



500th Episode: Recurring Themes, Key Takeaways and Book Recommendations

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This episode is brought to you by Organifi. They make delicious superfood drinks, they're beyond easy to incorporate into your routine. Let me tell you about my two personal favorites. Their green juice contains a clinical dose of ashwagandha, which supports healthy cortisol levels to aid in weight management. It also contains 11 superfoods for resetting the body and takes just 30 seconds with no chopping, shopping, or juicing, or blending. It's organic, it tastes delicious, and no blender needed. You just add water and drink it up, and let your body soak up the benefits. I also love their Gold drink at night, it's like a turmeric tea, they even have a chocolate version, that contains nine superfoods for rest and relaxation. It tastes delicious in warm weather and can be mixed in milk, water, or milk alternatives. It's low sugar, so you can enjoy this dessert-like tea guilt-free and wake up refreshed without drowsiness. My kids love the chocolate one. You can check out these and all of their products, including protein powder and red antioxidant drink by going to organifi.com/wellnessmama, and using the code wellnessmama to save 20% on your order.

Katie: Hello, and welcome to the 500th episode of "The Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com, that's wellness with an E on the end, which as you probably know, is my personal care line of non-toxic products for families. It has been a wild ride since this podcast first started in 2014 and I know I've learned so much along the way, I hope that you have as well. I've gotten to talk to and learn from some incredible people and hear feedback from so many of you along the way. At this point, we've now recorded over 50 million downloads, which is mind-boggling to me, and over 700 hours of audio recorded on a wide variety of topics. Throughout these 500 episodes, I've noticed some patterns and key takeaways that seemed to recur in these interviews and I think some of them will surprise you, I'm going to go through a lot of them in-depth today.

But while this podcast is geared toward health and wellness, the recurring themes that tend to lead to success in these areas are not just directly physical health-related and this is also really relevant and noticeable in the recurring book recommendations. One of my favorite questions to ask a guest is if there's a book or a number

of books that have had a profound impact on their life, and if so, what it is and why. And I'm going to go into a lot of these books and give my five-minute summary of each, and also talk about the practice of reading in general and how it relates to all aspects of health, including physical health, much more than I had previously realized. In fact, through these interviews, I've realized that much more of our health is in our mindset than I previously thought and I think this is a recurring theme that we're seeing sort of across the board when it comes to health. So, to start at the top, I'm going to go through the most recurring book recommendations from these past 499 guests.

The one that tops the list tends to be "The Four Agreements," which has been mentioned the most times by guests as being hugely impactful to their life. It's by Don Miguel Ruiz, and I think the reason it's most recommended on this podcast is because of its simplicity and how short it is, but also how impactful. This is a yearly read for me as well. I often read this one as well as a couple of others I will mention in a minute as part of my beginning of the year practice along with fasting. But in short, this book talks about things like self-limiting beliefs and how they rob us of joy. And it goes deep on how we are all essentially domesticated by these early agreements that we make that we don't even realize we're making, and how his principles of awareness, forgiveness, and action of choosing better beliefs can lead to big changes in life. So, specifically, the four agreements that of course go into much more detail in the book, but the four agreements are, number one, be impeccable with your word. Number two, don't take anything personally. Number three, don't make assumptions. And number four, always do your best. And I have these hanging in my home and in my office as just a daily reminder of that book and the lessons within it.

The second most recommended book on this podcast is "Man's Search for Meaning" by Viktor Frankl, which is another yearly read for me and definitely, like I said, a top recommended book here. In fact, I read this one, like I said, at the beginning of every year during my 7 to 10 day fast that I do mostly for mental and spiritual reasons. If you're not familiar, this book details Viktor Frankl's experience in a concentration camp and his resulting psychological approach, which he calls logotherapy. For me, this book is a reminder of some key mindset points, specifically gratitude and the constant ability to choose our own mental states. A favorite quote from this book that I have in my office, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms, to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." And in this book, Frankl talks about the importance of finding meaning in life even in the most difficult of circumstances.

And his work has helped me understand and practice the idea that we always have a choice about how we feel and how we respond, even when outside circumstances are difficult or even seemingly insurmountable. And this is largely the basis for my realization that I'll talk more about later in this episode, that happiness is completely a choice. Another great quote from this book, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." I also really like Frankl's idea about success and happiness that he says, "Don't aim at success, the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you're going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued, it must ensue and it does so only as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a greater cause."

This reminds me of Goodhart's Law that states, "When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure." And Frankl also talks a lot about the meaning of life and how each life has individual meaning at any given time, and it's up to each of us individually to find it. As a good analogy, if you ask a chess player the best move in chess, he or she wouldn't be able to answer because there's no such thing. But there are a number of moves and perhaps the best move at a given certain arrangement on the board. And the same with the meaning of life. He explains that there's no single meaning of life or even a single meaning for an individual. But instead, we find meaning by the degree of responsibility we bring and the decisions we make.

Third on the list is "The Untethered Soul: The Journey Beyond Yourself" by Michael Singer and it's also one of my yearly reads and perhaps one of my most gifted books to others. This book delves into how we can detach from ego and expand beyond ourselves. A key concept is there's nothing more important to true growth than realizing that you are not the voice of the mind, you are the one who hears it. And Singer talks about how our thoughts don't define us but are merely outputs of what our consciousness perceives. It's easy to identify and be defined by our thoughts and emotions, but he explains that the first step of breaking this pattern is to realize that this is happening and to realize that thoughts are merely objects flowing through you.

Singer calls this the difference between self and personal self. He also talks about inner energy, which some practices called chi, and the importance of letting this flow and not blocking it by holding on to certain thoughts or emotions or judging them. Singer believes that we suffer because we focus our mental and emotional energy on perception or on being liked by others. And these emotions are so prevalent, we often don't even notice them. He compares this to a fish not noticing water because he's so immersed in water. So, the first thing to do is to stop expecting your mind to fix what's wrong with you. Singer explains that your mind is a highly effective computer tool and that we should use it to ponder noble thoughts, solve problems, and serve humanity, rather than worry about what others think.

And this helps us stop focusing on external problems and stop focusing on...or start focusing on internal problems, which will be a recurring theme here as well. And finally, Singer talks about the concept of death and how the knowledge of dying one day gives life meaning in the present moment. And this is a concept I've talked a lot about in past podcast episodes as well. And I even have the word "memento mori," which loosely translated in Latin means, "Remember your death," tattooed on my wrist as a constant reminder of this. This is also a lesson from stoicism and you can hear more about it specifically in the episode with Ryan Holiday.

Number four on the list, "Letting Go: The Pathway of Surrender" by David Hawkins. Several guests called this the most impactful book they've ever read. And in short, letting go involves being aware of a feeling, letting the feeling come up, staying with it rather than suppressing it, and letting it run its course without wanting to make it different or do anything about it. It simply means letting the feeling be there and focus on letting out the energy behind it. So, simply what we are and what we believe is constantly creating the reality that we experience and Hawkins says that we magnetize people in situations that mirror us. So, by changing our inner experience, we can change our external experience as well. And I thought it was worth reading a short excerpt that explains kind of this key process.

Hawkins says, "Letting it go involves being aware of a feeling, letting it come up, staying with it, and letting it run its course without wanting to make it different or do anything about it. It means simply to let the feeling be there and to focus on letting out the energy behind it. The first step is to allow yourself to have a feeling without resisting it, venting it, fearing it, condemning it, or moralizing about it. It means to drop judgment and see that this is just a feeling. The technique is to be with the feeling and surrender all efforts to modify it in any way. Let go of wanting to resist the feeling, it is resistance that keeps the feeling going." Or a side note, this is often what you resist persists or what you resist, resist back.

