

Ep 26 - Bouncing Back from Burnout

Hello and welcome to the Breaking Up with Anxiety podcast. I am your host, the anxiety nutritionist, gut and hormonal health expert, yoga and meditation teacher, and cat mom, Taylor Gendron. And this podcast is designed to show you how to relieve and resolve your chronic anxiety through the powerful combination of food, lifestyle changes, targeted supplementation, gut and hormonal health optimization, nervous system regulation, yoga, meditation mindset, lifestyle coaching, and more.

Hey hey hey, ok so funny story kind of about today's episode and guest. When I first started this podcast which was last December, so December 2022 I got super excited about bringing on all my amazing friends, peers and colleagues that I kind of went a bit overboard. I recorded so many guest interviews that they just started piling up and I couldn't even keep up with releasing them all. Then I went on vacation and took a bit of summer holidays and so now I'm finally getting around to releasing a bunch of guest episodes that were recorded so long ago.

Dr. Stephanie who you will hear from today, we recorded this back in March! And a few things have changed since then. March was around the time I was almost done with my burnout recovery which started in August 2022 and wrapped up around March/April which you will hear me reference. Going through a 7 or even 8 month burnout recovery process really opened my eyes to the impact alcohol had on my body because I would have just a few casual drinks and it would really, really derail any process I was making. On that note, I also think I talk about how much I love spicy margs, which is very true but you know what I have been doing to crush that craving? The lemon habanero and mango chili LMNT electrolyte packages I will just bring to the cottage or even to a patio or restaurant or someone's house and I definitely do not feel like I am missing out.

Ok so Dr. Stephanie is a Naturopathic doctor from Vancouver, Canada who takes women from bloated and burnt out to fiercely confident and energized! She believes that when you are no longer bloated and tired you show up differently in your life. You are able to own it and not miss out on precious once in a lifetime opportunities and time. I'm beyond excited this episode is finally going live because if you have an anxiety disorder or chronic anxiety you have some level of adrenal dysfunction and therefore I really encourage you to listen to this entire episode from start to finish. Burnout is not a diagnosis, it's a state we enter into and we cover the three main stages, what are the symptoms, how to identify which stage you are in, what to do about it, what steps to take, specific herbs and foods to focus on, how to actually restore the nervous system. We also talk about what markers to look for on blood work that your doctor is missing or maybe not even running. So without further ado let's get into it shall we?

Welcome to the breaking up with Anxiety podcast. I'm so excited you're here. Thank you for having me. I'm honored. Let's dive right in because we have so much to talk about.

I know this is going to be such a hot topic because we are talking about burnout today. And when I did my Burnout episode, I got flooded with DMs and emails from women who could either relate because they had gone through that or women being like, oh my gosh, I think I might be in Burnout. So let's first start. Who are you? Tell us a little bit about your story and then we'll jump into the stages of burnout and things like that.

Okay, so I'm a dual licensed Naturopathic doctor, so I can see patients in British Columbia and Ontario. I am also a nutritionist. I was a former psychotherapist and life coach, and now my big passion is helping women navigate Bloat and burnout to get to a place where they can feel energized and confident. This is why your mindsets everybody needs to follow you on Instagram, which will be linked in the show now. It's like the way you explain things and your mindset.

When I found out that you are a life coach and you used to be like a psychotherapist, I was like, oh, that makes so much sense because she has this mindset piece nailed down. Yeah. And I have a squirrel brain, so it requires a lot of work to work through mindset stuff. So I needed to do a lot of personal work to get there. And it's a constant work in progress, for sure.

So have you ever experienced Burnout? I know the answer, but I feel like we like to try to help others navigate what we've been through. So, yes, I have definitely experienced burnout many times. I have what I think I like to call a superwoman complex, where I used to think that doing more was associated with more accolades, more success, more accomplishment. So my first experience with Burnout was back in 2012.

I was doing my masters. I was doing a bunch of other undergraduate courses. I was working at a vet. I had a partner that was 2 hours away from me, and I basically had half an hour out of the week to myself, and I would take a bath and I would try to just sit in silence for 30, right? Yeah, this is self care.

