Lifestyle: Your Prescription For BP Health Transcript

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Introduction and Mindset Overview

Welcome back for another wonderful conversation we're going to have today with dear friend Rip Esselstyn. How are you today? Hey, Laurie, doing fabulous.

Thank you. I say that is a wonderful way to get started. And you know, today I really want to speak to your expertize, which is all about mindset and community and overcoming challenges because you have such a unique background being the son of Dr. Esselstyn and then a fireman and just an athlete.

So it'll be really fun to see what some of your answers to these questions, I think will help a lot of people. Absolutely. Yeah. Fire away. Let me let me tackle it. All right.

So first question, why is mindset such a critical component when committing to lifestyle change, for example, chronic disease management or improvement?

Why do you think that is such a critical piece? Well, actually, I would actually say that mindset is not only, you know, critical for trying to control chronic from disease mindset to me is everything in life.

And if you can get the right attitude and the right mindset around just about anything that you want to pursue in this life, that to me is 90% of the battle.

And, you know, I've been I've been working with people since consistently since about 2009, when I wrote my first book, The Engine 2 Diet, and I enlisted 72 guinea pigs to try out this lifestyle because I wanted to I wanted to see with my own very eyes the efficacy of what can happen when you eat a whole food plant based diet and the caveat that I had was you could not be a participant if you did not if you would not agree to do a couple of things.

A. You had to agree to not cheat for the 28 days. B. You had to agree to keep a food log of every morsel that you put in your mouth. You had to also let me know how much you were sleeping, how much you were exercising.

Any issues that you were having. You know what was the most difficult thing? Because I wanted to write about it.

Why Mindset and Accountability Matter

And so in some ways, I, I actually, you know, weeded out people that I knew would not be successful because, a, they had to basically sign a contract with me that they would not, to the best of their ability, they would not knowingly cheat and go out and, you know, have a McDonald's cheeseburger or something like that.

And they keep this food log for accountability and course corrections. And Laurie, it was so invaluable not only for them, but also for me to see how everybody just was not only complying, but so enthusiastically engaged. So, again, to me, this is all like, you know, you go into this and you have to have the right mindset.

You know, one of the things we've talked about is how important it is to have community or I think in the case for many people, like even a coach, somebody that can be there or or actually, you know, let me take a step back.

It's so funny because I wrote this book so long ago, but I insisted that everybody have a fire buddy. And that's because, you know, as a firefighter, you never, ever go into a burning building by yourself.

You have to always be paired up with somebody. And so I kind of made the analogy, I don't want any one of you basically going into this whole food plant based lifestyle, feeling like you're alone.

Not only do I want you to have a a fire buddy and remember these these people were on two paths. They got to

they got to decide, do I want to take the the fast track and do the the firefighter program for 28 days?

Or do I want to do the slower track and do the fire cadet? But both ones got you to the end point. For the last two weeks, you're eating only whole food plant based foods.

And so in some ways, you know, I let them choose which path which was, I think, very empowering for them. But again, everybody had a fire buddy that you can lean on when you know, you're like, Oh, my God, I can't do this anymore.

You can pick up that phone. You could call them. And then they also had me as a coach, kind of a motivational coach that was making sure that they were doing this correctly.

And Laurie, I mean, the results that we got in 28 days were nothing shy of jaw dropping. The weight loss, the average weight loss we had was 15 pounds for the for the guys, nine and a half pounds for the girls.

You know, unfortunately, I think that's just because men typically have a little bit more mass maybe, and therefore they just maybe have a tendency to have a higher resting metabolic rate.

But, you know, but the fact is that's pretty good. Almost 10 pounds for the women, 15 pounds for the men in 28 days following this, the average drop in total cholesterol was 35 points.

The LDL was 24 points. The average. I told you the weight loss, the average drop in blood pressure was ten on the systolic, five on the diastolic, which is wow.

Which is, which is great. Um, and I think by eating these low fat, low sodium plant based foods, they were hitting, you know, hitting all their markers.

And I want people to know, because I know this is a summit about hypertension. Right. And that is, you know, the average American is you know, and maybe you've you've talked about this with other speakers, Laurie, but is getting somewhere between 3000 to 5000 milligrams of sodium a day.

