The Link Between Mindful Eating, Gut Health, And Quality Sleep Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Background

how we choose to fuel our bodies fuels these gut microbiome and the gut micro biome is not only going to you know have your gut be healthy in terms of like your bowel movements and your digestion but it is going change how you make your mood hormones.

It's going to change how your skin looks. It is going change your hair growth. Literally everything about you. What's so exciting over the last five years is really seeing so much of this being discovered by our colleagues who are doing research on this.

I can only imagine where it's gonna go. This is Dr. Talks. Hello, everyone, and welcome again to the Sleep Deep Summit, New Approaches for Beating Sleep Apnea and Insomnia.

I am your host, Dr. Audrey Wells, I'm super excited about the next guest. This is Dr Heather Hammerstedt, who is an emergency medicine physician who also holds specialized board certification in lifestyle medicine as well as additional training in integrative nutrition and health coaching.

In fact, she got her health-coaching certificate way back during medical school when she realized there was a huge hole in our medical education around food and mindfulness and exercise.

So at this point, She is a real expert with thousands of hours deep diving into food, and weight, weight loss. And she has put together a kick-ass lifestyle transformation blueprint to get women to long-term health without products or BS.

Welcome, Dr. Hammerstedt. Thanks for having me. It's a pleasure to talk to you. And I want to start out with this interesting concept of eating mindfully.

Can you explain what that means?

What Mindful Eating Means

Yeah, I mean, so many of us, we put a lot of emotion and importance into food, which I think can be a good thing, can also be something that distracts us from the purpose of food.

And so I like to practice every once in a while, like really sitting down and consciously enjoying my food for what it is. You know, our food comes to us from a long, long paths from where it was grown and how it process and where comes it to from.

And I think it's important for us to nurture that in way. when we're eating. And I think that it brings to us a couple different opportunities that way.

One is we usually eat slowly when were being more mindful about it, but we also probably eat less as well. I feel like there's a different kind of stages of learning to eat mindfully.

The first stage that most of us are in most unaware sort of like unconsciously incompetent sort-of way of eating so you're in like an eat-repeat cycle and you don't realize that your attention is not even on the food that you are eating and sometimes that ends up you end up feeling a little bit hopeless about your eating process.

The next step is sort being uncertain so I'm realizing that I have decision points that i can make with my food and that, I can, make mistakes and I, can be inconsistent but I Can also realize that the food that.

I Have in front of me is there for a reason the next step is sort of becoming more aware so I'm not dieting I am not binging all I Am doing is realizing that my, food in.

Front of, me Is here for me and then I. Can taste it and i Can feel it and all the sensations that I have and really putting that energy into that food.

And then I think the most mindful stage that you can be is sort of, I can manage my food, and I feel confident about handling that. I'm aware and curious and accepting of the food that's brought to me.

It's bringing me kind of what I want in terms of how it makes my body feel. That's kind a lot to start out with. But I really think when it comes down to it, Can you sit with your food and really take from it what it's trying to give you?

And can you bring yourself the food that you want? Is it bringing you what you're hoping it is? excellent points and you know I think at its foundation is fuel.

I've heard that a lot, food is a fuel in my world of sleep medicine for people who are not sleeping well for a number of causes, I notice that people often turn to food for energy or even to stay awake for example if Someone is having trouble with driving.

There's a tendency to snack on sunflower seeds or something that's crunchy and that can kind of promote a little bit of awakening or arousal. Do you also see that with your groups who are trying to get more mindful around food?

I think food and sleep are pretty integrally related to each other. It's a pretty complicated topic. I do think that the act of eating can keep you awake.

And I that's what you're bringing up in terms of like, you have a long drive and you want to keep yourself so some sort of energy. Um, I, do know that, the hormone shifts that you, have when eating, can definitely, affect your sleep.

So carbohydrates in particular, even the good complex carbohydrates that we talk about do have sort of an awake signal. So we often recommend people really have those complex carbohydrates at least two to three hours before trying to go to sleep.

But I definitely do think that that especially is key. I do also know that the we can have some cortisol and growth hormone shifts extend later in the evening, the more that you're eating before you go to bed.

Absolutely right. And I think for anybody who's listening to this or watching these videos, it's really important to underscore that stopping food intake three hours before bed is what's recommended.

Also because, you know, your digestive processes are an awake activity or a daytime activity, and those tend to be significantly less prominent overnight.

So even the way that you process glucose or secrete insulin changes. Another thing that I have seen is for people who tend snack late or eat late, the choice of their food is quite different compared to the morning.

