Summit Introduction and Guest Welcome

Welcome everyone to the Gut Health and Longevity Summit. I am so glad you are here, and I want you to take a moment right now, because what you're about to hear could shift something fundamental about how you understand your own health.

We built this summit because the science of connecting your gut to every system in your body, including your brain and your mind, has never been more compelling, and most people have never heard of it in plain language.

Today's conversation takes that one step further into a territory I find genuinely fascinating. The idea that your mindset is not separate from your gut health, it is part of it.

My guest today has a term for this. It's called psychogenic longevity. And once you hear what it means, you will not think about food stress or aging in the same way again.

My next guest spent the last 17 years studying the human brain at Harvard, and what he found changed how he thinks about everything from stress to longevity to the food you put on his plate.

He does not separate the mind from the body, and he proves that they are in the same conversation. Please help me in welcoming Doctor Srini Pillay. He is a Harvard trained psychiatrist and the most awarded resident at Harvard Psychiatry.

He has directed the McLean Hospital's Anxiety Disorders program and was a brain imaging researcher at Harvard for 17 years. He is a chief medical officer of a rule.

Don't know if I'm pronouncing that right, but you can correct me. A digital therapeutics company using AI to reduce chronic disease risk. And he has authored three books.

Life Unlocked a Your Brain and Business, and The Tinker, Dabble, Doodle Try, which has been translated into eight languages. And so he has also been a TEDx speaker and is a member of the Transformational Leadership Council.

And I'm so excited to welcome doctor here. And I've been looking forward to this conversation, because I think it's a very unique way of thinking about longevity.

And I think people are going to be really in store for a really great conversation. So let's dive in with the first question I have for you, which is your big idea.

Psychogenic Longevity and Mindset Basics

You've coined the term psychogenic longevity. Most people think of longevity as diet and exercise. So what is it that you are actually describing and why does the mind belong in that conversation?

Well, thanks so much for having me. It's really lovely to be here today. Psychogenic longevity is the term that I coined. The term psychogenic aging has been used in the literature to refer to psychological factors that impact aging.

And so when I became interested in trying to think about health span and longevity, it occurred to me that a lot of what goes on in the brain is connected to the rest of the body.

So on the surface, people think of mood states, they think about focusing. They think about self-transcendence

states as being mental or intellectual, and then they think about health span and longevity as being related to biomarkers or actual concrete physical health that you can see over the years.

What we've learned is that emotional states like stress, for example, can actually impact the gene by causing epigenetic changes that eventually is related to chronic disease.

And as Canada's move down, there are a number of other mindsets which have data showing that they connect to inflammation and immunity and as a result, health span and longevity.

So I'll name the nine mindset so that anyone listening can give themselves a score from 0 to 10 where they say, I'm so terrible at this that I'm a zero or I'm perfect this, I'm a ten.

The first is focus, right? The second is optimistic. How optimistic are you? The third is confidence. You know, are you trapped in uncertainty? A lot of the time, or do you you generally feel confident the fourth is or so or inspired states.

The first is somatic awareness, which is ways in which we are aware of our bodies. And then there's the connected mindset where your relational autonomy, where you do things that actually feel like they're self-directed, resilient.

Are you someone who recovers from adversity easily or empowered? Do you feel empowered to make to make your own decisions in life? Now, if you go down each of those mindsets and you see that you're close to attend for every one of them, then you'll probably have the green light on mindset, saying that no matter what you're eating, even if you're paying attention to eating a good diet, optimize mindset will actually help you.

However, if you identified one or more areas where you think, I'm not really that it's hard to be optimistic at times like this, a lot of people will say, or I'm not.

I don't really feel like I'm in control of my life. I feel like I have to listen to my boss. The moment you start going low on that, the practical significance is what one area can I choose to build that mindset?

And just to give you a sense of of some examples, if you look at people with ADHD where the focus mindset is not even a thing. People with ADHD have twice the rate of death before the age of 46.

If you look at Optimus, Optimus had 11 to 15% longer lifespans. Another mindset that I didn't mention among those because people often don't think of it as a mindset, is the self-transcendence mindset, but it's connected to some of them.

Read proposed a model for self-transcendence, and that model basically said self-transcendence is when you go inward so you're not just operating as your LinkedIn profile, which a lot of people do when they're describing themselves.

But when you go inward and you start to explore what's going on in your mental state, that's one form of transcendence. The other form is when you're not just connected to yourself, but you're connected to others.

And, you know, a lot of recent studies have shown that the protective effect of being connected to others is close to 50% in terms of mortality rates.

Compare that to high blood pressure, which skews mortality rates 25%. People are much more likely to pay attention to high blood pressure than they are to the strength of their connections.

And and and so and and there's two other things about that. One is or is another way of connecting, of self-transcendence. And then more than half of the studies show that connecting to something spiritual or being religious can actually also be protective in terms of health span.

And my favorite of all is hopping off the timeline. And I always say, what the earth does around the sun has nothing to do with myself construct in terms of my health and my age that can do what it wants to do.

Chronological age does not have to match psychogenic it. Okay, I'm really okay. So I'm excited about this because I also talk about mindset in my book, The Anatomy of Well-Being.

And you've introduced nine mindsets, which I had a few of them in my book, but a few, like a few, are new, so I really want to dive into these a little bit more.

