Brittany's Hypertension Journey

Welcome back for another conversation regarding hypertension. But today I really wanted to share with you what it's like for the everyday person who's dealing with hypertension to understand the valuable power they have that's literally on their plates.

And the perfect person for that is my co-founder of The Healing Kitchen is Brittany Jaroudi. How are you today? I'm good. How are you? I'm great. Well, I'll tell you, you have an inspiring story, first of all.

And could you give a little highlight of kind of your health journey in the sense of you were a kid growing up and then how things evolved and where you found yourself ill?

Yeah, I pretty much lived the standard American lifestyle from the beginning. I grew up in a household where I had a busy mom who was working all the time, and so it was very quick meals and just I feel like, you know, very classic of the box of cereal and different things that were processed that found our way into our house pretty often.

And so I live that way. My entire life. I thought it was normal and I, you know, didn't really notice. You know, I started to notice issues when I started to come out of college.

And some things that I started to pay attention with were like, my weight had continually went up. And I'm very short in real life. I'm only 4'11. So I was morbidly obese on the BMI scale.

And it kind of just progressed like I you know, college is stressful and then finding a job is a little stressful. I got married and so then I started to pay attention to, you know, going to the doctors and really like kind of taking responsibility for my health.

So when I went to my annual physical, I got my blood pressure taken and it got flagged really, really high to the point where they were concerned. You know, me being so young, maybe I had something going on with my mitral valve and which required, you know, I KG and different things like that for screenings and they, you know, everything looked perfect and it was so high that they put me on to different blood pressure medicines and, you know, to go along with that.

Also, my blood work showed that I had high cholesterol and I had a high HSC-reactive protein. And then also I wasn't feeling the best, you know, as well, there was a lot of starting of chest pain and things like that.

And so at the age of 23, that's pretty alarming and something you generally don't really think. You have to worry about. And the blood pressure definitely was super concerning because it was something I could test daily with at home, like monitor, cough that we had.

And my mom also was a nurse. So she also would take my you know, she had when you go to the doctor's office, she could take my readings. So with both of those, like daily, I would see that my numbers were very high.

And that is very alarming because, you know, that increases your risk for stroke and some other not so fun things down the pike if you just let things go.

And I had readings that were very scary, like 160 over like 110 at one point. And that was with medications or without. Before. And then with the first pill, I came down to like 148 over, I think it was like still like 199.

And then they put me on a second one which came down and I and it still like just was above like what they consider normal. It would, you know, and then also the side effects from being on medication too.

I wasn't really a fan of, so I got really lucky. I found out about a whole food plant based lifestyle through watching forks over knives, and in the documentary they talk about heart disease and cancer.

And those were really the two big players in my life. My dad had a triple bypass surgery when I was in elementary school, has had, you know, strokes, has had a defibrillator and a lot of other really scary things on top of diabetes.

And, you know, my mom had a big history of cancers. And so, you know, I was trying to figure out, you know, being a newlywed and already being so sick, like, how do I help myself?

You know, I was going the route of doing the traditional going to your doctor, seeing what they can do to you. And not once did they talk about lifestyle with me, which was very upsetting after learning all of the information.

But, you know, they just told me it was genetic like my dad and uncle and some other family members all went to the same doctor. And so he was they were the patients of that doctor.

Lifestyle Changes and Blood Pressure Recovery

And they were just chalked it up to genetics like, well, you're young, nothing's wrong with all the scans we've done. This is just how life is going to be.

And I just didn't want to accept that. So while I took the medication, I also started to follow a plant based lifestyle and noticed a drop in my blood.

Pressure was one of the most immediate things that I started to do. I did focus on foods from Dr. Kroger's research that were specifically good for lowering blood pressure, like making sure I get flax in my diet every day.

I still do all of these things to this day, making sure, you know, I upped the amount of hibiscus tea I was drinking and made sure I got lots of dark leafy greens in my diet and things like that that I didn't do prior.