Hawkins continues, "When you give up resisting or trying to modify a feeling, it will shift the next feeling and be accompanied by a lighter sensation. A feeling that is not resisted will disappear as the energy behind it dissipates. As you begin the process, you will notice that you have perhaps fear or guilt over feelings. There will be resistance to feelings in general to let feelings come up. It is easier to let go of the reaction to having the feelings in the first place. Fear of fear itself is a prime example of this. Let go of the fear or guilt that you have about the feeling first, and then get into the feeling itself. When letting go, ignore all thoughts, focus on the feeling itself, not on the thoughts. Thoughts are endless and self-reinforcing and they only breed more thoughts. Thoughts are merely rationalizations that the mind tries to explain the presence of a feeling.

The real reason for the feeling is the accumulated pressure behind the feeling that is forcing it to come up at the moment. The thoughts were external events are only an excuse made up by the mind. As we become more familiar with letting go, it will be noticed that all negative feelings are associated with our basic fear related to survival and that all feelings are merely survival programs that the mind believes are necessary. The Letting Go technique undoes the programs progressively. Through that process, the underlying motive behind the feelings becomes more and more apparent. To be surrendered means to have no strong emotion about a thing. It's okay if it happens and it's okay if it doesn't. When we are free, there's a letting go of attachments, we can enjoy a thing but we don't need it for our happiness.

There's a progressive diminishing of dependence on anything or anyone outside ourselves. These principles are in accord with the basic teachings of the Buddha to avoid attachment to the worldly phenomena, as well as the basic teaching of Jesus Christ to be in the world but not of it. Sometimes, we surrender a feeling and we notice that it returns or continues. This is because there's yet more to be surrendered. We have stuffed those feelings down all of our lives and there can be a lot of energy pushed down that needs to come up and be acknowledged. When surrender occurs, there's an immediate lighter, happier feeling almost like a high. By continuously letting go, it is possible to stay in that state of freedom. Feelings come and go.

And eventually, you realize that you are not your feelings, but that the real you is merely witnessing them. You stop identifying with them. The you that is observing is aware of what is happening and always stays the same. As you become more and more aware of the changeless witness within, you begin to identify with that level of consciousness. You become progressively primarily the witness, rather than the experiencer of the phenomenon. You get closer and closer to the real self and begin to see that you've been duped by feelings all

along. You thought that you were the victim of feelings but now you see that they are not the truth about yourself, they are merely created by the ego, the collector of programs which the mind has mistakenly believed are necessary for survival.

Number five, "The Body Keeps the Score. Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma" by Bessel van der Kolk is another commonly recommended book on this podcast. A key quote that stood out to me from the book, "Once you start approaching your body with curiosity, rather than fear, everything shifts." And this book was personally helpful to me and my own trauma healing, and I've heard from many of you who had the same experience.

It's a little bit of a dense read but it has some really profound key points, including the use of EMDR, which stands for eye movement desensitization and reprocessing as a tool for trauma reprogramming. This works because when we relive a traumatic event, the brain and the body don't actually know the difference between that experience reliving it and when it actually happened, so it plays out in a stress response as if it were happening in the present. EMDR can be helpful in integrating those experiences and helping the brain understand them as memories rather than recurring events.

Another key concept is the use of somatic experiences like yoga or bodywork to reprogram the body response and to help the brain and body understand that they are safe. Finally, van der Kolk talks about the importance of mindfulness practice and to have a supportive community for recovery. A couple of other quotes that really stood out to me, "As long as you keep secrets and suppress information, you're fundamentally at war with yourself." And then, "The critical issue is allowing yourself to know what you know, that takes an enormous amount of courage." And like I said, this book was personally impactful to me because while I had done therapy for a lot of years and I was doing a lot of things that would usually correlate with physical health, because of the emotions and traumatic responses I had stored in my body, my body was for a very long time in a sympathetic nervous system state. And books like this and some of these practices helped me to start to shift those memories and release that current or recurrent feeling of stress.

Another book recommended at least seven times, number six on this list, is the "Tao Te Ching." It's actually one of the most read books of all time and at only 81 passages long, it's a very easy read. It's also the second most translated book of all time after the Bible. It was written 2,500 years ago, though much of it is still very relevant today. The title can be translated as essentially, "The book of the way," and it outlines some core ideas that stem from Taoism. Some quotes that stood out to me, "If you want to be reborn, let yourself die. If you want to be given everything, give everything up," and, "Can you step back from your own mind and thus understand all things?"

"Not knowing is true knowledge. Presuming to know is a disease. First, realize that you are sick, and then you can move toward health. The more you know, the less you understand. And if you realize you have enough, you are truly rich. Be content with what you have, rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you." And then lastly, "I have just three things to teach: simplicity,

patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures. Simple in actions and thoughts, you return to the source of being. Patience with both friends and enemies, you accord with the way things are. Compassionate toward yourself, you reconcile all beings in the world."

Number seven, a more recent book recommendation from the podcast that's been recommended now by several guests and whose author was actually a recent guest as well, "It Didn't Start with You, How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How to End the Cycle." And Mark Wolynn, the author, shows how the traumas of our parents, grandparents, and even great grandparents can live on us through unexplained depression, anxieties, fears, phobias, obsessive thoughts, and physical symptoms. And this is what...it's actually been pretty well studied now and scientists call this secondary PTSD. And Wolynn delves into what he calls core language, which are basically the idiosyncratic words and sentences behind our deepest fears.

And this I feel like is really eye-opening, especially if you have any anxieties or fears that don't seem to line up with your direct life experience. And he says this language provides clues leading to the source of our unresolved trauma. Core language can also be expressed in physical sensations, behaviors, emotions, impulses, and even symptoms of an illness or condition. And this is another segue into a big theme on this podcast of those emotional and inner things really correlating to physical expression of illness. A growing body of research suggests that trauma like that from extreme stress or starvation, among other things, can be passed from one generation to the next, like physically passed, and here's how. Trauma can leave a chemical mark on a person's genes, which can then be passed down to future generations.

Wolynn delves into things like attachment trauma, and he gives a framework for identifying and working through early life and generational trauma. This book builds on the work of some leading experts in post-traumatic stress, including the Mount Sinai School of Medicine neuroscientist Rachel Yehuda, I believe is how you say her name, and as mentioned a minute ago, psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk who wrote "The Body Keeps the Score." The idea being that even if the person who suffered the original trauma has died or the story has been forgotten or silenced, memory and feelings can still live on through genes. And these emotional legacies are often hidden and encoded in everything from gene expression to our everyday core language and then they play a far greater role in our emotional and physical health than we've previously understood. So, I highly recommend that book especially if you are dealing with any of those issues that I mentioned.

Number eight is a little bit more of an obscure one, but it's been recommended several times. It's called "Stalking the Wild Pendulum: On the Mechanics of Consciousness" by Itzhak Bentov, who is the creator of the pacemaker, the steerable cardiac catheter, and EKG leads. This book has been mentioned several times, most recently by Paul Chek. And like I said, while it touches on some unusual concepts, I really enjoyed reading this one personally. This book is described as, "In his exciting and original view of the universe, Itzhak Bentov has provided a new perspective on human consciousness and its limitless possibilities. He's widely known and loved for his delightful humor and imagination. Bentov explains the familiar world of phenomena with perceptions that are as lucid as they are thrilling. He gives us a provocative picture of ourselves in this expanded consciousness, holistic universe view. And in this easy-to-read book, Bentov paints the provocative

image of the universe as comprised of sound vibrations, light rays, subtle energies, and packets of consciousness.

I know that can seem a little far out, but stay with me. He explains his theory that our brains are actually just thought amplifiers, not thought source, which again, lines up with a couple of other books I already mentioned. He talks about the idea that the universe is a hologram as is the brain, and that we can instantly reclaim any information ever known that our bodies mirror the universe down to the working of each cell, there's some fascinating diagrams about that, that we are essentially pulsating beings in a vibrating universe in constant motion between the finite and the infinite. And he talks about research on the nonlocality of consciousness and the holographic nature of the brain that is now being commonly discussed and explored in both consciousness studies and quantum physics. And his original work was written many, many years ago and it brought a lot of these ideas to mainstream science. So, if these are new concepts for you, it's a fascinating, easy read.

