

This is a rough transcription of The Femails podcast. This transcription is for Season 4 Episode 5, featuring Dr. Robin Berzin. It originally aired on October 15, 2019. There may be errors in this transcription, but we hope that it provides helpful insight into the conversation. If you have any questions or need clarification, please email editorial@careercontessa.com

Well, hi. Dr. Robin. Thanks for joining The Femails today.

Thank you so much for having me.

All right. Well, let's start with you briefly sharing your career path leading up to launching parsley Health.

Yeah, so it's been a crazy ride if I think way back to like where this all came from and actually goes back to college and I never was pre-med. I never thought I'd be a doctor. Shocking you weren't one of those. I was not one of those and yet here I am but I ended up in the middle of college taking a course on cancer and everything from the sociology to the biology to the epidemiology of cancer, like everything about cancer to stop by one of the foremost geneticist and researchers in cancer to so fascinating and at the time my grandmother was dying of colon cancer, and she had really smoking cigarettes have been the the ultimate reason that she developed that condition. And I ended up going on this deep dive of all of the ways that we can prevent cancer and alternative therapies for cancer and how to rethink cancer and it was this kind of like weird lightning bulb moment as I delve into scientific research something. I never, you know, thought I would be into that.

I was really interested in public health. And so that really carried with me and long long story short ended up in medical school in New York at Columbia knew I wanted to do something in public health Primary Care chronic disease. Prevention holistic medicine wasn't sure exactly what that was got bit by the tech bug along the way and so co-founded another Healthcare tech company.

And here we are at least years later. I you know parsley really came about as I saw how powerful this more holistic proactive personalized approach to Medicine could be right and I had this foundational training in medicine. That was so amazing and I saw. This more functional holistic medicine approach in practice, but then I also have my tech background and I had a moment where I was like how the hell do I combine these things because they feel really unrelated right and parsley really brought for me brought those things together. And so it's a tech company. It's a Healthcare Company. It's bringing personalized holistic medicine to the world were based in New York or national. It's really fun to be here in LA. Because we were just talking about we're about to open our Flagship first built out custom gorgeous space here in West Hollywood's.

Yeah, your spaces are really pretty

thank you.

So for I mean especially because people maybe have never you know, heard of parsley or they've never been to a parsley. Can you kind of describe? I mean, it's a membership and you're obviously paying to get these health benefits, but can you kind of talk about like how it works so person pays this monthly membership and what can they expect?

Yeah, so we're monthly membership for modern holistic medicine. So when you join parsley Health, you get unlimited access to this doctor and health coach team who are there to work with you on everything you have going on so people come to us to optimize their health and get some of the cool diagnostic testing. We do microbiome genetics all that fun stuff. Yeah cool stuff, but they also come because they're dealing with chronic symptoms that nobody else can figure out and they also come because they've been diagnosed with a chronic disease and they really want a quarterback for their. More time with their doctor. Yeah, and so the membership really allows us to have this ongoing relationship with you you get unlimited access 365 days a year. So that's right as if you have a question about how you're going to stick to that eating plan while you're at that wedding this weekend, which I just felt with this past weekend failed somewhat or you need a refill or you woke up with a new symptom. So you have that unlimited access but then when you do need a visit with your doctor that visit average visit length is almost an hour. We really get to know you and our doctors are prescribing not just prescription. Drugs we do that but we also prescribe nutrition Mental Health Sleep Fitness supplements, and we use this cool in-depth diagnostic testing.

It was referring to to really understand the whole picture of you and to help you guide help guide you to your ultimate. State of health right? Well, there's definitely a lot of people who are more interested in tools that are not prescription medicines, right? So yes. Yeah. This is a but they don't want to like go through the Journey on their own. Yeah, and we're really The Best of Both Worlds, you know, we don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater modern medicine is incredible. I mean, I'm endlessly grateful for my foundational education at places like Columbia and my all of our providers and doctors are trained at top medical institutions we do. Drugs, we do refer to specialist we do all of that. But in today's modern world were 90% of our health care costs are due to Chronic lifestyle driven diseases, right? We are living ourselves sick. And so it's not enough to ignore nutrition mental health sleep. We know that sleep is such a huge indicator of Health supplements and all these other tools. And so what people get at parsley. People say all the time you guys bridge the gap. Yeah, and that's what we do. Yeah. No, I mean, I think the more Alternatives people have to the better because obviously it's not a one-size-fits-all approach. Yeah and medicine today has to be personalized and that's what we're really bringing. You know, we say that in medicine. It's like a buzzword personalized medicine, right? But partially how this actually doing it and we've also made that affordable because. To access this type of medicine before parsley in this is something that I observed in one of the things that inspired me to start Parsley was that you yes, there were some doctors out there practicing like this, but it was like thousands of dollars an hour and not not happening for most of us.

