Introduction and Matthew's background

Hi, I'm Dr. Scott Stoll and welcome to a regenerative life podcast where science becomes hope, food becomes a catalyst for healing and every conversation explores the profound connections between personal health, human flourishing and the earth and future that we will share together.

But more importantly, we'll explore one of the most important questions of our time. What happens when we actually begin living in alignment with the way we were designed?

Matthew, I'm so glad you're here with me and I appreciate your gift of time. And I have to say I really enjoyed your Instagram and your social media. Thank you.

I think you've stepped in in a really unique way to educate people with a little bit of fun, fantastic science, and a compassionate view that is like the truth in love.

And I think that's really unique. So I'm glad that our audience can learn about you and hopefully more people can follow you, and learn from you on a regular basis.

But I'd love to know stories about people. I would love know your story and how you got to do what you're doing today and what inspired you. And where did that start?

Yeah. So, I mean, that goes back quite a ways. It goes to when I was in my teen years, you know, played all the sports in the world. Soccer, still play to this day.

I did a bunch of different martial arts. Played volleyball on the school basketball team, all up the above. Even though I'm short, so on a basketball.

Yeah, guard, or, but anyways, despite all of that and being very much into fitness, always struggled with my weight management as a part of it. And I also had asthma at the time that at one point did get really severe around when I was 12 years old, maybe 13, and seasonal allergies, just certain health related issues.

And when was 15, I working with a trainer specifically for football, ahead of football season. What position did you play in? I played running fullback mostly, but I did play a little bit of receiver in the later years as well.

But yeah, mostly full back. And he was really training me and he promoted a very plant forward approach, like very planted side. It's a bit maybe unique to what a lot of other trainers would have said.

I just didn't really take him seriously for a long time. As a 15 year old guy, you know, I didn' t think too much about what I ate and I certainly didn t eat very well and at one point he wanted me to record what i ate, do a food diary.

This is something that I now do with patients, funny enough. And I was just terrified that he was going to, the workouts already sucked. Okay. They were killing me.

And now I'm thinking, man, he's going see what I eat. He's gonna work me extra hard. It's just not gonna be good. So for those couple of weeks there where I recording everything, I actually just changed my diet.

I eliminated dairy at that point, a lot of the kind of classic ultra prostitutes, potato chips, sodas, that sort of thing. Was that his recommendation?

These were things that I knew he recommended and had recommended. Yeah, exactly. I didn't lie. So that's one thing, I don't like lie about what I ate, and I just actually made these changes.

You have a lot of smoothies, fruit and veggie smoothys and that sort of thing. And I started losing weight. Felt like my breathing was a little bit easier as far as the asthma goes.

That's when I first thought, okay, maybe there's something to this. Maybe there is something that we eat, you know, being important.

Teen years, health struggles, and plant-based shift

and i just stuck with it. So from when I was 15 through kind of the late teens, I ate, we'll say plant predominant, relatively whole foods diet, not a hundred percent, but pretty plant based.

And then I went off to university and I'm studying microbiology in undergrad at the University of Victoria. In my first year, my 1st semester I am on residence, eating cafeteria food.

didn't have as many options necessarily. And I was out, you know, drinking with my friends on the weekends and stuff as you do. I'd noticed by the second semester that my health, I wasn't feeling as good as I, was maybe prior.

That was a light bulb went off in February of 2011. One day sitting at lunch with I actually had chicken on my plate. Remember, that I remember exactly who I'm sitting with.

and I said, You know what, 100% plant-based right now. He's like, Oh, There's no way it's gonna last, you know, are you sure?" And I was like, yeah, I'm gonna do it and it has been ever since.

And so that's what led me to plant-based living. Now, fast forward a little bit, when I decided what I wanted to do post that undergraduate degree, and I thought about how could I bridge the gap between medicine and nutrition.

it might be different depending on where you are in the regulations, but in British Columbia, where I am, naturopathic doctors are actually considered primary care.

We can prescribe medication. we can also obviously do a lot of lifestyle nutrition counseling. And so it was a really good opportunity for me to shadow some practicing NDs.

