How does Yoga, The Gut-Brain Axis, and Stress Intertwine? - with Emily Wolbers Transcript

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Opening on Joy, Nature, and the Podcast Intro

The one thing that every single person should do for their gut health is something that brings them joy. It is different for every one of us, but if you can have that one that sparks a sense of joy every day, please do it.

We are having a problem with our disconnected to nature. People aren't getting out enough, putting their feet in the grass or looking at the moon. feeling the sunshine hit their face.

So getting out in nature more often, if not every day, things huge. We are here to challenge the status quo. We're curious about the connectivity and complexity between diverse fields of knowledge as they relate to consciousness, chronic illness, mental health, resilience, and beyond.

Learning more about art and science of healing, or listening to stories of extraordinary healing. You're in the right place. Let's dive in. Welcome to the Two Curious MD podcast where medicine is more than science.

It's story, art, connection, and integration. This is the space for the curious and we're going to dive into today and entice you, especially about and introduce you to Dr.

Emily Wolbers, who is going talk about the gut brain access, stress, the science of healing. A little bit about Dr Emily I hope I said that correctly.

She is a naturopathic doctor specializing in gastrointestinal health and gut-brain connection at QC Natural Health, recognized as one of the top natiropathy doctors in the United States.

That must be an accolade. Wow. Dr. Emily bridges evidence-based medicine with practices rooted in mindfulness, yoga, and nervous system healing.

Dr. Emily Wolbers and the Gut-Brain Connection

She's been teaching yoga and meditation since 2013 and lectures internationally on mind-body medicine, helping patients understand how stress physiology, which is very, very important, the vagus nerve, inflammation, hormones, and emotional health are deeply, deeply intertwined.

And we're excited to have her because our audience is often asking us those same questions and it's always great to to share to and ask those questions that we get to ask as well.

So we'll be exploring the science of the gut-brain axis, why chronic stress silently reshapes the body, and what yoga may have to help us with healing centuries of modern medicine couldn't do.

This episode is for anyone who's ever been told their symptoms are just stress and knew that there had to be more to the story. Thank you for being here, Emily.

Thank you so much for having me, you both. I love your intro on how you're blending medicine as art and science and stories. And I think that's a huge part of it and sometimes gets missed in modern medicine or fast-paced medicine.

Yeah. So tell us, Emily, let's start with your story. What got you interested at this intersection? It's clear that that resonates with you as well. And so like, what's your kind of journey to becoming a healer?

And I do want to stress that the gut-brain connection, like why specifically just that? That seems to be your expertise. Yes, yes. I think I'll answer both of these questions by weaving them in because I will always be a yogi first.

I've been doing yoga for so long, and I have been teaching for long. And even before medical school, I was teaching yoga. I knew that I wanted to help people and knew I that wanted people in a medical way as well.

And because of the yoga being this foundation for nervous system regulation and mindfulness, being able to cut through the noise of what goes on between the ears every day, it's like, okay, this is gold.

But people want help with their body, too. So let's bridge that gap. And I started to study dietetics and nutrition, have dabbled in Ayurveda and bringing those those art and sciences together.

Then I was hungry for more. Okay, this is good. We've got the mind, we've gotten the nutrition. Now what else? And to me, the bridge between the minds and Nutrition is the gut.

So this gut-brain connection is seeming like a platform and a platter where people can enjoy nutrition, enjoy mindfulness, and enjoy the nourishment of where our food is coming from and how it heals the body.

And so the gut-brain connection, I could talk about it all day in all of those facets. Why do you think so many people are beginning to just realize their digestive system is symptoms are kind of connected to stress and emotional health?

Like, why hasn't this happened already? Why is it taking so long for people to recognize this, including doctors, I would say. I agree. It is taking a long time.

And people, just two months ago, was at an event and I was looking at people's heart rate variability. You're probably familiar with this and a lot of your listeners probably are too.

But heartrate variability is how quickly the heart rates changes. And ideally, when we have high health and our nervous system is strong and adaptable, we've high heart rate variability, which is kind of counterintuitive.

But basically, We want to be able to steer quickly. So if we get stressed, the stress comes on, and then we can de-stress quickly and so at this event, I was measuring people's heartrate variability.

They come in, We hook them up to the monitor and I was surprised how stressed people are just seeing by their data, looking at their heart rate variability.

They didn't seem that they were agitated, they didn' tell me they're stressed, but then looking their body's response, people were stressed out. And I think we live in a fast paced world.

We are constantly being inundated with information and news and notifications and, oh, I've got to do this and oh there's another text message, another email, and it quietly just nags at our nervous system.

And, because humans have had to adapt so quickly to this fast-paced world, our bodies are not able to keep up with that. It's taking some time for people to realize we need strategies to help with this new age world that we're exposed to and living in.

And I think that's part of where the gap is.

