Summit Introduction and Guest Background

Welcome everyone to the Gut Health and Longevity Summit. I am so glad you're here, and I want you to take a deep breath right now, because what you're about to hear over these sessions could genuinely change the way you think about your health, your food, and your future.

Nutrition advice is everywhere right now, and most of it contradicts the post right before it. My next conversation is with someone who has built his career on cutting through that noise.

Exactly. Separating what the research actually shows from what simply gets the most clicks. If you have ever felt confused by conflicting headlines about protein, seed, oil, soy, this session is definitely for you.

My next guest has built his career doing something rare in the wellness space. He actually checks the research before he opens his mouth. In an era where nutrition advice is decided by whoever posts the most confidently.

That should not be a differentiator, but it is. Doctor Matthew Nagra is a natural Catholic doctor based in Vancouver, holding a plant based nutrition certification from Cornell University and Te Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies, and a background in microbiology.

He practices at to numb Integrated Health. I know I'm saying that wrong, where he uses evidence based plant forward nutrition alongside physical therapies to help patients prevent and recover from chronic illness.

He has contributed to Springer Nature's Handbook of Public Health Nutrition and serves as a nutrition science advisor for the documentary The Game Changers two.

He is a recent guest across the plant based podcast circuit, including The Proof with Simon Hill, The Ritual podcast, and the Plant Strong Podcast, known specifically for debunking viral nutrition myths with data rather than ideology.

Doctor Matthew Nagra welcome. I have a feeling this conversation is going to clear up a lot of confusion for people. I'm hoping so, and thanks for the introduction.

Yeah it's great. All right. So let's start with the first question. Big picture. When someone asks you point blank why they should even consider eating more plants, what does the actual evidence say for their heart for how long they live for?

Basically, the evidence that you talk about every day. Well, I think of where to boil down nutrition to like a single component or class of components, which is pretty reduction, as I don't tend to do that. But if we were to do that, I think the strongest argument we can make is for fiber.

And where do you find fiber in whole or minimally processed plant foods, and in virtually all of the whole or mentally processed plant foods? And so that would be a way to just up your fiber intake is by focusing more on plants and swapping out some of those animal foods for plants.

Now, in addition to that, if we're to go to, say, specific food groups, one of the biggest, most powerful swaps that people can make is swapping out animal protein for plant protein, especially when the animal protein is meat and in particular, red or processed meats.

And so, you know, fiber is kind of big, big picture. But if we want to get more specific, swapping out a few servings of meat per week for plant based alternatives like legumes, beans, chickpeas, lentils, etc., as well as tofu and other soil products can make a meaningfully meaningful difference in your long term health outcomes.

Yeah, so I know this might be hard for some people to hear because we see it all over. Eat more protein. Eat more animal protein.

Why More Plants Support Health and Longevity

And the research clearly points to specifically that red a meat and processed meats are linked with certain chronic diseases. I know myself as a pathologist who has looked at plenty of cancer under the microscope, including colorectal cancers, amongst way too many others.

And then really looking at people's diets. It's, you know, there is a clear link because there's compounds in there. Is there certain compounds that are doing this, or is it that the meat in general?

Well, food is a package deal. So you have to consider like what it does in context. But there are a few specific components of meats, again, particularly red meats that we can point to as very plausible mechanisms for why we see higher risk of cardiovascular disease, certain cancers and so on for one esteem.

Iron. So red meats very rich in him iron and in the environment that meets provide that he Meyer may have carcinogenic effects. It may impair insulin resistance or insulin sensitivity.

Rather it may promote atherosclerosis through a variety of mechanisms. We also have the saturated fat that is one of the components, at least for heart disease, that is most strongly linked.

And that's because it drives up your LDL cholesterol levels. And that can later on, you know, develop into plaque once it builds up. We also have what you're missing with red meat.

So if you're looking at consuming things like red meats or processed meats in place of plant protein sources, you're getting less fiber. You're not getting those phytochemicals which have beneficial effects.

And so I don't like looking at a specific food or individual foods in isolation. You have to sort of consider what are you eating them in place of. Because if you're eating things like like meats in place of donuts, well, maybe it's not a huge, you know, shift one way or another, but maybe it's even better.

But if you're consuming the meats in place of your beans or your tofu or what have you. Well, then you're doing yourself a disservice if you're consuming those regularly.

Yeah, absolutely. So where did you. Where do you find that there is a strongest human data when it comes to the eating plants for longevity. Is there a certain study that we can kind of point to.

And what does it say. Well, for for longevity you're kind of talking about total mortality. And one of the issues there is that a lot of the studies aren't designed with that outcome in mind.

