Podcast Introduction and Guest Welcome

You cannot change what's been going on with your body for 12 years and one week. Right. And a lot of people want these like quick results. I have to gain it's a time for, you know, You to get where you are.

It's going to take time to reverse that and to Reverse it in a realistic and healthy manner. At the end of the day, I had that nursing degree behind me and I'm not going To do anything that's gonna harm someone.

And if you can't do it sensibly, then I'm not the person for you, but I try to encourage to do in a healthy fashion. Welcome to The Functional Edge. I am Dr.

Julia Ward, and this is where science meets real-world strategies for living healthier, sharper and stronger. From uncovering hidden environmental toxins to unlocking peak performance and mental clarity, we cover it all.

Ready to take control of your health and thrive? Let's dive in. Well, welcome to the Functional Edge podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Julia Ward, medical director and founder of Balanced Body Function Medicine.

Today, we're honored to welcome Karen Walters to our show. In this episode, Karen will be sharing insights on fitness and bodybuilding, offering expert guidance to help you navigate your health journey with the latest advancements in functional medicine.

Stay tuned for an engaging conversation that promises to empower and inspire your path to wellness. Karen, thank you so much for being here and I'm going to give you a chance to just tell us a little bit about your background.

Karen Waltersu2019 Background and IFBB Pro Journey

Okay. Where do I start? As far as my career, I've been a massage therapist since 1999. I don't know if that tells my age or not. But I have trained in massage therapy under the best that you could train under so that I can service any type of athlete that exists.

I specialize in medical massage, myofascial release and deep tissue sports therapy. That's great. And you recently won your IFBB Pro card? I did, yes.

Back in November, November 24th, so just a few months ago, I received my IFBB Pro status in the figure division. That is great! Yeah, it was quite a journey.

I didn't think I would get there. knew I wanted it, but I don't know that I could get. There I trained for two years to be able to compete at an elite level.

if you will. And I have the help of a doctor. Her name's Julia Ward. That's awesome. We'll get more to your story about how you prep for that and what that involves in a little bit.

But first, you have such a unique background. You're a nurse, massage therapist, trainer, coach, and now IFBB Pro. So can you walk us through your journey into the world of fitness and bodybuilding?

Yeah, I can. Actually, this all started in 2011. 2011 is when I discovered that I had carotid artery disease and high blood pressure and cholesterol. My parents had gotten sick at the time, both at that same time.

And I knew that it was time for me to go get myself checked out. So I went to an internal medicine doctor, you know, the typical tests done, blood work done.

and I did also have a complaint of memory loss. I was in nursing school at the time and, um, I had always been a

very great student and um I would take in microbiology at that time.

And I, couldn't figure out why I couldn' remember anything. That was the first class I didn't make an A in and so it must be a reason it's not me. Do you mind me asking like about how old were you at Or 30, 30. So you were young.

Yeah. Pretty young to have all these like chronic issues start cropping up. Right. I was really young and I. Was always an athlete in high school. And I would say I took care of myself because I didn't know what take care.

Of myself was at that time. Mm hmm. Um, I know that I did. Drink heavily, smoke, you know, no, didn. Do all that at the time, And that, I mean, most of my meals I did eat out, but, you know, didn't really know anything about nutrition at that time and fitness as far as just being an athlete myself and volleyball player.

But like back to the doctor, we did a sleep test. Uh, it turned out that I had sleep apnea at the time I was 135 pounds. So I couldn't figure out like, how am I so sick?

And we did the blood work and found out that I had high cholesterol.

Health Scare and Reversing Chronic Conditions

I have the high blood pressure just from the symptoms that i explained to the doctor, I would walk run every morning and I couldn't breathe and just a lot of things I was complaining about.

We ended up getting the Blood work back and it looked bad. And so he did a carotid Doppler and INT. Maybe you can explain what that is to everybody. But at that point, it was discovered that I have arteries of a 68 year old and that had carotted artery disease.

So that was pretty scary. That's pretty scary. So the doctor sent me to a dietitian. And, you know, I'm not trying to talk bad about a dietician, but it was like I was a single mom of two, 34, and you're telling me that I am about to die.