I visited the school, chatted with students, and I saw that, you know, within the scope of practice, I could really do ultimately what I want to do. and that's help people with both sides of the coin, medicine and nutrition.

That's what led me you know, later on kind of spiraled into the social media world as well, and just educating people on a larger scale. So yeah, you started seeing patients, how did the general population of education evolve out of that?

So it actually started a little bit before I went into practice. So between when I graduated and actually starting my practice, I thought I have a bit of time here as you know, you're signing all the papers and doing all of that, that maybe I can get some information out, plus I sort of promote my practices ahead of my time as well.

And so I started just posting some little tidbits about nutrition. I remember I did one post on like how to get iron on a plant-based diet, just little things like that.

And I started getting some relatively big pages, actually sharing some of my stuff. Now, some I knew from the Vancouver scene. And then I remember through that, Simon Hill had seen some my posts that he got in contact with me and people just started sharing this with their hundreds of thousands of followers at the time.

I start thinking, okay, you can actually get this out there a lot easier than doing just the one-on-one, which I still do that. But that's what got me thinking about you know, pursuing a little bit more of the social media side and seeing how I can get my voice out there and get this information out, which has evolved a lot as Instagram changed from pictures to videos to now there's lives.

There's all sorts of different ways to do that. And so you're always trying to find out like what is the best way. Yeah. I love the nuances too, like with, you, know your screen shot of watching someone else, but it's very engaging.

That's one of little tricks. If somebody's clip goes viral, you already know that their clip grabbed people. And so rather than me just talking to the screen, hey, here's this new study, it shows this.

If somebody's commenting on it, maybe in a negative way or whatever, garners attention, well, I can use that clip that already got people's attention.

It's already proven to get people attention and then I could respond to it. So I find that that's a really good technique just for people who are maybe thinking about getting out there on social media more to help bolster your audience.

Choosing naturopathic medicine and social media education

Yeah, that really is great. You know, one of the things that I really appreciated, you know in the debates that you're having online with the Keto carnivore people, You do it in a way that leads with evidence, but there's a compassion also.

And so I'm curious like where that comes from, because debating is not easy. I've been in debates, there is some kind of an antagonism right from the get go.

But you do such a great job of leading, like I said earlier, with truth and love. So I'd like to just know how you developed that type of an approach and how do you approach a debate in a meaningful way.

Yeah, so I mean, I think it's important to debate first off. I know here at this conference I have a different position on oils than some people will, and I feel it is good to have those conversations.

And I used to be on the side of like, we should absolutely avoid oils as well. And so it was actually through discussing with people who maybe had a different view of the literature or had seen stuff that I hadn't that, I ultimately changed my view.

That's sort of how I look at these debates is like okay, We have opposing positions here. Let's share our research. We can review each other's studies and then let's talk about them.

I think that is the most effective way to do it. Now in the online kind of social media landscape, you don't always get that. and people can go into it with sort of guns blazing and I wouldn't say I'm free of that either.

I try to prepare really well for these debates that I've had because I am not going to debate something I don't understand. Like that's the other thing, if I was confident in my position, I want to make sure I covered all of my bases.

And so, when I go into a debate, I feel very comfortable with the evidence I'm bringing forward, very uncomfortable with arguments that I have planned.

I know the opponent's arguments and I don't think they're particularly strong. And, so I think that helps me to, as calmly as I can, and again, sometimes you get a little heated, but as calm as you can rebut their arguments, present my evidence, whereas I felt like when you're backs up against the wall and you really maybe don't have the greatest evidence base for your position.

That's when like personal attacks and stuff like that will come out. And I think I largely avoid that because I try to prepare so heavily with the actual evidence.

So I guess the take home there is I probably wouldn't go into a debate that I'm not prepared for it. If I am well prepared, there's no reason for me to get super worked up.

That's right. Yeah. And you're really just presenting evidence for them to consider. Exactly. Right. For the audience that's watching. That is more important.

