Erica Lugou2019s Health Journey

A health and wellness advocate, Erica Lugo rose to prominence as a fitness expert after her own 160 pound weight loss journey and battles with thyroid cancer and autoimmune disorders.

Today, she's a relatable go getting mom and formal personal trainer on The Biggest Loser turned wellness coach, focusing on helping women navigate hormonal health, perimenopause and all the challenges that come with it.

With over 70,000 social media followers, Erica brings humor, heart and real life experience to her platform, inspiring women to embrace their health and life boldly, one balanced hormone at a time.

I am so excited for Erica to be here today. Erica, I am so excited you're here today. I know we have met each other so many times on social media, but this is the first time we've gotten to connect in virtual real life.

So thank you so much for being here and sharing your experience and empowering women and people suffering with thyroid disorders today. Thank you. I feel like I'm the one who's actually fangirling right now because I followed your your account for a long time.

As someone who's obviously suffered with thyroid problems for the last 4 or 5 years. It's really nice to, like, meet you via zoom versus stalking you on your stories all the time.

So I'm going to be honest. I love it. Oh my gosh, I feel the same. So tell me a little bit. Share with us what kind of led to your interest in thyroid and your kind of journey and how you got here?

Yeah. So for sure. So my journey is a little different. I started, you know, my whole journey with wellness and fitness and weight loss. Probably about 11 years ago, I weighed 322 pounds.

And I just remember, clear as day, my son looked up at me and said, Will you play with me? And I told him no, because I just didn't have the energy at that weight to get up and play and like, pick up the toys.

So, that's been my like intro to fitness. I lost 160 pounds. I tracked it all in social media and and very blessed with all the amazing things that have come from it.

You know, like Women's Health magazine and Rachael Ray and Today show. Like, I got to work with all those big celebrities for years as, like, their weight loss guru.

And then obviously was a turnaround, the biggest loser. But all that kind of came to a different head or a different beast, I guess you can say when I got in a really bad car accident, I actually passed out while I was driving.

I was going to my fitness studio because I owned a fitness studio locally, and I was going in a 6 a.m. to train an early morning client. And I just remember feeling very off and, like, almost like my body was like, danger, you know, danger will same kind of thing.

And I was at a stoplight and I told myself, okay, if I could just make it to that parking lot over there because I felt very woozy, I started sweating.

It was like December, I want to say not no, it was right before Thanksgiving. So it was cool outside and I'm like, sweating and rolling the window down.

All of a sudden I hear ringing in my ears and like my vision just starts to go. And I just remember going, this is it. Like, I thought I was going to die in that car.

And I woke up and I had, thank goodness it was so early in the morning, but I had gone, across four different lanes down a hill in a ditch. And then, like, my car flew up from that ditch into a picnic shelter and a completely crashed into that picnic shelter.

And I woke up to a stranger pulling me out of my car like, oh my God, I just like, came to. And I'm like, oh my gosh, what happened? And I should have definitely died in that car accident.

I don't know how I survived and so obviously get an ambulance, go to the hospital and to make sure I had no head or neck injuries, they found a mass on the right side of my neck.

So that's what kind of started all of my thyroid awareness. I guess you can say, I had not that I knew of any thyroid problems. Because I had lost 260 pounds I was starting to deal with, like, dizziness and faintness.

My heart was starting to pop state, so we thought it was like a heart problem. All that was cleared. No one one said anything about my thyroid. I was a young, healthy at that time.

I was like in my late 20s and no one mentioned thyroid whatsoever. It wasn't even on my radar. And then when, the MRI came back and said, oh, do you know you have a mass on the right side of your neck? I was like, no.

And he was like, feel right here. And I was like, no, I don't feel anything. He was like, go a little bit deeper. And I was like, oh, wow, okay. That's I didn't know that was there.

So the day after Thanksgiving in 2018, I had an, a biopsy and I had no idea I would thyroid cancer or anything like that was not on my radar whatsoever.

I remember talking to the doctor who said, oh yeah, your name has been in the magazine. You just opened up a new fitness studio and congratulations on all this stuff.

And I was like, yeah, I'm scrolling my phone, like, not even worried about it.

Thyroid Cancer Diagnosis and Surgery

And he's like, well, I'll be right back with your results. And I said, oh, you do that here? He said, yeah, I'll be right back. So again, nonchalant, he comes back and his face is completely different.

And he hands me a piece of paper and it says stage two Papillary Thyroid cancer follow up with doctor. And he just, like, nonchalantly handed it to me and my face was just like, why does it go?

So I was like, what do you what, what is this? And he's like, you have stage two papillary thyroid cancer. He's like, it looks like it spread. And the word spread was underlined on this white piece of paper.

And that's all I said. I mean, that's his job, right? Like, he probably does that all day, every day. So obviously he has to play just like nothing's terribly wrong.