Would you agree with that? Oh, yeah, for sure. I mean, I think there's something about those highly palatable processed high fat, high salt, and high sugar foods that, you know, the old men in the lab coats created for us to especially want to buy.

Those things are definitely the things that you're going to want later at night. And I thank being conscious of that. As we're on the topic of mindfulness, being mindful of the fact that that is how those products were created.

Food, Sleep, and Late-Night Eating

specifically for that purpose is important in terms of how to make your choices. Definitely. I think that the highly processed food has an addictive quality.

It's hitting our reward systems unfairly. And at the end of the day, when your brain is tired, you're not as well able to inhibit those impulses towards snack food.

Yeah, I mean, so you're hitting it right on the money. So to get a little bit nerdy about it, what you are talking about with those reward systems is really that dopamine surge that we get, that feel-good hormone that you get.

And that is specifically met with things that like to do, right? So people who get addicted to gambling or people get addicted to cocaine, people will get added to highly palatable foods, it's the same thing.

late in the day, you've had a hard day. You're parenting, your working, running around, doing errands, all the things, and then you have an opportunity at night to suddenly stop.

Your dopamine is going to be depleted from that busy day and what are you going do to refill it? Is it binge washing a show? Eating potato chips? Is it what you know, what is it for you?

And I think again, we're talking specifically today about mindful eating is I Think the most important thing is to understand how your brain and your body are working around this so that you can like have that moment of being like, I know what my brain's doing to me like is this how I want to fill that like depletion, is this the choice that's best for me?

And if we don't even know that that is something that our body is doing to us, then yes, we're reaching into the cabinet to eat because that what we are doing.

It's automatic. Your brain is telling you to do it. it's not like your fault. Its just what your body's doing, but if you have that underlying knowledge to be able to take that half step and be like, Oh, yeah, right.

I heard Dr. Audrey and Dr Heather talking about this. This is why my body is doing this." That's so true. And I think it's really interesting to note that dopamine in your brain has a circadian rhythm and there is a dopamine decrease in the evening, which everybody has, presuming they're sleeping overnight.

And so to your point, just understanding and having that awareness can really help you to make different choices in a moment and not kind of get overrun with the urges.

I've never heard of anybody going for a midnight snack and chewing on some celery. It's really like the ice cream and the cookies and that. Yeah. That midnight snack can really throw you off though.

I mean, I get it why that happens. And we've all had that moment where we can't sleep and we get up and try to distract ourselves with food. But I would really recommend that you try and distract yourself with tea or distract your self with water or a 10 minute yoga or 10 minutes stretch.

before trying to go back to sleep because really the change of like, as you said earlier, you know, our bodies are made to digest during your awake cycles.

And if you eat and go to back sleep, your body is maybe will not let you go go sleep. Because it's thinking it is awake, those kind of things. Absolutely.

I think that doing those things in advance, making a plan for yourself will help you to kind have that on the tip of your tongue when you run into trouble with sleeping.

I wonder if you can tell us more about kind of getting into this place of mindfulness with eating. Do you have any specific exercises or programs that you could offer?

Yeah, so I think the first thing that I really understanding what hunger is. And it's not, I mean, i could talk about this for hours, but like, you know, there's, social hunger, right, like I always eat in this situation, psychological hunger, right?

Like we were just talking about like the need to buffer whatever emotion or to refill that dopamine that you have. Those aren't real hunger. And then there's actual bio hunger like your body does not know where to get its fuel from next, or I have not taught my body that it can go in and get fuel from our fat cells and from out liver.

And that's that real hunger that you're feeling.

Recognizing Real Hunger and Using the Hunger Scale

I think that, first of all, mindfully being able to understand which one of those sensations that your having and how to fix that whether it's with food or not with the food is the first step and that is just practice, practice practice.

It's really stopping before you make that choice to eat about like, what is it that I'm actually feeling right now? And is this the right choice for me?

It can be a very sophisticated thing, but I do recommend that people really try to think about that. If it is actual bio hunger, I think my very favorite and the simplest exercise is to really follow what I call the hunger scale.

And this is out there. I didn't create it, but I think that it is one of my most favorite things. If you think of it like an arch, like a half wheel, and you have minus 10, you're ravenous.

You haven't eaten in days and your body is disintegrating because you are so hungry. And the plus 10 is like, I cannot get up from the table because I am so full.

And if you try to think of that scale and then starting to eat when you're at minus four and stopping eating when your plus four, and like really living in that kind of pie right there of feeling satiated, right?

