N.Y.B.L. Podcast Ep 146 (How Stress Affects Our Gut Health)

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[00:00:00] Welcome to another episode of Negotiate Your Best Life. I'm Rebecca Zung and I'm so excited today to welcome my friend here, Rachel Sheer. I love the fact that your, your name is Sheer cause it's. Such a great name and I love the name of your podcast. Sheer Madness is such a great name. So Rachel is a certified functional medicine nutritionist, which is an awesome, really, really cool thing to be, and I really cannot wait to get into what it is that you do.

[00:00:37] I was listening to a whole bunch of your interviews and I thought, I so cannot wait to dive into what you do, cuz we're gonna be talking about how stress affects our gut health, and especially when you are dealing with. Difficult people. Toxic people, and how that can [00:01:00] seriously affect our gut health. How, you know, cortisol levels go crazy and how that can really affect our gut health and what you can do about it.

[00:01:09] All kinds of things that you should be eating, you should not be eating. You know, all the things that are going on in your body when you are under attack. When you're under stress and. Such an important episode. If you are dealing with a toxic person, if you are under stress of any kind, you do not want to miss this episode.

[00:01:36] Rachel is the expert. She had a huge part of our large intestine removed herself. She learned the hard way and now she. What she's talking about. This girl knows her stuff. So do not miss this episode. Sit down, grab a cup of tea, , [00:02:00] get going. Get your notepad out and you will learn so much from Rachel. Rachel.

[00:02:09] Thank you so much for joining me here today. Thank you. What an intro. I gotta live up to that now, but I'm also been called the Gut Goddess by so many of my clients, so gut health is so important and I'm really excited to dive into the gut brain connection today. Well, I mean, I know for myself personally, I, it has caused so much problem for me.

[00:02:34] I mean, it affects. So many areas of your life. I mean, it can affect autoimmune, it can affect, you know, I, you know, ibs, I mean leaky gut, all

kinds of issues. If you are under stress, if your body is under attack, gut health is one of the first areas mm-hmm. that it can really, really, um, you know, be affected.

[00:02:58] So I want to [00:03:00] go into you first, your journey. First of all. What is functional medicine? I mean, cause you know, that's how you're, you're um, you know, you get introduced certified functional medicine nutritionist, so I know that peaks people's interest. So let's just dive right into what that is and then we'll go into your journey.

[00:03:21] Yeah. So I'm an FMD functional medicine dietician. Essentially at the core, functional medicine really just means root cause. It asks the question why. Whereas with normal Western medicine, it really asks the question, what? What is the problem? What are the symptoms? Instead of really. Diving into why these problems are happening in the first place.

[00:03:48] And actually the reason I got into functional medicine, as you alluded to, was because of my own struggles with Western medicine and being put on a bunch of different band-aids. So I [00:04:00] ended up having extreme gut issues after competing in body building. Fitness was always my first love that actually got me into nutrition when I went to Baylor for nutrition and dietetics.

[00:04:10] Honestly, I just wanted to look good naked. I wanted to have six pack abs. Who doesn't? Who does want that? Yeah. And. But I'm a very much, uh, type A person. I can almost do things to the extreme in my life, which has served me in so many ways. But it's also been, you know, the downfall in a lot of different areas of my life.

[00:04:29] And we'll be diving into, you know, the mental stress. Piece, you know, here in a little bit. But I had all these stressors in my life. You know, emotional stress, physical stress, dietary stress. Um, those are some of the big components that I talk about with functional medicine. And my gut microbiome became severely off where I could no longer use the restroom anymore, um, without doing an enema.

[00:04:55] Um, which is not very sexy at all. I know that. Um, [00:05:00] but. I along with it, you know, my hair was falling out. I had no hormones, my thyroid plummeted, and you know, I was in massive pain after every time I ate. So what most of us think to do when we have, you know, symptoms is we go to the doctor and that's what I did.

[00:05:17] They did all the scans, the MRIs, the ct, and they said, Hey, you have. IBS or irritable bowel syndrome, which in my opinion is a trashcan diagnosis because I'm like, I know my gut is irritable. Why is it irritable? Why is all these things happening? And I would just leave with, you know, a prescription for laxatives.

