Introduction to Dr. Mark Hyman

Welcome back to this exciting episode of the Reverse Alzheimer's Summit. I'm so thrilled and absolutely delighted to introduce you to doctor Mark Hyman.

He's a leading health revolution expert. He has revolved his expertise around using food as medicine to support longevity, energy, mental clarity, happiness, and so much more.

Doctor Hyman is a practicing family physician and an internationally recognized leader, speaker, educator, and advocate in the field of functional medicine.

He is the founder and director of the Ultra Wellness Center, the head of Strategic Strategy and Innovation of the Cleveland Clinic Center for Functional Medicine, and a 14 time New York Times bestselling author and board president for Clinical Affairs for the Institute for Functional Medicine.

He is also the host of one of the leading health podcasts, The Doctor's Pharmacy. Doctor Hyman is a regular medical contributor on several television shows and networks, including CBS This Morning, Today, Good Morning America, The View, and CNN.

He's also an advisor and guest co-host on the Doctor Hour show. Doctor Hyman, thank you so much for joining us. You're welcome. Thanks for having me. So you have taken on a lot in your career, and one of the things that I'm most excited to chat about is this big idea that it's the food system that we need to fix in order to address our the root cause of our health as a society.

So this is a massive problem and a massive undertaking, and yet you've taken it on. Can you tell me a little bit about that experience? Well, I mean, maybe I'm I feel like Don Quixote yelling at windmills.

Why the Food System Drives Disease

I think it needs to be done because our food system from end to end is both the cause and the cure for most of the problems that we're facing today in the world.

And I just want to sort of list them and how I came to understand this, but really first started by me sitting in my office with patients, realizing that I could not cure diabetes in my office, that it was cured on the farm.

It was cured, in the grocery store. It was cured in the restaurants. It was cured in the kitchen and the workplace. And I could not fix my patients if I didn't deal with the upstream causes.

And I began to think about what's causing the food system that we have. And it really was our food policies. And then being look at what caused the food policies.

What's it's the food companies in the food industry that's driving so many of those policies through massive amounts of lobbying. And then I began to realize that the other side was not being heard.

And I and I started a nonprofit, 501 C3, the Food Fix campaign, and an advocacy group of five with for a lobby group to try to change that. And for example, this morning I was on a call with my lobbying team in Washington because we're trying to push for medical schools to build into the curriculum nutrition education and chronic disease.

It's the single biggest cause of chronic disease and the single biggest cure. And yet doctors know nothing about it. My daughter's in medical school right now, and she's like, daddy, we don't get any nutrition education.

And so we're trying, for example, to figure out how to how to mandate otherwise exams, nutrition and chronic disease questions, which will force the curriculums to shift in both undergraduate and postgraduate medical education.

There's just sort of one example. So I begin to sort of look at the problem as a whole and realize that, you know, how we grow food, drives the food that's consumed and the food that's consumers driving the diseases we see and the costs associated.

So now we have six out of ten Americans with the chronic disease. We have 88% of Americans with some form of prediabetes. That's just a mind boggling number.

Almost nine African Americans have metabolic poor health. That economic burden is staggering. One out of $5 in our economy is spent on health care, and probably 80 to 90% is on chronic diseases caused by food.

And then and then you have that economic burden on society and from governments and in America, and for example, on corporations. I think Warren Buffett said that health care is the sort of parasite of business because of the cost of health care.

And then we have other downstream consequences that are have to do with health inequity, social justice issues, the affect on kids and learning mental health.

I mean, I just, struck a friend of mine who's, a psychiatrist at McLean, Harvard, who just wrote a new book about, the brain called Brain Energy, which is coming out in the fall, where he discovered that by changing the diet and one of his schizophrenic patients to help them lose weight using a ketogenic diet, his schizophrenia went away.

And it just kind of left the light bulb for him. That. Wait a minute, the brain and food are connected and we may need to rethink the whole paradigm of mental health and even, neurodegenerative diseases, which I know we're really focused on whenever we're seeing. Alzheimer's.