And that was the start of my thyroid journey. So I had a full thyroidectomy, in January or March of 2019 and then radiation later that spring. So really my thyroid journey without a thyroid and hypothyroidism and Hashimoto's and all of those things, has really been like a crash course the last four.

Years, right? I learned really fast, and I had to learn really quickly, and I had to adapt really fast. So that's kind of where my thyroid journey started.

Wow. Yeah. That's like 0 to 100. It's like one day everything changed. Yeah. But you know, later on down the road I found it. Thyroid problems run in my family and no one had ever talked about it.

Right. Like I think generations before me, I'm going to be 38 years old. They just don't really talk about their health

problems unless they absolutely need to.

So it was always like sweep it under the rug. But, you know, my mom's had hypothyroidism. My grandmother had horses. And then my uncle actually had graves disease and had part of his thyroid taken out.

So it runs in my family, but there was no education around it. There was no information around it. Nothing. It was just, oh, take a pill and you'll be fine for the rest of your life.

And that's what the doctor told me once he took my thyroid, I was like, oh, yeah. Like you'll look back in five years and be like, that was nothing. And I try to educate people so much and be like, whoa, like that is having no thyroid and dealing with the imbalances is the most life changing thing ever.

The surgery and the cancer part was the absolute easiest part of my journey. It's living without a thyroid and learning to manage my symptoms and my medication and everything else that goes around it.

That's been the hardest part. Absolutely. And I find over and over and over again, and you might have heard me even say this on social clinicians, physicians, they will dangle this carrot of everything's going to be so much better after you just get your thyroid out.

Everything will be easy. You'll take this pill, it'll all be fine. And that is not the case. In fact, some of the most challenging cases for people to get their lives back of thyroid conditions is post thyroidectomy.

So, you know, there are people who are getting their thyroid out just for it's difficult to manage your thyroid hormones or you have Hashimoto's. I'm like, don't do that.

Don't take these people's diaries out. Now, granted, I had cancer, so my stories a little bright. It might have spread to my lymph nodes, so I needed to get it out.

Yes, I wish there was more education because I have a lot of people that come to me through Instagram and say, hey, like, I have the option to get my thyroid out because it's been really difficult the last couple of years. I'm like, don't.

If you don't have any indication, like I'm not a doctor, but like, obviously make your own decision, do your own research. But please don't because I really wish there is more understanding about how difficult life is.

And and obviously you've seen it, but that phrase that you said of how the toughest cases have been post I would ectomy. Yeah. What not having a thyroid is done to my body and things that I go through sooner that I've never dealt with before.

And it's not just physical and mental too. I've never dealt with anxiety or depression until my thyroid came out. I've never dealt with hormonal imbalances until my thyroid came out.

I never dealt with anything sleep problems, mood, irritability, sex drive until my thyroid came out. And I am 110% certain that I went through menopause at the age of 35 because I did not have a thyroid.

I am 110% certain about that. So I really wish I was more education for sure. Yeah, and I mean, I see that I see women who go there have a thyroidectomy and literally they never have a period again.

Like, oh, yeah, I remember, after my thyroid, it was probably bad for about a year now. My story too is a little bit different with that, after I got my thyroidectomy and radiation within four months, I was on Biggest Loser campus filming.

So. Wow, that is so intense. Erica. Yeah, so for a good I tell everyone for a good year where I filmed The Biggest Loser and then I had a media tour and then Covid happened.

So for a year I was running on pure adrenaline and I didn't have a chance, and my body didn't have a chance to know what it was like to live without a thyroid.

So I felt great. But zero adrenals were compensating and absolutely getting destroyed. Correct. And I was running on pure adrenaline and I was ignoring all the signs.

And then on top of that, I mean, think about I'm very lucky. I loved my time on The Biggest Loser, but I ran my body into the ground even more so on that show we filmed 15 16 hour days.

I was working out, plus working out with my, my group because obviously I wanted to win. So I got really skinny, really fast. I was not sleeping the greatest, I got engaged, I sold my house.

I was like, all within a year of losing my thyroid. And then Covid happened and then boom, 2020 is when my body was like, hey, we're going to humble you because now you're not running on pure adrenaline and running on pure chaos, and the world shut down and there's nothing to do.

And that's when I became very, very, very sick and very symptomatic. And my body just started to change. And then, you know what I threw I threw body competing on top of it, too, because I was bored.

Oh, no. Which is enough in and of itself to throw your thyroid off and your adrenals. Yeah. No one who who has it that who doesn't have a thyroid should never compete.

Never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever. And even people who do have any type of thyroid disorder should never compete. And I learned the really hard way.

And now I tell everyone I chased my wealth by sacrificing my health, and now I'm spending my health to get, you know, I'm spending my wealth to get my health back. So. Wow. Yeah.