Exactly. And then I was like, okay, I navigated that. I got through it, I rebuilt up my energy. And then it happened again. When I was in school to become a nutritionist, I was in school to become a psychotherapist, a nutritionist.

I was in all these different courses all at the same time. And I got to the point where it felt like I was walking through mud and I had debilitating brain fog to the point that I felt like I couldn't focus I couldn't concentrate. Like, everything was sort of shutting down on me. I later learned that I actually had significantly high heavy metals at that point, as well as a viral infection that I hadn't cleared. And then through genetic testing, I learned that my detox pathways, my glutathione and my sod two pathways are suboptimal, so I don't manage viruses and toxins well.

So that was contributing as well to the burnout. And then the next time was right before Naturopathic Medical school. I was working two jobs as a nutritionist in Fort Mac, and I was in all these undergraduate science courses because I needed the sciences to get into school, and I didn't have to try learning a six week course and cramming it into seven weeks, but doing it online. Like, my background is in languages and Psych, and that was just like my brain. So then we were evacuated due to the Fort McMurray Wildfire, so that factored into it.

So I arrived at school having these flashes where I would get really hot and really cold. I would get dizzy spells. I was super exhausted. And when we arrived at school, they actually told us that it was going to feel like you were drinking from a fire hose, that the program was so intense that your relationships would likely fail. You better give up your hobbies.

You likely won't have time to work out. They're scaring people away from being Naturopathic doctors. Yeah. And I was like, in that moment when somebody tells me I can't do something, it immediately lights. This internal attitude will watch me, which is so not helpful.

I don't endorse that for anybody. But I then was like, okay, I'll do the eight to 12 hours of school and studying, et cetera. But then I'll add in a 05:00 A.m CrossFit workout, and then I'll go to the driving range, and then I'll go to school, and then I'll box after school, and then I'll run on the weekends. And then I'll start a relationship with somebody halfway across the country for three and a half years out of the four year program. Let's try it this way.

And then after school, it's at least taken two years of full self care to sort of help me recover from that. So, yes, I have been burnt out many times. I'm trying to learn faster, to see the signs and to replenish sooner so it doesn't drive me into the ground. Yes, I've said this, I think, on multiple podcasts now that I think every single Naturopathic doctor I know is burnt out for the most part because we're just giving and working so hard to help other people that even we forget to take care of ourselves. Right?

Totally. Nobody is perfect. I'm really glad, and I'm sure we'll talk about this as we go into the stages of burnout and kind of the root causes. I'm really glad that you brought up heavy metals and viruses. Because of this understanding, I think the common understanding of burnout is that if you're burnt out, you just need to rest and then everything will be better.

And that's not the case if there's self pathogens, because those actually need to be dealt with or they will keep you in a state of burnout. Totally. So what are the three stages of burnout? How can we recognize what the symptoms are, if anyone's listening, being like, oh, my God. I actually don't like to use the word burnout, I prefer to use the word adrenal dysfunction.

It's just semantics to me, but I get like, I'm so NIT picky with language because I think burnout implies in my mind, when I hear burnout, it means, like, that's it, you're done, you're at the end of your rope. And our culture is so like, hustle, push, grind, keep going, that somebody could be in stage one or stage two, and they're going to push, push, push, push, push through it until they get to stage three, which in my mind, stage three is burnout. That's what I see burnout is. It's like that's the collapse. So I'm having conversations with women where they're like, no, I'm not in burnout, I'm fine, because burnout would mean that I was exhausted and I couldn't do anything.

And it's like, yes, that's partly true, but there are stages. There are stages before we get there and so let's go through these stages. Well, it's funny that you say that, because I find depending on what populations you work with, you can see that certain people don't want to identify with certain labels. So stress is a big one, that people so technically, they are jumping off of the stages of stress. But if you ask women today, especially because women are typically raised to be sort of the shock absorbers of society, they're raised to be perfectionists, caretakers, people pleasers.

