Introduction and Janau2019s prevention mindset

That's what motivated me. If I can prevent, and I'm in the prevention phase of this whole thing, because I now have more information than I ever did before, my parents didn't have that advantage of knowing that they could do something than knowing that changing their diet would make a difference to knowing that exercise would make this much difference.

This is Doctor Talks, real talk from real doctors on the issues that matter to you most. Welcome. In this episode, I'm joined by the insightful and inspiring Jana Abbott, whose story highlights the power of family, personal agency, and proactive health choices as we grow older.

Jana opens up to me about her own health journey, as well as her family's experience navigating dementia in her mother, including what she's learned from supporting her, adjusting her own lifestyle, and embracing a path of prevention.

After we recorded, Jana reached out to me with a heartfelt message she wanted me to share with you. In her words, In my family, both my grandmother and grandfather experienced cognitive decline.

My parents, who each independently carry one ApoE4 gene, have been powerful examples for me. I also carry one copy of that gene. But learning that it's a risk factor, not a diagnosis, was life-changing.

Seeing how differently that risk played out for each of my parents showed me how much influence we have. That's why I started this program and why I believe it is worth the work.

This conversation is about that belief that even in the face of genetic risk, of family history, there is hope, there is power, and there is possibility.

You'll hear about the role of diet, of sleep, movement, and compassionate communication, not just in preventing decline, but in reversing cognitive impairment and in aging with grace and purpose.

Let's dive in. Shanna, I am delighted to have you here. Really, it's been a delight to get to know you and your family over the past few years. And I have invited you here really to share with our listeners not only your own story, but your mom's as well.

And your family is just such an inspiration. I tell people watching you guys communicate is like watching a game of volleyball, but everyone's laughing, right?

It's watching you support each other, show up for each other, offer to pitch in in ways that are unique and creative, and then watching the love that you have for certainly for your parents, but really that all of you have for each other.

It's inspiring and I'm just so grateful that you are willing to be vulnerable and share your story here with us today. We had discussed starting with your health journey.

One of the things that triggered me as mom was going through her process is I realized my health matches hers a lot, you know, when you look at family history.

So when we started discovering some things about her, I thought, you know, let me go check into that and let me go check into that.

Health checklist: CPAP, parathyroid surgery, and A1C

And I found out that I needed a CPAP. I knew that I was snoring. That wasn't a problem for me. until I started realizing that it was really more about the damage that it was doing because I wasn't getting enough air, enough oxygen into my brain and that it was going to have some other repercussions.

And I started learning about things like that. So I started going down that path. And when I looked at getting ready to retire, and I have a retirement checklist and a check plan, right?

And it's like, here's all the things I need to do. There's money, there's plans, there's, oh, you know what? Let me double check on my health. It feels like now as a woman of my age, it's time to do some of the things that you don't get at a regular GP or, you know, you do your annual visits and that, but they don't check everything and, After watching you help my mom, I thought, you know what, you feel like a good person to come to, to really help me do the full checklist.

And I read Dr. Brennison's book and it talks about all these little things that it's like, if this is off and this is off, I'm like, you know what? It's time.

So this became part of my retirement checklist. which I wish I kind of would have started this a little earlier, but we're doing it now. And that's when I came to you and we started going down this path.

What are some of the biggest insights that you got as you went down this path, as you started on this health journey and really prioritizing this as you look towards retirement?

Well, one of the things that I was struggling with is I used to exercise a lot, then COVID hit, you know, and everything was pretty much down for two years and that, and I was trying to kind of get back into some routine.

I knew it was going to take me a while. It wasn't like I was going to get back to where I was, but I was really struggling and I was just feeling like I had a wet blanket on me and I just was having a really, it wasn't just motivation.

It was more physical than that. And one of the blood tests came back and the calcium was really high. And I knew it was high and the doctors had been monitoring it.

But I didn't know I even had a parathyroid. And it turns out that that's something that needed to be addressed. And I had the surgery to get that so that my calcium levels was fine.

