

MAKE MINDFULNESS A HABIT TO REDUCE DAILY STRESS WITH DR. LIZ ROOK

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 00:03

Hi, this is Dr. Adrienne, Welcome to Health Bite the podcast where we explore all things health and wellness. Welcome back to health bite our podcast where we discuss all things health and wellness and small actionable steps towards your better health. Today, I'm really excited to have Dr. Elizabeth Rook. Dr. Rook is a physician and founder of Thrive arena, which is a program in which she helps people thrive in their careers, relationships, and in their lives overall, she is really well suited to do this work as she has a master's degree in public health as well as ethics. She also has a doctorate in osteopathic medicine, which is a practice of medicine with which is more integrative right and holistic than general Western medicine. So really well suited again for this work, and then has a certification in internal medicine and rheumatology. And if that wasn't enough, went on to get a certification in nutrition, from Precision nutrition. And so she brings all of this background and expertise in helping her patients and her clients thrive. I love that welcome. Dr. Rook.

Dr. Liz Rook 01:27

Thank you so much, Adrian, I'm so happy to be here.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 01:30

Yeah, it's a pleasure to have you. So tell me a little bit about kind of how you approach this big but small topic of, of living well and thriving. How do you how do you approach this with your clients.

Dr. Liz Rook 01:47

So thriving, to me means to kind of bloom or blossom or just basically improve on what's already there. So I think of like flowers blooming. And for a flower to bloom, you need to have the soil and the sunshine and the water and kind of all the elements coming together. And so that is how I approach health and lifestyle and nutrition related changes both with my patients and rheumatology and also with my clients that I coach. And right now I coach one on one. And we talk about the things basically that are standing in their way. So are they not getting enough, you know, using the metaphor sunshine are not enough fertilizer or not enough water. So we look at all the aspects of their life and see where maybe they're stuck or their obstacles in their way so that they can improve all aspects of their life to thrive. Because, as you mentioned, osteopathic training incorporates mind, body and spirit we learn additional techniques for improving patient's lives and care. And we had additional training in nutrition and lifestyle and exercise. So I like to tie all of that together. And a lot of my patients enjoy it. Some of them do not when we're talking about their arthritis, or lupus or their vasculitis. But I do have some patients that I'm sure as you do that just want a pill to solve everything. Because the life the lifestyle changes are difficult, and they can be challenging, and it's easy to get stuck. Especially when we're dealing with emotional blockages where there's, especially stress is a huge blockage that a lot of my patients and clients come up against, and they're not sure how to go around or move through. And so a lot of the work I do with my coaching clients is we work on processing through emotion and stress. And

getting to the other side of that. And I have a big focus on emotional eating because it's near and dear to my heart.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 03:47

Yeah, I mean, all of those, all of those pillars that you mentioned, in lifestyle, nutrition movement, I think you alluded to nature and the sunshine are also important in this kind of collective pursuit to thrive. So it's So talk to me a little bit about how you get people engaged in doing this work. Because, as you mentioned, it is it is difficult in that it takes a lot of intention, even though we we usually feel better on the other end of exercise, we feel better on the other end of cooking for ourselves. It takes a lot of kind of cost to engage in it to initiate it. Let's put it that way. So how to how do you motivate your patients?

Dr. Liz Rook 04:35

So I think the easiest way that I've found to do that is just kind of talk to them and see where their beliefs are at and what's kind of holding them back from taking those steps forward. And I come from the school of thought that our thoughts and our beliefs create our emotions and our emotions drive our actions. So you can either come from a place of love or fear and a lot of us are driven by fear more than love and compassion, especially when it comes to ourselves, and our health in our own body, and sometimes their beliefs holding us back. So I have a lot of patients, for example, with rheumatoid arthritis or inflammatory types of arthritis, and they get this diagnosis, and just kind of stops them in their tracks. And they think that they have, they form this belief that they're not going to be able to exercise again, they're not going to be able to go out and do and live their life, and they get stuck there. And it's very common with any chronic disease diagnosis, that you can have anxiety and depression and worry. And it's very easy to get stuck. So sometimes just having that conversation and opening up that possibility that no, this is not the end of your life. It's not the you know, you're never going to be able to move or exercise and there's nothing that you can do to improve your health or improve your situation or improve your circumstances. And breaking through that barrier, I think is of the utmost importance to just create that possibility that there is life after a diagnosis, there is life after weight gain, there's life after surgery. And there's life after joint replacement. It's not you know, it's a death sentence in that aspect.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 06:15