And then in just a couple other points, you know, and then in terms of some of our big issues around climate and the environment, we see we see the food system, you know, not really is a big part of that, but in fact, it is probably the single biggest cause of, of climate change, environmental destruction through agriculture because of the way we grow food is, is is destroying the soil.

Soil is a carbon sink. And in fact, a third of all the carbon in the atmosphere comes from the soil being degraded over the last 150 years through tillage and chemical use that destroys the living matter of the soil.

We we we we really look at the end of the food system, from food waste to deforestation to the inputs from oil. And we're really facing the challenge of this right now because we have a oil dependent food system that that now, is, is being is being challenge because of the rising oil prices, because of the war in Ukraine.

And we're seeing global food shortages.

Fixing Nutrition Education and Chronic Disease

We're seeing developing countries for the food because as the price of oil goes up, the price of commodities goes up like corn and soy. And we are all dependent on oil inputs.

And so you're seeing now 20 plus million people. And in Africa, being at risk for starvation. So these are all interconnected problems. And we have to think of them as one whole problem.

When we think about Alzheimer's. It's similar in that it's a complex problem without a solution that matches the complexity of the problem. And as I hear you talk about the food system, right, it's this very interconnected, very complex problem that requires a complex solution.

So, as we sort of dive into how this affects the brain, you know, the again, the interconnectedness we need, the wisdom of our elders at the height of their wisdom and experience.

If they don't have cognitive function to to contribute that intergenerational wisdom, then we will not find solutions to the world's biggest problems.

Right? So having these conversation shifts and starting to think about how we can harness and protect that cognitive function is essential. And I'm we clear we're on the same page.

So let's talk about some tangible things that people can do, the decisions that they can make at home that have that ripple effect, not only the effect on them personally in terms of better cognitive function, less diabetes, better mental health, more energy, better sweeping of the list.

I love it because the side effects of like a medicine protocol or the vegan diet or or Doctor Perlmutter is approach right. All of our colleagues in this space is that the side effect is that everything gets better every body's better.

Yeah. And the ripple effects are that we're making better decisions for the planet, better decisions for society. So tell me what what would you say if somebody could make one decision today that would change their health?

What would it be? I mean, that's really easy. I think, you know, the challenges, just to kind of like a little side tangent before I answer that question, I just came back from a career.

Which one of the blue zones. And I sat with a woman who was 103 years old, and she was sharp as a tack. And another couple the husband was 97. The woman was 87.

And it was really astounding to see the level of health they had, the level of cognitive function they had. And in looking at their diet, it was just so clear that that their natural way of moving and living and being through their social connections to their having to move in terms of their, their, their sort of structural lives of shepherding and gardening and doing the basic tasks kept them active.

But the food was really amazing. For example, they drank this wild sage tea that every day and it's super high end. And they call that people like the catechins, which are from green.

We see them in green tea, but they have profound effects on, on our on our health, on activating longevity switches, anti-inflammatory switches, antioxidants, which is, detoxification switches in the body.

Sugar, Carbs, and Metabolic Health

And so, so there was a single thing I would recommend would be to, to really dramatically reduce or even eliminate, for the most part, refined sugar and refined carbohydrates.

Those are the things that are driving so much of a problem. And I mentioned earlier that eight out of ten, which are almost 9 in 10 Americans, have poor metabolic health, which means they have high blood sugar, high blood pressure, a high cholesterol, which, by the way, all caused by structure.

So we consume about 152 pounds of, sugar in about 133 pounds of flour per person per year in America. And those are poisons. Those are literally poisons.

And we think of alcohol as a poison. But in the same way, the biggest cause, for example, of liver damage in America is sugar and starch. Fatty liver affects 90 million Americans, and it drives all the chronic diseases.

So we now talk about Alzheimer's as type three diabetes because of this insulin resistance in the brain. So there's a single thing I would do is eliminate liquid sugar calories.

And you know, yes, you can have sweets from time to time, but but it should not be a staple in your diet. And flour

should not be a staple. And that and sugar should not be a staple. Right. It's a treat.

I think of them as recreational drugs. Occasional. I have a glass of tequila, but I don't do it every day and I don't have it for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

I think it really helps with understand a little bit of the historical and political context around the sugar industry and how they influenced this narrative.

