Emotional Vitality: Hope and the Neuroscience of Small Wins Transcript

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Introduction: Hope and Emotional Vitality

Hope is one of the most powerful tools in the entire toolbox. It sits ahead of supplementation. We'll do things that looked impossible even just the week before.

Welcome to Vitality Radio, the podcast that helps you make sense of natural supplements and thrive without pharma drugs. I'm Jared St. Clair. Hello and welcome to Vitality Radio.

I'm your host each and every week twice a week. My name is Jared St. Clair and this is an emotional vitality episode. These are the episodes where I give you tools or help to teach you, tools, or however you want to put it, that I can't sell you but that if you will implement in your life, I believe will impact your health probably greater than any supplement I could sell, you would.

To start this off, I want to talk about how your body is not broken. It is trying to help you. it is sending you signals, sometimes as symptoms, to tell you that something is off and help.

You understand how to fix it, not because it's broken, almost everything I'm going to. Talk about grows out of that today. And this episode is about one single word hope.

And I know how that word can land for some people. I knew how it used to land from my gin. Uh, it sounds soft. It sounds, uh, woo woo. Maybe sounds like something on a poster on the wall, maybe not an actual health strategy, but I've spent my entire career in supplementation.

That's the lane that I have been in and I love it. But after years of doing this work and walking alongside people in some of the darkest places that I've ever seen a human being go, I become convinced of something that surprised me.

Hope is one of the most powerful tools in the entire toolbox.

Jenu2019s Story and the Power of Hope

It sits ahead of supplementation, it sits a head of diet change, not instead of those things, ahead them, because a person who does not have hope doesn't take a supplement, doesn' change the diet, does' take the next step at all, and a persons who finds even a flicker of it will do things that looked impossible even just the week before.

And to illustrate that point just a little bit more specific to maybe you listening, if you are trying, which you ARE because you're listening to Vitality Radio, but you felt stuck or you know someone, I just barely got off the phone before recording this with one of my longtime clients whose daughter is really struggling with some health issues and she's willing to make a change now and hasn't been in the past.

But if you're trying, if your listening to shows like this, you are ordering supplements from our website or from anywhere. If you going to see a functional medicine doctor or whatever it is you doing, then you at least have a sliver of hope and that's critical.

Today, I want to talk about the mindset piece of hope. And I wanna start with the woman nearest and dearest to my heart and tell you a little bit about her that we've shared some of this in Jen's story, but maybe not quite this way.

I think it might land really well for some people listening today. For those of you who are newer here, it is my wife, Jen, who I'm talking about. There are five episodes called Jen's Story on the Vitality Radio podcast.

We'll link to her episodes, and I highly recommend listening to them. They are some of the most hope-filled

episodes that we have. But I want to give you just some brief summary of where she was when I met her.

When I really met Jen she wasn't the grounded, funny, strong, resilient, I'm going to keep trying and learning and doing until things get better person that she is now.

When I really met Jen in the deepest sense of meeting someone, she was living in a place that I can only describe as darkness. Not a bad week, not a rough patch, a settled, daily, bone-deep conviction that something inside of her was fundamentally broken and could not be fixed.

She believed her body was broken. she'd get a signal from her physical distress of some sort, pain, wave of anxiety, some other symptom. And instead of hearing it as information, she heard it, as proof.

proof that the machine was defective. And it didn't stop at her body. She believed her mind was broken. Her mental health was just never going to be balanced.

She'd lived so long in fear and dread that dread had become the baseline, the water that she was swimming in every single day, just trying to keep her head above it.

So constant that you couldn't even see it as separate from herself anymore. It was who she had became, her identity. And here's the part that I really want you to understand because if you've been there, if are there and you already know it, or if love someone who's there then you need to hear it.

When you're in that place, you don't believe things will get better. You've stopped believing it on purpose because believing and being wrong hurts worse than never believing at all.

Hope at that point feels dangerous. Getting your hopes up feels like setting yourself up to be crushed yet again. I can't tell you how many times in those early months and years of our relationship, how much times Jen said, it's better for me to not hope and not be disappointed when it does not work out.

So, Jen didn't get her hopes up about anything. She'd learned, and I'm choosing that word carefully, because we're going to come back to that in just a minute, that reaching didn t work.

That effort didn' t change the outcome, so the effort stopped. I couldn't hand Jen a supplement and fix that. I want to be really careful about how I say this right here because it's important to recognize that yes, as I stated earlier, I'm a supplement guy.

I am a Supplement Educator. In fact, supplements are what people do sometimes when they still have hope. And that's kind of what ended up, well, it's actually exactly what it ended happening with Jen.

There is not a magic pill that solves this problem. She didn't need a magic pill. What she needed was one small piece of evidence, one crack of daylight, that her situation was not permanent after all.