I think the audiences far more than the single individual because oftentimes, especially if you've built a following around a certain narrative or diet camp or whatever you want to say, I don't know that you are going to flip on that too easily.

Debating diet camps with evidence and consistency

A lot of the time, you know, there are biases there, but for the thousands, sometimes tens of thousands of people that are gonna watch that debate, they're the ones that I'm trying to reach.

Yeah, I want to pick up on that point because what you said is so important that, you know, in these debates around, low-carb diets, carnivore especially, more than any other, right?

People are emotionally charged, they're ideologically linked to the diet, and there's a part of their identity that's attached to this. And so it can be very difficult and sometimes science doesn't even win the day.

Like, I'm just curious how you see the ideological part of diet and nutrition and what you think we can do to kind of bridge that gap and help people kind-of scratch the record a little bit and not see themselves so ideologically attached to a particular dietary pattern.

I think it depends on what specific ideology we're talking about. So I'll give you an example. When it comes to a carnivore diet, the ideology is usually, and maybe I'm making assumptions, I hope they're correct here, about somebody really likes this idea of a carnaval diet and then they've adopted it for long enough that it sort of becomes a part of the identity.

I would view that differently than say somebody who adopts a plant-based diet because they are vegan, they care about the animals. That is a non-dietary reason.

It creates a little bit more of maybe an identity associated with the dietary practice. There's a lot more than just diet that goes into that, of course.

And so now flip it to like just say a plan based diet for health reasons. That would be more akin to what I mentioned with the carnivore diet, right? It's just sort of a dietary approach.

So I think it's okay to have an ideology drive your dietary practices if it is due to say, I don't want to harm animals. I have to often live up to science in that favor.

But let's all I think there are exaggerations that happen in the plant based camp. And I don't think There's any good reason for us to exaggerate because we know that it can be at least as healthy as things like the Mediterranean diet, diet etc, if not better in certain circumstances.

That's good enough. We don't have to say it reverses everything under the sun to make an argument for it. At the same time, it's better for the environment, and as I mentioned, the animals.

Most importantly, many would argue. So I don' know that that's necessarily answering the question, but I think there are cases where ideology is okay.

But it is not a great idea to let our ideology around the dietary practices specifically sort of drive how we go about it, because I thing that is what gives people fodder to kind of say we are full of it Right.

Exactly. I want to just take a quick side trip on something you said, which is, what are you seeing are exaggerations in the whole food plant-based space that we should be careful of?

Because we do want a line up of science and we don't want the misrepresent the power of a plate. So for one, I would say that animal proteins inherently or inherently causes cancer.

I think that is an exaggeration. Even if we look at the spike in IGF-1 that you get from certain dairy proteins, for example, it's nowhere near the levels that are actually associated with cancer.

And so I don't think we should draw that line. Another exaggeration that comes up is that a plant-based diet is the only diet that's been shown to reverse cardiovascular disease.

That's actually no longer true. For one, there are some concerns I have with the data around that, but let's just say, grant, that the previous trials by Dr.

Ornish and assistant and so on have demonstrated some reversal. Well, guess what? Now there's the Cordioprev trial using a Mediterranean diet with oils and some animal products that showed regression of plaque.

And so we can no long say it's only diet, yet it still is said often. So I think there certain things like that I'm presenting this to you now, but imagine if, if somebody in the keto or carnivore camp or whatever, or even someone in The Middle Ground, omnivorous, like Mediterranean sort of diet camp said, oh, well, why are they saying that that's not true?

Here's a study disproven right there. Why would we give them that fodder to say that we're making a false statement? Yeah, exactly. And so we just don't need to.

Right, right. There are studies in a keto carnival world about autoimmune remission. Yeah, yeah. I mean, again, they're primarily self-reported, like survey-based.

Yeah. We have to consider quality of data, but yes, you can point to research to essentially support any claim you want to. That's the tricky thing about the research.

You can search whatever you wanted and based upon your bias, we can find studies to support it. And that's what I try to really hone in on my social media is I tried to point out like why one study might be better than another, what makes that study superior as far as methods and whatnot.