So when you're looking at total number of deaths, you need a lot of statistical power to pick up on that. What we do have our studies looking at specific causes of death, like cardiovascular disease, like cancers.

And in those cases, we have multiple meta analyzes of prospective cohort studies now including actually an umbrella review that was published on plant based diets and cardiovascular disease recently by Matthew Landry and colleagues.

With those, we see lower risk of cardiovascular disease, lower risks, lower risk of cancer incidents, which are the two leading killers. And so that would likely down the road lead to a lower risk of total mortality.

The problem is we don't have a lot of studies on, say, vegans specifically versus mediators. If we're looking at that stark contrast, we do have, though, a lot of research on plant forward diets.

So shifting towards more plants and having a lower risk of total mortality. And whether that's looking at the healthy

plant based diet index or just vegetarian diets as a whole, which includes vegan and vegetarian diets, in those cases we do see lower risk of mortality.

So lower risk of dying during the course of these studies because there's just more people. You can take a study like the Adventist Health Study with several tens of thousands of people, but only a few thousand of them are vegans, whereas the vast majority are meat eaters or vegetarians.

And so you just don't have enough of the vegans to really track that particular outcome with precision. But overall, the research points to more plants equals lower mortality.

Why Nutrition Misinformation Spreads Online

Yes, yes, that is that we can say pretty confidently, especially if we're considering a healthy plant based diet where you're focusing more on those fruits, veggies, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds, the whole foods plant based diet.

Okay, so then my question would be you spend a huge amount of your time correcting nutrition claims online. Before we get into the specific myths. Why do you feel there are there is so much bad information out there in the first place.

And what's actually driving that confusion? So I mean, there's a few reasons for one. People like what they like. You know, a lot of people don't necessarily want to make huge dietary changes.

And and so if you can sort of justify what you're currently doing, I think that goes a long way. So there are some biases there. There's of course some some like industry influence as well as far as like campaigns to bash plant based products and things like that, that, that we actually have good evidence of.

Now that that has happened. But I'm actually reading a book right now called The Chaos Machine. I believe that authors Max Fisher, who's an investigative journalist and I'm about a third of the way through, and so far it's really, really good.

And it just highlights how social media works and how it sort of promotes misinformation. And it gave some really good examples. So obviously, what takes off on social media, what gets promoted to people is driven by their algorithms, which are invisible.

But we can make sort of assumptions as to how certain parts work. And a part of it is the engagement that a post gets, or whether a certain post drives somebody to engage with it and then look further and deeper and deeper, deeper, spending as much time as possible on the app.

And so when you look at, let's say, somebody, some carnivore saying that fruits and veggies are toxic and actually you shouldn't be consuming broccoli because of this, you know, sulforaphane is going to harm you or some ridiculous notion like that, that for somebody who is interested in that or maybe has a bias towards that, that's going to draw them in, they're going to look through the comments there, then going to look at other posts that are similar, and then maybe that'll drive to them, drive them to like the plant paradox, where they're saying all of a sudden beans are toxic to like, oh no, we have to stay away from it.

And then it turns into this spiral and they spend so much time going down these rabbit holes. Now picture on the other side. Picture that you're one of actually the majority of people in society who thinks that fruits and veggies are healthy for you because that's been told to us forever.

Your doctor tells you that your dietitian, if you see one, tells you that, and they see a post suggesting that, hey, fruits and veggies are healthy, they're not going to bat an eye swipe move on to the next thing because that's just not that interesting.

Even if they saw a post of someone saying vegetables are toxic, they're probably thinking, oh, that's ridiculous,

I'm going to move on. And so by luring in those people who are prone to the misinformation, it garners more engagement on those posts, which then promotes that post to more people.

So more people see it and then it turns into the cycle. And so that is why it's so hard to correct the misinformation, because the correction tends to get a fraction of the traction that the misinformation did in the first place, because people just aren't as interested and the people who would be interested, they might read it and say, okay, cool and move on.

They aren't going to go down the rabbit hole. Well, from from a physician perspective, what you kind of just reminded me of is a I don't think it's an equivalent comparable, but it's like, okay, if you you have a rash and you keep itching it and the rash keeps getting harder and harder, like in the sense of like it won't go away because you're kind of aggravating it more.

Right. So this is kind of this like pigeonhole that you go down when you keep clicking on it and, and it keeps popping up just like the rash keeps popping up on you because you have you haven't kind of looked into the details of it.

So let's talk about some of the more common myths. And there's a few specific ones that I want to address because I think I see them day in, day out. I get asked them in my clinic.

I still see misinformation around them out. So the first one I want to talk about is seed oils and seed oil causing inflammation, and how on social media they're quietly making everyone sick.

