



**Kirkland and Cressida in conversation: all you need to know  
about optimising your mental health with integrative  
medicine**

**with Cressida Bonas**

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

**Episode Transcript**

Host: Cressida Bonas

Guest: Kirkland Newman

## The MindHealth360 Show - Kirkland Newman

Kirkland Newman:

We decided to start this website, MindHealth360, to have as much information there as I could as a free resource for people, who could understand more about what might be contributing to their mental health symptoms and things that we don't usually think about; hormone imbalances, nutritional imbalances, toxins, heavy metals, inflammation, infections. You can have Lyme disease or Epstein-Barr and that can cause inflammation which can impact your mental health. And so it's really a tool to raise awareness and then also provide resources to people for free so that they can find the help that they need.

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 these 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.

Cressida Bonas:

Kiki, thank you so much for talking to me today. This is really exciting and I've wanted to do this for so long. And MindHealth360 is amazing and I'm so excited to ask you all these questions. And I wanted to begin by asking you about your story and how MindHealth360 began.

Kirkland Newman:

So, first of all, thanks for doing this as well, Cressida, I think you're amazing and your podcast is amazing and I'm very impressed with it. And I love so many of your interviews about fear, which I think are brilliant and it's a topic very close to my heart. I think I'm one of the most terrified people I know of and it's a constant struggle to basically deal with my own anxieties and my own fears. But anyway, that's on the side. So my story MindHealth360 started because I had postpartum depression after both my boys and the first one, I was offered a whole number of medications. So antidepressants, tranquillisers and I didn't take any and I healed myself through meditation and good nutrition. And I would have quite a few panic attacks with the first one. I was diagnosed with generalised anxiety and panic disorder. And one of the interesting things is I had no idea that postpartum depression could include that subset of panic attacks and anxiety. I just thought depression, it's when you're crying all the time or you're unhappy. And so it took me several months of having these panic attacks to actually see a psychiatrist and say something not right here. And he said, "Oh, well you have postpartum depression." I thought that to me, it was quite incongruous that it could actually take the form of panic attacks and anxiety. So that was a revelation and I healed myself on my own essentially.

Kirkland Newman:

Then the second episode after the second child was three and a half years later was actually a lot worse. And there I did have depression and I also had anxiety and I had terrible insomnia, which I hadn't had the first time. So my insomnia was just crippling. I would sleep two or three hours a night and it was just a terrible experience. And for six months, this went on and my panic attacks got worse and I was crying all

the time and it was just very debilitating. And for that, I was medicated. I was put on Mirtazapine and Zopiclone, which is a sleeping pill. And I had not a very good reaction in the sense that it actually seemed to exacerbate my depression. So it helped with the panic and the anxiety and it helped with the sleep, but the depression got worse and I just got more and more down. The hallmark of my symptoms was more the anxiety than the depression and the antidepressant ironically made the depression worse it seemed. I wasn't happy with being on it.

Kirkland Newman:

I wanted to get off the sleeping pills because I was so dependent on them. And my psychiatrist said, "Oh, you know, you'll be on these indefinitely." And I said, well that doesn't make sense. I've never been on an antidepressant or a sleeping pill before. Why would I be on these indefinitely? Surely this is just temporary. And so I ended up weaning myself off the sleeping pills and that took at least 10 days to get them out of my system. It was pretty bad. And then weaning myself off the antidepressants after six months was really tough, because I would have rebound panic attacks, rebound insomnia. And I had no help from my psychiatrist. She would say well, you should still be on these. And then I got it down to such a small amount. It was two millimeters. And she was saying, "Oh, well, it's a placebo effect. It can't be having any physiological effect on you at that level." And yet I just felt that that wasn't the case. And I did some internet research and I found all these other people in these forums who also had the same problem. They were on two milliliters and couldn't get off. Since then, there's research that's come out that's shown that actually the last 1% or something is the hardest to get off physiologically, not just psychologically. So I had a really bad experience on these drugs.

Kirkland Newman:

As a result, somebody actually gave me Suzanne Somers' book, which I think was called Breakthroughs at the time. This was back in 2011, and I found out about hormones through her. And so I went on this quest that then lasted three years and I went to see Thierry Hertoghe who's a gynecologist or a GPN in Belgium. And he wanted to put me on all these replacement hormones. And then I came back and I went to the Marion Gluck clinic. I saw an endocrinologist there and was put on bioidentical hormones, which were very helpful. I saw a nutritionist who then diagnosed me with adrenal fatigue and heavy metal poisoning and gluten intolerance. And I had all these physiological biochemical things that were not right, which had never been tested by conventional psychiatry. And another thing is I breastfed for a year and I was low on Omega 3's, low on Vitamin B's, low on D's. And this all came up in the nutritional panels that they did on me. And through this whole experience, and through the difficulty also that I had getting off my drugs, it took me, I would say about two years after getting off my drugs to actually stabilise my system.

Kirkland Newman:

It was almost as if these drugs had been stabilising my system artificially, and I had lost the ability to self-regulate. So whether it was positive stress as an excitement and overstimulation, or whether it was negative stress as in anxiety, any sort of stimulation to my nervous system would just send me through a roof. And I didn't have that variability. I'd lost the ability to self-regulate. And so through that experience, which was really difficult and also the experience of finding all these other physiological biochemical things that were not right with me, I discovered this thing called integrative medicine and functional medicine through this wonderful gynecologist in San Francisco called Dr. Sara Gottfried. And she had written a book on how to reset your hormones. And she was doing webinars on adrenals and blood

sugar and all these issues that were fascinating. And I thought, why did more people not know about this? And why have I seen five doctors, two GP's, two psychiatrists and an OBGYN, in fact, probably more than five, an endocrinologist and no one's ever mentioned my hormones. No one's ever said, let's do some tests on your hormones or let's look at your nutritional panels or status. And I thought there's such a disconnect between the way I was treated, i.e. put on antidepressants and prescribed some CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) versus what was really going on with my physiology, which was all these hormonal and nutritional imbalances. Plus my adrenals were completely shot.

Kirkland Newman:

For me motherhood was a really intense time of transition and it was very difficult because your whole life changes. And so there was a lot of stress and I was a perfectionist. I wanted to be the perfect parent. I didn't want to make the same mistakes that my mother had made. There was a lot of anxiety, chronic stress, which then depleted my hormones and my adrenals. And I was in this state of burnout essentially. And I now understand more about the nervous system. And I understand that I was in a state of sympathetic arousal for a very sustained period of time. And that just created a biochemical cascade in my body, which led to inflammation and led to all sorts of weird physical symptoms. And so seeing the disconnect between how my mental health had been treated by mainstream medicine versus how I felt that it should be, and all the alternatives out there by very reputable proper doctors who just happened to be practicing functional medicine or integrative medicine. I thought, why do more people not know about this? And people need to know about this because this is really important.

Kirkland Newman:

Just to give you another example, I had heart palpitations, so I went to see a cardiologist and he put a Holter around me and said, "Yes" after 24 hours of monitoring, he said, "you're having a lot of ectopic beats and heart palpitations, but we don't really know what causes them they're benign, but we can give you a beta blocker." This was nine months postpartum. Why did he not say, go have your thyroid checked? Because we now know that postpartum thyroiditis is very common and can cause heart palpitations or low estrogen. There are many hormonal reasons why you could be having heart palpitations, but in his mind, he's a very reputable cardiologist. It was no. We don't know what's causing this. Take some beta blockers if you want.

