Introduction to Food as Medicine

Now, one of the things I've always been really passionate about is giving healthcare professionals and the food industry together, and there's a lot of chefs that are truly passionate about using food as medicine.

And when it comes to the brain, there's a lot of data over 100 year old data suggesting that food changes are instrumental for brain health, such as seizure disorders and memory loss and all sorts of other things as well.

There's no one to really better talk about it than Chef Molino, so I'm really happy to work with him on to discuss this really fabulous topic. He's he's got a very unique, input because he's one of the chefs that really bridges dietetics and medicine with the actual medical, organizations on the island of, Hawaii, in, in Honolulu.

So really excited to getting, Chef Molina on to the platform to talk today. Well, awesome. Thank you for coming on. We've had great discussions off camera, and that's why you're on, this time.

But, man, I would just like to introduce you to everyone. And you know what is what is your story? Tell us about what your story is, what really got you from, like, this culinary mindset into the health field.

Well, it's obviously my name is Dr. Kiger, and I am a chef at, who I am chef coach. But my story, begins probably back in, like, 1992. I had four roommates in that time period over, you know, say seven years, whether in different homes or whatnot.

But I lost for them to, metabolic diseases. And at the time, it really didn't really resonate with me. Their last two choices and I last two to, metabolic disease.

And I think that really stuck with me, you know, at the time you're growing up and, you know, just, weaving your, your, your way through, life and you go through and you don't think much of it there in the back of your mind, you're thinking your, you know, your colleagues, loved ones and everything.

Well, but, it stood out when in 90 I was it 19, 2016? I had an experience of understanding that the first whispers of the ketogenic diet. And from there, I kind of, you know, started researching and, reached out to people who are experts in the field to kind of understand it, because I realized that at least on the metabolic, health side, that it could be extremely rare that that's amazing.

So, let's let's get into that for a second. So losing for, old roommates to trying to sort this find disease, that's kind of a big deal. You know, we shouldn't, we shouldn't really play that off as sort of a foundational moment.

And here's the thing.

Chef Molina's Personal Health Journey

Whenever we lose somebody that we know, and deep down in our gut, we know that, hey, you know, a lot of this could be prevented. It kind of eats away at us.

I've had a very similar, story in as well in my life. Except, you know, have I lost patients to my diseases? Yeah, definitely. A lot of I lost, family members to metabolic disease.

Yeah, I lost friends to metabolic diseases. Absolutely. So I think the same thing that kind of drives you similar to the things that drives us. But we also share something which is a very interesting, family, story.

Can you share a little bit about your, your, your family in the, in the Hawaiian background? Well, I, I think when I

was thinking about, family in general with, with Hawaii.

So I think it's, foundationally, it's it's a collective, larger group. Obviously it starts. Right. So with your immediate family members, but in general, it's, in relation to, to food, it's it's very important.

Everyone kind of and contributes to, to, to meals and, it's a place to discuss, events. And obviously this is kind of like carries over into history as well.

It's, it's something that's been carried over. But yeah, I mean, with, you know, with the family in Hawaii, it's extremely important. And, you know, for extended family, it's, it's you embrace to, to come in and, and enjoy food.

Yeah. The Hawaiian culture is very close knit. You know, the word family far beyond is extends just blood relatives as well. And even though there's there's a lot the lineage is there, and there's traumatic history in the, in the Hawaiian culture, as well.

And, and that also, you know, creates a bit of a distrust between the Hawaiians and the healthcare system. I mean, we have the exact same thing in, in Texas, especially in rural Texas as well, a lot of trauma with cultures there, you know, and, but every region in the United States in the world has some story that's, really there.

And that really brings us to, together. So but the concept of family is kind of lost, you know, within within medicine. So that's why, you know, I think it's really important to bring back this, this concept of family and heal together as a family dynamic.

Right. And that's why I'm so, you know, so gung ho about doing like share medical visits and group sessions with our patients here at Texas Center for Lifestyle Medicine.

But, you mentioned something, a bit earlier and is you started looking into this thing called a ketogenic diet and, and a few years ago, you know, I watched this documentary called The Magic Pill, with David Perlmutter and a bunch of other physicians as well.

Did you see that documentary? That's funny, you mentioned. Yeah, I definitely seen that movie. Just so happens that, the healthcare professionals that I currently work with, one of them was actually in that documentary.