True or false? And what does the literature actually say? Yeah. So the inflammation claim is one of the most prominent. I feel like I hear it a little bit less now because it has been kind of debunked to death at this point, but but it still does, you know.

Come on, come on. Here or there. But basically the idea is that the omega six fatty in seed oils. So these are all like corn, canola, safflower, sunflower, soybean.

It's the omega six fatty linoleic acid could theoretically be converted into another type of omega six called arachidonic acid, which could theoretically, in certain cases be pro-inflammatory.

So there's a lot of you know, it could it may you know, we don't really know for sure. It depends on the context, but we kind of assume where a lot of people assume that a leads to be leads to see leads to D.

And so that's called mechanistic speculation. We have these mechanisms laid out that could work. And we just kind of assume that they do. And then we say that they're inflammatory.

Well what researchers then do is they test that hypothesis. They actually do randomized controlled trials. And we have plenty of them at this point where they actually see.

Does consuming more of these lead to higher levels of inflammation. And over and over and over again we see that that doesn't happen. There are now multiple meta analyzes showing that actually if you up the amount of linoleic acid you consume, you don't produce more arachidonic acid, nor do you end up raising inflammatory markers.

So it just kind of falls on its face right there. Now, the last meta analysis was at least a handful of years ago. I can't remember the exact year, but I know they're actually working on a brand new one for this coming year.

I don't know exactly what it'll come out, but hey, if that all of a sudden shows pro-inflammatory effects, I'll change my tune on it.

Seed Oils, Inflammation, and Practical Use

But so far we have dozens of these trials and they have not shown anything of the sort. Yeah, I think about it from the perspective when I'm looking at my patients and we look at their pathways of their omega three and omega six breakdown and where it's getting stuck, I think part of it is also people aren't realizing there's cofactors in this pathway.

So if you have nutrient deficiencies, which I see both sides, both omnivores, carnivores and plant based can potentially have if they're not monitoring it, that it could potentially.

But that's an isolation of a seed oil where we're talking more like the saturated fat. Right. Because I would think saturated fats are going to increase your LDL.

I think there was a study that showed that the seed oil can lower LDL. There are several studies that show that that is a very, very consistent fine, especially if you're replacing saturated fats, like if you're having them instead of like butter or ghee or tallow or what have you. Yes.

So with that, should people be afraid of seed oil, should they be reducing seed like where's the practicality in this? Because just like we talked about like a food has phytonutrients in it.

It has carbohydrates in it. It has, you know, all these different flavonoids, all these different things boils the same thing. You're not just getting just omega six or just omega three.

There's like a combination. Foods don't live in isolation. So should people. What part of it should people be concerned about? Or is there like nothing to be concerned about?

I mean, the one reasonable concern I'd say people can have around just or isolated fats in general is the calorie density. So you're getting you're roughly 120, maybe a little bit more calories per tablespoon.

And so if you're just like cooking, you're just pouring it on, pouring it on. That can add up really quick. And that's not going to be great no matter which type of or fat you're using.

But if you're talking about cooking a stir fry and, you know, coating the pan or adding a bit of to your salad or something like that where the overall calorie density is still going to be very low, I don't see an issue with whatever sort of liquid plant you choose.

Now that could be olive oil, and I know that has a better reputation. If that makes someone feel more comfortable, go for it. No issues there, but also for like say, cost reasons or perhaps because you don't want it to have a flavor.

You want it to be a neutral oil. You choose to go with canola or sapphire or one of these other worlds. Excellent. Great options. I would just steer clear of using these solid fats too often, and those would be things like obviously the butter or the tallow and then even coconut oil, because that can be high and saturated fats and raise cholesterol as well.

Yeah, absolutely. You just reminded me. So my assistant, I had her preparing some of my meals for me because I in the beginning of the year, I was really busy, and I don't really use much oil in my cooking in general.

If anything, I might use a little bit of olive oil and she'd be going through like a bottle of olive oil a month and she'd be like, oh, hey, doctor B, we need another bottle.

And I'm like, okay, I'll get it next time I go grocery store. And I'm going, what is she doing? Right? And I like, I could have a bottle last me six months a year.

Like, I just don't use that much. And so then I went and got blood work done. And that was the only thing that changed, because I'm a Whole Foods plant based.

Except she was cooking my food with a little bit more oil. And I have consistently very, very low cholesterol, LDL

levels, great HDL, like all the levels, perfect.

There was a little push in the wrong direction. And I'm going I'm sitting here trying to figure out what it was. And it was that because that was the only dietary change.

So and I think the key that you said there it was, even though it was a healthy all the quantity of it that I mean, she was literally that person that was pouring it over the pan so anything wouldn't sick.