The ninth most recommended book is by another past podcast guest Byron Katie and it's called "Loving What Is: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life." And this one lines up with another tattoo on my other wrist, which is "Amor Fati," which basically means, "Love what is." And her work centers around what she calls The Work and these four questions which are, "Is this true? Can I absolutely know that it is true? What happens when I believe that thought? And who would I be without that thought?" A favorite quote from this book is she says, "I am a lover of what is not because I'm a spiritual person, but because it hurts when I argue with reality." As I said, Byron Katie is a past guest on this podcast and this book has been frequently recommended. In the book, she tells her own story of having depression for most of her life, until realizing at age 43 that she only suffered when she believed her own thoughts and then when she didn't believe her own thoughts, there was no suffering.

The idea of not believing what we think led to her recovery and to her creation of what she calls The Work centered around those four questions. She delves into dissecting our thoughts to overcome their source and removing the stress and encourages us to view our interpretations of things as the root of stress, not the event themselves as the root of stress. In doing so, we realize that by changing our interpretation of events, we can change how these events affect us. Byron Katie encourages readers to then turn these questions around and see how the resulting questions feel. She calls this the turnaround. And an example would be if you had the original thought, "Rachel doesn't listen to me." You would turn that around to, "I don't listen to myself," or, "I don't listen to Rachel," or, "Rachel does listen to me," and then feel about which of those might seem to be true. She then encourages us to even turn around our thinking.

And a quote about this, "As you do The Work on subjects such as the body, disease, career, or God, when you come to the turnarounds, substitute the words "my thinking" for the subject." So as an example, the phrase, "My body should be strong, flexible, and healthy," can turn around to, "My thinking should be strong, flexible, and healthy." Because isn't that what we really want at the core of it, a balanced healthy mind? Is a sick body really the problem, or is it our thinking and interpretation about the body that's the problem? I'd encourage you to listen to both her podcast episode, which along with all these books will be linked at wellnessmama.fm

as well as check out the book for yourself. She also has a great website that has downloadable worksheets that are free about each of those.

And lastly, the 10th most recommended book is "The Four Hour Workweek" by Tim Ferriss. This one has been mentioned by several guests as helpful in starting their businesses and in organizing their lives. This one won't necessarily be helpful to everyone listening in a direct way and I do think things have changed quite a bit since it was written. But I personally found this book helpful in teaching me several key concepts, including what's called the Pareto principle or the rule of 80/20, which essentially means spending your time on the 20% of things that get you 80% of results, and avoiding the 20% of things that cause 80% of stress.

And a quote from Tim about this, "Doing something unimportant well does not make it important." Tim also talks about the importance of validating an idea before launching, a lesson that I think is even more important in today's landscape. And he provides examples of ways to validate ideas for online businesses before actually creating and launching them. Well, I said the business examples won't be directly applicable to everybody listening. I do think that these concepts can be more broadly applied to everyday life, from things like running a household or keeping up with daily tasks and there'll be more on that in the key takeaway section in a few minutes.

Throughout the course of these 500 episodes, I've also noticed some recurring themes. Since this podcast is largely health and wellness-focused, you might think that these pieces of common advice would relate most to diet or exercise or some other aspect of physical health and wellness. But when I combed through these episodes, the most common themes actually spoke much more to mindset, emotional/spiritual factors, and community. And this makes sense, as many of these themes turn out to be more important for health than just what we eat or what products we use. And as I shared in Episode 309, which is a solo episode, I found in the past few years just how directly that was true in my life. So, here are the top 10 factors that showed up again and again among these guests in a wide variety of disciplines, practices, and expertise.

The first idea being that happiness is a choice and I touched on this a little bit in a couple of the book recommendations and the fact that those are the most commonly recommended books kind of speaks to this idea being a common theme as well. But the idea that the only pain we really suffer is the one we create ourselves. And recently, I posted something similar to this on Instagram and I received a wide variety of responses, including from some people who completely disagreed, claiming that due to something horrible that had happened to them, they weren't capable of ever being happy again. Like I said, this has been a personal lesson for me as well over the last few years and I wanted to touch on it here because so many podcast guests have said similar things.

As a personal example, I used to have a story in my head that went something like this, "I will be happy when," or, "If only X, Y, Z, then I would be happy," or, "That it was hard to be happy because of certain past traumatic experiences." I slowly and I mean very slowly realized that happiness is a choice, not a result and that I could choose happiness now and not wait on something external to be its catalyst. And of course, this is easier said

than done, as are a lot of things in life. And as some of the previous authors mentioned, they've been my greatest teachers in this lesson. It's been a recurring pattern among guests that the happiest among them and among us are not the happiest because circumstances were outside factors, but because of intentional inner choices and a creation of their own inner state.

And I also understand how hearing this can probably seem even more frustrating, especially at times when these outside factors do make it harder to choose happiness. And yet, guest after guest has talked about cultivating the skill of happiness through action, especially when external forces make it less than easy. I often think back to Viktor Frankl mentioned in the book recommendations who found purpose, peace, and even joy inside a concentration camp. In fact, he was the one that wrote, "Between stimulus and response, there is a space, and in that space is our power to choose our response, and in our response, lies our growth and our freedom." I remember when my own inner thought was that happiness seemed impossible because of certain things I've been through.

And I also now feel the peace and gratitude of having cultivated happiness, not only in spite of, but in a large way because of these things. And of course, on a practical level, we can choose things that help facilitate mental states like happiness by nourishing our bodies, getting enough sleep, spending time outdoors, and some of the other common recommendations I'll talk about later. But there's a lot of research to back the mental benefits of those things but it goes deeper than that as well. In fact, there are some well-studied and science-backed ways to increase feelings like happiness, joy, and contentment, including gratitude. Studies show that even just a five-minute gratitude practice daily increases optimism, reduces anxiety, and chemically changes the brain to be more positive.

Try incorporating this as a morning practice or family dinners or by journaling or as podcast guests, Travis Brewer does set a timer on your phone, he sets his for 3:14 every day, which signifies pi, a number that's important to him, and at that time, think of something to be grateful for. Travis often sends a person a text saying he's grateful for them or posts something about gratitude to encourage others to do the same.

Another idea, reframe the mental statements and questions that you make internally. We are profoundly impacted by our own inner voice and the questions and statements we say to ourselves have a big impact. And this is a point that many guests have brought up and something I've noticed over the last few years as well. When I was asking questions like, "Why can't I lose weight?" Or, "Why is this so hard?" My subconscious worked to answer those questions and provide me with all the reasons why.

When I shifted to how questions and statements and frame them positively like, "How is it so much fun to nourish my body in the best way possible," and, "How is it so easy to let go of excess fat," my mindset began to shift and these things got much easier. I've also heard the phrase, "Never be heard complaining even to yourself." And when our inner voice and monologue is talking about how tough things are or what we wish was different, that's where our energy and attention goes. And finally, for me, it was letting go of the story that, "I will be happy when," and choosing, "I am happy now," and that created a big inner shift for me. I

mentioned before a helpful statement from a therapist I work with and past podcast guest, Dr. Joy Martina, and she encouraged me to while alternating double taps on my hands, say, "Even though I am feeling whatever the negative feeling is right now, I love and accept myself," and "I love and accept myself when I now choose to feel" and then whatever your desired outcome is.