Stress, Heart Rate Variability, and Nervous System Resilience

Yeah, it makes sense. We are kind of inundated. More so than, I mean, just seeing, you know, we've both been in practice over 25 years now, and it's, You can see that in the way patients come, right, to the center, To what complexity it has become.

Children, the risk factors, The exposure that they're seeing earlier and earlier, We're seen more worse conditions that would have taken years to occur in The same context.

So, it does make sense. And I love your storytelling about it. Like the image you just drew is that reality has gotten faster than our cardiovascular system, for example, is adapted to.

We're not used to making such sudden changes. It's like taking somebody who, you know, was pretty good on a bike or whatever, and then you're like kind of telling them like, hey, go ski down this hill and just do it like in a day.

Yes. Yes. And the nervous system is just like, wait a minute, and then there's that chronic stress like you talked about and like that constant state of having to defend against that and the toll that takes.

So tell us more, like how do you kind of see this heart? And I think it's a genius idea to check your heart rate variability as kind like a spot check.

I've been seeing that a lot of the trackers are using it now and that's such a great kind tool because then that builds self-awareness in the moment. Because a person can see, right?

Yes. Yes, it is a biofeedback machine. Surrounded by it. And even just seeing that can be so empowering. Look at that. My body needs some support. And Dr.

Simi, like you were saying, with the bicycle to the skiing, that's such a great analogy because the context shifting that humans do every day, it is enormous.

Context shifting from even just thinking about your last half hour of were you working? Checking an email, checking another email. Scrolling on Instagram, seeing a new real pop-up and a real new pop up.

do the laundry, help feed your family. Like that can be somebody's 30 minutes and it could have so many context shifts and then make that throughout an entire day.

That is exhausting for the nervous system. So seeing these types of feedback where we can see it on heart rate variability. I love using data collection to help people get in tune with their bodies.

So I think in some ways, it would be so nice if we could all just go out to a farm and live off the land with no notifications for a couple of weeks, but that's not accessible.

And using these biofeedback things can help us to get into another body, even in this fast-paced world. So for our audience, can you explain what is a good heart rate variability and why does it have to vary?

Yes. So heartrate variability, the higher the better. The highest that you can have is 100, 100% or 100 percent of the time you're having these, these good, heart-rate-variability numbers.

A health marker is considered anything over 86. Anything between 86 and 100 is really great heart, rate, variability. Now, with the higher heart rate variability, that would mean, and I was thinking maybe for a different context, I can share some pictures with you so that we can put them in, but a high heart-rate variability has this smoothness to it as well.

So there's high waves and then there is a valley that comes right after it and it's very smooth. We can see this nice sine wave, whereas if people are more stressed, their numbers might not be as high and it'll be more jagged.

It looks like this. Like it might still have that same shape, but it's very, very touchy. And this means that the nervous system is not really clear on, is it okay to be calm?

Am I in a safe place right now? Can I relax? Or do I need to be on edge? Do I to respond quickly? Am i going to have to fight, flight, or freeze? And that is, it's an interesting nervous system response because with high heart rate

variability, there's abundant clarity.

When the body's relaxed, the nervous systems relaxed. when the Body is stressed, The nervous System's stressed and it has these very clear panels. But it's still, when the biomarkers are checked, it usually is averaged out, right, over the day.

So then that fluctuation may not be fully representative of the actual experience, I'm sure. Right. Yeah. And this is where it gets a little bit confusing because 100% or like 100 heart rate variability doesn't mean that it is high all the time.

There was a lot of variability and it was able to respond. With some of these tools, especially the ones that you can look at throughout an entire day, it will average your entire and see good, there was good responses all day.

And then if you're doing shorter bursts, like with these training tools. It will teach more in the moment of how your body's responding when you are breathing this way.

or when you're just coming to sit down. Or sometimes I'll even encourage people to think of something stressful so that they can see what happens in their body when that happens.

Correct. Yeah, definitely the mind. Now let's connect this to the body, to body and to gut. Does your gut see the story of what your experience before your mind has?

Ooh. I love it. So I think you are bringing up an important point that science can't answer yet. Because the gut has the, the number on this in the science keeps changing, but between the reason why I asked that question has to do with the neuronal connections that the guy is making to the brain.

Most of them are going towards the rain. So yes, 80% they say, right? Yes, yes. And that's exactly what I was just going to mention. The guy has three to 500 million nerve cells.

All of these nerve cells and exactly like you said, most of them are going from the gut up. Do we know that because all these nerves cells are there and they're so present and most to that signaling goes upward, is there something that's happening in the body, in that gut before we can even perceive it in mind?

And based on the science, I would say yes. However, it's not something we could exactly measure. Yeah, I've heard this said like, you know, if you have like a kind of like in a different eating pattern, um, You know you're craving more sugar.

You're curving more salt and it's kind hormone dependent right throughout your cycle that your gut bacteria if it is measured throughout that cycle is shifting and changing.