They don't want to identify with the word stress because stress to them means that they're not coping or they failed or they can't keep up. And it's amazing to me that I could ask a patient

who's just finished telling me that they're not sleeping, they're not really eating, they don't really hydrate enough, they're having disagreements with their partner about parenting. They're having a big sort of dramatic disagreement with a friend and they've got all these deadlines at work. And when I ask them to rate their stress, they'll tell me it's a one out of ten. And I'm like, I know, because you think I did this, because that's socially unacceptable, so you don't want to say that.

But I know on a physiological level, with everything you just told me, that there's no way that it's a one out of ten, but we've got all these pressures to tell us. So I agree, there's definitely semantics around identifying with things. Even the word fatigue, some people don't like. But it's interesting, if you ask people about people, we're busy on the other hand, like a badge of honor. No one would ever say, like, hi, I'm so and so, I'm so stressed.

No, but hi, I'm so and so and I'm so busy. I've got all these things going on, I've got so much going on. I'm so tired. These days they think that is more socially acceptable and that gives them more I don't know. I don't know if it's seen as a sense of accomplishment, almost.

Yes. I'll walk you through the phases. So phase one is the alarm phase. So this is where basically our response to stress is revving up. So we call this like the stage where everything becomes wired, everything's amped up.

So you start to ruminate, you start to overthink. You can't shut off your mind. You're anxious, you're over worrying about things. You can't sleep at night because you can't shut off the mind. You start to have like 03:00 a.m.

Waking. You might have the sensation that your heart is racing. You might have transient increases in blood pressure that might not show up in the doctor's office, but your blood pressure could be rising day to day. And then here you're usually still able to work out. Right?

So because you've got all this pent up energy, you're usually able to still go and do a workout or a weight class or a HIIT class, and it's sometimes going to be more invigorating because you've sort of offloaded some of that extra energy. Now, the interesting thing about this phase do you want me to talk about approaches like how we deal with the phases? Okay, yeah. And just like for anybody listening, if you have anxiety, you are in stage one. Yes.

You might even be in stage two or stage three. I tend to see more kinds of depression in the later stages as opposed to anxiety. But there has not been one woman that I have worked with who was not in stage one of Adrenal dysfunction. Because I work with women with anxiety. Totally, there is some level of Adrenal dysfunction going on.

So this episode is for you. And it's interesting when you are revving up. So when we're rapidly cycling your stress hormones, like your Epinephrine, your Norepinephrine, we've got increases in Cortisol. You're also going to have sugar and salt cravings, right? Because the body is so stressed that it's burning through things so quickly that you're going to crave sugar for energy here as well.

So the interesting thing about this one is first we need to prioritize sleep and rest. Yes, those would seem kind of intuitive, but then we would look to things like mindset work. Maybe it's something that you can do with a coach, maybe it's something that you can do through talk therapy or psychotherapy. We can leave the workouts for the most part as is. If they are working out, we can look at things in this stage.

We're looking at herbs like nervine, relaxants, so nervous system, relaxing herbs, things like lavender, cavacava, valerian, passion flower, holy basil. And then we want to replace what you're burning through to create those stress hormones. So things like healthy fat, healthy protein, B vitamins, magnesium, vitamin C, and then iron is a big one. But we usually do testing first to make sure that you actually have an iron deficiency that warrants supplementation. And I'll preface this by saying we're talking loosely about these things.

I'm not engaging in a doctor patient relationship with those listening. These are just more for educational purposes.

Stage two, you can think of it like now we've revved the system for so long, but we haven't done anything to support the body, right? So now we've burned through things. We're not replenishing, we're not supporting. So now we start to get into that phase where we're irritable, we're frustrated, we're quick to lose it, or we're quick to snap. We now start to feel more overwhelmed.

Now we start to see mood swings where we can go from maybe a high high to a low low and not really understand how we transitioned so quickly. We also start to see a decline in your motivation, your mood, your concentration. Brain fog can start to set in here as well. And then we also see your libido start to decline. So women's sex drive starts to go down here.