In some ways, this is as simple as noticing and choosing our reactions to events as talked about in the book section, or as Epictetus said many years ago, "We cannot choose our external circumstances but we can always choose how we respond to them." As an example, two people could have identical experiences and one might respond by thinking, "This is terrible, I failed and nothing ever works out for me," while another might respond with a mindset of, "I've learned so much from this experience, I'm so grateful that it happened." If you want to keep going deep on this topic, check out my podcast with Dr. Laurie Santos from The Happiness Lab and Dr. Joy Martina.

Another helpful though very simple tip is to smile or laugh more. As a philosopher once wrote, "Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy." Cool fact, we know that we smile when we feel positive emotions, but did you know that smiling might also help create these positive emotions?

Studies have shown that smiling, laughing, and other external expressions work as a continual feedback loop helping to reinforce our internal emotions. As a side note, this is actually why some sources worry about the effects of things like Botox that limit full facial expression as there's some evidence that it might limit the feelings and expression of these corresponding emotions. Side benefit, smiles are also contagious, and spreading happiness leads to happiness. Another very common theme recommended by largely almost every guest in some form is meditation. In fact, if I had to name the most common health tip from the past 500 episodes that guests cite as being vital to physical health, it would be the recommendation to adopt some type of meditation practice. In fact, on-air or off-air, I'd estimate that at least half of guests have mentioned this as being one of the most impactful parts of their life.

To preface, I should probably also confess that I was largely opposed to the idea of meditation for a really long time. And though I tried it a few times, I never noticed the benefit or felt a difference until it became a regular practice. Slowly, meditation shifted from something I felt like I should do, and I always aware when I use that word "should," to something I looked forward to doing to something that became an integrated part of my life. It's also funny to me that science now continues to validate this age-old practice that many cultures and religions have understood and practiced for hundreds and thousands of years. There are seemingly endless ways to try to incorporate meditation, and it seems to be a very individualized practice to figure out which is going to work best for you. But some starting places if you want to learn and jump in are Episode 162 with Dan Harris, and Episode 315 with Emily Fletcher, and those will both be linked in the show notes as well.

Another recurring theme, the idea of learning from our children. This is something that's recurred as a recommendation among guests in various ways and how we can learn from them on everything from mindset

to life. Of course, there are some caveats here. But recurring themes mentioned by my guests are things like that kids naturally move more and sleep in better rhythms than adults do, or specifically in how they move within their environment rather than exercise as an isolated event like many adults do. Past guest Aaron Alexander has talked about while we think that we shape our environment by creating what our house looks like or our environment we interact with, our environment also very literally shapes us and forms our posture and our movement patterns.

And so, something I've learned from my children and that we do in our family now, this realization has led to some modifications of our environment in our home including things like a gymnastics mat down the hallway, hanging rings and yoga swings from the ceiling, balance boards in the living room, and a lot of outdoor structures to climb. There's another element that kids get right and that I feel like we often lose as we get older, which is play, but turns out play is just as pivotal for adults as it is for kids. We don't lose the need for novelty and pleasure as we grew up, said Scott Eberle, which is he's a vice president for play studies and the editor of the "American Journal of Play." Play brings joy and it's vital for problem-solving, creativity, and relationships. I will say my kids have been my best teachers in relearning how to play.

And we're now seeing research that backs up the need for creative play in adults and studies show that even things like coloring can be beneficial to the adult brain. Coloring has been shown to have stress-reducing benefits. The reason? Coloring is said to calm the amygdala, which is the part of the brain related to fear and stress, while it stimulates the parts of the brain responsible for creativity and logic. There was a 2005 study that documented a reduction in anxiety in patients after a short time of just coloring geometric patterns. In fact, coloring therapy has been used experimentally for those with anxiety and stress-related disorders. Some people report sleeping better even after just coloring for five minutes before bedtime. And finally, a theme from kids has been to maintain curiosity, something that kids are naturally great at but that we often suppress as we get older. Many centenarians and supercentenarians credit their child-like curiosity for life was part of their longevity. So, as we can learn from our children, move, play, stay curious.

Another theme that showed up often among past podcast guests is the idea of constant questioning of everything. In their own ways, many guests have talked about the importance of constant questioning and then looking at things in new ways. I've shared my own yearly practice with this of making a list of things I believe or I feel I'm relatively certain about and then questioning each of those things by reading different viewpoints over the course of the next year. For me, this stems from the idea that if something is worth believing, it's worth questioning. And I feel like this practice has helped me gain perspective, understanding, and patience for those who hold different viewpoints in many areas, but it's also caused some pretty dramatic shifts in my own views.

Guests have talked about this practice as well, from doctors like Kelly Brogan, Ken Robawa [SP], and Ted Achacoso who questioned the traditional medical model and ended up discovering methods that were more helpful to their patients, to dentists who question the traditional dental model like Dr. Kelley Blodgett. Other examples include doctors like Dr. Gabrielle Lyon, who dove into the research and now advocates a much higher amount of protein consumption for women and many of her patients see great results from this, or

speakers like previously mentioned, Byron Katie, who really questioned why she was having those depressive symptoms and then discovered a method for doing what she calls The Work that shifted her own internal state.

The fifth reoccurring factor is the importance of sleep and how to optimize it. In 500 episodes, there are very few pieces of advice that every health expert seems to agree on and the importance of sleep is perhaps the most commonly reoccurring. In fact, I'm yet to hear any doctor, health expert, or anyone I've had on this podcast claim that sleep isn't one of the most important keys to health, they all agree that it is. And of course, there's a lot of variation in the amount and the type of sleep recommended but everyone seems to agree that sleep is essential for health and the data really backs us up too. Even just one or two days of missed or impaired sleep can lead to lower immune function, less ability to regulate blood sugar, and even lasting hormonal changes, as well as short-term impaired memory, learning, and processing.

In fact, studies show that spending one night without sleep will not just make you feel drunk, your brain will behave as if it actually is. In fact, 24 hours without sleep creates the body responses equivalent to a blood alcohol level of 0.1%, which means you're more than legally drunk as far as your brain is concerned. Additionally, the hormonal changes that occur from lack of sleep lead to cravings for junk food and a slower metabolism. Chronic poor sleep increases the risk of many conditions, from high blood pressure to heart disease, kidney issues, heart failure, and even stroke. Yet societally, we are getting, on average, 90 minutes less sleep than people of our same age 100 years ago, and there's a lot of evidence that this could be a contributing factor in the rise of chronic disease.

Past guest Shawn Stevenson makes a case for sleep being more important for health than diet and exercise combined. Check out his book "Sleep Smarter" For a full explanation of why. Sleep doctor Michael Breus also talked about this in Episode 58 and he really goes deep on this in his book, "The Power of When," how we all have a unique chronotype of sleep and how understanding this can help us improve our sleep over time. Some commonly cited advice for improving sleep quality from various guests over the course of these episodes, keep your bedroom cool or use something like a ChiliPad to help improve deep sleep. Avoid screens for a few hours before bed, since the blue light can suppress natural melatonin production. Stop eating for at least three hours before bed, more on this in a few minutes but this is also helpful for metabolism and weight loss.

Avoid caffeine after noon. Keep bedrooms dark using blackout curtains and removing sources of artificial light. Create a solid sleep routine. Keep the bedroom for sleeping only and avoid TV in the bedroom, and get daytime sunlight specifically soon after sunrise and during the brighter midday hours. The morning light recommendation is especially important for cortisol and other hormones. And while it isn't the most fun advice to get up early and go outside, getting up as close to sunrise as possible seems to have an almost universal benefit on sleep quality.

Number six recurring key takeaway and advice from this podcast is to learn something every day. If you've listened, you've heard me ask guests for recommendations of books that had a profound impact on their life

and almost every guest says it's hard to narrow it down because they're constantly reading. Lifelong learning is a common trait of my podcast guests and there's quite a bit of research to back up the importance of active learning for health and mental health.