And for somebody who's really only having like maybe a teaspoon every couple of days or something like that, that's that was a big difference. So good things can be good, but too much of a good thing.

Not so much. So next one. And we've already had a big deep discussion on this. But I would I would like to hear it from the perspective of the myths we see online is plant protein is inferior to animal protein for building and maintaining muscle.

Now me and you both have, I'm sure, a lot of plant based friends who are vegan bodybuilders, actually, so we know that's not true. But let's talk about what's going on online, why there's some confusion.

I know there's certain influencers who have a very, very strong stance on this, and I honestly I would love to see their blood work. I really would, cause I don't believe it, you know? Yeah.

I mean, I think that's in large part driven by biases a lot of the time. A lot of the people I mean, if you think about the fitness community in general, it's very kind of pro animal protein way protein, that sort of thing.

And it always has been. And so, I mean, you can go back to like the old Arnold Schwarzenegger days and everything. And he I think he did some ads for meat and stuff like that.

So there was certainly this bias. And now we're actually getting trials that are comparing a plant exclusive or nearly plant exclusive diet to a more oblivious diet, and actually tracking muscle and strength changes over time.

And the key is that if you're consuming the same amount of protein, typically around 1.6g of protein per kilogram of body weight, so that's about double the day.

It's basically you take your weight in kilograms and multiply it by 1.6. But when you're consuming about that much protein or more and your lifting weights regularly, you get about the same muscle and strength gains that you would get if you were having more animal protein.

And that's been shown a couple of times now.

Plant Protein, Muscle, and Amino Acids

There's actually some studies, even where they they do similar comparisons, but the plant plant based items are eating a little bit less protein and they still get the same outcome.

And so I think this whole idea of animal protein being superior, certainly vastly superior, is really not supported by the available evidence. And, you know, it's just a matter of making sure you're getting the protein in if you're switching to plants, like if you replace meat with bread and rice, you're probably not going to be getting very much protein.

But if you're replacing it with things like tofu, tempeh, Satan, a certain plant based meats, potentially those types of things can help you really get the protein up.

And then of course, there's protein supplements, which all the meat eating Jim Bros are having anyway. So like, what's the difference if you take a plant based option?

Yeah. And I think to expand on that the further down that rabbit hole, the plant myth is that you have to combine proteins like rice and beans and the same meal, or you won't get the complete protein.

Where is that information coming from, and what part of it is actually true when it comes to getting complete amino acid profiles on a plant based diet?

It's funny. It's one of those things that has like a nugget of truth, but then it gets kind of blown up. So for one, there's an idea out there that plants are missing one of the nine essential amino acids, the the building blocks of protein that we need to get in our diet. But that is false.

All the plant foods that contain protein have all of the nine essential amino acids, but they're available in different amounts, meaning that like one type of plant food might have less of one amino acid, another plant food might have less of a different amino acid.

But throughout the day, if you're eating some variety, it's just really not an issue. Now, where that could be an issue is if you essentially just ate one food for your whole diet and barely scraped your minimum protein requirements, that's a case where, okay, maybe you'd be lacking in one of the amino acids.

You wouldn't like it enough, but that is such a fringe kind of scenario that in like in the real world, really only occurs in places where there's severe food insecurity, where people are literally getting most of their diet as one food like rice or something.

But outside of those scenarios, in a scenario where you have some diversity in your diet, where you can go to the grocery store and pick up, you know, beans and lentils and, and rice and, and so on, that just really doesn't become an issue anymore.

So that's kind of where it stems from and how it's sort of extrapolated I'd say inappropriately. Yeah. And then also down one of the other questions around protein is especially when it comes to the gym, rose, you know, having it before or after your workout throughout the day.

Where is the science about when we should be having protein for optimal, especially plant protein? Like should it be throughout our three meals for absorb ability?

Does it matter if we just get it all at one shot? Because sometimes I have older patients who are like, I can't eat more than one meal a day. They just feel like, you know, so does it make a difference overall?

Little to no difference. That's another area, like when we're talking about specific types of foods or timing of protein or what you consume the protein with.

All of these things have little effect, if any. And that effect really would only apply to somebody who's like a competitive bodybuilder, where every little tiny gain matters for general practice.

There's just no point in getting stressed out about those little details. We can do just fine by getting enough protein. Whether that's in one meal, in three meals, in five meals, doesn't matter whether it's right after you worked out or before or, you know, hours later.

Just focus on getting in some high protein plant foods. And and the rest kind of takes care of itself. Okay, this is my favorite myth because I've been answering this myth for the last, I don't know, 25 years. So so this is my favorite men okay.