I am exercising three times more than I ever did before. And it's easier that alone and just giving me my energy back. So for anyone who's driving, don't look up parathyroid on your phone right now.

We'll give you a little insight into what that is. So parathyroid hormone controls calcium in your blood. So parathyroid hormone doesn't have a whole lot to do with your thyroid.

It doesn't control metabolism the way your thyroid hormones do, but it sits right behind your thyroid. So there's four parathyroid glands. They're called parathyroid because they're right by the thyroid.

So they're in your neck, behind the thyroid gland, and it spits out this hormone called parathyroid hormone, which controls calcium. Now that hormone only lasts about 15 minutes.

It's a very short-lived hormone. But when it's regularly elevated, it will increase the calcium levels in your blood. And this might mean that it's taking it out of your bones.

and this can be very uncomfortable and although not super common, it's common enough that I've seen it many, many times in my practice and Jana was one of those patients where we were able to do an intervention, refer her out to a specialist who could do the intervention of getting out the adenomas.

These are benign tumors that increase that parathyroid hormone in the system so that you're at risk for mood

disorders, fatigue, osteoporosis, kidney stones.

There's a whole litany of basically downstream effects from having these parathyroid adenomas. You know, this is something that everyone should be aware of.

Our doctors generally all run a CMP or complete metabolic panel each year. And if your calcium level, which is included on that, is regularly over 10.0, it's a good time to double click and see, hey, does my symptom picture match that of a parathyroid adenoma?

Now most labs won't flag it until it's over 10.5. So just take a look at yours and see if maybe this is something lining up for you. But I think generally the theme, even with Janie, with your story, is you want someone to dig a little deeper, look a little closer, instead of saying, oh, that's normal, that's normal, that's normal when you look at each other.

That's your normal is what I was told. It's like you have higher calcium because it's staying high all the time. Right. And there are these kind of nuances or, you know, we say zebra is not horses, right?

There's the really common stuff like diabetes and heart disease that comes through every primary care provider's office. And then there's something like this where, hey, maybe if you get someone who's spending a little bit more time, we might uncover something that's pretty relatively easily treatable.

Yeah. So the other things that I have also encountered is, speaking of those annual tests, My A1C kept slowly going up and everybody kept writing it off to you're just getting older.

It naturally goes up as it gets older. Well, after I started eating on the keto diet and really paying attention to, I always knew that sugar wasn't all that good.

I knew processed food wasn't always that good. The difference was I knew it. But once I finally changed my eating habits and got serious about it, now I could believe it.

And I watched my numbers come way back down. And I'm like, I knew it would make a difference, but I even told my daughter, I said, I'm shocked that it made that much difference.

one thing at a time, right? Yeah, how empowering.

Exercise recovery and finding the right movement routine

And I think, you know, the parathyroid adenoma, finding that and treating that, you mentioned you had more energy to exercise, right? When we start to play with these things and we start to get serious about them, sort of opens up more possibility because we're better rested.

You mentioned the CPAP. Now that you're better rested, you have the energy to exercise. You have the energy to make those better dietary decisions. And now that's affecting your A1C.

And it's sort of this Expanding circles or like a snowball effect, but in exactly the way we want to go. Yeah, I just feel Overall so much better. I've spent more time doing some more research to start starting to understand things like fasting and Exercise and trying to figure out what's right for me, right?

The exercise thing it's like You know It can be a real drag, but I found a combination of three things that I really enjoy and it made a huge difference.

I had knee surgery a few years ago and I was struggling with doing some walking. And I remember when I was at your office, you said, dude, what's with that date?

You're not, doesn't seem to be like you're walking as well as you should be. And I said, yeah, I'm still, you know,

messing with the physical therapy and really I was trying to exercise it through.

And you referred me to the Egoscu group and I'm telling you that made a huge difference as well. So, Again, just small steps. But now even as I'm walking through the office, people turn around and look and they never said anything before, mind you.

But now there's like, oh, you're walking a lot better. You just kind of slowly pick one thing at a time and you make this huge steps at the end of the day.