So in your debates with the keto carnivore, kind of low carbohydrate diet people, what are they missing? We know the short-term studies that they're presenting.

We knew the improvements in blood glucose, even A1C blood pressure. But what's the part of the research that are missing that you bring forward so eloquently in Instagram?

What the research says about healthy dietary patterns

I don't know that there's a part of the research they're missing. I think they are very inconsistent in how they apply their sort of standards for evidence.

For example, a lot of carnivore crowd, carnival, like even the doctors in that space, they'll say, oh, observational research, epidemiology, it's all trash, right?

Anytime something's pro-clinic based, that's trash. And then they'll happily cite several of those types of studies when all of a sudden, in a cross-sectional study, meat is associated with longevity or something, even though it's a low-quality type study.

We see that a lot. I've seen a clip where one of the famous sort of ex-carnivores now, Paul Saladino, had said very explicitly that animal studies don't necessarily translate to humans.

It's not really high quality. But then literally a week later, he's citing animal-studies in support of some of his claims.

Clearly… Both these videos can't be accurate here.

So which one is it? I think those are the types of things that I see much more often than what I try to point out in these debates. A lot of the time, it's not so much about who provides evidence or what have you.

It's more about how are you applying your standards to the evidence? Like if somebody sets the bar here for their evidence, And they're consistent with that.

Even if I might disagree with their take, hey, at least they are consistent, that's where they draw the line. If I set the lines here, I want to make sure I'm consistent.

And I think that is really important, is that consistency aspect. Yeah, no, that's really valuable. What is the evidence that they're bringing forward that supports what they believe?

So there's a few. For one, they'll often cite ancestral populations that might have consumed more meat. There's few issues with that. We are constantly learning about more plant foods that our ancestors had consumed because plant matter doesn't preserve as well as bones and whatnot.

So we don't necessarily know all of the plants that were eating, but there are new methods and they are understanding that better. Second, we have evidence of people consuming very traditional diets and they do have atherosclerosis.

The fact of the matter is they just tend to die too young to buy from a heart attack, which isn't exactly, you know, something we should follow when it comes to longevity.

And so there's a lot of concerns around that and actually co-authored a paper with Dr. David Goldman on the Maasai tribe. So that would be a good one to read as well.

And that's one. And now, another type of evidence they'll present are surveys that are done amongst people following carnivore diets and reporting improvements in certain symptoms or even reducing their medication use.

But the problem there is, for one, it's all self-reported. There's no verification of any of this. We also don't know, did they stop their medications because they heard they shit on social media or did the stop it because the doctor advised them to?

Those are very, very different things, right? But they'll cite that as, oh, here's evidence of a carnivore diet, but then they will discount prospective cohort studies with hundreds of thousands of people on plant-based diets.

You know, why the discrepancy there? And again, that comes back to the consistency aspect. Right. Yeah. Looking across the totality of the evidence, what do you think are the most misunderstood truths just about nutrition science in general and food today?

I think one of the easiest ones is just that the foundations of a healthy diet are so clearly understood at this point. There is very little debate to be had about that.

You can argue around the edges. Like, so we know that diets rich in whole grains, fruits, veggies, legumes, nuts and seeds. And if you're having animal proteins, certain like fermented low fat dairy products and fish, which you don't need to have, you are not necessarily going to really missing out if.

But those are essentially the foundation of healthy diets. If you want to argue on the edge of Like, oh, can you have a little bit of this or a bit that?

Is this vegetable better than that one? I mean, go for it. Maybe we'll understand a 0.5% extra drop in cardiovascular risk with some change. But like at the end of the day, those foundations are so consistent.

And there's a really interesting, relatively recent meta-analysis looking at what's called the Healthy Eating Index and mortality. So a healthy eating index is basically a measure of people following the dietary guidelines, or at least the older version of dietary guidance.

And those who are staying closer to the dietary guidelines across almost every single study had almost identical drops in mortality risk. That type of consistency across various populations over different timeframes, you know, with different cultural backgrounds is unbelievable to see.