On top of regular exercise, I also started to meditate, which was something I didn't do prior breathing exercises. I found a really neat gadget called The Core, and it's like a handheld device that measures kind of like your stress indicator and your breathing, and it kind of gives you a real time data report at the end of how well you like were calm throughout the whole thing.

So I love I use that thing to this day just to kind of help ground and I found that really helped me stick with a meditation practice and you know I started seeing it come down and it came down pretty quickly to the point where with my doctor's guidance, I was able to stop all my medication.

You know, two meds was way too much for my blood pressure lowering. So I went down to one and then tapered off and did nothing. And I'm been on anything else since.

It's actually really funny. Now I'm pregnant with our first child and you know, I'm going to our doctors appointments and they're looking at the history from eight years ago, nine years ago.

And I went in with all these blood pressure issues. And, you know, my blood pressure is beautiful at the doctors appointments, but they're like, you know, still worried about pre-eclampsia from eight or nine years ago.

And it's just funny that like, you know, every time I go out, I'm like, see, it's no good, you know, because my lifestyle hasn't changed. I still do all of these things.

I haven't went back and it's really been such a gift and empowering that it's not, you know, my genetics didn't necessarily was the reason I really implemented this lifestyle. And it's, you know, changed my blood pressure, my cholesterol, all of my things.

So I'm really blessed to have found this. That's fantastic. So what would you consider for the timeline? So let's say

that you noticed that your blood pressure, did you pull off the first one and then the second one to the point that you were off of all meds since changing your diet?

I would say like for four months to four pills. I would say, you know, in the first month I was starting to notice and starting, you know, as you go pretty low and, you know, a little light headed ness, you know, you really have to pay attention if you're on.

I would say, like it's really important to work with a doctor, especially if you're tapering off any medication. You're doing this lifestyle because sometimes you can see results so quickly.

But around that first month really went down to just the one and then it kind of just tapered like we went a little bit less and less. And then I would say three or four months I was off everything.

Yeah, I would definitely say it depends on how when you were young and you hadn't been on the meds very long, think that the sooner we get you earlier in life, the better, especially if there's nothing structurally wrong, like something wrong with your kidneys or your heart.

So. Absolutely. So then can we speak to also a little bit about your weight loss? Because obviously that had significant impact as well in, you know, the timeline there as far as your weight?

Yeah. So it took me about a year, maybe a year and a couple of months to lose 70 pounds. And when I went into it, you know, it wasn't like my the focus was really about the blood pressure and the immediate kind of damage I was doing.

I always say that the weight loss kind of a nice bonus. It was like, you know, I wasn't when I found forks over knives, it wasn't a fad thing. Like I had done all prior.

Like, you know, I'm going to try this for two weeks or my New Year's resolution is going to be doing this for a month, and then I get the results and kind of can slowly go back to the things that I did before I knew that this was going to be like a lifelong change.

So I really focused on like the science and then seeing the results of my blood work and my blood pressure and all of that. But I was really patient with myself and had a lot of grace for myself doing this and about, yeah, about a year, £70 came off.

That's amazing. So can we talk a little bit about what you said you gave yourself grace and patience. How did you have a mindset going into that? Did you have judgment about yourself before?

Like where did that come from? Because I think that's such a an important piece of the longevity and sticking to any type of health change. Where did that come from, especially someone so new?

Yeah, I always say that like we're our worst critics to yourselves. We're kind of like the meanest to ourselves. Like, you would never say things that you say to yourself, to a stranger, or at least I, you know, I would never dare to say it to a friend, and I forget where I heard it.

But I read or heard something, someone talking about how you should talk to yourself like you're a friend. And so kind of that self-talk of, you know, I'm doing the best I can today, look at all these changes I'm making.

I'm literally we're not going out to eat anymore. I'm not eating processed foods. I'm spending the time to make all of these meals. And I just had such faith it would all work out because I was putting in a lot of effort.

And so I just was really, you know, gracious with myself that like, you know, I didn't expect everything to get fixed overnight. I also reflected in it took me, you know, I was young when I found this lifestyle, but it still was like 20 some years of doing it the other way.