Feeling like I got the fuel that I need, my body feels good, but I could still get up and jog down the street if I needed to kind feeling. And I find that that has really guided me and guided many, many many holist clients about kind of really where to kind-of mindfully sit yourself and that means that sometimes you may not eat when everyone else is eating and you know what that's okay because everyone's body is a little bit different and giving yourself that grace giving your kids that Grace giving you a partner that Grace of like let's really like think about what I need right now like I know it's dinner time but I it turns out I'm really not hungry you now so I'll sit and enjoy and sit with you and be with You guys but like but now is not the time for me to eat I think is can be really important.

So that hunger scale is probably the most easiest and simplest thing to really try to get to understanding how your body is feeling and what you need to do about that.

I think if you do choose to eat, one of my favorite things to is to either drink a very hot or very cold drink before eating. It can kind of turn on your stomach in a way of like bringing your attention down to your body and getting out of your head a little bit and really like feeling what it is that's going on in there.

First off, if you drink a pint of water before you eat, you probably are going to eat about 500 calories less at that meal. That's just like generally known.

But when it comes to mindful eating, I think the most important thing is not necessarily that number, but sort of like, okay, here I am. Once you do start eating really, i think I try to take my first bite with my eyes closed.

because it's really silly, but I feel like it helps me really slow down and feel the texture and the taste in different parts of my mouth and really feel how it feels when it kind of gets down into my stomach.

And then putting down my fork between bites, like using chopsticks, something making it more difficult so that you have to eat a little bit more slowly, I think is really helpful as well.

I Think anything that helps you really just slow and like feel the food that you're eating. I always like tell our Holist clients who are in for mostly for weight wellness issues and wants that like the that of course you are going to have

food.

That is like that. You hadn't planned and that maybe isn't like really like on what your what? Your goal is and I call it a joyful eat because I'm like if you were going.

To have it like love it. Right? Like sit down, taste it, enjoy it. Like make that decision that you made like worth it and that's like the best part of mindful eating is like really loving the opportunity of that food and what it's bringing you.

And also not having a distraction while you're eating it, right? That can take away from your joy. There are so many great points. I just want to recap a little bit.

So it seems like naming it helps a lot. Naming the hunger. Is it social hunger? Is that hunger because you are bored or overwhelmed or stressed? Or is it real biological hunger where your body is asking for food?

And then once you kind of determine that you want to proceed with eating, one of your main points is to really slow things down and work in breaks to your meal.

So as you pointed out, close your eyes with the first bite, internalize the feeling of the food, and do kind a U-turn, like a Y-O-U-Turn inward. to see how does this food taste?

Is this what I want right now? And if you're slowing down your eating, that also helps your hormones that are released with digestion to kick in and signal satiety or fullness more quickly.

So I love all of that. Yeah, I loved the U-turn. I'm going to borrow that Yeah. Like to say that we do that at night. When you're lying there in the dark and the quiet, you do a U-turn inside, and that is helpful for getting to sleep.

I want to shift gears a little bit and talk about something that's really kind of out there on the media and is more and more known as being a significant contributor to health, the microbiome.

We have the gut microbiomes, we have a nasal. upper airway microbiome, a lower airways microbiomes, skin microbiomas. But in the case of food, what we're primarily interested in is how to have a healthy gut microbioma.

Yeah. So again, I give like 90-minute lectures on this. I'm going to give some high points. I think the important thing, the bigger picture in terms of microbiome, like what are we talking about here?

We're talking the fact that there are trillions of bacteria that live in our gut that are working for us or against us, depending on how we have chosen to feed them.

And I'm sure that you can talk forever about the gut microbiome and how that affects your sleep and that is like your wheelhouse. Mine is the fact that like how we choose to fuel our bodies fuels these gut micro biome.

And the microbiomes is not only going to, you know, have your gut be healthy in terms of like, your bowel movements and your digestion, but it is going change how you make your mood hormones.

It's going to change how your skin looks. It is going change your hair growth. Literally everything about you. And I think what's so exciting over the last five years is really seeing so much of this being discovered by our colleagues who are doing research on this and I can only imagine where it's gonna go.

But simplest part is that you have kind of good bacteria and you bad bacteria.

Slowing Down Meals and Eating with Intention

And simplistically, the good bacteria are the ones that are going to help kind of moisture your serotonin and your gut health and you immune system and skin and aging.

And those fuel off of very variety of colors of complex carbohydrates and vegetables as well as fermented foods. The bad bacteria are going to fuel themselves off of highly processed, highly palatable foods like we were talking about earlier, that high fat, high sugar and high salt foods.