Life After Thyroidectomy

I think, you know, it's such an important part of your story to kind of put a pin in that you can your body can trick you into feeling okay. Host's thyroidectomy.

And it really is simply a manifestation of your adrenals compensate eating. And they can only do that for so long. They can only handle so much where before you'll start to feel it.

And then not only do you feel your adrenals do compensating, then you also fuel your thyroid and you crash so incredibly hard. Yeah, I tell people all the time, your body's like a domino effect, right?

Like once one domino goes down, it wants to lean on the other domino until that domino can't take it. You know, too. Can't take the pressure anymore. So it all just comes crashing down.

And I learned that the hard way. And it's been four years, and I still. I mean, I just went through perimenopause, obviously. So that's a whole new beast, but I still have to manage my thyroid.

Right? Like, I find myself very, very educated and very, very fortunate with the industry I work in. But every coach needs a coach, and your thyroid is a whole different beast of a thing.

That I will always look to an expert for my thyroid versus even just myself. Even as educated as I am with credential courses and thousands and thousands of dollars later, I'm like, no, I'm going to leave this in the hands of someone else who knows better than me because I just, I, I put myself through the ringer, and my body needs way more support now than ever.

And I love to that. Your perspective as a leader and educator in the fitness and wellness world acknowledges the existence of the complexity of thyroid, because I think so much of the time people go to these trainers, they go and

they pursue weight loss or fitness or improve stamina, and their body is not responding the way that they're or the person that they are taking on, on their as their teammate, as their partner, as their leader, as their trainer to help educate and guide them on this just once their body to respond the way that they would expect it to.

But with thyroid conditions that looks very, very different, especially for someone who's been years into a post thyroidectomy situation. Have you found that also to be the case in your experience?

Yeah, for sure. I mean, I was the person that, I mean, magazines and TV went to for weight loss, as in getting lean. I mean, I'm 511, I'm built bigger anyways.

Like I definitely have bigger hands and bigger body structure. And when I competed and even on The Biggest Loser, I think I got down when I competed and I think I was down to like 145, 150 and I'm really tall.

Like I said, almost six foot and bigger boned. Anyways. So for me to to be able to do that with no thyroid is. Yeah, saying something that I did not do good for my body.

And I just, I see it every time. Right. Like I see all these people who are like. And don't get me wrong, I mean, I love the people. It's it's becoming more of awareness around thyroid health or hormonal health and what your body differently.

But I still see the same old junk out there of like and no ill will. Someone's listening to this and like, you know, certain, you know, Beachbody or boot camps or berries burn or, F45 or what are all those things.

And they're like, yeah, I'm paying $170 for this month, and I'm working out six days a week, and, you know, I'm doing boot camp and hit, and I'm like, I'm not losing any weight.

And I'm like, we need things differently. Like, I can no longer do the things that I preached in practice for so long that I was, well known for. I can't do that anymore without feeling like I was hit by a bus for the next three days, without feeling inflamed, having brain fog to the point I can't form sentences and just not feeling my best.

So my workouts look different. And because of that, again, I use that phrase. I use my health to chase my wealth, and now I'm using my wealth to choose my health back.

My whole brand is completely different because I can't be that person that I used to be anymore, which is not going to work for me. So like this morning my workout was not feeling great.

So I do listen to my body and I stretched and I did a little breathwork, and I just moved my body in a way that would serve me versus before I'd be like, oh no, I'm inflamed.

It don't feel good. Maybe it a little bit too much pie on Thanksgiving. I'm going to go work my butt off and I'm going to do hit, and I'm going to burn a lot of calories.

And I track it on my Apple Watch. I'm going to do a sauna after, like I was always going to do that and I just I can't be that person anymore. So I see a lot of people fall victim to it because thyroid health is a very big buzzword.

Perimenopause is a very big buzzword. Right? And all these coaches are coming out of left and right field being like, oh, I can help you with this. With no credentials, no background, no experience.

And buying a $25 course on Google does not make you an expert. So I, I even as someone who has spent thousands and thousands of my own money doing credential courses and college courses and all this stuff to still not make me an expert, I know a lot, but like, I would rather trust you versus myself with that degree problem, right?

And I love to that as a resource. You're out there for these women that don't need to just be pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing through that.

You're advocating for us to listen to our bodies, to take a unique and tailored approach because I think in medicine, but also in fitness alike, maybe even more in fitness that is missing in that culture, right?

It's always push harder, push through the pain. You're going to get stronger, but you've got to suffer first. And instead of people actually getting stronger, just like you stated, they're getting weaker.

We are breaking our bodies down even more. Yeah, it's not sexy, right? Like it's not sexy. Selling. Selling. I hate when you say I hate using the word selling, but obviously advocating for what we're advocating for.