Henry Ford said, "Anyone who stops learning is old whether at 20 or 80, anyone who keeps learning stays young," and it seems he was on to something. Gandhi also said, "Live as you are going to die tomorrow, but learn as if you are going to live forever." And in fact, many of the world's most successful people credit reading as a huge part of their success. Warren Buffett, in fact, when asked, explain his secret. He said, "Read 500 pages every day, that's how knowledge works, it builds up like compound interest. All of you can do it but I guarantee not many of you will do it." And of course, as moms, making time to read for hours a day isn't always feasible but there's something to learn from all of these guests and their love of reading. So, even if it's just 20 to 30 minutes a day reading...or 30 pages a day, this can have a profound impact. We also know as moms that kids listen to some of what we say and much of what we do. So, by having a visible reading habit will encourage our kids to do the same.

Many books are available on audiobook now, so I often find myself listening while working around the house or going for a walk. Turns out the types of book we read matter too. While fiction is great and very entertaining, over 90% of guests cited nonfiction books as their top choices, specifically books that helped with their business or personal development. And as a note related to that last point, experts seem to agree that it's better not to read in bed as this can interfere with sleep quality. Reading is also dramatically correlated with improved creativity, better memory, reduce stress, and increase reports of happiness. Other research-backed ways to incorporate lifelong learning in ways that directly benefit the brain and may even reduce the risk of brain-related diseases like Alzheimer's include learning a new language or a new instrument.

Even as adults, this seems to have a creativity-boosting effect and it helps the brain stay healthy as we age. Unlike many of our other organs, the brain has the ability to constantly change. This is a phenomenon known as neuroplasticity. New scientific studies show that we're capable of something called neurogenesis, which is a process where we create new neurons in certain parts of our brain throughout our lifetime. These ongoing biological processes mean that we have the power to create physical changes in the cellular structures of our brain to develop new nerve pathways, which can directly result in improved cognitive function, a slower aging process, and enhance memory. A personal tip on this, I use the Notion app which is [notion.so](https://www.notion.so) to track my reading list and also track things that I'm learning and goals related to them to help with a way to keep it in one place and to keep myself motivated to keep learning.

Another great tip, check out past episodes 184 and 354 with Jim Kwik who overcame his own learning struggles and a traumatic brain injury and he now teaches people around the world how to learn anything more quickly. I really enjoyed his speed reading and rapid-learning programs and so have my kids. Also check out episode 401 with Jesse Elder, which really delves into rethinking education and how to set our kids and ourselves up for lifelong learning.

The seventh reoccurring theme and key takeaway is the importance of community. If you've listened to this podcast very much, you've probably heard me say this over and over or you've heard many guests mentioned the importance of community, but it bears repeating here. The Harvard study of adult development is one of the longest studies into adult life and it found that community is an important factor in health and longevity and that conversely, loneliness is more dangerous to your health than alcohol or smoking.

Another meta-analysis of 300,000 people found that strong relationships and community boosted longevity by as much as 50%. Check out Episode 384 with Michael Trainer for specific tips on building a strong community if you don't already have one and he also talks about meditation, morning routine, and some of these other key takeaways. And communities with the largest population of centenarians, community involvement and social connection are incredibly important. How do they accomplish this? Researchers have picked out some of the most important contributing factors. In blue zones, areas where people live a long time, people are part of spiritual or very close relational communities and they know their purpose in life. They take care of their family first and often in blue zones, families live together in multi-generational homes. Parents also spend a lot of time with their children.

In our modern society and especially as busy moms, it is easy to get lost in the mountains of laundry and diapers and dishes and paperwork and emails, and not actually connect with anyone all day long. So, what is the modern mom to do? That's the question I think we're all trying to answer in some way and let me know if you find the answer, but here are some ideas to get started. Set aside an hour or so a day just to spend time together as a family. Commit to regular dinner together to connect and share with family or friends, blue zone communities always eat together. If dinnertime doesn't work because of schedule, try a different mealtime or have a snack or eat together when everyone's home. And schedule a regular night out with friends and invest time in building your social circle.

The number eight recurring theme and takeaway is a very broad one and that's the idea of mindset. Many guests talk about mindset being as important as any other factor when it comes to health, and several of the other points I've already mentioned touch on this as well. The book "Mindset" by Carol Dweck is another often recommended book, including by Guest 382, Elliott Row, who is a world-renowned mindset coach. As mentioned in some of the book recommendations, mindset might be the biggest key when it comes to health and essentially every aspect of life, and while we can't control our circumstances or what happens to us, we have complete ability to control our mindset. Some specific past episodes that come to mind about mindset specifically are number 230 with Chalene Johnson, 289 with Ryan Holiday, 448 with Michael Bayer, 488 with Laila Ali, and 496 with Paul Hoffman.

For kids specifically, check out episode 423 with Michele Borba who talks about how to help kids build a resilient and healthy mindset from a young age. And as mentioned, one of the therapists I work with, Dr. Joy Martina in Episode 368 also has some really practical tips for shifting mindset. As a couple of the books touched on, I've learned that a big part of this is paying attention to and becoming intentional about our inner language and inner questions, and here's what I mean. I touched on this a little bit, but I used to internally say things like, "Why is it so hard to lose weight?" To which my mind would inevitably answer and provide all the

reasons it was so hard to lose weight: thyroid disease, six kids, bad genes, etc., etc. After working with Dr. Joy, I started to instead ask myself questions like, "How is it so easy to lose weight and feel healthy?" And my mind jumps to answer the question with reasons like, "Because I love healthy foods," "Movement is fun," "Sleep helps me heal," etc.

There's an ancient proverb that the body becomes what the foods are as the spirit becomes what the thoughts are. I realized I've been poisoning my thoughts with bad questions and letting my subconscious work to answer those bad questions for a long time. It took a while to make the shift but I caught myself when those questions started popping up and I learned to rephrase them in a positive way. And many of the books that touch on this are helpful as well.

Another recurring theme across all these episodes is the importance of planning a daily routine. And there are endless quotes about this from almost every major thinker throughout history from Ben Franklin saying, "By failing to prepare, you're preparing to fail," to Napoleon Hill saying, "Plan your work and work your plan." For moms especially, I think this step is essential and many guests have shared the importance of planning in various aspects of life, from meal planning to time management, to setting and reaching goals.

And I've talked about my own systems for this in episode 316. Off the top of my head, I would say the biggest time savers I have personally are in rotating seasonal meal plans that save time with both planning and cooking, time blocking and work in our household schedule, and then mapping out and planning all projects and goals in our personal and family life. And I track all those as well through the Notion app which has been a really helpful practical tool.

And lastly, another recurring theme in these episodes is the Pareto Principle or the rule of 80/20, which explains that 80% of consequences come from 20% of causes, asserting basically an unequal relationship between inputs and outputs. This principle serves as a general reminder that the relationship between inputs and outputs is not balanced, though often we assume that it is.

So, as some examples, 80% of outputs come from 20% of inputs, 20% of criminals commit 80% of crimes, 20% of drivers cause 80% of traffic accidents, 80% of pollution originates from 20% of factories, 20% of companies represent 80% of sales, 20% of employees are responsible for 80% of results, and 20% of students have grades of 80% or higher. And this was firstly talked about as an economic principle but we can use this to our advantage when we understand the concept because as well 80% of our health comes from 20% of our actions. We go into this specifically in Episode 363 with Mindbodygreen. When it comes to health, this principle is helpful in prioritizing the things that make the biggest impact, from eating healthy 80% of the time to finding the 20% of workouts that make the biggest impact for your body specifically, so check out that episode for breakdown.