Based off of your expertise and your research that you have seen really will influence chronic diseases and longevity. So I'm going to pick a few from here, just so people can get a better understanding of what this might look like, because they might not be able to identify, do I have this mindset or like, do I need to work on this mindset?

So maybe if we can talk about a few of these specifically, I want to start with and mind you, the ones you gave us are all really positive mindset. You know, there's I'm sure there's a whole list of negative mindsets because I've also have studied that and put that in my book.

But let's let's talk about in a little bit more detail. What do you mean about the all mindset. Like what would that look like to somebody in their life.

Like if you can give an example so people can kind of identify, oh, do I have this mindset and what is the impact of having this type of mindset. So or is generally an experience.

Simply put that sweet tea off your feet. So you metaphorically speaking you actually feel like you're so moved by it. And you know, there are simple things that can create this mindset.

I think looking at a sunrise, looking at a sunset, a patient of mine I spoke to today was saying she's pregnant. And she was like, I could not believe there was this moving person inside of me.

And she was so in awe of the idea that she was growing a life. So it is personal to a certain extent, meaning whatever sweets you are for your feet. I think for me, simple things like beautiful sunrises and sunsets can really make me feel like like I moved.

But also you can look at amazing trees, really huge trees that make you feel. And for me, actually flying into New York City, I never lose the whole mindset.

So whenever I'm here and I look at just the buildings, I'm like, I'm always really sort of struck by what an amazing city. So what that's saying is that you're not just limiting yourself to cognitive stream.

Awe and Self-Transcendence

What you're also doing is you're connecting to your emotions, and you're connecting to your emotions in a way that might even make you feel vulnerable, because when you experience or then the ego itself disappears in the way we talk about it, and instead what you're left with is a self-transcendence state, where you are so moved by something else that you have the self-transcendence.

Now, preliminary studies have shown that long term transcendental meditators are able to turn down all 49 genes associated with inflammation, and they're able to to turn up the genes associated with immunity and oxygen carrying capacity.

So and I actually recently wrote a paper which was about enhancing longevity using the metaverse, because some of my work involves using virtual reality.

And Mayo Clinic Proceedings Digital Health published this paper in which I proposed that rather than only relying

on transcendental meditation, for example, can we put ourselves in immersive environments where we are able to transcend the self because something so much larger has taken over so specifically in relation to that?

That's what all is. And it can affect genes. It can affect you at a genetic level as well. Okay. So I'm thinking of two examples right now. I think, you know, for me I have two personal examples that I will give.

And maybe the audience can resonate with this. One is I do retreats in person with individuals, and I'm always in awe of the transformational change that an individual can have in the matter of a few days.

You know, like people think that they can't change their health or their outcomes. And and that's one thing. But then on a personal note, one of the things I noticed that I get emotional with and that I just feel like so amazing, like you are saying, like you like sunsets and stuff, I'm going to say that is music to me.

So when I find, you know, lately there's a lot of this on internet and social media right now is like these talented people just coming out of the woodwork playing violins and like all these instruments off the like the side of the street and the type of music that they can create.

And you can see that just the people sitting there watching like they're in tears because it creates such an emotional, I don't even know what the word is, but it creates this internal feeling of, like you said, like or.

I was watching one yesterday where this one video where this guy, he didn't even have like arms. Okay. So he had physical disability and so basically his arms up to his elbow, like from his elbow downwards were gone.

And he ended up playing classical music holding a flute. And the song that I think it's something I think it was like a Vivaldi, like a real, like classical, like musical tone.

And while it's meant to be played with a violin, he was able to accomplish this with a flute and just watching everybody's reactions. I think, you know, now, if people understood that just being in that space that you're turning off the bad genes, like, wouldn't you put yourself in more of those spaces to just experience life?

I think this brings to light the impact of when we are spending all of our time in front of negative news and all this, you know, bad stuff, that we are activating our genes in a way that we don't even because it's invisible to the eye, right.

That we aren't realizing. So finding times and spaces of all I think is absolutely critical. So I love the way you describe that. Let's talk about another one.

I'm totally going off like my script here because I'm so fascinated by this. Now we'll get back to my script, but I want to talk about so many okay, let's do somatic awareness next.

Tell me what that might look like for an individual. So, you know, there are certain kinds of techniques like the Feldenkrais Method where people learn to reduce pain by becoming aware of their bodies and then becoming aware of the meaning.

They were tributes to that pay. So, for example, a lot of people think pain is just fixed, that whatever pain you have is the pain you're dealt with and you have to deal with it.

But studies have now shown that by becoming aware of that region and your emotional response to it, you can actually change your emotional response because anxiety and pain pathways in the brain are actually interconnected.

So when you reduce anxiety, you reduce the experience of that pain because you are instead of just experiencing the pain, you are directing your attention toward it.

Now, a lot of these mindsets do have overlapping elements, right? Because part of what I'm telling you about is

that you're being more mindful of the pain rather than saying, I am pain, but you are saying, I'm going to observe that pain and you introduce some element of mindfulness into it.

The other, more direct way in which a body awareness can change longevity is if we intuit what is going on in our bodies, we are more likely to make changes to to move ourselves in the directions of health.