And so it like you are basically being directed by your got to go out and get the food. that is going to make that bacteria thrive. And it's happening on a kind of genetic translational level that we are not aware of and is very environmental.

It's very, like you said, it is in the body. The signals are coming in from the heart rate variability is a really quick test that tells you how resilient the bodies to the signals that are come from it.

Because yeah, Alia, you're right, it's so different. Like if you have a stressed out person and they're on vacation and, all of a sudden they are kind of like relaxed, maybe their heart rate availability will maybe improve a little bit, but then they don't have the reserve that maybe somebody who exercises regularly or is sleeping well and stretches and is really taking care of paying attention to their nutritional needs because their body is just going to be better able to withstand and therefore, you know, and I think what we're talking about here is resiliency.

Gut Signals, Microbiome Patterns, and Hormonal Transitions

So there's a weirdness of the gut where things connect and then there is, yeah, so go ahead and tell me what this pattern type is that you're asking questions about because I'm interested about some of these questions because it seems like we are starting to go and find typologies out there.

Like there's a, right? There's some patterns out there that are emerging as you work with different people. So I'm so excited to hear what you've discovered.

It's true. And I love decoding patterns of what do we see in the body? What are we seeing in nervous system? And how can we use that as information? Dr.

Simi, what were you saying with the diet? It only takes two days of dietary changes for microbiome changes to happen. And that is just wild to me. So think about people who try a carnivore diet.

Like that will change the microbiome. And then they go to eating a plant-based vegan diet, that would change their microbiomes. It only takes two days.

What we're seeing with these patternings is sometimes the issue, like the root cause of something going on, is truly in the microbiome. It is, truly, in a gut alone.

And so, if that's the case, I want to always make sure, is it those nerve cells speaking as well? Do people's digestion get worse when they're stressed out?

And, so we're seeing if there's an intertwining there. Because the gut and the brain are so intimately connected, and I wanna make I'm doing due diligence of looking at somebody's whole person.

You can't just look at the guy alone, gotta look the the, brain and nervous system too. So is there something with the microbiome? Is there's something this mind-body connection with a nervous system?

Hormones, this is a whole other ball of wax. I love helping people in hormonal transitions. So people who are in perimenopause and people full on in menopausal, people coming off of pregnancy or breastfeeding, those kind of hormonals transitions where something shifted in the hormones and they're feeling it in their digestion or they are feeling in nervous systems.

And that could be another pattern type where we look to decode what's going on, where did this come from, how did it happen. And then the fourth type, so if you take the quiz, which is a good way to start to see some of the patterns, the forth type is coming down to the mitochondria and energy.

So what people have noticed if their energy is constantly tanking at three o'clock. Maybe there's something to go with the adrenals or the way that the body uses energy.

Mitochondria being that battery of the cell, that energizer bunny, those are so rich in the digestive system that if we heal the mitochondria, it can help with a whole system, help put digestion, energy, and mood.

I also want to bring in the polyvagal theory and just the vagus nerve into this. The largest nerve, the connector nerve the chakra nerve. the nerve that knows everything and is you know by dual, dualistic nerve it's a parasympathetic and sympathetic system.

You work with the vagus nerve, I'm sure, every day because it's your work. What do you wish people would know more about that they're not getting from their doctor or from social media about the Vegas nerve and this connection that this Vegas has from the gut to the brain?

Great questions, Aliyah. The Vegas Nerve is such a powerhouse and I wish that people knew how simple it is to heal the Vegas nerve and help it to be healthy and strong.

We can do weightlifting for our vagus nerve every day. And the weight lifting are simple things like gargling,

humming, singing. Every day I sing. Before this podcast, I was nervous, so I do a singing!

because I knew it was going to be good for my vagus nerve. These kinds of things are like a training tool for the vagis. So it makes the vagus nerve healthy and strong without being taught, without Being too tight.

And that is helpful for The heart rate variability as well. Because if the Vagus Nerve can respond very quickly, just like you said, with it being a parasympathetic nerve, then it can Respond in both ways.

That can help with the heartrate variability, help With the nervous system. That's a big one. Even small things like cold water to the face in the morning.

That can be so good for the vagus nerve. And this is something that I wish people would do more. I wished I did more, but walking around barefoot on the grass is very, very grounding and has that quality.

Nice, nice. And the vagal tone, you said, what does that mean physiologically? So thinking about tone of a muscle, even though the vegas nerve is a nerve, it doesn't work exactly like a muscles, but we want it to be responsive without being overly strained or overly quick to respond.

So I think of the Vegas nerve as just thinking of sensitivity and resilience. where I want it to be able to respond quickly, but I don't want you to so sensitive that it's responding all the time.

So some signs that if your vagus nerve is working well, you will get salivation when you're hungry. Or if you're smelling delicious food, you'll notice saliva start to pool in the mouth.