Or selling our programs and our services is not sexy. It's not appealing. You know, it's one of actually one of the reasons I shut my fitness studios down in Dayton, Ohio, because Covid happened, obviously.

But secondly, I was going through different body changes, and I was realizing, wow, I'm putting a lot of my clients through stuff that they should not be going through, like boot camps and hips and stuff like that.

And they're all 40s and 50s plus, and they're like, I can't lose weight and like, but I'm in here working out, I'm lifting heavy and I'm going hard and I'm like, I'm not doing the right thing.

And unfortunately in our area, they haven't caught up to the mentality of like less, more. And I was just beating a dead horse. And I personally felt like I was doing a disservice to myself and my clients.

So I decided to shut my you down for that reason, because it's just not sexy. It's not glamorized. Right? Yeah. And it's probably the hardest battle. I will continue to fight until the day I'm done is just like, hey, health and wellness is not as sexy as other people are making it seem, and they're just selling something because it seems a facade.

Right? And honestly, coming from the background that I've come from, where I've been a trainer and the Biggest Loser, I've competed, I've been on the Instagram fitness world forever.

You have no idea what more than half those people who look amazing are doing to their body and how they feel. I have many of the biggest names in fitness and in bodybuilding, and you would not believe how terrible they feel, how much they have to put on a facade and how much, oh my gosh, like I'm saying, peptides and steroids and all these crazy things that they are doing behind the scenes just to make themselves look that way.

And I refuse to do that. I'm okay being 15 pounds heavier than I was at my leanest. I'm not. I'm not talking about competition weight, but like my normal, my normal lean.

Yeah, I'm okay being 15 pounds heavier because I'm not beating my body to the ground and my hormones are a little bit happier for it. So totally not sexy, right?

And I'm okay with that. I love it and tell me like some practical from you, from your wisdom and knowledge. Tell me some practicalities and how people with a thyroid condition or Hashimoto's or post thyroidectomy.

What are some tips and tricks that you employ or recommend with these people? As far as exercise is? Yeah, so the biggest thing is strength training and not strength training in the regards of oh, I'm going to do 12 shoulder presses and then go right to upright rows and then do 12 jumping jacks.

Exercise, Recovery, and Hormone Health

No that's hit, that's bootcamp okay man. So I think people get really confused or like oh, I'm strength training. I'm like, no, you're your strength training back to back with your breaks and getting your heart rate up really, really high. Right.

That's the whole point is like you want to do 12 shoulder presses and take a 45 the 62nd break before you do it again. So sometimes and I've had to reevaluate my thought process because again, I come from a big loser boot camp go hard, shine later background where I used to look at a person in a gym and not like I would ever judge

someone, but I would look at it and be like, oh, I'm working harder because I'm not taking as long as it breaks.

Not that they're not working hard, but I'm working harder. So I learn that, no, maybe that person has a thyroid problem, or maybe that person's going through perimenopause, or maybe that person is dealing with something different.

Like I told people, no, you're not like one of my favorite rules was, no, you're not lazy. You just have Hashimoto's. Like, yes. Taking a 62nd break because you have a thyroid disorder.

So taking breaks, you know, still learning that progressive overloads are good for you. So not staying with the 5 pounds forever, but lifting a little bit heavier over time and taking 60s strengthening strength training 3 or 4 times a week.

Yeah it's great. Honestly, I are more on the three times versus four times. Yeah. And walking counts as a workout. Just because you're not sweating doesn't mean it's not a workout.

Doing very low impact, steady state things is great for you. Tapping into that parasympathetic state is even better. So breathwork and stretching and yoga poses is great for you.

So that would be my number one. And then I know cortisol is super, super buzzy right now, but that's a super important thing. I think cortisol gets demonized quite a bit, but we do need a little bit of it, right?

It protects your heart, protects your organs. So people are like, oh, no, that's a bad thing. And I'm like, no, like too much is a bad thing, but a little bit it's okay.

Like it helps protect you. So learning just to like, de-stress and I'm not talking about go getting your nails done like that's I think that's the other thing.

I think it's like de-stressing. I'm getting my nails done and I'm going for a massage once a month. No, de-stressing is like an everyday practice that you have to do.

And that means getting, you know, grounding with your actual feet in the grass or doing some breathwork or, you know, quiet time or journaling throughout the day and sticking with it.

Not just once a month for any petty. Right. And then also nutrition is a huge, huge, huge area. I feel like garbage day because if it's Thanksgiving yesterday and I knew it, I knew what I was going to do, right? Oh.

We are doing this interview the day after Thanksgiving. Kind of regretting it this morning. We're both a little inflamed, so it's like just saying really.