[00:05:39] And then I'd continue to get worse and worse. Of course, I got severely depressed, you know, along the way because my gut was off. And the emotional stress, which we'll dive into here in a little bit. So I was put on an antidepressant. Um, I was put on thyroid medication. I was then put on, um, you know, a. A bunch of other different medications that were just managing [00:06:00] the symptoms and it literally got to the point where I'm sitting there in a doctor's office, you know, colorectal surgeon who's telling me I need to have my large intestine removed.

[00:06:09] Where I really made that decision of there's gotta be another way. And that's what really got me into functional medicine as a dietician because my background was already on the health side, and I just became obsessed with learning everything that I could about the gut and the gut microbiome and how those little microbes in our gut literally control everything from.

[00:06:31] The motility, the transit of food, which makes sense, but also to our mental health with how much serotonin our body produces, um, to our metabolism, to our thyroid, to our hormones, and all of it was really coming back. To the gut and I was like, Why is no one talking about this? Why is no one talking about the power of our gut and what all that influences in the body?

[00:06:56] And just like how I got super laser focused in body [00:07:00] building, you know, that passion soon began, but. Getting to the root cause of my own health issues and I fell in love with it so much. I became certified in functional medicine and my approach I now do with my clients that I work with is what I wish I had.

[00:07:17] You know, I wish I had somebody at that time when I was dealing with all of my health issues, who said, Hey, you know what? We're gonna do all the testing, but we're also gonna look at your. We're gonna look at your stress in your life. We're gonna look at your history of their past medications, um, and we're gonna look.

[00:07:36] How these systems in the body are influencing each other and really get to the root cause of what's going on, instead of just giving you a bunch of medications to manage the symptoms. And I've helped over, I don't even know,

like today, like 2000 people, you know, with my practice of registered dieticians.

[00:07:53] Do just that, get to the root cause, heal, but also step into optimization too. [00:08:00] Because just because you are on a medication or meaning a a symptom doesn't mean you're healthy, you know, at the core. And I think we tend to think about health of just the absence of disease, but in my opinion, health is actually the presence of optimal feeling and function and feeling our best every single day.

[00:08:20] So I know that was a long winded answer, . I wanted to hear more about your journey too. Yeah. So I'm glad that you went into that. I think it's important for people to know that, you know, you were struggling with that. I mean, I know I have too. You know, I mean, with my law practice, I was dealing with it myself.

[00:08:41] I mean, I ended up with an autoimmune issue, which was really actually brought on by Leaky gut. Mm-hmm. , you know, I mean, I think people don't realize that. You know, autoimmune issues can be linked to a leaky gut. Can you talk about that? Yeah. If you think about [00:09:00] it, you know, 70% of your immune system is actually based out of your gut.

[00:09:05] And the biggest things that play a role is not only your gut bacteria, but also your gut lining. And what you're talking about is something we call intestinal permeability. And if you think about it, our gut lining's one cell layer thick. That's a very. Small amount so it can easily become damaged. This can become damaged because of stress.

[00:09:28] High cortisol levels. This can become damaged because we have a poor diet. You know, this standard American diet, which I call the sad diet full of proses foods, artificial sweeteners, hyper palatable foods that just cause inflammation and break down the gut lining. It can also be environmental stressors too, toxins, heavy metals.

[00:09:50] But what really happens is when that gut lining becomes permeable or broken down, we start to get food bacteria and toxins that actually [00:10:00] leak into our bloodstream and trigger a full body. Um, inflammatory and immune response. And when this happens, this actually in the long term can lead to an autoimmune condition, which autoimmunity is, is self, right auto, and then our body literally attacking itself and.

[00:10:22] I always explain the gut. If you think about it, everything in our gut is actually outside of the body, and I know that kind of doesn't make sense if you think about it, but it's this hollow tube, so we're putting things essentially into our gut, but it's protecting. B, between everything else, essentially in our body.

[00:10:41] But when our gut becomes permeable, that's where our body starts to get on this massive kind of defense mode and attacking, you know, whatever's leaking into the bloodstream and leading to a lot of these issues. Um, Hashimotos, Crohn's also to colitis, psoriasis, All of these at the core [00:11:00] are. Gut issues. So with my practice, we always take a gut centric approach first because so many of that just stems from the gut.