That's a good sign. Even things like when you are getting tired, if yawn, or if your getting stressed, and you sigh. These are signs that the vagus nerve is healthy and toned.

If those signs aren't happening, that might mean that that vagous nerve it is a bit weak and it needs to be re-toned Versus the opposite side, if it's too much, then you're getting like tears and wetness, saliva, a lot, yawning, that could be a sign that, oh, it is too fired up.

Too much acetylcholine. So here we are talking about, you know, so what are some of the tests that you run, let's say on the gut or, some the data that kind of bring together?

Because I know that your talking personalization and that's one of things that we're really interested in is, the end of one that Alia you talk about which is that every person is very particular to their story.

to their life history, their ancestry, what they're carrying, right? And I'm curious because I think because now we have more data, we this ability to kind of tell a different story, you know, or unearth the story that's been kind-of trapped in the body that the person themselves may not know about.

You know? It's like, oh, I've got these eating patterns because i grew up X. in this place and this is what was available and that's what I eat, but now I live in THIS place.

And that is completely maladapted. There's just so much of food knowledge, so I just love that you talk about dietetics. We're learning about these bodies and just how absolutely rich they are in you know, information and also just how finely tuned they are in some very interesting ways.

Like you said, like this vagus nerve and you just, it's, we're just still trying to figure out how it all operates and comes together. You know? And what's driving what and how does this, you're all just kind of explorers.

And sometimes I feel like we are all in a dark room with an elephant, right? The blind people. I The lights are turning on now. Right, the lights were turning slowly.

The flashlights and now some beam lights and you know, now we're getting really nitty gritty and I love that you're

bringing it down to the mitochondria because it's about cellular health and there's a real integrative way that we are understanding because we have to because our environment is kind of forcing us to.

It's true. Right? Our food supply, the pesticides, and the amount of contamination of our body, mind, gut system. How many people have leaky gut from just insecticide in our food?

And we're learning more and more that it's been going on. Just today, I read something about how Driscoll strawberries in California have been linked to childhood cancer.

This is where we live now. So what we're talking about is not just woo, what were talking is just like nice to have. We're actually talking survival tools.

Yes. Right? Like this is about learning how to better heart rate variability for long-term health. Because if you don't, you know, your body's resiliency to withstand some of these toxic exposures, which we know are predictably almost going to happen.

are going to happen. You know, like we have the fires here. And last year, you know we in Pasadena, the air quality index went to like the 500s.

Vagus Nerve Health and Simple Daily Practices

Yeah, and there are people in India and Delhi that live in the 1000s, you know, these are all chemicals that our bodies are withstanding on a daily basis and it's impacting the microbiome, the gut, nervous system, kidneys, livers, detoxification systems, genetics.

epigenetics and all of that. And so as we are kind of talking about, like, I love that you bring yoga in because I feel like that is really an ancient technology, not ancient, kind just like a technology that was arrived at not with the brain only, but with brain, body and breath.

You know, so can you just kind of like bring it all together for us? And I love to think of the body as a bucket. We have a pocket of all of things that we come into contact with every day.

All the good, the bad and the ugly goes in that bucket, and so all the pesticides, all that pollution, any food that were put in, medications, alcohol, drugs, stress, emails.

It all fills the bucket Our bucket, our body is very resilient. We can handle a lot in that bucket. However, when the bucket gets to be too full, it will start to overflow, and that's when symptoms happen.

And so we can think of two strategies. we could either put less in the in bucket so decrease exposure to pesticides and herbicides, eat organic food, decrease stress, or strategy number two is empty out the buckets.

And I like to do a blended approach, but I think that's where yoga can come in so beautifully to help empty out the bucket, where these practices of breath techniques and eating holistically, these are things that help to keep the buck at a lower, lower fullness.

And then in a systematic way, you can do detoxes as well, if you want to like open up the whole valve and detox. I loved, I actually think of that as like almost opening up the like yoga as increasing the size of your bucket, right?

Like you can't really decrease what's coming at you. You can just hold more and not be overwhelmed by it. That's beautiful. It's more that resiliency, like what you're talking about is building resiliency.

So let's say we're taking about this brain fog, right? And I think a lot of people are talking bout fatigue, this 3pm crash. What's happening in that gut biome level?

an energy level in the body that's creating these behaviors that are so predictable that you can actually do a

questionnaire on your website and figure out who you are.

So I'm an Energy Seeker, apparently. Okay. This is good. The 3 p.m. crash, I wish there was a, oh, it's if this, then this. Unfortunately, Fortunately, we're complex humans and we have a lot going on.

But I always wonder about adrenals because the adranals, they're little hats that are set on top of the kidneys. They keep us going. And 2 to 3 p.m. is adrenal shutoff time.

