Introduction and Guest Background

Welcome to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr. Amy Cooper-Smith, a doctorate prepared nurse practitioner. And this show is about empowering you to live a radiant, healthy, and balanced life.

I'm very excited to introduce today's guest, Jill Shanahan. Jill is a certified nutritional counselor, lifestyle educator, and eating psychology coach.

She has a lifelong passion for fitness and nutrition, her goal is to educate, encourage, and provide individuals with the tools they need to proactively manage their health care.

Welcome, Jill, and thanks for being here. I'm thrilled to be here. Thank you for having me. Yes, we're going to have a really exciting conversation. Can you start?

Tell us a little bit about your journey and how it led you to health coaching. I had been a barber for 38 years, always interested in fitness. And when I hit my 40s, I realized that you can't outwork out a bad diet.

So I started getting interested in nutrition, sharing that with my clients. And they started asking me questions based on what I was sharing with them that I didn't really feel qualified to answer.

But it kind of struck me that I really have a passion for this. I had done some teaching in the barber cosmetology field, and while I didn't enjoy that, reaching people and sharing things with them that kind of turned on the light bulb for them did kind of jazz me.

So I decided to study nutrition. Around that time, I had gone to see a functional medicine doctor myself so that I could kind of sidestep some of the things that my friends were experiencing going through perimenopause.

And while I didn't think there was a lot going on and my goal was more for prevention, I did find out there were some things that actually we were able to correct.

And one of them was just lack of motivation. You know, they were things that I kind of chalked up as character flaws and just kind of beat myself for and found out I had to do with my neurotransmitters.

Interesting. So once we balanced my neurotransmitters, some of those things got better and I was able to pick up the ball and run in the direction I wanted to go in the next part of my life.

I decided to make this my career because it really gives me a thrill to share and to teach and to encourage and support others. Very satisfying. Very satisfying.

So I came across your information. There was a flyer in Dr. Joss Wright's office at Pivotal Health Systems. And I saw you were doing a seminar on epigenetics and nutrition.

And I said, oh, that's fascinating. I need to meet this person. So tell us a little bit about that. Well, nutrition is part of epigenetics. We have our genes and, okay, everybody's familiar with, you know, basically you have genes you get from your mom and your dad, and so there are some predispositions to certain illnesses or even mood disorders, things like that.

But we get our genes from our parents and they, what they say is load the gun. But what we found out is that epigenetics is what pulls the trigger. Epigenetics are things that can support these genes so that they don't hijack your life.

And that can be nutrition, stress management, sleep, hydration, environmental toxic exposure, and things like that. They're things that put the power When a patient goes to see a doctor, they feel rather helpless about their condition oftentimes.

And this puts the power back in their hands. Yep, absolutely. So we have genes, different predispositions we inherit.

Epigenetics and Nutrition Basics

But then there are other things that turn those genes on or off, depending on some things we can control and some we can't. So I think that's fascinating.

I've been doing a lot of reading about that. And what can we do to control how our genes are expressed? So what are some things that nutrition can do in terms of our epigenetics?

It's something that, it's like a cascade. And it starts with, I don't know if you've heard of the MTHFR gene. There's another name for that, which we can't say.

Use your imagination, people. So what nutrition can do, in order for methylation to occur, you need methyl donors. And those are vitamins, minerals, and things that we need.

And we can get them from our diets. We can get them from supplements. But with the MTHFR, gene, if one of those snips is not good, there's folic acid, which is a fake folate that's put into a lot of foods, some supplements, and that form can actually be toxic to someone with the MTHFR gene, so.

They think they're doing the right thing and they're actually causing harm to their bodies. Absolutely, absolutely. getting your nutrition, getting your methyl donors from your diet, and then supplementation as well is step one.

And then eating clean and making sure that you're not ingesting a lot of toxins from your food, which is a good argument for the organic produce. However, it's not important to eat completely organic.

You can, if you wish, but there's the Dirty Dozen Clean 15, which will kind of guide you as to which tend to be the most toxic. And washing all of your produce, whether it's organic or not, is important.

But even as far as just who you are when you show up to the table, how you eat, do you eat slowly, are you relaxed, can have an impact on digestion to the point where you're either you're either absorbing and utilizing those nutrients from your food or you're not.