And so people who are not body obsessed, because if your body obsessed, it can make you really paranoid and lead to extremes like anorexia. So your body obsessed is not what I would recommend.

In fact, I often when I'm speaking to people who are looking at their heart rate variability in number of steps, you do it within reason. Because if you're if you're obsessed, it's not going to help.

Body awareness actually allows you to then work on that particular region. And it helps you understand that your body is very connected. So an example of this would be I was working with a facial therapist once, and he drew my attention to something which I did not believe in the moment.

And I was I went up and looked up the medical literature and I was like, wow, this is true. One of the things he said to me was, do you know where most temporal mandibular problems come from?

You know, in the jaw? And I said, I said, I mean, it depends. Could be local, it could be distant. He said, no, there's a whole solid literature showing that abnormalities with foot posture are actually connected to your temperament joints.

And I thought the foot is he said, yeah, there's a fashion plane that actually connects the foot to the jaw. So those are just two examples where your health span is affected because you're not just attending locally to that problem.

You know, if you know that fact and the next time your jaw hurts, you will say, let me go to someone who can help. Help me relieve the pain in my foot.

So, so that is one of those mindsets where awareness can change your emotional reaction to something, but it can also help you make connections in counterintuitive parts of your body.

Okay, so example from my end, as I am somebody who for the last five years has experienced chronic pain in my for my right shoulder down to, you know, basically my arm because I have three cervical disc herniation from a trauma.

And I would agree with you that when you identify the like, when you're so focused on the pain, it is very challenging because I think many people who are watching this right now is like, oh yeah, I'm always in pain of that lower back pain.

I have chronic pain and all this. But creating that self awareness around it and almost like de-identified that, okay, the pain is there, but how can I in a way take my like for me?

Also, it was changing my mind to alleviate the pain. Now that doesn't mean my pain is disappeared. I still have it occasionally.

Somatic Awareness and Body Signals

You know, if I don't have like a proper body pillow to sleep in and, you know, this kind of stuff, but changing the mind of how I responded to the pain made a huge, huge difference.

You know, like so I would agree with that. So self-awareness, somatic awareness okay, let's pick another one I'm curious okay. Confidence. Confidence is interesting because the more and more that you know in your patient world, because you deal a lot with mental health, my patient world, I deal with a lot of chronic diseases.

And and I know somebody confidence level will influence their experience with the disease but also their outcome with the disease. So how can we explain, you know, when people are thinking of confidence like they might be thinking of like, you know, in high school I was never confident I wasn't the person who was outgoing.

But I think what you're going to say is a little bit more deeper than that, a little bit more scientific than that. So let's talk a little bit more about confidence.

Well, confidence can be just a really understand the importance of confidence. It's often contrasted with with extreme uncertainty. Right. And extreme uncertainty is often associated with anxiety.

Now our brains are not wired to process uncertainty accurately. So if you there was a study done by police and colleagues that actually looked at people who were in an uncertain state and people who were in a certain who were in a normal state, the people who were in an uncertain state three quarters of the time, 75% of the time they missed, predicted when something bad was going to happen.

So rather than telling themselves, I don't know what's happening, they said something bad is going to happen because uncertainty activates the anterior cingulate cortex, the conflict detector in the brain.

You can also activate the insula and suddenly your self construct becomes I'm in danger. Now, if you are in a state of chronic hyper arousal, or you have, you know, ongoing anxiety that disrupts your confidence, we now know that anxiety is connected to many diseases.

It's connected to arrhythmias. It's connected to cardiac disease. It's connected to it can be connected to thyroid disease. So the number of medical conditions where having a greater degree, having too much anxiety can actually sort of worsen that, that that particular disease.

A good example is, you know, when people I remember when when we first went through late, we were sort of thinking, I wonder what would be most reimbursable, like, would it be for PTSD or would it be for.

And most insurance companies said no pre and post cardiac surgery because people with higher levels of anxiety before they go, before they have cardiac surgery, stay in the hospital for much longer and they have much worse outcomes.

So when you're thinking about feeling states, you might feel that they live in a different world because of the way it's been marketed to you. And, you know, it's like, well, no, you don't feel too much like feelings are not really important.

It's important to just go through your day paying attention to one thing after another. Well, Pure Marty and his colleagues at the Paris Psychosomatic Institute actually found that there was an epidemic of what they called essential depression.

And in that instance, they weren't talking about necessary depression. They were talking about essential, as in primary. And what they found was that people who many people were presenting not with classic major depression like, we know, you know, you have problems sleeping or feeling suicidal.

They just lack vitality. And if I look at the world right now, I think there's a significant prevalence of essential depression where people lack vitality.

And what they found was that when you lack vitality, those people are overly operational. They're all about to do lists all about, you know, so they have a kind of false confidence in that instance.

And they're not connecting with the complexity of their emotions. You know, most of us, if we were really honest about we're feeling like I'm always taken off guard when someone says to me, how are you doing? I'm like, I don't know.

I have like billions of cells in my the part of me is like happy, part of me is anxious, part of me is sad. Part of you doesn't care. I gotta get stuff done, you know?

But if we were really honest about what we're feeling, we have very complex brings. A lot of people try to put out false confidence. And that's not the answer to confidence.

