



# **How to heal naturally: functional medicine and hormone balance for sustainable mental health recovery**

**with Dr. Kyrin Dunston**

## **[The MindHealth360 Show](#)**

### **Episode Transcript**

Host: Kirkland Newman

Guest: Dr. Kyrin Dunston

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

People at midlife, women at midlife, have crazy irregular periods; give them birth control pills. That's the protocol. They can't sleep, give them a sleeping pill. That's the protocol. They have reflux, give them an acid blocker. That's the protocol. Don't worry about all that. So that's what I did because I wanted to be a good resident and that's how I practiced for years. And that's how I was practicing on myself. And that's why I couldn't make any headway because those are all symptomatic treatments. They don't treat the cause of the problem.

Kirkland Newman:

Welcome to The MindHealth360 Show. I'm Kirkland Newman. And if you, your loved ones or clients suffer from mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, insomnia, poor memory, poor attention, mood swings, exhaustion, et cetera, I interview the leading integrative mental health practitioners from around the world to help you understand the root causes of the symptoms. Many of which may surprise you and suggest solutions to help you heal. If you like this interview, please do subscribe and forward to others who might find it helpful. If you want further information, please go to [www.mindhealth360.com](http://www.mindhealth360.com) or find us on social media.

Kirkland Newman:

Kyrin Dunston, OB/GYN, welcome to The MindHealth360 Show. Just to talk a little bit about your background and most of your bio will be in our show notes, but you lead by example. I mean, you have an extraordinary story. You're an OB/GYN, but you're also a functional medicine doctor and you lost 100 pounds and healed yourself from chronic disease by addressing the root cause of your health issues naturally.

Kirkland Newman:

You've been featured in numerous podcasts and summits on NBC, Fox, Reader's Digest, Huffington Post, First for Women, Best Self and more. You're also the host of the Stop The Menopause Madness (I love that name) summit where 50 experts share their top strategies for attendees to lose weight, regain energy, balance mood, feel sexy, look great, and master midlife. And you're also the author of Cracking the Bikini Code: 6 Secrets to Permanent Weight Loss Success, which details your all natural program for successful weight loss. You also host Her Brilliant Health Revolution podcast and Her Brilliant Health Secrets YouTube channel, which gives women the knowledge, tools, and support they need to take control of their health and not only heal but thrive.

Kirkland Newman:

And I think that's what we're really here to talk about is optimal health, optimal mental health. So what I wanted to focus on, because some people who aren't familiar with why an OB/GYN would be talking about mental health, because obviously MindHealth360 is all about mental health. And what I really like to focus on, after you tell us your story, because I'd love to hear your story and how you got into functional medicine after being a board certified OB/GYN, a traditional doctor, you then retrained also as a functional medicine doctor and now practice that way. So, that's the first thing I'm going to ask you. But then what I'd like to explore in this podcast is really the mental health aspects of what you do and how you can improve people's mental health by balancing people's hormones and how important that is. So first your story Kyrin.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Absolutely, sure. And mental health is a part of my personal journey too, and I don't think that you can separate mental health from your physical health. The two are intimately intertwined. And I think that's one of the reasons why we have the chronic health crisis that we have is because we don't address mental health. And so I was a very successful OB/GYN, delivered thousands of babies, did lots of pap smears and hysterectomies. And from the outside it really looked like I had it all; successful career, husband, kids, lived in a gated community. My kids went to private school. We went on fancy vacations, but the truth is that inside I was dying.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

I weighed at one point 243 pounds, and I suffered with chronic fatigue where I was tired all the time. All I had energy to do was work or sleep. I had something called fibromyalgia where I had pain in various parts of my body on a daily basis, every single day, no matter what I did. I did suffer with anxiety and depression. And at one point was on five psychoactive medications. I had irritable bowel, gastritis, no sex drive, hair loss. And I looked and felt 20 years older than I was. I was so demoralised because here I'm board certified OB/GYN, the American Board of Women's Health says that I know more about women's health than anyone else. And I clearly could not figure out what was wrong with me and fix it. I would run tests. They would come back "normal". I'd say, oh, my insulin's got to have a problem. Or this has got to be a problem. And they would come back normal. I go to my internist. I'd say, look at me, something is wrong. Please run tests. She'd run them. They would come back normal. I checked my thyroid at least 10 times and it was "normal". And I really got to this place where I thought, if this is what life is going to be, I don't even think that I want to live it. But I really didn't have a choice. I was the breadwinner of my family and I just kept putting one foot in front of the other and maybe some listeners can relate to that feeling hopeless.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Then one day one of my patients, so I was in my 40s at the time and a woman who was in her 40s at midlife having the same typical 40-year-old hot mess that we all have; fatigue, insomnia, weight, gain, crazy periods, no sex drive, hair falling out, right? It's just like your health goes off the rails. So I was doing the usual traditional treatment with her, which is a fistful of prescriptions, antidepressants, sleeping medication, reflux medication, birth control pills. And they weren't helping her, because they don't really fix the problem, right? Now I know. But they weren't helping her. So she went away for about a year. She came back, I saw her at the end of the hall and I knew immediately something was different. She looked slimmer and she had a bounce in her step and her eyes were shining and bright and her hair was full. So I couldn't wait to get her into a room and say, what have you done? And I did. And she said, oh, well, I learned about this thing called functional medicine from Suzanne Somers.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