So you mentioned eating clean. So it could mean organic. So we've talked before on the show about the Dirty Dozen. And those are things that, if you can, that those are choices you should make organic.

And they kind of change the list up every now and then. So I would recommend Googling that for people. But what else is involved with eating clean when we say that?

Well, if you eat dairy, it's important. Well, animal products in general. If you eat animal products, it's important to get free-range grass-fed grass finished for the reason that if you're eating an animal and it's been factory farmed, they're fed antibiotics because they're being raised in crowded situations and the likelihood of them getting sick is much greater.

So they put antibiotics in the food to prevent that rather than just waiting for an animal to be sick and then treat them. Also in the case of dairy, they give them hormones and whatever the cows are eating, you're eating essentially and that can throw off your hormone balance as well.

Yeah, absolutely. And I think, too, the way an animal's raised, if they're under stress, I think that manifests in its, like when we eat that, I feel like that affects us as well.

If an animal is stressed, the hormones that the animal makes just from being in those conditions are passed on to us as well. Absolutely. They excrete the stress hormones into their product.

So you mentioned washing your produce. What do you wash your produce with? I will just soak my produce in white vinegar and water in the sink for a period of time.

There are a lot of different produce washes that you can find. Most of them are concentrated. Vinegar's cheap. Vinegar's cheap. And why buy expensive stuff when that'll do the trick?

Just fine. Well, good. And then you also mentioned the speed at which you eat. So if we eat something very quickly, does that disrupt digestion? Yes. If you're eating quickly, your nervous system knows two phases.

You're either stressed, fight or flight, or rest and digest. And if you're eating when you're stressed, Your body, your nervous system doesn't know the difference.

So it's preparing you to run from danger. It's not in your digestive tract where you need it. So the digestion suffers if you're stressed, if you're having a fight with your spouse or watching something upsetting on television or multitasking and you're not present eating your food.

Eating Clean and Supporting Digestion

No, sitting down. So what's the point in buying this organic food if you're going to scarf it down? You're going to be missing the nutritional value. The other thing, too, is eating slowly.

Digestion of carbohydrates begins in the mouth. And if you don't chew thoroughly, and allow the food to be broken down, creating a lot of surface area, and then those enzymes in your saliva to get to that food, you're skipping the whole first part of digestion.

And that's where a lot of discomfort comes from too, because once the food reaches the stomach, that's another whole set of enzymes to break down proteins.

Are there specific, because you mentioned folic acid and specifically like fake nutrients, are there specific nutrients that you find are more powerful in turning on or suppressing different genes?

One that seems to be really important is glutathione. OK. And that facilitates your body's ability to detoxify. And considering all of the toxins that were Currently, we're swimming in a toxic soup, so to speak.

And there are some things we can control, like you had said, and some things, you know, we're just sitting ducks. We don't have a choice. So her bodies are marvelously designed to detoxify.

But again, if it gets backed up or behind, then we're going to suffer some some deep, you know, some toxic symptoms, headache, brain fog, you know, less if your body runs less efficiently.

Glutathione is a very important part of it, and it also is instrumental in creating ATP, which is our cell's energy. Nice. So glutathione's interesting because I know that it has to, not all forms of glutathione are created equal.

So we can't always, it's not always readily available in certain forms. Well, we make some. Inside, yes. But we can't, you know, we can't always keep up.

And there's also, you can also, you know, have too much. And then, you know, if you have symptomatic, if you're symptomatic from having too much, then it just takes a while for your body to use up what you have.

And, you know, then you'll be back to feeling better. So it's all about balance. It's all about balance. So are there certain foods that you might recommend to support this or just back to eating clean, avoiding the other things we talked about?

Eating clean is the most important. Eating whole food is the most important too because your body knows what to do with what comes from nature versus something synthetic.

I was listening to an interesting podcast the other day, and they were talking about ultra-processed foods. And so I tuned in. I'm like, what do you mean by that?

And so basically, people know that anything in a package is processed to some degree. But ultra-processed is actually, you can't make it at home. The ingredients in there don't exist from things that grow.

from animals, like it's completely fabricated. And they were talking about the devastating effect that that has on our gut and our immune system. So I think in today's world, we have so much access to those types of foods that just avoiding them is really paramount for good health.