And on my on the engine two program, on the engine two seven day rescue program, we've asked we want them to be getting somewhere around 1500 milligrams a day or below that.

And we know that just naturally occurring sodium in their spinach and their Swiss chard and their oats and portabella mushroom mushrooms is going to yield them about 500 milligrams.

And so if they can just keep the added sodium from their breads and their, you know, if they're eating whole grain crackers and pasta sauces, right. If they can learn to kind of keep that the number of calories per serving to the milligrams of sodium that are per serving, if they can keep that as close to a 1 to 1 ratio, then they're going to hit a home run.

When it comes to that, um, you know, a little fact is that the, there's a study in it was conducted it's called the Global Burden of Disease Study. It involved over 300 institutions across 50 different countries.

And it concluded that elevated blood pressure is the number one worldwide risk factor for death, resulting in fatal heart attacks, strokes and other catastrophic organ failure.

So, I mean, that little white substance, Laurie, that we it's in every packaged and box and canned food that's out there. If you go to the out to restaurants, forget about it.

Right. I mean, all bets are off when you cook. Do not use it when you cook. Only do a little bit when you want to like topically salt your food if you feel like it needs it.

But it's incredible what you can do when you really dial back that sodium. And then the other thing I want to say is

that sugar, you know, don't think that sugar is is not guilty as well.

You know, back around the time of the, you know, 1776, I was just reading this, the average American was consuming 4 pounds of of sugar a year, a year.

In 1970. Six, 1976, today, 2023. It's a 160 pounds, pounds per person per year. So is that even possible? Well, because it's because because 30 it's 30 added teaspoons a day and 80% of our food is adulterated with some sort of sugar.

And, you know, there's so many different names that we have for sugar that are out there.

Community, Fire Buddies, and Early Results

So and here's a little thing that can be helpful for your audience. You know, according to the new label guidelines, you have to list added sugars. So on the nutritional facts panel, you go down to sugars below that all say including however many grams of added sugars and just so your audience knows, four grams equals one teaspoon.

So if it says let's say you're eating a coconut yogurt, right? And it says including 16 grams of added sugars, that's four teaspoons. And then you go down the list and you'll see, you know, cane sugar, cane sugar, you'll see maple sirup, you'll see brown, brown rice sirup, molasses.

It's really crazy. But so sugar plays a very, very significant role as well in elevating elevating that blood pressure. And, of course, you know, all the added oils and fats, you know, the saturated fat that clogs our arteries and makes those makes all of our vessels work harder.

That also contributes to the hypertension. But I know that wasn't your question. It was mindset. So so, you know, and if you if you feel like, you know what this is going to be really, really difficult.

Like Lori, I was playing pickleball this morning with a gentleman and he said, Rip, I read all your books. I just don't think I can do this. And I'm like, listen, you know, it's that old quote.

You know, if you think you can, you can. If you can't, you can't. And I'm like, listen, let's just start by you hitting a homerun with your breakfast in the morning, all right?

Do oatmeal with fruit, a small little handful of, like, walnuts and then some chia seeds or ground flaxseed meal. And do that right. Let that be the kind of the the touchstone that gets you going every morning and then see if you can, you know, do it, do something great for lunch and dinner and so he's going to start he's going to start with that instead of his, you know, scrambled eggs and bacon and, you know, all that kind of nonsense.

But you everybody I think everybody you know, you know, your mindset, you know, we know some of us like some of us just some of us have it and some of us have a little bit more challenged.

If you're more challenged, find that fire buddy. It'll do this with you. Find that a coach that can help you and then find a community you know I know it it plan strong we've got a go plan strong community on Facebook that's 35,000 strong and there's no judgment.

Everybody's there just to support everyone. You know, we lay it all out there. You don't need to be, you know, not tell the truth because we find that the truth actually is very, very helpful for absolutely everyone.

So that's. BRADY Yeah, it's very liberating. Yes. So there are so many beautiful nuggets in that lovely discussion that you just had. I the things that came to my mind just kind of getting back to the mindset and I want to ask a specific question, but we're self-efficacy, accountability, a coach, which is like a guide, right?

Just guiding you along, giving you the education that you need to be successful. But my question would be, why do you think we make things so hard? Right.

So is it's literally we have to spell it out for some people. Like, you're exactly right. I had patients go, well, I'll try doctor. My was like, Well, you've already failed.

