Introduction to Dr. Wendy Schofer

For this DrTalks We have a physician guest. Dr. Wendy Schofer. She is a medical doctor, a pediatrician, an improv comedian, and the founder of Family and Focus, a program that helps families make healthy changes that are sustainable and long term.

We are going to talk about how to get your family and yourself moving more. How to make nutrition changes. That makes sense for the whole family. And maybe she'll crack a few jokes for us if we're lucky.

So thank you so much for joining us Dr. Schofer. Okay. No pressure whatsoever. All of a sudden it just comes up and like, oh my God, that's not what improv is.

Can you put it in the bio or. We're expecting you to be funny. And laughter is the best medicine, is it not? Oh my gosh. Seriously, it just opens up so many more possibilities when you just get to laugh about things and, finding the irony and of course, all the things with family every single day, there's plenty to laugh about.

Well, I'll I'll start just asking you a little bit about how did you get into this? Because, you know, pediatricians have lots of different things they do.

Tell me a little bit about, you know, your passion or why you like to help families as a whole work on health changes. Yeah, I mean, it's kind of one of those things.

It's like what I know, you know, of course, you know, we we all are a product of, you know, what it is that we've been doing over time. So, yes, I had my kids early and so they came through along with me as I was doing all my medical training and my practice.

And I love the way that people always look at you in the office. They're like, do you have kids? I'm like, yes, I do. And all of a sudden you get like additional street cred.

I'm like, I can tell you how I'm messing it up. So but, I think it's the stories of messing it up that really kind of hit, you know, hit home with me.

I love following with families in the office on, like, chronic, you know, just ongoing types of things. I don't want to say that's necessarily chronic diseases, but just following them longitudinally.

And, I noticed over time that, you know, we had increasing, discussions about weight, about nutrition, about movement, in the office.

Why Family-Based Health Changes Work

And it just really felt like the approach that I was taking just wasn't really working. So, you know, listened to the family, to their concerns. Make recommendations based off of all of the latest and greatest medical recommendations.

You know, this is how much you move. This is your portions. This is you know, how to know if you're sweating enough and, make a plan, send families home, come back in 3 to 6 months, and they're like, that doesn't work for us.

You know, I don't like to move. My kid doesn't like to move. We're just having food fights now. And so really what happened was, you know, families were telling me this, and then meanwhile, I was there going, oh, my God.

And I'm having the same problems, too. Finding the candy wrappers under the bed, like all these things. I'm like, this isn't working. And so it kind of was that moment to me that, well, first of all, it it's a painful moment. Like everything that I've done is a lie.

Like it's just not working. And the moment came later on when I was looking at it and I was like, I'm just looking at trying to fix, to change to, you know, tell everybody that they're broken and they need to change everything that they do versus looking at what's working in their family right now, what's working in their lives, what is it that they want to focus on?

How is it that we can really kind of find the foundation of what is working and build from that? And so that's really where family and focus was growing.

It was born from born from the ashes. It was really just trying to find a different type of focus, because we have a lot of really great, you know, evidence for what does work.

We're just using it the wrong way. I love that, you know, that was a lot of my experience early on in my career as well. Is, you know, moving from telling people what to do to asking a lot more questions and figuring out what makes sense for this person in the life that they're living right now.

Right. Sometimes people will come for me, especially for weight loss, and they have something that worked really well for them ten years ago, maybe when they were single.

Maybe they had less job responsibilities. They didn't have kids. And they're it just doesn't work for their life anymore. Maybe they can't do that strict of a diet, or they don't have the time to exercise as much as they used to.

We have to figure out what works for right now in our life, right? Because, we could write down what a really good diet is, what a really good exercise plan is, all these great plans.

But if they don't work for your life in your family, like you're probably not going to be able to do them. Yeah, yeah, I love that. That what works right now because so often we think none of that works.

And so it's kind of like throwing everything to the side. But what is the, you know, one thing, the smallest thing. What is something that's working right now?

There's always something I love that too. Yeah. Like looking for that positive things like what is going well. That's how I start off most of my appointments like what's going well.

And sometimes people you know struggle to find that a lot of times we're just really hard on ourselves too. You know. Oh that is my favorite part though because it's also the moment there.