And so if you're just thinking about like, you are not just feeding yourself, your feeding these trillions of little like bacteria that are like living in your gut in there and you're choosing your future.

You're, choosing what you are shifting your body and your health span to be based on what your feeding. So it's not just about the scale. It's, not about what can pinch around your waist.

This is literally you, are fueling those gut bacteria to fuel your, future in a way. I really love that because it speaks to how the choices we make today are going to affect us later on.

And that's true no matter what aspect of health you're talking about. One of the questions that I get a lot are, is can't I just take a probiotic pill or a prebiotic pill to get things normal with my gut microbiome?

I think that, so first off that I thing about pro and prebiotics and I separate them out in my brain of being like probiotics are like a capsule of like several million little bacteria that can take that is going to supplement the balance of that good versus bad bacteria in body.

And I that that has a very good use and is very necessary in certain parts of our lives. I of pre-biotic of the food that is fueling the bacteria. So the actual nutrients that we are taking in that are fuel the bacterias that already there.

There are two very different things and both very important. In terms of a prebiotic, when I prescribe antibiotics from the emergency department, I go through this with everybody and everyone's probably rolling their eyes like, why is this crunchy doctor talking to me about vegetables?

But if you get prescribed an antibiotic, you absolutely need to be very on point with your prebiotic food, right? Very colorful vegetables, eat the rainbow, make sure you have fermented foods to really fuel the good bacteria that are being targeted by that antibiotic that is very necessary for whatever bacterial infection that you.

And I say that, that should go on a probiotic for at least 12 weeks after the antibiotics are complete. Now, and if you're not on antibiotics, I also think this is very important.

Gut Microbiome, Prebiotics, and Probiotics

Those very colorful variety of vegetables and that fermented food is anti-inflammatory and is going to unprocess yourself enough that you are going feed back the gut microbiome in the way that it wants to be fed as I was talking about feeding those good ones and not the bad ones.

So can you have a crappy diet full of highly processed foods, highly palatable foods? that the men in lab coats all made for us and take probiotic pills and will it be better?

I don't know. I think what you're doing is you are just adding more bacteria into the mix and is a couple million of them in a pill really going to change that spectrum of what's in your gut that much if you still feeding the bad ones?

I think that answered your question. For sure. And that clarification was great, because there is a difference between prebiotics and probiotics. Fermented foods, I thing of kimchi, sour kraut, those types of things.

There's some question out there, about what is good food? What is processed food, lab coat food. I'd think of it as anything with a food label, but I'm sure that you could elaborate too.

Well, I think I'll get even simpler. How's that? I say if it was grown or if was born, you can eat it. Got it, so like things with chemicals and additives and preservatives and all the things that are difficult to pronounce on the food label is processed food.

Yeah, and I think if you're going to buy things that come in a box or in can, the less amount of ingredients means that it's less processed. So trying to find a food label with five or less ingredients is a good rule.

I also think just like the food science studies out there is that if take something that is very healthy, you think of like a carrot, right? And you process it into something else, even if it is now carrot cake, it it drastically different for your body.

So anything that is being done to a food is going to change what nature intended for it to be as a nutrient for us. And so just thinking about that, like, who messed with it?

And what did they do with that? Did I want that right? So really, you know, lifestyle medicine is primarily, our data is, primarily around whole food and mostly plant-based research.

I think that thinking of that whole-food aspect of is really important. How was it grown? How close is it to that right now is going to make sure that you're not getting the mostly pro-inflammatory responses from processing food that we get.

Absolutely, and great explanation. I think that's really accessible and a healthy dose of common sense too. You know, what you put in your body will give you energy if it is less processed closer to the way that nature built it.

In my world, timing is everything. So I of things on a 24 hour cycle. And because of this, I wanted to get a chance to ask you how you feel about time restricted feeding, also known as intermittent fasting.

Yeah. No, I think that, um, that when, when it comes down to nutrition, there's three boxes, the way you think about things. You think. Why you're eating, which we already talked about a little bit.

We talk about what you are eating. Which we also just talked. And then when you eat, those are the three things, why, what, and when. When it comes to when, everyone's a little bit different.

I think that time restricted eating or I don't love the word restricted. It makes it restriction equals rebellion, right? That's the way our brains work.

Intermittent fasting also is a scary word for a lot of people. Fasting scares a lotta people away. But when it come down to it, choosing the time period in which you are going to eat can be very important for lot different reasons.