And the other thing is that weight training or workouts start to be more draining. So not only do you not have as much motivation for them, but when you do them, they leave you feeling exhausted, they don't leave you feeling invigorated. And here we're going to have to take things deeper if we want to basically replenish things. So we would still be focusing on the things that we did in phase one. Obviously, sleep is going to be paramount.

I should preface all this by saying no matter what you do outside of sleep, if you are trying to get by on like four to six hours, not a lot of these other supports are going to have as much benefit ever as just ensuring that you're getting consistent. Eight hours, that's like a basic foundational concept that we need. And then say nothing will work. Yes, I straight up. Just say nothing's going to work.

If you're chronically getting under six hours, like six hours and less of sleep chronically, I would even say a few nights in a row of that because it's going to massively implicate your hormones, which is going to aggravate the Adrenals and aggravate the situation. And I know for a lot of my listeners, not being able to sleep is a really big symptom for them because of what's going on with their gut, because of what's going on with their Adrenals. So it can increase anxiety when people hear this. And I just want to make it very clear that the reason you can't sleep is not, you

can't see me, I'm doing air quotes because of the anxiety. It's because of the imbalances in the body that are also creating anxiety.

And so there are root cause explanations for why you can't sleep. So when you hear this and you think like, oh my gosh, I want to sleep. I'm trying to sleep, but I can't sleep. Give yourself some grace and just understand that there are reasons for that and that can be fixed. I would say that's like an "easy fix". When you're working with somebody who understands what's actually happening and it's not, oh, just take some Melatonin or CBD, it's like, no, we actually have to address why what's happening in the body.

Totally. No, most definitely. And I think on top of sleeping and taking breaks, it's really hard, I find, for women to take breaks. Like they'll tell themselves they're taking a break, but really they're folding laundry or they're making the bed or they're still doing something. It's not an actual break where they're just like out for a walk or they're sitting in silence.

So I find even taking breaks is a struggle. But besides doing what we did in phase one, now we might have to take it a little bit deeper. So sometimes we need to incorporate things like physical medicine, things like acupuncture, massage, tapping, things that drive that healing deeper into the body. Sometimes people even need to go to hypnotherapy to make that mindset work more internally. And then here we're looking at things like adaptogenic herbs.

So herbs that help your body adapt to stress better. So things like Cassandra rodiola, PanEx and Siberian Ginseng. And then we're still doing all those supports to help you still make your stress hormones efficiently. And making sure that we don't have any nutrient deficiencies is another big one as well. So then let's say we kept going in that phase and we haven't replenished anything.

Then we go into what we call the exhaustive phase. So this is technically like a long burnout. And here we've got mental, physical and emotional fatigue. Now you've got debilitating brain fog. It is next to impossible to wake up in the morning.

You're constantly hitting snooze or you're constantly just resetting your alarm. You might feel emotionally numb, like you're just disengaged from the world here. You have no libido, you have no motivation left, you have no drive to go to the gym. It's not like you're staying in bed all day, but you're walking around like everything's sort of a struggle. You might be still getting things done, but everything is like, oh my God, I just want to sit down and do nothing.

So here we've got a lot of work to do. So sometimes this can be where we've burnt the candle at both ends and now we really need to do so much support for so many different body systems. So not just for the nervous system, but now we've got to throw in immune support. We need to make sure your cells are supported. We need to do gut health work.

There's so many different factors to it. So now we would take that like talk therapy, psychotherapy, hypnotherapy. We'd probably have to do mindset work, meditation, breath work. Now we're looking at herbs that are actually the nervous system. We call them trophorestorative.

So they actually help repair the nervous system. So things like milky oat, seed blue vervain orish seed oil. We've got to do a lot of work with nutrients, a lot of immune stuff. And then we can look at like adaptogenic mushrooms, things like reishi cordyceps, turkey tail, chaga. We can also go into nourishing foods like soups, stews, bone, broth, and then doing more restorative workouts.

So like yin or restorative yoga or starting with walking, once they have the energy to be able to do that. I usually don't have patients starting with any kind of more intensive workout because it's just going to be more depleting until we build them up a bit. And would you add in like glandulars in stage three as well? Or licorice, like not DGL, but actual licorice? Of course, if there's no contraindications.