Yeah, that's amazing. So, EGOSCUE, E-G-O-S-C-U-E, EGOSCUE therapy or the EGOSCUE method, this is sort of an alternative to physical therapy. If you're not making the progress that you wished you were with pain, physical pain or with limitations, especially in your joints in terms of range of motion or what you're able to do, EGOSCUE could be something worth considering.

A gentleman named Pete EGOSCUE wrote a book called Pain Free in the 90s. It's since been updated That's a fantastic resource and there's also agoskew clinics around the country and in fact internationally as well.

So thanks for pointing that out. So tell us now, what's a typical exercise routine like for you compared to where you came from? I had a personal trainer for a long time.

So I was doing mostly strength training and resistance training and I could get up on the elliptical And that, and I still do some of that, but right now I've been really focusing on Pilates because I'm not real good at jumping anymore, right?

That's just not my thing. I used to do jazz exercise a hundred years ago. So I do the Pilates, the club Pilates. I do the Egoscue. And then I also do the water aerobics because I really enjoy just being in the water and it's kind of a little social club going on with all of those different groups as well.

I've met a lot of really nice people, which has been a lot of fun. That's fantastic. Right. Fun is such an important piece of creating exercise routines that are going to stick.

And so I love that you found a social group to do it with. That can motivate us right on those dark, cloudy, cold days when you don't really want to get in the pool.

But if you know your friends are there and you're going to have a good gab, then it's worth showing up for, right? Yeah. And it's interesting because with the water aerobics, because I live in Indiana, a lot of times I'll be looking outside and I'm like, it's snowing.

I can't go. So I kind of have to motivate myself to put on the suit, put on some clothes over the top of it, walk into there, and then actually do the class.

And then it's perfect because in that gym, I also get a chance to do the sauna and get the heat and the sweating in a couple of times a week with it. And it warms you back up before you go back out in the snow.

So it works out perfectly. It sounds magical. So, Jana, paint a picture for us of what your life was like day to day. Describe some of the limitations, the struggles, the pain.

What was going on four or five years ago before we met? And then how is that different from today? I knew the things that I needed to do and I was having a hard time physically doing them.

Like, if you're sitting on one side of your house and you think about Okay, well, if I get up now, I can do those three things together as opposed to just getting up when you have to do something and then you get up the next time to do something.

I mean, it got that bad. I had a lot of foot pain and knee pain and just a lot of struggle. Didn't have a lot of energy. It

was difficult and I knew that if I could change things, right, had been on every diet in the world.

Yeah. Every single one of them and they all worked for a while, but I'm telling you this, the keto thing and just eating natural just makes you feel so much better.

There's days that I still struggle. I mean, you know, There's temptations and all that kind of stuff out there. There's a reason why all that other stuff sounds good.

And I know that sugar is addictive now. I can absolutely prove that. And I didn't believe it before, right? I'd heard it, but it didn't believe it. And now I can see it.

So that just takes you to the next step. It just helps you motivate you. And it makes you stop to think about your choices. right, and really make choices in your life.

Cause it's really, nobody's forcing you to do anything in particular. You've got to be motivated. I find that a lot of times when I know somebody and they're like, just, you know, why don't they just make this one little change?

Well, truth of the matter is they have absolutely no desire to make that change. So why would they, right? It's not even on their radar to think about making that change.

So you got to choose what you want to see different in your life and figure out how you're going to get there. And that's one of the things that you refer to in the book.

It's like, you don't have to do all these things, but just pick one, pick two, Make this change. Okay, that one didn't work yet. So let's go back and try it again.

The thing in particular that I'm working on right now is wearing my own clean shoes in the house and leaving my dirty shoes at the door. And I keep walking around the house and I'm like, I forgot to change my shoes again.

And it's not a big thing, right? It's easy to go back and just change them. But that's just one more thing that I'm trying to add into my world just to keep everything better.

to keep iterating. And that's part of it, right? You mentioned that you have a sugar addiction. So do I, right? We are human. Those things are tempting by design.