So if fatigue is continually happening at 2-3 p.m., I first think adenals. And with adrenals, this ties into the hormone sphere because, especially with people in perimenopause and menopaus, the adranals have been working so hard for decades.

You've gone through your career, you've done your residency, been in practice for 25 years for goodness sakes. You have done a lot of giving, and a lots of people who are energy seekers tend to be that archetype where they give a whole lot.

And so by three o'clock, the adrenals are saying, okay, boss, slow down. That 3 p.m. crash can often be related to the adrenal. The other piece that I get curious about with data is how is the body using energy?

Is by this time of the day, have you used up the fuel that you've been feeding yourself appropriately? And then is there a blood sugar piece, that it could be a crash at that middle of afternoon time?

I use continuous glucose monitoring with people and I always encourage people to get curious about what's going on with them too, because that can give pattern information on what happened at three o'clock.

Yeah, I've always been that kind of person, just even since I was a kid. Oh, really? Yeah. I always like a post-lunch crash kid in there. Uh-huh. So maybe in your unique case, maybe it's more of But I always, I think I also had like obstructive sleep apnea and things like that.

So it's like, you know, but I, think what we forget is that people have had, like maybe undiagnosed things, right? Yes. Alia, what are we seeing on the integrative medicine side for, when we check cortisol, and when you check hormones, What are some of the typologies that we're finding when, we are seeing these kinds of patients?

I think it's variable, I would say. You know, when I check cortisol levels, it almost like the phenotype, you know you want to get the history of the pheno type, the fatigue, The anxious, stressed, depleted, this kind of getting the History of their experience and how they're responding to that experience in what way over time.

So based on that when i'm listening to patients, i am listening like okay so tell me more about when you feel the worst, right? Which is what you're talking about, the cortisol lull.

And if you have a lifestyle, like you are a nurse who's, you know, working late and night shifts, You're never going to get to that healthy circadian rhythm because it's just wacko, and then you can kind of hear that, okay, well, they don't even have the lul, They just have luls all the time and they can't predict it.

So then, then the cortisone pattern is going be off and you will have to go to a 24-hour cycle. Sometimes you hear about, you know, I just can't get out of bed, and so that cortisol level is, it correlates easily to that.

And then comes the entire story. Just explain a little bit of that, is that the cortisol is the response of the body to what's happening? Or it is a response of the body to the crash itself, right?

Corazol is excreted from the adrenals when it's fight or flight. It's time to like get the heart rate going, get blood pumping, wake up, and get more, you know.

energy in there, send your troops in, right? It's kind of like your send-your-troops-in moment. And what happens? Increased sugar, it's so much more complex, I think, than just sugar.

It is the interaction of so many things. I mean, gluten has an opioid effect for some people, right? The metabolites of gluten have an opiate effect, so you get lethargic and dull and withdrawn, you know, I means some, not everyone.

But it has to be related to your gut biome, what's in your guts. Is that what you see, Emily, as well? Absolutely. Let me just put in a little cultural item here and yes, and we should talk about this because the cultural piece here is that in Bengal, which is where my people are from, there's something that translates to like rice sleep.

And that's, something, that you know, happens to people is after they've had rice because, you, know it's really abundant. It's the largest staple, everybody eats it and they eat large amounts of it because it's cheaper and so then they have this like sugar crash right afterwards.

And you put that together with like the insulin type that we have, which is kind of like based on the South Asian genetics, or which kind are hyper reactive.

to, you know, sugar because we have had a genome that's kind of been over a couple of centuries with like famines and things like that. So there's like a correlation there of some sort of metabolic syndrome happening because of adaptations that have been passed down that are now in a new environment where those adaptations themselves now have become maladaptations.

Yes. Because put me in an environment with refined sugar and like there's just no way I'm going to be able to like, you know, and it's really interesting to me this phenomenon, right?

It's so true. So yeah, so add that on to kind of just like what Alia just asked about, yeah. Yes. And both of you bringing up such an important point where it is layers.

It's probably a piece of blood sugar, a peace of insulin, piece, of gut biome, and piece hormones. That is one of the reasons why I like to have people look at their patterns because when it comes to healing, or if people have a goal of, I don't want that 3pm crash anymore, then we need to start pulling at these threads.

But it's usually not just one thread. It's a gentle nudge and a repatterning by peeling off the layers. And from an epigenetic standpoint, I love that you brought that story in too.

Yeah, and you know, it's called rice sleep, right? So what we were just talking about is like that 3 p.m. crash is, like, how would it be if we looked at the patient like okay, what is your, you you know, or biotype, genotype or phenotype that's kind of like presenting.

And I think we're getting closer and closer with a lot of this information of putting together some stories here that then help us like illness scripts, right?

We're able to put together illness script then that, then when we hear somebody's story, we were like, oh, this looks like that illness. Let me test a few things.

let me confirm my theory. and then off you go, you've got a management plan. that's really personalized, well put together and responsive to the symptoms.