Kirkland Newman:

So as a result of that, I thought, okay, I need to raise awareness about this to help other people so that they don't have to go through the same experience. And I decided to start this website, MindHealth360, to have as much information there as I could. As a free resource for people who could understand more about what might be contributing to their mental health symptoms and things that we don't usually think about; hormone imbalances, nutritional imbalances, toxins, heavy metals, inflammation, infections. You can have Lyme disease or Epstein-Barr and that can cause inflammation, which can impact your mental health. It's really a tool to raise awareness and then also provide resources to people for free so that they can find the help that they need. And there's a database, a global database of people, doctors, who practice integrative medicine, that people can go to, to get help. Because I'm just such a passionate believer that this is a more sustainable solution to people with mental health problems. And it gets to the root cause of what's really contributing to their mental health issues. Because the current model, nice guidelines, which are the clinical guidelines given by the government are for mental health mainly SSRI, so antidepressants, and CBT--Cognitive Behavioral therapy. That's just

the tip of the iceberg. And that's mainly treating the symptoms, especially the antidepressants, rather than the causes. So I'm very passionate about a different approach to treating mental health. And I really want to create a revolution in the way mental health is diagnosed and treated both in the UK and the U.S. and around the world, really. So it's quite ambitious.

Cressida Bonas:

I think MentalHealth360 is such a clever name because you are really dealing with the whole thing rather than when you go to a doctor and as you were saying, they say, talk about your symptoms and give you a sleeping pill or a tranquiliser or whatever. And they don't talk about what are the causes. So then it gets very confusing. And then if you go to a nutritionist, they talk about something completely different to what a doctor or a psychiatrist talks about. So I think what you are doing is so interesting and I really hope that more people hear about it. And just talking about hormones specifically. So in my mind, I think of cortisol and insulin being the really powerful hormones in our bodies, obviously there's a lot more, but can you talk a little bit more about those hormones and why there is such an imbalance sometimes?

Kirkland Newman:

There are quite a few key hormones that really impact your mental health. And this is something I had no idea about, but for instance, you have your sex hormones, which the main ones are testosterone, progesterone, and estrogen. And all of us, men and women, have these in varying degrees. Obviously women have more progesterone and estrogen and less testosterone and men have more testosterone, but these hormones and the hormonal balance are essential to your mental health because they dictate the status of your neurotransmitters. So for instance, there's a correlation between estrogen and serotonin. Serotonin is your happy neurotransmitter that regulates your sense of wellbeing and your moods and your sleep and your appetite. Progesterone is very linked to your GABA. So GABA being your calming neurotransmitter. So if you've got low estrogen, you're going to have low serotonin. Low progesterone, you're going to have low GABA. And consequently you're going to feel pretty depressed, or you could feel pretty depressed if you have low estrogen and pretty anxious if you have low progesterone. So those are just two very basic examples. Testosterone dictates your libido and is also linked to your dopamine. Your sense of motivation and pleasure and drive, which come from your dopamine, are very correlated to your testosterone levels.

Kirkland Newman:

Cortisol is a really important one. Cortisol and DHEA are your steroid hormones, which, and your adrenaline, are very linked to your stress. So when you feel stressed, you have a release of cortisol and adrenaline which then have this very specific physiological impact. So they speed up your heart rate. They slow your digestion. They take all the blood away from your digestion and put it in your limbs. There are a lot of physiological things that happen when you have high cortisol. We're designed to have high cortisol and high adrenaline in a very temporary way. You're attacked by somebody and you have to be able to run or to flee or to fight. And then consequently there's this physiological response that pumps the blood to your limbs and makes your heart go faster and shuts down the less necessary metabolic processes, like digestion. But the problem in our current societies is that this high cortisol and high adrenaline is very chronic. And whether it's rushing to get your kids to school or financial worries or stressful relationships or the 24-7 connectivity that we have with our devices and this constant feeling of pressure that we have to always be doing or being on. These are all ways that your cortisol ends up being chronically elevated. And that has a physiological impact because one of the metabolic processes that

slows down when you have high cortisol is your immune system. And so cortisol in the short term is necessary because it creates inflammation and it boosts your immune system so that you can deal with whatever wound you have, but if it's chronic, what happens is that you have this chronic high inflammation, and we know that high inflammation is correlated with plenty of diseases, whether it's cancer, diabetes, autoimmune issues, but also mental health issues, such as depression, cognitive decline, anxiety.

Kirkland Newman:

These hormones, whether there are steroid hormones, or stress hormones, or our sex hormones, are absolutely crucial to our mental health. And I think the third one you mentioned, which is really important is insulin, which regulates your blood sugar. And so when you eat sugar, for instance, or refined carbohydrates, you have a spike of insulin, which then accompanies this glucose, the sugars into your cells. And what happens is if you have too much sugar constantly, or too many refined carbohydrates, your cells become resistant to the insulin. And so they don't open the doors to the insulin anymore. And so you essentially have a lot of glucose going around your system and not getting into your cells. And this can be something that leads to diabetes, for instance, and leads also to inflammation. And there's also a link between insulin and estrogen. And also getting glucose into your brain cells. So for instance, if you're insulin resistant, then you're going to possibly have more brain fog because you're not getting the energy that you need and your brain cells. So we don't think of this, but actually our hormones are so important to regulating how we feel, how we're thinking: Are we sharp? Are we motivated? Are we happy? Are we calm? So much of these are interactions between your hormones, your neurotransmitters and all your bodily functions, which are really dictated by these hormones.

Cressida Bonas:

Yeah. So I'm wondering how you balance the hormones? Because I definitely feel that sometimes where I just feel there's a lot of cortisol running through my body that shouldn't really be that heightened just like missing a train or forgetting something, and then it feels all over the place. How do you balance them? I'd love to talk about nutrition a bit later. Other than nutrition, how can we just have a regular hormone balanced system?

Kirkland Newman:

Totally. And that's the holy grail, isn't it? To balance our hormones. Because you know that if your hormones are balanced, your transmitters will be more balanced, your system will be more balanced. And I think one of the key things that springs to mind is stress. And so we live in such stress heightened societies, and we have to try and manage our stress response. As I said, having some sympathetic arousal, some cortisol is good and is healthy. You don't want to sit on a sofa all day and have no cortisol at all because it's not going to be very adaptive essentially, but in our modern societies we're under constant stress. And so I think anything that you can do to lower your stress levels, whether it's meditation, yoga, walking in the woods, spending time with friends, laughing, just switching off, getting rid of the phone. We're constantly bombarded by whether it's dopamine hits or cortisol hits. We get a text and we don't know what that's going to be. What is it going to be? Bad news? Is it going to be something we have to do? Is it going to be something we've forgotten? Is it going to be something negative or positive? But we just never know what's coming through that phone, but we're always open to receiving all these pieces of information that are impacting our system and that can then create a stress response.

Kirkland Newman:

So I think I would say to balance our hormones the most crucial thing is stress, to try and manage our stress as best we can. The second thing is definitely diet, as you said, and I know you want to talk about that later but, eating less refined carbohydrates, so less processed foods, fewer sugars, no white bread, well as little as possible, white breads, pizzas, candies, chocolate, et cetera, because these all create insulin spikes and they all can lead to insulin resistance and they also can lead to inflammation. Sugar is very inflammatory. And also the blood sugar blood. Blood sugar is hugely important in mental health. And so what we want is to have regular blood sugar control, which means fewer spikes of refined carbohydrates and more predictable meals where we have three meals a day with proteins, fats and complex carbohydrates, rather than snacking on sugary foods. So that's a really good way to manage your blood sugar, which in turn will decrease your inflammation and also ensure more insulin stability. That's another way.