Her name is one. Yeah, yeah. And that's kind of like how I got started, in this whole space and literally knocked on the door at, Children's Hospital at, Shriners to you know, just to see kids that they were at the time she was there at the time, I believe she still is. And she's just, one of the dietitians that we're trained to understand that diet.

And I was like, I just wanted my general curiosity was just to understand it. Just to understand it. It was related to food. I'm a chef. I wanted to see, you know, what it was about.

And it led down this incredible rabbit hole of, knowledge of understanding and, and working with people in a different way. You know, I work in the kitchen, and I'm not out there in front of a guest.

Of course, there's the the family dynamic is a different story, but generally as a, like a professional chef or something, you're you're working a lot and that doesn't happen.

So I got an opportunity to actually work with families. Incredible opportunity. Amazing. Because you know, the for those people who are listening, who don't know what what the documentary is, it's called The Magic Pill, I believe is available on Amazon Prime right now.

You guys have Amazon Prime. And this documentary, explores, the story of doctors, patients, scientists, chefs, farmers, all of all across the planet on sort of this fundamental paradigm that the magic pills actually, dietary and cultural.

And so, you know, they really explore this concept of what's called a ketogenic diet, which is ultra low carb diets

and the history behind them, that shooting, epilepsy, which is seizures and other neurological disorders.

And so, it's a very compelling story, but the, the translated not to just neurological disorders, but also, you know, asthma, diabetes, cancer, etc., etc..

And it's it's based on this concept of this, low carb, higher good quality fat, you know, diet. And what I really took away from it is that it really takes a village to, to to create, quote unquote, this magic pill.

It's not just doctors that are in there. It's not just the nurses. Even farmers are involved. Chefs are involved in the discussion. Right. Which is why I'm having you on, today.

And so what what do you think is your value as a chef in delivering this knowledge to the patient population that you see in Hawaii? Great question. For me, my value is just the years of experience just being, in a kitchen.

Not everybody enjoys cooking, even the the sole cook at the house.

Family, Culture, and Trust in Healthcare

They they have busy lives. And, you know, the people that I'm serving, whether it's like severe medical kind of situation or just the, the day in, day out kind of lifestyle that they're living, maybe they're just not in there to, you know, prepare meals, that are nourishing.

And they now are forced into a situation where they actually they need to be as a caregiver for a loved one or for themselves. And without having that little piece of, confidence to prepare a simple meals, they might not be able to, you know, fully implement the, the diet that was prescribed to them.

So. Right. And then also, I, you know, I think, without the confidence, it's not as enjoyable. You know, food should be really an enjoyable thing. And everything that we put into a mouth is designed for nourishment, right?

Not destruction. And that is especially true when it comes to the brain. There's more data on food as medicine for the brain than any other type of, dietary metrics that are out there, you know, and for a lot of years.

Right. We're over a century worth of data on this. And so, and, you know, and that's the piece that I am missing as a doctor, as well, I don't know the nuances of, like, culinary preparation, of food preparation, for the home right now, I only know because I'm a father of three and my husband, a son.

We live in a three generation household here. Right. And so I do cook. So I know from that aspect, what? But it's nothing I learned in medical school or residency or any medical training.

Right. So I do feel that there's, there's a big piece missing when it comes to the culinary world. So, you know, here in Texas, we have this program called Doctor Doc Kitchen, and this program is actually mirroring all the worlds, all the worlds together from the patient side, the family side, the doctor, the, the dietician, and then the the the the culinary experts.

Usually as a chef that comes in and, and it's powerful. It's so powerful and so value valuable what the actual chef brings in on a conversation because the whatever the chef says makes it fun, it makes it creative.

And instead of being fearful of creation of meals for nourishment, it becomes just like the sense of wonder. Create. And you utilize cooking now to bond with the family, to bond with yourself rather than see it as a chore.

Right. And I do think that's a piece that we're completely missing, you know? And if anyone was a doctor, then that typically actually talks about the actual talks about the missing piece.

It's not just looking about, you know, fats and proteins and carbohydrates looking at like relationships. It's looking at, you know, who's around the dinner table.

It's looking at even there's no one around the dinner table. Do you know what the food is going to do? Immediately after you put into your mouth, or ten minutes later, 30 minutes later, an hour later, a day later, actually does different things depending on what you put into your mouth.