It is, but it's very difficult. It's a tall order because so much has been processed, ultra-processed. Our bodies are designed to be on high alert when something it doesn't recognize enters.

And we're not adaptable, like some of the smaller creatures in the world. So it takes, you know, but I think we can build up a tolerance to some degree, but at the same time, things that are, or people think they're tolerating it.

You know, they push a lot of symptoms, especially as they get older, off to, well, this is just what's expected when you get older. You don't, you're not going to have perfect digestion.

You're not going to have loads of energy. And it doesn't have to be true. Also, the ultra-processed food messes with the microbiome, and everything starts in the microbiome.

We make some of our hormones in our guts, and that impacts our moods. And then these ultra-processed foods damage the gut lining and allow things outside of the gut that doesn't belong anywhere in the body, but that digestive tract in and out, right?

There's so much about the gut, we're going to do a whole episode just about gut health because it's that important for our well-being. But when you're recommending nutritional changes for a client, it can be overwhelming for somebody.

Is there just a place where you recommend people start? Like just start here. Don't get overwhelmed. Make this one change. Depending upon where they're starting.

I can't take someone from Cheetos to kale overnight for sure. Exactly. But I meet them where they are. And if they like their potato chips, I'll find them a healthier potato chip.

And all the while, you know, I'll talk to them about what the bad potato chip or the ultra-processed potato chip is doing. I mean, have you ever read a can of Pringles?

Sleep Hygiene and Blue Light

I just point these things out, and they kind of make these decisions on their own. Is there any potato in there? I don't think so. I think it's potato.

powdered starch or something. I don't know, but I just try to find them healthier options. And then as we work together, they start to make better options.

They start to make better choices for themselves because they start to feel better. They start to see some improvement. They start to understand how processed food works or ultra processed food works.

And they don't want to put that in their bodies, but it takes a while to get there. So sometimes it's baby steps and some people are like, just tell me what I have to do.

I'll do anything to feel better. I'm going to have you hold that thought. We're going to pause for a break from our sponsor. You're listening to Energize and Revitalize with Dr.

Amy. Don't go anywhere. We'll be right back. Welcome back to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr. Amy Cooper-Smith, and my guest today is Jill Shanahan.

Before the break, we were talking about epigenetics and nutrition and how the things that we eat can affect how our genes express themselves. So now, gene expression can also be affected by other things like sleep and stress.

What do you find when you're working with clients that's going on there with sleep? With sleep, there are just a lot of things that go on during sleep.

And so if we don't get proper sleep, that is when the body rebuilds. And that's when memories are committed. In the brain, there are things that you that you experienced that day are kind of processed and filed away and those kinds of things don't happen when you don't get the right amount of sleep.

So many of my clients are perimenopausal or menopausal and probably the number one complaint is lack of sleep or lack of quality sleep. Is that something that you've encountered as well?

More than not. Yeah. I've spoken to very few people who sleep like babies anymore. I know. I know. So what do you think is going on with us and why aren't we sleeping like we should?

I think that we're overstimulated. I think there's just too much information coming at us, not only all day long, but then when, you know, at night when people settle down and they've had a long day, they want to treat themselves to something, maybe some mindless activity to just chill and unwind and they choose their phones and their devices.

So they're staring into that blue light and that stimulates the brain and it stops that natural sleepiness from occurring and can interrupt sleep. And that disrupts melatonin production too, right?

The blue light? The blue, yes. The blue, yes. It's important to get the bright light in the morning because that produces serotonin which is a precursor for melatonin and then the melatonin builds during the day.

but it stops the release. So you might have enough, but it stops the release of melatonin. Yeah, that's something I'm working on, because I like to read, which is a great pre-bedtime activity.

But I read from my phone. So OK, how do we protect my hormones and still get that unwinding that I need? Well, there's a couple of ways. You can get blue blocking glasses.

And most devices also have. And if they don't, you can get an app to put right on your device that will lower the blue light at a certain time of the night.

You could choose a book book. I know, go back to the good old fashioned book. Old fashioned book, or you could just, you could do a book, audio book, and listen to that.