Kirkland Newman:

What else? Other things that can disrupt your hormones are things like toxins, and if you're exposed to mould for instance, or you have heavy metals, that can cause inflammation in your pituitary, or any of your hormonal glands can be exposed to inflammation from these toxins and that can then disrupt your hormones. And one more thing in terms of nutrition is fat. So one of the key precursors to your hormones is cholesterol. Believe it or not. And so people bang on about how bad cholesterol is and a lot of people are on statins to lower their cholesterol, but actually cholesterol is hugely important as the building block of your hormones. It's a precursor to pregnenolone, which is your master hormone. From pregnenolone, are made all your other hormones. If you're getting the right fats, saturated fats, but also EFAs essential fatty acids, such as omega-3s, these are all really important to regulate your hormones as well.

Kirkland Newman:

Another hormone that I haven't mentioned is oxytocin. It's a really important hormone. It's the love and bond hormone that comes through orgasm, childbirth, breastfeeding. But also just bonding, hugging, spending time with loved ones, you release oxytocin, which is an incredibly healing hormone, and which is also an antidote to the cortisol. If you have a lot of oxytocin, then that will lower your cortisol, and vice versa, if you have high cortisol, will lower your oxytocin. But oxytocin is such an important hormone for your feelings of well-being and happiness. Being inversely correlated with cortisol, it's a very good stress reducer. So social engagement. If you're talking about the polyvagal theory, for instance, of Steven Porges, it's all about the connection between social engagement and the hormone oxytocin and the lowering of your cortisol. I think good relationships, and that can be pets as well. Relationships with pets releases oxytocin. So, not-processed food, whole foods, balancing your blood sugars, reducing your stress, spending time with loved ones and reducing your toxin levels is very important.

Cressida Bonas:

When someone says a toxic load, what does that mean?

Kirkland Newman:

That's another good question. Toxic load, again, it's something we don't think about when we think about mental health or hormones, but essentially our environments are so replete now with toxins. Our air is much more polluted than it used to be, our water is very polluted. Our foods are polluted with pesticides and herbicides. Tap water can have residues of chlorine, pesticides, herbicides, heavy metals, leads, coppers, etc. The air that we breathe, if we live on a busy street, we're getting car exhaust or we're getting factory exhaust. The other problem with toxins is things that you don't necessarily think about, cleaning products for your home and your personal care products. Shampoos, toothpaste, skin creams. If you look at the number of toxins and chemicals over the past, I think 50 years, has increased exponentially. I mean, the number of toxins runs in the millions now. Our bodies are exposed to this. It's not like we're exposed to one toxin, we're in this toxic soup. No studies have been done on the long term effects of being in this toxic soup. They might have studied a toxin for like six weeks or something, but it's never going to be over the years, and not in conjunction with each other.

Kirkland Newman:

We don't know how these toxins are interacting in our bodies. Again, no studies have been done on the interaction, the cumulative effect of all these toxins that can get stored in our fat cells, for instance. Our fat stores these toxins, our bones can store lead. What happens is our bodies accumulate these toxins, and then they can disrupt our microbiomes, or they can disrupt our guts. They can cause inflammation and they can then in turn, disrupt our hormones. We now know, for instance, that Parkinson's is very linked to heavy metal load, and that Alzheimer's, neurodegenerative diseases.

Cressida Bonas:

Heavy metals, where does that come from? How do we absorb that?

Kirkland Newman:

That's another great question. Basically heavy metals you think of: lead mercury, arsenic, cadmium, gallidinium... I mean, there are a whole bunch of them. The main way is from factory exhaust, but also if we eat tuna or swordfish, there's a lot of mercury in those larger fish. We're better off eating smaller fish. Heavy metals are in the earth. They come from, I'm not exactly sure, but I do know that for instance, a lot of chemical products that are used, whether it's in paints, I mean, they used to put lead in paints. Now they don't anymore. But thermometers used to have mercury in them. This stuff leaches into the ground and it leaches into our food processes and it leaches into our air. It can be in the water. Arsenic for instance, which is quite a common one, ironically is in rice.

Cressida Bonas:

Really?

Kirkland Newman:

... Yeah. If you're eating even brown rice, and brown rice is arsenic-concentrated even more. If you eat a lot of rice... And I'm not sure if the study-

Cressida Bonas:



I eat a lot of rice.

Kirkland Newman:

... Well, you have to be a little careful about that.

Cressida Bonas:

But I didn't know that.

Kirkland Newman:

There's a lot of arsenic in rice. I'm not sure about organic rice. If you eat organic rice, does that mean that there's less arsenic? But for instance, I've had to stop my kids eating as much rice as they were doing because their arsenic levels were through the roof, both of them. One of them is gluten free. He eats a lot of replacement gluten products, which are based on rice. He's been getting very high arsenic, I think, due to the rice. The heavy metals are ubiquitous. If you have an MRI scan, you can get gallium in your system. To get rid of them is not easy. I mean, smoking. Smokers tend to have heavy metals as well. I think it's lead and cadmium.

Cressida Bonas:

What sometimes I find tricky is say, you can't always buy organic food and you can't avoid fumes all the time. If you live in the city, you don't live in the country, and you don't have that choice to live the most healthy life that you want to live, in terms of food, et cetera. What can you do? What are the tiny things that you can do?

Kirkland Newman:

That's a good question. I mean, it is a bit dispiriting, and you don't want to end up being... I mean, I tend to be quite neurotic. You can't drink that and you can't eat that. You have to be super careful and you have to live in a bubble. I mean, that's not the answer, but there are a few things that you can do. For instance, avoid large fish, so tuna, swordfish, shark, and focus more on anchovies, sardines, mackerels, smaller fish. Make sure that you eat as much as possible organic because the pesticide and herbicide residue and heavy metal residue is going to be much lower.

Kirkland Newman:

Make sure that your drinking water is from a good source. Now, the problem with drinking water is that the tap is not great because there are a lot of contaminants. But bottled water isn't great either because the plastics from the bottles can leach into the water, and leaching in BPA or other plastics. That's not good either. Plastics are known endocrine disruptors, which means that they actually disrupt your hormones. They think that kids now who are having puberty earlier and earlier, a lot of it is due to the plastics. Never ever microwave or eat anything in a plastic container. Only cook with stainless steel or glass. Never cook in plastics. Never leave a bottle of water in the car that you then drink. I have a water filter, which is a reverse osmosis water filter. It takes everything out of water. The problem is it also takes the minerals out. So then you have to add the minerals back in because minerals are important. That's one thing that you can do is eat organic, make sure that your water is filtered. As much as possible, get out into nature. Ideally, if you have a choice as to where to live, try not to live next to a very busy road. Make sure that your care products are organic as well and you can read the ingredients, and don't have

parabens and phthalates and perfumes, and is natural and as organic as possible. Same with your household cleaners. I mean, use vinegar and buy carbonated soda. There are a lot of very good natural household products. But you always have to read the ingredients because a lot of the advertising will say, this is natural, but actually if you actually read the ingredients, there's still a lot of stuff in there.

Kirkland Newman:

So one is avoiding the toxins, but then two is enabling your own body to detoxify because we're designed to detox things like these. The problem is when our system gets overloaded, or if we're stressed or if we're not sleeping enough, or if we have genetic pathways that mean that our detoxification systems aren't as good, or if our diet is poor, we don't have the right nutrients to detoxify, our own detoxification systems will be sluggish. Therefore, you need to really make those as functional as possible. One of the things I do is I have an infrared sauna. I swear by it. I mean, the more I do it, the better I feel. The sweat that comes out... sweating is a great way of detoxifying. An infrared sauna really gets deep into your tissues, into your cells more so, I think, than a traditional sauna. Exercise is a great way to detoxify. Breathing. I mean, breathing is incredibly important in terms of detoxifying. It actualises your body when you breathe correctly, otherwise, you could be in a state of acidosis.

