Introduction to Nutrition for Neurodivergent Brains

Hi, everybody. We are talking about diet. What is the best kind? What about your neurodivergent child and what really makes our brain and body work better?

And we have an amazing certified nutrition consultant, Julie Matthews. She has been speaking about nutrition for neurodivergent brains for a very long time.

And she has an amazing book, her newest book The Personalized Autism Nutrition Plan. and she's here to help us sort out what is the best diet and why, and really address some of the myths that we have and of course talk about picky eating because If there's anything, Julie, everybody wants to talk to me about, it's about picky eating.

So welcome and let's dive in and really get in there and talk about I think the questions people have probably besides picky-eating, which we'll get to, is talk how food really affects our mood, our attention, and our behavior and why nutrition has such powerful impact on the nervous system.

So let's jump in and talk about that. realize the power of food to affect all of those different things that you mentioned, whether it's mood or behavior or attention or anything.

It's a couple different ways. One is when we add good nutrition, when add nourishing foods that help with the brain and the neurotransmitters and all of that then we start nourishing and adding good things for the brain and then when we look at things that maybe there are some areas where the body's not as what I was gonna say firing but maybe more accurately it's just there might be imbalances in biochemistry or underlying systems and certain foods really bog those down and create inflammation and create irritation in the system or are deficient in nutrients or require us to use our good nutrients when we could be using them for other things.

And so I feel like it's really a two-part thing. One is getting that good nutrition and one is avoiding the things that are causing challenges to the systems.

So many myths about nutrition. People will say, oh, it takes too long, which I think is bologna and cheese. But why do you think so many miss persists about, I have my own opinion, but I'd love to hear why does so much myths persist about Nutrition?

I think nutrition is not always easy.

How Food Affects Mood, Attention, and Behavior

People are looking for the quick fix to things, so sometimes it's easier to come up with reasons why it is hard than it really is to do it. But in the end, it isn't really that hard.

It doesn't require major sacrifice. But once those changes are made, it typically doesn't take much more time. It's not more challenging. I don't feel that it is creating hardship in people's life.

They don' feel deprived. But when you're starting with a particular diet, It might seem like a lot of change. People feel they're going to be deprived largely because they think people don't cook well and they know how to spice foods and create things.

And I don' even, I always cooked. I'm sure I was cooking with my mother pre-verbal to, be honest. So I remember being on a chair and cooking on the stove.

My parents let us be very independent. We grew our own food. They were immigrants from Italy. But as somebody

where food and cooking is just part of my DNA, cooking doesn't have to be complex.

The best foods can be very simple. I've taught a lot of people to cook. When I was in college, I used to teach people. Sometimes there's that resistance because they think their kids are going to push back, which they probably are.

things. It makes such a difference, but nutrition is so immediate in its impact. Like go and eat a Cinnabon and then go have fruit with nuts and notice how you feel.

It's going to be dramatically different. There's a lot of things to change. If you just eat one food different one time, you might not notice anything.

But if you change things so that you even give it just even a few days, it can really make a huge difference in how somebody feels. It's really it can really be amazing and the key really is to figure out what's going on for that particular person What are the best changes to make because as I said it is a change and so you want to do the right change So that you're getting the impact so that it's motivating to continue if all of a sudden you feel better and your maybe you are not having tummy aches if you're a kid or you maybe you don't have headaches or there isn't as much irritability or anxiety.

It's pretty easy to follow a diet when you feel dramatically better. You work with parents of kids who are neurodivergent, all different kinds of impacts, some mildly impacts some severely.

When you are typically starting with people Is there a way, where do you like people to start? And I know it's unique for everybody, but are you somebody like, I'm always working with people with inflammation in their brain.

So I just say, you can't have gluten. You can have dairy for right now and you shouldn't sugar. Like that's where we got to stir. And then I try to figure out what we can do, how we work with that.