And so making sure that we're not too hard on ourselves, right? We have that self-compassion and we just keep coming back to it.

Lifestyle changes, diet, and self-advocacy

You mentioned the big things, right? Taking your shoes off at the door, that is going to reduce your toxic burden at some level. But the big things you talked about, exercise, diet, and sleep, these are really, really big factors.

And you saw the shift in your ability to move, in your enthusiasm for movement and exercise versus being so fatigued, barely able to get up off the couch and walk across the room, to getting excited about going to water aerobics and doing your Agoski exercises and doing your strength training and going to Pilates.

This is fantastic and it's a different life. right? When your A1C is coming down rather than going up, you described a retirement checklist, kind of setting yourself up to look forward to those years past retirement rather than dread them.

Well, and just not think that everything is downhill, right? It doesn't have to be that way. Again, you've got choices in your life and you just got to figure them out.

Somebody asked me kind of going back to the exercise thing, class is coming up and I know it's coming up and you

know, the little thoughts go around in my head and my, Oh, I don't want to go.

You know, I just went yesterday. I don't need to go today. You know, whatever those little thoughts are that they're demotivating you. And then I get up and I go put my clothes on anyway.

And I go to the gym and I sit in the parking lot and I kind of go through it again. It's like, well, I could still go home. And they're like, oh my gosh, how is it that you managed to get through your classes?

And it's like, because I know how I feel after I'm done. It's the, okay, those are nice thoughts. I can hear myself. They don't make any difference. But the thing that does make a difference is how good I feel after I'm done.

So that's the thing that gets me through. And just like, I have to keep thinking about where that is. That's the motivator. How fun. So you mentioned you got on this path because of where your mom is at and watching her journey.

Now, I think most people listening, you, me, your mom, we all wish that we'd started sooner and maybe learned some things earlier in life. If you were giving advice to say the version of Jana from five or six years ago, what would you say to her?

What would you wish you had kind of known in advance so that you could streamline this process? I wish I wouldn't have believed those people that kept saying, this is just what happens when you get older.

You know, it's that line or that's not in the normal range, but that must be normal for you. You want to trust your doctors and you have good relationships with them in that.

But at some point you really need to stop and be your own advocate. What else is there? Is there somebody else I need to talk to? When you choose a doctor, do they align with your thought process or do they just hand you another pill?

It's like, are you getting to the root cause of things or are you just making that pain tolerable? So it's that process of don't necessarily accept until you've really exhausted all your options and just keep digging.

There's a lot of philosophies out there and I will follow several different doctors or read several different books and find out where the commonalities are and what works for me.

Right. And then sometimes you have to try this for a while. Well, that worked kind of, but it didn't work exactly. So what do I need just logically thinking and based on the new things that I've learned, but you know, let's try changing something up.

Okay, so that didn't work. That made it worse. Okay, well, let's go back and let's try something else. Again, you've got to be your own advocate and figure out what's the right thing for you.

A lot of these diets or things that come up, it's like, you know, I can't eat keto because I can't deal with kale. Well, there's a lot of other options.

You've got to find what works for you, right? It's like the exercise. What is fun for you? What gets you up in the morning? But it doesn't work if you don't do it.

And so figuring out ways to make it actionable, to make it implementable, that's a key component. And it sounds like you've gotten there through quite a bit of trial and error.

Like maybe there isn't a shortcut to figuring out what works for you. Well, and I find I eat a little bit different in winter than I do in summer. You know, it's like I get to a certain point where I cannot eat another salad.

I think I'm just going to die if I eat another salad. And then I start steaming my vegetables and then, you know, it's

like, well, let's try a different seasoning or, you know, life is full of variety.

Gosh, online, you can find a hundred gazillion keto recipes, but then you have to read what's in the ingredients because I'm finding out that keto isn't keto everywhere, or there's variations of keto in the net carbs and the real carbs.

And you got to sort through it, right? And realize that for me, it's really about the carbs. If I can get those carbs down, it makes a huge difference.