What do you say you're going to try? You're leaving room. You've already said in your head that you're not going to. So I need to understand what you can do today and tomorrow and the next day.

But why do you think we make things so hard? This is just changing the food in our plate. Why do we why do we do this? Well. Well, it's there's a confluence of things that are going on there, right?

I mean, food is it's in our culture. There's just so many traditions that we have that are so deeply rooted in so many different households. Like if you knew how many times I've heard, I don't think I can do this.

I'm Italian, right? And I've got to have my, you know, this my olive oil, mine, whatever, or I'm Greek, right? You're not telling me I've got to, you know, forget olive oil.

You know, I'm Greek, I'm Italian, I'm French. I'm, you know, basically what? So, of course, that's one you know, there's so many memories, too, that are associated with food and the smell of food and and all that.

So I just, you know, I think what we need to do is and what we've been able to do in the Esselstyn household, starting with my parents, is start new traditions.

And it is so incredible. Like, I'm going to be going home here shortly to celebrate my my dad's 90th birthday and there's going to be 45 assistants and cousins and nieces and nephews, 45.

And I can guarantee you not one of them is going to be whining and complaining about us having, you know, mashed potatoes and gravy and big old salads and tofurkey and, you know, plant strong apple pies, pumpkin pies, you know, all these things.

Everybody's going to love it. Everybody's going to make a dish and so this now has become very, very easy for the whole Esselstyn tribe. It's what's expected.

And and and it's just a beautiful thing when you're you're not going to be marked. You're not going to be belittled for the way you eat. And that's another thing, right?

I mean, you try and do this and you're going to be the odd person out wherever you are, whether it's the, you know, the holiday Thanksgiving face, the Christmas, whether it's the birthday parties.

And you got to be okay with that, right? You got to have a thick skin. And I can tell you there was no tougher place probably on the planet to be a whole food plant based junky than at a firehouse in Austin, Texas, which is basically the land of beef.

You do talk about a you know, an oxymoron, right? I mean, a bunch of firefighters going plant based in Texas. But you know what? We were able to do it because we knew we knew in our heart of hearts that this was the right path for us to be on.

If we wanted to be the healthiest, best, strongest versions of ourselves. Because let's face it, when you're a firefighter, the people that call and pick up 911 and are having an emergency, they expect a superman or a superwoman to come and answer them when they're in need.

And the fact of the matter is and this is really, really sad, Laurie, close to 85% of paid and volunteer firefighters across the United States are overweight and obese.

They're dealing with pre-diabetes, type two diabetes, all these things because the culture at the fire houses across not only our country, but really the globe, it's so meat centric.

It's so it's it's it's got such a strong masculine toxicity associated with it. But I want you guys to know that if if I can do this at a firehouse in Austin, Texas, and it took me six years before I was able to basically make any progress on getting these guys to convert.

Why Change Feels Hard

Six years I was I was hanging in there, but I never gave up. It's it's anybody can do this. It's never too late. And, you know, let us at Fire Station two in Austin, Texas, be a shining example that any house in this country has the ability to do it.

And it just goes back to, I think, Laura's initial question. You're going to have to get her out. You've got to get the right mindset, get the you know, get the right support behind it.

And just amazing how one person can flip a whole family, a whole community, you know, a whole a whole country. And I look at what my father was able to do with his groundbreaking research on heart disease.

And he is literally he is he is leaving behind a legacy like no other. And this is now out there. This is like he's got the most profound before and after angiographic, you know.

Evidence. Thank you. Evidence really on the face of the planet, showing that you can do this. And he's done it again and again and again and again. So and it took somebody outside the field of cardiology to show the cardiologist that this was something that was possible.

And so, you know, my heart goes off to Dean Ornish and my father for being such trailblazers and disruptors when it comes to the number one killer of men and women in this country.

So I know I've kind of taken a bunch of tangents that. I wouldn't know that all of it's fantastic. I mean, heart disease is so closely tied to hypertension.

And so I think one more question before we break to to the conversation would be so we've spoken about, you know, changing your mindset and stuff, but what are the strategies to really solidify that long term commitment like?

Is there anything in particular like especially during the challenging times of holidays and like you said, luckily for you, your your parents have said this president and the family has engaged in that and embraced it.