I went and saw this doctor in the city and she did these special tests. She checked my hormones and I'm thinking, I'm an OB/GYN, we don't check hormones. And she said, oh yeah, we checked my hormone levels. We did salivary cortisol testing. I'm going, what is that? So I didn't know any of what she was saying, but she was walking, living proof.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So she brought me this book she learned about this type of medicine, Suzanne's book. And she said, I brought it for you. And I took it home. I was married at the time. I put it on my nightstand. And I said to my husband, I'm not reading this book. It's by Chrissy on Teresa's Company. What is she going to teach me? I'm a board certified OB/GYN. So I didn't read it for the longest time. And he said, oh yeah, she was a Playboy bunny too. So then I really wasn't going to read it. So I let it sit there. And then one Saturday, a few months later, my kids came in to say, oh, we're going to the movies with dad. We'll be back. They didn't even bother asking me anymore if I was going to go because they knew the answer is: mom is always going to be, when she's not working, she's at home, in her pajamas, in the bed. So they just said, we'll be back. So I said, okay, let me pick up the book and look at it so I can check it off my to-do list and give it back to her.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

I started reading it and it was the most amazing thing. It wasn't anything about Suzanne. It was her using her celebrity to interview doctors and scientists in this field I never heard of called functional medicine. But we all have a truth meter, right? We know when our friend brings that guy home, the first time in five minutes, that he's no good. We know what we know. We have an innate sense. And I knew what I was reading was the truth because the scientists and doctors talked about all the basic science, biochemistry, physiology of what I learned in medical school, all the beauty and intricacy of how the body works. And then I was told when I went to residency, yeah, never mind about all that. Just follow the protocols.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

People at midlife, women at midlife have crazy irregular periods; give them birth control pills. That's the protocol. They can't sleep, give them a sleeping pill. That's the protocol. They have reflux, give them an acid blocker. That's the protocol. Don't worry about all that. So that's what I did because I wanted to be a good resident. And that's how I practiced for years. And that's how I was practicing on myself. And that's why I couldn't make any headway because those are all symptomatic treatments. They don't treat the cause of the problem. So I started reading this book, before long like it was the DaVinci Code, just turning the pages and consuming the material.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

When I got to the end of the book, and I read that whole book that day, the sun had just gone down. I'll never forget that Saturday. I closed the book and all of a sudden this weight lifted off me and I had this feeling, oh my gosh, I know this is true what these doctors are saying. And I know now that I didn't know everything there was to know about healing women. And that means that there's hope for me. And that means doing these special tests and these special treatments, I have hope that my health could be different and my life could change. And so I vowed right then "I'm going to learn everything I can about this. I'm going to use it on myself. And if it works, I'm going to teach as many women as possible about this". And that's exactly what I did.

Kirkland Newman:

That's amazing.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Yeah. So I started actually working with a naturopathic physician, doing some special tests. But even the regular tests that I had done on myself 10 times at least, like my thyroid, when I did the right thyroid test and I read them the right way, I was hypothyroid. But by mainstream medical diagnosis, I didn't have a thyroid disease. So they weren't going to diagnose me with a disease or give me a drug, but I was functionally hypothyroid. So, that was the first thing I uncovered. And then when I did the sex hormone testing that we don't even do in mainstream medicine, and they still don't do, I was progesterone deficient. Well, my goodness, that would be helpful to know because progesterone is the antidepressant, anti-anxiety, sleep well, feel good, lose weight, diarrhetic, happy hormone. Well, that could have helped my anxiety. So I started replacing my progesterone and it did start helping my anxiety and it just went on from there.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So then I started going to conferences, of course, because I had to learn everything. And I'd go to a conference, I'd learn about a test, functional stool testing. Never heard about it in mainstream medicine. So I'd run that on myself. Oh my gosh, my gut was a mess. I had leaky gut. Well, no test in mainstream medicine diagnosed this. So then I started rehabbing my gut and I did food sensitivity testing and got rid of all the foods I was sensitive to. And I'd say at that point it was literally like I was this big inflated helium balloon and it got popped and I just started deflating and shrinking. The weight just started pouring off of me. My energy started coming back. My hair started re-growing, my mood improved, and the whole journey was about two years. And this is about 10 years ago. I lost 100 pounds. I had energy like when I was 20, my hair grew back full and shiny. People didn't recognise me at the mall. They would walk by me. I'd say, hey, how are you? And they would just look at me and they get 10 feet past me and turn around and go Kyrin? Oh my gosh, is that you? I didn't even recognise you. So my entire health transformed, got off all prescription medications and had a whole new lease on life.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So then all my patients started doing the same thing to me that I did to that patient that day, pulling me in the exam room. "What are you doing? Because you look amazing. I want that." So I started doing it with them. And after a while, I wasn't integrity practicing mainstream medicine, giving pharmaceutical band-aids and doing surgeries for conditions that needed to be treated naturally and functionally for the best interest of that woman. And so I retired from OB/GYN, traditional OB/GYN in 2011. And I've worked with women holistically ever since.