What do you notice? What is the difference that you see? I lose weight. I mean, weight's been a battle for me since after I've had my second child. I might go down quite a bit and then it goes back up and that's because I keep going back to some old bad habits.

If you go on a diet, you're going to lose some weight. But if you go back to eating the way you were, that's why it always comes back, you know, and you know this, but you gotta go through it a couple of times to believe it and to understand it and to own that this is my choice and this is what I'm eating tonight, right?

Today may have been not my best choice, but tomorrow I get to start over again. How beautiful. Thank you. I also want to understand your mom's journey a bit.

This is how we originally met. So would you mind sharing? She's always been amazing. She is one of those very creative people, very driven, very clear about all of the things.

She made my sisters and my wedding dresses without a pattern, mind you. She just puts things together. She knows how to do stuff. She's done almost every craft in the world.

Yeah, just on a whim, she made a couple of quilts and patterns that other quilters, she was asking them about it. And they're like, is this your first quilt really?

Because she picked something that was so difficult, but nothing ever held her back. And I always thought that they were, my parents were an amazingly beautiful couple because my dad's an engineer and my mom was so creative that between them we had just like all kinds of fun stuff in the house.

It was when she was 80 years old, she woke up and she had had a stroke and they took her to the hospital. They didn't catch it with whatever medicine they do in time, but she recovered pretty just fine, she's left handed, but she lost a lot of strength in her left hand.

But she was very bound and determined to get that strength back. And she did physical therapy long after the doctor said, probably not going to make any difference at this point, but she kept after it.

And she was very determined and clear that that's what she wanted. And that's just the kind of person she is. Right.

Momu2019s stroke, cognitive decline, and starting treatment

And then after that, what she doesn't exercise as much and fell down and broke her arm and after that things started getting a little rough and then she fell down and broke her hip and at that point we realized that she was asking a lot of the same questions over and over and over again and I know that part of the drugs that they give you to help you go through the surgery and all that kind of stuff.

That kind of messes with your mind. And yeah, she came home from the hospital and she was asking when she could come home from the hospital. And we're like, something's not up.

You know, something's just not quite right. And my dad is amazing at his exploration of He will find anything that could potentially help. I mean, this is where we get it from, right?

It definitely all comes from him. And he had heard about Dr. Brennison and he read his book and he was all signed up for that. And so he found then you that had the Brennison certification and knew the program and that.

So we brought mom to you and we started going through that process. And then we found out really she was doing such a good job of hiding things. We didn't realize how hard and how far she had fallen in her cognitive decline.

And that was scary. Really terrifying. When I met your mom, she had a MOCA score of eight. So a single digit MOCA score, which Although I have seen miracles happen over and over again, your mom being one of them, our confidence as reticent providers is not as high when someone comes in in their 80s after multiple falls at a stroke with a single digit MOCA score.

It's a really big miracle we're asking for, right, to see any change. And I remember you guys describing your mom as someone who was, I mean, I describe her to your dad as constitutionally strong, right?

She is a force that you can tell, it doesn't matter. How many times? Stand in her way. That thing stands in her way, she is amazing. Yet this is a really big task.

This is a big undertaking to hope for recovery for someone at this stage. And I think it was surprising to all of us because she's very verbal, she's very determined, and that really serves her I think in this case.

So we got to meet, we measured where she was at, and then share what happened when you guys went home. I could tell that she was going to be, you know, if anything boosts my confidence, it's when someone comes in with a team and a team like yours, like your family, like you guys are so present and willing to step in and help and take responsibility and make things happen.

And so seeing that determination, not just from her, but from your entire family, that was what gave me confidence when you guys left. So what happened when you went home?

Well, dad had already started keto and that he had already discovered that through Dr. Gundry and that but we realized now how important that was so he stepped that up even a little bit further and we started on the supplements and she also does daily exercises now we always keep hoping that we can get her to do a little bit more but you know one thing at a time one piece at a time As a matter of fact, she just started doing Pilates.

She started, yeah, she just started some private lessons to see how that's all going to work for her. You can see the difference in the process. You can tell that she's understanding things better.