Puppy this morning, but I know why. Like me too. Me too. Yeah. The food. Baby talking. But, rape kit is important and but again, that that balance of like, you still have to live life.

So picking and choosing your battles, right? I don't regret having the pie or the stuffing that I had, but like, I'm going to go right back to making sure that I eat what I know fuels me and makes me feel good today.

So those would be the biggest things in like little hacks, right? Like, I love my Brazil nuts, I love my seaweed. I love those kind of things that help me along the way.

And then also the one of the biggest thing is, is don't click buy now to every thyroid product that you see on the market. Amen, sister. How much more damage than it can be good.

And even if you don't finish the bottle just taking a couple doses, especially, granular. Like I see so many granular products being sold and I'm like, there's no education around this. And I'm like, please don't die.

And there's no, there's no consistency in dosing either. For the record there, you will sometimes be wildly have too much thyroid hormones then under it's completely unpredictable in terms of glandular or supplements.

Yeah. And then also like really educate yourself on what your thyroid numbers mean and how your thyroid should be operating. I think I was really naive when my doctor said, oh yeah, your panels look fine and it was just a TSH and a T4.

Yeah. Wasn't all the other things right? And I had to take time to understand, like what is conversion mean and what is T3 play a role in. And free T3 and free all of those things.

I had no idea until I had for myself and learned to advocate for myself. Right? So and then also, sometimes living well means living through science. I am as natural as I can be.

I love all my natural things, but sometimes you just have to take a T3 and sometimes you just have to get higher T4 and you have to do all these things to make it work, to fill in the gaps and deficiencies until we, we or you or your doctor can help your body get to that optimal state.

Right. So yeah, I would say those are my biggest things to tell people who are dealing with thyroid problems. I love that. And so, I, I want to put a pin in a couple things.

The first is like the exercise piece because it's something that I preach so much. Walking counts, right? Like low sustained non stressful exercise is such a great form for people who are in the middle of a thyroid crisis.

Strength training to like, we advocate for the exact same darn things, but let your heart rate come down between sets and circuits like build your muscle mass.

We need muscle mass as women, especially going into perimenopause menopause when we when it becomes more and more difficult, right? Yeah. But allow that heart rate to rest and just calm down.

Huge, valuable, valuable pieces of advice that I imagine you could not ever imagine recommending when you were on The Biggest Loser. No, never even, you know, and it's I grew up in the culture, right.

Like I'm like, we grew up with, go harder snack wells, low fat sweat. Jane Fonda hardly doing anything until, like, you sweat. So yeah, it's still hard for me to do, but, like, this morning, I stretch and I'm going to go for a walk today, and I'm not.

Then try to go hard or. Yeah, you know, earn back my food or whatever it is. But yeah, the fitness pieces, it's always going to be hard for me because I love it.

I love boot camp. Right. Those things I understand why people love them. But your body, if you want to love your body back, you have to do something different.

Right? And a big thing that I tell my patients, in addition to literally exactly what you shared today, I completely and behind us listen to your body, right?

Like if you exercise and you like you, for example, feel like you've been hit by a train for three days, you're overdoing it like never exercise more than your body can handle without being more tired, more fatigued, napping, feeling sick.

Those are very big red flags. And it actually, the longer you push through that, the worse you get, not the better, not stronger. I'm sure you found the same thing.

Yeah. It's humbling. Right? Like I and I'm someone who I again find myself pretty educated and been living with this for five years. And there's times where I still don't learn right?

I'm like, oh, look at the busy holidays, right? I'm like, oh, I need to put the tree up. I need to shop, I need to exercise. And you do that and I'm like, whoa, whoa, whoa.

It's okay to sit on the couch and journal and read and take my time today. And so I don't feel like garbage for the next three days. Right? It's just it'll ever, forever be a learning experience for me.

And even I still experienced swings. Even I could do everything right. So I think that's really important, too. Like, you could do everything right, and to not beat yourself up when you experience swings because your body, just anything and everything can, can make that happen, right?

Like a traumatic event could trigger that or, you know, a little stress or lack of sleep. So like, really, really listen to your body. And I know women say that all the time, but I can say like, that's honestly the biggest thing that's helped me stay well longer.

Not to say I don't experience swings, but I don't experience as drastically as I used to. Right. And you're not, you know, stealing from tomorrow's energy by pushing yourself today.

Yeah. Which long term will allow you to be healthier, longer your health span will be better. It's not not push and grind all of the time, especially in the world for thyroid of thyroid. Yeah.

You mentioned a lack of education around like thyroid cancer and life after a thyroidectomy. What specific areas do you feel like we need more awareness or support in?

Yeah, just letting people know that it's not the easy cancer. I hate hearing, oh, you got the easy cancer, you'll be fine. Or. Oh, you're not a cancer survivor because what you went through is not really traumatic.