Actually I am more about adding fat and protein because everyone is so dysregulated and that will put things down, support the gut, get the neurotransmitters working.

Where do you start? Because people say, should I do keto? Should I this? Do that? And I'm inflammatory. So I'd love to hear your professional opinion.

Yes, well my book actually has a 12-step approach. So the first step is to get out the artificial junk food. The artificial colors and flavors and preservatives and all of that.

And I would put sugar in that category as well. You could, if, I wouldn't even say, you just want to start with the Artificial things first and then look at sugar more in what I'd say like step two, which is eating a healthier diet, would be the exclusion of a lot of sugar.

however you wanna think about it. But towards the beginning, I've got 12 steps and the first six are pretty much things that are good for most people.

Like eat healthier, get some basic nutrients, avoid the junk and toxins and that kind of thing. In that first phase actually is avoiding gluten and dairy as well.

Because I feel like you that most people really do better when they don't have those in their diet. While everybody is unique that's the one diet principle I fell like is the most likely to be beneficial for everybody.

Starting with the Right Dietary Changes

And then the second half goes into all the different therapeutic diets that we can touch on in a moment. Yeah. Are you so excited that the largest grocery store in America, Walmart, has committed to removing X, Y, and Z dyes?

I don't even know the list, but by the end of 2026, I believe is when it's supposed to happen. I am. Other countries have been doing this for a long time.

We're like the last, certainly not in the first. So to see companies taking the initiative themselves, since it's such a large company with so many people buying their food, that when you have somebody like that making those changes, it really does start to make sweeping changes across the board.

And I'm very excited. about it, but I think that this is a great example of really that tide changing rapidly. Well, and it makes it so easy in your step one.

The MAHA report came out and said that 70% of American children are primarily eating processed foods. I don't think people understand that that impact of You need whole foods.

It doesn't have to be that hard. Like people want to know what I cook. I do a lot of free things in advance. like I pre-marinate meats and I Do things to me for convenience for ease, but we largely eat paleo in my house because that works for us.

So I'm not saying that everyone should do that. it's what my family likes and my kids are carnivores. My kids were little and they'd be like, they walk up to you and go, you got any meat?

I had to start carrying jerky around and we got a dehydrator. Then, then jerkey, clean jerkeys started coming out more and whatnot. But they knew what they wanted and they're still, they are young adults and are always looking for meat and seafood.

processed, removing a lot of dyes and whatnot. And I personally, I know people can be very skeptical of that, but time and time again, do not see that the people you work with, that they notice, even in that phase one, they can notice shifts.

Oh, absolutely. That's why it's the first step because it is what I think is the easiest step that helps the most people that doesn't really have any downside.

You can even find, I mean, not that I'm a fan of eating sugar or lollipops, but you can find pretty much anything that's going to be free of artificial dyes and free artificial preservatives and things in a more natural form without even having to change the diet radically.

And that is why I think it's a great first step because it is really accessible to anybody and their child for the most part should be pretty accepting of it because If they like a cookie, you can get a different cookie.

If you like an ice cream or a lollipop, get the different one. Again, I don't recommend that, but as a first step, it's very helpful. Research back since 2007, there was a study in the Lancet that looked at artificial food additives and found that they were associated with hyperactivity in children.

These were all children, not just neurodivergent children and so even more so in kids typically that are neurodivergent because they tend to have more inflammation or more trouble detoxifying and things like that.

And parents have been telling us this since the 70s. So it's not new. No, it's not new. It's just the conversation is coming up a lot more, both because of political reasons, but also because we now have almost 10% of all births now are a child with autism.

it is an incredible amount and people are starting to understand that obviously doesn't include kids with ADHD and other things. We have to look at you know, our population is becoming more neurodivergent.

Some of the things, the changes you can see are changes in this phase. So changes and activity level, attention, focus. What are some of other changes that you notice within this space for some people?