Right right. Now, I your everyone should check you guys out because also your prices are affordable and you have in person you can go to an actual location if it's in your city, so. A lot of good options there. I want to talk about something else that was challenging

which was you know, you mentioned you launched a company while you know the startup while you were in med school. You did your first round of fundraising while pregnant and now you're trying to bridge the gap between two worlds that as we you just said don't really like to play nice with each other. Wellness and medicine so really I guess do you just love a really good challenge.

Apparently, apparently I think anyone who goes through like the pain of going to med through medical training has some sort of like inform in for it, right?

But no, I mean, I think it's really just been my my passion for these things that I've listened to along the way that's guided me and you know, Fundraising while pregnant nine months pregnant don't recommend it. Yeah, and that was a really challenging moment. My son is 2 and 1/2 and parsley is about 3 and so you do the math on like when all of that was going down but I you know, it's one of those things one of my teachers sometimes says, you know, don't think just do. Sometimes when you feel this calling you just have to put one foot in front of the other and you don't plan any of it. Yeah, but here you are. I actually I agree with that a lot. I think most of the time that over-planning overanalyzing overthinking having you know feeling like you can't get started until you've got all your ducks in a row really kills more of the idea more than the actual like let's say you failed at something. It's like well the over-planning or the doubt will kill more of it than the a perfect can be the enemy of really good. Yeah something to remember and I say to my team all the time you have to move forward you have to launch before you're ready. Yeah and create something and so that's what we keep striving to do, right? Although I do think we're a lot of us are very programmed to not be comfortable with that. For sure.

Yeah, and you know, we are I was talking to someone earlier about this like are weird pretty good actually at listening to her guts. But sometimes we listen to the fear side more than the drive side or more than the calling side and it's about. How do I listen to the thing that I'm really called towards as much as if not more than the thing that I'm scared of?

Yeah, absolutely easier said than done but definitely other definitely important if you can do it.

I know it's interesting how like some of these sayings that we you know, it's like listen to your gut that people been saying that forever and like so I know to do that but I am still trying to figure out how to do we're all still trying to figure out how to do it. Even though it's been you know, something probably our grandparents were saying, yeah. Yeah, so if someone told me that they work out four days a week. They eat clean most days and are all about self-care. I would definitely consider that person healthy quote-unquote healthy, but according to you that's not always the case. So how which is scary. So how do we determine if we're actually healthy?

So first of all, it's not about what you do. It's how you feel. And so if you feel like crap doing all of those things if you're a breaking out and Bloated or dealing with a chronic illness, you could be quote unquote eating healthy and exercising a few times a week and doing all the right things

but stuff just isn't working and something I always remind people as if you're doing all that stuff and it isn't working. It's not your fault we need to dig deeper. And so I think unfortunately we get that messaging in our culture that it's just a quick workout away from Perfection and Ray and easy solutions and then. We ignore the medicine, right? And so that's why I'm kind of love what I do because we get to dive deep and we get to do all of the diagnostic testing if you're gaining weight and you're constipated and your hair is dry. And your mood is low. Those are all classics thought signs of hypothyroidism. One in eight women in her lifetime will be diagnosed with a thyroid condition. It gets missed all the time women get told that they're depressed. They're just not working out enough women. Don't get listen to women and minorities. Don't get listen to it by the Healthcare System the way that. They showed her as much as men and so there's this huge opportunity to kind of engage with medicine dive deeper. We do really cool testing it personally for hormones to diagnose not to microbial. Sorry mistress up pretty good from hormones to inflammation nutrient deficiencies.

Microbiome genomics and we use all of that information along with a really big deep dive in a conversation on you your story how you feel. When did this start? It didn't has heart and yesterday right. Usually, yeah oftentimes it's come from the past and we need to understand the past to understand our present. Right? And so when we can pull all of that information together with you, then we can Empower you to figure out what's going on and to truly feel healthy, right?

That's really interesting about the thyroid that you talked about. I mean in the fact that it's being missed. Is that something where if you went to a few different practitioners, they would be able to catch it or is this one of those things where people are doctors are just moving so quickly and that's why they miss it.