Kirkland Newman:

For instance, if you're surrounded by toxins and stress and you're not breathing properly, your system will become quite acidic. You want to bring it back into alkalinity by reducing your stress, limiting your toxin exposure, and breathing, deep breathing, breathing out more than you breathe in. Also eating the right food. So cruciferous vegetables, broccolis, brussel sprouts, cabbage. Because they're sulfuric, they basically are very good for your detoxification pathways. Same with garlic, onion, those types of sulfuric compounds are very good to support your detoxification systems. You can supplement. You can take glutathione, which is a fantastic antioxidant, essentially for your detox systems. You can take milk thistle to support your liver to detoxify better. There are a lot of supplements you can take. I think it's a two-pronged approach. One, you avoid the toxins as much as possible, and two, you optimise your body's ability to detoxify.

Cressida Bonas:

Because the gut and the brain are so linked, aren't they? I think more than we ever will realise. Or I think we are gradually beginning to realise, but I think it's so entwined.

Kirkland Newman:

That's a really good point that I forgot to mention, which is fiber. One of the key detox pathways is through your colon and through your digestion. It's really important to eat the right fiber so that you are binding and pushing out all the toxins that you have. That you're not constipated and that you have regular bowel movements is super important for detoxification. You're right. The gut and the brain are super connected. More and more we're finding that things like leaky gut... Leaky gut is gut permeability, it's where the tight junctions in the lining of your gut wall is only one cell thick. If that becomes compromised and becomes permeable, then what happens is that the undigested molecules in your guts can go out through these leaky tight junctions, into your system and cause systemic inflammation because your body then doesn't recognise these molecules and thinks that this is some sort of attack, we have to amount an immune response, and creates inflammation. That can also get into your brain if your

blood brain barrier is slightly leaky. If your gut lining is leaky due to stress or due to poor diet, there are a number of things that can cause leakiness in your gut, then what might also happen is your blood brain barrier becomes more leaky. And then you have this systemic inflammation. More importantly, you have neuro inflammation.

Kirkland Newman:

There's one compound called LPS. Lipopolysaccharides, I think they're called, are a component of gut bacteria, which when they get out of your gut and go into your system are notorious for causing inflammation. One, you want to make sure that your gut lining has as much integrity as possible, and is built through the right foods, proteins. You want to make sure that you're avoiding any inflammatory compounds. Say, you have a gluten intolerance, or you have an intolerance to dairy that's not been diagnosed, and you keep eating gluten and dairy, that will cause inflammation. Eventually, it'll cause this leakiness in your gut lining, which will then cause neuro inflammation. You want to diagnose any food intolerances.

Kirkland Newman:

The other thing is gut dysbiosis. The bacteria in your gut are incredibly important. They've shown that most of the communication between your gut and your brain is afferent, which means it goes from your gut to your brain, rather than from your brain to your gut. The bacteria that are in your gut are absolutely crucial for your moods and your state of mind. 95% of your serotonin is actually made in your gut. Same with a lot of your other neurotransmitters, they're made in your gut. You need the right bacterial environment for the right neurotransmitters to be made. You need to eat the right foods. You need to eat a lot of green leafy vegetables, a lot of fiber, a lot of prebiotic foods, such as artichokes and chicory and capers and onions and also, a lot of probiotic foods such as kimchi and sauerkraut and fermented foods, so that the bacteria in your gut are healthy, so that the good bacteria outweigh the bad bacteria. Because essentially your gut is the longest barrier you have between you and the outside world. Everything that comes in that you ingest goes into this gut. If your gut is not healthy, it's really going to affect the rest of your system and your brain. One of the fascinating things is they are now discovering that there's a particular bacteria in your guts that's been shown to be present 10 years before somebody develops Parkinson's. There's this link between this particular bacteria and developing Parkinson's.

Cressida Bonas:

Really?

Kirkland Newman:

We don't understand yet the mechanisms. Part of the problem is a lot of the studies have been done on animals as opposed to humans. But we do know that the quality of your microbiome, so the makeup of your gut bacteria is absolutely essential to your mental health, and equally the integrity of your gut lining is absolutely essential to lowering inflammation, keeping your inflammation under check. There's a huge resurgence of autoimmune conditions currently in the world, which we think are in large part due to our diets of processed foods and chronic stress.

Kirkland Newman:

This leakiness in the gut will create gut dysbiosis, and then will lead to inflammation and this chronic inflammation, which is a chronic activation of your immune system. Then the immune system starts to attack itself and create all these autoimmune conditions such as psoriasis and Crohn's disease and Hashimotos and rheumatoid arthritis. There are hundreds of them. The gut is absolutely essential to mental health. Coming back to mental health, we know that certain gut bacteria such as lactobacillus, and certain bifidobacterium infantis, for instance, have been shown in lactobacillus rhamnosus specifically to help with anxiety for instance. Another fascinating study is they took these mice and they exchanged the gut microbiome of these mice. Their personalities changed as well. The mice who had a certain microbiome were quite anxious. And then the anxiety moved to the other mice based on this transfer of gut. Now they have this thing called fecal transplant, which is where they actually transplant fecal matter from one person to the other, to see how that impacts mental health. It sounds revolting, but it actually has had fantastic outcomes in terms of helping people with depression and anxiety and autism and cognitive decline.

Cressida Bonas:

I have so many questions. I have so many questions from that. In my head I was going, don't forget that. I need to ask that. Just talking about good bacteria and bad bacteria, and this is a really simple question, but something just taking a probiotic every day, is that good to do that?

Kirkland Newman:

It's a good question. I mean, I would say, yes. I'm not a nutritionist or a doctor, but I personally take probiotics. I think, why not? There's no downside. I think the most important thing is to clean up your diet. To eat whole foods, unprocessed foods, organic foods.

Cressida Bonas:

Some people say don't eat red meat, other people say you have to eat red meat for protein. What is what?

Kirkland Newman:

... It's a really good question. I mean, I personally... I mean, I'm not a vegetarian. I'm very sympathetic to vegetarianism. I personally think that for mental health eating animal protein is good because I do think that we get the most complete number of amino acids, which are the building blocks of proteins in animal protein. It's much harder to get that complete protein profile from vegan or even vegetarian diets. I also think that the B12 and the iron that you get from red meats is really important for your mental health and your hormone balance and your energy levels.

Kirkland Newman:

Protein also, which breaks down into these amino acids, are the building blocks of your neurotransmitters. For instance, serotonin, you need tryptophan, which is an amino acid from protein to make the serotonin. You need tyrosine and diphenylamine to make dopamine. It's absolutely essential that you're getting these amino acids. If you are a vegan, take a protein powder by all means. There's a real correlation between girls who are vegan or even boys, and for moral reasons, but a lot of them develop eating disorders or can because they have very low serotonin or their low serotonin from the lack of protein is a contributing factor to their eating disorders.

Kirkland Newman:

It's difficult because proteins and amino acids are building blocks for that gut lining and help protect the integrity of the gut. It's a tricky one, because I personally think that eating meat is a good thing for your mental health. However, you don't have to eat that much of it. I mean, you can eat it in moderation. I do think that 80% of your plate should be vegetables, green leafy vegetables. The other thing about green leafy vegetables is that the fiber creates this compound called butyric acid, which is very important as an anti-inflammatory in your gut. I think what you eat is absolutely essential to the integrity of your gut. Taking a probiotic is... I think does no harm. It's always confusing which probiotic do you take because they're-

Cressida Bonas:

So confusing.

Kirkland Newman:

... many out there.

Cressida Bonas:

Vitamins as well because people say different things. You read stuff online, that says one thing, you speak to a doctor, they say another thing, you speak to a nutritionist, they say another thing. It's really difficult to know what is the best thing to take for you because obviously we're all so different. It's so personal. How do you know that without having to do loads of very expensive tests? How do you know? Some people say, well, just take a multivitamin everyday because then you get everything. But maybe that's not what you need. Maybe you need just one specific mineral vitamin. That's what I struggle with, is it's almost a bit too overwhelming.