So when do you find people are coming to you? Like, what are the typical, you know, when, do people say enough is enough? Or, You know? When do they kind of say, all right, I'm going to try everything I can.

I'd be curious to hear if this is similar to the type of people that you all see. But a lot of the people who come in to see me, they have done so much already.

Personalized Testing, Energy Crashes, and Root-Cause Patterns

They have so done much work. To their thoughts, their doing everything right. And a lots of times my thoughts too,

it's like, oh gosh, you're putting in so many effort without reaping the fruits of their benefit.

A lot times I would want to acknowledge that of you are doing such a great job. This isn't because something's wrong with your body. But instead, let's figure out what is going on.

Let's do some digging. Because if somebody who had an unhealthy lifestyle adopted the things that my patients have done before they come to see me, they would feel better in a day.

But these people who have done everything and they're still feeling in shambles, that's the typing that I want to do some digging to figure out what's pattern.

Is that the type of people that you… And what do you find? Yeah, is that kind of the people we're seeing as well? Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. You can probably speak to this a lot more because you really do that integrative testing and you're looking at the full genomics and metabolics and things like that.

Once you've got the type, once you got your data, And I think it can be overwhelming for people. I really want to bring that up. This is a lot of new information all at once for a lots of people who kind of look at this time as we don't have a playbook for this.

We really don't have a playbook for what's supposed to happen, for burnout. We don' have playbooks for perimenopause plus burnout and all the ways in which we've adapted and changed and shifted, you know, right?

And it is overwhelming. So how do you guide people through the overwhelm in some ways, because they're already exhausted. Like you said, they've tried everything and I love your…

like positivity forward aspect of like you have tried everything and that's to your credit that this is something you really are passionate about and you want to do.

Yeah. And that is where circling it back to heart rate variability, the vagus nerve, making sure that that a foundation of people's healing path. because it is overwhelming.

It's a lot of information. People just want to feel well. If we're doing one piece at a time or pulling on one thread and then supporting the nervous system, pulling another thread, make sure the nerve system is still supported, then all of a sudden this 50-ton tanker that's going down the ocean at very rapid speed, then it finally starts to slow down, and then we can start to turn it around.

We're reminding people that we're doing one or two things at a time. And it might be one of two new things every week, like we'll keep the momentum going.

I want people to feel empowered and not overwhelmed. And that nervous system support comes in so handy. I, want to remind people that yes, it's soft. It's the soft medicine.

it is not as glamorous, but it, is the piece that is so important in the healing. I love that. The soft medicine, because yoga to me feels like the soft medicines.

Honestly, I think it was yoga and mindfulness and meditation that really helped me understand and learn about my own and get a sense of kind of agency like, oh, this is possible.

Can you give us an idea of a daily practice you believe everyone, everyone should integrate for their long-term and gut health? Just daily practices. Five daily practises, say.

I was only to say one. The one thing that every single person should do for their gut health is something that brings them joy. It is different for every one of us, but if you can have that one that sparks a sense of joy every day, please do it.

Okay, that's one. That's the number one! We've got four more. Get singing. Singing, humming, gargling. Yes, yes. Every morning. Three times a day. Just like brushing your teeth.

Yeah, okay. I'm going to do that. I'm committed. Okay, wonderful. I do think we are having a problem with our disconnected to nature. People aren't getting out enough, putting their feet in the grass or looking at the moon, feeling the sunshine hit their face.

So getting on nature more often, if not every day, things huge. Sleep has to be in there. How does sleep affect your gut biome? So cortisol, for sure, helps with the cortisol piece.

And there was a study that came out not too long ago that showed people who chronically got, so the study was two weeks in a row, chronical got six hours of sleep, had the same cognitive brain function as somebody who went two nights in row with no sleep.

But the perceived sleepiness was the So sleep is tricky like that because it's not something that everybody perceives every day. It's, oh, I need more sleep.

I'm not getting enough sleep, it really affecting me. But it is a silent, It is silent gnar, gnaw, take away. brain function and energy and just cognitive ability.

But that is playing a piece into the rest and digest and the detoxification happens during that deep sleep. So that's when a lot of the microbes would get rebalanced and stay more regulated.

My number five would be you are what you eat. Yes. I was going to say, I mean, come on. If you're going eat sugar, you going be sugar. You know, You're gonna have sugar in your body and it's gonna just not know what to do.

And if you gonna eat high processed food, it is, going feel processed. Yes, when you eating. Whole foods, you're gonna feel whole again. I mean, just going back to nature, right?

If you are gonna be eating food that are constipating, You're going to be consti-pated. You are going be burdened. The emotional response is also related to the type of food, I would say.

Fibrous foods make you feel cleaner. In a way, it gives you the sense of the internal feeling of that food. Polyphenol type foods make you feel more colorful, more diverse.