I think it's a combination of factors. I think it's of the proverbial 15-minute visit which is a waste of time. It's the. Reluctance to do more in-depth even blood work. I mean these thyroid tests that we do routinely at parsley for everyone uncover stuff all the time and they're just a shade more advanced than the most basic of testing but doctors aren't are doing them proactively and that is something that we take really seriously, right?

So let's say a person is doing all the right things, but they're not feeling great or I mean, I know we're going to talk about burnout but like burnout is. Is upon them. They're not sleeping. Well, so even though they're doing all the things right? Like they know that they don't feel I just don't feel number one. What steps should you take after you get your test results and maybe what are some examples of the changes that someone might need to make yeah. So the first step is understanding your test results, right? And almost I talk to people all the time who are like I have these test results and no one ever explained to me what they meant or. I did this at home test which by the way, I'm all forms super all about people being empowered to have their own health information. So I'm very Pro like the at home diagnostic testing movement. But at the same time what a lot of people into the left with is sort of the tip of the iceberg and their unmoored in their ability to understand this information.

I mean the questions we get on what is my vitamin D level and what should it be and What vitamin D. Should I take and for how long and how much and when do I read? And that's a vitamin D. So when you're talking about more complex, testing one of the things that we do, you know, your first visit with us is an hour and 15 minutes.

The second one's an hour we go through all of that testing with you and talk to you about it. And that for a lot of people is really the first step what's going on with me. And then from there what we might recommend you do is really personalized right so it could mean taking a medication it could mean.

Doing an Elimination Diet to eliminate food triggers that are causing an autoimmune reaction. It could mean repeating nutrient deficiencies. It could mean looking at a genetic marker that tells us that you metabolize serotonin a little bit differently in might benefit from a very specific type of b-vitamin.

It might be going to bed at 10 p.m. Instead of 11 p.m. To miss that evening cortisol spikes so that you're starting to sleep better because. I always tell my patients like if you're not sleeping. Yeah, that's it. Right. So when someone's not sleeping Step One is get you sleeping. Let's figure out and then more and most importantly. Why are you not sleeping? Yeah, you know, we sort of go 0-2 Ambien and our medical culture and there's a lot in between there of you have a magnesium deficiency. Are you anxious? Do you have high cortisol at night? There's a lot of reasons you might not be sleeping. Are you looking at Blue Light from your screen and scrolling the Graham and that is keeping you up. So really teasing all of that out then leads to that personalized plan. Yeah. I definitely have some questions about sleeping because I used to sleep like a rock like I was the kid. We're literally there was an earthquake and I did not wake up. And now I almost feel like I never get into that deep sleep. I have to be like really exhausted and part of it is sometimes like your brain is just going going going. How do you calm your brain? And is that die just need a vitamin or do I need more a few ways and that you know what you're describing is. State of all of us today, right? Yeah going from morning till night. We are living in a state of sympathetic overdrive the sympathetic nervous system is your fight or flight your run from a lion, but our proverbial lion is the an email. Yeah and the appointment and the thing we have to take our kids to and so we see so many people especially women especially working women waking up in that overdrive from the moment they wake up. You know wine at the end of the night to kind of calm it all down and then this rinse and repeat cycle and as a result, they're not sleeping alcohol is one of the number one reasons. You can't reach deep sleep. Yeah, your body can't actually reach a cool enough body temperature at Elite reach deep sleep. If you've had a couple drinks. Your resting heart rate is a little bit too high at night if you've had alcohol. Magnesium glycinate as a supplement that's non-addictive. That's awesome and helping calm. It's kind of like Nature's Annex a little bit not non-addictive staying up too late the blue light from your screens and then not moving, you know, we sit at a desk all day and you have the screen and then wonder why we can't sleep at night and our bodies Were Meant to move and discharge energy that way and exercise. Is you know, if you're dealing with digestive issues constipation, you're not sleeping you have anxiety exercise and moving every day has been shown to be one of the top cures for all of those things. Yeah. I'm a big fan of 10,000 steps

a day. I feel like there's obviously other forms of exercise. But when I feel like that became more mainstream just like just walk just because I felt like. You know, I was kind of on the I got the messaging of like you got to go to that workout class and work out really hard for an hour. And the reality is is like people are like everyone has an hour wall Not not always when you have to drive there and drive back but the 10,000 steps a day that I really like. I feel like that is very much something you can accomplish definitely and there's so many ways to move. I have these exercise bands that are like Loops that I travel with. Yeah. I do a little bit of resistance training in my. Airbnb or of my friend's place. I'm crashing with and I get so much out of that metabolically and energetically and it takes 5 minutes 10 minutes. Right?