Yeah. And it's really important, I think, to talk about the incremental ways in which people can benefit. So I think a lot of times when we think about weight loss, it's all or nothing, you know, it's like, lose 40 pounds or nothing. When we talk about exercise, it's exercise every day or nothing. And I think what's really important to get across is that small incremental changes have not only big impact in people's well being, but also the data is there for impact in in health, right? So Small changes can really reduce chronic disease reduce inflammation in someone who already has a chronic disease, for example. So yeah, wouldn't you say that, you know, small, small changes, again, small bites?

Dr. Liz Rook 07:06

Yes, definitely. I love the health bite perspective that at small bites add up. And one of my key I guess, core phrases I've had, since the beginning, even back when I was solely focused on nutrition coaching was that small changes add up, and no changes too small, because if I love the book, atomic habits, because he talks again and again about this small repetitive things, and the compounding factor is time.

So small changes over time add up and they compound, just like you know, if you put money in the bank, and the interest is adding up, you get five cents a day, it doesn't seem like a lot, but you add that five cents over the course of a year, five years, 10 years, you're making so much more money, because every time that five cents adds up, now you're compounding interest on that it's the same thing with our health, even five minutes of movement, even leaving two bites on your plate over time that adds up. And it's very easy, it's normal human concept to just kind of be like, Ah, you know, it's not going to make a big deal. If I you know, eat those two bites or leave them. But over the course of a week, or a month or a year, it can add up to huge changes. And putting it in that perspective. And I love that is so important to help people see that and sometimes approaching it with different examples can kind of reach them in a way that they may not have thought of it before.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 08:27

Yeah, I mean, small these small, those two bites that you eat, for example, may have a negative impact over time, right and to buy things on your plate will have a positive impact and, and getting people aligned with the longevity of those practices. We're so naturally focused on getting results quickly and getting motivated by those results. But it is kind of that mindset. How do you help people to kind of stay with that that mindset over time? Or or stay with the changes over time? Through mindset?

Dr. Liz Rook 09:10

Great question. So one of the things that I've seen in myself, because I am not immune to any of this, I practice on myself first. We all do. And translating that into client and patient successes is one thing, especially as women, we don't tend to stop and celebrate our wins. We tend to just kind of downplay it, you know, we graduated from medical school, we finished our residency, we had a kid, we don't stop to celebrate that we just kind of keep moving forward with our head down. What's next, what's next. So one component of that I think for mindset is stopping to celebrate and even make a list or keep a list or a sticky note every time you have a win. Write it down, record it, add it up. And so on those days where you're you're feeling like nothing's working or it's not an Enough, you can look back and say, Well, actually, that's a thought error, it's not really true. Look at all this stuff we've accomplished already. And that kind of helps with the motivation. And the other thing with motivation is just finding those sneaky thoughts that are running in the background that we don't pay attention to. So when we're in the moment, it's easy to kind of get caught up in Well, right now this isn't working, or right now, you know, my weight is up a pound, or I wasn't able to work out four times this week. So just to kind of kick into the automatic kind of beating ourselves up and shaming ourselves, you know, we failed, we didn't succeed, instead of looking back. Well, for the last four weeks, we've worked out four days in a row for the last four weeks, we've been steadily moving down in this scale. For the last four weeks, we've been able to do all the things we wanted to do in our day to day lives, despite our disease diagnosis, despite all these other factors, and just kind of reassure ourselves, hey, you're human, you're having a bad day or a bad moment. This too shall pass. And I think one of the sneaky thoughts that I've seen a lot over time, is that enough the concept of enough or not enough? And I think that's a really sneaky thought, especially in society, like, are we doing enough? Are we doing not enough? I could go on for