That fat was bad, but sugar was an okay replacement. I do, I guess that's a rabbit. I mean, I, I wrote a whole book about this called Each Jacket, and I talked about the history, of the belief that it was, fat and sugar that caused a problem.

And it's a long story if you actually read that book. But the basic short story is that that we thought high cholesterol was the problem. We thought cholesterol was caused by eating too much fat, and that that was the problem.

If we cut fat, would cut, cholesterol, we cut heart disease. Just didn't turn out to be so simple. In fact, the thing that causes your liver to manufacture cholesterol is starchy sugar.

That's what causes high, triglycerides, low HDL, small LDL particles, many LDL particles. Those are what we call pathogenic dyslipidemia. In other words, the kind of cholesterol that causes heart disease and and hardening of the arteries, which happen in your heart but also in your brain.

And a lot of dementia is actually hardening in the brain, which is caused by the same mechanisms. And so we kind of got sidetracked. And the government kind of bought that line.

And the McGovern, report in the 1970s tried to sort of make an advance on dealing with nutrition and disease, but they they were influenced highly by, experts at the time who were were pushing the notion that fat was the problem.

And so we were told to eat less fat and eat more carbohydrates. And the food pyramid said, eat 6 to 11 servings of bread, braciole and pasta and fat sparingly, which was sort of the upside down we should be doing.

And now, you see, you know, the, for example, the, the, groups like Berta Health, which is, so outside of health care, using ketogenic diets to reverse diabetes, type two diabetes, 60% of diabetes gets reversed in advanced diabetics.

I've seen this over and over in my practice. And we see, you know, them, them actually using 70% of their diet as fat. And this is not necessarily good for everybody, but for those with really poor metabolic health, you know, using a higher fat, low carbohydrate diet can be very effective.

And and this is really not my idea. I'm I'm a practicing doctor. I'm not a research scientist, but my colleagues, like David Ludwig at Harvard have done really the hard work and published, you know, really profound research looking at how, for example, taking identical calorie diets but swapping out the the fatty carbohydrates, you know, those who eat the the high fat, low carbohydrate diets, high above, high metabolism burn 400 calories more and they lose more weight.

So it's not about calories in, calories out. It's about the information on food. And that's really the foundation of functional medicine is understanding that food is information, not just calories.

It's instructions are code, and it regulates every single function of your biology, from your immune system to your microbiome to your hormones, to your detoxification system, to your mitochondria function, to your what you made out of your structural system.

So all of it is really connected to food, and it's the most powerful lever we have to change. And and we really got it pretty wrong. When you look at the historical shift in obesity, and I think the government is just it just caught us by

surprise.

Even doctors are kind of still not very aware of this, because in the last 30 years it's been like a hockey stick of obesity and diabetes, and people are just like, wait, what happened?

And it's really because of this, this, push towards a high carbohydrate, low fat diet that really drove so much of this problem. And we I want to just echo that over and over again.

What I see personally in my clinical practice is people reversing their cognitive decline, reversing diagnosed Alzheimer's when they get on a ketogenic diet.

Yeah, I one of the things that comes up is this idea that a ketogenic diet can, you know, is it just bacon and eggs and cheese? No. Go. Oh, ask the pig.

I'm saying, am I saying that right?

Food as Medicine for Brain Health

Yes. Pig in. Yes. Vegan diet. All right. So you are a proponent of the vegan diet. And I'm so curious, you know how you described because I know there's a lot of overlap with the ketogenic diet.

But, if it says on veggies, well, the whole idea is it is it is focus on a few key principles. One is, is quality. So what is the quality of the information you're putting in your body?

Is it food or is it not food? Most of the stuff we eat is not food. It's highly processed ingredients that are pretty far from what they looked at look like when they came out of the farm.

The second key principle is food is medicine. So understand that that is it literally code or instructions is programing your biology with everybody. And the third is personalization.

So not everybody needs to create that. But the Piegan and I was sort of a joke basically I came up with on stage when one doctor was, focusing on paleo, one was a vegan cardiologist.