Number one. It is part of mindful eating, right? You are choosing exactly when you want to fuel your body and when are going to not fuel it. And I think that can be a really powerful thing in terms of not just losing weight, but also having a different relationship with your food and also getting some food freedom, meaning like the food doesn't control you.

You're the one who are making the choice about what and you wanna be eating it, I think it can be pretty powerful. I don't like people to try to intermittent fast without really dialing in the why and the what first, because you can only eat within a certain period of time and still eat really crappy food, right?

And that's not the point of this. The point is, how am I fueling myself in a healthy way and why am i doing it? So I think really getting to that why really digging into like why you've let food control you, why, you understand whether or not you're hungry or why your making the behavior changes that you want to be making that that's like super number one important.

Cause anyone can tell you to go on a diet, right? But you have to like really understand yourself in order to stick with it and not get into that rebellion phase that I sort of mentioned a minute ago.

And then what, like you need to be on an unprocessed plan.

Time-Restricted Eating and Long-Term Metabolic Health

I think before intermittent fasting is going to really helpful for you. If you eat those highly palatable, highly processed foods, you are going. Like spike your insulin and then it's going drop like, really fast.

and your body's gonna want to feed itself again. The point of intermittent fasting, and again, I could talk about this for hours, is like really teaching your body that it knows how to get fuel where you've already stored it.

You know, when you eat, you use the glucose you took in and then the rest of it you put into your liver, your fat cells. If you're just continually feeding yourself, You're never learning how to go get those and bring them out and recruit them.

So you only do that by unprocessing your food and being satisfied enough with your full long enough because you're eating good fats and good protein and complex carbohydrates to be able to level yourself off along to not eat for 15, 16 hours.

and your body can go get that glycogen and break down those fatty acids and keep you sustained. And it's not gonna know how to do that if you are eating pizza and donuts and then just not eating for 24 hours.

Like that's just, it not the point. Yeah, and what you're talking about is a real long-term approach. These are lifestyle changes that are meant to be sustainable over time.

And I love that idea of sort of teaching your body that it's okay to have a period without food so that your buddy learns to dine in, so to speak, And mobilize those fat stores that people are often trying to get rid of.

All of this has been incredibly helpful. As we come to a close now, I wonder if you have any final thoughts for us. Yeah. Well, I just wanted to say, thank you.

I love talking about food and I loved talking. You know how to be mindful about that and really understanding how our brains and our bodies are working around this topic.

Cause so often, you know, everything out there is like, oh, want to lose five pounds or how do you lose 20 pounds fast? And like they don't, like. They don' get into like what's so interesting about our body and brains.

And I think if we really understand this about ourselves and we get into it and really like get it, then like we're making this choice for ourselves for a longer, healthier health span throughout our life, not just what I look like or what the scale tells me.

It will get you there. If you unprocess your food and you are conscious about when you're eating and why youre eating, and what you re eating. Yes, the skill will move.

The most important part is what is that bringing you from a metabolic health standpoint for what your life is going to look like and preventing all sorts of metabolic disorders, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, all those things down the road that are directly related to how you are fueling yourself today.

And I think that when people really have that light bulb go off in their heads about like, right, like that's why I'm making this choice for myself today, that why am I gonna move my body like today?

That's I am gonna concentrate on how Dr. Audrey tells me I get my seven to nine hours of nightly sleep, these are the things that are, they seem so simple, but they don't feel simple if it's just someone telling you to do it.

once you figure it out on your own and you really internalize it then that's like where that real behavioral health change can happen and where we get that long-term metabolic health from.

So refreshing to hear that and right back at you I mean this work is important and what you just described is truly an investment in your whole body health which I know so many people value and strive for.

So this is how you do it, everybody. This is you engage and look inward and understand why you're making these choices around food, around exercise, and around sleep.

Dr. Heather, can you tell us where people could find you if they want to work with you? Yeah, sure. Our website is holisthealth.com. That's W-H-O-L-I-S-T.

I chose that name because in medicine, we're gastroenterologists and hospitalists and laborists, and this is our whole body. So here, that's what we do at Holist.

And we have a 10,000 person Facebook group called the Midlife Wellness Collective, where we talk all things food and mindset and metabolic health.

Closing Thoughts and Where to Find Dr. Hammerstedt

That's awesome. And I think I fit into that midlife category as a child of the 70s. Listen, it's been a pleasure to speak to you today. Thank you so much for all your encouragement and your wisdom.

Really appreciate it. Thank you for tuning in to Doctor Talks. We hope today's episode has enlightened and inspired you on your path to optimal health.

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