Yeah, those are my go to less glandulars. Actually. I thought glandulars would work better on me than they did, but like high doses of licorice. Mind you, I don't have any blood pressure issues. So just a side note, make sure you're checking contraindications, but like a high dose of licorice from a supplement perspective amongst I did mushrooms as well.

A bunch of stuff that was like a game changer for me in addition to everything else she's talking about when I found myself in stage three, and I figured it out in August, and now we are in March at the time of this recording. The podcast will come out in a few months because I batch. I batch. It's like the best feeling to batch. Four years I haven't been doing it, but with the guest interviews, I do it, which is great. So we're in March

Hey. Hey. I am quickly interrupting this episode because if you are like me and you are a visual learner, I wanted to let you know about my free 1 hour webinar class called The [Three Secrets to Natural Anxiety Banishment](#).

It walks you through. Well, the [Three Secrets to Natural Anxiety Banishment](#).. Specifically, how to optimize your digestive function, how to fix your gut, how to eat in a way that boosts natural neurotransmitter production and reduces inflammation, and how to bring your hormones back into balance. I love podcasts for listening to when I'm on walks or driving or cooking or cleaning. They inspire me and give me so many AHA moments.

But I am a visual learner, so I benefit the most when I can see the information presented in a clear and organized manner, like a slideshow. I don't really remember or retain information that well when it's just presented verbally, which is exactly what I have done for you in my Three Secrets to Natural Anxiety Management Training. And within that training, I share the top things that you need to be doing to optimize digestive function, boost neurotransmitter production, bring your hormones back into balance, all in a beautiful slideshow. So if you haven't watched that, hit the link in the show notes to get your copy of The [Three Secrets to Natural Anxiety Banishment free training](#), emailed right to you. Hey, back to the episode.

So we're in March and I just kind of redid my assessments. I'm actually sending in a Dutch next week, but based on my and we can talk about functional testing because people are probably like, what's the Dutch? But I think I'm in stage one. So what is that? How many months is that?

Like August, September, October, November, December, January, February, March. That's like seven months. And that is 1000% realistic. And I knew that going in. It was funny because my partner would be like, when are you going to be better?

When are you going to be out of this burnout? And when he asked me that in the beginning, I would snap. He'd be like, well, it'll happen when it happens. Leave me alone. But now I had to make changes in my life.

And until those changes were made, I wasn't moving out of stage three. I was just kind of in this maintenance where I was not getting worse, but I wasn't getting better. And then that took three months to leave a job and to make some pretty significant changes. And then it kind of started to pick up from there. But I was telling him it's probably going to be months.

I've worked with women, and I know women where it's like two years. And you even said that in your story, that it kind of took a full two years when you graduated from Naturopathic Medicine School to really feel like, okay, we have done the replenishing, we are good to go. So what would you say? What kind of timelines do you see for stage one? Stage two, stage three?

Obviously it's generic, but I know people are always curious about that. I think it more depends on how dedicated they are to actually working on restorative processes. So sometimes people go into stage one and they're aware and they recognize, oh, I'm actually in a high stress state. I'm going to set increased boundaries, I'm going to make sure I get proper sleep, I'm going to get out in nature, I'm going to do these things so I can reset myself. So I think it depends on their awareness, how in tune they are with their body, and how willing they are to restore themselves.

I don't know that I could give timelines for the first phase and the second, but the third phase, depending on how long you've been there, how many times you've been burnt out before, how exhausted you are going into that stage of burnout. Usually it takes one to two years, but I also don't want that to be a deterrent for people to work on it, because that can seem really daunting. It doesn't mean that you're not going to feel better until the end of the two years. It just means you might not feel like you're full cell and fully equipped to cope with stress, maybe the same as you would on an optimal day until that two year time. And sometimes it's shorter than that.

Yeah. And I have said this before, and I'll continue to say this because I think it's really important to set realistic expectations for people. But I see the same thing when it comes to anxiety. You can be feeling if you have a chronic anxiety disorder, it doesn't have to be diagnosed, but if you experience chronic anxiety. So every day, a few times a week, just before your period, but it happens every single month, kind of thing, that's what I would categorize as chronic anxiety.