I mean, you can attach an emotion to the type of food. I love that. There is, there is. So there's a texture there. And you know, we see this, part of what's happening in our nervous systems is when we are in this imbalanced state, when are we in the fight or flight.

There's so much energy and information processing going to survival that we shut down some of the luxuries, the nice-to-haves. And what's a nice to have?

The ability to fully taste your food or fully see something or feel something. What we see after we start treatment with ketamine therapy and people are coming out of their therapy, The first thing they eat after that they'll sometimes like stop because they're like suddenly in their really rested, cleansed, you know, they can see everything clearly.

It's crisp, it's clear. They're feeling it, and everything is kind of brand new. You're, like, wow, this is the best raspberry I've ever had. They finally are just sitting there tasting it and you want them to linger with that.

You want to notice that and do some mindful tasting. I was going to say when you asked the question, part of what got me back was I used a program that would run me through different meditations.

It was nice. A walking meditation, an eating meditation and a driving meditation. A road rage meditation. It was

really the most interesting thing because I would drive in Los Angeles in traffic as my road-rage meditation is going and I'm doing the thing it's telling you to do which is like with my breath and it works!

Yes! It works. And that's the beautiful thing is this is, this medicine is free. It's, the one people are thinking, no, I've got to do these big fancy things, but the breath, it's free and it works.

I love that story. What would you say, because you're a naturopathic doctor and we're both MDs, and you've been doing this a long time. We practice integrative medicine, so we would, I believe, in natural and the integrator and in the conventional.

What do you think is missing in conventional medicine for women? Because, you know, we are women. When it comes to their hormonal health or digestive health, what do feel we could do better in convention medicine?

Yeah. I think that I'm seeing this a lot in our world, actually, and like the integrative, the functional, in the naturopathic world. There is a fear-based medicine where it's the fear that if you're not doing everything right, you are doing it wrong.

Or if that you were doing this laundry list of things, your health is going to be doomed. And I see that fear alone is causing issues. And it seems like almost every day I'm talking somebody off the ledge of, you don't have to get a hyperbaric oxygen chamber.

You don' have have avoid every single piece of cocoa because it might have cadmium in it. And so I think if we can find a middle ground where, yes, we're informed, but we are not injecting fear into our women patients, I that could do a lot of healing.

Oh, wonderful. That's so true. You know, because fear is also toxic, right, to the gut. Definitely affects, emotions affect the good, as we talked about.

Yeah. And women going through transition and changes in their hormonal health from birth onwards. It's like it starts at birth. Our one-hole changes are happening from birth onwards till you die.

And it's constantly evolving. It's so related to how you live and the simple things that you need.

Healing Overwhelm, Agency, and the Role of Soft Medicine

I find that a lovely name. I want to name that the cohort that's going through perimenopause right now is a particularly stressed cohort because we are the Gen X sandwich generation taking care of adult children as well as aging parents, right?

So there is that aspect to it. And for all the reasons that we've named, you know, there's like a real need to clarify this, to really like understand, because there hasn't been much data.

Right. Because there haven't much, digging and we're kind of like discovering as we are going. And I think it's, You know you've demonstrated today kind like, a really, I we have to approach this with like the right amount of hope and skepticism as well.

Yeah. They're kind of balanced with, you know, honoring the person, giving them back their agency, like not adding to the healthcare trauma that they're all carrying because that's also what they are carrying when they say, I've tried everything is that, You know I have not been heard or I have been heard, but nobody really knows in the conventional models how to treat what I haven't.

So everybody just calls me treatment resistant and dismisses me. And, you know, there's that aspect of it and it's so easy to then be victimized, right?

Or be kind of like poached on. And so I think that's one of the tasks that we bring ourselves to is like the knowledge

base is evolving so rapidly and it's adding so much richness, but also confusion.

Yes. Because we're not getting enough space to integrate that in our educational spaces. I mean, nowhere are two MDs and an ND having a conversation like this in a medical school or naturopathic school, which we need to be having, right?

Interprofessional education needs to 100%. At a radical scale. And as a person who has been an educator, and I know clinician educator is one of your rules, we tried that in a medical school where we had OT and we have PA school and the dental school talk to each other.

Half the time we were managing cultural issues. We were managing hierarchical issues. We are managing issues of power and liability. And these kind of were all acculturated a little bit differently into the healing arts.

I feel like this is integrative medicine, alternative medicine complementary. There's this larger and larger bucket. Going back to your bucket analogy, it's like the bucket is enlarging of our society's ability to even talk.

you know, about yoga, because I discovered yoga when I was in Kansas City, you just like went to the Y one day and goes on, what is this? And then like six months later, I'm like, why is it that I like this so much?

You know, I feel better and, oh, let me discover what this is. And then reading about it and going, what? All of this here? And I went to, you know I've been in medicine for 25 years and none of, this has come about and I tried to integrate it, but it's just, You can't, change a system overnight.