So they were fighting and I it was getting kind of heavy. And I'm like, hey, if you're paleo and you're vegan, I must be Piegan. And I sort of made joke and and it stuck and people laughed and I okay, they wrote an article about it, but it's actually it's really focusing on those three key principles.

And depending on where you are in the spectrum of your health, you may need more aggressive treatment. Right. Like Benjamin Franklin said, you know, I know it's a prevention is worth a pound of cure.

And sometimes people need a pound of cure. And in certain cases like, you know, diabetes, Alzheimer's, autism, schizophrenia, and, epilepsy and various kinds of neurologic diseases, we see profound effects of ketogenic diet.

And I think, you know, I just I just, I don't know, very if you're over this psychiatrist at Harvard, you know, put this patient on this kind of show, dying with schizophrenia and cured of schizophrenia because he just changed the metabolic health of his brain.

So the brain, you know, the interesting psychiatrist paid little attention to the brain, and neurons pay little attention to the mind. And so we kind of have to understand that the brain is as part of our biology, not like we learned in medical school that it's a sort of disembodied thing that sits on top of our neck, and it's disconnected from those our, the rest of our biology by this thing called the blood brain barrier, which is not really what we now know.

It's a it's very dynamic and everything happens in our brain that happens in our body. So we really have enormous power to pull these levers that traditional medicine is not pulling, unfortunately.

And we're seeing it just breaks my heart because I see so many people suffering that don't need to suffer. Doesn't mean to say we can cure all Alzheimer's and we can cure all disease, but we just have so much better understanding of the biology now.

It's just not. It's just not getting into medical practice. This is such an important point that there's unnecessary suffering happening, and that's what gets me out of bed every day.

To do it is because we can see. We see it with our own eyes every day with our patients. And I know your work is to spread that. How can we increase the impact?

There's so much suffering that doesn't need to happen. And particularly with dementia, as we approach this demographic shift, we're going to have many, many more elderly folks than we have young people to care for them.

We must find solution then. And as you mentioned, so much easier than treatment. Our confidence goes up when we can intervene earlier. So when someone is younger earlier in the disease process and if they can fall in with exercise, diet, sleep, all of these foundational pieces that, really are critical to health.

So I'm so excited to be joining you sort of in this crusade, maybe shouting into the wind. But I know I've talked to patients who have come in to my office with your book in hand, saying, I've got better, I've gotten better.

Things are better, I've lost weight, I feel sharper, I feel better or doctor better. I'm getting better. It's from this book. Now the next layer. So thank you for inspiring people to do that.

Now you have you seen patients that have reversed dementia and cognitive decline? What are the awesome I love it. So do you have any quick anecdotes to share?

But of course, of course I'll tell you a couple of quick stories. You know, one was was originally a woman, and this was a sort of an easy win. And it just shows the power of nutrition.

She was about a year early 80s. She was, you know, a wealthy woman who was on the board of some major companies and, running her company. Then it was just was told she had MCI, real time impairment, and just to get her affairs in order and sorry.

And I said, well, gee, let's have a look and see what's under the hood. And turned out she, you know, had severe B12 deficiency, which is not uncommon in the elderly because of low stomach acid and Diane and various things.

And she had also real problems with methylation and B vitamins and which is a key part of your cognitive function.

Patient Stories of Reversing Cognitive Decline

And and so I just gave her B12 shots and I gave her some B vitamins like that help with methylation like Foley B6. And she was like oh, back to normal.

And then about five years later I got a call from her, and I'm like, oh. And she maybe she's declining and a little worried about her because, you know, when you treat patients, they get better.

They just they don't see them anymore. And then she's like, well, Doctor Hyman, I'm going trekking in Britain and I want to know what I should say and bring with me.

Like, okay, I had another guy who, again, was, you know, the CEO of the company and running his family business and, and really was, was pretty far gone.

And it was worth sitting in a room and really kind of severely cognitively impaired, depressed. And his family, his kids, grandkids didn't want to be around him and was able to function in social events.

Nothing could have been running his company as well. Just let's look under the hood. And he had, you know, not one thing. And often it's not one thing.

