have been in those photos with so much more empathy and love and respect. And thanks for, like I said, for my mind, protecting me in that time and for all the lessons that came with that. But I can't go and undo the past, so instead I'm trying to make an effort to be present in photos to make sure there are pictures of me with my kids at their different ages and family pictures and even on the blog pictures just because I think that was something I was so afraid of for so long and it's a way that we can connect as humans. And so trying to face that fear as well.

There's also obviously like the physical side of this, which is not by any means the big part of the transformation, but there was an aspect of this, I want to speak to it as well. As I said, I didn't make any major dietary or changes in exercise intentionally. That wasn't my focus. In fact, if anything, I shifted from an attitude of depriving my body by dieting and punishing it with exercise to loving myself and wanting to nourish my body with good food and enjoy it through fun movement. And this led to some practical changes, but they weren't the focus. They were the by-product. At this point, physically I've settled into a comfortable plan that nourishes my body. I'm still losing weight and I'm building muscle. And I would say I'm much more in tune and intuitive with what my body wants and needs. So, there's not really a typical normal day in this aspect, but there are some things I commonly do and I've also found through like that reassociation with my body that there's not really a form of dieting. It's definitely focused on nourishment but when my body is fuller doesn't need any more food, I now I'm like no longer able to keep eating. So, when my body reaches whatever level of nourishment and food that it needs, I just physically don't even want to put any more food in my mouth no matter how good I think it is. And so I'm trying to be very in tune and intuitive with my body and listen to it as we kind of learn this process together.

But some things I commonly do are I often intermittent fast till lunch. And I don't think this again is right for everyone. This has worked well for me and I feel better when I do this. It helps me actually just feel much more productive in the morning. Lunch is my biggest meal and I'll usually eat light at night, but I'll get my most protein and most calories in general at lunch. This just seems to be really good for me for focus and also because then I'm not eating a lot at night for digestion and I've noticed improvement in my sleep. Like I said, I don't think intermittent fasting is great for everyone and for people with acute hormone issues I think it can be problematic and I made sure to watch my hormones and that they're all fine. My hormone levels are fine by doing this, but again, not recommending it for everyone.

There is a lot of data on this from researchers like Dr. Satchin Panda, about time-restricted eating and how even just shortening the window in which we eat...shortening the window that we eat even by a little bit can make a big difference. So, they've done studies on even, for instance, cancer patients and other people who ate in even a 14 or a 12-hour window, which doesn't sound as scary when you think of it like that instead of eating 16 or 18 hours a day and how that led to changes, not just in weight but in other markers of health as well. So, I look at it that we all fast while we're sleeping because no one, at least that I know of, has figured out how to eat while we're asleep. So, most of us are already fasting for at least eight hours a day. So, I experimented with extending that window and I probably eat within a six to eight-hour window. Most days, I will consume non-caloric things if I'm just intermittent fasting in the morning. So, like herbal teas or sometimes coffee or like herbal teas at night, but things that don't have calories whereas, if I'm water fasting, which I've written about, I don't consume those things at all.

Another thing that is a very common aspect of my life is getting morning sunshine with people that I love. So, often my husband and I will sit on the front porch and drink tea or coffee in the sunlight. And this is advice I got from one of my first doctors that was instrumental in my healing from Hashimoto's, Dr. Alan Christianson. And he explains how getting outside, even if it's a cloudy day as soon as possible after waking up, is really vital signaling mechanism for circadian rhythm. So, it leads to big changes in melatonin production at night, in stress hormone levels and all kinds of things. And it's an easy free thing that we can all do. And I like to kind of stack beneficial things. So, I do that with my husband so there's time for connection or with a child.

Sometimes when my kids will go for a walk during that we'll all a beverage that I like that has some kind of nutrients in it but without the calories. And that's just a time to center and connect and also to get those hormonal benefits.

I also have shifted to focusing on nutrient density versus calories and actually having to actively track nutrients to make sure I'm getting enough because I'm not as hungry now. Like I said, and I eat on a shorter window, so I have to make sure that all the foods that I eat are very nutrient-dense and consume a lot of them. So, I aim for high-quality proteins and I'm usually based on getting about 6 grams per pound of body weight daily. Mostly, for me, from seafood or broth or other types of meat. So, this is things like, I eat a lot of sardines, tons of greens, both cooked and raw, lots and lots of cooked and fermented vegetables and lots of broth, which has beneficial amino acids like proline and glycine that balance out the other amino acids that are found more in meats.