And I had a stroke. Oh, wow. You actually had to stroke? Maybe it's a T. I. A. transient ischemic attack or just like a mini stroke is what they call it.

So, yeah. And the whole thing was like in my ride done or and it was confirmed and all of that. But I'm going back and forth because the timeline is. Yeah.

It was so long ago and that's not my life anymore. I'll try to forget it, but right. So, yeah, so I went to a dietitian and, you know, she was saying, eat a piece of meat the size of a deck of card and do this and that.

And I was like, ma'am, I had a stroke and I need something a little bit more like serious to go by. I'm committed. You just have to tell me what to do.

Yeah. So that's when I started researching bodybuilding and body building coaches and trainers. And I'm looking into what their certifications were. And they have certications in not only nutrition, but weight loss.

It just goes the extra mile in their knowledge. So I found a bodybuilding coach that received his degree at Colorado State. He had all the nutrition knowledge and that's when I hired him to help me with my fitness journey.

Okay, make a long story short. It took me one year to be free of high blood pressure and high cholesterol. And then at my two year mark with him, I did the carotid Doppler and INC and I was free off carotic artery disease.

That's great. So you were able to reverse it. I was able to reverse it. And, uh, you know, at that time he was like, wow, You've already won. You may as well do a bodybuilding show.

Right. Okay. I'll do it and my first body building show was muscle mania and I got fifth place out of five. But you

were there and that's the important thing.

Yeah. Absolutely. Without sounding too dramatic, I survived. Yeah. Well, that's how I got into my fitness journey with a sickness. Right. Which I think happens for a lot of caretakers who go into more natural kind of medicine.

They have some sort of health scare, either themselves or a loved one, and they start exploring alternative or more-natural options. But with over two decades of experience in sports and therapeutic massage, what initially sparked your passion for working with the body in such an in-depth way?

really and truly it started off with cancer patients. Interesting. But I still felt limited. I know cancer is a real serious disease and I was happy to like help in that aspect, but it's still, I felt like my skill level could contribute more.

So I don't know how to word that, and that's when I started working with athletes. Athletes are very in tune with what they have to go out and do. They know how to prepare for it, but they don't practice recovery.

And so, you know, I wanted to be able to help athletes learn. How to recover and take recovery theory and that, You know creates longevity in the sport that they perform.

That's great. Yeah. And how has your expertise in anatomy and physiology influenced your approach to training and competing? Oh, wow. That the deep question that I would almost have to ask you to answer properly.

But as far as Yeah, Yeah, it is helpful. Um, my expertise and anatomy and physiology kind of lets me take the fluff work out of training. You know, you see a lot of people in the gym doing all these fancy things, that they see on YouTube and everything.

And for me, I am very specific in my training and as far as like the expertise in anatomy, where origin and insertion is on a muscle. I know the muscles function.

And so therefore I can just get right to it and do what needs to be done. A lot of people might work out for an hour and I work 30 minutes and accomplish it.

Very efficient. I believe in efficiency.

From Recovery Work to Athlete Performance

Well, again, congratulations on your recent win at the MPC, Texas State. What was your journey like leading up to that? The journey was challenging. I want to say that first because I am perimenopausal.

Is that the proper term? I'm peri-menopause. And, you know, I actually came to you in September of 23. I think it was 22 or 22 because I because i am certified in nutrition and training I was on a regiment that would have put me in a deficit which would Have started me on A cut or to lose weight right and nothing was happening and I couldn't figure out why nothing was happening and I know I knew what I'm doing.

Yes. Yeah. So that's what brought me to you. I new that I couldn't see a regular doctor. And I had to go to a functional medicine doctor and it did take time to research you and a couple of other doctors in the area and chose to with you because I liked your approach.

Your approach wasn't like, let me put you in a little box and give you all this medication. It was let's find out the why. And I need to find out the why type of girl.

And so as far as my process of starting again and the two year journey to the stage, once you did get my hormones under control, they started responding how it should respond.

Right. That just encouraged me more to keep the training going and to finally choose a coach that wasn't myself. I'm just somebody accountable and someone just as smart as me that I can trust to help guide me along the way.