Kirkland Newman:

It is really overwhelming. I would agree with that. And that's why I think the basics are really important, like eat a really good diet that's whole foods, not processed, mainly vegetables, lots of good fats. So olive oils, even some saturated fats, such as coconut oil, but essential fatty acids, fish oil, oily fish, eggs, those are really good. They have phospholipids, which are essential for your cell membranes and for your brain cells. And the fats, the omega-3s, are very anti-inflammatory, which is super important for your brain. And I think it is really overwhelming and confusing.

Kirkland Newman:

It's interesting because recently I did a podcast with two ladies, Bonnie Kaplan and Julia Rucklidge, and they were saying that a multivitamin, multimineral approach, what they call a multi-nutrient supplement, is much more effective than a single nutrient supplement. And so they were big advocates, and they've done a lot of research, they're both PhDs, to say that actually it's a combination. If you're going to take a supplement, take a combined supplement which has all these different nutrients. So I think there are 35 vitamins and minerals in this one supplement. Because if you take too much of one thing or too much of something else, or if it's in isolation, it doesn't always work. And some of the

problem is that the research is limited in the sense that a lot of research that's usually done on supplements is done on a single nutrient, and so it shows, okay, well, there's some benefits to vitamin C or there's some benefits to vitamin D. I think this idea of taking a multi-nutrient is a very good one, but equally, there are things that you can't bottle. So for instance, phytochemicals, so the polyphenols which are in blueberries, or green tea, or cacaos. So they have these polyphenols, which are very anti-inflammatory. Antioxidant compounds, herbs. You can't bottle those. I mean, they've tried and you can to some extent, but most of your vitamins and minerals don't have these in them and they're not as deliverable. So there are certain things that you get from your foods that are really important just to get from the food.

Cressida Bonas:

What do you think is the worst thing we could be eating right now? What is that?

Kirkland Newman:

Sugar.

Cressida Bonas:

Sugar.

Kirkland Newman:

Absolutely.

Cressida Bonas:

The worst thing?

Kirkland Newman:

The worst thing. And, yeah, it kills me to say this because both my kids are addicted to sugar-

Cressida Bonas:

Me too.

Kirkland Newman:

... and eat sugar all the time. You too?

Cressida Bonas:

I thought I'd ask you that, and I knew you were going to say that, but I just wanted to check. But it is the worst thing? Because I am completely addicted to sugar. Completely.

Kirkland Newman:

It's not great, Cressida.

Cressida Bonas:

No, I know.

Kirkland Newman:

It's not great.

Cressida Bonas:

I know.

Kirkland Newman:

Because, I mean, the problem with sugar, and my friend, Robert Lustig, Professor Lustig, he's a big advocate of the sugar-free, and he's just written a book called Metabolic or Metabolical, which is all about processed foods, because it's not just that refined white sugar that you see. It's also pizza dough, and refined carbohydrates, white flour, then gets converted to sugar. So obviously, it's slightly less bad than taking a spoonful of sugar. But things like sodas, or Coke, or 7 Up, or whatever it is, I mean, they have, I don't know, 34 grams of sugar in them, which is like 15 tablespoons or something. I can't remember the exact numbers, but it's a lot of sugar. Sugar is incredibly inflammatory and it's not good for your gut. It's not good for your blood sugar control at all because it spikes your blood sugar. It's not good for your insulin. We know that a stable blood sugar is really important for mental health and we know that we want to reduce inflammation. It's also empty calories. There's no nutritious value at all in sugar.

Cressida Bonas:

And do you think, I'm slightly going off here, but I do really want to ask you this because a great fear of mine is losing my mind, like getting older and losing my memory, which so many of us do, my grandmother did, lots of people do, and I want to come to genetics in a minute, but is a lot of that, would you say, to do with things like sugar and what we eat? And Alzheimer's, dementia, is that linked, or is that quite a out there thing to suggest?

Kirkland Newman:

No, it's super linked. In fact, I just did a podcast with Dr. Kat Touns, who's just one of the world's experts on dementia. My mother has dementia and it's absolutely a terrible, terrible disease. And it's an epidemic. It's going to increase. My feeling is, well, based on my research, and Dr. Dale Bredesen wrote The End of Alzheimer's, which is brilliant, and Kat is coming out with Dementia Demystified, which is going to be her book on it, it's a combination of factors. And so sugar, high sugar, processed foods obviously are big factors in that. These neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's are very much linked to the health of your mitochondria, your mitochondria being the cells in your body that are the powerhouses, the batteries that power your cells. They produce ATP, adenosine triphosphate, which is the energy chemical. And sugar has an adverse reaction on your mitochondria. So sugar is key, eating the right foods. I think in terms of dementia, stress is a big one. It's due to chronic inflammation. And so if you have chronic inflammation, over time it destroys your brain cells, your neurons, and that's what happens. I mean, these neurodegenerative diseases, your brain cells just don't regenerate and they start to atrophy. So you have brain atrophy. So stress, the way you eat. Genetic, obviously, they've identified the APOE4 gene, which is a marker for Alzheimer's, but your genes are not your destiny. I mean, there's a

lot you can do. Exercise is absolutely crucial for preventing dementia. In fact, two of the most inexpensive and effective ways of avoiding dementia are meditation and exercise.

Cressida Bonas:

So meditation, which is something I do try and do, but it's a lot of times like, "Am I doing it right? How do I do it?" People have different ways of doing it. People have mantras. People focus on their breath. What is the best way to meditate?

Kirkland Newman:

That's a really good question. I mean, I'm a long-term meditator. I think it's the only way I stay sane, which is always a daily struggle. But for me, meditation, somebody said once, and this was so useful to me, was, "You don't have to clear your mind. All you have to do is notice your thoughts." And so all you have to do is become the observer of your thoughts. And so rather than saying, "Okay, I've got to empty my mind. I've got to push all these thoughts away," and my Zen meditation teacher said this, he said, "You should neither lasso nor whip away the bull," the bull being the thoughts. So you don't draw them towards you. So when you have a thought, which is this bull, you don't lasso the bull and pull him in. You let him go and you don't whip him away. So you don't get upset and say, "Oh, I shouldn't be having that thought." You're simply the observer and you just observe your thoughts and your feelings as they come and go like clouds in the sky.

Kirkland Newman:

So for me, mindfulness is one of the most powerful practices. It's just sitting on a pillow, being anchored to your breathing and just using your breath as an anchor, and then just noticing thoughts, feelings, sensations, and letting them go. So not getting too attached to anything and not getting too attached to even emptying your mind, just saying, "Okay, this is what's happened. This is the presence. And I'm just going to let all this go." If you make that a daily practice, it can be hugely helpful. I think it's one of the most amazing tools that we have at our disposal to manage our mental health and our physical health, frankly.

Cressida Bonas:

On my podcast, the two things that people say that really helps them in their life, and I always ask people what's the habit or routine that's changed their life, and the two things that come up a lot is meditation and cold water therapy, which I haven't really got into, but everyone says it's the best for your nervous system and your immune system. But meditation, it almost feels like, oh, it's a kind of a discipline in a way, well, it seems, until you really enjoy it, if that makes sense.

Kirkland Newman:

It's a real discipline. I interviewed this guy, this wonderful guy, who's a suicide survivor, Kevin Hines. He jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge and survived, and he's such an inspirational character. And he said, "For me, it's not that my desire to kill myself is gone, I still have that every day, but it's a daily practice to manage it." I think the daily practice approach to mental health is really important and the daily practice of meditation is really important. It's almost like exercise, like you don't really want to do it and you don't want to sit there, and you're like, "Oh, I don't have time for this," but the more you do it, the more it



becomes a discipline and the more it becomes a practice and a habit and, actually, the easier it will become. I think it's that daily practice that is so important.