That so raises estrogen levels and increases breast cancer. Yeah that's an age old myth. So the myth sort of stems from well soy contains these compounds called isoflavones, which are also sometimes referred to as phytoestrogens or a type of phyto estrogen.

And when people hear that, they think of estrogen. And we know that like high estrogen exposure can promote

breast cancer. And so then you draw connection, kind of like we did with the Omega Sixes and everything earlier.

There's also some studies on rodents where they give them really, really high doses of these phytoestrogens and they can develop cancer. And so that's like another piece of, of evidence that is used to support this idea.

But there are a few problems with all of that. For one, phytoestrogens don't behave just like estrogens. They actually bind to specific or preferentially bind to specific types of receptors in our in our body that have different effects in different parts of the body.

So in breast tissue they actually have anti-static effects, which is the opposite if anything would be protected. But then in bone tissue they have pro estrogenic effects, which is a good thing because you want to you want more June and bone tissue, more acting on bone tissue because that helps prevent fracture, prevent osteoporosis.

But now with rodents, for one, the doses are insane that they give them in these trials. But then two, they actually metabolize phytoestrogens differently than humans.

So when they're given these doses, their phytoestrogens levels rise like crazy and stay up for a long time. That doesn't happen with us because we metabolize them a lot quicker.

And so that's another difference. We have to actually look at what happens in humans. And we have numerous, several, dozens of randomized controlled trials in humans, both men and women, showing no significant impacts on hormone levels or any meaningfully meaningful impact on like hormone responses in the body.

We see that in long term prospective cohort studies like observational studies, over time, higher soy consumers tend to have a lower risk of breast cancer, again suggesting that there's an anti AstraZeneca effect as I mentioned.

And then we also see on top of that lower risk of cardiovascular disease and other outcomes as well. There are some evidence suggesting that a few servings of soy a day might even help with menopausal symptoms.

Like there's there's plenty of potential benefits there.

Soy, Oatmeal, and Blood Sugar Myths

So it's just completely misconstrued. Yeah, absolutely. I think PQM released some data on soil helping with hot flashes in perimenopausal women. And I think with our aging population, the key is, is your risk of breast cancer increases as you age.

I mean, 1 in 7, 1 in 8 women have the risk of breast cancer. Osteoporosis is also increasing in North America as well as we know the cardiovascular risk.

So those are three big reasons to eat soil. And and I'm saying this after I've eaten a big like tofu scramble today. So and I will once again eat more soy this evening.

Okay. So how about this one? Oatmeal. Another whole grain carve. Spike your blood sugar just like refined sugar does. Yeah, this one's crazy. So, okay, there's a few issues here.

For one, eating carbohydrates in general is going to lead to a rise in blood glucose. That's supposed to happen. You consume carbs, you break that down into glucose.

Your blood sugar is going to your blood glucose is going to go up now in hopefully that just happens temporarily. Right. It goes up for a bit and then comes back down. And that's what happens.

And then normal healthy individual. And that is not of concern. I think where it becomes a problem is when people pathologies this normal response often to sell you some supplement that apparently helps with that and could potentially lead you to to consuming less healthy things like bacon, because that might not spike your blood

glucose as much, but it can increase your colorectal cancer and cardiovascular disease risk.

And so there's there's some issues with suggesting that it's inherently harmful. Now the other thing that that's interesting is idea is not only to do with like blood glucose.

So what happens when you exercise your blood glucose goes up when you exercise as well. Is that all of a sudden are we going to avoid exercising or are we going to keep doing it?

Because at the end of the day, we have a good outcome. Blood pressure goes up, heart rate goes up. They can actually stay up for a while. Inflammation goes up.

Your markers of inflammation can stay up for 24 to 40 years. Yeah. So you know we can all of a sudden pathologies these normal responses to exercise and say, oh, we should avoid exercise because of all of these responses that our body goes through.

Instead, we look at okay, if people exercise more over the course of several years or decades, what happens? Do they have a higher or lower risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, etc.

and we see lower risks. The same things with whole grain consumption. We see over long term lower risk of cardiovascular disease, lower risk to type two diabetes, a lower risk of certain cancers.

And so that outcome is what we should be focusing on. Not this. Again, mechanistic speculation that doesn't even have any bearing in the evidence. In the one case where people need to monitor these sort of blood glucose rises and potentially treat them is in cases of diabetes, especially in cases where they are using insulin as well, insulin dependent diabetes, because they obviously need to control it because their body doesn't make enough.

So that's a very special case. But in otherwise healthy individuals, there's no reason to be concerned. And if you are, you can temporarily try a CGM and monitor it.