It's many things, you know, in medicine where it's the one thing is it's one pathway. That's one drug will fix it. I'm like, the amyloid is this. It's it just doesn't work like that.

The body's an ecosystem. So he had a whole series of things. He was very insulin resistant. He was he was one overweight in a big block and big pot belly.

She was very handsome. He just it he had extremely high levels of homocysteine and these methylation problems that we're talking about. He also the genes for the centage for for gene.

And he also had a double for. So he was a high risk because this genetic risk in the he had a really high levels of heavy metals because they were in Pittsburgh.

And almost all my patients from Pittsburgh are heavy metal toxic because the U. S. steel is there and they have used coal to run the steel plants, and that coal goes in the atmosphere and it's everywhere.

It's on the soil. It's in them, on the streets, it's everywhere. And so he had high levels and, you know, mouthful of fillings. So he had one of the highest levels of mercury ever seen.

We we talked to him from Mercury. We got to showing that we optimize insulin methylation. We he also had terrible gut issues. Now we know the microbiome plays a huge role in cognitive function in the brain.

And we know it declines as we age, but also we know it's it plays a role in dementia because of the inflammation we could gut. And we know that Alzheimer's is a brain inflammation.

So where's it coming from? It could be that not all that could be the methylation issues. It could be the in some distance, but also in his gut. And he'd had irritable bowel for years was I think was at Stella's or something risk which is the psychotic break that got down.

We fix his gut. We fix his insulin, we fix his methylation, we fix his metals. And he literally woke up like Rip Van Winkle. It was really quite amazing.

So I think, you know, case after case like this and it just it just give me hope. Now there are some patients I really have struggle with who like, you know, we dry things and it's kind of a maybe we haven't figured out the whole puzzle pieces yet, but but I would say that, you know, eight out of ten, you know, either get significantly better or dramatically better.

And, you know, so whether it's it's mold or Lyme or it's or just in therapy metals or the microbiome or often a whole collection of these things, you have to deal with all of them.

It's not like the one thing and like they'll talks about this, you know, if you have 36 holes in your roof, you know, if you plug up five of them, it's still going to rain your house.

You find all the holes and you got to plug them holes. Absolutely. It is so exciting. It absolutely. There's hope for people right now. There are ways to prevent and reverse cognitive decline.

And yes, we always need to know more. We always want more research and more data. Yeah. Fair criticism. We did a clinical trial in my office, and, we're excited to share the results this year and published this in a peer reviewed journal.

And Doctor Bredesen, also in his team, did a trial and got similar numbers to what you're describing about. Yes, percent of people get better. So we know enough to act right now.

We don't more. And I love that. A lot of this is just common sense, just uncommon practice. Yeah, exactly. I mean, the finger and there's even major research trials like the finger trial was a trial use lifestyle and dealing with all these different metabolic things and changing diet and lifestyle.

And so, not only a slowing but a reversal of decline. And Richard Isaacson's work is really profound. He's, you know, was was, really, you know, extremely rigorous science around this and is coming to the same conclusion.

So all of us who are trying these things are coming to the same conclusion. And, you know, yes, there's always more to uncover. And I talked to Richard about other layers of things like heavy metals reference he might not be looking at, but even the simple stuff, I'm just like fine tuning each person's unique biology, which is really what functional medicine is about.

It's about understanding the imbalances of the body, correcting those imbalances by taking out the bad stuff and putting in the good stuff, the body. It can recover. It's really remarkable.

We're built to heal. We're designed to heal. So what's next for you? You have taken on big projects. You've written many, many bestselling books that you've been involved with.

I mean, your your resume, your CV is a I know, I can't believe I'm still standing. But anyway, so what? What's next for you? How do how do we share this message more broadly so that it's more, adopted by more people and there is less suffering?

What is the what's next for me? What's next is, you know, I just finished writing a book called Young Forever, which is about taking the science of functional medicine and focusing on longevity and understanding how we activate all our and the healing systems, our longevity switches, and actually bringing that into sort of more of a common conversation about how people can do this on their own.

And also what's coming in the next science. So it's really kind of exciting.