Like nobody talks to me that way. Everybody's always asking, how are you? And we're always like, I'm okay, fine.

Movement vs. Exercise

But like, what's going well right now? It's like, oh, you got to tap into a different part of your brain to actually start going through that inventory, because we've got all the inventory of all the things that aren't.

Going. Well. You mentioned one of the challenges you saw for families was moving more. And we know that movement is is so important for health, for adults and for children.

Maybe we can start off just talking about the importance of movement and how movement might be different from exercise. Yeah. Oh, I love that because I think that, you know, while we could really kind of see how we can split movement and exercise.

Yeah, there's a lot of overlap. There's a lot of similarities. And it really just depends on I think really the, the

definition kind of like the eye of the beholder type of thing.

How do you want to look at movement? How do you want to define it? I found that in the office exercise kind of has a bad name. It's kind of like, you know, there's kind of like this emotional energy that's around it.

And so I ask, what kind of words do you use to describe how you move your body? And some people are like, oh, yeah, I go out and exercise. I'm like, okay, that's a word that we can use here.

And others like, oh God, I hate exercise. And you know, we can explore a lot more about, you know, why and the energy behind it. But I'm like, okay, well, what is a word that you do like to use around moving your body?

And sometimes it's just that movement. Okay. So it still comes down to exercise or movement because I don't get a whole lot of other words that are suggested.

But it's really looking at what is it that is, kind of accessible to the individual. What is it that they actually want to talk about? Because if they say, you know what, exercise really stinks.

I don't want to do that. They're shutting it down from the get go, even though, I. Mean, I guess of the other word is activity, right? Like your activity level or physical activity.

Yeah. I just need a conversation with someone earlier today, actually, I can't remember if it was a doctor talks or not. And we were talking about how, you know, people used you didn't used to exercise, right?

Like 100 years ago. Not very many people probably exercised or did planned physical activity. There's probably some professional athletes and college athletes and things like that who had formal exercise training regimens.

But most of us were just very busy moving, you know, making dinner, like tending to gardens, washing clothes by hand. We didn't have machines that did all these things.

A lot more work was manual labor, right? There was no computers. No one was sitting in front of the computer all day long. Right. So, I think that idea of, like, thinking about it in terms of movement can be helpful because most of us don't move very much.

It's easy to not move in the modern world. And so now we have to be more intentional about it. Yeah. You know, it's interesting and I'm I'm really bad at quoting, you know, studies.

So I don't know the exact name with it, but there was, a study where they looked at the psychosocial impact of describing movement as exercise for housekeepers.

All right. Are you familiar with this? Well, so housekeepers who are, you know, working in hotels and having lots of movement all day long, it was fascinating that when they thought that exercise needed to look a certain way, they were thinking that they didn't get the exercise over the course of their day.

They'd come home. They're like, I don't have time for this. They looked at the health impact and so their well-being, they looked at their biometrics, and then they compared it to when it was kind of like this.

Educational, intervention where they were saying, did you notice how much you're moving, how much you're exercising over the course of the day? And with those housekeepers that had that, you know, education about what it is that they were already doing, they did not change anything.

They actually had such significant improvements in there's, in their psychosocial well-being as well as their biometrics. So they were actually losing weight doing the exact same thing because they were looking at, oh my goodness, I'm getting exercise.

Look at this.

Why Movement Matters for Health

And so it can go both ways in that situation seeing that they were, you know getting exercise, defining it that way was actually beneficial to them, even though they were doing the exact same thing that they had been doing before.

Wow. That's pretty powerful. So some of the mindset stuff is important as well. Yeah. And and I also I'm just very mindful of thinking about how it I don't want to assume how someone else is looking at exercise.

You know, they there's lots of ways to define it. There's lots of ways to feel about it. And really getting curious about what is their experience and how do they want to approach it.

So we have danced around it a little bit. But why? Why is movement so important to health? Yes. So, you know, the funny thing is, as soon as you say that I have that use it or lose it kind of coming into my mind and you know, thinking about how I'm biased with looking at children, you know, having so much of a focus in children.

But, you know, movement is something that is so beneficial for really our place in this world. So we think about how it's, you know, calories in, calories out.