She doesn't ask the same questions the same way, but she always wants to understand why she's taking which supplements and that kind of thing. I mean, that's the kind of person she is.

She just, it's like, I'm fine. I'll take these pills, but I want to know what they're for, right? Tell me again, what they're for. And then we're good to go.

Oh yes, I want that. I want that. If that's going to help my kidneys, if that's going to help my liver, if that's going to help my brain, yep, give them to me.

I'm all good to go. And when we first met, I think I remember you guys describing holidays, how she had been a hostess, right? She was creative. She loved to decorate.

She loves to invite everyone, have all the family over. But the Christmas before we met, she was really down and dejected. And she was kind of hiding in the corner, not wanting to talk to anybody, probably afraid that she was going to miss something or forget something.

And then a year later, she was in a pretty different state. Can you kind of describe that? From what I've seen and what I've experienced with her, because I realized that the connection over correction, that was one thing that I really went through.

And I know this is kind of an aside to your question, but I didn't understand what she was going through. And I kept trying to put myself in her position in that if you can't process the conversation that's going on around you, it makes it really difficult.

It makes you feel like you're left out. And then pretty soon you just kind of shut down and stop listening because it's like, well, that's just too confusing.

I mean, I could potentially do that at work when they're start talking technical stuff. And I'm like, no. catch me up later because I'm not following along.

So that Christmas in particular, even her cousins noticed that she was a lot more quiet and just kind of reserved. And it was about a year later that She's back in the conversation.

There's still days that, you know, can be a little bit harder, but she's back in the conversations and she wants to know, you know, what's going on and she wants to know what's on the menu and all that.

Yeah, she's not, she's not running the host of stuff. Dad kind of took that over. He really loves to party and that way he has control over the menu and he knows we're eating healthy.

Mom will go back to some of the old recipes that probably don't serve us as well. I love it. That's great. I think this is part of the miracle. When we measured her mocha, it had gone from an 8 to a 15. And she sustained a mocha score right around that level.

And hopefully, she'll continue to get better and better. Especially now that she's going to Pilates, she's getting that dual task, exercise, strength training.

Yeah. And I think the CPAP made a huge difference because her mood is so much better in the morning. If she chooses one night not to wear it, she's just a little grumpier in the morning.

But if she, when she wears it, she gets so much better sleep. So this is one of the big, big takeaways of her case. And as a clinician, it made me wonder how much memory loss, how much age-related memory loss is actually sleep apnea.

Sleep apnea, MOCA improvement, and cognitive recovery

We know how important, how crucial good high quality sleep is to cognitive function, right? All of us can relate to this, to being jet lagged, to missing a night of sleep, and then feeling like our brain just doesn't work the next day.

And so when we have this night after night after night, decade after decade, and maybe it even happens subtly, it slowly changes. You mentioned at the very beginning of our conversation, it doesn't matter to you that you snore, right?

And your dad probably takes his hearing aids out at night, so he doesn't hear your mom snore. But what matters is the quality of your sleep, that we need to get that deep sleep.

We need REM sleep. We need enough sleep. And if we don't, our brain is not going to function. It's going to increase our risk of neurodegenerative disease.

Now, we know that REM sleep disorders are associated with Parkinson's disease. There are very clear connections between neurodegeneration and sleep deprivation.

And your mom was I learned so much from Dr. Bredesen and Dr. Gundry and all of the luminaries we have on this show and from my teachers, of course, and my mentors over the years, but my patients teach me more than anyone.

And your mom was one of those really eye-opening, like light bulb went off. I need to test every single person that walks in here with any symptom of cognitive impairment for sleep apnea.

because of the miraculous, this profound benefit it can have for the brain. So she went from an 8 to a 15. She went from not really being engaged in Christmas celebrations, at holiday celebrations, to getting back into the conversation.

Her life really changed rather than going down the expected downhill slope, right, towards more decline. She turned that around. She reversed the direction and came back, back into the conversations, back into life, a more fulfilling life, back into that relationship with their dad as more of a partner than a dependent.