Right. Yeah. Okay. I'm definitely going to try that for sleep because I I do and it wears on you. It's like you have one bad night asleep. And then you have to bad night's sleep in your like okay by the third day at work, you can tell that your concentration your like foggy, you know,

absolutely and you're actually in when you're not sleeping well. Your metabolism is off the next day. You have something called insulin resistance you crave more sugar and so lots of people get in a vicious cycle of caffeine sugar poor sleep caffeine and the caffeine and the sugar actually drive poor sleep as well. No, I know. I'm like take that out of his podcast not just getting.

So let's talk about burnout because it's now an official medical diagnosis. But how do you know if you actually have official burn out or if it's something else?

Well, first of all again, I always go back to how you feel because you tapping into your perception of what you feel and what's happening in your life is the most important thing and that's why we do a lot of parsley around us and listening to you. Yeah, but is your story the story of your health is really the story of your life. And so that's what matters most there are tests that we do there's an in-depth urine test that looks at a number of adrenal hormones like cortisol and DHEA as well as female hormones. Thyroid the hormone system can be a good tell if it's deranged that or off that you are suffering from burnout. And so that's how we tested medically and it's real, you know, I always say that self-care isn't a luxury it's a necessity. And when we invest in calm and we invest in movement, and we invest in rest, we that's when we achieve our Highest Potential it's by tapping into this physical body. This only vehicle that will have for life right there in the car.

You're hot for life. You're not when we tap into that and we take care of it and we pay attention to it. It has a lot of information for us. It has a lot of wisdom and that can ultimately help you reach your greatest potential. So I think a lot of us are. Striving strivings driving burning the candle at both ends 100% guilty over here.

Yes. Yeah, I'm doctor and forget that when we actually do our best work and make our best decisions and experience. Our greatest productivity is when we take that time out and back to the sympathetic nervous system that fight or flight that were all living in the opposite of that is

the parasympathetic which is our rest. I just relax and heal. And that's kind of our nervous system is really powerful and it actually is what creates a healing response to the body knows how to heal the body actually knows how to fix itself in a lot of cases. We don't give it any time. So most people they don't even spend an hour a day, maybe even five minutes a day in a parasympathetic dominant State a relaxed State when they're awake and just doing that through meditation through going on a long walk. Yeah through cooking, right? These are things that are analog that bring us back into our bodies and that trigger that parasympathetic nervous system and then that then the body starts to fix itself and that's really cool because you don't necessarily need all those medications. Right? Right. Your body is able to heal.

That's so fascinating. I I've kind of heard that a little bit before we've talked about mindset and meditation and mindfulness on here, but we haven't really said. Okay, you need if you don't do it your body the fight or flight, we haven't necessarily connected to that and it is fascinating because you do and I'm sure people can recognize this when they are in that kind of like anxious feeling and it's that you know fight or flight but they feel like they have to fight versus the ideas are just coming to me I'm calm and now I've just like have come up with this idea or I'm going to move forward with this or almost like there's less anxiety around your decision making process to yeah.

I mean, it's all about creating space for yours. Yeah. You know the body will tell you I'm you know, we were talking earlier. I'm getting over a summer cold. I haven't been sick in years, but I had a really intense spring and it's funny. A lot of times people will describe this this stress drops and then they get sick.

Yeah, because you've been living in that fight or flight mode where you sort of been living an adrenaline, right? And then you crash and that's actually a sign of burnout. So I'm taking my own advice. Yeah. I've done a lot of rest in the past two weeks to. Get over my cold obviously, but also be in recognition that you need to restore right you need to put gas back in the tank and as working women as mothers like we are always depleted.

Everything's always going out. Right and we have to remember that the self care which is this buzzword that people kind of dismiss is actually a really potent ability to put gas back in the tank.

Yeah, absolutely. All right. Well last question before we move into rapid fire, which is what was the last courageous act you made and what was the result or impact of it?

Such a good question. You know we touched on this earlier and it's only in retrospect that I can say this because it definitely didn't feel like that at the time but I do remember raising our seed round for parsley nine months pregnant. And going into investor meetings and all the investors were guys. Some of them were older gentleman. Yes, and everyone was very respectful and lovely only one said to me so who's going to run the company?