Kirkland Newman:

Back to your dementia question, there's one more thing I wanted to say. So exercise and meditation are key, but the three things that Kat Toups was saying were really often overlooked in dementia are hormonal imbalances, so as we were talking about before, and because testosterone and estrogen are very linked to BDNF, which is brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which are trophic factors for our neurons, essentially, growth factors. And the things that actually increase our growth factors are exercise, meditation can help with BDNF, but also having the right hormones. So if we have hormone deficiencies, it can impact our BDNF. And obviously cortisol, high cortisol over a long period of time is very neurodegenerative.

Kirkland Newman:

The other thing she mentioned was toxins. So we've spoken a bit about those and how heavy metals and plastics and these toxins can be very damaging to our neurons and create inflammation which damages the neurons, especially in the hippocampus, which is where our memory centers are. And the third thing, which we haven't spoken about, are infections, so things like Lyme disease, Epstein-Barr, herpes. They found that 98% of autopsies that they did of patients with Alzheimer's had herpes. I can't remember if it was one or two, but-

Cressida Bonas:

When you say herpes, do you mean the sexually transmitted disease or do you mean herpes as in simplex virus, which is-

Kirkland Newman:

The cold sores.

Cressida Bonas:

... the cold sores? I have no idea where that came from or why I have it. But I have ulcers. I get ulcers a lot, and that is the virus that I've had for a long time, since I was a teenager.

Kirkland Newman:

And it's very common. I think something like 80 or 90% of us have herpes and have Epstein-Barr, for instance. Now, the problem with these viruses is they're very opportunistic, so they'll stay in your body. Then if you have a period where you're under stress or your immune system is down, then they're opportunistic, so they'll basically flourish and you'll have a reactivation of these viruses. And I think it was herpes simplex. So I think it was the cold sore variety, but I couldn't swear to it, that was so linked with Alzheimer's. But it's not just that, it's also Lyme disease and all the tick-borne diseases like Bartonella and Babesia and Borrelia, and the EBV and the herpes. There's so many of these viruses, cytomegalovirus and coxsackievirus.

Cressida Bonas:

Where do these come from? So for me, for example, herpes simplex virus, which I have, flares up when I'm tired, flares up when I eat sugar, which is a lot. Where do they come from?

Kirkland Newman:

So the viruses are pretty much everywhere. I mean, it's like the COVID virus now. I mean, they're everywhere, so they get transmitted in different ways. So EBV gets transmitted through saliva, for instance. Coxsackievirus is probably airborne. So there are many different ways. Herpes, I think it's probably, I'm not sure, either airborne or you get it through saliva exchange. I'm not sure. Obviously, the sexually transmitted one is through that sort of exchange. So they're always there in our environment. The question is, is the terrain favorable or not? And are you susceptible to that particular virus? If you are susceptible and you get it, then it reactivates when you're under stress.

Kirkland Newman:

They're really hard to get rid of, these things. And the problem is they can create, if they're in a low level activation, they can then create this low level inflammation, which again, contributes to neurodegeneration. It can contribute to depression, anxiety, a lot of mental health issues. And more and more we're discovering, in fact, there's this whole field called psychoneuroimmunology, which is essentially the effects of your immune system and inflammation on your mental health and your moods and your anxiety levels and your neurodegeneration. And it's tricky because a lot of us don't even know that we have these viruses. I mean, I was recently diagnosed with something like five or six viruses and that sent me into a tailspin because I didn't know. But my Epstein-Barr, for instance, is active at the moment because I'm under a lot of stress, and a lot of my anxiety could be due to the EBV virus, which is reactivated.

Kirkland Newman:

So there are ways of treating them. I mean, you can take certain supplements, you can take herbal protocols, but the most important thing is stress reduction. I mean, again, nervous system. And that's why I come back to the work of Stephen Porges and Bessel van der Kolk and Benjamin Fry, I mean, all these guys who work with the nervous system, because the best way that you can help your body is to be in a parasympathetic state. Your parasympathetic nervous system, which is the part of your nervous system that's relaxed and that allows you to rest, digest and repair is absolutely essential for repair. So cellular repair is the key to health. And so we have to be in that state of calm relaxation in order to be repairing. And most of us, unfortunately, spend a disproportionate amount of our time in our sympathetic states of our nervous system or in dorsal, which is shutdown. I think that's why there's such an epidemic of chronic disease, whether it's diabetes, or cancer, or autoimmune disease, or mental health. I mean, there's a huge epidemic in mental health. And I really believe that it's because our nervous systems are so overwrought that we don't give our bodies time to heal from these toxins and viruses, et cetera.

Cressida Bonas:

A lot of that comes from trauma, doesn't it? And when I say trauma, that doesn't have to be you were in a horrible car crash. It can mean that trauma can mean different things for different people. Someone can be affected by a certain trauma and that wouldn't affect another person. It can mean lots of different

things, big or small. But how does that affect our mental health throughout our lives if we have a trauma from a young age or whenever?

Kirkland Newman:

Such a good question. Last night, I actually went and watched Gabor Maté's movie, The Wisdom of Trauma-

Cressida Bonas:

Oh, wow. Yeah.

Kirkland Newman:

... which was really good. It was hard to watch, actually, because there is so much trauma out there. And, yeah, as you were saying, we think of traumas like some terrible abuse or accident that might have happened, which we call trauma with a big T, but there are so many little T traumas which are neglect, or say your parents were too busy to look after you, or the smaller types of trauma, a sense of abandonment or a sense of low self-worth which then manifest as an inability to look after yourself, because you don't think you deserve to be looked after or you don't deserve self-care. I think they've shown a correlation between adverse childhood experiences, and there are 10 of them that they identified in this longitudinal study, and including death, divorce, abuse, and I can't remember all of them. And people who had, I think it was six or more of these adverse childhood experiences had much worse life outcomes than other people.

Kirkland Newman:

There's absolutely no doubt that early childhood trauma, or trauma, or chronic stress that you've been living with is going to impact your mental health in a huge way. I think the biological mechanism of that is that, again, you're in a state of hyperarousal and hypervigilance and sympathetic nervous arousal. So if you're a kid, for instance, and you're being abused or you're having a very difficult childhood with people fighting and maybe your parents are fighting a lot, or your siblings, you're in a very difficult environment, you're in a state of chronic stress, hyperarousal, you're always on the lookout for the next thing that might go wrong. And that creates a state of chronic inflammation, which, as we've seen, can dysregulate your hormones, your neurotransmitters. It can make your immune system much less resilient.

Kirkland Newman:

We know, for instance, that addiction and a lot of mental health issues are very linked to these early childhood traumas. And as you say, I mean, it could just be that your parents were too busy to really look after you, and then you internalise that as a lack of self-love and a lack of self-worth. Then as an adult, you don't really know how to look after yourself. And so maybe you're always looking after other people and you're putting yourself last. Gabor Maté was saying, he wrote this wonderful book, When the Body Says No, because it's all about how we essentially don't look after ourselves enough, and then our body just rebels and gets sick and says, "Hey, I'm here," and often with tragic consequences.

Kirkland Newman:

And the other thing which, as Benjamin Fry often talks about, is if you have this trauma in your nervous system, you will have what he calls a dysregulated nervous system, which then means that you either

overreact or you underreact to certain circumstances and people in your life. And so for instance, you could be at work and a colleague says something, and that would warrant a three out of 10 response. But because of your baggage, your trauma baggage, you'll have a nine out of 10 response, and then there are all these consequences to that. And so it's really important to deal with your baggage and your trauma baggage so that you're aware of what your triggers might be, so that you are able to have more harmonious relationships, because otherwise it snowballs, and so your trauma creates more trauma essentially around you.