Kirkland Newman:

That's amazing. What an amazing story Kyrin and I have to say, I applaud your honesty and your openness, but also your integrity and making that switch because I know a lot of functional medicine doctors who have made that switch, sometimes it's easier to practice the old fashioned way because you just prescribe a pill. It's less time-consuming, it's less detective work. And it's sometimes even easier on the patient because there's less effort to be made both by the doctor and by the patient. But you don't get the sustainable long-term results that we're all looking for for optimal health. So well done. And I think one of the things that really comes to me is why are not more doctors practicing this way? What is it blocking? I mean, this is so evident to me, to all the doctors that I know who are practicing functional medicine. They would never go back to mainstream medicine and the way they used to practice. And why do you think it's not more prevalent and what is blocking this from being mainstream?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Well, there are more and more doctors every day, however, when you take very bright conscientious people and you put them through training to go into a career that most of them are, like me, wanting to go into their whole lives. I mean, I have a picture of myself when I was three or four listening to my stuffed lion with a stethoscope. It was something I always wanted to do. And then you train us in the right way to treat people and you board certify us. And you say that we know all there is to know about the creation of health and healing in humans. You shut off our inquiry into other possibilities. When you think you know everything, it's easy to have contempt prior to investigation. Because actually in my town, there was a guy who practiced this way, years before. And we, the physicians, we used to laugh about him and talk about him and say he was a quack and he didn't know what he was doing, but we didn't take the time to investigate. Did he really know what he was doing? Now I know he did, but there's this contempt that I know everything, you don't know anything.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

And therefore it's discredited, the contempt prior to investigation. I think that our society is really set up around the mainstream medical model. And there are a lot of businesses that are very lucrative. So the insurance business is very lucrative. The medical business is very lucrative. Big food is very lucrative, which is a key part of what keeps people sick. And for anyone to look outside and say, "oh, maybe we don't know everything", I think is very challenging. You will find that all the practitioners pretty much who practice this type of medicine at our conferences, they had a health problem that mainstream medicine couldn't solve and they weren't willing to take that for an answer. Or they had a loved one who had a health problem, and they went on a journey of seeking. It's a rare person who comes at this spontaneously and naturally. Although I was given that chance because I was raised in New York city, but to a mother, her name's Jerry, we used to call her Granola Jerry. And she was really good friends with Gary Nowell, who some listeners may know who's written I don't know how many New York Times bestsellers back in the 70s when I was a child all about natural health. And he owned a health food store a few blocks from us. And she would go in there and take me in there several times a week and talk natural health with Gary.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

And when my sister and I would get sick, she would give us Echinacea Goldenseal and make us sweat it out. And we just thought she was eccentric and different. And then I went off to medical school. And when I came back at one point, I said to her, mother, we heal with steel, with great arrogance. And she just said, okay. And she let me have my medical school experience. And then fast forward years later when all this happened, God bless her, she never said, I told you so that that's not the way. We don't heal with steel. But she was right. So all of this was seeded in me. And maybe that made me more receptive when it was presented.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

But even the most hardcore physician, ask any physician and most of us have in our bathroom cabinets a complete pharmacy of every medication you could want. And we freely medicate ourselves and our family and friends. When we have enough. You need an antibiotic, here you go. You need a pain medicine, here you go. You've got reflux, here you go. And even some of us who are hardcore like that, when we really get desperate, you become open, right? Where the cracks are, is where the light gets in and then you become receptive to new information.

Kirkland Newman:

I totally agree. Well, well done. And if we're looking at your experience now working both in conventional and now in functional medicine, what would you say, if we're talking about mental health, what would you say is the biggest cause or the top three biggest causes of mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, poor memory, poor cognition? Are they all linked? And if you had to pinpoint the three areas to focus on, if somebody came to you and said, I have these mental health symptoms, what would you look at first?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Right. So like I said, it was part of my story with the anxiety and the depression, and now not on any anxiety or depression medications, which is amazing considering I was on five at one point. And so for me, there's emotional health and then mental health. To me, memory more falls in that cognition. But emotional health, and I include in that addictions, personality disorders, things like that, depression, anxiety, one of the first things I look at are the root physiological causes. And the gut really is the second brain. So anyone who has emotional disturbance by definition has a gut problem until proven otherwise in functional medicine, because the gut actually has more neuro-transmitters than your brain. And if there is inflammation in the gut, which can be due to food sensitivities or pathogenic organisms, whether it's fungi, bacteria, parasites, that feeds directly from the gut up into the brain and actually causes inflammation in the brain, which alters the neurotransmitters.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So that would be the first place that someone with an emotional disturbance should look, and hand in hand with that goes hormonal imbalances. There are seven main metabolic driving hormones, and those include insulin, thyroid, cortisol and DHA, estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone and imbalances in any one of those can contribute to depression and anxiety. And so those absolutely need to be evaluated and adjusted to get them into the optimal range. The hormones work very closely with the neuroendocrine system, the nervous system and the hormones, and actually the hormones originate in the brain. So where there's mood disturbance, there's typically hormone imbalance also, and oftentimes autonomic nervous system imbalance, which I know I'm giving you all of this at one time, but we can go back and talk about each one of these.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

And this gets to the ACE Study, adverse childhood events study, that found that adults who had childhood yes, big T trauma, right over trauma, like physical or sexual abuse, we know have higher medical diagnoses as adults, higher numbers of medications, shorter lifespan, but also people with little T trauma. So that could just be relational or emotional trauma where their needs weren't met or they had a chaotic household, parents being divorced. That was me. So just any disruption in the emotional security of a child has been shown to be linked to number of medical diagnoses as an adult, number of prescription medications, age of death, all of these things.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

And that really gets to, so how is that communicated to our health? And one of the ways is through our stress response system, autonomic nervous system, and that fight, flight, freeze part of our nervous system, that's intimately involved with our cortisol. So cortisol is one of those hormones we've got to evaluate. And a lot of people who had those big or little T traumas as children have these hyper-reactive cortisol and also autonomic nervous systems that are stuck in sympathetic outflow and overdrive and

parasympathetic depleted. And sympathetic is the Hulk and parasympathetic is the Buddha. So you've really got to go in, and that's one of the first things I do with people, start working with their autonomic nervous system, using heart rate variability and other practices to calm it down. So I've said a lot, but those are the first three places I go with people who are having emotional disturbance.