And so, again, depending on how long you've had it for, but what I usually see is people feeling 70% to 80% better in three to six months, again, based on their kind of dedication to the process and how diligent they are with the changes. And everyone comes in at a different level, like some people. It's a big overhaul. For other people, it's tweaks. But on average, what I have seen in four years now is about three to six months.

But you kind of go up and down, up and down, up and down for about two years. And so I also have this two year mark, and I tell my clients this all the time, too, and all the women in my group coaching program. I know it sounds really daunting, but I'm not saying you're going to struggle for two years, but you might feel amazing for six months, and then boom, you have a panic attack. And it doesn't mean that everything you've been doing isn't working. It's just the body has to take time to rebalance.

And you're building a new foundation. It's like you've torn down a house, you're building a new foundation. Right. And I don't know if anybody's ever gotten a new build, but it takes years to get those things done, and there's always delays. Yeah, totally.

And I think, too, when you show people through all the different work, just how good they can feel, even if it's 70% to 80% better on an energetic level, or in an ability to cope or ability to be more resilient to stress, most people are going to be like, oh my God, I need to keep going. I really want to maintain this. And once you've given them a taste of it, they know what that feels like, so they're more hyper aware when they're off. So if I'm used to feeling like 70% to 80% better, and let's say I get hit with some sort of viral infection and now I'm tired again for three weeks, it makes me love and appreciate that energy that I've worked up to so much more. Because I think we've normalized, having no energy, and people just don't think energy is even achievable these days.

Everyone's just running around normalizing, tired. Oh, 100%. Especially women. Especially if you're a mom, especially if you're a working mom. Like, oh my gosh, the list goes on and on.

The timing of this conversation is really great as well because I have been feeling so good. I'm like, oh man, I'm definitely in stage one. I redid my symptom analysis. I'm sending in my Dutch, as I said, and I'm super excited. And then I had last week, I had a really rough week.

And for me, I'm just curious about it at this point because we've been at this for so long that I'm just kind of instead of being like, beating myself up and shame-talking myself and talking shit about myself in my head, I just say to my I'm like, oh, interesting. Why did that happen? What was I doing, like a week ago? Kind of thing. And what I had done was I had more drinks than I normally did.

I think like three or four nights out of the week, I maybe had two to three drinks, which is a lot for me. Usually I'm like no drinks or like one to two drinks kind of thing, like a few drinks a month. And that was enough to push me back into the state of I was like, oh, man, I am so tired. I am so irritable, I'm so grumpy. Like, I'm exhausted.

I'm sleeping until 08:00 and I normally get up at five and I'm going to bed at 09:00, so I clearly need sleep, right? And things are going to happen in life that are going to feel like setbacks. But I would actually love for you to kind of riff quickly on the mindset of setbacks or the healing journey being not linear, because I'd love to hear what you have to say or how you coach your patients. Through this because this is every single all of my clients come to me with this, where it's like, I was doing so good, and now my symptoms are back, and it's freaking me out, and I feel frustrated and I'm scared and all these things, and I'm just, like, keep going. I feel like you have some good tips, so I call it the success staircase.

So if we think of walking up a set of stairs, let's say you hit a setback or something throws you off like you described with the drinks. Or for me, if I get, like, a viral infection or if I've gone out and I get less sleep if it sets me up, it could be other things that are maybe seen as a more dramatic setback as well. But I like to think of it as you just drop down one step. You have all the wisdom, all the learnings, all the tools that you've learned up until that point that you can take with you moving forward. But I think what happens is people catastrophize things so they take this setback in their mind, they're all the way back at the beginning of the stairs and they're like, looking up and seeing this daunting staircase and thinking like, oh, my God, how am I ever going to do this again?

But really, you're halfway there already, right? So, you know, you had all of these learnings and you have all the tools. Now it's just implementing them again. And I think we beat ourselves up so brutally if we could just focus a little bit more on self kindness. We are human beings.