And it's pretty interesting data. I did that for two weeks and I'm like, okay, worrying about something I don't need to be worrying about. So okay, so last one in this segment and maybe the most useful is someone is scrolling social media right now and sees a confident nutrition claim from someone with a big following.

Like, I'll give you an example, somebody eating literally a stick of butter and a steak on a daily. Wonder who? I wonder who that anyways. Or or somebody pretty much, you know, saying that leafy greens are going to give you oxalates and kidney stones even if you do not have oxalate issues, you know, something like that.

What should they check before they believe it? Like how do we navigate them through this? Because social media is not going anywhere. But how can we navigate them into a less fear, more informed direction?

Yeah. So this is always really challenging because it's not like we're going to in a few minutes, answer here, educate someone on how to evaluate the research or something.

But there are certain things that you can look out for that can at least guide you a little bit. Like for one, do they even provide a reference? Because I've seen people doing both of those things who don't.

So that's one. Now if they provided a reference, is it actually on like humans or is it some like rat research or something if it's on humans okay. That's a little more, you know, viable here, a little bit more valid.

But if it's if it's on like rodents or other animal models, you can kind of do away with it. You don't have to give it too much thought. So. So those are a couple of things.

Now second I would look at how do they respond to critics. Because chances are if this is somebody with a large following and they're saying things like those, you're going to have some people pushing back in the comments, maybe myself or others, you know, asking, well, what's your evidence for this?

Well, actually this study shows that or something. Do they dismiss it? Do they just throw an insult or do they actually engage with with the criticisms?

Because if they're actually engaging and it seems like thoughtful discourse will, then maybe they're more reasonable in the way that they approach this stuff.

But from my experience, again, with those particular scenarios, you don't get a lot of that. So those are a few things I think, just to look for. And then honestly, they're not perfect.

But I would kind of go back to guidelines. I think we can, you know, have some criticisms for the latest, you know, US dietary guidelines. But even if you look at like the American College of Cardiology or American Heart Association or whatever, if you're in the US or if you're in Canada, where I am the Canadian Food Guide, does what they're saying align even kind of closely with, you know, what those guidelines are suggesting, because those guidelines are generally based on on the highest quality evidence at the time.

Can we quibble about small details? Absolutely. And can we say that okay, well, maybe it should be four servings of vegetables instead of three or, or, you know, like or maybe we should recommend certain types of fruits over others or whatever.

Sure. But the sort of basis that they provide is pretty solid. And if someone saying that actually you don't want to be eating leafy green vegetables because of some plant toxins or something, or you don't want to eat beans because of lectins or whatnot, those don't really come anywhere close to to what those guidelines are suggesting.

So you can probably put it to bed there. But obviously, again, I'm not saying guidelines are absolutely perfect. They're always evolving as we get more and more research.

How to Evaluate Nutrition Claims Online

Yeah, I think it's definitely tough to be discerning these days. There is so much information out there and I know I like I put a comment on somebody's post basically saying that don't ever get a biopsy because a biopsy is going to spread your cancer to the rest of your body.

And I'm like, okay. And they said, there's 50 research papers on this. And I'm like, I would love to see them. Because as somebody who's looked under the microscope has followed the tracks of like, you know, an entire mastectomy specimens and colonoscopy specimens where the like where they take the polyp or the mass out of it gets tattooed, like, we can track all this and and basically the comment is very interesting because it does show me the confusion and mistrust that has actually been created by non qualified practitioners because they're basically saying, you know, I'm sure you've heard this, that doctors get paid to keep people sick.

Oh yeah. Which I've spent my entire career. Honestly I would love to retire if everybody would just get healthy. But until then, I'm going to continue talking about this stuff because I know they need to know, but but it was very interesting because and I'm sure you've experienced trolls yourself, but when you actually go look at the profiles, there's like people who themselves are already unhealthy because their entire page is covered with smoking or drinking, I mean, things that have already been established as carcinogens.

So I'm like, clearly they are just have nothing to do with your time. So I know when you're saying, oh, that people should go and look at the comments, but I think also they should look both sides because it's not just how the person who posted it is commenting, but what are there people who are under it commenting as well?

Because there is a strong bias there, because there's a lot that is behind the scenes in social media that I think maybe a little bit older population who has not grown up with it doesn't understand, like if I ask my mom's like, oh, I saw this.

And I'm like, no, mom, that's not real, that's AI, you know? Yeah. So it is, you know, challenging. So let's take us practical for somebody listening, right?

Oh, yeah. No, I was just I was going to say it also like kind of spraying off what you were saying that. Yeah. Like social media creates echo chambers.

It literally creates echo chambers by feeding you what you engage with. And then you're now engaging with other people who also engage with the same things that you engage with.