Because I think parents struggle and they'll say, I tried diet and might have not really tried it long enough. I'm somebody who the day I eat something that I am not supposed to, I literally going to feel sick for the whole five to seven days.

So it's very easy for me to avoid anything because I love feeling good. But it is not always that way with kids.

Processed Foods, Dyes, and Early Wins

And things when you are feeling awful, you don't know that you're feeling off. What are behavioral signs that even on the negative? You can see focus problems, sluggish learning, mood.

You can see constipation, skin issues. The list goes on. I'm sure I missing things. That's exactly right. And it does depend on the other side. It depends which diet you're looking at in terms of how long it takes to see things improve.

So I kind of go diet by diet to help people figure that out. But it can be anxiety. Can be irritability, aggression. hyperactivity and attentiveness, sleep challenges, easily crying.

It could be lots of physical symptoms, like you said, whether it's rashes or diarrhea, constipation, language, challenges with language. challenges with pain, like are they hypersensitive to pain or insensitive?

So I would say that those are probably some of the big ones that come to my mind. When it comes to not particular to a diet, so I got a lot of questions about what are the foods that improve attention and focus.

Mood, rage, anger. Those are probably the two top categories, right? Just general dysregulation, like brain foods. And then we'll get into restrictive eating and picky eating, because that's a real challenge for many kids.

You don't even need a clinical diagnosis for that. What are some of the best foods to help the brain regulate and improve mood and attention? Well, I think I would approach this again in two ways like I did at the beginning.

So what's good to add in? Anti-inflammatory foods, foods with good fats, omega-3 fatty acids, fatty wild caught fish, nuts and seeds and olive oil and avocados.

All of those good anti-flammatory food are good add-in. And then what needs to be removed? Not only inflammatory foods like sugar and artificial things, but Now this is where it does depend on the person and the diet.

So for some people with things like aggression and mood and behavioral challenges, hyperactivity, things that it might be certain even what we consider healthy foods like polyphenol-rich foods we call salicylates.

And so it can get a little tricky. I don't want to tell everybody not to eat good herbs and spices and fruits and things like that. But for some kids, they do contribute to these quite significantly.

They can eat different ones, but they might need to be careful of some of them that are causing the problem. Or what's causing inflammation for them? Is it grains?

Oxalate, is it histamine? Do they have other things going on in their environment that would be triggering some of these things like mold and mast cell activation or pandas or something where there's just a lot of inflammation going already and these can exacerbate those challenges.

So figuring out what, inflammation is a big one. It's a underlying factor pretty much for all chronic conditions and that's no different for mood and cognition and behavior and all of that.

finding which foods are creating the inflammation for that person is where I typically spend a lot of time. That's the whole second half. Because you're talking so much about things that are like when you are in these parent Facebook groups, people like try an oscillate free diet and a casing free and gluten free.

So how do people figure that out? I show them a couple things. What are the most common symptoms typically associated? What is their food generally, or their diet generally look like?

what foods are they eating? What is there personal health history, their health, history their family history?what underlying factors do they have going?

Do they get dysbiosis? Is that going to be depleting certain nutrients that are important to process? certain pathways and all of that's in my book. If people, I go through all that, those I usually use the multi-phased approach because you know how it is if you said, okay, so and so has fatigue.

Well, you it could be one of a hundred different things. And so, but if we have clusters of symptoms, Fatigue with pain with this and that eating a lot of these foods and these lab tests We start to paint a bigger more accurate picture.

Brain Symptoms, Inflammation, and Food Triggers

You help people connect the dots by the cluster of symptoms Yeah, which which is helpful because again parents are super overwhelmed now overall your when you talk about the different diets, this is where you start saying, This diet is best for this and this diet because people always want to ask me.

And again, I'm just general anti-inflammatory. If you want something more specific, then you should work with, you know, somebody who that's with all they do.

Yes. I mean, that is a little tricky because there are some diets that I would look to first if somebody said they have these these cluster of symptoms.