Every day, I also consume things like broccoli sprouts, which I grow in the kitchen. There's tutorials on the blog if you want to figure out how to grow those. Those are a source of sulforaphane which supports the body in a lot of ways and also just a great source of nutrients. And sometimes I'll make really nutrient-dense smoothies with like wild-caught blueberries and cacao and maca and added protein and all kinds of stuff or make protein shakes with added nutrients on days where I'm having trouble reaching my protein levels. Again, I think it's extremely personal, both diet and supplements. But there are some supplements that I take regularly, although I don't take any supplements every day.

The ones that I take most often are probiotics. I take one from Just Thrive, I'll link to it in the show notes. There's so much evidence about the gut-brain connection and how focusing on our gut health can help our mental health. And I've noticed this as my gut health has really improved over the last two years, I noticed the more calm and more happy mental state as a result. I also take vitamin K2-7 also from Just Thrive, which is anti-inflammatory and one that I think has a lot of benefits. I take specific B vitamins, so riboflavin was big for me during this year just because that's something that's in higher demand during weight loss and maybe protein, all kinds of things. So, I realized from experimentation that I needed a lot more riboflavin than I was getting. And also thiamine and pantothenic acid.

I also added a lot of extra vitamin C, magnesium and vitamin D, which I was testing for to make sure I kept my levels good. Because all of those things can be needed more during weight loss. I also drink, like I said, herbal teas daily. I'll use all kinds of different kinds. And then some other supplements I've been experimenting with are things like resveratrol. I mentioned vitamin D, choline inositol, I think is what it's called, and phosphatidylcholine, which both have made a huge difference in my mental state and focus. And then I think I was not getting enough because I can't eat eggs. That's one of the few foods that I still react to. So, I was trying to find an alternative source of choline. I mentioned riboflavin and B1 as well.

And then other things I just do regularly as part of this process for me, I make sure that I incorporate play and movement regularly. This might be something as simple as going for a walk or trying to slackline with my kids or I have been playing tag and capture the flag with the neighborhood kids lately. Just things that remind me

to be in my body and that are fun. We also in our area, also sauna and cold tub often with friends. And this is something that I've learned from Finland as well. Saunas are such an important part of their culture, but also very important to their community and to their connection. And so, I love being able to do this with friends or my husband or ideally with like a group of us because I think it's also a chance for connection and community as well as all the benefits of sauna, which I talked about at length in previous podcasts and have written about. But I think the community aspect really just amplifies it.

And then I've also tried to really prioritize time not working and spending time with family and close friends and to do that almost every day. And statistically, those types of relationships and building strong community like that is one of the most important things that we can actually do for our health. It's more important than exercise or not smoking. And it was something I wasn't doing well and as I've taken baby steps of learning vulnerability and learning to be more deeply connected in relationships, that's been a really important part for me.

In conclusion, I think I'm very much still on the journey and I think that for all of us, especially the inner work, it's always a process and I don't think we ever fully arrive. I think we're constantly on the journey, but this past year has been transformational and extremely paradigm-shifting for me. And even though this is still like the aspects of this are difficult to talk about, I hope that my experience and sharing this can somehow be helpful to you if you face any of these same things.

What sticks out to me most I think in this journey is that I fought my weight and I hated myself for my inability to resolve it for years, literally for my entire adult life. And I had that script in the filter that if only or when I lost weight or looked a certain way that I would be happy and accept myself. I think we all have some version or several versions of the "if only" script. And the irony was that when I decided to work on loving and accepting myself and being happy with where I was even, and especially for my flaws, the thing I'd wanted so badly to happen happened without any of the fight at all. So, in other words, instead of if when this happens I will be happy, I was finally able to decide and choose that I will be happy now and I will love my body now where it is and I will love my children where they are and I will love my husband where he is and I will love my life and the lessons and all of these things and we'll choose happiness. And when I did that I could start letting go the fight and letting go of the walls and that led to stuff that I could never have anticipated.

I found a quote recently that really resonated with me, it was by, I think her name is Nayyirah Waheed and the quote is, "And I said to my body, softly, "I want to be your friend." It took a long breath and replied, "I've been waiting my whole life with this." And that was my lesson of the last year, was taking that first step with my body and connecting again, my body and my mind and my emotions and realizing how much more whole and connected we can be when we do that. I'm not saying that self-love is a panacea and that it fixes physical problems, not by a long stretch, but I can say with certainty now that at least for me, the mental and emotional stuff was a huge part of my journey that I ignored for a long time. And that I don't think I could've worked through the physical stuff without addressing those.