It's so much more than that that that's not the point of movement. Movement is the way that we get to build the foundation for our bodies. So you think about building the muscle that we're going to be needing over our lifespan, building the bone density that we're going to be needing over our lifespan.

So I think about how the activities, the movement and the exercise that our children get is really an investment in their future. And so that's so critical for them to be able to get out and move in a way that it it's enjoyable for them now, and it's going to be carrying over into the future.

And, you know, thinking about it, it's beyond the social of sports. But just you know, there's so much social engagement with movement. There's so much intelligence that we have in our bodies that we can tap into as we're moving.

I mean, I think about just even going out and walking my dogs, which is one of my most favorite things of all time. But you know how things come to you, like the opening up, creativity, different opportunities, cities, different, ideas.

There's an intelligence that we tap into when we're moving our bodies. And I think that we overlook that so much when we just kind of skim it on the surface and think about just the external body.

Well, I just got to build some muscles. There's so much more to it. Yeah. So exercise isn't just about heart health or burning calories or strength. Like, see, I didn't even. Mention heart health.

Add in heart health. Yes. But there's all these other things that that it's doing as well. And, you know, I totally agree with that. You know, that intelligence that goes with it.

I've definitely had some of those like, whoa, this is my next new idea, my next new project when I've been on a walk or a hike and, your brain finally can just kind of calm down or.

I don't even know. I don't know what the science is, but those ideas sometimes do come to you, when you're moving. Yeah. It's fascinating when we start tapping into the different, like, neural networks and, you know, getting out of, like, I need to think about this and we're focusing on it, and then we get to go into the creative mode as we're moving.

I love that it's an easy way. Like when they say, get into your body. Like there's a thing about that when we're talking about that in, mindfulness, as we're talking about that in different movement modalities, get into your body, get out of your head, because there's so much more there that you can tap into.

Yeah. Powerful. So what type of movement should we be focusing on? You know, we hear so many different things.

Finding the Best Kind of Movement

There's strength training, there's aerobics, there's yoga, CrossFit, there's dancing, you know, and you can find something that says everything is the best exercise.

And everyone loves the thing they're doing. What what's the best movement or the best exercise for people? You're. I feel like I'm trying to be baited here.

Everybody says this, but what's the one? Isn't that the thing, though? We're all looking for the one. For the one answer. And I gotta tell you, I look at it very holistically.

I, I really am encouraging and practicing that it's about doing it, doing what is meaningful to you, like getting out and doing it. So, I mean, I'll answer the question for you.

I don't mean to trick you there, but the way I always say is what you just said, which is the best exercise with the exercise you'll do right. Like yes, yes and yes, tongue in cheek and joking up joking about this.

But I mean, that's the thing. It's like, what is it that you do? What is it that, you know, so many times we think about or we hear the words should like, what should I do?

What do I need to do? Well, what about what is it that you will do? What is it that you know is available? Available to you right here that you know, whatever is going on with your schedule, whatever is going on with your body right now, what's the one thing that you can do now?

We can always look at building a plan. We can always look at what is it that you want to incorporate more of. We can, you know, look at, you know, as I was talking about building that foundation with the muscles in your bones and, you know, specifically, you know, that's where I start thinking about bringing in different aspects or particular aspects of exercise and movement, like, let's get something heavy in there, know, let's get some resistance in order to be able to build that.

But yet it's not the end all be all. We still need to be able to make it something that you can do this, it's accessible to you. You want to do it or maybe not.

You're not exactly wanting to do it right now, but it's accessible to, you know, you're like, I can do this. I will do this. Right there is your first step.

So for parents who are getting maybe they're struggling to have their kids move more, what are some of the things you suggest for those families? Yeah.

So I think that we have to look at this from the perspective of, this issue pops up at all different ages, and I think we really have to keep in mind the age of the children as we're having discussions about, how do I do this, how do I create changes, at home and I think about, really looking at the younger the child is, the more that the parents are like, listen, do this is just the way we do it in our house, you know, really establishing from that role that we have as parents that parental authority like, this is what we do.

We're getting outside every day. You know, this is just what we're doing. And it really helps to be able to create that kind of a pattern from the younger ages.

But there's some of us that are walk ins. Hey, you know, I've got concerns now and my kids are pre-teens and teens now what? And I think that the biggest thing that I can recommend is looking at it as a family, you know, really looking at it as a family affair.