And that is what we want for everyone. That is why Jana has been so kind to share her time with us and this story, her family's story with us, is because this, I think, is more inspiring than anything that I could drone on about or write about in a book.

It's stories like your mom's. It's made a huge difference and just in talking to her and remembering stories and she just loves to do her puzzles and anything.

She's working hard on having a goal every day. She's working hard on making sure she accomplishes some things now, you know, that is very driven, very motivated.

And that's inspirational to me. I'm very proud of how much I have had some friends that have had moms that just kind of gave up and didn't exercise and didn't try.

And, you know, they've already lost them and it just breaks my heart. And I'm like, do you want to try? And they're like, you know, one thing is knowing, one thing is believing.

When you can see it and it makes a difference, you're so much more signed up. Yeah, so much more committed because you're experiencing it. And I wonder if some of the people who give up, if it's because they believe that old narrative, right, that there's nothing that you can do, that their experience is normal, that you just inevitably decline with age, that life is just going to get worse, not better.

And I think it's stories like yours, like your mom's, that start to show people, hey, there's a different possibility out there. There's a different option.

We can really be empowered. We can take control of our health as we age, and we can look forward to those golden years rather than dread them. I think it's worth a try anyway.

I mean, that's what motivated me. It's like if I can prevent, and I'm in the prevention phase of this whole thing, Right. It's like if I can prevent, cause I now have more information than I ever did before.

My parents didn't have that advantage of knowing that they could do something than knowing that changing their diet would make a difference to knowing that, you know, exercise would make this much difference before you just did it because you were supposed to, and you know, you could keep moving.

But now that if it improves your brain as well, it's even more motivating. Absolutely. So do you have any other tips for people who are just starting out on this journey?

I think that the key thing is in your book and the thing that I look at is every once in a while I'll reread and I'm like, okay, I need to add one more thing.

But just if you can just add one thing, the diet and the exercise of the things that are the easiest, right? Get a sleep study. Don't be afraid to find out at least where you're at.

Get the information, right? It's like if you can start with the information, then you get to make your own choices and

you get to take your own path. But if you don't know that you have sleep apnea, or if you don't know that your A1C is out of control and that, and you don't want to end up being diabetic or that, get the information.

then make your choices. And if you can only do them one at a time, do them one at a time. If you can only do it for a week at a time, do a week, just start somewhere, right?

And take control of your life and choose your life. You still live, right? Choose to live that fulfilling, amazing life that's there for you. Yeah. But I'm curious, what brings you joy as you look towards retirement?

That's part of that retirement checklist, right? It's kind of funny. I'm looking forward to donating some of my time and volunteering some of my time.

And I'm trying to figure out where those things are that are the best for me. And one of the things that I'm most excited about is I'm looking into a program right now where the babies that are in the hospital, because they have to stay there longer than their parents, and they just need somebody to come and cuddle them and hold them.

And that just seems so incredibly joyful to me. And something that I know means something when they're that little, they just need somebody to look them in the eye and hold them and care for them.

So things like that. I'm also having an awfully lot of fun with my grandkids right now, watching them learn and grow and explore. We spend a lot of time in the library and talking about all of the different information that all these people have done work on, all these people have information on, and all we have to do is go to the library and gather it.

It's amazing. So we have conversations like that and that I've been having fun teaching them the things, my arts and crafts and stuff that I've done, just to expose them.

They don't have to ever do them again, but at least they know now how to sew on a button and some basic things. cooking, you know, those are the things that bring me a lot of joy outside of doing a little bit of research and learning.

Trying to share joy and kindness, I guess, is a lot of it right now. How inspiring. When people are struggling with Alzheimer's and dementia and not as with it cognitively, it can be frustrating at times to communicate.

You are hearing the same question over and over again, or you ask a question or give a directive and they've forgotten. That can be a struggle. And I know that you experienced that a bit with your mom.

Is there anything you wish you had known or any tips that you have for other people who might be in that situation? Well, one of the things I knew that I'm not supposed to argue I know that I'm not supposed to correct, but it's so difficult when they say things that you know, or just often left field.

