The Coalition Talk Show with Dr. Shani Belgrave: Stress Management with Dr. Alicia Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Welcome

Welcome to The Coalition. This is a talk show dedicated to discussing health, wellness, and inspiration. I'm your host, Dr. Shani Belgrave. Hello, everybody.

Welcome to The Coalition. I'm your host, Dr. Shani Belgrave. I am a bariatric and minimally invasive surgeon in Atlanta, Georgia. You can learn more about me and get connected at www. DrShaniBelgrave.com.

I am delighted to welcome to the show today, Dr. Alicia Hodge. Dr. Alicia is a licensed psychologist and founder of The Shift, which is a wellness brand dedicated to helping high achieving women break free from perfectionism, burnout, and anxiety.

Dr. Alicia, welcome to the coalition. Thank you. Thank you for having me here. So I already know this is going to be a very impactful episode because who has not experienced anxiety?

Um, so I'm delighted that you were here right on time for stress awareness month to let us know everything we need to know. Can you please get us started by telling us a little bit about who you are and what you do?

Yeah, thank you. Well, you did a great intro. But as you said, in summary, I'm a clinical psychologist and I have a virtual practice called the shift.

And what we do is really focus on where can we shift your perspective to help you see something differently. And that applies to lots of different issues, of course, anxiety, work stress, life changes, and the word you mentioned before, perfectionism.

And so I assist women primarily in helping them really break free from cycles of worry. If they're finding that they have this picture perfect checkbox filled life, but they're still feeling like This isn't it.

Perfectionism, Burnout, and Warning Signs

I've done all the things. I'm really unsatisfied. I'm really unhappy. We work together to really reframe what does success mean to you and how can you live a life that you actually want to live?

Yeah, so that's what I do in my therapy space. I also do coaching and speaking. I love outreach things like podcasts. I really want everyone to know that there are some very simple ways to make cumulative change in your life and live a life that you're in control of.

that is extremely powerful, controlling the mind and shifting the way that we think about things. So what can you share with us about burnout and perfectionism?

First off, do you know where perfectionism comes from? Yeah, so perfectionism is actually, I like to make a joke that perfectionism is fear in a blazer.

And so really it's just a dressed up version of being afraid. Whether that means I'm afraid I'm not doing it right or good enough or I'm not trying my hardest, we sort of overcompensate and we develop these unrelenting standards that you meet the mark and then you're like, I could do better next time, right?

And you just keep pushing it out to the point in which you become burned out. And so really they are kind of a hand in hand thing. You're driven by a little bit of an anxiety or a fear and it causes you to push past your limits in a way

that's not sustainable.

And that's when you end up burned out. So what are some signs of burnout? How does someone know if they are burning out? Yeah, so burnout, you know, the World Health Organization has a medical definition that we also use in the psychological realm, excuse me, but a lot of it can be physical.

So it's actual exhaustion, getting sleep, but still just not feeling like you're rested at all. You can feel less enthusiastic about the future, very irritable and apathetic.

Um, you might find yourself sort of feeling like, you know, what's the point or things that you used to be passionate about, you find yourself sort of stepping away from it, not engaged.

You're just kind of hovering above everything when you used to be in it. Thank you so much. I know that this is really going to help a lot of people. You said there are many simple things that we can do to address these issues.

What are some of these simple things? Yes. And so maybe I should scale back, right? These are practical things because simple would imply that there's no work involved and this is very easy.

However, one thing that I like to encourage women, especially women who are ambitious and high performing, if you can put a lot of effort and energy in anywhere, why not put it into yourself?

And so, you know, if the challenge is I need to slow down, one of my tips oftentimes with anxiety is use the art of delay, like just before you respond, before you give in to the urgency, can we just slow down for five minutes before we answer a text, before we say yes to something when we know we're too busy, before we agree to something when we know we don't actually want to do it.

So one first practical tip is I call it the art of delay. Just give yourself five minutes to actually ask yourself, what is it that I want here? What works for me and what's sustainable before I actually jump into typically saying yes.

Practical Tools for Anxiety and Boundaries

That is a good one. Another thing I wanted to talk to you about, which kind of goes along with what you just said, is boundaries. Boundaries is a very popular word.

In a way that I'm happy that there's more awareness, but I also think there's sometimes a misconception that a boundary is like hard no, that's what boundary means.

And it can, so don't get me wrong, but boundaries are just ensuring that you have a good sense of yourself. And what it is that you want in a situation and being a little less, you know, not wavering on that.

So, for example, if you say, I really need to get a good night's sleep. I'm not taking any phone calls after eight. And then someone calls you at eight, ten.