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 11:16

Yeah, I mean, it. It also ties in for me, when I think about that into more, you know, it's more, needing to do more, be more act more, more productivity, it fits into that as well. There are a couple things that you

brought up so that I want to get into a little bit more, one of one, which was celebrating the wins. And I think sometimes people feel like these wins have to be monumental, like medical school, or residency or your degree or what have you. But you know, when I think about it, for me as a big one, this morning was spending 30 minutes, you know, blow drying my daughter's hair and getting all the tangles out and having quality time with her during that 30 minutes. And it's really acknowledging those small things that happen in the day, the small moments that are really meaningful, joyful. And that makes me also think about savoring, right, like savoring practices, which actually does have scientific data behind it.

Dr. Liz Rook 12:26

Yes, and mindfulness is key. I'm reading this great book called work and it's by a monk and I can't pronounce his name, so I can get you that information afterwards. And the whole book is about mindfulness and intentionality. Because, especially in American culture, and throughout the world, in our day to day lives, would were, say, a perfect example, you're blow drying your daughter's hair, but your mind is thinking about the eight different things you have to do the laundry, you didn't get done yesterday, the four projects you have coming up, you're not in the moment, enjoying it, and it takes away from the experience. And over time, those small stressors add up, and then we look back, and we realize we've missed out on that experience. And that stress adds up and becomes chronic stress. And that affects our health, it affects our immune system. So being mindful is really important. And I am always trying to come up with new ways to talk about it. Because there's so many books out there. There's so many videos, there's so many ways to be mindful and intentional, but it's almost like that gets glossed over as well. Because people are seeking that quick fix, or that instant gratification. But when we truly are in the moment and not thinking about the past or worrying about the future. And we're in the moment with our daughter blow drying her hair and just being fully there, smelling and seeing and touching and talking. It transforms our lives when we can live that way, moment by moment. And sure we have to think about the future. And we may think about the past, if only to learn and adjust for the future. But overall if we can become more intentional and just aware, aware is awareness is so key. In that experience.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 14:08

Yeah. And I think it's not only about this idea or desire for a quick fix. I think it's also a matter of people being steered away from their own intuition. I think intuitively we all know that there is joy to be had and benefits to be had in those small meaningful moments, for example. But we get steered away from that by by, you know, gimmicks, so to speak or other ways of grandiose ways. Let's put it grandiose ways of being moved away from stress. But I think the important point here is that the studies do show I mean, there are medical studies that do show that these techniques of mindfulness, remaining in the present moment of savoring really do have concrete physiologic benefits, like reducing inflammatory markers, for example. So people that you treat with rheumatologic diseases, a lot of them have an autoimmune component. And even if they don't, it's an inflammatory process, right. And these kinds of practices will help reduce inflammation, which I think is really powerful. It's something that's intuitive, but has shown to have really profound physiologic effects.

Dr. Liz Rook 15:30

Yes, and I believe that there are studies showing as well, meditation even three to five minutes and it doesn't have to be seated in the lotus position. You know, with your eyes closed, even walking

meditations, or just intentional mindfulness for a few minutes per day, improve sleep, it decreases unhealthy coping mechanisms like eating or drinking drug use, you know, scrolling on Instagram, or Facebook, and it helps bring us back to our our intuitive, like you said, health benefits. So inflammation, I agree is so important, especially with our autoimmune patients. So connective tissue diseases, like lupus and scleroderma, and myositis, are all affected by the stress response, which is our fight or flight response that kicks in when we're having worry or stress or fear. And when we can reduce these outside influences and internally become more aware and mindful and incorporate these stress reducing practices into our lives, it does show a decrease in disease flare over time. And that will help with inflammation as well. So it is something that I do talk about with all of my patients. And when I was first starting out, in practice, I used to say, okay, you have to reduce your stress, and then just kind of laugh about it, because I didn't know how to do that either. But I've learned over time, and I'm always happy to share that and discuss it with my patients. And I'm always, I'm always interested to hear and what methods they can come up with and incorporate easily into their lives and what works for them. Because that's the biggest thing is finding what works for you having an N of one, and doing that experimentation and finding what works for you that you can do long term because that's the other key is anyone can tell you how to eat or how to exercise or what you should do. And there's so many, almost overwhelmingly pressing forces, the fitness and wellness industry is a billion dollar industry. And you can go and change your nutrition and your exercise every day for several years without coming across the same type of program. But it's what works best for you that you can do for the rest of your life. And when you can incorporate that into your lifestyle. That's when you know, you found what works best for you to basically to thrive in your health and your life.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 17:45