So there's so much of that that can be taught by like dietitians and nutritionists, which is great. But from a chef's side, the actual preparation side, there's no one leading them on the execution of these things.

And that's what makes a lot of like, dietitians burnt out. You know, that's what makes a lot of doctors burnt out and the patients burnt out as well. So I do think that that what you bring in the values is this absolutely crucial.

Now, you, tell me about your actual chef journey. And what did you do professionally, like being an actual chef? Yeah, I'd love to ask that question, but I just want to circle back.

Just to touch, because I don't want to definitely devalue that. What those dietitians are doing specifically, when you referenced the the The Cage diet or for food, specific, you know, metabolic purposes like, right.

And epilepsy. So if I were to implement my thinking and style as a chef for that particular diet, I would never be in range because I've tried it. Trying to be creative is not what it's about.

It's about an fitting into the specific macronutrients that they need to stay in ketosis. So, no, but it goes to, the people that design those, that, that macronutrient for that specific, you know, patient because, yeah, it's a challenge.

So yeah, I can imagine. Yeah. So yeah, all I that's all I have to say about that. It's just like not anybody can go in there trained professionals.

The Magic Pill and Ketogenic Diets

And I think there's not enough trained professional dietitians because I would there would be more chefs maybe going into the home and helping with that part of it.

But, yeah, I feel fortunate that I'm able to, to experience it that, you know, that's, and then, you know, with me as a chef, again, it's been pretty unique.

So I, I didn't start in that field probably like most chefs. Again, I just knocked on the door of a, predominant kitchen here in Hawaii after, you know, years of, you know, working in the mainland and just not really having a real path.

But my passion was always around food and nutrition. So, yeah, I just knocked on the door, like maybe 20 years ago of a predominant restaurant and said, hey, I'd like to start.

At the time, I didn't know what that means. Yeah, now I understand. Kids get to go work for free. And so I did that for several, several months and, burned out my, life, my financing, and and finally they're like, okay, I guess we're going to have to hire you.

And that's been my journey. And I've been fortunate because I've been in some really, really great kitchens. I'm not going to tell you that I'm the most amazing chef, but I understand the value of food.

I have a passion for, you know, the flavors of food. And then to realize, after this long education, you know, this journey of, like, learning food at this food is medicine level.

These are the same ingredients, but now they have more power. To me. I understand how they can implement and infuse even more, nutrition into a meal, which is going to be ultimately beneficial for you know, it's amazing.

And so you're right, you know, your path is not typical, right? Knocking down, knocking on these doors and then going down the path of a nutrition oriented mindset is very not typical, as well.

So I'm so happy for you to be doing the things that, that you're doing, you know? And so, how important do you think it is for people to, know the power of the ingredients that they're using?

In their home kitchen? And what can that potentially provide for people? So the space I like to stay in is, that, of course, it's it's could be universal because the ingredients are, speaking to everybody.

But I really like helping people that really want help. So the ones that are dealing with, certain health conditions, those things that I'm able to, really look them in the eye and give them guidance that this is really an incredible ingredient that has a ton of health benefits.

And here's how I would prepare it. Here's the simplest way you can prepare it. And here's how you can make your life simple. Throughout the week, if you probably implement a couple of steps and just be preemptive about your approach and just having a plan, I think that's across the board.

And many things in life, just having, some sort of a plan to get to where you need to go, right. And, in the kitchen, a lot of that has to do with, like, meal prepping or, kind of like, modifying foods and, repurposing and things like that.

It's nothing new. It's just that a lot of the people that, just aren't aware because they're not in the kitchen all the time. And it's just nice to share these really simple tips that they can use.

And they're really appreciative of, you know, the information and that's all you can ask for, right? And, if they're excited about the, the flavors, you know, I use a lot of spices.

Obviously, I don't look at food as a, as the cuisine from a region. I really look at its nutritional value. And if it's available and it's local, then I'm gonna stuff that into the meal someway, somehow.

And it's, you know, I like to try and make it specific to, you know, your needs. Isn't that what, like culinary medicine is all about anyways? Yep. Yeah, yeah.

So if you've got a particular element, and I, you give me the permission to, to to know what that is, or then I can fit in the nutrition that was prescribed by your, your doctor.