That her body was NOT the enemy. Maybe, just maybe, it was actually on her side and just didn t know how to say so. That's where this whole thing turns and understand why one small crack of daylight, one little victory matters so much.

I have to take you into the brain for a few minutes because this isn't a pep talk. What happened to Jen is actually a mechanism. The first thing I need you to separate in your mind is the difference between a state.

and a fact. Hopelessness feels like a Fact. It presents itself to you as the truth about your life, your body, and your health.

Learned Helplessness and the Brainu2019s Default Response

Nothing works. This is just how it is. But it isn't a FACT. It's a temporary condition your nervous system has settled

into, and because it's state, it is workable.

You can change a state you cannot argue with a fact. Now, back to the word I flagged earlier, learned. For 50 years, psychology described exactly what Jin was living in as learned helplessness.

The classic idea, going back to experiments in the 1960s, was that when a person or an animal goes through enough uncontrollable adversity, they learned that nothing they do matters, and so they just simply stop trying.

They give up. On paper, that describes Jin perfectly eight years ago. But here's what I find fascinating. And it changes the entire picture. In 2016, just 10 years ago, two researchers who originally discovered this phenomenon, one at the University of Pennsylvania, and one of the university of Colorado, 50 years after their first work went back and said, essentially, we got it backward.

and modern neuroscience is what let them see this. That reframe is the hinge of this entire episode, so I want to walk through it and explain exactly what's going on in the brain.

The corrected picture is great news. is not something that you learn. It's actually, believe it or not, the brain's default response to prolonged uncontrollable stress.

Now, this stress can be physical stress, chronic pain, a physical debilitation of some sort, significant emotional or mental stress any of those things.

Deep in the brainstorm, there's a small structure called the dorsal raffi nucleus. When adversity goes on long enough, with no relief, that structure floods the system with serotonin in a particular way that counterintuitively drives passivity and heightens fear.

That's the default setting. Left alone, under enough sustained stress, That is where the nervous system goes, naturally. It's not a character flaw. Its not weakness.

its biology, doing what biology does when the body is under siege. So if giving up is the default, what is it that you actually learn? Well, you learn control.

There's a region right behind your forehead, the prefrontal cortex, thinking, planning, deciding part of your brain. Its job in this story is to detect one thing.

Can I or can I not influence what's happening to me? And the moment it detects that there is a yes to that answer, that, there's something here that I can control, it reaches down and it puts the brakes on that default passivity response.

It quiets the dorsal rafi. it calms the amygdala, the brain's threat detector. The system shifts out of shutdown. Its the opposite of what most of us assume.

Helplessness isn't the thing that gets learned. Agency. is the thing that gets learned. Your brain is wired with a circuit whose entire job is to notice when you have control and to use that noticing to override despair.

And it gets better when we have an experience of control, even a little one. It doesn't just help you at that moment, it literally alters how your prefrontal cortex responds to the next hard thing.

You're building resilience into the circuitry. The researchers even use the word hope in that paper because that's what this is. Hope, biologically, is the expectation of control.

It's your prefrontal cortex saying, there is something here that I can do. Now, layer one more system on top of that. When you take a small action and something moves, anything moves.

Your brain's reward system responds. You get a little bump of dopamine, not because the whole problem is solved,

but because your brain registers movement and progress.

And when you're deep in hopelessness, that reward has gone quiet. The brain has stopped expecting that action leads anywhere. So every tiny win that produces a real result is doing two jobs at once.

It's giving your prefrontal cortex evidence of control and it's waking the reward system back up. This is why the little wins matter so much. A small win isn't small to your nervous system.

It is the brain collecting proof that reaching, trying, works. And that proof, that prove is exactly what dismantles the default of despair. I want to read something to you that illustrates this.

And I'm actually going to tell you two stories that have recently happened just in the last week about two clients of mine. This is from a client who I do phone call consults with.

So I've been on the phone with her a couple of times.

Client Story: Small Wins Rebuild Agency

And she's a regular listener to the show, and she gave me permission to read this from her, but I'll do it anonymously. She says, I wanted to give you a positive update because I tend to update on the negative.

We're headed to the beach today. My husband was on road this weekend and we left as soon as he got home. So getting everything packed and ready to go was me.

Normally the few days leading up to a vacation, a trip or anything that I really would like to be excited about, catch that, would to like be exciting about.

I start to spiral with anxiety and negative thoughts. What if I get sick? Mostly because that's something that she struggled with for a long time now or just what if this or what?

If that in addition to him being gone and getting ready for vacation I'm also just a few days out from my period All that to say, I had a couple of moments, thoughts of not wanting anyone to get sick, but overall I have been so much more calm and able to focus on what I need to do.