But I'm curious, what would you suggest for something like how you stuck in there for six years, which is amazing. How can you help others also stick into it. For the long?

I think it's important that and we everybody always talks about, well, what's your why like why did you decide to do this and why is this important to you?

And I think that you need to have a why that is so big and powerful and and really beyond yourself that when it gets hard, because, let's face it, it's going to get hard at times for me.

Now, I've been doing this 30, 36 years. It's an absolute snap. I don't even think about it. But for those starting out, find out what is your why that is going to make this so that, you know, you could do this even if you were being pressured in a bunch in a firehouse.

And I'll give you an example. When I first came out as a firefighter, I was at the Animal House. It was fire station one in downtown Austin, Texas. There were 18 guys that were there.

We had we had a ladder truck and two fire engines. And then we also had an EMS unit, 18 guys. So what is going to be that y that is going to allow you to do this when you have 17 people basically saying, oh, my, I mean, making fun of you calling you names, saying you will never be able to do this as a firefighter, the last vegetarian that that came through here didn't even last a month.

You know, what are you thinking? You don't any food you eat what food eats, you know, how do you expect to be a firefighter if you're eating twigs and berries?

Right. We should just tie you up to the tree outside and have you just eat the grass. I mean, it was brutal and, you know, and for me, I, I want to I just want to be a crusader for the advancement of all things, whole food, plant based.

I want to do my part as a human being to make a difference when my time has come and I have definitively helped as many people as I can. And that drives me.

But there's so many different whys, right? I mean, one of the people on my my team, his wife died of cancer. And his the last thing she said is, you know, I want you to be able to live for the both of us and play with our grandchildren.

They didn't have grandchildren at the time. He now has grandchildren. So he is living so he can actually or be eating this way because he was having, you know, heart issues, high cholesterol, hypertension, all these things.

It's all vanished. He's down on £50. He's like incredible shining example.

Finding Your Why and Staying Committed

And he's getting, you know, on the floor playing with his grandchildren and all the things that he thought he would never be able to do into his, you know, mid-late sixties.

You know, one of the things that I love about people that are doing this for animal rights is there's a reason that's much bigger than themselves. And that is they're just they do not want to do anything to be part of the to be complicit in the murder of 80 billion animals every year. So.

Wonderful, right? Fantastic. I absolutely love it. You know, we talk about how the number one cause of global greenhouse gas emissions is animal agriculture.

And the data varies. It's as low as 16% of all global greenhouse gas emissions and as high as 82%. But I think it's fair to say that those numbers are astounding.

And if you consider yourself a true environmentalist and we know with what's going on right now with planet, planet Earth screaming for help and, you know, you can't you can't go a day without reading about a drought, a forest fire.

You know, a population has basically had to retreat from where they were living because it's now flooded. I mean, it's it's downright ugly. So if you're a true environmentalist, another great reason to to to drop the meat and the dairy and and all that jazz.

So find a reason and you can latch on and not crumble when 17 angry firefighters come after you. I had such an interesting vision in my head when you said that.

So this does so But what advice do you have for someone who might experience some setbacks or moments of doubt in the journey like me? And this is just getting to it?

I know we we spoke about their why, but let's say that they maybe they fell in to the Thanksgiving holiday dinners and they do when they don't feel well like a lot of people are like well, why even keep going?

How do you help someone jump back on the horse, so to speak? So I'm going to I'm going to give you a couple of quotes right now that I love one. One is from Winston Churchill and the other is from Babe Ruth.

So Winston Churchill has a quote and it's five, five, never, never, never, never, never, never give up. Right. And so if you fall down, you just get right back up, right?

Never, ever give up. And if you were like Laurie, if we were, what kind of car do you have? Laurie okay, have a it's an old ones 2014 Buick Enclave and a 2007 Jeep Grand Cherokee.

Okay. So let's say you're driving that Jeep Jeep Grand Cherokee down the highway and that right front tire goes flat on you. What are you going to do? You're going to pull it over.

You're going to get out of the fast lane, pull it over. And what you're going to do is you're going to get out the jack and you're going to fix it, or you may call triple AA or something like that, but you're going to fix that flat.

I know. Tent type. Yes. Yes. But what you're not going to do is you're not going to get out a big old knife and you're not going to slash the other three tires.