Kirkland Newman:

I'm a big believer in the fact that it's really important to do that work on yourself and on your nervous system, to be aware of what your triggers are, what your traumas are, what your patterns are, so that you can then heal them through some somatic therapies and go into the nervous system and regulate it so that you then have more appropriate, balanced responses to events and people, and you become better colleagues, better parents, better friends, better lovers.

Cressida Bonas:

I definitely see myself doing that sometimes and I see other people doing it as well, when you react to something that it doesn't need that big a reaction internally. Something that maybe needs a two reaction is like a 10 reaction, and then it just completely messes up your whole inner life for that moment. So, yeah, I completely see that, relate to that.

Kirkland Newman:

Completely. And I think mental health concerns, I mean, I'm very interested in the biochemistry of mental health, so the chemical imbalances and the leaky gut and those things, but essentially, the more people I speak to now, whether they're doctors or therapists, the more I think a lot of it comes from dysregulated nervous systems and early childhood trauma, which then translate into biochemical imbalances.

Kirkland Newman:

And an interesting thing, I was talking to Neil Nathan and Jill Krista about mould, for instance, and mould toxicity, so mould is a big problem when it comes to neurodegeneration, and inflammation, neuroinflammation, you're actually more susceptible if you're in a mouldy environment. So we know that about 75% of people can detoxify exposure to mould, they're not that affected by it. But then the remaining 25% are very affected by it. And why are they affected by it? Maybe it's a genetic snip, that means that they're less likely to detoxify or they have less optimal detoxification pathways. However, we also think that if their system has been traumatised or they've suffered from chronic stress, they're going to be less resilient to these biochemical stressors, such as toxins and also infections. So we were talking about infections earlier, will be more susceptible to these infections if our nervous systems are dysregulated, if we've had trauma, if we've had chronic stress.

Kirkland Newman:

So it's a perfect storm because it's essentially then you have the psychospiritual factors such as trauma, difficult life circumstances, stressors, and then you're more susceptible to the biochemical load, the biochemical stressors. So it's all about stress, but it depends, are these psychological stressors, are they biochemical stressors? And you have to be so aware of both, and that's what I'm trying to do with the MindHealth360 is to be able to treat these psycho-spiritual stressors, but equally the biochemical stressors, because I don't think that you can sustainably heal mental health without treating across the board essentially.

Cressida Bonas:

And also, I think there's traumas that happen at a young age that we're not so aware of because we don't remember, they're just in our bodies. In later life that lack of self-esteem perhaps shows its ugly face and then there's a lack of meaning and purpose potentially. And I wanted to ask you what is so important for our mental health, and if you have a lack of that, how does that affect us?

Kirkland Newman:

So this is a great question. Interestingly on my website, one of the most visited pages is lack of meaning and purpose, which really blew my mind because I thought, it would never have occurred to me that that was such a popular page. And I think a sense of being needed and that your life actually has purpose is incredibly regulating to your nervous system. It's incredibly regulating to your sense of self-worth. But it's an issue because some people can start off in early life, as you say, having these traumas that some of them are not even aware of, and then they live these incredibly purposeful lives. So they become doctors, they become social workers, they go off and they work in camps with refugees, but are they doing this? What is driving them? And is it a sense of low self-esteem, low self-worth that makes them believe that their life has to have purpose? I don't know. I mean, I don't know the answer to that, but I think there's a lot of codependency in the caring professions, essentially, about the feeling that your life has to have meaning and purpose. But at the same time, I do also think that having meaning and purpose is a gift. And I think because existentially, you think, okay, what's the point of this life? And my belief is we're here to learn and we're here to grow, but we do that a lot through interacting with others and I also believe that we're here to help each other.

Kirkland Newman:

There's this beautiful quote by Ramdas, which is we're all just walking each other home. And I do believe that a sense of belonging and a sense of having this purpose in your life is a real gift, and conversely the emptiness of feeling that you don't have a purpose, whether it's due to low lack of self-worth, because I mean spiritually, you can say, well, we don't need a purpose. We all just are beautiful and perfect the way we are, the way we exist. But our cultural upbringing makes us believe that our life has to have purpose. So it's a really fine balance between that spiritual concept of we're perfect as we are, and we don't need to do anything to deserve love, we can just be, and we're beautiful and perfect, versus our life has to have purpose and meaning and we have to help people, and we have to engage with people, and we have to engage with the world. And for me, that's always been a very interesting balance. And then also, how much do you lose yourself or do you give yourself away when you're giving to others? How much do you exhaust yourself? I mean, Gabor Maté was talking about how people get cancer, or often people who are over givers, they're always looking after other people's needs at their own expense. And so it's just this very tricky balance.

Cressida Bonas:

So interesting. I didn't know that. Yeah.

Kirkland Newman:

Yeah. I mean it's quite scary because as somebody, myself, who's quite codependent, I always feel that I have to help everybody. I think, oh shit, does that mean I'm going to get sick because I'm not looking after my own needs. And it is that balance of self care and feeling that you deserve to look after yourself and you deserve to care for yourself, and also that you're worthy just because you are, not because you're doing something.

Cressida Bonas:

And I wonder how people that feel they don't have that, how they can find that because you do hear a lot of people, well, I hear a lot of people say, more younger people, often people that are leaving university they don't know what their purpose is yet. Or they don't know the meaning of life. What is the, none of us really know the meaning of life, but people are trying so desperately to find their purpose and get so frustrated and angry and depressed when they don't know that is. So I wonder how people are supposed to find it when they feel they don't have that.

Kirkland Newman:

Yeah. And that's such an important question and funny, because my ex-husband was always saying you're so lucky, you have a sense of purpose, and I don't really know what that is, mine. And in some ways life was a lot simpler before because it was just about survival. I mean, our purpose was less important in the sense that we knew that we had to provide for ourselves and our family, and we had to just survive. We had to put food on the table. And now you've got Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it's like our basic needs are taken care of so now we climb up the ladder and we're more into, what are our spiritual needs. And I think our sense of meaning and purpose is more a spiritual need, essentially. And I do think it's really tough for young people because in some ways we've lost a sense of community.

Kirkland Newman:

A lot of these kids are their survival is okay, they're taken care of, they're mollycoddled. And it's like, okay, well, I'm going to university, and then what am I going to do? There's a malaise, a general malaise, as to what is the meaning of my life, and what am I meant to be doing, and how do I find that? And in old times it was like, "oh, well, you go out and you farm the land, or you go to war", and we don't have that anymore, as much in our societies. And I think my advice is, because I certainly had that, I mean, I had very much no idea what I wanted to do after college and a real sense of malaise and emptiness that I didn't know what my life was for. And so what I did is I did a lot of things, so I worked for Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and I worked in advertising, and for IBM, and I worked for the Princess Trust, and I did this big urban music festival. And each time they were experiences that were important and formative, but I didn't feel like this sense of purpose. And then I went off and I did a master's in Middle Eastern studies, and I was really involved in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. And I was like, is that my purpose? But that was more inherited from my mother because, my mother was a big Palestinian activist.

Kirkland Newman:

It was only through my own suffering, and through my own mental breakdown that I found my meaning and purpose. And if I hadn't gone through that, I would never have been doing what I am doing now. And I'm incredibly grateful now because I'm so clear that this is my purpose and that this is what I'm meant to be doing, and that's a gift, but that only happened when I was about 45, about five years ago. So it took me a long time to get to this point, and so my advice would be just try as many different things as possible. See what makes your heart sing, see what you find interesting.