It's the very first thing I say to people is, if you want to disrupt this connection between anxiety on its own, being connected to cardiac disease or to health span, all being connected to exacerbate stress, which has a lot of evidence showing its connections to chronic inflammation.

The first thing to do is to reframe anxiety in your head. It's a reframe not just anxiety, but to reframe uncertainty. So rather than saying, oh my God, I don't know what's going to happen next, the world feels so uncertain.

And then saying something disastrous that's going to happen. Say my brain exaggerates three quarters of the time. It's going to tell me a disaster story that doesn't exist.

So let me just use self-talk, because self-talk can actually improve your your level of confidence and it can decrease your uncertainty. Now, Ethan Cross and his colleagues have actually found that if you're trying to pump yourself up because you're not confident, one thing that's better to do is to speak to yourself by name and speak in the third person.

So a lot of people in there trying to get pumped up, they say, I'm going to crush this. Let's say you're going to give a talk. We're going to a board meeting.

Well, it's far more effective if I was saying it for me to say, you're going to crush that, because if you're feeling anxious and you say, I'm going to crush that, your brain is like, yeah, whatever, you're not crushing anything.

But if I say 3D, you're going to crush that. It actually separates out the anxious part of me from the part of me that can crush that. And so those are two simple ways in which, firstly, name the feeling of affect.

Labeling is a super important technique, which is sort of naming the feeling. It can actually decrease the activation. And in addition to that, naming the feeling, reframing the uncertainty, saying there's no disaster.

Uncertainty just means I don't know. And speaking to yourself by name and in the third person can actually improve your state of uncertainty and anxiety and eventually your health span as well.

Confidence, Uncertainty, and Anxiety

I would recommend, if you're wondering about this, just look up, you know, centenarians online. Look at a video of them. The one thing you'll see is that there's a certain level of acceptance of life that they've had.

They been through very difficult times. You know, we've been through major wars, they've been through major illnesses, loss of loved ones. But their whole thing is, you know, and I'm in sync with life to a certain extent, even though that's not classical meditation or classical mindfulness.

Elizabeth Blackburn, on her colleagues, found that being mindful, present in that way can actually protect the ends of genes called telomeres. So if we think of genes like shoelaces, shoelaces have the little plastic part at the end.

As we get older, that part shortens and eventually we have disease and death. But being mindful rather than just taken away with one's anxiety can actually protect that part of the genes and prevent the onset of disease and promote health span as well.

Okay, I'm all about protecting the telomeres. I totally agree with you there. You just reminded me of a few things on this topic. So for a centenarians that have gone through, you know, all these life experiences and how they've responded to them, I just think back to like when I was in medical school, I got to experience and watch the

Yugoslav war, you know, like I would go to school with like tanker trucks and like, you know, refugees on like, like it was insanity.

I then in residency got to experience. I was working in a hospital in, in Brooklyn where I was on the surgery rotation and early in the morning on that rotation when I was doing rounds, I got to witness the second tower, twin tower get hit.

Oh my God. And I experienced my first code orange, where we had to evacuate the hospital because we were expecting all these people to come in and we needed beds for them and spending the whole night cleaning glass shards and all this.

And so, you know, I replay these experiences as like, okay, what is this? Like, what is this teaching me about? You know, when we do have that uncertainty in the world, because for the longest time, I personally didn't understand anxiety.

And when I work with patients and they tell me that they're so anxious about this, and I really wanted to understand because I didn't experience anxiety, I just okay, I see things happen and I process them.

But I've been trying to understand where does this anxiety stem from in individuals? Because I can see the relationship with anxiety slash uncertainty and confidence.

And and I know myself, I'm pretty confident when it comes to certain things, like because if I don't have an answer, I will go find an answer. That's how I build my confidence, right?

But since the opposite of confidence is uncertainty and anxiety, why is it that we see so much of this nowadays in the world? Like where is this all stemming from?

Because honestly, like, like every conversation I have and I'm like, but why? You know, like it's not true. It's like, you know, there's no truth behind it.

Yeah. So one simple it's a little oversimplified as an answer, but the amygdala is actually a part of the brain that processes all emotion. But in my book, Life Unlocked, I talk about the fact that fear jumps to the front of the line because it's it's a survival instinct.

If I'm in danger, I should make sure I protect myself. So one of the reasons that people, people do this is they just let their amygdala do its own thing where they're like, no, but I'm telling you, the world is terrible, and I'm telling you this disaster.

And my mind and I often say to people two things. One is your brain is not a trash can. So don't just throw whatever you feel like into it. It impacts your mind and it impacts your body.

But the second thing is you can pay and redirect your attention. You can redirect your attention to hopeful things. Now a lot of people will say, yeah, but that's just like lying because, you know, there's a lot of disaster in the world.

And they say, well, if you're trying to tell me that there's enough misery in the world for you to be miserable, I will never argue against that. Like there's more than enough misery to be miserable.

But the question is, how can you train your brain to be able to pay attention to things that are not miserable? Because there are amazing things that happen in the world, and having a sense of hope can actually truly influence how you move forward.

Because hope opens the door to possibility, and possibility is essentially entertaining a hypothesis and putting your energetic resources toward building something that you want, not something that you don't want.