So, I will leave in the show notes, wellnessmama.fm, a comprehensive list of all the stuff I've mentioned, the books that have helped, other resources, you can find all of those there. But I'll mention a few again, just that it really helped in case you are just listening and you want to hear. So, I read a lot of Brene Brown over the last year. I love all of her books, especially "Braving the Wilderness" and "Daring Greatly." Of course, "The Body Keeps The Score" was pivotal for me. There's several great books by Rhonda Britten. I'll make sure all of those are linked in the show notes. Other resources I'll link too is Erin, the woman I mentioned who did a session at that thing. Aaron Alexander who runs the line podcast, who did Rolfing with me, "The Tapping Solution" book and the app. The idea of never wasting a trigger and then also just some practical things that have helped me track and make sure I was staying healthy during this process.

I used an app called the DietBet app, which is funny, just as a motivator. It was not something that I thought would actually make much of a difference at all. But the idea being that you can bet like \$35 or some small amount that you will lose whatever amount of weight, a small amount of weight by the end of a certain period of time. And for me, that just was like a reminder and a motivator. As I was going through that process and I realized it was, I think a lot of us as humans we have more of a fear of losing than we do have a desire to win. And so, that app was helpful to me.

I also use an app called Zero, Z-E-R-O which is a fasting app. And so, that let me track my intermittent fasting every day and just see what window I was eating in. I was using a Renpho Scale, which I'll link in the show notes and it has an app connected to it. And that was really motivating and just to be able to see my progress, not just in weight loss but in things like protein levels in the body and muscles, like skeletal function and muscle mass and things that I was trying to improve as well. And to make sure I was getting enough nutrients, I used MyFitnessPal to track the foods that I was eating and just make sure I was actually getting enough calories. So, an interesting part of this for me is that I'm actually eating probably more than I was in the past, which was also helpful in healing my metabolism and making sure my body was getting enough nutrients but I'm very conscious of getting enough protein especially and enough nutrients from things like green veggies.

I've been using something called the Heads Up Health dashboard that lets you keep track of labs and a whole lot of other metrics in one place. And I did this regularly with labs to make sure I wasn't messing up my hormones and this let me see, easily graphed out kind of examples of every metric so that I could see where I was improving. And then I used the Oura ring and the Biostrap. I've used both. I've used them individually and both at different times, but those track things like sleep and movement and heart rate variability and other factors. I used the Real Plan app all the time for meal planning and again, to make sure I get enough nutrients.

And so, in hindsight, I would say the things, the lessons of this past year that I'm keeping and sticking with are focusing on things like community, learning how to be vulnerable more and more, learning to play and be happy with my body and never wasting a trigger. And as I said, I'm very much still on this journey and I was hesitant a little bit even to share what I've shared today because I don't think that I'm in any means at all an expert in any of this. I just wanted to share my personal experience in hopes that maybe that story could be helpful to someone else who's working through some of these same things or afraid to start that process or to take the first steps.

I'm not trying to give any medical advice and certainly not any kind of mental health advice, just sharing my own inner journey and I would love to hear yours, especially like I said, I wanted this to be a way to start the conversation. And if this is a conversation that resonates with you or sadly that you've ever faced in any similar way, I would love for you to be part of the conversation because I think that there is tremendous healing in community and in relationships and in loving each other. And I hope that I can maybe be a small part of a domino in a cascade of events for someone else. And either way, I'm very grateful to you for listening and for being here as part of my journey and I would love to hear more about yours.

So, please join me in the show notes at wellnessmama.fm and say hi or if this resonates with you or reach out to me on Instagram, I'm [wellnessmama](https://www.instagram.com/wellnessmama) on Instagram. Message me if you'd rather not share publicly and just tell me about your journey because I think there's power in the story and there's power in acknowledgment and I hope that I can start to be a forum for that. And as always, thank you, thank you, thank you, for being here and for sharing what is truly one of our most valuable gifts, our time, with me today. I'm so glad that you did. I am so grateful that you're part of this community. I'm just so grateful for your time today and I hope as always that you will join me again on the next episode of "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

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