All good tips. So do you do anything with sleep hygiene, sleep routines? Oh, whenever I talk to a patient who's reporting that they're sleeping poorly, we start at the beginning of the day, and we go through the day.

And then we talk about the importance of sleep hygiene. Sleep hygiene is basically a night-night routine, something that you start before bed. It cues your body and your brain.

It tells you we're getting ready for sleep. it's kind of like if you're preparing a meal and you're taking in the smells and the sights and the sounds and and all the aromas you know of the meal what begins to happen is your digestive juices start to get start to churn and your body is preparing to eat the meal so by the same token we want

to prepare the body for sleep we want to turn the lights down not use overhead LED lights at night, use incandescent lamps.

Again, the blue blocker sunglasses. Try not to eat, everybody's a little different, but try not to eat two to three hours before a meal. Get off of your devices an hour or two before, I'm sorry, before bed.

And then get off your devices an hour or two before bed. You might wanna take a bath, rub some essential oils on your feet.

Stress, Inflammation, and Food Sensitivities

Get into bed with a book. Listen to a guided meditation. If you're somebody who has a hard time turning their brain off, doing what I call a brain dump, which is basically just taking a pad of paper, keeping it next to your bed.

And if you're laying in bed and worrying about things, you just… Write it all down, put it aside, and say, all right, it's there, so I don't forget it.

Revisit in the morning. Can't do about anything about it tonight, so I might as well just go to sleep. I've heard of that tip before for those people that wake up in the middle of the night and all those thoughts are coming in.

OK, just write them down. Deal with them later. Right. And if you wake up in the middle of the night, for gosh sake, do not get on your phone. That's the worst thing.

That's the first thing people do, too, is they pick up their phone. I know. That's going to make it worse. And I like the idea of a routine, because with our children, when they're little, we have bath time, story time, and it helps them to get ready for sleep.

So I think we deserve the same treatment, so that we can get that quality time. Yes. So now, this is very relatable to stress. So stress and sleep disruption kind of go hand in hand.

But what sorts of things are you encountering with just stress with people? People are having a hard time shutting their brains off, ruminating about things, just being bombarded by too many responsibilities, and just feeling overwhelmed.

I think we're a really busy population and that just kind of trickles down and a lot of people become stress eaters or eat things perhaps that aren't supporting healthy gut biome and getting inflammation from those things, which leads us to another problem.

So I know inflammation is something you deal with as well and you've done some seminars on that. So what kinds of things are causing inflammation for us?

Well, I mean, it can be things like an injury. Okay. But, you know, oftentimes, inflammation can be just a reaction to something that we're sensitive to.

It can be the ultra processed foods. And sometimes I even find that it's foods that are good for us, whole foods that people are eating in the name of being healthy.

that their body just does not like. And I was thinking about this. When we're children, sometimes we have an aversion to foods. And we can't explain why.

You know, maybe a toddler can't tell you, when I eat this, my stomach hurts. But we developed aversion to certain foods. And oftentimes, I'll find out as an adult, when we do a food sensitivity test, someone sensitive or allergic to a food and didn't know it, but never really cared for it or gravitated towards it when they were kids.

I didn't like milk as a kid. And back then, you have to drink your milk. Exactly. And I kind of had to, but never liked it.

I've talked to moms who are like, well, we're trying to get him or her to drink milk.

They didn't agree with them when they were babies, but we know how important it is for their health. And I said, none of it's making them sick and inflamed.

And then you think about the commercial milk, all the hormones in there anyway. So maybe it's not as important as we thought. No. So are you seeing a lot of food sensitivities?

Absolutely. One of the biggest offenders is eggs. I know. They're so good for you, though. But yeah, a lot of us are sensitive to them. A complete protein.

I hate telling people they can't have eggs. But people who are bodybuilders and things will eat them to extreme. And you can develop a sensitivity just from overexposure.

And it can be corrected sometime just from abstaining for a while. Do you think three months or six months or it just depends? It just depends. Some people are just always sensitive to eggs.

I've had patients that have tested two and three times and they're just never gonna be able to eat eggs. And other people can clear it up in three months.

Yeah, I am sensitive to eggs and it's one of my favorite foods. So sometimes I'll just take a break for a little while and then I can have it in moderation.