Now, if you're thinking about, you know, how can hope be that powerful? It's just sort of like it's empty. But if you look at some of the earlier studies on placebo and many studies on placebo show that when you believe that something is going to work, it often does.

So, you know, one example of this is they gave people the same tube of paste, all this, a neutral paste. They labeled one little cane for pain relief.

They labeled the second one capsaicin, the active ingredient in Chile. And they labeled the third neutral. And people, when they got the lighter cave was the same neutral page.

They were like, oh, this is calming. And you look in their brains. And the reward centers were turned on. When they had the active ingredient of Chile, they were like, oh, this stings a little.

And you look in their brains and the pain centers are activated and nothing happens with the neutral pace. So what this tells us is what you expect is actually something that will change your brain.

A lot of research by Lisa Feldman has shown that, in fact, your experience of the world is based on the prediction formula that you are giving it. So if you tell your brain the horrible world, terrible things are happening, your brain would actively go in search of data to support that hypothesis.

So it will strengthen your hypothesis. You will see even more terrible things, and you will then feel like you're right in your judgment. But if you change the prediction algorithm, if you say, oh, I'm not going with this formula anymore, brain, from now on, my formula is going to be, I think this can be an amazing world, and I would like to create my reality.

Now, the term that I use for this, I've thought about this deeply with a colleague who passed recently, whose name is Jim Selman, and he and I defined this concept of existential confidence.

And existential confidence is different than this uncertainty thing. I was telling you what existential confidence is, knowing that this tremendous uncertainty.

But your commitments determine your reality. Reality does not determine your commitments. So with most people, they're just like, it's a horrible world and I'm reacting to this world.

But if you stop being a reactor for a minute and you say, actually, I can create my reality now for different people, the different extends to which they can create their reality.

They may not have the resources they need, but you can create a reality based on changing your brain's prediction algorithm. So one of the things I would say is that I think that working with the brain in default is what is causing this ongoing anxiety.

Take a simple example of how powerful feelings can be. Alicia Crumbs study. Many, many years ago, she gave the same number of calories in a milkshake to two groups of people, and she told one group it was double the amount of calories.

Well, that group stopped having the milkshake sooner because they thought they were fuller. And when you look at the hunger hormone levels, they actually dropped.

So your expectations and beliefs can change your hormones and change your brain. And so what I recommend to people is if you're finding yourself in a darker place in life, if you're finding yourself, you know, this is a crazy world.

Resilience and Anti-Fragility

I don't know how to just set aside one hour a week and say, in this hour I am going to be clear about the reality

one reality that I want to create. You know, a good example of this was Lady Gaga.

Lady Gaga gave a talk at Yale where she said she reached a point in her career which was completely burnt out, and she was like, I didn't want to sing anything that's crazy.

Like, you're famous. You have a beautiful voice. She said, well, I just realized I was saying yes to too many things, I didn't. I don't like perfumes, but I had to advertise perfumes.

I spent all my days making money for other people, and I was like, I'm going to start saying no. And the moment I started to say no, I would be able to go home, look at myself in the mirror, and I said, you, I can sleep with any time because you have integrity.

You are moving in the direction of what it is you want. And so even if we don't have the same privileges that Lady Gaga might have, we can change. They might.

There's got to be one thing in your life you can say no to, to allow yourself to become hopeful. And I think in that one concrete way you can do this is at Honor's dot com.

I have a free ideal Self guide, and Richard and his colleagues have found that people are much more likely to reach their goals if they live according.

If they have an ideal self that becomes their compass, they're like, I want to look like this. I want to make this much money. Once, once this ideal self becomes your compass, it's much more effective than putting out fires.

A lot of people feel like, oh, I just got to get up on a Monday morning. And, you know, I'm a problem solving, a problem solving. You can be a problem solver.

And sometimes we have to be. But how often are we actually taking the opportunity to honor our ideal selves? And in this guide you'll see that when you download it, you can actually start realizing that you can live a life that's closer to your own value system, and having that sense of value and feeling like you're being honest with yourself is what will allow you to stop seeing the world in this entirely negative way.

Now, no one's asking you to lie and say, you know, I love everything that's going on in the world, and everybody's happy every day, all the time. Just ask yourself, is there one more thing that I could do to move closer to my ideal self?

And is there one little way in which my commitments can determine my reality rather than just reacting to life? Okay, all right, I'm going to do one more.

I'm still not getting back to my question because I like this. I think this is really helpful. Let's talk about the resilient mindset. And what does the science say about that.

And how do you define that exactly. Because I know how I define resilience. So I would love to hear from you. What can people think about when they have a resilient mindset.

So resilience is the ability to recover from adversity. And when you have a resilient mindset you are not anxiety slave. You recognize something horrible happened, but you figure out a way to actually recover from that adversity.

So one technique that I that I often teach and outline this in my book, Life Watch as well, is a mnemonic called circa C. I see a. And there are five things that you can do to improve your resilience by decreasing amygdala activation.

So the first thing is chunking. How do I break things down into digestible and manageable portions? You get up on a Monday, you don't just open your email and say, oh my God, I'm freaking out.

You ask yourself, what do I need to get done this week? And then you go to how can I ruthlessly prioritize? Like for most people, we can't get everything done in a day.