And I don't even know how to respond to that because I just don't even understand where you even came up with that idea. And I remember the first time I heard you talk about it was in a webinar where, which was connection over correction.

And then there's more in the book about it. And then I know that you've also got some other supportive documents and information in that.

Connection over correction and caregiving wisdom

And I was struggling. I go out to visit mom since I'm in another state. And I go out to visit mom and I'm out there for, you know, two, three weeks at a time.

And there was one time that, you know, she ended up getting very, very upset with me because I just wasn't handling things as well as I could. And so I really spent time thinking about when I have a conversation with her

and it didn't go the way I wanted it to or it caused some upset.

I'm like, oh, that really didn't happen the way I wanted it to. And I really think about where is she at? What is really important is what she's telling me have anything to do with how I feel about her.

And all the answers to those is no, for sure no, right? It's more how do I provide comfort? How do I spend time with her? How do I want her to feel about our relationship?

Because I know when she deals with other people and they're kind to her, She always makes a point to say that, that person was really kind and gentle with me, right?

It's like that part, the whole rest of the story can be complete, often left field or not what I thought was going on. I mean, I'm not always there, but she comes back and she can always tell you it's how she feels about it.

It's the kindness that you portray and that you give her. And once I finally got there, my relationship with her has changed back to where it was. Again, we're in the good place.

This is not easy, right? We're all human and this is so much easier said than done, right? Every one of us wants to go in. If you're listening to this, it's because you have a loved one that you care about, right?

And you're showing up, you're doing the hard work, you're getting the information. And then when we go to do it, it is hard work, right? We have our patterns.

This is your mom and you've got years of baggage right in this relationship. It can be really challenging to stay in that place of compassion when she's saying something that's clearly erroneous.

But when we do, if we come back to, what is our goal? And I think you stated that so beautifully. Like, what is my goal? It's to spend quality time with her.

It's to amplify the joy of the time that we have left together. Growing old is a privilege. Not everybody gets that. And having your mom around, you mentioned that you have friends who have lost their parents.

It's such a privilege to have our parents around. Now, what is the quality of the relationship and the quality of the time that we want to spend? And if we put that effort in to changing how we respond, even in those challenging moments, we get out of it what we put into it.

Yeah. Especially when, if you were trying to connect thoughts together and you're having a hard time putting those thoughts together and you're just aggravated because you can't connect pieces in your own head, regardless of what's going on around you.

The last thing you need is somebody to tell you you're having a hard time for God's sake. You just really need somebody to reassure you that it's okay, because they are in a safe place.

They are with somebody they love. And at the end of the day, that's the only thing that's really important. All right, that's how you made them feel. That being the really crucial piece.

Jenna, there is so much wisdom from your experience. Is there anything else that you wanna share with our listeners today? Just be patient, be curious, Don't let wherever you're at that you think that that's the only answer.

Just keep going, right? Change things up. Sometimes you just need a little bit of change and so you just got to figure out what that next piece is. Think about it, plan it.

You may end up coming back, but don't be afraid to change. Don't be afraid to explore. Don't be afraid if something doesn't work and you come back. Jana, you are an inspiration.

Your family is an inspiration. I'm so grateful to you for sharing the story of hope, really of hope, of resilience, of commitment to this future, to this brighter future, to really owning that and doing the hard work that it takes to make sure that you can move and engage and teach your grandkids.

This is a big part of why I do the work that I do is that intergenerational wisdom transfer, that you get to take your wisdom and experience that you've collected over the course of a lifetime and pass it down to your grandkids and have a good time doing it.

Thank you so, so much for joining me and for sharing this incredible story today. It's been a pleasure having you. Thank you, Dr. Sandison.

Retirement, volunteering, and closing reflections

Dana, thank you so much for your time and just the love and compassion that you're sharing with us here today. I know that so many people are going to get so much value out of this.

Thank you for your guidance because without you, I wouldn't have been here now. It's a privilege to be of service. Thank you so much for listening to the Think Well, Age Well podcast.

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