And you just kind of that's why looking at the comment section, you see people kind of in a similar mindset, I guess, to the creator. Yeah, yeah. Okay.

So we want to make this practical for people, someone listening to this right now and wants to start eating this way tomorrow. What does a genuinely healthy plant based plate actually look like day to day?

Yeah, let's hear it from you. What's your thoughts on this? Yeah, I mean, I think you don't need to have every food group at every meal I'm kind of looking for, like through the day.

Are you getting these five things fruits, veggies, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds? Those if I was to break them into like five groups, nuts and seeds, obviously being the same group.

Now for breakfast, that might mean oatmeal with berries. And you throw some flax seeds on there. You've got the fruit, you got the whole grains, you've got the nuts and seeds with the flax seeds.

Maybe for lunch you have, I don't know, lentil curry or chickpea curry or something. And you maybe do some whole grains with that and some, some leafy greens or something, or some other veggies, whatever works well with that sort of a dish.

I like doing, actually, legume pastas a lot. So you do like the lentil based pastas where it's really just like lentil flour. So you're getting the legumes that way, and then you can do a tomato sauce.

You cook a bunch of veggies into the sauce. And that works really well for a bunch of the legumes and veggies as well. So there's not like one plate that I would prescribe, but I would look at ways to get those five things into your day each day as best you can.

Absolutely. And I always say, don't forget your best friend Roy G. Bev. And the colors of the rainbow red, orange, green, yellow, blue, indigo, violet.

So always look down at your plate and say where can I add more color? Okay, plant based meat sauce everywhere now and there's real disagreement around them.

Do they actually fit into a healthy plant based diet, or does the ultra processed label disqualify them? So ultra processing, I don't think like the label, I don't think disqualifies any particular food, just on the basis of the label alone, because that that category is so broad.

It includes things like processed meats, like sausages, sodas, pastries, but then also includes whole grain breads, whole grain cereals, plant based milks, a lot of them, the ones that are fortified and whatnot.

And so there are some things in there, like the whole grain products and the plant notes that can be healthy. And then there's of course, things that aren't so healthy.

And so what we need to look at is, well, what effect does that particular food actually have on our body? And we have randomized controlled trials. I actually published a review with my colleagues at the University of British Columbia a couple of years ago, looking at the the studies on this topic.

Building a Healthy Plant-Based Plate

There was also a more recent meta analysis just published the end of last year looking at this. And we see that

when you replace meat like animal based meat with plant based meat products, we actually see improvements in total and LDL cholesterol levels.

We see potentially a little bit of weight loss as well. And maybe that has to do with some of the fiber and whatnot that you're getting with the plant based products.

Even though it's not a ton, it's a lot relative to the average American diet, I guess, but we're seeing some improvements in certain markers. That doesn't mean that if you were to replace beans with the plant based meats, you'd be better off.

But it's all a spectrum, and it sits on the healthier side of the spectrum compared to the meats. So it comes back to the question of compared to what.

But within that, I think it's also important to note that plant based meat served heterogeneous. There's so many different types, different makeups. And so I look for a few specific things.

My first is I look at the saturated fat content some of them will be quite high at, like, say, for a burger patty, like eight grams of saturated fat. It's about the same as what you'll get with a ground beef patty.

But then there are some that are like two grams of saturated fat, maybe even less, and that's a much better option. I'll also look at the protein content.

If I'm having a plant based meat, I want it to be high protein. So look for, you know, 20g or so. Again, if it's like a burger patty or something like that, and then, you know, down the line, if I'm looking at a tie break, I'll look at things like fiber content.

Sodium content is actually another one. I should mention that that can be quite high in some products. It's widely variable. So like in the I know the latest Beyond Burgers, it's around 300mg, which isn't too bad.

But in some plant based meat products you'll get like 1000mg of sodium per serving, which is really, really high. So that's just something to keep keep in mind as well.

But it's not as simple as they're healthier. They're not. There tend to be healthier than meat. And depending on the product, some of them can actually be quite healthy, while others maybe are best limited.

Okay. All right, so now that we got people thinking about eating more plants, the next question is, is there a meaningful health difference between eating 100% plant based and 90% plant based?

Does the number itself matter? Is there a evidence that shows a dose response relationship, or is it really marginal? What happens to the other 10%? Like like let's reframe this for people so they can kind of go, all right, what am I going to do here.

Yeah. So there is a dose response generally, but we don't know where the where really caps out. I would guess that if you're eating a really high quality plant predominant diet at like 90% plant base with a little bit of like low saturated fat animal products in there, you're probably getting comparable health outcomes to a plant exclusive diet that's of similar quality.

So tough to make an argument one way or another where makes sense. To go further towards the plant based side is when you consider like animal rights, ethics and the environment.