So two years of working out, recompositioning my body. And then with 24, the last 24 months of the two year period is when I started my cut the actual started weight loss and cutting and getting prepared to actually pick a show.

And that's when I picked the show in November. It was my very first MPC show because I had always done muscle mania and it was successful. Very successful, very successful and we'll put some pictures up as well of your winning photos because they're pretty amazing.

Thank you. And thank you for your help. Of course, of course. Can you sort of break down what your prep looked like, like how you structured your training or nutrition and like recovery in those final months?

In the final month of training, really I pushed to the very end. I still did a lot of heavy lifting, which employs hypertrophy in the muscle. Matter of fact, I didn't, and I still worked in that fashion.

So basically lifting heavy, making sure I have the proper nutrients. I think I was still eating 1600 calories, maybe maybe 1600 calorie for the end. And then we reduced gradually as the show got closer.

I don't know if I can say how much. So you're still like, how long did your workouts last? How much time were you putting in the gym? I worked out six days a week, 30 to 45 minutes.

It's not like you were spending hours and hours. I wasn't spending ours and ours, but I did add cardio onto the end because again, you want to live as realistic as you can nutrition wise and the deficit came more from my activity.

So I did pick up my cardio sessions, but at most it was, I didn't split 45 minutes in the morning upon weight. And then I would do 45 minute and the evening to get that deficit.

Yeah. How many meals were you eating a day?

Training Philosophy and Bodybuilding Prep

Four meals a. Day, which I still eat four meals. A day now. Okay. I have a very heavy work schedule and I will love to eat six meals per day. Yeah, I'm in the perfect world, but I still do food timing and what I do with the formula.

So I'll fast in morning. I fast about one o'clock and then I have my breakfast at one O'Clock and I start eating every three hours after that. OK, until what time?

I usually try to get all my meals in by like 10, 11 o'clock at night. I don't get that much sleep, maybe six hours a day. Sorry. Were there any major obstacles like mental, physical, logistical that you had to overcome during this prep?

Mental and really and truly, I mean, because I work at the gym, Yeah. You know, I call our members, civilians, the ones that are not athletes. And it was pretty tough.

I know they didn't mean it. A lot of people don't know what words to call like our fitness journey, but you know you have people giving you their opinions.

If your coach is telling you you're not quite there yet, that your gym members or people are saying, oh, you look skinny. Are you okay? Yeah, mentally, because you, no, not where you supposed to be.

Yeah. Hearing a lot of comments. Right. Other feedback. It was really hard to come to terms with like people saying things. And, you know, I have a of people in the gym also that are coaches that, and they really gave me words of wisdom on how to like, get past or still smile at people because they don't know to say, You look lean.

They might say you look skinny. There were choices and they don't mean to be hurtful. So yeah, you know, I just had to come to grips with that, but that's really the only mental challenge that I had because I've been a bodybuilder since 2012.

I took five years off, But I know what it takes. And so I knew what I have to do. Yeah. And then for me, my idea is hire the best in every area that you need to adjust and you're going to be okay.

I hired the Best Doctor, I hire The Best Coats, and I knew that I was going in prepared. So I really didn't have a worry. That's great. It was awesome.

the best prep that I have ever had. That's great. And so you're not just a competitor, you do posing coaching yourself. You counsel people on nutrition and personal training.

How do you tailor your coaching approach based on each person's body and goals? What a great question. I feel like it's very important to set my potential client down for an interview.

Um, I do go through a couple of questions about their goals, where they've been in life and their fitness goals. Have they ever had a coach and I get to know what their lifestyle is.

I actually asked them their work schedule and it takes me through. A day of their works schedule in how they eat and they're work scheduling. And I kind of get an idea of what's realistic for them.

In the medical world, we have this big word called compliance, right? And we want some client patients. And so I look at how I can bridge what I do for people and what they can be compliant with.

Yeah. We start there. So my meal plan for my client might not look clean at first because they haven't been eating clean. As we progress, I just clean up their meal plans.

as we progressed, we add more days in, and we have more cardio in. A lot of people really want to just get to it and in my experience that hadn't been very successful for many people.