[00:11:08] And when we get the gut right, when we get the gut right, we start to see everything fall into place. We can actually literally reverse autoimmune conditions, which they used to say you couldn't do. Mm-hmm. , right? They would just give, again, like western medicine, a bunch of medications, immunosuppressants, um, other different things that.

[00:11:28] In the long term, you know, maybe manage the symptoms, but people would get worse and worse and worse.[00:12:00] [00:13:00] [00:14:00]

[00:14:00] Um, psoriasis, we would treat it topically. Um, clients I work with who have Crohn's or ulcerative colitis where their intestines are literally, Eating themselves. They just get put on a bunch of medications like Humira, um, immunosuppressants. And you know, I think if we can really take this gut centric approach, you know, and also determine what caused the gut to be off in the first place.

[00:14:24] Because I work on people all the time with healing their gut lining, right? Repairing that. But if we don't actually remove what caused the gut to be off in the first place, we're gonna be chasing our tail quite a. Yeah. So what, um, how can stress cause these issues? So, you know, if people are under a lot of stress, like in their relationships or they're dealing with toxic people, how can stress cause these issues?

[00:14:52] That's actually one of the biggest things because it makes sense, right? That food would really negatively impact our gut. Um, [00:15:00] but we don't really think about stress very often, and the whole person must heal for the gut to function. Wait, the whole, Sorry, Lemme say that again. The whole person must heal for the gut to function optimally.

[00:15:12] And it's also not a coincidence that most people who end up in therapy and counseling have ibs, irritable bowel syndrome. They have an autoimmune condition, which really all stem to the gut. Because we have this bidirectional communication with our gut to our brain and our brain all the way to our gut.

[00:15:33] So when we're under a lot of stress, and I'm not talking about like little short term burst of stress, for example, you go work, you're gonna get a little cortisol response. That's normal. We're supposed to, someone cuts you off on traffic. You're, you're corti. Cortisol's gonna get a little bit elevated for the, for a moment.

[00:15:48] That's normal actually. Short term stress is, It's this chronic elevated stress, which can come from unaddressed trauma, where this creates a [00:16:00] hypervigilant nervous system where small little things that shouldn't normally set somebody off does and puts them into this. Chronic elevated cortisol state. This can be from being in a toxic relationship, which is something I know you talk about quite a bit.

[00:16:16] Um, having someone in your life that is not good for you or your stress hormones are chronically elevated. Um, this can be work stress, you know, no work life balance. But what is actually happening here when we're. Chronically elevated cortisol state. Our digestive system actually completely shuts down because when we're in this parasympathetic response, which is what we call that fight or flight response, what's actually happening is we're inhibiting the largest nerve in the body.

[00:16:49] This is called our vagus nerve. This connects the. The gut's down here, all the way to our brain and our vagus nerve is actually our body's parasympathetic response, [00:17:00] rest and digest, which is that communication from the gut all the way to the brain. So when our cortisol is super elevated all the time, our vagus nerve.

[00:17:11] Is being deactivated really. And to go along with that, our digestive system is therefore shutting down because we want all of our energy going to our extremities. Most people have heard this saying like, I'm running from a tiger. We could say, Here, I'm running from that narcissist here. Yeah, but you're, you're in a fight with somebody.

[00:17:29] Like your body's not thinking. Digesting, you know, it completely comes to a halt. And as a byproduct of this to the vagus nerve, what it does is it actually keeps inflammation. Low in the body, and it also helps with the motility

of our food throughout the body. So our digestive system's shutting down and we're getting more inflammation.

[00:17:53] So this actually sets the tone for what we call SIBO or bacteria overgrowth [00:18:00] because we have more inflammation in the body and we're really not. Processing food the way we would need to, we're not absorbing all of that food. So the vagus nerve is super important, and that's really actually opt activated when we're in that parasympathetic sympathetic response.

[00:18:18] But to go along with that cortisol in of itself is very catabolic. So catabolic means breaks things down and bodybuilders. So I always reference that coming from the body building world. But they avoid cortisol like the Hulk, and that's because it breaks down muscle tissue. But we don't think about it very often that our gut lining is actually a muscle tissue.