That's the other thing too. You know, I am a personal chef and I could do a lot of things out there, but I. I truly believe that it is in partnership with your health care team.

Amazing. Yeah. And of course, the health care team, like, myself included, have some a lot of limitations when it comes to ingredients, as well, you know, and, you know, I was I was born in China, so understand a lot of the Chinese cooking when it comes to some of the other stuff.

It's it's it's very different, for me, but I think it is important to, see ingredients, like you said, and not necessarily as a cultural or regional thing, but as, an element of flavor, something that doesn't make it, you know, truly enjoyable.

So, I want to transition onto this topic, what, a few years ago, and this is going back to your timeline. Originally, you had some experience and the Milestone Center pediatric neural development.

So can you kind of, explain what that, experience was? Because, this is I assume it's a center that had the resources for, children's brain development with brain disorders.

Yeah. You know, unfortunately, that that program was short lived, but I was there, to see its opening and kind of just, participate in their, their grand opening, but, it honestly did not survive as long as I wanted, you know, I'm sure everybody involved to, to really help the amount of people that they could have helped, and and to because it was so new and then it, kind of vanished so quickly.

It was really a lot of incredible pieces and a lot of health care. I guess professionals that had everything involved in-house to really speak to children with, like, specific people, logical, disorders.

I don't know much about it, but I would say that the same physicians were actually leading that program. One thing I'd say though, through that, that experience, later on, actually, what was it?

Just last year during the pandemic, I was able to volunteer, for one of the one of their patients who, you know, needed more support with the ketogenic diet.

And I was able to kind of, you know, step in and volunteer and be creative with, some new foods.

Chef's Role in Culinary Medicine

To, you know, one day experiment because, you know, it's not every day you get to, to work specific with, a modified ketogenic diet, but it really has to be within parameters.

It was just usually it's, you know, the low carb community, you can kind of get go all over the place as long as you reducing carbohydrates, refined carbohydrates or just sugars that are but this case, I was able to kind of get creative and find, play with new foods, which was awesome.

And the family was super appreciative. And we still stay in touch, which is, you know, awesome. But yeah, I wish I had more for you because I would I don't know if that if that organization was still up and running, it would be a powerhouse, I think.

Yeah, I think so. I mean, not just pediatrics with adult care neurodevelopment as well. Post traumatic injuries. You know, you have post stroke, and stuff like that.

So there's actually centers, around the country that have that component of more of a, you know, modified ketogenic type of, of information delivery, on the aspects of food.

So, but it was so interesting that you got to like, physically, you know, experience that from a chef's side. And also had this there's, being a personal chef of one of the, patients back in the day.

I mean, that's got to be truly empowering info for you just to kind of experience that. Right? What are what are some of the things that I think some simple things that people can do at home from a cooking or a meal preparation process that allows them to just be a little bit healthier?

What is what is maybe 2 or 3 things? There? I think if we're talking about the adult population, I mean, we could talk about kids, we could talk about athletes.

And there's a lot of, you know, different ways to go with with nutrition. Right? Yeah. They they have the ability to take on all kinds of different, you know, macronutrients and make it all work.

I just think that when we started getting older, change and like that, that type of eating pattern may not serve us well. So probably reducing refined carbohydrates down to a it is not going to affect our insulin would be number one.

And that would include sugar. That could include well more than likely it includes ultra processed foods. A lot of this information isn't new, it's just that it just needs to be stamped hard.

That that's kind of the direction society needs to kind of go to tamper down some of these, diseases that are affecting our society, you know, on a on a high level, you know, it's impacting a lot of, areas in society that our government is going to have to deal with where we're dealing with it. Yeah.

The reason why you have a chef on here, I have no idea. You know, ten years ago, I don't even have a chef that's up here really talking about the things that we're talking about.

It's just because their level of care that needs to get out to the public, and it comes down to learning how to cook. I

don't generally do anything really fancy when we're talking about preparing meals for, for patients.

I because I have to keep it simple for them. That's actually a hard thing for me because I come from this, this kind of fine dining background sort of speak where I like to personally really take foods and, you know, reduce it down into its yeah, it's like essence of flavor because I know where you can derive flavor.