Those are the reasons I believe to go 100%. But if someone is looking specifically for health reasons, I don't think we can make a super solid argument that 100% is going to be better than 90%.

Okay, this work clearly means a lot to you, both personally and professionally. So can you share with us what got you here? Was there a moment in your own life that pointed you towards plant based nutrition in the first place?

Yeah, I had a trainer, a personal trainer when I was younger who actually I funny enough, I just saw a couple of weeks ago for the first time in what seems like years.

But anyways, a personal trainer who promoted more like plant based diet sort of practice. And at first I didn't really take a lot of what he said seriously.

I was a teenager at the time, but eventually, once I actually gave it a shot and I started to shift, I didn't go 100%, but I got rid of dairy. I reduced my meat intake, having a lot more fruits and veggies and those sorts of things.

I just started feeling better. My skin was clearing up. I had pretty bad asthma as a kid that seemed to be doing better. I was losing weight and I just decided that I would sort of stick with it.

And over the course of a couple of years, I just learned as much as I could.

Plant-Based Meats and Diet Quality

Back then, social media wasn't really a thing, so I was like reading books about it and looking at blogs and, you know, that sort of thing. But learning as much as I could learn some incorrect things along the way that, you know, I would crack myself on now, but but yeah, eventually transitioned to 100% once I was in university.

Not necessarily because I think 100% better than 90% or whatever as we just went over. But because for me, I started slipping back the other way once I was in uni and eating at the cafeteria and that sort of thing.

And I just realized that if I draw a hard line in the sand, I'm going to be more adherent. And, you know, I'm not going to give myself that little bit of leeway that turns into more leeway.

And then that's what drove me to be 100% initially, followed by watching a documentary called The Earthlings later on that same year that drove home the sort of ethical component which keeps me 100% plant based. Yeah, absolutely.

I think the ethical component, once your eyes are kind of open to it, it's really hard to look away if you have a bit of a conscious, I know, for my own journey and also for the people who are listening and watching, if you're just kind of transitioning here, like I grew up eating everything.

I mean, at home, yeah, my food was mostly plant based because that's what my mom cooked. But at school, I grew up in the state. So school, school lunches, doctors lounge lunches, you know, turkey sandwiches, all the stuff.

Right? You know, steak dinners out. And so I transitioned from eating everything and to pescatarian to vegetarian and then to vegan. And I remember it.

But last meal in 2013, over a decade ago, I used to be responsible for ordering the lunches for our physician group meetings. So I would always order.

I don't know if you have this in Canada, but and I would never order it now. We went between two places. We went between a Thai place and Panera. If they wanted something really quick.

And Panera is like a sandwich shop, but they do make great salads. They make like big salads and stuff. But one of the things they always used to make was this catering size mac and cheese.

Okay. So I mean, it was good stuff. Yeah. It was like this big thing. So I remember December 31st, 2013, that was the last time I ever ate at that place or ordered something like that.

I'm like, all right, I'm just going to order the catering size, and the next morning I'm going to wake up and not have any of it.

Plant-Based Percentages and Personal Journey

And that's the way it stayed ever since. So if you guys are watching this and going, oh, I don't know if I can give up the cheese because I know that's really hard for some people.

Take it step by step, make small changes one thing at a time, one meal at a time. And overall, as we started this conversation, it's going to run you better for your longevity and your overall health and preventing chronic diseases that we see today.

Doctor Matthew Nagra, is there anything else we've touched upon that you have not said? That's at the top of your mind right now that you would like to share with our audience?

I don't know, I think we hit all the big ones. We hit protein, we had seed oil, we hit soy. Those are the ones that always come back over and over. But I think just reinforcing what you said about, like if you're struggling on like where to start or if it seems really daunting to make a huge shift overnight, then don't.

If you find that that cheese is going to be the toughest thing for you to swap, okay, don't for now, you know, start to start with other things and then work your way towards it.

You know, it doesn't. So yeah, take it slow if you need to. Absolutely. Well, thank you so much. This has been genuinely clarifying and a space this noisy.

Having someone willing to just follow the data is rare, and I think our audience is going to come away with a lot more confidence and what they choose to eat.

So Doctor Nagra can be found at Doctor Matthewnagra.com and on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube at Doctor Matthew Nagra. I'd also point people to his recent appearances on some of the podcasts, like The Proof with Simon Hill and Rich Royal Podcast to do some more deep dives into the myths we've covered today.

Here's the key takeaway for you today. Audience. The best nutrition advice isn't the most confident voice in your feed. It's the one willing to show you the research and change their mind when the research changes.

So thank you so much and stay tuned for another episode.