Definitely. But again, someone could say, I have mitochondrial dysfunction. What diet's the best? Well, am I generally say this one diet, but for other people, that diet is just contraindicated and not a good diet.

So that's why it's good to look at a combination of things to really figure it out. But yeah, there are more common like hyperactivity, irritability, aggression, red cheeks, and red ears.

I tend to think of something like salicylates, typically. There are some that are more common. What are the reactions to these foods? And sometimes you can't always see the reaction.

Sometimes you CAN, but sometimes, you cannot always the see reaction, so imagine when we're talking salicilates and those are found in berries and grapes and raisins and cinnamon and and kids kids eat a lot of and let's say absolutely some berries with breakfast and some cinnamon something at snack and then some let say grapes with little raisin with lunch and so they're eating every couple hours.

to see a reaction from eating it is more challenging, because the reaction's kind of just always there. And so then it goes up a little, but it's a lot harder to the contrast.

Whereas if they're out of the diet, then you can really see that contrast in that. So sometimes a dietary trial can be helpful. Yeah, and the behaviors are breadcrumbs, right?

They're clues to help us better understand. And I think sometimes, like, I remember like 20 years ago when my kid was getting red ears, you know, nobody knew what the heck that was.

Nobody could answer it. It was like 10 years in somebody. I don't remember where it was, but I was. That's what it is. Let's talk about one of the biggest obstacles to getting to kids to eat foods for their brain.

it's picky eating and restrictive eating, which has a lot of sources, often sensory can be just straight old resistance here. or anxiety, there's lots of things.

It also can be that the whole family's not doing it. There's a lot of reasons why kids restrict and it's real. I don't want to diminish how hard that struggle can.

What are your thoughts on that? And when you have a restrictive eater, which is probably more than 50% of the people you work with, because they're about 70 to 80% I work Where do you start?

How do help help their kids? You're 80% of kids with developmental delays have picky eating and of those with variety of different delays, autism per se is the most common and they have the Most picky-eating habits and some unique ones that other kids don't have.

So it's very common. I would say a vast majority of the people I work with have pick eating. It's uncommon to not be a picky eater. Yes, it's common to be.

In the populations and people that you and I tend to work with. So that means that we have to learn very early on how do we help. kids with a good diet and good dietary choices when we know that the ones, the ideas we come up with are gonna have to be something that they're gonna eat.

I think you really highlighted one of the big ones which is texture. That's a really big one. And so if a parent or even a practitioner can figure out what textures does that child like by kind of looking at all the different foods they tend to eat, then trying to mimic those textures in whatever it is that we're going to feed them.

I mean, most kids love crispy and crunchy. That's like the most common. But I have one client whose child liked pancakes and like a spread on top. And it didn't matter what was in those pancakes.

It could be liver and cauliflower. That was fine. it was just about what the texture was. Tearing out what that texture is can be really, really helpful because we can make vegetables crispy and crunchy, we could make them smooth, We can do all sorts of things when we start to get creative with what we think is going on.

We talked a little bit about some of the best foods, but Putting in a variety of foods can be a real challenge with picky eaters, but that is where my people have been successful, is figuring out the texture and then mimicking that, replicating it over and over.

If you're lucky enough to have a kid who likes soups and stews, and things like that. Man, we can get a lot in there.

Picky Eating, Texture, and Sensory Support

I always try to get them to do two things. One is to things to regulate the nervous system before you eat, but also to sensory activities, which is called the sensory diet, to lower the stress response around the texture.

And I find those to be very, very helpful. Then just parents being as consistent as possible. It's not always easy. I mean, some of the kids, like you said, it's only a pancake.

And that's a challenge. It can be a challenges and so I never want to dismiss the concerns or challenges that parents might be trying to address. Sometimes with some creativity it can really go a long way or sometimes working like you said with a practitioner or a particular type of therapy.