What is it that I want to create changes with my children, as opposed to create changes within my children telling them what to do? Because I gotta tell you, I, I am just an overgrown teen, okay?

You tell me what to do and I'm going to tell you where to go. And that's what they do. It's it's a normal thing. It's not them, you know, being bad. It's just a normal push back.

Helping Families Move More Together

As humans and particularly active in toddlers and teenagers, it's a resistance to being controlled. And so not wanting to risk that, but how can we invite our family to create that change together?

So, you know, looking at why is it important, you know, why do you want to bring in more movement? How can you do it with your family? Yeah. What are some of the solutions you've seen families come up with in terms of, you know, how they get that movement in together?

Yeah. I got to tell you, it's really, really wide ranging. You know, sometimes it is, you know, just having some fun, like messing around while they're doing laundry, like having laundry, like throwing battles.

Like, I kind of defeats the purpose of folding laundry. Maybe this is pre laundry. I don't know, but I've heard about, you know, doing laundry tag. Okay.

That's not one I would have come up with. But you know, you hear about the dog walks, you hear about going out for bike rides, hear about going out. I'm shooting some hoops, thinking about just even wandering aimlessly around the neighborhood.

Like there's a lot of things that it doesn't have to look a certain way. It's just getting out and doing it. So more often than not, when I ask families to come up with it, it's usually the child who says, well, I want to go out and do this with you.

So there's something that they're building a connection. It's about the relationship more so than the movement. Yeah. So than any exercise, it's. It's very interested in it.

Then there's buy in right. You know if they, they want to do it. And it sounds like some of what you mentioned is just kind of playing. Right. Which kids are so much better at than adults most of the time, which can be a way of moving.

Right, or just playing or, you know, sometimes, yeah, we have data for this for adults from the National Weight Control Registry that watching less TV people maintain their weight better.

Right. Well, if you're not watching TV, you're more likely doing something that's even slightly more active, even if it's folding laundry, which is, you know, not certainly training for a marathon, but it is more active than sitting and doing nothing.

Right. And so, sometimes it's like, well, how do we cut out the screen times? The really, really sedentary stuff if we're just doing anything, whether it's cooking together, folding laundry, just playing with trucks, whatever it is like now we're or moving as opposed to not moving.

Yeah, I love that because I think that that's the actually there are two things that you said in there. First of all, play two thumbs up. Absolutely. You're tapping into me, as you know, a comedian and playing, but also as a pediatrician and just as a human.

I mean, I think that how it one of the biggest questions that I can think of is how can we play in more in general, you know, our kids, but especially us?

It doesn't mean that, you know, we've passed some kind of an age that all of a sudden it's like, no, you got to leave

your play clothes over here. Like, now we can still keep doing that.

And it's not even just about what we're doing, but it's even an approach to it. Like how can we bring play into doing the laundry? Like we're using that example right now, but I think that that's what we're really hearing.

Like they're bringing play as an approach to getting other things done. And so that is something. Grace is, you know, we make things racist sometimes.

So who can put all their laundry away the fastest now it's made it a little more active and it's playful. Right. We've made it a little bit of a game.

Yes. Yeah, absolutely. I gamify it. Well, moving on to nutrition and not to try to trick you again, but, you know, in families, one of the one of the challenges I see for, anyone who lives with anyone else, to be honest, but especially parents, who have kids that they're preparing meals for is trying to get like everyone to eat healthy food.

Sometimes when people have very different preferences of what they are willing to eat or, have different priorities of how they are trying to eat, maybe they're trying to follow a really strict diet or something.

Making Nutrition Less Stressful

So do you have an approach or a suggestion on how to make, feeding your kids a little less stressful? Yeah. So I think that first of all, as soon as I hear that it's stressful, I always want to look at what is stressful for you because, I mean, that's a very wide range of a concern.

And I think that really understanding what is stressful in your home can really be helpful. Now, I'm going to make a couple of assumptions here, acknowledging that.

But, you know, making assumptions about how well we've got different taste buds, we've got different interests, we've got different needs now. Right. And so I think that, you know, it's funny coming back to that whole thing about like the different ages and, you know, starting from, you know, even the youngest children, you know, the parents are in charge of like what is being put on the table in the first place.