Kirkland Newman:

But the problem is a lot of the time you actually come to your sense of meaning and purpose through suffering, I think, and through adverse experiences and through challenges in your life. And there's so many stories, people who've had these adverse experiences and that's completely changed their lives. And they've discovered their sense of purpose through these experiences. And I don't wish that on anyone. I mean, I hope that people can find a sense of purpose without that. And some people are quite clear. They're like, I want to be an artist and I want to paint. And they're very lucky to be very in touch with their own creativity and their own flow. But a lot of us are conditioned to feel that we have to do a certain thing at university, and then we have to have a certain type of job, and we have to make money in a certain way, or do a certain thing. And we've lost touch with what really is our inner essence. So we've become disconnected from our true self. And sometimes that adverse experience can reconnect us to our true self and put us back on the path away from the conditioning that we've had from our parents, and our teachers, and our societies, all about what we should be doing rather than what we really want to be doing.

Kirkland Newman:

And I've always been very envious of people who have huge clarity. And often people in the creative industries: painters, artists, singers, who are just very clear about the fact that this is their dharma, essentially, their path. But I think that's rare. And so my advice is just try as many different things as possible. And unfortunately, I think at some point life will usually send you some sort of message or a hard knock, and then that will often change your course. But if it seems hard in the present often you'll look back and say, actually that was the pivotal point in my life where I discovered my purpose.

Cressida Bonas:

And it feels like a lot of it comes down to that feeling of self-worth as well, and trusting ourselves. If we love doing something to follow that path, or to just love ourselves, as cliché as that sounds when people talk about loving yourself, it kind of feels so overused now, but it is true, isn't it? It's... It's so important.

Kirkland Newman:

It's so true. It's so important. And I think people who are less hard on themselves and they, I mean, look, full disclosure I always wanted to be a singer. I've always wanted to be an opera singer, from a very young age. And it was always my passion and my mother said, oh, well you're not fat enough to be an opera singer. But the point is, I think in some sense, if I'd had more self-worth, I would've pursued that in a more dogged way instead of saying, okay, no, well, I've got a good Oxford and I've got to do well, and I've got to then do the right thing. And obviously I think in some ways your path is, in some sense, predetermined, or there's some universal influence on it. Because if I look at my life, there have been certain milestones that have led me to where I am now, which are so clearly just placed there by some

divine power, I think. But, I mean, I think to your point self-worth is, it's a wonderful thing. But some of the biggest artists are the most tortured as well.

Cressida Bonas:

Yeah, definitely.

Kirkland Newman:

Yeah.

Cressida Bonas:

I know a lot of them.

Kirkland Newman:

Yeah. Well, that's the thing. I mean, some of the most amazing poets and writers and dancers are very tortured souls and probably are driven by lack of self love as well.

Cressida Bonas:

And I think that's, I mean this is totally going off track, but that's what can be so beautiful about an amazing painter, or singer, or actor, or someone that's just got that kind of raw talent, is because you see the pain in the art and you relate to it because that is part of life is to suffer. So I think we connect to that, but I suppose they make that because from their own sense of pain somewhere inside themselves, if that makes any sense.

Kirkland Newman:

It makes total sense. And it's funny, it reminds me of Rumi. He said the wound is where the light gets in, and I've always been struck by that. And I think you're absolutely right. We identify with the pain that we see in their work, because it's something that we can connect to, because we've experienced it ourselves. And I think that's what makes it come alive.

Cressida Bonas:

So, I've got my last question before my last question. A little, going back a bit, but I wanted to ask you, I was wondering about nurture and nature because we touched on it a bit. But sometimes I think, oh, I was born with that so I'll just always have that, I can't get rid of that. Or was I born with that thing? Or was that from school? Was that from my environment? You don't really know. You can look at your parents and kind of see that and maybe think, oh, it's from them. Can you get rid of that? Can you? And I'm talking kind of like on an emotional sense and also a physical thing as well. For instance, imbalance of hormones, how much of that is nature and how much of that is nurture?

Kirkland Newman:

Yeah. And that's the age old question, isn't it? Nature versus nurture. And we used to think that it was, most of it was nature, and my mother would always say, oh, that's just nature. There's nothing you can do. You were born that way, that's it. But now they've actually shown, the field of epigenetics has shown that actually you have so much influence on whether your genes are switched on or off, according to



your environment. And so if you take it from a purely biochemical scientific perspective and you look at genetics and epigenetics, actually epigenetics are certainly just as if not a lot more important than your genetics.

Cressida Bonas:

And epigenetic, meaning your environment?

Kirkland Newman:

Exactly. So epigenetics are all the factors that impact your genes. So your nutrition, your exercise, your relationships, your stress levels, all the things that we've talked about. And so you have your genes, but whether they get turned on or off will depend on your environment and your environmental factors. And they've done lots of studies on identical twins, and they've found, that's how they've studied this epigenetic factor, and they've recently found that it's much more important than they ever thought in the past. So I would say, certainly it's a balance obviously of your genetic makeup and your terrain, essentially. And it's not just genetics. I mean you have to start looking at intergenerational stuff and Karmic stuff and stuff that comes.

Kirkland Newman:

So for instance we know that your microbiome is partly influenced by your mother's, well is very influenced by your mother's microbiome, which is influenced by her mother's microbiome. And so there's an intergenerational baggage that gets passed on. And interestingly, we now talk about the emotional transgenerational trauma, and if there's been trauma in one generation, then it gets passed down. And we think it actually gets somehow embedded in our DNA, and I don't know about the mechanisms, but that it's not just an expression, intergenerational trauma, but this is actually a biochemical imprint of this trauma. And so we are, I think, the sum total of everything, and everybody that's passed before us, and we have this baggage, but then we're so capable of changing it. I mean, I'm a big believer in, yes, we have this terrain, but there's so many things that we can do to impact that. Whether it's how we choose to sleep, how we choose to eat, the relationships that we choose.

Kirkland Newman:

And I'm also a big believer in doing work on yourself. And I feel that we have responsibility as individuals in doing the work that we need to do to become better people, and to grow, and to learn from our mistakes and to evolve, essentially. And regardless of our genetic makeup, regardless of our early life experiences, I think if we get to the end of our lives and we've had a real learning curve, and we've developed, and we've made the right choices or whatever right is, but we've made healthy choices that have enabled us to grow and enabled us to spread health and harmony amongst our circles and ourselves, then we've done a good job. We have a huge amount of influence over our lives and over what we choose and what we don't choose.

Kirkland Newman:

And just as our genetics, our epigenetics, are absolutely crucial in terms of the expression of our genes, what's also crucial is the choices that we make and who we become as people. And it's tricky because people with mental health issues, you don't want people to feel unduly responsible or blamed, or say, well, if you're depressed you, I mean, I'm very against that "oh, well just get over it or get out of bed" or

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whatever. But I do think that with the right help and the right support, there's a lot that can change, if we're getting the right biochemical treatment, the right psycho-spiritual treatment, and the right lifestyle advice. I mean, there's this huge group of people now, health coaches, that's been resurgent in functional medicine. And so there are all these health coaches who are there to basically help you on your path towards wellness, and help you make the right decisions, and help you choose the right lifestyle, and psycho-spiritual and biochemical therapies that will help you become the best, healthiest person you can become essentially. And I think that's the journey that we're all on is to try and at the end of our lives be as healthy and as fulfilled and have learned as much as we can.

Cressida Bonas:

Kiki, thank you so much. This has been... I've learned so much. My brain is kind of exploding right now. I ought to go home and empty my fridge and replace it with greens. At the moment it's just full of crap, which is not good. Kiki, thank you so much. This honestly has been wonderful. Thank you.

Kirkland Newman:

Thank you so much for listening to the MindHealth360 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. Please share this interview with anyone you think may find it helpful, and don't forget to subscribe to keep up to date with our latest interviews on integrative mental health.

Kirkland Newman:

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