Whether it's play therapy, a feeding therapy or occupational therapy sensory integration, whatever it happens to be for that particular person can really, really go a long way.

the strategies somebody's been trying aren't really working than maybe something else would. We use neurofeedback and PEMF as part of it. I think parents come in and say, how can I, I just don't think my kid's gonna eat this.

And so I love how you're talking about figuring out the texture and then going from there. Cause that's what I do. People work with us in it, we have a wraparound program.

we don' do one off. and people are often surprised. and how they can open up the palate by doing the texture, regulating the nervous system, sensory support.

And those things combined work to alleviate symptoms, but also improve tension and focus on all those other components. With all this talk about nutrition, there are a lot of people who are very restrictive in their eating.

Sometimes sensory have a of OCDers. I have lot people's hands in these types of things. What happens long term? to a brain in a body who is nutritionally deficient, either because they're so limited.

I've had people who have that only eat less than five foods and they are not really nutrient dense food, or they just restricting their eating to the point where it's ARFID or another eating disorder.

But talk a little bit about what happens and how we move to nervous system not being able to support the brain. I know a lot of parents really, it's a tricky beast when I have some of these emotional cases because really when there's OCD around contamination around food, which is the whole other common thing, but there could be a lotta reasons why kids are eating, not eating beyond sensory.

But what happens in the brain and body when they're just not getting the right nutrients, regardless of why? Yeah, so it can be we don't have enough neurotransmitters, we do not have amino acids to make those neurotranmiters.

And that can create some of those, even those symptoms that you are describing or those conditions you're describing, just as one small example. Anything from a frank deficiency that creates a disease state like vitamin C and scurvy.

I understand and there's certainly no judgment. It's like there are so many things each day to try to get done in a day, to challenge and tend with on a daily basis, whether it's some tasks you're asking someone to do or whatever it is.

There's so much things that sometimes food is a battle that is just that people just don't want to necessarily do. right? They have enough that they have to do that, they think, well, you know what, this is one that I could let go for today.

And the thing is, I have, there's a lot of case studies in the literature of kids that have had scurvy, some other pretty significant whether vitamin deficiency or something like that so I don't want to scare people it's just that we often think well they're eating something so you know they'll be okay and hopefully they will but we have to think that there's a couple things there is really Frank deficiency and then there's just not really functioning as well and that might not be so obvious might think well They always had some X Y or Z symptom.

Well, we need those nutrients to like I said earlier build the neurotransmitters for our good mood for Our ability for brain to function for mitochondria to have energy for every cell including our brain to function.

We need carnitine. There was a story of a girl who published two studies and one of the studies was looking at a comprehensive nutritional and dietary approach for autism.

And so we had different, six different vitamin and mineral and nutrient and diet interventions in the study. One of them was carnitine. Carnitinine is really important for mitochondrial function.

This girl, she had such poor energy that, and nobody, I don't think had diagnosed her with any sort of mitochondria or anything, but she could not go for a walk outside her home without having some sort of a wheelchair to be pushed around in because her energy was that low.

When we looked at her diet there wasn't any red meat or carnitine or anything like that in the diet really and so when she started taking that carnotine supplement she was able to get rid of her wheelchair after that for the long term from something I mean seemingly small but not because it was so profound for her so Looking at getting those good nutrients in our diet whatever they are for us whatever we need can really really be profound and it is

worth figuring it out or coming up with creative ways and just doing our best.

I'm all about nourishing hope and helping support where somebody is and also helping them realize that it is worth the struggle sometimes that can be involved because it can really make a big difference in somebody's life that they may had had really no idea before.

because obviously she's not needing a wheelchair. But I love that one small action can have an effect like that. And I think people don't realize, you talked about scurvy.

I'm like, I am thinking pirates on a ship, but I don' think that people realize how frequent nutrient deficiencies are. You know I see them all the time and some of them, why do they happen?

Sometimes they're happening because they are simply not eating the right things. Sometimes it happens because of genetic variance.