But what do I have to get done? And the third, which we often forget is delegation. But those three ways are ways that you can chunk the I in in circle is for ignore mental chatter and ignore mental chatter is essentially mindfulness.

So how do I sit in a chair for five minutes a day? Pay attention to my breath and I just pay attention to breathing in and out. And if my mind wanders, slowly bring it back to my breath again.

The R is reality check. It's the type of self-talk which basically says this too shall pass you. You have those days and you're like, oh my God, I cannot believe I did this.

And then you're like, okay, I need to get over it because they need to move on. If you look at excellent sportspeople. They often say that they have their amazing and deliberate forgetting.

If they lose, they don't carry it on and on and on with them. They're like, what did I learn from that loss? How do I move to the next thing? Then the second C is control check, which is it's like the Serenity prayer.

What am I in control of? What am I not in control? Like let's say you have ten attentional units in your brain. Just for argument's sake, if you get up in your field of seven of them with the morning news, you've only got three more attention units to live your life the rest of the day.

So why not tell yourself, do I really have to be that freaked out about a war in a place where I'm going to be doing nothing about that? Or should I rather pay attention to what I can control?

And then the last A is attention shift, which is how do I shift my attention to solving whatever problems at hand rather than only paying attention to the negative?

So chunking ignore mental chatter, reality check, control check, and attention shift are five ways that you can build resilience in your life. Now, studies show that people even in the 90s, when they are more resilient, they are more likely to become centenarians than people who are not.

Now, some people would say, you know, I've had all these disasters happen to me. It's not about denying the disaster.

Gut-Brain Connection and Whole-Body Intelligence

It's about giving yourself the ability to understand that you are a creator in the world, and that even in the presence of disaster, you can create. Now, an upstream version of of resilience is a concept called anti fragility.

An anti fragility is not just recovering from adversity, it's thriving in it. You know I used to feel a little bit like this when I used to first go to the emergency room when I was in an emergency room rotation I would be like, oh God, you do all these lumbar punches, it's going to be.

And then I was like, I kind of like like the more chaotic it became, the more I felt like I could thrive in whatever that environment was. And I realized I had leveraged the initial anxiety to use it as fuel to just feel more organized.

Because for some people, when you're in that amount of chaos, you can actually really thrive. You know, the immune system sort of works like that, right?

The immune system needs provocations to become stronger. So that's a that's a requirement for medical doctors to. All right. We're always thrown into some sort of chaos.

Yeah, absolutely. So so I think, you know, I think to the extent that we don't have to deny when adversity occurs, but we can remember that we can recover from that.

In fact, post-traumatic growth is much more common than post-traumatic stress disorder. And that's because people recognize that there are ways in which they can bring their lives together again.

Okay. All right. Now I'm going to get back to my questions that I know you you have quite a few more in there, but I know people can reach out to you and learn more about that.

But let's get back to some of these questions. So you have said that gut health is a naive idea if you strip it away from brain health. And that's a pretty bold statement.

So what do you mean? And what is the gut actually doing that requires the brain to be part of the picture? Well, so I think, you know, gut brain interactions have become part recently.

People are like, oh, yeah, I realize that that's guts connected to the brain because because we know that, you know, the vagus nerve is one way in which they are connected and signals are transported in both directions.

However, the reason I think it's a naive state is if you think about how we were we all came to be, there's a permanent of them. They form a zygote as a fertilized egg.

It's all one. And then it starts to differentiate into different things. Now the first thing we want to know is that we want to remember. Dennis Noble has pointed this out.

Noble is a physiologist at Oxford who has actually he made the first mathematical model of a heart cell. And he said, what's really striking is that the heart begins to beat before the brain is fully developed.

It's as if the body has some innate intelligence telling it, you know, nutrients can no longer just go across a membrane. They've got to be pumped by something.

So all of a sudden you're like, oh, so there's intrinsic intelligence. And I was like, yeah. So the reason and the other thing that he says is that there's no privileged level of causation.

He says the genes instruct the cells as much as the cells instruct the genes, and the cells instruct the organs as much as the organs instruct the cells.

And the organs are instructed by the exposition or the outer reality. And we affect our reality, and other reality affects us. So there are two way levels of causation all the way along to separate out the guts and the brain.

I think that's an epic phenomenon of modern specialization, the idea that there should be a specialist for the gut. Now, of course, there's some value to that.

People who know a lot about one organ, you know, there are lots of advantages to that, but I can tell you that I never see I, I kind of don't believe in mental health.

I think it's there's no such thing. There's nothing. I can't move my right foot. I'm glad you're saying that because you're trained as a psychiatrist to say that.

But I myself have believed that for a long time. Like I told you, anxiety. I'm like, I don't understand. Like, what is this process that you're saying?

Because it's. Yeah. Continue, please. So the reason I don't believe it though, is that I think that to separate out the mental from the physical is just it makes.

No, it makes no sense even at a psychosomatic level. So remember I mentioned at this parapsychology institute, they found that people who are overly operational have many more physical problems and many more cosmetic surgeries as well.

And the way they frame it, there's a beautiful paper that looks at Wilfrid Beyond's theories and talks about the institute's work. And what they found was that if you have an emotion that's unprocessed and if you are not prone to imagination and fantasy, that suppressed emotion has to go somewhere.