[00:18:41] Right, it's, it's a smooth muscle tissue, and as I talked about earlier, it's only one cell layer thick. So when our cortisol is elevated, not only is our vagus nerve rendered inactive, our digestive system is shutting down, we have more inflammation, but that cortisol actually. Breaks down that gut [00:19:00] lining.

[00:19:01] And when that gut lining gets broken down, that's what actually can create that autoimmune type conditions, food sensitivities, and really lead to that full body systemic inflammation to go along with it. So you start to see, you know, That stress is really, really negatively impacting the gut. And we see people who have cbo, small intestinal bacteria overgrowth.

[00:19:25] We see people who have autoimmune conditions literally can all stem from this hypervigilant nervous system or a heightened cortisol state. Mm-hmm. . So that's why you see people with the, like they do like the vagus nerve. Um, yeah. Stimulation or, you know, I've seen, or, um, there's, there's actually exercises to like calm your vagus nerve and things like that, right?

[00:19:52] Yeah. The vagus nerve is so crucial for the g bring connections. So there's a lot of things that you can do to actually stimulate the vagus nerve. [00:20:00] One of the best ways is actually breath. Yes. Um, because when we're in that stressed state, right? What, what is our breath doing? It's like that. It's like that shallow state.

[00:20:11] I also know like when I'm stressed, like I'm literally sometimes holding my breath, right? And I don't even realize it. And what's that actually doing is it's causing that cortisol to be elevated. So our breath is such a powerful

tool, and when we can slow down our breath, take those deep, deep belly breaths, and you can literally put your hand on your chest and your hand on your belly.

[00:20:31] In your belly. My, you can't really probably see here, but it should extend out a bit further than, you know, your hand on your chest is extending out here. So like somatic breath work. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. And that's one way that you can calm down your nervous system. So I'm a big fan of breath work, um, humming actually.

[00:20:51] So if you've heard people in meditation where they're. Mm. That noise is actually stimulating your body's vagus nerve quite a bit [00:21:00] there, right? Um, there's also, yeah, there's different supplementation to that can really help support your vagus nerve. Omega-3 fatty acids are super crucial. Probiotics are incredible.

[00:21:14] I was gonna ask you about probiotics. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. Are there specific ones that you recommend more than? Yeah, so there's three different types of probiotics. Um, there's the normal bifido bacterium and lactobacilli type strains. Um, there's ones that are more soil based probiotics, so then there's beneficial yeast type probiotics called sacra mylo.

[00:21:36] Each of them kind of have different purposes, but a common misconception that people have is when they take probiotics, it actually colonizes to the gut. That's actually not the case. When we take these probiotics, what it's actually doing is it's working as a natural antimicrobial, meaning it's fighting off a lot of bad bacteria in the body.

[00:21:57] It's fighting off a lot of, uh, bacteria that can [00:22:00] cause inflammation, um, that can negatively impact a gut brain connection. So, I believe everybody should be on a probiotic. Probably the most common is that bifido and lactobacillus type probiotic, and that one can be really crucial for also strengthening that gut brain connection.

[00:22:16] Yeah, for sure. And and what about foods? Let's talk about foods we've heard about, like the FODMAPs diet and things like that. Yeah. What are, talk about foods to eat or foods not to eat. Let's, um, you know, let's talk about ones to avoid first. Yeah. So foods that damage the guts. Um, sugar is gonna be one of the most common ones.

[00:22:42] Sugar feeds bacteria in our gut and it's not natural sugars. I'm not worried about people eating too much fruit or things like that. I mean, maybe in

certain cases, but that's not usually the norm. I'm really talking about those like the white sugar, the white sugar, the ultra process type [00:23:00] foods, which typically when we eat these alter a processed foods, we also see a lot of, um, inflammatory fats in those as well.

[00:23:08] And that would be number two. So industrial seed oil. vegetable oils. So these are pro-inflammatory fats to the body. Um, so these are things like canola oil, um, grape seed oil, vegetable oils. Typically when you go out to eat at restaurants, you know, they're, they're frying in a lot of these inflammatory fats.