And that's important when you want something to be, you know, to be, you know, enjoy the meal. So that takes time. That's another thing. So you have to be kind of we've around, your schedule, like you can do things a week out.

So that way your weekend meal is like incredible. And then you could dip into portions of that throughout the week if you need it. For example, like stocks, you know, people are really big on bone broth and for good reason.

You can take that stock and you could use it for soups. And at the end of the day, whatever's leftover or reduce it down, it turns into a sauce and it flavors an incredible dish.

Things like that. Yeah. Without that, people really take the time and they don't really have all that time. But if you were to implement those practices more often, it would make your, your enjoyment of food that much more.

Absolutely. You know, another, another part of the brain discussion we're talking to the few doctors about, you know, people think that, oh, I don't have enough time to do X, Y and Z and eating, but in reality, the ability for us to perform for the day or for the hour depends on what we ate last or not eat last.

Right. And so the amount of things to get done is, is it's very high, you know, and and this is even talked about by, by Kevin O'Leary on, on Shark Tank and he was discussing how like, you know, eating healthy is the core part of being entrepreneur because if you eat refined carbs and you know, you're 11 a.m.

eating, you're already crashing the ability for you to make sense and drive that forward momentum and the high power to say that your brain needs to be in is is not there.

So even he likes to work with entrepreneurs that eat healthy for that particular reason. Right. And so and so this is about brain performance. Right. And so I do think it's important to like dedicate some time and like this whole thing with with the broth you're talking about.

Right. And you know, and making that and then and then using, you know, pressure cookers and stuff like that doesn't take a whole lot of time. And by the time you get home, you have this, this broth can reduce it to start the next day.

I mean, this stuff like that actually doesn't take a whole lot of time. But there's a lot of human elements like collagen. There's, there's a lot of, fatty acids, amino acids within that bone broth.

It's actually, you know, help with the gut and the brain and the clarity and stuff like that. So that can be very useful or, you know, could do the same thing with vegetables.

You can do vegetable stock, if you don't want, if you don't want animal protein, that's that's totally fine too. Right? So it's the little things that's for people to understand is that the reason we eat is to live.

It's not a chore. And the way that we live depends on the things that we eat. So, so, you know, I think that that's certainly a big factor there that we want to, educate to, to people as well, you know.

Yeah.

Practical Cooking Tips for Health

So I do have one last question for you before we kind of jump off and, and this one is, I just want to kind of

understand what is the perfect future, incorporating the culinary world into the medical word.

What does that look like? What is you, like, ten out of ten? Like, wish for the world to incorporate those two worlds together? Perfect. Will give you a magic wand. But you know, the.

For me, I mean, the things that I'm trying to aspire, you know, to really be is, you know, at a high level, a chef and a health coach, you know, I don't I wouldn't aspire to necessarily be a dietitian, but I want to know that language.

I want to know the language of the the doctors and and, everybody within the health care organizations, but having direct contact with, patients or clients and, showing them really easy ways to prepare meals.

That would be amazing. So my big ask would be that more chefs get involved in that space. So that way we can contribute to the health and wellness of the country.

When we're empowered with a lot of really good information, I think we can get out there and do, things that are really impactful to, to our health across the, across the country.

It's not there that you can go to different pockets, that the statistics are telling us that we're not there. And like I said, we're just hopefully another piece of this, like, integrated system of, health care that they can lean on when they need that kind of support.

They might not not everybody, you know, need it. They're they've got those skills or they've got family members that have those skills. But, everybody needs to prepare meals that going out constantly and consuming foods, generally speaking, probably has, you know, more of the things that you don't necessarily want.

That's that you're consuming out there and, you know, in the public and eating at restaurants, but not all the time. There's some amazing restaurants out there.

But I think as a general rule of thumb, everybody needs to be preparing healthy meals at home with their family and sitting around the table and de-stressing and, commuting and thinking, you know, talking about the future plans that their family is going to be having or whatever it may be.

I think that social aspect of food is obviously circling back to that is really important, being able to not stress. Yeah. Things like that. Yeah. And I think it's really important for the family to get on board with everyone understanding the style of eating that promotes health for generations to come.

That's how we stop a lot of these generational chronic disease states. Right. And, you know, circling back to your original story, when you lost four old roommates, two prior disease states.