So I just add one component at a time. And you know, I do ask them what their commitment timeframe is when we go in so that we can have some realistic expectation.

Yeah, that's great. What are some of the most common mistakes you see new competitors or gym goers make? Just what I said, trying to do everything at one time, always preach baby steps.

Take baby steps. Consistency is the most important. So if you're working out two days a week, be consistent with it. Once that becomes a habit, then add another day in.

Um, a lot of people try to like make these unrealistic goals and then they beat themselves up and they get discouraged and them they stop. Yeah. And at the, toward the end of our lifespan, we need to be able to do our ADL, you know?

So, I mean, at least be consistence so that You know, you can have longevity and fitness, and that is enjoyable. Yeah, absolutely. And just FYI, the ADLs are activities of daily living, right?

To do some of those. So with your deep background in massage therapy and modalities like myofascial release, how do you integrate recovery into your regimen and into clients?

Um, that's great. I just mix it all up. Okay. What I mean, um, all the areas that I'm like certified in and have been doing for years, I added into the therapy.

Coaching Approach and Common Fitness Mistakes

So on my like service chart, this is deep tissue. This is therapeutic. You know, don't have it like broken down like that because I feel like the whole session is a therapeutic session.

If you need something done, I'm gonna do it. I don't have a cupping service added on because if I need to cup you,

i will get permission from you. But then I will like, you know, add that into your therapy.

i feel like I would be doing someone a disservice if i just did this one modelli. Oh, You just paid for this, so I am just gonna to do this. Yeah, yeah.

You wanna do whatever it takes to get the job done. That's awesome. So you've worked with elite athletes across sports, so NFL, NBA, world champion boxers, Olympian level bodybuilders.

What have you learned from supporting high performers that everyday athletes can benefit from? Recovery, stretch, the infrared sauna. I mean, what I've been teaching them is the amount of time that you put into training is a same amount time you need to put in for recovery.

And if you are a serious athlete, you will add those in. It's very important. You know, I'm trying to get to the rocket now. That's my favorite theme actually, but it's like, like I can do your treatments for you.

I just don't want y'all to be hurt. Yeah. But you know a lot of people still look at massage therapy as a luxury. And it has definitely moved out of that luxury category like years ago, a lot of hospitals have massage therapy incorporated into their hospital system.

And it's for a reason. Yeah. I mean, the research is behind that body work really helps an athlete recover, people recover. Do you have some favorite recovery tools or techniques that you always come back to?

I always go back the deep tissue. It just worked. If I have an hour with someone, I'm going to do the best modality or the that's going get me where I need to get in that time frame.

And then when somebody gets on the table, you know, I tell them if something is uncomfortable for them. I have 20 other ways to gets a letter Z. So, just communicate with me during your session and we can pick any type of modalities.

But I do find after all is done, after everybody's come up with all these techniques and tools that deep tissue is it Yeah. Yeah, we've been around for how long, you know, a long time.

Well, I can tell you from personal experience, it does work. It's highly beneficial. Be uncomfortable. That's okay. You know how we tell people there's a difference between pain and discomfort, right?

You might get uncomfortable, yes. But I do describe to them if they're in pain, they might feel a hot flash or start sweating or feel nauseous. So those are some of the things that I tell them that they don't want to feel during my treatment.

Yeah. Can you tell us more about Kinetics Fitness Center? What sets it apart and what kind of community and services you're cultivating there? Yes. Well, I do feel like we do focus on community.

Um, we range from age 13 all the way. We have a member that's 98. Wow. And, um, yeah, were able to, you know, help everyone at every walk of life. Um, we have equipment that ranges from hydraulic equipment to, uh, machine work.

We have dumbbells, powerlifting. I have a boxing ring in the middle of the gym who will 30,000 square feet. And, you know, provide everything from massage therapy, infrared treatment, dry sauna, stretching.

we had 25, I believe 25 trainers at the moment. But everybody has experience and so many levels and they'll and I make sure that everyone is certified at the top level.

We only accept certain certifications so that if we have to refer a member, we know they're not going to get hurt. we Know that they have an expert behind them.