And lastly, because this is a podcast about most aspects of physical health and wellness, there are some recurring health practices and bio hacks that guests recommend. And while we've definitely talked a lot about a lot of cutting-edge bio hacks and very specific therapies in these past episodes and I think specific approaches for more nuanced issues are important, some commonalities really emerged from all these past guests. And the best part, many of the most common recommendations that guests cited as being really impactful and pivotal for health are completely free or at least very inexpensive. And while I believe there's a time and a place for more complicated and expensive approaches, these core suggestions form the basis of healthy living, most of them can be done as a family, and most don't cost a thing or even take very much time.

In fact, I think most guests would agree that these common practices while free, form the foundation for all healthy living and that even the more complicated expensive bio hacks should only be stacked on top of these. The first being breathwork, and I'm going to go into a little bit of the specifics of different ways to do this. But think about this, we can live a very short amount of time without air, a longer time but still a short amount of time without water, and a much longer time without food. Yet often when it comes to health, we talk so much about food and don't talk very much about how we're breathing or what we're drinking and I think those two factors deserve more time and attention. At least a third of guests have mentioned that intentional breathwork in some form is important for health.

And I know what you may be thinking, you've been breathing since you were born. But the way we breathe can make a big difference in our stress response and in a lot of areas of health and this is one area where a very short daily practice can make a really profound difference. In fact, this might be the fastest way to combat stress on a body level. There's a 2017 study that was published in the journal "Frontiers in Psychology" and it found that people who completed only 20 breathwork training sessions over the course of 8 weeks had significantly lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol compared with those who did not. Cortisol is responsible for our body's stress response, and at high levels, it can contribute to chronic inflammation. So, here's one reason that breathing and especially in intentional ways, which I'll explain in a minute, works so well.

There are receptors deep in our lungs, and when we breathe deeply, we're actually sending signals to the body to move from sympathetic nervous system to parasympathetic. Essentially, calm breathing is a sign of calmness in the body. So, intentionally replicating that calm breathing tricks the body into thinking it is calm and the rest of the body processes follow suit. Intentional breathing also helps, like I said, to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system. This part of the nervous system is responsible for rest and digest. When a stressor triggers a stress response in the body, breathing exercises help bring you back to this place of calm. And for me personally, I realized that until I processed some of my past trauma, I was likely in a state of sympathetic, which is the fight or flight nervous system for years and years and years, and breathing and some other methods were really helpful to me in kind of deprogramming that response.

Over time, as you exercise this muscle of breathing, the parasympathetic nervous system gets stronger. So, the next time you encounter a stressor, your body is more likely to re-enter a state of calm more quickly. There are times when sympathetic nervous system activation is good like during exercise, but breathing can

help us move back into parasympathetic once those states passed. Breathing practices also seem to affect the vagus nerve. The vagus nerves are two large cranial nerves that run from the brain through the upper body and all the way down to the colon. Deep breathing stimulates the vagus nerve and triggers calm in the body. According to a 2018 study, stimulation of the vagus nerve is the most likely reason that meditation, mindfulness, and breathing exercises can help the body get into a calm state. The vagus nerve is responsible for stimulating digestion and regulating things like heart rate and blood pressure.

Deep breathing activates neurons that detect blood pressure. These neurons signal to the vagus nerve that blood pressure is going too high. The vagus nerve then works to reduce heart rate and blood pressure. With many guests citing stress and inflammation as core drivers of health problems, this little practice can make a big difference. It's also something that can be easily incorporated with a family, and even just five minutes a day can create a noticeable change. Other studies have found a positive effect of regular breathwork practice on blood pressure, digestive symptoms, and pain management. Several guests recommended the book "Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art" as a helpful starting point for understanding and incorporating breathwork. And specific podcasts that go into the science of breathwork include Episode 375 with Max Gomez and 472 with Josh Trent.

There are various methods of practicing intentional breathing. But some of the most simple guests recommended ones are simply deep belly breathing, which means taking a long deep breath through the nose to fill the body with air like a balloon. You want the belly to expand and the chest to rise, full breath in. And then as we exhale, the chest falls, the ribs fall back in, and your navel pulls in. And this is an important key, by engaging the abdomen, you experience the full capacity of breath and you create that vagus nerve response, sending a message to the whole body and mind to relax. Another simple technique is called 4-7-8 breathing. This practice uses the technique of holding the breath to basically press pause on the busy mind. And the sequence is to inhale for a count of four, hold the breath for a count of seven, and then slowly exhale for a count of eight. A longer exhale is said to calm the nervous system and I find this one specifically helpful before bed for improving sleep quality and HRV.

Another easy one that's recommended often after exercise is called box breathing is perhaps the simplest practice to start with and it simply involves breathing in a box pattern. So, inhaling for a count of four, holding for a count of four, exhaling for a count of four, and holding for a count of four. And this too helps the body shift into parasympathetic and release stress.

Another easy one is called alternate nostril breathing. Alternate nostril is a great way to relax the whole body, it takes a little bit more concentration but once you get used to it, it becomes a lot easier. Basically, all you have to do, use your dominant hand with your thumb and your pinky finger, you blow all the air out of your lungs, then you hold your right nostril shut with your right thumb, and you inhale through your left nostril. You hold your breath at the top and then you switch to close the left nostril with your pinky finger and you exhale through the right nostril. Then you inhale through the right nostril while you holding close, and then exhale to the left. And repeating that 10 times has, there's actually a science to back that up, creating a reduced stress response in the body.

Number two, movement is another very common theme among guests, but not just related to exercise or specific workouts. Repeat guests Katy Bowman talks about the difference between movement activity and exercise and why that difference is important. You can check her out in episodes 106 and 482 for her full explanation. But the bottom line is that even those of us who check the exercise box regularly are probably not getting enough movement or nutritious movement as she calls it throughout the day, and she explains that this is as important as what we eat. She and guests Aaron Alexander and Hunter Cook talk about how our environment and our movement patterns very literally shaped our body and how to incorporate healthier movement patterns as part of daily life. While we might not all want to get rid of all the chairs in our house or sleep on the floor as Katy's family does, there's a lot to be learned by shifting our mindset towards movement and exercise.

Specifically, thinking about places we spend a lot of time like desks and beds and how these can be improved. These guests also recommend working in small movement breaks throughout the day, from little walks to just simply a few squats to sitting on the floor instead of a chair. These guests all agree on also not pushing kids into organized sports that encourage specific repetitive movements at a young age. Episode 326 with guest Turner Osler talks about specifically the dangers of not getting enough movement, and he provides a free plan online for creating a better type of chair that is better, more beneficial for kids, and it lets them maintain movement even when they have to sit in school. We use these in our house and our schoolroom. And if you want to grab those plans, like I said, they're free, the website is buttonchairs.org, B-U-T-T-O-N-C-H-A-I-R-S dot org.

Number three is a little bit more controversial and I think it's really, really important, and that is sunlight exposure. Though light might not be one of the biggest factors that come to mind when we think about health, a lot of past guests have explained the importance of using light to our advantage. This is another totally free area of optimization that can have a big impact, especially when we're talking about outdoor light exposure at different times of day and how they can manipulate hormones. I first heard this tip from past guest Dr. Alan Christianson to get outdoor light for 15 minutes as soon as possible after sunrise or after waking, and it makes a big difference in how you feel. The idea behind it is that bright light exposure, which even on a cloudy day, the light is much brighter outdoors, helps regulate circadian rhythm and improve cortisol patterns.

I personally notice more mental clarity and better sleep when I do this, which is enough of a reason for me. But research shows that making this a regular habit can help regulate cortisol levels over time, increase melatonin production at night, and have a positive impact on other hormones as well. So, my tip for this, sip some coffee or tea outside every morning and get the benefit of being outdoors. But the benefits of the sun go far beyond just light exposure, cortisol regulation, and even beyond vitamin D, which has gotten a lot of attention lately.