Actually say out loud that I'm excited to go. I never allowed myself to be excited in the past because I became a little superstitious about what's going to happen if I decide to give my hopes up.

Does that sound like anybody that I just described earlier? I sat in silence on my drive to church this morning, she continues, so thankful, thankful for the ability just to even feel thankful.

I have lived in so much darkness and fear and dread for a really long time. So much more that i could say, but I'll stop before I write a book. Except to say that God has used you to give light and hope to a mom and a wife who has lived in darkness for a long time I don't read that to you pat myself on the back.

I read it to because of that one specific line I have never allowed myself to be excited in the past because I became a little superstitious about what's going to happen if I decided to get my hopes up Now, that sounds exactly like my gin.

Why? Not because these two people are sisters dealing with the same stuff. The stuff they deal with is very different other than both of them dealt with some anxiety for sure.

Well, a lot of it. But because it illustrates my point that this is a default position for people who have dealt with these things for an extended period of time.

It's the exact same mechanism playing out. That's exactly the same protective shutdown that Jen lived in when I

met her. and notice where her turnaround started.

It didn't start with her anxiety magically lifting, it started with a small physical win. For her, and this wasn't in the text message, but it was in messages we had previous, the first crack of daylight was a noticeably easier cycle over the last couple of months that I've been working with.

one hard thing in her month that got a little less hard, that was the data point. That was evident that her nervous system needed that something could shift.

And from that one small win, it built calmer, more focused, able to say out loud, I'm excited, and able feel thankful for being thankful. That is the mechanism we just discussed.

Playing out in a real person's life, small win, evidence of control, the system starts to come back online. And she continues to pile up little victories.

I am convinced that she will be just like my Jen very soon. No longer saddled with these anxieties, but rather empowered by boundless hope. Yesterday, a woman came into our new location in South Ogden.

She came in looking for a water pill, as she said. That's it. She wanted something for water retention, an herbal diuretic. Simple request and I could have just walked her over to the shelf and rung her up.

but I don't do that. I always ask questions. So the first question I asked was, can I ask you a few questions first? Because when someone comes in chasing a symptom, especially something like that, I wanna make sure we're actually after the right thing.

And she said, yes. so I started asking and within a couple of minutes, she told me she thought the water retention was tied to estrogen dominance, that she suspected a hormone imbalance was underneath it.

Now that's a woman who's paying attention to her body, And here's the reframe that I want you to notice because it's a whole naturopathic functional medicine type lens.

A water pill treats the symptom. It pushes fluid out. The symptom goes away, but it never once asks the question her own body was clearly asking, which is, why am I holding onto this water in the first place?

Her body wasn't malfunctioning, it was signaling. So we followed the signal. We talked first about electrolytes because this sometimes surprises people, that water retention isn't just about water, It's about hydration and it's About minerals.

And when the body is retaining water, the instinct is just get rid of the water. But fluid balance in the Body is governed by sodium, potassium, magnesium, electrolytes.

They're what tells your cells how much water to hold and how to release. Getting those in proper balance, including the Water you actually drink, is a far more intelligent conversation about Water than take a pill to flush it out.

that's supporting the body's own regulation rather than overriding it. From there though, the conversation opened up the way these conversations often do.

We talked about where estrogen dominance actually comes from for many women, not just what the ovaries are making, but what body is or is not clearing.

because we live surrounded by compounds and plastics and cosmetics in the general environment that can mimic estrogen and disrupt the endocrine system.

Your liver is the organ responsible for metabolizing and clearing excess hormones.

Root-Cause Approach to Water Retention

So if the liver's overloaded, hormone clearance suffers. And if your gut microbiome is a mess, and hers was, based on additional questions I kept asking, that clearance suffer even more because the gut is part of how the body escorts used up estrogen out the door.

Are you seeing how this all connects? Water retention, hormones, liver, gut. One signal, water retention pulled a thread and the whole system was talking.

By the time we were done, and this was a good 30 or 40 minutes of talking, she wasn't leaving with just a water pill. She was leaving with a plan to support the actual systems involved.

She would support her gut microbiome with Back On Tract, the same product that I first gave Jen when she was so hopeless back then. Of course, back on track is built around probiotics, digestive enzymes, and soothing herbs for healthy gut and digestion.

She was going to support her liver's natural detoxification processes as well with liver vitality. And she was gonna support healthy estrogen metabolism and her body's naturally detox pathways with Endo Cleanse.

That's what she actually left with. Indoclens, of course, has dim and de-glucurate and indole-3-carbinol to help essentially rid the body of as many of these excess estrogens and fake estogens and all that stuff as it possibly can.

Now, I want to be careful here because this matters a lot. None of the products treat anything. They support the systems doing the work. That's really what's happening because what she told me when she left wasn't, you sold me a bunch of stuff.