You know, we can talk about the division of responsibility and that is, you know, based in intuitive eating where we're looking at, you know, what's the parents responsibility and what's the the child's responsibility.

The parent is responsible for saying, this is what we're eating, this is where we're eating it, and this is when we're eating it. So I picture, you know, this is the menu we're eating at the table.

We're not eating in your room. And these are the meal times. And then it's the child's responsibility to say which of those foods they're eating and how much they're eating.

And so looking at that, that's something that is very helpful. Just as a general guideline, I found for families with children at various ages, but also kind of coming back to it's creating the structure, it's creating the structure of this is the way that we do things in our family.

This is the way that we create the menu. Now we, I use, the example of our family. We've hosted exchange students over the course of time, and we've had a wide range of different dietary needs that have changed every single year in our family.

So it's kind of taking the example of, you know, we've got all sorts of different things and then it keeps on changing. Now what? And so we kept on coming back to, okay, how can we create the menu that we know that there are healthful foods available for everyone on the table, and then it's up to them to be able to choose what it is that they're going to eat.

Now there are some folks that say, hey, my kid's going to go in and eat like six portions of something. Well, then

sometimes we need to adjust a little bit of how much food is there.

And that's something that's in the menu planning, you know, for our responsibility that we say, okay, well, maybe we're not going to make a week's worth of pasta to put out on the table.

And then we're going to make a smaller amount because we're mindful of what's going to happen with this. And so I think that it's something that if I can plant one more seed, there's a lot of things that we give far too much.

I'd say autonomy to very young children to determine their diets. And that is not the rule, for the youngest children. So thinking about kind of the, how would I say just the pattern of picky eating and how much more we're hearing about that now?

Well, my child doesn't like it, so I'm not going to serve it to them. That's not their role. So I've heard someone else sum it up as, the parent provides, the child decides, so you give them more reasonable options.

Maybe they're set out on the table or my kids, they're still littler. And so they tend to like those plates that have the different sections. They don't want stuff touching, you know, and so it's like here are, you know, the three things that are the components of your meal that are reasonable and healthy and, you know, like if you want to eat all of your fruit and veggies tonight and you're not that interested in the chicken, like, that's fine.

Because these were all reasonable options. And like, you can listen to your body a little bit, but if I let my kids completely listen to their bodies, they would eat nothing but, like, yogurt and candy and fruit, like, that's all they would eat.

Yep. Absolutely. And that's why we just need to know our kids know our families. Like, okay, what is it that I can create this structure, give them that opportunity, but also realize there's some things you get to decide.

There's some things you don't. So we're going to create this space where I'm deciding this is the menu. And then you get to decide within this menu what you know, what you're going to.

Have, how much and of which thing. Right. Like we don't want the finishing the plate sort of mentality. We want people to listen to their bodies a little bit, but we can guide them to what their body might need a little when their kids.

Yeah. And even the way you said that, like it was, you know, about bringing in the the collaboration, there was a playfulness. It's like, yeah, we're going to work on this together.

Where to Find Dr. Schofer

And I think that is really kind of the approach to take, like, how can we do this together? And the more that we practice with it, the less that it's like, it's because what I said or, you know, because I'm the parent, it's like, you know, just kind of I know a little bit about what your body needs here.

Let's, let's just kind of work on this together, have some playfulness with it. I love it. Well, doctor Schofer Where can people and families find you if they want more information or want more support with how to make healthy changes around movement, nutrition and lifestyle in general?

Bring it on. Well, I got to tell you, as long as you can spell my name, you can find me. So, so well, we'll make sure we're in the show notes. So the Family and Focus program is housed at Wendyschofermd.com.

And that's where you will find out about all of my upcoming programs. We have a, group program that runs quarterly for parents that are concerned about their families weight.

And so you can come on over and find out about, the next program, opening, as well as one on one, opportunities to work together. And I'll lastly put it out there now have a new collaboration, working on, I know you're like, well,

but working with my folks at the improv theater and really bringing the, improv communication, to help other health care providers.

And so it's something that we're really expanding. And you'll find more there on the website. Wonderful. Well, thank you so much for joining me. Thank you so very much. It's been a pleasure.