Kirkland Newman:

I think that's really interesting because essentially this is what always fascinates me is the nervous system, which you mentioned the autonomic nervous system and that connection to your hormones and your gut. Because essentially, when I got into functional medicine, for me, this was like the holy grail and it was all about the biochemistry. And then I met people who were into the nervous system and trauma. And for them, that was the holy grail, healing that trauma. And I thought, okay, well what comes first? And there's this circular relationship between the biochemistry downstream from the adverse childhood events, for instance, which then create chronic neuroendocrine imbalances, which then disrupt your hormones and then your gut.

Kirkland Newman:

And so I think the three things that you've picked out are absolutely, I would completely agree, the root things to look at. And then I guess the question is, you know, is your cortisol high because of a traumatic event or because of chronic stress? Or is it high because of possibly some other physiological stressor? Which could be a toxin or it could be an infection, or it could be a food intolerance, right?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

I think that when you have a big hammer, everything can look like a nail. And so maybe the somatic trauma people like Bessel van der Kolk, their way is it's all in the body and you just need a somatic experience. But then other people who are functional medicine, oh, it's the gut. You've got to heal the gut, right? But one thing I've learned from my own personal journey is it's never one thing. It's everything. And if you don't take a comprehensive view and address a problem from all of the inputs, you're never going to get resolution most likely for the majority of people.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

You really have to take this 360 degree view. For some people I can seem a little extreme and aggressive because I know what it feels like to have health that every day you wish you weren't alive. I know what it feels like to feel hopeless that, oh my gosh, this is going to get worse and I'm going to be on disability by the time I'm 55. I know what it feels like. And I know that there were well-meaning people who said, oh, I'm a chiropractor. It's all about the atlas. We just need to adjust your atlas right. And they had fancy machines to get my atlas. And then I would wonder what's wrong with me that, oh, now my atlas is right and I'm not all better. Why wasn't that the answer to all my problems?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

And then I would go to another well-meaning person who would do her well-meaning thing, over and over again and never was the answer. And it wasn't until I started looking at root causes and asking these questions ruthlessly, why. Like a toddler, why? Why does that happen? Why is it the thyroid though? Why, why, why, why, why, why, why? And when I just became like that and ruthless and kept going on this path, that's when I got my own health straight. And I work with my clients the same way. So I'm not



one who's going to give you some vitamin D for three months and then see you back in the office and see how you feel because that's never the answer.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So when it comes to the things we're talking about, like you said, with mental health, I think it's a little irresponsible to say functional medicine and healing the gut is the only necessary task. It's just not. You've got to have, the body does keep the score, energy is neither created nor destroyed. It only changes form. So traumatic events where a child couldn't feel those emotions and had to stuff them, well, they're stuffed in tissues. So they need some help getting that out. Whatever's right for that person, whether it's a somatic experiencing, or maybe they do EMDR, or maybe they do psychedelics or MDMA assisted therapy, or maybe they do lowaska, something like that.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

But you've got to address that while you're also healing the gut and you're addressing the hormones. But I do think that even a lot of functional doctors practice functional medicine like mainstream doctors practice mainstream medicine. "Oh, well, you can't sleep. Take these supplements to help you sleep." Well, that's the same thing as, "take some Ambien." It's really no different. So in the short-term, is there harm to that? Probably not. We do need to sleep. I call it the nectar of life. But in the long-term, that's not solving the problem. That's not why. So I think that really taking a comprehensive approach and looking at all the things you're talking about is important.

Kirkland Newman:

I mean, that's music to my ears and that's why I called my website MindHealth360, because it really is about the 360 degree approach. And that's the only way to sustainably heal. I think the challenge for people though is, one, it can be very expensive to look at all these things simultaneously and very time-consuming and also very energy consuming. And if you're someone who's already struggling with lethargy and depression and anxiety, how do you have the wherewithal, the resources, whether they're financial or time or energy resources to actually heal? Given that you have to look at all these things simultaneously and address them all. What would you say to people who are struggling with that?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

That is an excellent point. It is very time consuming and financially consuming. It is a huge investment. I'm not sure what the answer is to that. I was fortunate to have the resources because I paid for everything with my treatment cash, to have the resources to do that. I also knew that if I didn't spend the time that I wasn't going to have time to spend on anything. So it became an extreme priority. And I had family that I actually called on to help at that time and say, look, I need help with this. I can't do all this myself, eat this different way and with the shopping and all of this. So it is a huge investment.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

It gets into some political socioeconomic issues, which I don't know if you want to talk briefly about them, but our societies for the most part are not set up in a way that's very nurturing towards people. We're very much taught with our health that it should be: fix it and forget it. Sleep some hours, shove some calories in your mouth and you're good. And if you're not good, then you go to the doctor who is the expert on your body, and they will give you a drug that will restore you to health. But all of that is a fallacy, right? Your body, just sleep a couple hours and throw some calories. Isn't true. And we eat this

denatured, energetically denatured, non nutrient dense processed food that's got a lot of issues. It's inflammatory because even our livestock is corn based at this point. So our diet is not only not helping us, but it's making us sick.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