We are going to make mistakes along the way. And the fact that you've committed to not only self care, but improving your health to begin with and you've already made these changes, I think there's a lack of celebrating the wins we need to celebrate.

I'm the most annoying coach. I will tag my clients to be like, what's your win? I post like a weekly win in the Facebook group, and if people aren't commenting, I'm like, tagging them, being like, I know you have something to celebrate. It's been seven. Days, like, come on.

Yeah. I think that a big part of it is like, we're not celebrating the things. It's just constantly looking at the next thing we need to do and the next and the next. And you look back and you're like, wait a second, I've done so much, and I've come so far. But there's sort of a lack of acknowledgement of that.

So I think realizing just how far you've come, celebrating and then kindness, I think we set these arbitrary barometers for ourselves, and then when we can't hit them, then we're a failure. Like, I used to tell myself if I wasn't waking up at four, which is outrageous oh, my God. Wasn't waking up at four, I was not maximizing every moment. I wasn't living life to the fullest. And it's like, whoa, okay.

But then I drove myself into the ground. So was it really that worth it? Whereas now I'm like, okay, if I wake up at seven, I'm not a failure. Let's just tone it down a notch. So I think self kindness and compassion is huge.

I know. I have a girlfriend of mine who listened to my Burnout episode, and then she sent me a text, and she was like, holy shit, I'm burnt out. And she's like, listening to that episode gave me a lot of peace of mind because I was thinking, what is going on? And so I'm supporting her with that now. But she's just gotten back from a two week vacation, and she was saying, it's in these moments that you really understand that health is the most important thing, because I just spent all this money on a vacation, and I was exhausted, I was irritable.

I don't feel rejuvenated coming back. She's like, I had a good time. I don't regret going. But also I'm spending so much money on this vacation. People will spend a couple of \$1,000 on a vacation, and then they will balk at spending \$1,000 on their health.

But it's like, you need your health to enjoy those vacations. You need your health to work and make the money to go on those vacations. It's just a society thing ingrained in us since birth that our health is not at the forefront of things. Yeah. And I also think something that can really help people is if you sit down with yourself and you hone in on what you value, then all of your decisions in life can be traced back to that value.

So if something feels like you can check, and if it feels out of alignment, you're likely not going to commit to it. So for me, I deeply value energy and joy. There's many other things that I value, but I'll give those in the example of health. So everything that I do is I evaluate, will this action either detract from my joy or detract from my energy? And if it will, then it's less likely that I'm going to go forward with that and I do it with everything.

Like if something's going to hijack my happiness from the next day, like staying up late or I don't drink, but drinking would be a big one and it's part of the reason I don't drink because I don't want anything to interfere with those two things. I value them like they're in my top ten values. So I think that can also help people. I think the word health for people is so broad that they don't know how to put that into value. But if you value your energy, or if you value chasing your kids around and being able to do fun things with them, or if you value freedom or I don't know, there's different things that can help you sort of navigate decisions and sort of stick to a health plan, definitely.

What is one of your favorite or maybe top two ways to work on being kind and compassionate to yourself? I personally love the meta meditation, the loving kindness meditation. And when I find myself slipping into a place where I'm not being super nice to myself or not patient to myself, or I'm getting easily frustrated by other people, I will kind of recalibrate myself in my morning meditation for like seven days or as long as I feel like I need it. I'll do meta-meditation. Love that.

I do a few things.

I do a morning meditation with breath work and then I'll do hypnotherapy. Like I have recorded hypnotherapy sessions that I've done. Or I think you're part of the "to be magnetic" membership. Oh my gosh, I've talked about it on this podcast. I'm obsessed.

I forgot that you were in that too. I can't say enough good things about that. Which is a type of hypnosis. Yes. So I take one of those.

I'll do any of them, like the soothe one, the anxiety, any of them. I'll take that and I'll go into my sauna blanket. Yes. I'm so jealous when I see your videos of that. I'm like, oh man, work through that journaling is another big one that I will do.

Just in terms of journaling. Why just freehand about like why I'm being so hard on myself.