So, you know, being graceful that like my if my cholesterol didn't come down, you know, it wasn't the perfect, you know, numbers that sometimes we see people talk about overnight, you know, to be grateful that eventually, you know, as I do this longer run, slowly come to where I want it.

And that's kind of what I found. The longer I've done this lifestyle, you know, it only gets better and better each time. Excellent. So you started small and things evolved and continued.

So how did you find healing in the kitchen? Because I think that's really is speaks to what we do. And how did you start sharing that online? But you talked maybe about some of the foods and the the recipes that you really, you know, hung on to that really helped you move forward with your health journey.

Yeah.

Weight Loss, Mindset, and Self-Compassion

So I was the only, I was kind of on my own island, you know, figuring I figured this out, found forks over knives, desire to go, hopefully plan base to make this change the day before Easter.

But I was my only person doing it. I didn't know anyone else near me. You know, this was before, really. I feel like even like Facebook communities really kind of blew up where now, you know, way, way, way before COVID.

So, you know, we weren't quite looking for that online. So I really felt like my own kind of little, you know, planet doing this. And, you know, I had my husband has always been a healthy weight.

He had never had any issues. I had he comes from, you know, Middle Eastern background. So they weren't quite as meat and cheese focused as I was growing up.

But I wanted to you know, I knew how much longevity this lifestyle would do, and I wanted to get him on board. So I started making recipes that were familiar, and I think it also helped me a bunch to make this fun and just swapping things like figuring out how to make bolognaise with like lentils versus ground beef.

And that really made me feel like I wasn't such an outcast. Like I'm not just sitting here eating rabbit food all day. And also then it got my husband excited because I did the cooking and then, you know, he liked the meals.

And so it kind of snowballed from there. I also made a pact with the big guy upstairs where if I got my health back, you know, I would do everything in my power to help someone else get their health back.

And that really was my core mission for starting our channel and website and still is to this day, because it was the biggest blessing. I just want to help someone else, you know, in that same regard.

So really the kitchen has been such a beautiful place and kind of my playground and safe space to do all of us. I think it's fantastic. I didn't know about your pact with the big man upstairs.

I think that's great, which makes a lot of your personality. So because everyone who meets you is just absolutely delighted. So I'd say so let's talk a little bit about the basics.

So let's say you have someone who joins and they really, really want to start this and do it as quickly and as healthily is way, way possible. What would be some of your basic guidelines or directions to help someone find a path to cooking this way, especially if they don't have any cooking experience?

They're not eating. You're not even culinary training like you did this, right? Yeah. Right. Yeah. I just kind of switched my mindset of thinking of like when, you know, you would have a meat in a meal, think about a bean or, you know, even, you know, a legume.

Those two are kind of our foundation blocks. I mean, sweatshop, you know, if it's a soy based or if it's, you know,

black beans and I kind of change it up all the time so it doesn't get boring.

And then, you know, we have our greens and instead of, you know, buying white pasta, we bought whole wheat pasta or we bought being pasta or, you know, and then I experimented with all the different grains that I was very familiar with. Rice But, you know, it would be like white rice prior.

Now you brown rice or forbidden rice or, you know, different. I love playing with all the different grains I've never knew before. I like commute and stuff and all those things.

And same with the vegetables. You know, I suggest eating things you enjoy. There's no reason to stuff down things that you don't enjoy. So, you know, there are such a variety.

If you don't like brussel sprouts, you don't have to eat them. You can find something else. But you know, it's endless and same with fruits and everything.

So I really just kind of packed my meal is kind of like that where it would be, you know, greens or vegetables. I would have our starch, I would have our fruits and kind of belt our meals around that.

And it just became doesn't have to be as complicated as people make it out to. Can be very simple too. It can be as gourmet or as simple as you want, just like olive cooking.

So really that mindset shift really helps a lot at the beginning. So someone is busy and they're working and they'll say they already have kids at home.

What would be some of the tips that you would help them kind of just be able to transition to effective specialty if they don't have anybody helping way.