[00:23:29] They're cooking your foods in a lot of these inflammatory fats, and these will actually cause inflammation in the gut and negatively impact our gut microbiome. Um, the third one I would say would be artificial sweeteners. And there's a lot of kind of controversy about these, but if you look at the back of a lot of artificial sweeteners, uh, sucrose, xylitol, manitol, and you look up their side effects, you'll actually see symptoms of bloating, [00:24:00] constipation, diarrhea.

[00:24:02] And although these are zero calories, they're. Not feeding something in our body. Mm-hmm. . So they're, they're prebiotics that oftentimes are feeding some of the bacteria in our gut. Mm-hmm. . Which is why when people have a lot of gut issues, we try to cut out a lot of those artificial sweeteners to go along with it.

[00:24:21] Mm-hmm. , So what about alcohol? Yeah. Alcohol would be the fourth one for sure. Which, yeah. Everyone hates to hear that . Yeah. Well, you know, But yeah, alcohol is a toxin. We're literally intoxicating our body, um, it's inflammatory to our gut, you know, I'm sure as you know, doing a lot of leaky gut protocols.

[00:24:41] Like yeah, alcohol is something you don't wanna have in there cuz it causes that breakdown. Mm-hmm. of that gut lining. Yeah. So some of these foods can be more so bad because they feed. You know, bad bacteria in the gut. Some of 'em can be not good because they cause inflammation or a [00:25:00] breakdown on the gut lining.

[00:25:01] But for most people who have poor gut health, they have a combination of all three. They have inflammation, they have some leaky gut, and then they either have low diversity or they have an overgrowth of bad bacteria in their gut. Yeah. And what about, um, like red wine? Yeah, so there's kind of two parts to red wine, right?

[00:25:20] So Red Wine is great for gut health in one regard that it has a lot of resveratrol in it. Yeah. Cuz you, you hear mixed things about red wine. Yeah. Yeah. So resveratrol is actually a polyphenol, It's, it's deriv from red wine and there's a lot of studies about resveratrol. Kind of working as a natural probiotic in the body and also helping, um, promote good growth of probiotics to go along with it.

[00:25:48] So it's not an actual probiotic, but it can help increase good bacteria in the gut and decrease bad bacteria in the gut, and it's a natural anti-inflammatory. However, the double edged sword is [00:26:00] the alcohol in of itself is not good for our gut health. So maybe a little better. Where, why every once in a while.

[00:26:06] Yeah. . I, I take actually just an isolated resveratrol supplement myself. Um, and it's also great for teaching purposes. That's not so much about, It's not as fun. I know. Yeah. . Um, okay, so let's talk about the Fuji that you can eat. You know, we've heard about the, I don't know, some people have heard of the fod.

[00:26:24] Diet. So tell, tell me about that. So FODMAPs are, is actually a specific kind of diet that people do where we remove fermentable carbohydrates from the diet. Fermentable meaning food sources for bacteria. Now, FODMAPs aren't bad, and I think this is a common misconception. They are triggers for people who typically have cbo, small intestinal bacteria overgrowth, or.

[00:26:52] Degree of gut dysbiosis, which just means an imbalance of that good and that bad bacteria. So when my gut microbiome [00:27:00] was really off and I had SIBO dysbiosis, I couldn't tolerate a lot of these FODMAPs. So I had to go on what we call a low FODMAP diet. Mm-hmm. . However, FODMAPs are actually great for promoting more bacteria in our gut.

[00:27:16] Right. Cuz they're feeding. Te so it's, it's kind of dependent. If you're someone who already has poor gut health, FODMAPs can be a trigger. And that may mean we need to kind of go through some gut healing first. So gut healing's a bit different than gut health. Gut health is gonna be like the person more in the maintenance plan.

[00:27:35] Where we're eating a diverse diet with a lot of fibers, a lot of probiotics, probiotics, polyphenols, healthy fats, a lot of variety, maybe eating some not so great foods from time to time. Gut healing is gonna be the person who. Has a ton of gut issues already. They have the chronic bloating, constipation, diarrhea.