And it's not the real cancer like, no, I have a scar to prove it. And, you know, went through radiation and, I live every day without a thyroid because of my cancer.

And that is one of the hardest things I've ever had to go through. So I wish we doctors would stop saying it's the easy cancer. I also wish doctors would sit down with patients and be like, I want you to understand that now that you no longer have a thyroid.

Signs and symptoms to look out for, of what a swing may feel like, or how to do life differently. Because the moment that my thyroid was out, like I'll never forget after my first appointment to check my incision to make sure I was healing, it was maybe ten days.

I had my sneakers in my gym bag in my car, waiting for approval for the doctor to say to go to work out. And I would told I was like, oh, I can't wait to go do him and sweat a lot.

He's like, go have fun. I write. I wish he would have said, do you understand what those kind of workouts are going to do to you? Like, you may feel fine now, but you know how that's going to impact your thyroid health moving forward.

And also understanding the differences of types of thyroid medication, because there are such very different types and they can make people feel wildly different from one person to the next.

I had no option. I was like, here's what I love about the rock scene. Here you go. That's it. That's the only thing. There's no other way. If you feel like shit, sorry. Well up it, and that's it.

And that's kind of how it went for two years. And I had to learn the hard way, because every time I would go and I'd be like, I don't feel good, not feel good, and they would just up it and then it would put me in a hyper state, and then they would lower it, and then they would up it and then they're like, oh, here's a T3, okay, we'll get rid of the T3 and it's like, what?

What are you what are we doing here? Do you know what I mean? So they're throwing darts at a dart board blindfolded, hoping to hit a bullseye is what's happening.

And it was basically just based off my TSH and. T4, right. Exactly. And I really wish people understood.

Navigating Medical Care and Advocacy

Like, and you may have differences depending on this, but like from what I experienced in my own journey, my TSH numbers don't indicate how I feel. Absolutely they are meaningless. Yeah.

So I try to tell people that all the time. They're like, you're not a doctor. I'm like, you're right, I'm not a doctor. But I'm telling you, like, based off my own personal experience and my research and with other clients, TSH means absolutely nothing.

And then I call my things. Number changes are changing my my levothyroxine and my why? Like, that's. Throwing darts at a dart board blind. I'm trying to hit a bull's eye.

I mean, what makes you symptomatic? So I'm kind of confused about that. So, those would be the biggest thing, right? Like, understand your numbers and what they mean?

Yeah. Stop saying the easy cancer and really sit down with the client and say your life is going to have to be different. You do not go on the same like you are going.

Like when I travel, my whole family knows, anybody which was the the Biggest loser campus people. It was like kind of a joke. And sometimes I get a little bit, what's the word?

Pissy about it. Sorry. You can bleep it off. But like so like we know where you don't have a thyroid because I'm like I can't do what I used to do right?

I can't when I go travel, you know, overseas I have to make sure that everything is on point, that my sleep is on point. I give myself a day of rest in between traveling, that I don't go right off the plane and go explore, explore the city.

I have to do things differently. And I wish that was more education around that. Like sleep and stress and eating and fitness like we say it, but we don't say it, you know what I mean?

It's kind of yeah. Certainly not in a clinical setting. Right. And that's right. I still get laughed at like, I'll go to my endocrinologist and he's like, that's a whole bunch of like hocus pocus.

Or he's like, you're. So we will, right. And I'm like, why do I know more than you like? Right. And and that's where we kind of have to be honest. And I'll be honest, is medicine has a lot of evolution that has to take place to get to that point.

But that's why I think people like you, people like me, this summit is really here to educate the masses so that they are able to be empowered and informed and be able to drive their care, because the thing that I think most people with thyroid conditions do not realize early on, and often not ever, is, you cannot sit back and passively allow your doctor to manage your thyroid and expect to be a thriving human full of life and vitality, because that's probably not going to happen.

We need to be educated and informed consumers of our thyroid and hormone health, because medicine is not up to par. Still, I'm sure you couldn't agree more, and I love.

That you, as someone who's in an actual medical right practice, does acknowledge that, right? Like I feel, I because I don't have a degree in that. Right. And I'm not ever going to say I will.

But I'm saying, as someone who has had to take her health in her own hands and spent many dollars and hours and time spent on educating myself about this, just because someone is a doctor in a setting doesn't mean they're always going to have their your best interest or, understanding or education.

And that's why I tell women all the time we are very blessed. It's a double edged sword. We're very blessed. But also it's like a very thin line of trusting people online and trusting experts online, because we do now have the opportunity to go elsewhere, and we do have the opportunity to get expert advice outside of our doctor's offices with practices like yours or, you know, when I struggle with OCD, but also thyroid people don't.

Right. And really mess with your mental health. You know, I was able to find an OCD expert online outside of my insurance and so we're very blessed. But also, you're right, women's health care specialty has a long way to go.