Nutrient Deficiencies and the Need for Supplements

A lot of times they happen because of the dysregulation and the nervous system being so over activated, there is a drain and they act need more nutrients.

need supplementation. We always want to have diet first, but we also have to, have supplements at times too, particularly for our neurodivergent population, which have more, typically more variants.

Because my brain always goes to okay, well we evolved over many, many millennia with eating food. we didn't have, supplements and things like that. Clearly food must be good enough to keep us all healthy, but that's not necessarily the case the amount of certain nutrients and certain multi vitamins and other supplements is Significantly higher than you can get from food and that for all the reasons that you just said there can be drains or ways the system gets depleted and also our genes can turned on or off based on things that happen in our environment, certain toxins, other things.

We have generations of maybe toxic exposures and things create certain gene variants, turn certain genes on and off, creating a situation where the level that we would have normally gotten from food several generations ago is not sufficient for what someone might be going through or even just maybe in that moment maybe they have some infection in the gut or something that's creating this it's taking all of our antioxidants to fight the inflammation from the fire from inflammation or whatever it might and so there are times that sometimes we do need some extra support And just stress, 40% of parents in the US are overwhelmed.

There's no way they're going to have normal magnesium levels. You know, like some of our most essential nutrients will just be depleted because the body's overworking to compensate for the stress.

And the same is for our children, especially the neurodivergent brain and kids with autism are experiencing things more. They feel everything. So things that are benign, noises or touch, actually create the same kind of sensation for them as a slap in the face or I mean I'm not even exaggerating, it creates the kind startle response in their nervous system.

So you're going to burn through things and that's why these kids when you do really improve their nutrition You see differences in them. I see it on a brain map.

We didn't even talk about that. So I'm able to see, I haven't had anybody recently that done this, but I've actually done brain maps pre and post diet change only.

How cool is that? I love doing all that stuff. But it's amazing. You can see the impact. Brains that are kids that're eating a variety of foods, and are largely following an anti-inflammatory diet, forget about kids, anybody of any age, their brain has so much greater neuroplasticity and what I can do with them is completely different.

I could have an 80-year-old that's a clean eater and their brains will train more easily than a 10- year- old who is a restrictive eater. And that's not to say, like, I don't want you to give up.

I want to you be excited by the possibility of eating better foods and helping the brain to be more flexible to get those neurotransmitters working and the gut working, and all those components.

Exactly, and I love what you said. We don't want anybody to feel, I don' and it sounds like you don', want anyone to fell like wherever they are isn't okay because I've seen people starting at challenging places where diet's not in great shape, And I'm not expecting somebody to change that tomorrow.

Like, oh, just start giving them broccoli and liver and they'll eat it. No. I understand. You might not even be able to blend broccoli in liver into something.

It might be tiny, tiny baby steps Swap outs. Some people that's where you got to start and it's one. And nobody should ever feel bad. Exactly. It's a one tiny little thing at a time.

If it turns out you can't even make one, tiny change at the time, maybe it is beneficial to get some help from somebody that can figure out, is it a chewing thing?

Is it swallowing thing is? It a texture thing. Is an anxiety? thing. What is it and how can you help them? It's not I don't ever believe that picky eating is a like bad behavior in the child.

I think that there's something for going on that they're having difficulty with that and I dont consider it a failure from the parents either because it is really hard and i know all parents are doing their best to feed their kids it's just they don t know what else to do but I guess I just want to say there are things that you can do and It can take some time.

I had clients where it took months of feeding therapy to make some changes. And I've had times where just a creative idea they hadn't thought of made a change overnight.

So it can be either one of those things. But just to stick with it, kind of have it as a goal in your mind on how you can eventually get there. and you know sometimes it's even nutrient deficiencies create picky eating so maybe it starting with supplements or something like that if they can't change the food.