And in their own words, the body takes part in the conversation. And, and it's a it's a pretty profound way of, of explaining how, you know, there have been studies looking at emotional suppression and mortality, showing that over 15 years, people who suppress more emotions are much more likely to die sooner.

And it's a because. So so what we call an emotion is a brain activation that impacts any way that it can reach in the body. But I personally had an anecdotal experience recently where I had a killing issue that wasn't really going away, but it was odd it would get better when I played tennis and would get better when I worked outside.

I was like, well, that's good, but why is it still there? And to make a long story short, I was with a friend in London. I don't know where this came from, but remembering my mother's death, because we were very close and I thought I had processed it and I just I burst out crying in the middle of this restaurant and thank God it was him because he, he, he understood.

I didn't want to be comforted. And like, I just wanted to do people feel whatever I was feeling in a way that I've made the association, that Achilles thing went away and I was like, oh my God, was that like weird?

Like I thought I was doing all the right things to process my emotion. But there was still something knocking in my head saying, hey, this is not fully processed and I'm not sure it could ever be fully processed, but what it does make me do is in addition to paying attention to physical things, if I have a physical ailment, I pay attention to emotional things too.

So going back to the gut, the gut also has its own sense of intelligence, right? It's not that they often call it the second brain. It has a nervous system.

The nervous system is it often responds to nutrients. Right. It's not like waiting for the brain to tell it how to respond to the nutrients. So it has its own intelligence.

And I think if we say, well, it has its own intelligence, number one, but number two, that it has nothing to do with emotions. Well, just look at the literature on irritable bowel syndrome and stress and anxiety.

It there's a very strong connection. You know, if you look even if you look at inflammatory bowel disease, very strong connection with stress and anxiety.

So I always think it's important to pay attention to a particular area. But it's also important to ask what is going on in my brain that this is going on in my Achilles, what is going on in my brain that my stomach feels a little funny, what is going on in my brain that I'm processing pain in a particular way.

So, you know, to summarize that, I agree with Dennis Noble that there's no privileged level of causation. I believe that individual organ systems have their own intelligence, like the immune system, the gut and the brain.

But I also believe that there is a constant conversation going on within our bodies and between our bodies and the environment. Yeah, it's an entire ecosystem, as I call it, and it is constantly communicating and messages are coming from all different directions.

So really important, the input you put in to it.

Diet, Expectations, and Individual Response

So let's let's look at one of the inputs that you also mentioned is why does it like if somebody has the same diet, why does it work the same way for a person.

What's actually going on. And I think maybe I'm not sure if it's crumbs work where it's like that mindset psychology research that's influencing the response.

But how can you explain to us what the what's happening in in our head is influencing like person A and person B eat the same diet? Well, so so I think it's now widely known that that human physiology is pretty individual, right.

Which is why a lot of science has moved from population studies to what we call n of one studies, where we look within individuals to see, for me what is best, because everybody metabolizes emotion differently.

Everyone metabolizes food differently. Everyone responds to stress differently. So if you just take one concept like a cortisol belly, people talk about that in a high stress individual.

If you take two people exact same diet, but in the high stress individual, there's like an excessive production of cortisol, which is, you know, it's a little bit too gross. Speak about it this way.

There was a study that just came out a few months ago showing that cortisol is better understood through applying AI and machine learning through identifying a pattern.

So it's not like high cortisol or low cortisol. We're talking about a specific a stress induced pattern. When it is secreted in the stress induced way it is changing.

The metabolism of food is changing, the is changing weather, glucose is being absorbed or not. And so I think for every individual it's important to pay attention to the population studies.

But it's important to realize that you are your own lab, that you can actually figure out what you think you can eat, that can that can change how you operate.

I think an example from my own life was for a while I was like, well, if I put on a little bit more weight, I'm just going to stop eating carbs for a week and I'll be fine.

And it worked consistently, you know? But then I had to talk with my trainer and he was like, like, I mean, you know, you really don't think the carbohydrates an important part of your diet.

And I was like, well, not only are they important, but I love rice roti buster. I'm not gonna not eat those things. They said, well, you know, honestly, I think I would recommend you do is I would recommend you increase your protein and I would recommend that you try on small in small bouts of increasing carbohydrate.

But also think about how you want to change your exercise. And so I think in the process of six months I found that by within myself, I made my own body a lab and I was like, wow, just kind of cool.

Like I, I had this presupposition that carbs were always going to make me gain weight. Now I can maintain the same weight if I eat more protein, and I exercise more because the cards are doing something useful in my body.

So I think that that the more we live intuitively, I am a big believer in intuitive eating. For example, you know, I recognize that for some people there's just like no self-control.

So they're like, I have no, I am like that sometimes. But but I think if you can say, yeah, I don't I don't think, I mean, I have that today. I'm not going to have dessert today because I think I'll feel better if I have this or, you know, I'm, I have this singularly annoying sort of habit of being able to eat two fries so I can order a whole lot of fries and then have two in my head.

I'm not thinking this is the healthiest thing in the world. I'm thinking to myself, this is an indulgence which I need to understand is an indulgence and not as a frequent phenomenon.

So I think that that, as you referenced, crumbs, work on what you believe can change what's happening. The

stress is a great example of something that impacts your brain and also impacts your gut.