And I mean, We're totally confident, you know, with putting a client with who matches their personality or, You know what happens because we Yeah, yeah.

Yeah. So offer online workouts and customized meal plans. In these tools help clients stay consistent with their goals. It really still makes people accountable.

If I provide an online program, I do expect you to meet up with me. Zoom or workout. I still like to see how you're going through a workout so that I can kind of guide you on what intensity you are supposed to be at while you working out alone.

We do progress check-ins once a week and I do make their meal plan based on numbers.

Recovery, Massage Therapy, and Kinetics Fitness Center

Take their weight, do calculations, you know, the old school method and calculate their macros that they should be for their particular fitness goal. And I go through what the typical weight loss is per week and body fat drop for weakest so that we can kind of know how long you're going to have to work with me to accomplish your goal.

Okay. It's a number of things, it's science. What's your approach to long-term fitness for someone who's not competing but wants to live strong, pain-free, and confident?

Slow and steady and consistent. I mean, we're going back to that word, right? This consistency. And to not push yourself so hard, It is going to come.

You know, you don't have to like, they didn't build Rome in the day. Right. So you cannot change what's been going on with your body for 12 years and one week.

And a lot of people want these like quick results. It's a time for you to get where you are. it's going to take time to reverse that and to, reverse it in a realistic and healthy manner.

At the end of the day, I have that nursing degree behind me and I'm not gonna do anything that's gonna harm someone. And if you can't do it sensibly, then I, you know, am not the person for you, but I try to encourage, to do in a multi-fashion.

Yeah. So getting back to the bodybuilding subject, what drew you to figure division specifically? And how do you think it differs from the other categories in terms of training and presentation?

Yeah, picked figure because of my body shape. I have broad shoulders. Each division and bodybuilding has a particular body shape that you're competing in or trying to accomplish for that particular division.

And, uh, the look is dictated by the organization. So they tell you what bikini should look like, what wellness looks like what figure looks and what they're expecting as far as criteria.

And, um, looking at my body, I have the broad shoulders. I. Narrow hip and figure competitors look like a martini black, so I'm a cosmopolitan. So, that's how I picked the division that I, and to maintain that martine look, you know, dictate how our workout.

I work out to build my back. I workout to bill my quads. So I don't do crunches or all that other stuff. Or if I do any kind of ab work, I'm not doing anything over 10 pounds because I want to bulk up my midsection.

Right, right. Uh, so with bodybuilding or with figure, you have to, one of the criteria is symmetry. And so I try to maintain symmetry in my body. Right.

Right? Uh, what advice do you have for women considering getting into bodybuilding or strength training, uh, especially for those who may feel intimidated, hire a professional, do your homework, you know, interview a couple

of coaches.

People interview me all the time. Do I always get picked? No, something doesn't match up, ya know? So I feel like you should interview your potential coaches and see if they're matching up to what your needs are.

Because at the end of the day, you might need a lot of attention and one might be able to give you more attention. One might just train online and do online check-in, picture check ins.

So it's about the individual and what they feel their needs. But I always say interview coaches and then see who lines up with your goals. Did I answer that question?

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Finding a good trainer is kind of like finding a therapist, right? You kind have to click, not clicking it. It just falls apart.

So, yeah. And I would like to say this too. Yes. Hire a trainer, hire a professional that can guide you through your journey and give you realistic goals because they're not going to.

Oh yeah, you can get in shape in this timeframe and you really can. You know, really, it's like a kindergarten teacher, right? You need someone who's gonna nurture your mind.

Also, you know? I mean, we're dealing with a sensitive thing, not just somebody's body. but you know, their mental capacity, how they feel about themselves.

So like you're more than just trainers. We're kind of therapists also. Yes, you kind are. Yeah, we're kinda therapists, also, but once you hire a coach, listen to that coach.

we all have different techniques that we use and things that somebody might use a different technique and might give you advice that doesn't match up to your coach's advice.

If you are going to interview and pick a Coach, trust that Coach. Yeah. So now that you've earned your pro card, what's next? Are there particular shows or goals that your, um, aiming for next particular goals?