One of my favorite episodes personally is Episode 373, in which Ari Whitten makes a very compelling case for why sunlight exposure is as important or more important than diet and exercise combined for health. While we've been taught to fear the sun, he argues this fear is misplaced. And that when we look at the data, sunlight exposure, even during the midday sun which is often touted as dangerous, ends up being much more beneficial than harmful.

In fact, when we delve into the actual data, it seems that more is actually better, of course, while avoiding burning, and that sunlight has an inverse relationship with all-cause mortality. Which means, simply put, the more sunlight, the less likely you are to die. One study showed that women who got more sun exposure lived longer and had better health outcomes, while another compared avoiding the sun to the harm caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day. So, recap, avoiding the sun one study says is as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Ari explains a concept called mal-illumination, which he claims is just as big of a problem as malnutrition and that our avoidance of the sun from fear of skin cancer has actually created a lot more health problems.

And he says that by avoiding the sun, we've increased our risk of other cancers, diabetes, and heart disease. Not only that, but he makes a very strong case for the idea that sunlight does not actually meaningfully increase the risk of skin cancer. But surprisingly, as we're learning in the media recently as well, and surprisingly, that sunscreen might actually increase the risk of skin cancer. With the earlier idea of questioning everything, I'd encourage you to turn that critical lens on what you've been told about sun exposure if you haven't already. It goes far beyond the benefits of vitamin D as well. While that is an important piece of advice by many guests, we can't get the same benefit by supplementing vitamin D as some sources would argue that we need to get vitamin D exclusively from the sun.

Past guests have also explained that despite what we've been told, avoiding the sun can actually speed the aging process. And they explained that the more sunlight you get during the day, the stronger your brain gets against the negative effects of artificial light, which we know as I have already mentioned can suppress melatonin production. Episode 301 with Matt Maruca delves more into the artificial light side and why it's worth avoiding certain sources of light at night. He echoes advice to get more of the right type of sun exposure, and he makes a strong case for avoiding sunglasses because this can actually create a harmful response to the body. Furthermore, lack of sun exposure has been linked to a reduction in serotonin and a potential increase in depressive symptoms. The good news is the sun is free and widely available depending on the area where we live and that is one easy free change that can have a really big impact on hormones.

This episode is brought to you by Hiya Children's Vitamins. Did you know that typical children's vitamins are basically candy in disguise, filled with two teaspoons of sugar, a lot of unhealthy chemicals, and some gummy junk that growing kids should never eat? Hiya is made with zero sugar, and zero gummy junk. Yet it tastes great and is perfect for picky eaters. Hiya fills the most common gaps in modern children's diets to provide the full-body nourishment that kids need, with a yummy taste that they will love. It's manufactured in the U.S.A. with globally sourced ingredients, each selected for optimal bioavailability and absorption. Hiya arrives straight to your door on the pediatrician recommended schedule. Your first month comes with a reusable glass bottle, so your kids can personalize it with stickers and then, every month, you just transfer. There are no

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This episode is brought to you by Organifi. They make delicious superfood drinks, they're beyond easy to incorporate into your routine. Let me tell you about my two personal favorites. Their green juice contains a clinical dose of ashwagandha, which supports healthy cortisol levels to aid in weight management. It also contains 11 superfoods for resetting the body and takes just 30 seconds with no chopping, shopping, or juicing, or blending. It's organic, it tastes delicious, and no blender needed. You just add water and drink it up, and let your body soak up the benefits. I also love their Gold drink at night, it's like a turmeric tea, they even have a chocolate version, that contains nine superfoods for rest and relaxation. It tastes delicious in warm weather and can be mixed in milk, water, or milk alternatives. It's low sugar, so you can enjoy this dessert-like tea guilt-free and wake up refreshed without drowsiness. My kids love the chocolate one. You can check out these and all of their products, including protein powder and red antioxidant drink by going to organifi.com/wellnessmama, and using the code wellnessmama to save 20% on your order.

Another recurring theme are various hacks for supporting the brain. Quite a few guests have talked about various aspects of brain health and a few key and free recommendations emerged. Repeat guest Dr. Andrew Hill has a Ph.D. in cognitive neuroscience and he's the one that has done qEEGs on my brain. He goes into an overview of what things like qEEG and neurofeedback are, he explains the science of how meditation changes the brain like we've already mentioned, he explains this in a very tangible way, and then he makes a strong case for why sleep is the single most important factor you can focus on for the sake of your brain. He also gives his clinically validated top three rules in order of importance for improving sleep based on thousands of brain scans. And the great thing is all of his pieces of advice are also completely free. He says based on over 10,000 brain scans that the things most likely to benefit your brain are not eating for about three hours before bed, getting up before the sun and getting morning light, and doing at least one fasted workout per week.

His brain recommendations also echo some of the other common health advice from these episodes, though he provides a brain-centered explanation. For instance, like I mentioned, many guests recommend waking up with or before the sun and getting some morning sunlight. Dr. Hill explains how this creates measurable changes in brain scans and how it may slow the brain aging process and increases things like focus and creativity during the day. As another example, many guests advocate some form of time-restricted eating, more on that in a minute. But Dr. Hill explains that from a brain perspective, avoiding food for the few hours before bedtime specifically is important for deep sleep and for the body's process of flushing cerebrospinal fluid, and for removing things like amyloid plaques in the brain, as well as for proper hormone production because growth hormone is suppressed when we go to sleep with elevated insulin from food. Episode 418 with Dr. Perlmutter also goes into brain optimization, providing additional recommendations, and delving into his book, "Brainwash."

So, I touched on it a minute ago but another very common recommendation on this podcast that does directly relate to physical health but is also free is some form of caloric restriction, fasting, time-restricted eating, or

circadian fasting. In fact, at least a quarter of guests have recommended some form of fasting or time-restricted eating and there's a little bit of a difference there, or caloric restriction. And with good reason, the data is really clear that some form of caloric restriction is correlated with increased lifespan. Of course, while it's a free thing to do, caloric restriction isn't one of the most fun things we can do for our health. And actually, doing that and getting people to do it is one of the tougher parts of this. But research shows that there are methods of achieving the benefits without just eating less at every meal or consciously restricting calories.

Rhonda Patrick, who's one of my favorite researchers, explains that the mechanisms by which caloric restriction works are not fully understood but that some of the benefits of caloric restriction that we see validated in studies are, that they appear to involve the inhibition of key nutrient sensing and inflammatory pathways and the regulation of multiple molecular, cellular, and metabolic pathways that promote things like protein homeostasis, genomic stability, oxidative stress resistance, and proper stem cell function. Some of the molecular adaptations that have been identified with time-restricted eating or caloric restriction involved increased activity of sirtuins, AMPK, and Nrf2, while cellular adaptations include increased autophagy, DNA repair, immunosurveillance, and others. These adaptations promote a vast array of metabolic improvements, the decreased insulin growth factor, changes in mTOR, insulin, inflammation, and oxidative stress.

But it seems that some easier methods of time-restricted eating can be just as affected in achieving these results as traditional caloric restriction. As Rhonda Patrick explains, time-restricted eating within a 10-hour window and fasting for just 14 hours a day without restricting calories altered the body's production of proteins consistent with a reduced risk of developing chronic conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, and cognitive decline. And that's from just eating within a 10-hour window, which is doable for most people. Other guests who have touched on this topic include Dave Asprey in Episode 410 when he explains the different ways to incorporate fasting and why protein in the first meal of the day is important, and how to know if fasting is safe for you.

Episode 455 with Gin Stephens specifically addresses fasting for women and what the science says about how to do it safely and effectively without affecting your hormones. Episode 345 with Dr. Amy Shah suggests circadian fasting, which lines up with the recommendation not to eat three hours before bedtime, and what she explains is safe for women and ties in a lot of these other factors that we've mentioned. Additionally, episode 466 with Cynthia Thurlow addresses specific factors women need to pay attention to with fasting. If you want to go deeper on the science, check out episode 255 with Dr. Valter Longo which talks about how certain types of fasting can protect normal cells from cancer, how fasting is used in conjunction with chemotherapy for better outcomes, and what something he coined the fasting-mimicking diet is.