Yeah, I mean, focusing on this topic of mindfulness, I think there's so much discussion and conversation about it right now. It's It's so topical mindfulness and mindfulness meditation. And this image of people sitting on a lotus pad, in order to do it is really false. Right, so to speak, to your point of finding what works for you. There. What are other ways that you get people initiated into mindfulness? Or encouraged my mindfulness? What are some some other maybe unique strategies for mindfulness that you would suggest?

Dr. Liz Rook 18:23

Sure, a lot of times I asked what interests me, my patients and clients like, what do they enjoy doing? Think back to when they were a kid. What did they love to do? And I think play and having fun is truly missing in a lot of our adult lives, because we feel like there's this image that we have to maintain. But when you can take time to either, you know, get outside and just be outside and feel the sunshine and the breeze. Or, you know, some people have said, Well, I used to like to roller skate. Great. Let's find some roller skates and you go try it, you know, and obviously, there's some some people have safety precautions, but getting them back to that state of intentional play and relaxation. And like you said, it doesn't have to be sitting quietly. I'm as Type A as they come in. For me sitting quietly is like my idea of torture. You know, and I do meditate, because it's good practice for me. And I, I've worked my way up from three minutes a day after two years to five minutes. And occasionally I can do 10 without, you know, wanting to do 50 other things. But just kind of tapping into everyone's unique interest and what's fun for them because what's fun for one person and enjoyable and relaxing is not necessarily fun for the next person.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 19:42

I also think there's something in the mundane activities, right? So your drive to work or you know, we're not driving very much to work anymore, but you know, your drive to work or doing the dishes or folding laundry or things that are maybe Monday But if you can quiet your mind in those moments, they tend to be times where people are, are, can capture that presence right can capture that stillness in in that rote and mundane activity.

Dr. Liz Rook 20:16

Yes, it's almost like a walking meditation. So sometimes, when my body wants to move in, it's good for people that carry a lot of stress. And they feel that kind of physical agitation or jitteriness, and they just want to move their body. So just like you said, doing dishes, but paying attention to what you're doing, and not letting your mind wander off to the future or the past. And just being present in that moment, folding laundry, you know, have sitting down and having dinner and not letting your mind wander when your spouse spouse is talking to you about their day at work. And you're just like, I, I care, but I don't, because I just want to, you know, my mind just wants to jump to what happened during my day, or what's going to happen in the next three days, being fully present. And it's hard because our minds just want to go go go once they're on. And just bringing the intention back. And I think with regular practice, like two to five minutes a day, just being in the moment, just being here on this podcast with you and not thinking about the rest of my day or the rest of your day, it really does kind of relax the body, as well as the mind. And it helps just kind of slow down and come back to where we are.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 21:28

So we've talked about savoring, we've talked about mindfulness. I think another another technique that has been demonstrated to have benefits to well being as well as health benefits is gratitude practice. And I think it's an interesting time right now, because, you know, we're we're kind of in the middle of the pandemic coming on the heels of the summer, where we were, we lightened up a little bit right, things were looking a little bit more rosy, and we were feeling a little bit more optimistic. And now heading into the winter, where things aren't looking as rosy we know we have a few months of difficult times ahead of us. And some of the ways in which we were creating connection. Doing things Outdoors is not feasible for a lot of people, right, because of the cold etc. And it makes it difficult to think, not difficult to be grateful. But it may feel a little, like a Pollyanna to have gratitude in the midst of all this. But even in the midst of all this, there's an opportunity, right for for a gratefulness or a gratitude practice. What are your thoughts on that? And