[00:27:55] They have an autoimmune condition. Maybe they're really struggling on the mental [00:28:00] health side, you know as well too. So common symptoms there are brain fog, anxiety, depression. Those can also be gut-based symptoms where they may need to do more of a healing diet. Lo fod. Do some other type of therapies, antimicrobial protocols, um, do some gut lining support to go along with it for a set period of time, but with the goal to get over to gut health where they can reintroduce some of those FOD FOD maps back into the diet, if that makes sense.

[00:28:31] What about gluten? Yeah, so gluten in my opinion, is a big trigger for most people. Mm-hmm. , um, you. We used to think in like dietetics that if you only had celiacs, that you should keep gluten out of your diet. Mm-hmm. . But after being in this work for quite some time now, I would say most people, even if they don't have celiac, gluten, is still a big trigger for a lot of people.

[00:28:58] Even, even if they don't have [00:29:00] symptoms. Even if they don't have symptoms. Yeah. So gluten can, um, negatively impact our gut lining and we can have something called non celiac, um, gluten intolerance where we're still producing antibodies and it's causing inflammation in the gut even if we don't have symptoms.

[00:29:17] And most of the time, autoimmune conditions and gut issues, they start out more silent. Meaning there's a lot of things kind of happening below the surface between. You know, intestinal permeability, a little bit of inflammation before symptoms have actually manifested in the body. Yeah. It's just so much to learn.

[00:29:38] I feel like we could like sit here all day and like, I mean, I, there's so many other things I wanna ask you about, but that I, I feel like we should have almost like a part two on this, you know? Yeah. So many other things, but where can people learn more about you? And because you, you have a whole other area in your practice where you actually do [00:30:00] testing.

[00:30:00] Yeah. And you actually coach people. And I mean, just briefly kind of go over some of the things that you do in your practice. Yeah, like I, I said at the beginning, like, I created an approach that I wish that I had when I was dealing with all of my health issues. So that's been my mission, you know, since I created Rachel's Sheer Nutrition, was to help people get a more empowered approach, get to the root cause, identify what's going on, and create a customized protocol with nutrition, lifestyle changes and coaching, accountability to create the health and ultimately the life that they want for the.

[00:30:38] Because that's why we're all on this journey anyway, You know, why do we wanna heal our gut? Why do we want to work on our relationships and the people we surround ourself with? And so we can, you know, we can create the life we want, We can create a more empowered life. So I do all the testing on all my clients.

[00:30:55] We do stool testing, blood testing, urine testing, [00:31:00] saliva testing. So I'm pretty much getting all of the fluids from you and we're looking at all the systems in the body. And Western medicine very often just looks at, you know, here we're gonna look at just these different systems as if they're not interconnect.

[00:31:13] Did, but they're all interconnected to each other. So we need to look at everything. We need to look at your gut microbiome, hormones, thyroid, adrenals, We need to look for deficiencies, inflammation, detoxification, you know, environmental toxins. So it's about 40 pages worth of labs. And what we do is we help identify what is.

[00:31:36] The why behind it, and then create that customized treatment plan to get your body back into balance, but not just heal, but also get you to the best health of your life to go along with it. I love that. Talk about negotiating your best life right there. I mean, really, I mean, I know that you've helped so many people like really become the best versions of [00:32:00] themselves.

[00:32:00] I mean, and empower them to. Become, you know, really you give them a whole new life. Mm-hmm. a whole new life. So where can people find out more about you? Yeah, you can give me a follow on Instagram at Rachel's she, Then my practice page is at Rachel's Sheer Nutrition and I have a podcast. Your madness. She mentioned it a bit earlier, it's madness

[00:32:26] And then if you're interested in working with me and my team, you can check out rachel sheer.com. We do a free 30 minute zoom call with anybody just to get to know your goals and what testing would look like for you. So everybody needs to do that right now. Who is not gonna do that Free 30 minute call with her.

[00:32:46] Go give her a like give her a follow. Check her out. Book your call right now, Rachel. Sheer sheer madness. Go listen to her podcast. Subscribe to our podcast. Give it a follow [00:33:00] and rate it, review it. Check her out. She's amazing. Is she not amazing? She's incredible. . I told you she'd be amazing. I mean, really, this was probably one of the most.

[00:33:14] Impactful, incredible, um, half hours of your life, right? So thank you all for joining me today, and remember that today is a great day to start negotiating your best life.