Oh my gosh.

I really interesting experience that I'll never forget but by and large, you know, I just sort of did it and it wasn't a choice. I didn't say. Oh, I'm gonna go raise pregnant like some sort of heroic decision, we weren't trying to be a hero. No, I'm definitely not trying to be a hero and the hardest part of it was that I got about halfway through the round and was time to deliver and have my baby and had to stop raising for six weeks. And I remember thinking that everything's falling apart this round is done. I'm never going to get it. I'm never going to get my momentum back. A lot of fundraising is about momentum and Mojo. And I'm in loving and enjoying my son and really excited on the one hand and also just feeling like I'm sliding on a wall by my fingernails. Yeah, and the other and in the end I ended up raising more money than I'd planned from better investors because of this delay and it's goes to show like the things you never plan and the being some of the best gifts that you've ever received always always. Yeah and looking back people are always like a can't believe you did that. And I think it just speaks back to this listening to the calling to do something because you really love it and you really believe in it and I didn't do that because I thought again I this is this courageous thing to do. I mean, it's the last thing I would have chosen for myself. But it wasn't about that. It was about feeling that parsley had to exist in the world. And I was just going to keep doing whatever it took to make that happen. Right? I also think that you Embrace flexibility like yes, of course, if you got to plan this out on paper, it's not how you would have done it, but you are flexible your like this is how what's happening.

I'm gonna go with the flow, which I think there's a little bit of hard wiring in a lot of us where it's like, we aren't we're not flexible. We think we're flexible. We're really not. And I don't mean in like the Pilates way. I mean, it's like the mental mental way and especially when it comes to work. It's like you cannot control all that. Yeah, absolutely and flexibility resilience seeing taking the Long View and seeing the Horizon less entrepreneurs. These are things that we need every single day because the proverbial meteor hits your startup every single. Yeah. There's always something right and if. Stand there and say oh my God. Oh my God. This guy is falling you'll never put one foot in front of the other. So you just have to be like, okay. Yes sky is falling. I will now move forward. Yes and keep doing that. It's funny. My examples always the buildings on fire and I'm calmly like okay everybody the buildings on fire. We should probably go. Yeah, and it's but if you had asked me and week one of being an entrepreneur, I would have been like screaming yelling at everybody, you know, but I agree entrepreneurship. It's always feels. Highest highs and lowest lows in the same our absolute. We're not talking about the same mom. We're talking about the exact same out every single day every day.

Okay. So let's move into rapid fire. These are short or one word answers a daily ritual you practice is...

walking the dogs with my Double Espresso and writing down my five gratitudes of the day. It's great. I love that.

We've been talking a lot more about like writing things down and people talking about their journaling practices, and I'm very impressed with that a health or Wellness Tren you're really excited about...

All this cool diagnostic testing that's coming out if she's putting the power of medicine and all of her hands and making it all more personalized. Yeah. I'm not a nerd.

Yeah on the weekends we can find you...

at yoga class at the playground with my son and generally cooking or eating something healthy, but also yummy

great looking back you tell your younger self...

Listen to that thing that drives you and calls you and sometimes people will think you're crazy but keep that focus and fire alive and you will get there. Yeah, and sometimes you have to get quiet to listen to that as we just pointed out. Yeah, and sometimes like this isn't a rapid-fire answer you don't even like know that it's happening when it's happening, but I got this email literally in two days ago that made me cry. It was one of my professors from Columbia Med who's like a huge deal there and she wrote me this email and she said I don't know if this is still your email address, but I just have to tell you one of my patients daughters was in kidney failure and no one can figure it out and she saw one of your doctors at parsley and they discovered toxic mold and now she's recovering and I just have to say like I remember. You seen I forget the word she is but you seen a way for it in medicine that didn't exist. And I'm so glad that you created it. Yeah, and you know when you're doing it, you're like am I crazy? Yeah else seems to see this thing. That's yeah obvious to me. And so that was just like such a moment for me.

Yeah. I think there's a comfort and people getting it right away. It's like when people ask what you do if they don't get it right away. There's this discomfort and being like, okay, so I have to explain this more to you. But you're right. It's just that they don't get it's not that you don't get it, right? Yeah. Awesome. Well, thank you. Dr. Robin for joining us today. Where can people find you if I'm parsley. Where should where should they go?

Yep parsley health.com. You can follow us on all the social zat parsley health. I'm Robin Burton MD and yeah, we have beautiful centers in New York La San Francisco.