And connecting the dots, I think, like, you know, thyroid health. A lot of people don't realize that health plays a huge component of your thyroid health.

Right? So, Which affects your hormones, which, you know, affects your mental health, which. Yeah, that domino effect. So, you know, quick story. I went to my endocrinologist because I have to obviously get scans on my thyroid cancer free.

So first off it took like eight weeks to even get into my and my endocrinologist. Secondly, he just ran my T4. I brought to him my labs because I can run them labs because thankfully we have our ENT and dietitians on staff so I can run my own labs, thankfully.

But there's also many avenues where people can get lab work done, so I don't want people to see that my resources are any different. You can go online.

There's many places. But I ran my own labs and he was like, yeah, I guess you don't need a T3 anymore. And like, oh, like, maybe you're. No, I don't think your gut health has anything to do with this number spiking up because I swung and I was like, no, I'm pretty sure because, like, I have a hygiene and I'm burping a lot and all that.

And that started to happen around the same time. He's like, you know, it has nothing to do with with your thyroid. Everything's so disconnected, right?

Like we all of our physiology systems run completely independent of one another. Nothing, nothing is integrated. And I was just like, okay, just to schedule my ultrasound, you know, like I thankfully have resources like you and, you know, other things that I'm like, okay, I can I can have people really take a serious look at my thyroid.

Yeah. Without you being the sole provider, because I love what you said. Right. Like, if you expect your one endocrinologist who has hundreds and hundreds of patients that you're waiting eight weeks to get in and they only see you for five minutes if you expect that person to give you the vitality, and attention.

Unfortunately, they don't. You know, I have a lot of friends who are doctors, but they're in scopes of like, insurance and time and people and patients that I have a lot of friends who are like, I wish I could help.

Like you do, or I wish I could help like an independent practice. I just don't have the time or energy or resources yourself. Right? So it's no fault.

Theirs. It's just unfortunately, our system. It is our system is broken. And y'all. And it's like Modern Thyroid Clinic is outside of insurance and people are like, why don't you take insurance?

It's like, well, then I would be offering you exactly what you've already been experiencing. I can't solve your complex medical problem in 5 to 8 minutes.

That's not how real life works. And I can't work for $34 for an hour. Right? Like in overhead. I mean, it's impossible. So, you know, definitely don't be afraid to look outside of an insurance model because those people, a lot of them,

they're just invested in your health.

They're not invested in, you know, placating your insurance company and working for them. They actually want to help you solve, solve those problems. And to be super, super candid, even if we had the time, our formal medical training and I've gotten this I.

I'm a PA, I know NPS, I have infinite physician friends. Everyone agrees their thyroid, our thyroid training is not great. It is a one size fits all. Give them levothyroxine.

If they still have thyroid symptoms, it's because it's not their thyroid. Buried symptoms are very generic and nonspecific and so it must be something else.

And I tell you as a person who 100% of the patients that come to modern thyroid have been told it's not your thyroid, it's something else. You eat more exercise.

I mean eat less, exercise more, you know, sleep, de-stress. Well, no, it's a lot of times if it looks like a dog, it quacks like a duck. It walks like a duck.

It's a darn duck. And it needs to be appropriately addressed. And it's a very fixable problem. So could not could not agree more. Yeah. And I work, you know, in the perimenopause space and it's right thing.

Right? Like, it's just, a lot of my doctor friends that I have, I probably got I can count them on both hands, but they're like, I received less than a week of actual menopause education.

Yeah, perimenopause. That wasn't even really discussed. I think it was maybe one word in a chapter, but it was nothing that was ever done and it wasn't there.

It's just not there. Right? So again, don't discredit. Like, obviously I tell anyone who listens, like if you're looking for an outside resource, do your research on what kind of accreditations they have, what kind of, you know, government official credentials, whatever that is.

But make sure you do your education out there, on what they've gone through, because sometimes I'm sure you've run into this. Well, you're not in actual practice, and you don't have this credential and this credential to, like, clearly you can't help me.

But I'm like, I've got friends who are RN's who've gone through tons of credential courses outside of their actual degree. Yeah, way more than someone who is an expert on the doctor, but they're never taken serious because they don't have that.

Right. Right. Meanwhile, the, the doctor has zero lifestyle nutrition, exercise training whatsoever. Not mine. I will admit, it's a very fine line. I get it. Is.

Yeah. Like, do your research on who you're going to and who you're discussing your health care with. But we do have an opportunity to find some really cool resources outside your normal. Right.

And then there's the flip side of that conversation of people online who are doctors, but they are advertising as if they're medical doctors and they can prescribe, but they actually can't.

But they're acting and putting forth the concept of, yeah, I am a doctor, I can prescribe, but you don't need medication when really they're not, you know, they're a doctor of fill in the blank.