Yeah, I am. Well, first of all, it was the smallest girl backstage.

Figure Division, Advice for Women, and Future Goals

That was surprising to me. Um, the girls are pretty, you know, competed at 118 pounds and you. Most of those professional figure athletes are competing at 130 pounds.

And so my goal now is to grow, to take my time, like a period of a year and really like, you know, be very focused on what I'm eating, how much I am eating.

You know? And what is it doing for my body? Because at the end of this year, I would like to have gained muscle a realistic amount, and compete at, just having a better body than I did before.

Yeah. And I think a lot of people don't understand that your, your competition shape, you know, like your stage picture, You can't maintain that. Like that's totally unrealistic to maintain for any period of time.

Exactly. I agree with you. Then the goal is not to. Maintain that because how will I change my body? How will grow? Right. Yeah, and I want to just say, when I say put weight on, weight on healthily you know a healthy muscle but I also do want a little fat because if I'm trying to gain muscle I am going to be lifting heavy and I do need to protect my joints you know, I don't stay away from injury.

And if I, don' have a little body fat on me, how can I do that? Right? I mean, you tell me. Yeah, no, absolutely. You're right. We need a bit of fat as well.

So eating a well-balanced diet, obviously. Right. Exactly. Enough protein, enough, a lot of people are scared of carbs, but we do need that. and you can tell us the right number.

You know, I haven't practiced nursing in a while, but as far as nutrition is concerned, you know we say that the amount of protein that you eat most go to your brain.

And then the rest go to your muscle. And that's why a lot of people take amino acids and things of that sort. But people really forget about the little guy, which is the carbohydrates.

We need that. For energy, we need to help build muscle, not just proteins. Yeah. I feel like carbs have gotten a bad rap. They have. If we're going to sit down and eat chips and candy, yeah.

Well, tell us, what is a typical day in your life look like right now? How do you balance the training, coaching, running a facility and practicing massage therapy?

Yeah, it's a lot, right? It's like I have long work days, but I'm very lucky. There's one particular client that I've been training since 2015. You know, she's got it.

She knows how to work out. See, you know she knows the why behind why we're doing things. And she asked me to be her workout partner, which was a blessing for me because my day is so jam packed with clients that, you know, I told her yes.

And she's my workout partner and we work out, I say an hour because we'll do an efficient workout. Sometimes it might take the 45 minutes, but then we have time to do a little cardio together as well as a thank you.

So I do want to say that she really helped me because I'm able to manage a work schedule. And I'm able to get my workout in every day. That's nice. Yeah, that's really nice because when, sometimes when you're a trainer, you don't, forget to train yourself or you forget.

Prioritize your time. So we're being service providers, right? We always put everybody ahead of us and you know, it's hard to tell people know when. You know it has been hard for me to program people around here.

If you see me working out, I am busy. I'm not free. I've been lucky this go-around that everybody's so respectful of my goals and because this is such a close-knit community at Kinetics, people are very supportive of your goals.

So they see you working out and they cheer you on and let you have your moment to work out. That's great. So it's been pretty easy to juggle it all. So what do you do to stay inspired?

Is it music, people, rituals or personal mantras? Just being surrounded around people that have my same goals in life, my business goals, fitness goals.

Same mindset. You know, I consider you one of my friends and it is nice to see you on a weekly basis as my client, Because, you know, we check in on each other's goals.

And I know I'm going to see you. So I knew that I have to be on point, so just basically being surrounded by people like me that have the same interest in me.

You know, I can say that, oh, yeah, been on my meal plan. How's your meal going? That is awesome. Yeah. Well, Karen, thank you so much. It's been really such a great pleasure to talk with you and thank all this stuff.

So thank. You so. Much. I'm so glad that you did. Such a profound person and. I'm just happy that I fit within this podcast because I know you have some excellent guests on.

Yes. And hopefully I've added to something that your patients will be interested in. Yeah. I think a lot of people are going to be interesting in this topic.

So no doubt at all. Thank you again so much. All right. You have a great day. See you soon. Bye. Thank you for joining me on the Functional Edge. I hope today's episode gave you fresh insights and practical tools to level up your life.

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