Helping the public interpret nutrition evidence

And when we have that kind of consistently, I think we can be pretty confident about the foundations, again, arguing around the edges. Yeah, that validates the general recommendation for population.

Exactly. And it reminds me of a plant-based dietary index too, you know, new studies that are coming out with unhealthy, healthy, and just general plant based dietary.

Yeah. I would say there's a lot of overlap between that and the healthy. They're very similar, but you have a few changes. But yeah, like that's super consistent data too.

You'll rarely find a study where the Healthy Plant-Based Diet Index isn't associated with better outcomes. I love presenting the evidence for people on just from large general studies, you know, that recommend 800 grams or 10 servings a day or healthy plant-based dietary index and disease, because I think those really substantiate a solid foundation for the general population without getting to the edges, right?

And you do such a good job of not arguing the edge and letting that be, the defining moment. And I that's really important. So as you're working with the General Public, how do you help the evaluate the evidence and land in that place where they say, okay, I know generally what I need to do on a regular basis without getting caught up in the…

You know, so I have a little bit of a tough time explaining to the general population on how to actually evaluate research. I think that takes a lot of additional training and skill or work to fully understand, but some general guidance for people is if you look at like American Heart Association, they'd actually just released new guidelines.

Like American heart association or in Canada, the similar organization or Canadian cancer society, et cetera. You look at the outlines of like a healthy dietary pattern by any of these organizations and there's almost entire overlap.

There might be, again, very small differences depending on the condition, but very close overlap I would say looking to those organizations and what they recommend as their dietary guidance is pretty good.

Again, can we argue about little things? Sure. But let's not focus on that. Let's get the basics down first, and then we can worry about all the other stuff.

So I think that's a big part of it. And then when you're seeing stuff on social media, it kind of goes back to what I said earlier, are they even citing references at all?

Because that doesn't happen a lot. What is it? Is it a rat study? Or is that actually, you know, a population based perspective cohort? is a randomized controlled trial?

Those would be considered, higher quality. So, but again, there's you need a little bit of the kind of understanding of a scientific method to really dive into that.

And I think it's just much easier to look to, well, what are these general guidelines we're getting from these other organizations? I mean, that's fantastic.

and following people like yourself, who are doing such a nice job. I really believe that. So beyond what we're talking

about, the science, that public debates, you and I also believe it.

The foundation is laid. I mean, it's validated on what the general public should eat. But what gives you hope about the change that we will see in the future?

Because it is challenging. 50 million people every year are usually on a low-carb diet and there's a lot of misinformation. What gives Matthew Nagra hope that the feature can be different?

Hope for the future of plant-based nutrition

I think actually there's going to be like change is going organization shift that way we also see that like a lot of plant-based meat companies well again the price point has to come down and it is slowly we're seeing them like beyond meat switching to avocado oil lowering the salt content and you know actually improving the healthiness of their products of the people want those products they want meat so to speak At least they have an option that tastes very similar, that is much healthier than the older iterations, and healthier then the meat that they would otherwise be consuming.

And so I like to see those shifts. I think there are a lot of advancements coming. Cultured meat, maybe from a health perspective, not great, but from an environmental perspective is a really good change to happen.

But I thing it's more so going to be how necessary it is for us to change regarding the environment that's going ultimately drive some change. and I stay optimistic about that, But we'll see what happens.

Yeah, I think for me too, looking over the last 20 years, we've come a long way. Yeah. We know there's going to be headwinds because there is a lot of money involved, but we have come along way Yeah and actually I'll add, it was just in Dr.

Gemma Newman's talk and she had presented some data on like where people are getting, or what's hers actually might have been Sharon Palmer's dietitian, that was one of them, was talking about where are people getting their information and, actually, most people turning to healthcare providers.

Now, the question there is how familiar are healthcare providers with this information? But if people like yourself with conferences like this can get the information out to healthcare, providers, then there's a huge opportunity there to really educate the masses.