But nobody's doing anything about it because of government subsidies that were put in place decades ago for the corn farmers so they have so much corn, so they feed it to the livestock. So we're inundated with corn which is part of the reason we're sick, but nobody will do anything about it because nobody wants to hurt the corn farmers. So, we're making health decisions for political reasons. And anytime we attempt to solve a health problem through politics, we are going to fail every time. So it comes through with our food sources. So we're getting shot in the foot. So then we already have to spend a lot more money to eat healthily, right?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Then even with our medical system, because of how we're socialised, that we are not the experts on our body and our health. That the doctor is, and they know best. We are disenfranchised completely as children, and we abdicate responsibility for our health to the doctor. So we don't even think we have to worry about it because the doctor's got a pill, they'll fix it. And I'm grateful that I had the upbringing that I had because that I never had that attitude. And so even though I went through my training, we all have our journey for a reason. And I needed to have that experience to learn what I needed to learn. But like I said, I was married and my ex-husband had a completely dissimilar experience. It was exactly what I'm describing. The doctors, the authority on your body, when you're sick, you go to the doctor, they give you a shot or a pill to make you better. And basically he and his family didn't do anything to promote their health. And it was just really a source of friction between us, but I really got to see firsthand how the average American is socialised to believe that they're not in control.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Part of when I work with women, I tell them, you have been socialised towards not speaking the language of your body. So you don't even understand the signals your body's giving to you. You don't speak body language. And part of my job is to help rekindle that relationship with your body so you understand what it's telling you. Because it's been telling you for years it didn't like that gluten, I promise you. And it's been telling you for years it wanted more sleep. And it's been telling you for years all of these things, but we ignore, ignore, ignore. We ignore the pebbles and then it becomes a big boulder. And then we're like, "oh my gosh, I have to go to the doctor. Oh my gosh, I'm so afraid they're going to tell me I have cancer". Well, if you had listened to all the messages along the way, you wouldn't have gotten to that point. So it's a very big topic.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Where does the average person start? I think for me personally, I was one that always wanted to spend the least amount of my health, right? I want to go to the \$35 copay doctor. I want the insurance that's going to cover everything so I don't have to pay anything, because I saw health expenditures as an expense to be minimised. No different than my car payment or anything else. But when I went through this journey and I became desperate, I was like, I will pay anything. I will do anything. I will eat a cup of dirt a day if you tell me that's what I have to do. I will pay cash, right? And I remember the first time I

went to the health food store to get my list of supplements. And they were like, "oh, that's \$880". And I'm like, what? And I was like, I'll pay it because I want to get better.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So I think shifting our mindset from viewing what we spend on our health, taking it from the cost column and putting it into the investment column. It is an investment in your most prized asset, which is your health. So we have to have that shift. And then going forward, I think that it would be great if we actually had healthcare systems that took care of our health and promoted health and didn't just manage disease.

Kirkland Newman:

Yeah, 100%. I completely agree with you. And I think it's really important for people to have that switch. I love what you said about being from a call center to an investment into our health, because the whole point of functional medicine is it's about prevention. And it's much better to handle this early and preventatively rather than wait until you're sick. And I think the same goes with mental health. I mean, mental health has to be managed daily on a daily basis by managing our lifestyle and our sleep and our nutrition and our stress. And all of that will really help us develop the resilience that we need to then deal with whatever life is going to throw our way, which it will.

Kirkland Newman:

Talking about hormones for a minute, what would you say are the top three most important hormones for mental health? And how would you deal with them in terms of, okay, these are the top three hormones, what do I do about it? If I'm depressed or anxious, what should I be looking for hormonally?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Hormones, they're so essential. Sometimes we talk about them like they're an afterthought or a sideshow, but they are, along with the nervous system, the communicators in our body. And nothing happens without proper communication. Think of the kids in grade school who have a substitute teacher with no lesson plan. They are running around making paper airplanes and telling jokes. Your cells don't know what to do when they don't get the proper communication from the nervous system and the hormones. And luckily our nervous system is a little hardier because it's hardwired, kind of like your hardwired internet that you plug your computer into the wall is versus the wireless internet in your house. I don't know about in yours, but in mine frequently, there's a problem, right? My computer won't connect. Is there a problem with the signal? Is there a problem with my neighbor's WIFI interfering? I mean, there's so many points at which you can have a problem and your hormones are the same because the brain secretes something to signal endocrine organs, which have to make a hormone, which may have to get transferred into another hormone. And then it has to go to the cell and be received from the cell by the cell. And so all these points of potential disruption. So we have a lot of hormone problems.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So when it comes to mental health, my top three, I have to go with cortisol as number one. It's the number one for every problem. But I call her queen cortisol because you must obey the queen or she will have your head. And your cortisol is your stress hormone. It regulates your sleep wake cycle, your weight, your energy level, your immune system function, whether you get sick or not, whether you get