Dr. Liz Rook 22:51

yeah, that's a great point. And I actually just finished for the month of November, I did a gratitude challenge in my facebook group, to kind of encourage people to find just one thing that they were grateful for that day, because it's easy to be overwhelmed by circumstances by COVID. By, you know, having the kids at home and homeschooling and virtual learning and virtual working. And I feel like this has been the year that has challenged us all as humans. And it's bringing up all of our underlying challenges, but it's also bringing out the best in people, because you got to see who's growing, and how they're growing and how they're getting creative. Like even food service, restaurants that couldn't open, how did they get creative, to still stay open and be profitable and serve people. And I think focusing on

thankfulness and service and what we can control, which is how we see the world and practicing that helps to encourage more joy. And I agree, I don't think it's about being happy when something bad is happening. It's about being able to see that, again, this too shall pass. And all emotions are temporary. So as frustrated as we're feeling as cooped up and held back and restricted, I guess, limited that whereas we're feeling we still are able to be creative in our limitations, and we're finding different ways and different ways to grow with the restrictions and the limitations that have been placed on us. And that I think is really amazing the way that people have reached out to each other found creative ways to stay connected and stay engaged. And I really think that speaks to the ability for humans as a race, you know, to find gratitude in our lives on a day to day basis.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 24:48

Yeah, I like that. I like that way of putting it because what you're saying in essence is is noticing your resourcefulness Being able to pivot in a situation is kind of a form of gratitude, right? Because you're taking what you're dealt with. And you're demonstrating that you can still, despite that be innovative. And that's, that's in a way, a form of gratitude, I

Dr. Liz Rook 25:18

think. Yes. And I think it's a way of forced growth, like, you know, when we're growing, we don't necessarily enjoy it, we don't like it, it's uncomfortable. But on the other side, we've grown, and we've learned, and we've maybe produced something new that wouldn't that opportunity wouldn't have been there had that limitation not been placed on us.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 25:38

I'll tell you one thing for me that I have found during this time that I have. I mean, I had to really be intentional and thinking about it. But in being intentional, I have gratitude for is some of the social activities that I that I miss, actually, that I feel lost for not having, on the flip side of that, I feel a little bit of gratitude for having that time, you know, for not being rushed to have to be somewhere every Friday night, or have to be a birthday parties for the kids or, you know, having to take the older ones from one place to another. Some of those social activities for me and my children that is being missed, is being translated into more time. And so that, for me is a positive. You know, I'm grateful for the time.

Dr. Liz Rook 26:32

Definitely. And I think I've seen that almost across the board. You know, I have some patients in my clinic that have always said, You know, I say, How are you doing, and they say, it's great, I woke up today, you know, it can always be worse, and other people who tend to focus more on the negative. And I think a lot of people believe that, like they're either positive or negative, and there's no in between, I think we all have the full range of emotion. And this almost kind of like forced stop or forced slow down, has helped us all kind of refocus and have gratitude for most of us, that we had to slow down. Because most of us, you know, especially women in medicine, we're almost all overachievers and we just want to go go go and do more and more and more, and nothing's ever quite enough. And this almost forced us to just put the brakes on completely and stop and look around and reevaluate. You know, if this virus was to come into everyone's home and take out three or four people, we didn't know back in the spring, what was gonna happen, you know, if this was something like, you know, I hate to say, but like, if it was something like Ebola, that was spreading, you know, uncontrolled, we

would all be much different than how we are now. But because we have that increased awareness, just from the slowing down last spring, and being kind of sheltered in place, we know what's most important to us, because we were all forced to stop and evaluate and take stock. So I think that's definitely true. And I think we've all kind of come back to center in a way this year.

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 28:09

So going forward, speaking about, you know, the winter months to come and the fact that we're all kind of hunkering down a little bit more than we maybe had over the last few months. These practices that we that you talk about, I think are going to become increasingly important. But they also become difficult, right? So like, when, when we need it most, we tend to give up the sleep. We're staying up late and watching Netflix, or when we need the exercise the most we feel apathetic towards it, or we don't have the volition. So can you talk about a little bit about the importance of these practice practices right now? And what are your maybe five key stress reducing practices, or mood enhancing practices?