Yeah. I see all the time these days. I know, tell me. I wanted to, like, put a pin in one more final question, and then I want to share an offering that you have with our people.

What advice if you could give people post thyroidectomy or thyroid cancer? One piece of advice to take away

today. What would that be? Or most important, one that you want to highlight?

I know, no pressure, right? I know that's so hard. That sounds so cliche and so basic, but really evaluate how you feel and what your body needs at that time that's going to change as seasons change, right?

There are times where my thyroid needs a little bit more support, and I have to take a little bit more time off fitness or working out and, work. And I know, I know, that's a very, but you're blessed thing to say because not everyone has that opportunity.

But I remember working with the coach who told me at one point, and I'll stick with me. He's like, you are going to have to say no to some things. Yeah.

He's like, and if you don't, you are going to get very sick and you are going to not have the life that you want to live. And I was like, I can't say no to things.

I'm a single mom or I have kids, I've got sports, I've got work, I got this.

Advice for Thyroid Patients and Resources

He's like, you're going to have to say no. Yeah. Learning to really say no and listen to what your body's needs as the seasons change. Yeah. Because if you don't like, it's, you're it's not going to turn out pretty.

And I know as someone who's like, I'm sure people listening who've had thyroid problems, there been days I lay in bed and go, I think I'm dying. Like I literally oh yeah, my heart rate is feeling off.

I'm so fatigued I can barely move my limbs like I thought I was dying. And I just remember him saying, you're going to have to say no to some things. And that's why my whole business model has changed.

That's why my life has changed. I've said no to six figure deals with fitness because I would be filming workouts seven days a week, three times a day, and I'm like, I can't do that.

I can't do that. I can't do that. And that's that's huge. To turn something down that big, that's life changing money for people. But I knew I would be sicker in the long run for it.

Yeah. So you have to say no. And I learned that the hard way, I really did. And even if it's like on a smaller scale, you do the laundry, clean the kitchen, or you take a nap.

Like if you. I tell my patients this all the time, especially in the beginning of their journey, you have to rest your way out of this process sometimes, right?

Not push through, but rest your way out. If you can. Take a nap, take a nap. Don't feel guilty about it. Women just we have this tendency to push, push, push.

And what I think sometimes women need is just the permission to like, rest a little bit. Sometimes when you can't, can we always know? But if you can and you have that opportunity, do it.

So I love that. I love it. As the two women who are working the day after Thanksgiving, you know. True. But but I'm doing it in my PJs, in my slippers, and I'm not doing else the rest of the day and get my workout.

I'm not going to go hard. And then cleaning and decorating. I'm just going to do that and that's it. Right? So boundaries, there's boundaries, right? Boundaries. And balance. Amen.

Yeah. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to have this conversation. But even more than that for putting, like, dedicating your life to empowering women on their journey of thyroid dysfunction, hormone dysfunction.

I absolutely love your content. I very much want you to share with people your favorite place to hang out where they can find you. And also, I know you have a little gift for us that further can empower us on our thyroid and hormone journey.

So share with us a little bit about all of that for sure. So I own a functional health coaching company where we do actually have runs and Dos and dietitians on staff, so we're not the fake ones, I promise.

But we created a hormonal health quiz because we focus more on, you know, women's actual like estrogen, progesterone, testosterone and detoxification, liver function, things like that.

Adrenal. So with all of the buzzwords out there, it's really confusing for women to understand what's actually going on with me. So instead of throwing like, darts just blindly, we have created a hormonal health quiz that breaks it down for us and let you know, okay, it might be a thyroid adrenal problem.

So here's some resources for that. Or it might be a perimenopause problem or adrenal function or liver function. So we created Hormonal Health Quiz that you can take and just kind of get some answers and resources and point you in directions that may not even be with us, but other experts in the field.

Because if you don't even work with us, we want you to work with someone. That's our biggest thing. So we provide those kind of things. So. Yeah, I'm gonna give you guys a hormonal health quiz.

I love it. And where can people find you? Online so you can find me everywhere. Erica. Fit, love. No one calls me Erica. Everyone calls me fit love. So that's just my name. Oh. That's cute.

I didn't know that. Oh, I love it. My kids, my husband. No one calls me Erica. Everyone just calls me fit love. So myself, like, hey, fit love, what's for dinner?

But yeah, you can find me at Erica. Fit love everywhere. Yeah, you can just. Erica Lugo. Erica fit love. You can find me anywhere and everywhere on all my social platforms.

They're all the same. I love it. I can't encourage it enough. Please go find her. Thank you again for having this conversation. I hope you enjoy the rest of your day and you enjoy your rest and your recovery.

And I know, thank you, thank you. Have a good one. You too. Thank you.