Yeah, so I got it. It's all quick you know, just like I do think that putting in some effort for a results you want makes a big difference. It's just kind of the similar thing when we spend money, we spend money on things that we are valuable.

We spend our time doing things that are valuable. For me, I know like raising our first one, you know, having family meals is very important to me. And so I have plans to have us all have dinner together and kind of make that a core value and teaching them to cook young and enjoy it.

But, you know, things that are familiar. So like instead of doing chicken nuggets, you can make chickpea nuggets and you can still you know, make your own ketchup or, you know, and nowadays there's even some like low sodium to know.

Sodium ketchup is on the market that you can buy. So you know, it doesn't have to be things that are so foreign that things you aren't familiar with, lasagnas and soups and stews and things like that that are really fun.

And you can enjoy, your kids can enjoy, doesn't seem like it.

Building Healing Kitchen and Plant-Based Cooking

So, you know out there is really my suggestion and nowadays like with whole harvest I know that we both like whole harvest. You can buy meal kits sent to your home.

I mean, they didn't have that eight, nine years ago. It didn't have a two years ago. Yeah, I know. So really it's nice to have a lot of those options, you know, to make it work for whatever lifestyle you have.

Now that's perfect. So cooking and then so let's say that you make something what are some of the like bold ideas and or leftover ideas because I know some people would get bored quickly and others maybe you're like, Hey, it doesn't matter to me.

I just want to make something easy for the rest of the week. What would be like any batch cooking ideas? Yeah, I love batch cooking in a sense of not so much like making, you know, triple amounts of a recipe, but batch cooking like grains and starches and having those ready to go in your refrigerator so you can quickly pull it out and assemble whatever you're in the mood for.

So like, potatoes are great, sweet potatoes are great. You can cook them, you know, in the oven or a pressure cooker or however you'd like it and have them say for the week.

You can cook up a big thing of, you know, different whole grains, pull those out. You can make even your vegetables if you want to cook them and have them available.

And I think that's a big thing, too, is like having the foods that you want to eat available for you, even like we always have fruit out. So, you know, I'm quick to grab an apple or something else really makes it helpful.

And that's the same in our fridge. If you open my fridge today, it would be, you know, all the all the things that I've kind of cooked up ahead of time.

And then I just make whatever we're in the mood for. If it wants to be, you know, a soup, we could add grains to the soup or vegetables to the soup or the broth.

If it wants to be a grain bowl, I can make a sauce really quick and out of green, blue or chopped salad. So, you know, whatever, whatever. I'm in the mood for. Hmm.

So how do you approach flavor? Because I know a lot of people like it just, you know. Right. It's going to be eating carrots and lettuce all day, eating a plant based like like there's no flavor. Can we talk a little bit about how you approach flavor and find success in flavor?

I actually think one of the most things, the first thing you should do, being healthy plant based, is to find a couple sources that you like because really that's such a driver.

You know, you can put a sauce on anything. And if you love that sauce, it really is going to make it more enjoyable. So there's so many great like cheese sauces where you can make cheese sauce out of butternut squash or potatoes or red peppers.

I mean, there's a variety of that online also. Same with like pesto or green sauce. You can make it spicy or not spicy depending on your preference. So really finding like a couple of different salad dressings.

I mean, it doesn't have to just be balsamic vinegar. I love balsamic vinegar, but you know, you might want that and something else is an option. So there's a lot of different creamy and zesty things.

And I just think that, you know, if you put that on your broccoli or zucchini or something that you really, you know, you're wanting to eat, it really can bump up the enjoyment factor a bunch.

Yeah, I would say that's really important. I actually have a passion to honestly she was had been troubling, you know, having struggles with the plant based diet over and over again.

Like she'd go into it and she's trying to be really hard on herself, like I have to be 100%, 100% of the time. And she we finally when I met with her, she's like, listen, I will eat plants, but can I still have my Chick-Fil-A sauce?

And I'm like, sure, because she put her potatoes in, as she put it on things, she doesn't eat a excessive amount, but it was enough to keep her consistent.