But I think it's through language, through knowledge, recognizing that this chronic illness population is only growing. And the challenge is, because we are so well-resourced, we have so many opportunities.

so much at our disposal, more than most people around the globe, right? Like, we can do this test, that test. But how do we get to a place where people are able to manage themselves?

And, you know, how did we got to sense of agency about it instead of a sense helplessness? Yes. Yeah, agency and empowerment, really, as you mentioned.

So as we close, we want to ask you a question that you would ask us or the audience or something related to something that brings you to, you know, this conversation and something you're curious about.

Yes, I love that. This is a great closing question. And Dr. Semi, what you were saying with This population of chronically ill people is getting bigger.

So how can we use our resources? I'm curious to hear what you two think. How do you think we can empower people to have more agency? So many ways. You are already doing it.

First of all, can I just say also, Emily, power move. Like we asked you a question and then you turned it back onto both of us. That's a great, it's great question.

It's the question that we all kind of, I think you're seeing the beauty of in your work when patients are educated, when their knowledge, and they're given the, what they've heard when they listen to, you know, not gaslighted, as so many women get gaslit.

Oh, it's just stress. Oh you've got to just do it. This is motherhood. You're not doing it right. What are you eating? Or there's all this negativity in what women are doing wrong rather than what they're doing right and I think once they hear that, oh you know there is something wrong with my gut but it is actually telling me something and it isn't a bad thing.

It's not a bad thing. Maybe I should be listening in. I don't know. That's kind of what I feel is once patients become aware of their body and given that, hey, yeah, it's a good thing that this is happening.

Let's take it in that light. And then suddenly they're like, oh, okay. Well, I'm curious now. Why am I having this? Yeah. It was a great idea to listen.

Yeah, that would be my answer. Listen to your body because it is trying to tell you something. Yeah. This is a great question because I think it speaks to also giving back power, you know, because there's always been like this hierarchical sage on the stage, kind of the knowledge holder, which was true before knowledge became more democratized through the internet, right?

Now it's, somebody with an internet connection and a you know, good knowledge of how to use it, can reach their own diagnosis in ways that they couldn't before and be very knowledgeable.

And also with chronic illness, there's a story that builds up, right? There's this story, that's being told. I think, Alia and I, we both kind of look at it as like, okay, here's the story.

We all have a stories. Is it a functioning story? A well-functioning story have you metabolized it? Has it been made into something that you are proud of living into?

You know, and with kind of like a sense of authenticity and you know because it's like, yeah, if somebody had a life-changing illness and they're no longer going to be able to do the thing that they love doing, they are going have to change their story.

There's just no doubt about it, you now. And so, sometimes it is being alongside. And also saying, Hey, you get to direct the story and let me not take that agency away from you.

Just because I think I know better. Cause I mean, that's the other thing we've seen in the hospital, right? Is like, sometimes when push comes to shove, we're, were left with decisions which are worse and worse than worse.

Right? Like too bad, the choices aren't very great. And in those situations, who am I to say what the right choice is? You know, especially to somebody who's suffering, but once you, sometimes when people don't have control over their bodies, the one thing they have to control is the choice of what to do with their body, right?

And how to be with it. And, and that relationship of like, when I'm ready, you know? and also honoring that. Cause I think that honors the fact that there's a readiness aspect and there is an energy aspect.

It means a lot. it takes a while for me to ask for help. You know, it's the other piece of that is like when somebody's asking for help, and means a lot to them, you know?

That trust and that always goes back to the relationship, the healer and the person seeking help. And I feel like if there's one thing we all share in our training is paying attention to that.

That was a great question, Emily. Emily, how about you? Yeah, great questions. Thank you both for answering. I feel bad because I thought that that was what I was supposed to do.

No, you know, that's a nice way to take that question because you can take the question any direction you want. So thank you for showing us that there is a different way of looking at that How can people find you?

How do you just let us know where you to be found? Absolutely. I love sharing information as much as I can. Share information and being aggressively helpful about sharing knowledge.

So on my website, I've got the quiz. You can do the pattern type, and that is a fun way to start to see, to decode the patterns. The website is qcnaturalhealth.com.

And then every day, Monday through Friday, I'm posting a YouTube short on what's going on in the research right now. What are we seeing? And that's linked to my Instagram and Facebook, all QC Natural Health.

Wonderful. Thank you so much. Education is the bedrock of healing, as we know, and we've learned so, so thank you for this conversation. This has been a joy.

Have you ever noticed that your body's giving you some information, communicating with you that you, your mind wasn't fully aware of yet? So yeah, I'd love to hear more from our audience, share your reflections and curious questions in the comments.

Your curiosity may inspire even a future conversation on Too Curious MD. So thank you. Thanks for joining us on the Too curious MD podcast. We hope today's episode inspired you to ask new questions and explore fresh perspectives.

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