Yeah. But you didn't start lifestyle and lifestyle. Yeah. And so if, if but those didn't start with them, they start generations up because there's certain beliefs about different things as well.

Then those beliefs may used to serve as the one point. But over time, and the longer does because we kind of live in a different world. So the things we learn from previous generations may not serve us anymore.

And that's the thing that when you figure out, you know, in the, you know, 40 years ago, and for example, in China, in China, there was no like, you know, KFC, McDonald's and stuff like that.

And in, in China. Right. And so there's the availability now is becoming global as well. So we have to be careful, understanding not just what's marketed to us right, for profit, but we have to have someone advocate for us in terms of food knowledge and cooking knowledge.

And that I think that's where, you know, people like you and chefs can really inspired. So what are some good. So I'm, I'm pretty sure there's chefs and cooks kind of listening to this.

Right now, but what are some resources for them to get into if they're passionate about nutrition, just like you? So far as resources in the space, I know that there's some organizations out there that, that are more geared toward training the the doctors.

I think, you know, culinary schools are now really starting to look at, and they're always probably at the top of the food chain as far as, like, giving information and educating, students.

So culinary schools are great for that because they give the foundation the nutrition. So big plug out for them if you're already a chef. I wouldn't, I would say find someone that that you gravitate to as a, a health care provider and see where you can fit in.

Like I said, I, I kind of just knocked on the door.

Future of Culinary and Medical Collaboration

I said, I'm curious about this, particular nutrition and I'd like to learn more. And they were receptive for me to get into the culinary space. I knocked on the door and I said, I would like to learn what can I do?

And they were receptive. So, I think being of service to people is really important and it can open up a bunch of doors. I know it has for me, in tremendous ways.

And then just kind of I'm thankful for that. But yeah, don't be afraid to, to reach out to people and, and see if that's a good fit for you. I really feel strongly that, chefs should really be partnering with, the health health care organizations, on a more personalized level.

Right? You can't just blanket show up and, cook in a cafeteria and expect that all that food is going to be exactly healthy for everyone that walks the doors.

SB individualize. And so that when that's why you actually need your physician. Right. So, for example, if I go and I start preparing a, a low carbohydrate diet or something like that for, for a patient, it, it has to be in partnership with your physician because of possible many things like that.

That's I think when you look at this, you look out in social media and whatnot, there's a lot of really great creative people with, I guess, resources to make really entertaining information and cooking classes and, you know, demos.

That's all awesome. But for that one individual who, you know, it may not be exactly what they need. And so you need to work with somebody. And that's why I think chefs need to be really integrated into the health care team so they can reach out if they need it, like the dietician is going to be there 100%.

And that's the other thing. The patients or society in general, they need to ask about their dietitian and see how they can improve their health if they're not getting that information, their doctors probably don't have all those answers at the moment.

They're getting trained even on how to cook. But, dietitians are my heroes as well. So, you know, they they have a lot of great information. And, I respect what they do.

I think they should be the ones actually doing more cooking as well, so they can probably implement. They do. I'm not going to say they don't. And just what I'm looking for is for a chef to be integrated into the system.

However, that may be because of blanch vegetables, because then that's also super important. Well, on that note, I'm going to give a plug for myself. So Doctor Kitchen, you just put that into your a little.

It's called Doctor Doc Kitchen. We actually created exactly that. That's exactly done here in Texas. And we want to promote, doctors to really understand more on the culinary aspects of medicine so we can, create a larger, impact.

And on that note, you know, there are training courses actually for, for doctors and dietitians and physical therapists, physician assistants, nutritionists, psychologists, if you will, on the fundamentals of culinary medicine.

Harvard even has a program for it. Right. And so there's there's actually a lot of programs out there, now. And you have Baylor College of Medicine. That's doing the culinary curriculum, that which is a student created curriculum, that is teaching the students, on aspects of, cooking and lifestyle medicine as well.

So it's it's getting them out there. This is really the first time that we're talking about it. Maybe by next year we're going to see a lot more, movement in this, which I do think that we will.

Listen. Thank you so much for coming on. Oh, what a awesome experience. And, I'm for those who are listening, I just want you to understand that the reason we have a chef on here, is because it is excruciating, important.

And, in healing as part of the healing process for chefs to be involved in the process. And if you are a chef, them all the process. Just know that you are not alone.

Thank you very much. For.