cancer or not, whether you get autoimmune disease or not. So I have to go with cortisol and it has its backup hormone, sidekick, DHEA as number one.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Number two, thyroid and insulin probably both come in there at number two. Insulin, which is the hormone when it's disrupted significantly can cause diabetes. But before that can cause pre-diabetes and insulin resistance. And I find that people initially can start having a lot of anxiety and depression even when they're on that what I call road to diabetes. So when you get diabetes, you didn't just wake up one morning and your body said, whoop, we got diabetes. You are walking down that road towards that diagnosis for years. Could be five years, 10 years, 20 years. And you were walking through insulin resistance, pre-diabetes to diabetes. And fatigue is a huge component of insulin disruption. And along with that, I find that people start feeling depressed; it's the most common emotion. So insulin has got to be in the number two slot, but right next to thyroid with anxiety in particular, but also depression. When you are hypothyroid, anxiety can be through the roof and the hypothyroid is way more common than hyper. But anxiety can be through the roof. And in fact, that's sometimes how I'll pick it up in someone. They'll just say, "I'm just so anxious." And especially if they say I don't have any reason to be. I didn't even have little T traumas in childhood. That's something I always ask about. "I look at my life and it's really going great, but..." And if they didn't used to be that way. And then they say, "and then it started like a couple of years ago. Nothing really happened." That cues me, maybe it's more of a physiologic issue and I immediately start thinking about thyroid. So those two would be together the number two slot.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Then when it comes to sex hormones, I have to have them all in the number three slot. The sex hormones, yes, they're about reproduction and they're about sex. So they are named appropriately, but this belies their global impact. You have more sex hormone receptors in your brain and central nervous system than anywhere else in the body. So what does that tell you? It has everything to do with nervous system function. So your nervous system is just not going to function, and estrogen deficiency can contribute to anxiety and depression. Progesterone deficiency; anxiety and depression. And actually, if those are too high; anxiety and depression. They've got to be Goldilocks, sweet spot just right.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Then testosterone, if it's low, even in a woman, definitely depression, sometimes some anxiety too. And if testosterone is too high, it can contribute to anxiety also. So I kind of got all my hormones in that one, two, three. And then I have to mention oxytocin.

Kirkland Newman:

We love oxytocin.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

The hormone of connection, right? The bonding hormone that helps women to have their milk come in to nurse their babies and is the hormone that's released when we have physical and eye contact with other humans. It helps to dampen our stress response, our cortisol response. So it's so vital. And right about now, none of us is getting enough oxytocin.

Kirkland Newman:

Yeah, I totally agree. And it's interesting because Stephen Porges talks about, in the polyvagal theory, it's all about social engagement and the importance of social engagement to really boost the parasympathetic system. But social engagement and oxytocin are so closely linked, right? And none of us are getting enough social engagement at the moment. And so I love how you've packaged those three. I think that's fantastic. So, cortisol is pretty obvious in the sense that we run very high cortisol because of chronic stress. And then that disrupts all our other systems. Is that how it works? Does it cause inflammation? Why is cortisol so bad when it's chronically elevated? Can you talk us through more detail in terms of how that impacts our mental health?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Sure. Well, cortisol goes through stages of dysfunction. And so the first stage is where all the levels can be chronically elevated throughout the day. I call that the superwoman phase, and most people feel pretty energized. They don't need a lot of sleep. They can go, go, go, go, I've got this. I can handle this. And then what happens is the body's ability to keep up this high level of production of cortisol eventually becomes outstripped and levels start falling, usually in an irregular pattern. So someone will say, well, I slept all night, but then I'm still tired and I want to hit the snooze button. I don't want to get up in the morning. But then I finally get up and by 12, I'm ready to go. But then at six o'clock I'm ready to lay down again. But then when it's time to go to bed, I can't fall asleep. So you get this crazy disruption and that's stage two. And then with prolonged stress, the levels can't even keep up with that. And they just all fall to the bottom and you get to stage three. And that's where I was when I did mine. I was just a flat line across the bottom of the graph. So alive and breathing, but really no energy for anything else. So it depends what stage you're in as to how it's affecting your body.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Actually in that stage one when all the levels are pretty high, most people feel pretty good. They might even feel anxious because if you've ever had a steroid, you've gotten a shot for a knee or had it for a bronchitis or something, steroids can cause mania. And so people can actually feel quite manic when they're in that first phase and anxious. Depression is usually not a part of it. But this is why it's so vital to know where your cortisol is regardless of what health problem you're having. But if you're having mental health or emotional problems, you need to know also. And then with this disordered in phase two, I've seen some people can have anxiety, some people can have depression and it can wax and wane. It's not always come and stay for months, but sometimes it does. And then with that bottom level, almost everyone is depressed. There's usually depression with that along with chronic fatigue and there can be a lot of anxiety.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So how does it interact? Well, cortisol interacts with all of your other hormones and it is queen cortisol. It will be fed at all costs. So for instance, your cortisol will siphon off of your sex hormones if you have a higher demand for cortisol, because you need it to live. So say you're in that stage two. It's disrupted secretion and your overall putting out less than you should. Well, your body is going to shunt progesterone from the reproductive cycle and make cortisol instead. And so your cortisol can be a little better, but oh, now you just lost progesterone, your anti-anxiety, anti-depression sex hormone. That's a problem, right? It's also your sleep-good hormone, which then causes more problems. So that's an

example, but it just depends what stage you're in. It can siphon off of your other hormones and affect mood, definitely.

Kirkland Newman:

That's fantastic. That's super helpful. And then I'm curious about insulin and thyroid. Insulin in the sense that you never think of insulin necessarily in relation to mental health or at least I don't. You think of it in terms of blood sugar balance. And you think of it, which I suppose is related to mental health and to cortisol, but it's not the first thing that comes to mind. I mean, insulin resistance, you think obesity, you think diabetes, metabolic syndrome, but you don't think necessarily the mental health aspect. So explain what's the mechanism for the insulin and how does it impact mental health?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Well, it's intimately involved with mental health because it's intimately involved with blood sugar and intimately involved with cortisol. So there are two great examples of this that came to mind as you were talking. The movie *Supersize Me* where the guy went out and ate obviously unhealthy junk food, like McDonald's for, I think, two months. And he not only became physically ill, but he became extremely depressed and mentally unstable. So the main hormone that he was affecting by eating the way he was eating was his insulin, because it was very high sugar and carb content, French fries, milkshakes. So right there that tells you. But you can't separate out. The cortisol also gets damaged when your blood sugar's so labile.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So that's one movie that comes to mind, but then there's another that was called, that *Sugar Film* by an Australian filmmaker called Damone Gummo. Because a lot of people saw *Supersize Me* and they said, oh yeah, well, that's obvious if you eat obviously bad junk food for two months, you're going to get that sick, right? They said that. So he went out and he did the same thing, but he ate so-called healthy foods for two months and tracked his health journey over two months. So he ate all the things that are marketed as yogurt, fruit smoothie, granola bars, right? All the stuff that we think is healthy that we eat all the time when we're trying to be healthy. And he got sick and mentally unstable too. Not to the degree that the *Supersize Me* guy did, but to a significant degree. I forget the details on exactly how much he gained, but I want to say he developed bipolar illness and was mentally unstable and actually had to have another adult to help caretake him because he couldn't caretake himself in two months. His whole point was the average Australian and American, the amount of sugar that we take in is multiples of what we should take in. For women it should be six teaspoons a day.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

And so it is a key part of mental health, but I think one of the problems is that our standard American diet, our SAD diet, S-A-D, is primarily a high carb, high sugar diet. So, so many of us are eating it that we don't even realise that it's a part of our mental health crisis, but it is. It's kind of masked in that way because most people are eating that way. But with someone who has any emotional imbalance, that's one of the first things that I look to. And I haven't looked at statistics to see if diabetics are more prone to depression and anxiety. That would be an interesting statistic to look up. I would bet the answer would be yes. But that's always one of the first things that I look at.

Kirkland Newman:

So that's very interesting. So it feels like cortisol is being caused probably by chronic stress. I mean, these are broad brush strokes, and insulin being caused by poor diet. When you talk about the thyroid, what can cause these thyroid imbalances? And also I was very interested when you mentioned that the low thyroid can cause anxiety. I always think of high thyroid causing anxiety, but not necessarily low. I think of that as causing depression. So I was really curious about that. So, why would low thyroid cause anxiety? And also what would cause thyroid imbalances?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So thyroid imbalances are often because of cortisol and insulin imbalances. So I call thyroid, insulin and cortisol the three Musketeers. They hang out together, they're besties and they all support each other or they all fight and hurt each other. And so if you have insulin problems by definition, you start having cortisol problems. Because it's not only chronic stress and inflammation that hurt your cortisol, but it's also blood sugar imbalance. So when you're on that blood sugar roller coaster going up and down, up and down, you're hurting your cortisol every time it goes down. And then those two start pulling on the thyroid, causing it to be unbalanced. So I always look at all of these hormones. That's the first thing I do. But commonly people with thyroid imbalances are going to have insulin and or cortisol imbalances, or they could have a primary thyroid problem, which oftentimes is due to food sensitivities like gluten, if they have something like a Hashimoto's autoimmune thyroiditis.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

But yes, so I always thought that too. Oh, well, low thyroid is going to cause depression. And also fatigue, and they're going to sleep soundly, but that's not true. Actually, if someone wakes up in the middle of the night, sometimes the cause is that their thyroid is low. So, I say that the sex hormones are Goldilocks hormones. They have to be just right. But they really all are. They really are. They're like Prima Donnas they need to be just right, but they deserve to be Prima Donnas because they're keeping us alive. So the thyroid actually, if it's too low, you may be tired, but you might wake up and not be able to sleep. And same thing, it can cause anxiety if it's not just in that sweet spot. What is the mechanism? I don't recall how exactly it's triggering anxiety, but they're intimately involved with the neurotransmitters. And when you've got anxiety, typically you think of low GABA and acetylcholine. And depression, you think of low serotonin and low dopamine. So I'm not sure of exactly who's pulling what string there, but pull they do when they're out of balance

Kirkland Newman:

Completely. And then I think the final ones, which you mentioned with the sex hormones, and I'm particularly interested also just to mention that men presumably, I mean, we talk a lot about women and women are four times more likely to suffer from mood disorders than men. We know that, and anxiety disorders. But men also are subject to mental health driven by hormonal dysregulation and all the hormone dysregulations that you've mentioned that can impact mental health are applicable to men as well. I just wanted to make that clear. And when you talk about the sex hormones, obviously the male hormone, which is testosterone, which women also have, but the progesterone estrogen, I've always understood that serotonin and estrogen are very closely linked and GABA and progesterone aren't. And testosterone is linked to dopamine, I think if I'm not mistaken. But tell us what can disrupt these sex hormones, both in men and women? And I guess the next question will be, how can we fix all this? But first, how can our mental health be disrupted by disruption in our sex hormones essentially?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Right. But yes, your point about men, men have all the same hormones. Men just have 10 times the testosterone and women have 10 times the estrogen. So everything pretty much applies. What doesn't disrupt them would be a shorter question. But I think this is one of the reasons why women have four times the level of mental health problems that men do because we are cyclical beings. And a moving system has the potential for more problems always. A static system is a steady state, just keeps rolling on. And men are pretty static until they hit andropause, usually 50s or 60s. So we're cycling on a 28 day cycle, lots of moving parts, lots of potential interference with the wifi that is our hormones. So I think that's why we are subject to so many differences and our sex hormones are so intimately involved with our neurotransmitter function and our mood as evidenced just by even with a normal menstrual cycle.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Any woman can tell you that she's not the same two days out of 28, we're just not, right? We're always different. And any disruption in the healthy cyclicity of our hormones, our estrogen, progesterone, and also sometimes our testosterone can be more cyclic, we can have disruptions in our mental health that can become pervasive on more days than not. So evidenced by PMs or PMDD, which occurs before the cycle, which typically actually the functional root is lack of progesterone. So it's a progesterone deficiency in the second half of the cycle that leads to sometimes clinical depression and anxiety and disruption in activities of daily living. That's pretty significant. So mainstream medicine says, well, we'll give a birth control pill. We just shut the whole system down. Don't worry about it, right? But that's not really the answer. The issue is why is she progesterone deficient? Because other tissues need that progesterone to be optimally healthy. So when you just give birth control, you're not fixing that. So figuring out why she is progesterone deficient and balancing it out.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