I hope it works. What she said was she felt empowered. She felt capable. she was thrilled, her word, not mine, that she finally going after the root cause instead of just chasing the symptom of water retention.

And that that feeling in her, that thrilled feeling is the whole point of this episode. Do you know what she walked out with? Not a bag of products, a small win, A sense of control.

Her prefrontal cortex detecting maybe for the first time on this issue. I don't know. There's something here that I can do. She came in for a water pill and she left with agency.

That's worth 30 or 40 minutes every single time. So how do you actually use this in your real life? Whether you're the person in the dark or you love someone who is, here's the practice.

You stop waiting for the big rescue. There usually isn't one. The big shift out of hopelessness almost never arrives as one dramatic moment. It's built one small victory at a time.

For Jen, the very first victory wasn't emotional at all. She hurt every time she ate until she tried Back On Tract the first time with her meal the next day after I gave it to her and it didn't hurt anymore.

I always joke and tell people that's when she knew I wasn't a quack. And to some degree, that is true. But it also is when, she thought, oh my gosh, something can actually change based on something I did.

She put a capsule of Back on Tr act in her mouth with her meal the next day and it didn't hurt this time. That was the first data point. And then it got a little better and a lot better.

For the woman who texted me, the 1st victory was one easier cycle for the women in the store. It was 1 decision to go after the root cause. None of those are finish lines.

Every one of them is a starting line and your job This is the actual skill is to notice the small win and let it count.

Celebrate it. Remember what my friend in the text message said?

She said, I was thankful for the ability to feel thankful. That is noticing. It's noticing the small victory. Most people blow right past their small wins because they're measuring against the mountain.

Don't make that mistake. When something moves, name it, say it out loud. that worked, that was a win. You are deliberately feeding your nervous system the evidence that it needs.

You're teaching your brain on purpose that reaching produces results, which is the exact opposite of the lesson Despair taught it. And watch your language while you do it because your Nervous System is always listening.

I have an episode on the reticular activating system I want you to listen to. that ties in with this beautifully, we'll link it in the show description.

There is a world of difference between I'm broken and my body is sending me a signal that I just haven't decoded yet. Both of those statements come from a symptom.

It's really how do you interpret the symptom? You're broken and you can't be fixed, or there's a problem and it can be fix. You just haven't figured it out yet.

One is a permanent identity. The other is temporary workable state. And it's also true. Speak the true one because the false one is I'm broken. That's how the mindset actually shifts.

Not by pretending you feel great, by stacking small real wins until your brain updates its own forecast from nothing works to some things work.

Building Momentum Through Small Victories

And I've got some control and I got this. The greatest lyricist in my book of our time, Neil Peart, the late great drummer from the band Rush, wrote this in a song called One Little Victory.

The measure of the moment in a difference of degree, just one little victory, a spirit breaking free. One little Victory, the greatest act can be one Little Victory.

Before I let you go, there are a few things that I want to stay with you. Once again, your body's not broken. It's signaling. That's it. Now you can start looking into how to fix it.

Hope isn't woo woo, it's not fluff. It's your brain's ability to detect that you have some control. And it is the thing that has to come online before the supplement or the diet or anything else can do its work.

Because once again, the supplements often doesn't even come if there is no hope. But this is important too. If the supplemental, we'll just talk supplements because that's what I do, didn't work, It's just not the right supplement.

And that's okay, because you're still trying and it's still a data point. Even that is one very small, but still detectable victory. You tried a thing, it didn't work, now you know you need to take a different path.

That's OK too. Build on these small wins. Notice them, name them. Let them count. Write them down in a diary. Be grateful for them in your prayers. Talk about them with your friends, your family members.

That's not positive thinking, that's you handing your nervous system the evidence that it's been looking for. A quick reminder on all of this, of course, I'm not your doctor.

I don't wanna be your Doctor. Maybe I can be one of the people in life that helps to shift some of these stuckness that you might feel. If this is an episode that reached you or you feel like it could reach someone that you love and care about, please share it with them, either on YouTube or on Apple or Spotify or any of the other podcast apps.

We're all over the place out there. I really hope these emotional vitality episodes land and that YOU are finding more hope. more of your capacity, more your power to heal and to become what you really want to be in your physical, mental, and emotional health.

If you have questions, call us, 801-292-6662. Jump online, vitalitynutrition.com. And as I said, share this episode if it touched you. Thank you so much for listening to me.

My name is Jared St. Clair and this has been Vitality Radio. Hello, everyone. I hope you enjoyed this week's episode of Vitality Radio. Just a reminder that this podcast is for educational purposes only.

This podcast has not been evaluated by the FDA. Thank you.