So we start seeing, you know, she's lost £30, you know, and her blood sugars are improving. She's literally reducing her blood sugars just by eating those.

But I think you're exactly right. Sauces are so important. So with that in mind, what are one or two of your favorite sauces that you make that you have always in your fridge?

So one is a salad dressing that we make all the time and it does have balsamic vinegar in it, but I love it. There are so many different flavors of balsamic vinegar is like California balsamic in particular.

They have just a great like zesty Italian one that I love during the summer. I buy up tons of them in the summertime because we love to mix that with a little bit of hummus and then some Dijon mustard for a little bit of zest.

And it just makes the creamiest easiest salad dressing or dipping sauce. And I just change it up. Like sometimes if I don't want that Italian one, we'll switch it up with a pomegranate wine or, you know, a cherry wine or a fig one.

And it just changes the flavor slightly that it always stays interesting. And that takes like 2 seconds to make. Another one that I love is like A to Z sauce.

So we'll chop up some dill, you know, in the summer refreshed also amazing and cucumbers and it makes a creamy sauce and you can do a creamy sauce with some extra white beans in there really to pump up some protein to and get sneak in some you know, maybe you're not used to having white beans.

It's a great way to sneak it in. You can't taste that. There's beans in there and that's really fun. And we love to do that with different pita meals or, you know, potato meals or or all the different things that we love to VQ sauce on.

So, you know, I always for me, I'm always experimenting, making recipes, I'm always testing out different things. But those are two that are kind of always around at our house.

And I really want to get to like maybe breakfast, lunch and dinner options, maybe a couple that you are or your go tos just so that we have some concrete.

What do I do tomorrow if I'm starting this diet? Yeah. Breakfast. Breakfast. I really kind of stuck to two things for breakfast, especially when I was losing all the weight.

Meal Planning, Flavor, and Everyday Recipes

One was a simple like, I like the little breakfast cookies I would make and it would just be rolled oats, a smashed banana. And then I would add in, you know, you could add in like just a couple raisins, maybe some shredded carrots, some carrot like carrot cake, spices that you would have some maybe like ginger cardamom, things like that, cinnamon.

And that was really fun. And then sometimes I would add in some apple pie space or pumpkin pie space depending on the season, some chopped up apples to that.

So that was like always fun. And I would make them like three good size cookies out of that. And I felt like you're eating cookies for breakfast, but you're not.

And I also would always add in flax fox was a non-negotiable. I've been eating flax every day since I started this, and I like to get it in a breakfast because it's kind of an easy way.

So you can sprinkle in some fox and there and sometimes I'll do chia seeds that are ground or hemp seeds, but I always make sure to get that fox and especially for blood pressure lunch.

I always like to do like a big chopped salad, but I wouldn't make it more than a salad. I would add in, you know, half a cup of some kind of grain and, you know, that would be a green I pull from my refrigerator.

That would be cold, you know, and I just I like it in there cold. So it could be cold farro that I throw in. And if it's not a grain, it would be a starch.

So it could be some sweet potatoes. I have very lucky the grocery store and it's not like a fancy grocery store down the road has the purple sweet potatoes that are beautiful.

And so I will be so sad if they stop selling those. But I cook up a bag of those and have them in the fridge. And so it's just nice to kind of chop them up filling to your salad.

It's not just greens. And then sometimes I'll add fruit to it too. So it's like you get a little bit of like blueberries in there or raspberries and then like I would do that hummus, that hummus dressing on there.

So really it's a nice filling meal. The salad takes me a while to eat because I really try to chew all of my greens and just enjoy. I try to take that moment for myself.

But, you know, I'm not usually watching TV or something when I'm eating, not I'm kind of taking a break. That stress reduction. I'm just going to sit here and enjoy my meal.

So that's really a good one. And then dinner, I always did something that was like traditionally like what we would have had before. So that could be like a lasagna.

That could be we make a wedding soup going through all the ones that we've done recently. We do like curry is we do Thai food and I just make them whole few plant based you know option.