So any type of disruption, and I will say that in fertile, younger ovulating women, the most common imbalances that we see are estrogen excess and progesterone deficiency. So you can get a kind of mix and match balancing on these. They could both be high sometimes, rarely, but usually you get this mismatch where the progesterone's low, estrogen is high. And that can cause varying mental health disruption, but I've seen some women whose estrogens were so high and they're so depressed. Well, if you have too much estrogen, it can make you extremely depressed. But when you detox that excess estrogen, the depression lifts and you balance it with progesterone. So it's just a combination for each woman of what she's experiencing, but I think this is the reason why it's so prevalent in women.

Kirkland Newman:

Understood, totally agree. And now my final question, because we're coming to the end. Thank you so much for your time, Kyrin. You've been amazing. What are the top tips that you would give people for their mental health if people came to you? I mean, I know it's super complicated, but just in a nutshell, top tips to look at for people who are struggling with their mental health. What would you recommend?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Great question. I'm going to try and give practical tips to try and help yourself right away. And I don't think it's necessarily a great tip to say, find someone who does functional medicine. So I'm going to say, look at what you're eating, like we talked about with those two movies *Supersize Me* and that sugar film, and cut the sugar and carbs out of your diet, and go to an unprocessed whole food carnivore, primarily plant diet is number one. There's another book I would mention there called *Sugar Blues* that was a



bestseller probably in the 70s, when I was a kid, that you might want to look at too. And it talks about the link with mental health and sugar also. So that'd be number one, change what you're eating.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Number two, I would say is to feel your feelings and listen to what they're telling you. I really think we have an epidemic of not feeling our feelings, bracing against our feelings, stuffing our feelings. Hence the sugar. Sugar's a great feeling stuffer. I don't want to feel it, to actually feel them. My friend, Dr. Joan Rosenberg has a great book called 90 Seconds to a Life You Love. And she talks about how any emotion takes only 90 seconds to be fully felt physiologically in the body. But we spend so much time resisting the emotions we don't want to feel that we don't feel them, but this is energy in motion. And if you don't allow energy to flow it stagnates and it stagnates in your energy system. And so you don't have to be a kid to have that happen. You can do it as an adult to yourself where I'm not going to feel that, I'm not going to feel that. And then it stagnates your whole system because if energy is not flowing, that free flow of Prana or Chi or whatever you want to call it, the life force energy that enlivens you, that is who you are, then you're stagnating it. And that shows up in your physical body.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

And number three, I would say is find somebody who, like Kiki and I are talking about, can help you with a comprehensive evaluation. Yes, look at your hormones, look at your gut health. Look at what physical modalities might help you like somatic experiencing or EMDR, lowaska or whatever. And give yourself, and love yourself enough to do a comprehensive approach and invest the time and money in yourself because you are worth it.

Kirkland Newman:

Totally. That's fantastic, brilliant. Well, Kyrin, those are fantastic tips. You've given us a lot today. So I'm really, really grateful. And the one thing I heard in another podcast you mentioned a lot was sleep and the importance of sleep. And I think that's always a challenge because if your hormones are disrupted and your biochemistry is disrupted, it can be really hard to get a good night's sleep.

Kirkland Newman:

And yet I've heard you say how important that is, and we all know how important that is. And I think that's challenging. So I guess your point is work with a practitioner to get the biochemistry regulated and the psychospiritual stuff, and then hopefully we can all sleep better. Is there anything else that you want to add?

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

I would just say that I love what you're doing, really bringing awareness about a comprehensive approach to mental health. It is what is needed. And I really think that a comprehensive approach is what's going to solve this crisis that we're experiencing globally. So thank you for doing this.

Kirkland Newman:

Well, thank you so much, Kyrin. And in the show notes, I'm going to put all your resources, your menopause summit, your book, all your webinars. I know you do some fantastic things and obviously your website. And presumably you're still also seeing patients. You take on new patients. Do you have a waiting list, if people want to come see you?

## The MindHealth360 Show - Dr. Kyrin Dunston

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

I do actually group programs and have a one-on-one component with that. And I work with people in the US right now, hopefully we can expand that in the future. Because I have had a lot of requests for it, but there are just some legalities overseas that we have to figure out how to navigate, but yes.

Kirkland Newman:

Fantastic. Well, that's brilliant. Thank you so much, Kyrin, for your time. I really appreciate it.

Dr. Kyrin Dunston:

Thank you for having me.

Kirkland Newman:

Thank you so much for listening to TheMindHealth360 Show. I hope that we've helped you realise that mental health symptoms have root causes that can and need to be addressed in order to sustainably heal, and have given you some ideas about steps you, your loved ones or clients may take to start their healing journey.

Kirkland Newman:

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Kirkland Newman:

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