Right. Because you're so absolutely pissed off and upset that you've got a flat tire. Flat tires happen in life. They do. Right. And sometimes they're very, very much unexpected at the most, an opportune time.

It's snowing outside. It's 110 degrees outside. You're on a freeway, all these things. But you deal with it. You fix it, and then you move on. And that's what I want all of you to do.

The other quote is from Babe Ruth. And I love it because I'm a very, very competitive person. And I love athletics. And it's it's hard to beat someone who never gives up.

Right. And so that's just my attitude. And again, it goes back to the whole mindset thing, but just don't ever give up. And I want you all to know that as trying and difficult as this may, may get for you, because you're going to have some challenging moments and times this past is the path that you want to stay on and figure out.

And if you ever take a little detour here and there, just get right back on the plans, wrong path, because it truly is the one that that has the science the most enlightenment and will allow you to get copious amounts of food for breakfast, lunch and dinner and snacking when you need it without having to starve yourself, without having to make and weigh and measure your food, without counting calories, doing all these things that most people think they need to do when it comes time for them to to lose weight.

And, you know, I'm sure Laurie is talk about this with somebody else, but there's a thing called calorie density. And the beautiful thing about whole plant based foods is because of the water and the fiber that's in all of them, it makes their calorie density about 600 calories per pound, down to about 100.

And if you can say and stay in that sweet spot between 106 hundred consistently, you really will have almost an impossible time ever gaining weight.

Handling Setbacks and Getting Back on Track

And what will happen is you'll just find your body will will find that that sweet spot where it wants to be, like when you were a freshman in college and stick with it, right.

If you have to lose 80 pounds. My bet is it'll take you a good year if you're doing this consistently right. And, I mean, I just I just was reading today about a gentleman that attended, ah, one of our immersion programs.

His name is David Honoré. I write about him in the age of the seven day rescue book, and he lost 8 pounds in seven days when he was with us here. He dropped 80 points on his total cholesterol in seven days.

His blood pressure came down, ten over ten is systolic and diastolic, but guess what happened? It gave him the the confidence that I want to do this long term.

And so a year later, he was down 80 pounds, Laurie. His blood pressure was down like another 20 over ten. He was no longer he was he was pre-diabetic.

And the most exciting thing was he was he would never wear flip flops because his feet were so swollen and absolutely, according to him, just ugly. And now he proudly wears or wears a round flip flops because his feet are so beautiful.

And he used to be an opera singer, like a beautiful opera singer on the side. But he said that when he gained all the way, he just didn't have the the wind and everything to to do it.

And so he's now back being an opera singer. So, you know, all this to say that it's all yours for the taking. Just don't give up, right? Don't give up to all the noise, the distractions, the kido, the Lions, the carnivore, the Atkins, the Paleo.

This is a very this is a detour. You do not want to take because it will bankrupt your health. Yes. You may lose some weight in the short term, but it will bankrupt you and not a not a wise decision.

So be strong. Be PLANTSTRONG. Which is fantastic. I think it's a beautiful place to end. But could you just speak to a little bit about where where people can find you and we'll have it in the show notes?

But I love to talk about your food and everything that's available for people. Absolutely. So plantstrong.com is where you can go and you can see all the the whole ecosystem that we offer from coaching meal planner our food line.

Where to Find PlantStrong Resources

You know, we've now got close to 47 different products across about 12 different categories to help make people's journey that much more convenient and easy.

And this way you can rest assured that you don't have to read the label and make sure that the sodium is isn't too high or there's added oils or, you know, added sugars.

We are as clean and flavorful as you can get and and still be whole food plant based. And then Laurie, we've also you know, I've got the PLANTSTRONG podcast that drops every Thursday.

You know that that seems to be very comforting for a lot of people that are trying to stay plugged in to the community. And we have some of the best doctors like you.

We have scientists, we have nutritionists, we have testimonials. We have athletes, we have celebrities. So that's always kind of a nice thing for people to tune into.

And and then on Instagram, you know, you can go to @ripesselstyn on Instagram, go @goplantstrong on Instagram if you want to stay plugged in that way as well.

Fantastic. Yeah. Oh, well, thank you. And thanks everyone for listening. And we'll tune in to our next conversation.