So on our YouTube channel and in the Healing Kitchen, there's so many recipes out there that I've done and that's exactly what we eat for dinner. And it just those kind of three things with some snacks in between.

And, you know, I love snacking on celery or having an apple or something like that in between really make it enjoyable. And that, you know, I never feel I never felt like I was hungry or deprived.

You know, it really taught me to eat until I was satisfied. And those were kind of the the ticket is breakfast and lunch pretty much stayed, you know, different various things could go in there for grains and things, but those are pretty ones that were standard.

And then I just like that one meal to be kind of our wild card meal where I could be fun. And also doing the kind of that way made me not think about, you know, I wasn't constantly using a lot of brainpower to think about what I'm having for breakfast or lunch because I kind of already had my go to use, but it's been really helpful.

Yeah, I think you're right. A lot of people eat many of the same meals, eight or nine castles within the same month or so. And I think if people look at it, they were creatures of habit.

Can we speak a little bit also to one your YouTube channel and the resources that you offer? Yeah, so I have. And so I made that pact. If I got healthy, I would help somebody.

So I started a YouTube channel. It's everything's out The Jaroudi Family I named it that because I really want in my family to help your family get healthy.

I came from having such sick parents and really growing up and seeing a lot of people pass away. Super young from uncles to my own mom and just a lot of heartbreak.

And, you know, a lot of it could have been prevented by some lifestyle actions. And so I made this YouTube channel where it's just sharing recipes and tips and we have a lot of fun. We do.

We have a camper, so we do camping videos and we do tons of different recipes on there for kids and adults, small parts and things you could take to your family holidays and people would be interested in.

So things that are comforting and familiar. And then so that's our YouTube channel. We have a website that goes with it and you know, everything has a free printable PDF of the recipe, very convenient for for people to find

perfect.

And that is wonderful. And then with the Healing Kitchen, you and I join forces and we meet weekly live Brittany shares two delicious recipes. She cooks in under 30 minutes and I've learned so much from her.

And then I answer questions. And then we are to, you know, expert workshops per month for free as well, part of the membership. So yeah, this is fantastic.

Brittany, I think you're a really wonderful testament of what this lifestyle can do for people and just a little investment in themselves. And I really like how you mentioned also being mindful with your eating.

Can we just kind of touch upon that real quick before we close it out? Because I think that's one thing that so many of us don't do.

Mindful Eating and Closing Reflections

We don't sit, myself included, sit back in really understand that the situation or the environment we put ourselves in to eat can have drastic influence on how we eat, how much we eat, our hunger cues.

A lot of different things. Yes, stress. I also feel like the lifestyle medicine pillar that people don't talk about a lot is stress. And it's such a you know, I had so much stress in my life.

I was a caretaker to my mom who battled cancer for many years. Then she passed and there are a lot of stressful things. And so I've learned that stress also can make your blood pressure go up and different things like that.

So really taking those moments to be mindful and and so what I am not always the best at this. You know, I try to put away my phone, I put it on airplane mode or flip it over, put it in a different room.

But when I am going to have mealtimes, I like to, you know, have kind of everything off and sit there and enjoy my meal and focus on what I'm doing. I've also noticed that my digestion is better doing that because most times, you know, you're kind of mindlessly on your phone watching something, watching something on TV, eating, and, you know, you eat a lot quicker.

You're not actually, like, enjoying and savoring things. And so I do try out meals times as kind of a form of meditation. I mean, it can be an act of meditation to really take my time and enjoy what I'm doing and eating and not be distracted.

And I've noticed that that has also helped stress levels as well for me as well as digestion has been a bonus. No, I think that's great. It's a wonderful time to be mindful.

It can be just like a walking meditation. I like to walk and be mindful. I struggle with just sitting down. But yeah, the mindful eating piece is such a beautiful part and just even thinking about where your food came from, you know, all the inputs that required it to be here.

It also provides gratitude, which also helps so many different things. So I think that's fabulous. So well, thank you, Brittany, for being part of the Summit and I hope everyone found this very helpful.

We really appreciate you and in sharing your journey. Thank you so much for having me.