Nutrient deficancies, zinc, magnesium, they could make a huge huge difference in and and even I mean for me everything for is regulate first. I don't often even attempt If I have a super restrictive eater, we wouldn't even attempt to make dietary changes until we calm things down because the anxiety is going to be too big and I don't want to diminish it.

And some of the kids do swap out and some kids are willing, on a personal level, anytime somebody came to my house, you know, like I would, my friends, they would say, this kid's not a picky eater at your house.

I'm like, well, first of all, I cook really good. But I will be like tell me what you like. And then I'd be like, oh, okay. And I would make something and have it in there and they would suck it down.

I never had a kid who wasn't like let me come back for this. But you do have to start. and I think people have so much fear that their kids won't eat anything.

We can think is potentially one of the greatest myths out there. but I do know some kids that really were very restricted, particularly on the spectrum.

What are some myths that hold people back? from actually darting and making more brain foods. Because I like the word healthy, but people have an aversion to it.

Yes. I think a myth is that you're going to have to do all or nothing. That you can just start wherever you are and

make one change at a time. It will be beneficial.

You can see benefits just on taking out the artificial colors, like we said, or whatever it happens to be. If the diet isn't perfect overnight, it doesn't mean it's not worth trying.

Add a little more healthy food here, try a something there. Before you know it, months will go by, because we know how fast our kids grow, and now there's 10 new changes.

Therapeutic Diets and Finding the Right Fit

So even if it's just one new change every couple of weeks or something like that, before you know it, it really does make a big difference. I think that's a myth, that it is too hard and whether it may be too time consuming for the parents.

But I have a good friend who used to be a client who said, I'd gladly be in the kitchen cooking every day if my child was feeling better. Usually that doesn't end up happening, but also if you're having a nice happy child, you have a lot more capacity to enjoy something and ability to do things like cooking if needed to, I would say the other thing is it doesn't take that much longer.

The learning curve's a little steep. What foods you can have, what foods can't cook with, how do you make them taste good, How do make in a good texture, all of those things.

That learning curves a bit steep, so at the beginning it can seem overwhelming. But once you get the hang of it, it really doesn' take any more time to cook the new special diet than it did the othe diet.

I think it's very true. We're afraid it is just going to be more effort. And certainly once the kids actually start eating these things, it cuts down on some of that friction that's happening.

That's priceless. Well, this has been an incredible conversation and I love that we're talking about nutrition because I actually, like I said in those brain maps, I know it.

to be one of the most impactful things that we can do for kids with any level of dysregulation, whether they have an official diagnosis or they're just quote unquote neurotypical.

I don't know who you are, but apparently you're out there in the world. This is how we change the brain and body and help our kids to more focused, regulated and happy.

It doesn't have to be as hard as we think. And you're right, you are starting small. I have some people who don't really have the patience, but I talk about it as walking into the pool or jumping in the deep end.

Some people want to jump in deep and that's okay. But that really isn't for everybody. It can be a system. absolutely and I do tell parents just work you know your child better than anybody does some are better at like you said okay so we didn't even get to talk about therapeutic diets and we won't go into them now but like let's say it's you mentioned keto or grain free or let Let's take, let's say grain-free, and first someone says, okay, well, we could get all the way over here to grain free, or we can start with just gluten free.

And then we go to allergen free and then could do this and we do that. We could try these four different diets and if that still doesn't work we get over to this one.

Or you could even say, you know, take a more extreme diet like keto. Is it the gluten? Is is the grains? To get here, some people would say Yeah, I don't want to do that more complex diet.

I just want take baby steps and see, maybe it's this and I can stop here, or maybe its this, and then I'll know. Other people say, just give it to me.

Or maybe a better example is if someone comes to you and they have two or three, let's say three different sets of dietary principles we think that they might need to I do like to test and trial things one by one, and then we can see how they're doing.

But some people say, no, my child doesn't do well with change. I don't want to do three sets of changes. Very much. Some people do better with that more restrictive.