But yeah, that's such a bummer when we have to give up something that's really good for us. Right, yeah, right. about being an eating psychology coach?

What is that? It's basically exploring somebody's relationship to food. And the best example I can come up with is stress eating. Because certain foods release certain chemicals that make you feel good, and it becomes kind of addictive.

And if you don't have better coping strategies, in place, which is what I work with people to do, find a better way to cope with whatever it is that makes them reach for the chocolate or the sugar.

So the same receptors that are stimulated if we were to do cocaine, sugar can stimulate those same receptors. Of course not to the same degree, but it can be very addictive.

But meanwhile, when we eat those things, especially the ultra-processed, like high fructose corn syrup, it's creating inflammation inside and making us sick.

It creates inflammation. It depletes our important, you know, nutritional cofactors and things that make, you know, all of the methylation and all other kinds of things work for us.

Do you find that most people know that, but they just, because of stress or different issues, they do it like, I know I shouldn't eat this, but I'm going to do it?

Well, it's a vicious cycle. Because they know they shouldn't, then they do it, then there's the guilt and shame that comes with that. So it's something that you have to become, first of all, aware of what you do.

And some people are aware of what they do. They just don't know a better way. Well, how do you help people deal with shame? Well. Acknowledging it maybe first.

Acknowledging it and I guess pointing out that we're all human and we're all going to do things that we're not proud of or we might know is not the best way.

Eating Psychology and Self-Compassion

But I acknowledge people for reaching out for help and for support. And everybody's a little bit different. So I address it just based on who I'm dealing with.

acknowledging them for coming forward and asking for help because it's not something you can often figure out by yourself. And even if you can, you're your own worst judge.

You need someone to offer you some grace while you're learning and while you're changing your behavioral patterns. Yeah, we have some weight loss clients in our clinic.

And I see that so often where people come in and they get on the scale and they say, I am angry and I'm angry at myself because I did this. Like, okay, good, we have a start point, but what if this was your best friend who said this?

How would you talk to that person about where they are in this journey right now? And just trying to get people not to beat themselves up. Right, you're absolutely right.

I mean, we speak to ourselves in ways we would never speak to someone we love. So we're almost out of time, but you have some exciting things coming up.

I do, I do. I've been working remotely with Dr. Campione at Concierge Wellness Care up in Georgia with her remote patients. I counsel them in lifestyle and epigenetic areas.

But I have recently just aligned myself with Dr. Joshua Wright. who was also a guest on the show. He works with nutrition, but would like to spend more time or offer more time to people who really want to delve in and make some modifications.

And so I'm going to be onboarding to support his patients. So exciting. I'm very excited. So that's one way, if people want an appointment with you or to discuss more, they can go through Dr.

Wright's office, but they can also contact you directly? Yes. And we'll put that in our show notes, but do you want to tell people how to get a hold of you?

Probably the best way to get a hold of me would be at my email address. Shanahanjildi at gmail.com. And I can also be reached through Concierge Wellness Care as well.

And we'll put all that on the site so that anyone can find you when they need you. OK. And so before we go, is there one thing you would like to tell our listeners or encourage them to explore?

I would encourage you to explore the many ways that you can support your own body and mind.

Closing Remarks and Contact Information

There are a lot of tools that are available for a fraction of a cost of a doctor visit. It's cheaper to take care of your health, right? I am, I guess, I am just a proponent of somebody who prevents versus waiting.

Don't ignore signals and signs. Get some answers, figure out what you're dealing with. And oftentimes what you're dealing with, pain, inflammation, things like that, are signs of a deeper issue.

And you might have multiple symptoms that you're concerned about and maybe just dealing with those root causes can make a lot of that go away. So dig deep and find, you know, find someone that will help you dig deep.

Wonderful. And we have a couple of resources now. Yes. Yes. Thank you again for being here today. Thank you for asking me. I enjoyed it very much. And thanks to our listeners for tuning in to Energize and Revitalize with Dr.

Amy. If there are topics you would like to hear more about, please send an email to radiantpodcasts2025 at

gmail.com. Check out our past episodes on Amethyst Wellness YouTube.

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I'll be back next Saturday morning at 7.30 with more expert insights and practical strategies to help you live your healthiest, most energized life. Until then, stay healthy and here's to your best life.