The boundary would be you saying, hey, you know what? I'm really not taking any phone calls. It's late. Thanks for calling. I'll schedule something with you tomorrow.

This way, you both are getting something that you want, right? It's kind of a mutual situation, but you're not saying like, oh my gosh, that's my friend.

I have to pick up her call. You know what forget it. I'm just gonna stay up until 9. Don't worry about it because those That's going against what you set for yourself And it also puts you at risk to be very resentful now to your friend who didn't know anything about you going to bed at 8 o'clock that you just You know for over went what you thought and you took her phone call You can end up really resentful when you could actually just communicate and say I'm great tomorrow girl No, then so When should someone see a psychologist?

Are there certain signs or cues that may alert someone that, you know, I could benefit from seeing a psychologist? Yeah, I often tell people you know yourself very well and so maybe not the first moment but the second moment you start to assess and observe yourself and you're like this is this is not like me you know or i'm struggling more than i'm used to or i've talked to a trusted friend or i've tried something else and it's really not working for me I encourage people to start looking because looking is a process.

You don't always find the first therapist right away, immediately. And so give yourself a window to not be overwhelmed and almost feeling as though you're drowning by the time you reach out for help.

So I'd say those first couple of times where you're like, I'm just not myself or I've tried the things that I've usually tried and this is not like it usually is.

Just be open to looking. Right. And then I noticed that one of your sayings is slay anxiety. What does it mean to slay anxiety and how can we all become anxiety slayers?

Yeah, so I think that was like a really nice play on words. I was actually on a podcast now over five years ago. And it was sort of a play on like, you know, slay like slay girl and also slay legitimately right like slay your anxiety like a dragon.

And so I like the phrase I think culturally it's relatable, but I also think that anxiety is very much an overwhelming presence that needs to be slayed.

So there are some very direct and specific things or ways that you can change your thinking that will help put your anxiety or your response to anxiety in the proper perspective.

And so I guess an example of that is, like you said earlier, everyone has had anxiety. You can make yourself anxious. I could sit here right now and imagine that somebody's stealing my car and start getting really upset, even though it's not actually happening.

And so part of when I give people that example, I say, you have power in one direction, but you actually have power in another direction. Are there situations that we can step back and even use numbers on a scale of 1 to 10? How bad is this?

Versus just immediately being like, This is the worst. I knew it. Right. Along with managing anxiety, what can you tell us about stress? The actual definition of stress and how we can navigate stress.

When to Seek Help and Slaying Anxiety

Yeah. So stress is better described as a chronic circumstance in which it's not just worry that lasts for one day. Typically, it's ongoing. And it's impacting you, usually physically and mentally.

So when we're stressed, we may find that we're losing sleep. Our appetite can be disrupted. We may find ourselves going over a scenario or a situation and our heads ruminating over and over.

And so stress. Anxiety is a little more finite. So they can coexist, but they tend to interact off of one another. So I could have this long-term stress about a move and then become very anxious at certain points.

Like the more that I think about it or like, oh my gosh, tomorrow's moving day. Now I'm really anxious. Stress can be managed by Again, I'm going to use words simple, things like exercise to just help with your overall physical functioning, things like yoga, mindfulness and meditation where you're really focusing your mind and working that mental muscle on a specific thing instead of letting it run free to lots of worrisome thoughts.

Sleep, even though I know that sleep can be really impacted when we're stressed or anxious, sleep is actually one of the most helpful things to get our brain back to a more calm state.

But also some of the, I guess, mental exercises I tell people to do are put yourself in a quote unquote happy place. Think about the grounding experiences you've had.

Sometimes I tell people if you're up late at night scrolling, why don't you go on your camera roll and scroll your favorite photos. Like if you're going to be up thinking about something, let's do something just slightly different.

It's not always a matter of shutting down or forcing yourself to go to sleep because we both know you can't do that anyway. So I'm all about trying to take pivots And so even if you're telling yourself the worst case scenario, like I'm the worst person in the world, sometimes I would just jokingly say, well, what if you were the fifth worst person in the world?

Like, are you the top worst? Or are you the fifth worst? And then I guess people sort of step back and say, OK, well, maybe not the worst. So just even coming back from catastrophizing can be just helpful in the type of response that you get.

Absolutely. There are certain things that come up that are stressful. And you may not immediately be able to change the situation. And so I think doing some things to kind of navigate how you respond to things is going to be helpful.

Stress, Mindfulness, and Social Media

Particularly, I do believe and agree that exercise can really help and also making sure that we're getting adequate sleep so that you're kind of refreshed and you're better equipped to kind of face the challenges that may arise.