Bottom line, overall, fasting and time-restricted eating, which is just eating within a shorter window, are highly effective for health when they're done correctly. And they're even better than free, you actually save money by not eating as much. Of course, this is not medical advice but some ways I have personally incorporated fasting practices are with a yearly 7 to 10-day water fast at the beginning of the year, which as I said, is more for mental and spiritual reasons than just physical. Time-restricted eating most days, so I try to stick to that 8

to 10-hour window that Rhonda Patrick mentions, and then occasionally more reduced feeding windows or one-day fast, as well as intentional refeed days where I spiked calories above my normal level.

Another common piece of advice relates to temperature variation and things like sauna or heat cold therapies or just cold plungers in general. And before I go deeper into this, I will say that one result of modern society is that we often live in a very temperature-controlled environment, many of us only experiencing a temperature range of less than 10 degrees throughout the year because we heat and cool our homes and we're not exposed to big temperature swings, but there can be a benefit of those temperature swings to our bodies. This is also one of the only pieces of common advice on this list that can be more expensive if you choose to get a sauna or a cold plunge but there are ways to get the benefits of temperature variation without expensive equipment. If you've listened much, you've likely heard these practices mentioned and here's why. Studies show that using a sauna five times a week can extend lifespan by seven years and reduces all-cause mortality.

According to the German bicycle riding study, exercise and near-infrared sauna can boost weight loss by up to 444% and regular heat exposure can help increase ATP production for mitochondria. A review of all the published scientific literature about sauna use shows a strong trend of coronary benefits, most notably in their ability to help normalize blood pressure and reduce the chance of congestive heart failure. A Harvard review of data showed a potential 40-plus percent reduction in heart attack risk from using the sauna four to seven times per week and that benefit went up with increased use. In other words, the study showed that the more often and the longer amount of time a person used a sauna, the more benefit on average and the longer the person tended to live, and here could be some of the reasons why.

Saunas increase heat shock proteins, antioxidant enzymes, and stimulate cellular clean up, or what's called autophagy, which can help our cells function like new. In my studies, an increase in heat shock proteins helped delay aging and improved cognitive function. And saunas can also increase several anti-aging hormones, including human growth hormone and insulin growth factor one or IGF1. And in particular, this also is helpful in injury healing. Saunas have a brain benefit as well. Sauna is considered an exercise mimetic, meaning that you get a lot of the same benefits of exercise without having to go for a long run. But just as when you do go for a run, sauna use increases endorphin which is the happiness hormone, opioids which are a natural pain reliever, as well as a molecule called brain-derived neurotrophic factor or BDNF in the brain.

BDNF stimulates neurogenesis, which is as we talked about the growth of new neurons cells in the brain and it protects these new neurons from damage. Improving BDNF therefore can be really helpful for cognitive function and low levels of BDNF may be related to several mental and psychiatric diseases. Sauna use also has a positive effect on inflammation. Studies looked at participants who use sauna regularly, and they showed lower levels of oxidative stress even within just two weeks of sauna use. Another study found that men who use the sauna four to seven times a week had 32% lower levels of C-reactive protein and 70% reduced risk of neurodegenerative disease. And since both heart and brain diseases are on the rise, this can be a really important factor. Of course, saunas are not free and they can be very expensive and hard to find and you have to make time to use them regularly. We have one in our house, and this would probably top the list of devices that I would prioritize and save for.

But even without a sauna, some of the same benefits can be achieved by regular exercise that causes a good sweat, spending time outdoors when it's hot, taking a hot magnesium bath with Epsom salt, and fasting, as mentioned before, because some of those same pathways are stimulated. There are also now less expensive sauna devices and even things like sauna blankets that let you get some of the same benefits without an expensive sauna unit or without taking up a lot of room in your home.

Cold exposure is another type of temperature variation that has some additional benefits and that can be easier to do at home. I think of heat and cold as separate categories with separate benefits and contrast therapy where you alternate between heat and cold as its own separate type of therapy because the results are all different.

People like Wim Hof and Laird Hamilton have been popularizing cold exposure for a lot of reasons, including cold-water immersion at just 57 degrees. It was shown to increase metabolic rate by 350%, norepinephrine by 530%, and dopamine by 250%. And another benefit, even short exposure seems to increase what's called mitochondrial biogenesis, which is basically the process by which new mitochondria are created in the body. It's one of the principal reasons that we also get the adaptations of endurance exercise, but it turns out we can get it from cold as well. Many factors can actually activate mitochondrial biogenesis not just cold, but exercise, cold exposure, heat exposure, fasting, and ketosis seem to top the list. But the reason I like cold exposure for this, it seems that even just short cold exposure can create a pretty measurable effect when it comes to mitochondrial biogenesis.

Cold exposure also activates brown fat, which is a type of adipose tissue that is correlated with a lower prevalence of cardiometabolic diseases and might even be a promising therapy for obesity and obesity-related disorders, which is what it's being studied for right now. Early studies of mice are showing that cold exposure can actually alter the composition and the activity of the gut microbiome to improve energy metabolism and support thermogenesis. The best part is you don't have to be in actual freezing temperatures to get the benefits. I used to do really, really cold plunges like 34 degrees, but when I looked at the studies, many studies are looking at water in just the range of 50 to 55 degrees and this can be easily created at home in a bathtub with a bag of ice.

And the final recurring theme of these past episodes is the importance of personalization and individualization when it comes to health. I've said many times on here that we are each our own primary health care provider and many guests have repeated that statement. In my own health journey and in the journey of recording these 700 hours of podcasts, I've learned that while every expert and every guest has something to teach and we can learn something from each book, each episode, each system, at the end of the day, we each have to figure out what works for us and no outside system is going to give us our exact blueprint. For specific health conditions, the best outcomes do seem to occur when a well-informed patient works with a specialized practitioner in partnership.

And there are general commonalities, like many of the factors I just mentioned, that can be really helpful for health but there's so much variation even within those. And personalization seems especially important when it comes to diet, supplements, and even exercise as we all respond so differently to each of these factors. As an example, almost everyone seems to benefit from supplemental magnesium as our food supply is largely depleted and our bodies need magnesium for over 300 biochemical reactions. But the amount of magnesium we each need can vary, we might respond differently to different forms of magnesium, and there's a whole host of other factors that are involved. Also, depending on things like our genes, our need for other nutrients like B vitamins or even certain fats can vary greatly.

As an example, I have a couple of specific genes that benefit from choline and taking choline was life-changing for me, but other people might not even notice a difference. And this is the reason that I try to have a wide variety of guests on this podcast, especially ones with different approaches and viewpoints to just provide an educational starting place for each of us to personalize our health. In other words, while we can't replicate any other person's system directly, each of these can be a great springboard into more learning and into personalization. And my hope in these past episodes and in the future ones to come, that you can find the ones that are helpful and that resonate with you and learn from the guests that are gonna most align with what your body and your lifestyle need and not listen to the ones that aren't helpful to you.

So, that was a recap of the past 499 episodes. Lastly, I'd really like to just extend my extreme gratitude to all of you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you so much for listening and for being a part of this community. You are the backbone of this. And as I say at the end of each episode, I don't take lightly that you share your most valuable resources, your time, your energy, and your attention with me on this podcast and in anything that you read.

I'm so grateful for your time, for your energy, and for you being here and helping create changes for your family and for our society. I would love to hear from you about who you would like to hear in the next 500 episodes and beyond and what topics are most important or top of mind to you and your family right now. But with that, I leave you with extreme gratitude. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for listening, thank you for being here, and I hope that you will join me again in the next 500 episodes of "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.