It might be more challenging, but again, you know your child better and it might not be better for them. They'll eat whatever it is. it's just they don't like change.

Just do all the change other people know we're going to take baby steps. And Julie, when you talked about the different kinds of diets, really what you were saying earlier, just to clarify, is that if really there's no one diet that's for everybody and anti-inflammatory, cutting out things that create inflammation are the best food dyes and preservatives, gluten and dairy, sugar, ideally.

But you really talk about in your book, here are these cluster of symptoms, and here the diets that work best with these clusters of the symptoms. But, you start smaller and then work to that.

Like you just said, some people want to dive right into that diet. And everyone has what works best for them. There isn't one that works for everyone, but the most studied for mental health is the Mediterranean diet.

That is hands down, clinically proven to reduce every mental-health symptom known to man and reduce inflammation. And it's not terribly re not at all.

And I think tha diet. It's also just a ge diet, so when you get a v you're going to start to s right? Whereas you like ta diet? It is not something studied as frequently.

For in the autism world, interestingly, the gluten-free and casein- free diet, as well as the ketogenic diet to kind of opposite ends of the spectrum, are some of most studied diets in that world.

But there's also a low FODMAPS diet. So like, what's causing the issue with gluten? Or with wheat? Is it gluten, is it the FodMap in it? Probably the Gluten.

You know, for some people, there might be other things as- The pesticide that we have. Yeah, I have lots. I'm sure you do. Have lots of people who go to Italy and have no symptoms.

We've had this happen so many times. This was like maybe 15, no more than 15 years ago. Worked in a doctor's office and I had adults that were like business people and that I can't tell you the number of times that people would come back and say that exact situation.

And this was before they was talking about it. I've heard this story so many times. My grandma never likes to go out because she's like, I could make Italian food better at home.

Small Steps, Practical Advice, and Closing Thoughts

And I don't just cook Italian, I cook a lot of Asian. I love Latin food and it's, there are certain foods that just easier. It's very easy. Actually. And then I tell everybody people like, how are you Italian and your gluten and dairy free.

Ask the relatives who the number one best chef in the house. They always want to go to it. It's how you cook it. And there's so many things available in the past 20 years.

But I would say the last 10 years, it's dramatic, like where you get things now and different kinds of flour. Oh, and also you can get good pre-made product.

I got this beautiful bread, gluten-free bread from Israel. This is gluten-free, I had to keep looking at it to inspect if it

was real or not, Julie. I was like, there's gluten in here, it's gotta be.

But I think, out of this, the top level of conversation for overwhelmed parents, do what you can. But take action, start small because nutrition is much more impactful, particularly neurodivergent brain than you realize.

If you're overwhelmed by picky eating, think about some of the precursors. Think about regulating the nervous system. think About sensory activities that you can do.

And then what can you do that is texture? And what Can you Do with swap outs? Those who best places to store. I consistently find it. People will say, oh, there's no way that it has to be Purdue chicken nuggets and whatnot.

That's because they're not thinking of the texture. What other things you do and food shape and size and all these things can make a huge difference. And I've had autistic adults on my show before talking about how they got over their RFID and it was texture everybody.

But I appreciate this so much for this conversation. And really, for those of you that are on this journey, we'll have this in our show notes, you really want to get Julie's book, the personalized autism nutrition plan, and it's all one word URL together, but it will be in the show note because guess what we need professional guidance.

in doing these things, and she's generous enough to put this in a book, which makes it accessible for so many people. I really appreciate your work. You've been doing this a long time.

We really are a leader in teaching people about how to have nutrition for the neurodivergent brain. And I don't think this is just for kids. This is for anybody of any age.

Nutrition is so impactful. Don't feel scared. Just jump in. That's right. Thank you so much. Yeah, thank you. Want more insights and solutions? Well, subscribe to our disk regulation insider and it will show up in your inbox every week.