Whereas actually not a big percentage are really getting it from social media and all that, even though it seems like that might be the case. Yeah, it's got to be a multi-pronged approach.

There has to kind of be general public education, government level, and education of healthcare professionals. Because when patients come to see you, they really want to know, what does Dr.

Nagra want me to do and what can improve my health? Yeah, and I think just for other healthcare providers, that's something that I found that really works well and often advise people to do is look at what are the low-hanging fruit that you can sell.

Let's not overhaul everything overnight. So let's say they're having red meat seven times a week every day, basically. What if we can switch four or five of those to some plant protein?

So even three, if that is what's doable at the time, let us shift a little bit of the animal protein to plant proteins. If they are using butter for cooking, lets switch it to a plant-based soil rich in unsaturated fats.

Like these are all little things that are not going to be huge, you know, tasks for somebody to do when they've been eating a certain way for 50 years.

And then, once they learn a few things, they tried some recipes, I really like them. Okay, then what are the next

steps we can take? Take it slow. It doesn't have to overnight.

You don't develop cardiovascular disease overnight, so you're not necessarily going fix what might be causing it in the first place overnight either. Yeah, no, that's a beautiful approach because that gives people an opportunity to gradually change something that is, you know, deeply held inside of them.

Personal motivation and where to find Matthew

So, as we wrap up, I just want to ask you, like, this is personal. What motivates you or what inspires you in life and maybe what kind of truth gets you up in the morning and makes you excited to move forward into your day?

I think there's a lot of different things. I mean, I'm always like, my dad and I are talking about this. He was actually talking to us the other day how it's always good to just look forward to things so if they're, you know, like I'd say coming to this conference I was really looking forward.

And that's something that you're preparing my presentations and planning out like my social media posts while I am here because I have stuff still going out.

Like, yeah, just having things to look forward to, but it's broad. It can be this, it can a trip, a soccer game on the weekend that I have or what have you.

And then when it comes to ultimately, you know, what I do, seeing people in my practice or online who, they send me messages saying, oh, You've totally changed my mind on this.

I've started doing this and I feel great and what-have-you. Or with patients, we run their blood tests and maybe they had an LDL cholesterol of I don't know what the American units would be.

So excuse me, but they might've had an LDL of like 3.5 or 4.0, which is a little bit outside the range on the high end. And now they've cut it almost in half, you know, making pretty substantial dietary changes.

Those are the types of things that really keep you going on, the health side, because even though, we talk about, or I talk a lot of anecdotes don' t matter, not that they don t, matter but that I wouldn't base recommendations on them, they are nice for sort of reinforcing what I am doing, right?

That's the sort feedback that ultimately I get. And where can people find you? How can they follow your work? Yeah, so Instagram is definitely where I'm most active, but I post across all the socials.

So, you know, TikTok, YouTube, et cetera. I also have a website, drmathynagra.com, where i post larger or longer blogs every now and then, or usually podcasts or things like this will be linked there.

And then of course, if people are in BC, Canada for any reason, I can work with them as well, one-on-one. That's fantastic. Thank you, Matthew, for all that you're doing.

Thanks for making a difference for people. and thanks for spending time with me. I really look forward to continuing our work together. Thanks for having me and actually can I add one note?

Yeah. Okay, so I meant to tell you this, but I'll tell it on camera. In 2017, I came to my first Plantrition Conference, okay? I remember meeting you and I have a photo and i'll post another photo of us today.

And I told you then one day I'm going to be on that stage and that's happening today!

Full-circle moment at Plantrition Conference

That's amazing! I love it! And you know, I want to tell you, my part in starting the conference was to create an environment where new people could grow up and become the next generation of people standing on that stage

and take over the leadership of this movement.

So that means the world to me. I love it. Full circle. That's awesome. Thank you Matthew. Thanks for listening to a regenerative life podcast. If this conversation inspired you, follow the podcast, share it with someone you care about, and join us changing the world one bite, one conversation, One connection and one life at a time.

Please visit PlantritionProject.org or Dr. Scott Stoll for more information.