Dr. Liz Rook 29:05

Okay. So I think the biggest thing is to maintain awareness. And as a practice, I like journaling. Some people don't like writing things down. Some people prefer to kind of take a walk or just get up in the morning and sit quietly. I think, having intentional time in your day, even if it's two minutes that you kind of block out at the beginning or the end of the day just to kind of recenter and be aware. awareness, I feel is of the utmost importance as far as maintaining sanity and stress reduction over these winter months. Also practicing gratitude. And sometimes that's just you know, finding one thing in the moment that you can be grateful for, I'm grateful for my balsam fir candle that smells great when I'm otherwise you know, inundated with having things to do, and moving your body, you know, even if it's limited stretching in your chair, you know, taking a walk, even if it's around the house, walking up and down the stairs in your apartment building, you know, stretching your body doing yoga, finding online videos, the world of the internet is vast, and there are so many free resources out there. And reaching out to other people, I think is important and staying connected. Because when we isolate ourselves, it's easy to kind of get inside our head and just stay there and find a little deep hole. But reaching out to someone, especially when you're struggling is actually a sign of strength. And I think that I can't stress that enough to not pretend that everything's okay when it's not. And to just, you know, have that one or two people that you can go to and say, Hey, you know, I'm having a hard day, or this is really bothering me, can you just listen for a moment, or even just to write down those thoughts so that they're out of your head, and you can release them?

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 31:05

Yeah, I love the practice of journaling and writing. And sometimes I tell my patients that, you know, when we're having trouble sleeping, for example, when the anxiety levels are high as they are right now, having just a timer, set a timer for what you think you can do 10 minutes, and spend that 10 minutes really just writing, getting it all out, even if it's redundant. Even if you're repeating the same thing over and over again, I actually first started with 30 minutes, because then it really becomes redundant. But then you promise yourself once you're done, you close the book, and then you know, you're not allowed to go back to it until the next 30 minutes or the next five minutes, the following evening, as a way to clear your mind. So I really liked that journaling practice.

Dr. Liz Rook 31:59

I think the other thing that I remembered when you brought that up is one thing is keeping a notebook just beside the bed because I have a lot of patients who wake up in the middle of the night and then their brain clicks on and thinks it's time to start worrying about everything. Again, just having that notebook to just jot down what's going on until you know kind of reassuring your brain Okay, we can think about this tomorrow. So that's one practice, I do recommend if people have a lot of interrupted sleep, or their sleep is, is difficult because of worry and anxiety. The other practice is giving yourself a 10 to 30 minute period a day to decide that that's when you're going to worry. And that's when you're going to think about everything. And it's like your worry time and when your brain starts clicking on when you're in the middle of something else. You say Nope, I'm going to save this for my worry time and then you set the clock and then you have nothing else to do other than worry for those 30 minutes. Yeah,

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 32:52

it does help kind of compartmentalize that and allows you to have a strategy to move on from the ruminating thoughts are the persistent thoughts. There are so many great points that we made here we kind of it was a flowing conversation that went from one thing to another, but I appreciate your time and your expertise in in how you guide patients in living well and less stressful lives. Tell us Liz some of the things that you're doing right now and how people can learn more about your work.

Dr. Liz Rook 33:28

So my coaching practice is thrive arena coaching, you can find me on Instagram at the underscore thrive underscore arena. And then I'm on Facebook, Liz rook and then thrive arena coaching. And I do have a Facebook group for busy women who want to lose weight and stop emotionally eating. And I'm actually going to be doing a challenge in the next few weeks I launched that today. It's going to be the 13th through the 17th it's called the losing it challenge. So we're gonna plan to lose it losing it being losing our weight, losing our stress, losing our limiting things for five days with implementable tools and ways to get you thriving into the new year even before it starts.

34:12

I love that. Well

Dr. Adrienne Youdim 34:13

thank you so much for your time. It was a fun conversation. And for those of you who want to know more about us and our newsletter and our podcast health bite, please check us out at Dell nutrition. And Dr. Adrian udim calm and I hope we can have another conversation soon. That would be great. Be well Liz,

Dr. Liz Rook 34:37

thank you so much, Adrian, have a great day,

34:39

too.