So what can you tell us? You mentioned mindfulness. What are some actual things that you can do to practice mindfulness? Like, for example, one thing that sometimes I'll do is take a moment to hear the birds chirping or listen to the sound of the cars on the road, you know, and it just really hone into staying in the present.

But what are some other ways that we can really appreciate a moment and achieve mindfulness? I like what you said, the idea that mindfulness is about being present and grounded in the moment and not having like all of the added interpretation and the judgment.

So one of the ways it's almost like just like physical exercise, right? You know, you first get the two pounds or five pounds and you're like, Oh my gosh, you know, at first it starts off maybe heavy, but then it gets light.

You have to sort of work a mental muscle to say, I'm flooded with thoughts. Can I go put my hands under cold water and just focus specifically on that feeling?

So I tell people, activate your senses. So if you're having a hard time pulling up thoughts because you're maybe stressed or worried, you can do things using your senses like touch, I tell people smell a scented candle or scented lotion, but really thinking about like, how can I come down in this moment in the present if you have loved ones?

hugging them. Sometimes it's just that simple. If you have children, sometimes watching them from a distance and just really noticing them can kind of bring you present and just a little bit more mindful and thinking about meaningful things versus, again, being outside of your body really tense and worried about other things.

All good suggestions. You mentioned earlier scrolling. And one of the things that I try to encourage people to do in terms of sleep hygiene is maybe shutting off devices and things to allow some time to kind of decompress and things like that.

But as a psychologist, do you think that some of these devices and people spending a lot of time on social media can worsen stress and anxiety? The short answer is yes.

Only because I think there are two things. The way that the phone works is that it's very activating just to your brain overall. And so your phone and the apps have obviously used a little bit of probably dark psychology to keep you

locked in and scrolling and disconnected.

Your phone is really about dissociating. So it feels good, but it's almost like a band-aid. taken one step back from reality and you're able to observe or be entertained.

But truly, like we talked about earlier, mindfulness is about being grounded in more in the present moment. And I'll be honest, it's very hard to do that on your phone.

Yeah, your phone is not made for that. I love my phone. I love social media. So sometimes I encourage people, if you know you're someone that you're really going to struggle with putting the phone down, why don't we get some apps on there that are about meditation and mindfulness so that you can actually be using them and looking at those countdown videos that kind of keep you present.

Curating a social media page that's only pleasant things, only health-based, health and wellness-based things. So now you're on your Instagram, but it's actually encouraging you to be aligned with whatever values you have around wellness.

Right. Well, those are all really great ideas and suggestions. Thank you so much for sharing that. This has been extremely insightful. Do you have a particular takeaway message that you want everyone to know or remember or keep in mind from today's podcast?

Yeah, I think one of the things I like people to remember is that once you can start to conceptualize that life is not happening to you, that you can actively make small choices in your life every day, even if it's just, which way do I want to drive home?

What time do I want to get started on X? Reminding yourself that you can command your time in a way that you feel you're healthily in control of your life versus lots of things happening to you.

So that's part of perspective. And I think once we can stretch our perspective, we can start to see our life exactly the way that we would prefer to. I love that.

That is beautiful because It brings to mind a sense of autonomy and agency. And while we can't control every situation, we can control ourselves and how we respond to things and how we think about things.

Key Takeaways and Closing Remarks

Food for thought. Well, Dr. Alicia, I have thoroughly enjoyed this conversation. So thank you so much for joining the coalition. I know that this is going to help some people and transform lives, which is what the show was all about.

What is the best way for people who have enjoyed this conversation and want to get to know more about you? What's the best way for people to contact you?

Yeah, so my actual website is www.slayyouranxiety.com. And it has information about me in general and all of the different services I have. But also on social media, I think I give more a glimpse of who I am and into my personality.

And that's on Instagram. And my Instagram name is HelpMeHodge. Thank you so much for joining the coalition. I'm hopeful you'll come back another time.

Oh, of course, of course. Thank you so much. Well, everybody, thank you for tuning in to another impactful episode of The Coalition. I'm your host, Dr.

Shawnee Valgrave. You can stay connected with me at www. DrShawneeValgrave.com. Very special thank you to Dr. Alicia Hodge, also known as Dr. Alicia, licensed psychologist and founder of The Shift.

Dr. Alicia came on today and shared some amazing information on anxiety, perfectionism, burnout, and stress management. You can get connected with Dr.

Alicia online at www.slayyouranxiety.com or on Instagram at HelpMeHodge. Thanks everybody for watching. Make sure that you share this episode with at least one person to raise awareness for stress management.

I'll see y'all next time.