Whatu2019s Next: Longevity and Food System Reform

We're now for the first time, I but then I talked about as we were understanding the mind of God, how how will we design? How is everybody doing? How do we work with it in a way to enhance its function and optimize its performance?

So that's kind of an exciting project. And the other thing I'm really working on a lot is the food system. And we sort of touched on earlier, but how do we change the food system?

Because if we don't do that or we're kind of swimming upstream, and I think that's really a key focus of mine is how do we change Who policies to change agriculture, to create a more of a general agricultural system, to create a general health care system, working on things like we talked about nutrition in medical schools, on medical killing me.

Also Medicare will pay for food is medicine where we change and fund agriculture transformation through agriculture and starting to happen, you know, through the work we've done, we've really gotten billions of dollars allocated to the USDA for regional agriculture.

Secretary Vilsack just announced the Food System Transformation Framework, which works on multiple levels that enhance the food is medicine framework and regenerate agriculture.

We we're not going to have a white House conference on nutrition and health, which hasn't happened in 50 years. That's gonna happen in September. So there's a lot of really exciting things happening that are coming out of our work and other people's work.

It's obviously not just us, but we're just trying to move this down the field, collectively. And it's really quite exciting

moment in history. I think we're like waking up to like, wait a minute, maybe there's another way to do this extremely exciting.

So how can people help? I know our listeners are going to one want to make different decisions after hearing this conversation. So is there something they can buy in in the grocery store?

Sure. I mean, I think I think, you know, all of us have the opportunity to vote with our dollars or with our forks, with our actual votes. And I think it matters.

I think people have heard this in franchises connected to what I do doesn't matter, but it does. And it could be, you know, as simple as, you know, taking initiative of composting or creating a garden.

I mean, 40% of the food in America during World War Two is grown in Victory Gardens. We call them Victory gardens because we needed to put people to work in factories to make air, you know, a bomber every 52 minutes, which we were great at doing.

We can't even I don't know what's going on with this kind of, you know, we can't even make the master people. So it's like, the potential for us as individuals to make the small changes that make a big difference collectively are huge.

And and when we vote with our dollars, companies change. You know, I have a friend, for example, who, is on the sustainability board of Nestlé, and they I work with the city of Nestle, which is the biggest food company in the world to to help them.

And they committed to do by 2030, 70% of their supply chain is are doing their agriculture. That's huge. That's huge because that's going to drive the market, that's going to drive agricultural change.

And so I see I see these initiatives happening and it's really exciting to me. And then to how can people get involved. Should be a sign up for our newsletter.

How can they find out more about you? Sure. I mean, if you can keep track of what we're doing, go on social media. This is doctor Mark Hyman, Dr. Mark Hyman at and Twitter and Facebook and Instagram and TikTok.

I think you and then and then of course, they can go to my website, Doctor hyman.com. I've got a newsletter for recipes. I've got my podcast, The Doctor's Pharmacy. Every week.

We've got a couple of episodes, a week in that. And so there's ways for people to get connected and, and also, if you want to join the movement, devotees of food system, you know, politicians don't lead. They follow.

So if, if they if they don't see the grassroots movement, if they don't see people interested who are voters, calling these issues out and pushing this forward, they're not going to change.

So so if you want to join, we're going to be activating our community through through political action, which will be just me just making comments on social media that we can then aggregate and collect and then share with the government.

That's what the government's looking for, particularly with this white House conference, which is in September. So if you really want to help, sign up, sign up for, my social media account, sign up for my newsletter.

We're going to be activating people and getting people to to kind of call in, a change which we can all do together. And I just want to sort of close with a, a quote from Margaret Mead who said, you know, never doubt that a small group of, of, of committed individuals can change the world.

In fact, it's the only thing that ever has. So I think I think that's really what we need to think about. And we really can make those changes in difference.

Incredible. Doctor Hammond, thank you so much for taking the time to be here with us today. Share this message. So important, so critical to people's health individually and also all of us collectively.

I'm so grateful to you for the work that you're doing in the world. Thank you so much, Heather. I appreciate being here. Have a wonderful day. And, please sign up for that newsletter and take action where you can.