And and I think the more we recognize that and also there's a lot of data to show that dieting itself is pretty useless in terms of like sticking to it.

You know, most diets fail. Maybe you wouldn't think that if you just got into Instagram's algorithm, you saw like 10,000 people with six packs and you'd be like, oh my God, I must be the only person in the world without a six pack.

And then you're like, no, probably the people without six packs are not in my algorithm feed. For some reason, I might have looked at two exercise videos and all of a sudden Instagram things.

I want to look at that. So I, you know, I think that, I think that what's going on in our brains can change our weight. Also, the extent to which you believe you can change matters.

You know, there's Ellen Langer's famous counterclockwise study. She took 70 year old men and had them behave as if they were 20 years younger. So they were watching movies that were from 20 years ago.

They were eating food at the age 20 years ago. They fully immerse themselves in a different mindset. And when they immerse themselves in a different mindset, they had stronger vision, stronger hearing and stronger muscle strength.

What we think I really think should not be underestimated, you know, and I don't think it's the only thing in the world I think it matters. Even if you're eating high caloric foods and fast foods constantly, and you're hopeful, you're still probably going to not go in the right direction with your health.

But to know that there are little tweaks that you can make to your mindset to change how your diets impact you, I think makes a big difference. I did see a research supporting this bias of mine, but I always feel that because I grew up in a home where no matter what conflict was happening in the home, my mother was insistent that eating time was happy time, usually to leave everything behind.

And everybody. There's no fighting, and it actually changes the way you digest your food. And it does it it and it changes. And and the healthful effects of that I think are very different than like sometimes you see people in their like, always angry and they're always attacking their food.

And I'm always like, is that like, I know they're eating the perfect diet. There's no way that's going to be the same as someone who's eating an identical thing, but is actually giving themselves the pleasure of enjoying that experience.

Mindful eating makes a big difference. All right. Last question. And I want it to be very concrete. So for some someone listening right now who has done all the right, you know, gut health things and still doesn't feel well, what is the first psychological or mindset shift you would tell them to make starting today?

And I want to be very, very specific.

Unfocused Time and Practical Takeaways

Like if they just had to leave listening to this conversation, that they can start right now. Well, my last question will doodle try unlock the power of the unfocused mind.

And it's about a network in the brain called the default mode network. And the default mode network turns off when you focus and it turns on when you're unfocused.

Most people are living their days just being focused. Focus, focus. Fatigue. That's it. They don't have regular unfocused during the day in that book.

When I wrote it, I wrote it because there were lots of creative advantages to that, and there were lots of advantages in terms of how the brain was maintaining its energy.

More recently, when we look at the default mode network, it is the one network in the brain. There is always off when this inflammation, cardiac disease it's associated with not regulating that network is associated with many, many diseases.

So I would say the very first and it just happens to be the self network in the brain as well. So what I would say to people is the first thing is build regular periods of unfocused into your day.

If you ask, well, how you could either build some kind of brisk walking regimen into your day where you're just letting your mind flow, or you can do what is called positive.

So in terms of what people can do, they can actually build periods of unfocused by using positive constructive daydreaming. And positive. Constructive daydreaming is a type of daydreaming that allows where the first thing you do.

It's not like sitting at your desk and daydreaming or thinking about your priority nights indiscretions. You have to be doing something low key if you know how to knit, knitting, gardening, or walking.

Then, rather than paying attention to what's outside of you, you let your mind wander into something wishful and positive, like lying on a yacht or running through the woods with your dog.

And you just do that for like 15 or 20 minutes. What people, what studies have shown is that it will activate this default mode network, and it will also I think it will reduce burnout.

It will allow you to be more creative in your approaches to health, and it will allow you, who cannot actually truly add 115 minute period of unfocused in your day.

So I would strongly recommend that. I think the second thing I would recommend is try out circuit either one or all of the steps, because I think that that has a lot of research behind it and research behind it that says, this is how you can change your brain.

Other things are things like meditation. But I think you said one thing. So I think unfocused in the day is probably the first thing I would start with.

Perfect. All right. So doctor, thank you so much. This has been a genuinely expansive interview in every sense. The idea that our beliefs and emotional state are literally shaping the terrain of our gut, our immunity and our aging.

And that's not a metaphor, right? This is biology that we're talking about. And you made that very real today. So thank you so much for being here. Now, if people want to learn more about you, to explore your books, to connect and learn from you.

Where would be the best places that they can reach out to you? So if you go to my website, which is drsrinipillay.com. I'm also at NBGcorporate.com. I post pretty regularly on Instagram at Doctor Srini Pillay, and it's the same handle for LinkedIn and meta as well, which is that doctor swimming pool.

And to check out my books Tinker, dabble, doodle Try and Life Unlocked and Your Brain in Business. You can find these on Amazon or Barnes and Noble. And I would love it if you join my knowledge.com community two.

And if you if you join drsrinipillay.ccom, I actually have a weekly newsletter that's connected to psychogenic longevity and poetry and provocative thoughts that I would love for people to sign up to.

Amazing. So the key takeaway here is your gut and your mind are not in different rooms. They are in the same conversation, and you have more influence over that conversation than you think.

And so stay tuned for our next session, our next interviewee. But for now we are going to be signing off and we'll see you in the next episode.