I really think we all just hold we're the reasons that we hold ourselves back. I actually don't think it's anything out there. I think it's our own belief systems and if we can work on those, we can step out of our comfort zone a little bit more. Yeah, I believe that too. And outside of whatever your situation is in life, and I obviously do recognize that there is a level of privilege involved in certain situations, but for the most part, I strongly agree with that.

Where no one's coming to save us, we're the only ones who can help ourselves and we're the reason we don't have what we want.

Okay. It's amazing too, when you see people make significant life changes. I always want to know what changed then for you. Like somebody who's been one way for a very long time, but who's often talked about wanting to do things differently. I'm always curious when they make a drastic shift that lasts for them.

What was it at that point in your life that shifted? It's interesting when everything comes together for you, it's like everyone has their own personal rock bottom, if you want to call it that, and it's going to look different for everybody and something that just snaps you out and you're just like, okay, I'm tired of my own shit.

I was talking to my mom about this the other day. We go for like a weekly walk and I was telling her, I was like, I really see this in the mental health space. This victim mentality, like, woe is me, this is happening to me. I can't do anything about it. And I get it because I was there in the early years of my mental illnesses, when I was in my early twenties, I was in a total victim mindset.

I was doing things kind of like I was on medication, I was going to therapy, I was doing things. But I really let that define me and kind of used it in a way so that people would feel bad for me or things like that, or I would use it as excuses for maybe my behavior, or I would use it as an explanation for why I did the things I did. And my mother, who's also had her own struggles with her mental health, was saying the same thing. And then I said one day, I wish I could pinpoint kind of what happened, but one day I just woke up and I was just like so sick of my shit. I was like, okay, because you're not like, yes, things have happened to you in life or for you.

Things have happened for you and we all. I don't know if you like Amanda Marshall. I love her because she has a song like, everybody has a story that could break your heart. And it's true. Everybody has a story that will break your yeah, something has happened to everybody. But are you going to let your circumstances define you or are you going to do what needs to be done to kind of make the change?

Yeah, no, totally. I think there's a lot of identifying with people, identifying with their story, and then it becomes all encompassing. Yeah, I'm an anxious person. And this becomes your personality trait. It just becomes kind of who you are when it's a symptom.

Yeah, definitely. Okay. I want to talk about functional testing recommendations because most people are just going to their medical doctors and just being like, hey, I want blood work. And they're running like ten markers, just like, not enough information. And then they're looking at it from lab ranges, which are very broad so what kind of functional testing recommendations would you recommend for people in burnout, for women in burnout?

And I would love it if you could pull a few blood markers and that are clues I know from my own blood work. Now, in hindsight, what the clues were, if you can speak to that a little bit and maybe give some functional ranges. So people who do have copies of their blood work, by the way, if you do not have copies of your blood work, you get copies of your blood work, like, every time you get a lab run, doctors won't give it to you unless you ask. You should have copies of all of your medical records, including your blood work. And don't look at the numbers and just be like, oh, I don't understand this, because Steph will point out a few markers for us.

But I really, really stress the importance of getting proper blood work and having somebody who can look at it through functional ranges. I think so much can be caught there. Yeah, I agree. So I'll preface this by saying so burnout isn't a diagnosis. So usually diagnoses come with a diagnostic criteria and then a specific treatment, whereas burnout is like a state that we can enter into.

And because of that, the lab testing that we would do would be lab tests to rule in or rule out certain causes of fatigue that could be furthering that situation for you. So a lot of the labs I run in my practice are sort of catered to the whole symptom picture that somebody has. And when we're looking at burnout, usually I'll look at it in a few different categories. So we'll look at nutrient deficiencies. Are they deficient in nutrients that we need to either oxygenate the cells to make energy or are they deficient in nutrients that we need to actually build energy?

So iron studies is a big one. So your CBC with Diff is sort of looking at your red and white blood cells. We can look at that to see if there's any underlying infections, or we can look at that to see if there's a B twelve or an iron deficiency. We also have other markers for iron as well. So iron and total iron binding capacity will give us an idea of the iron levels in the body.

And then on top of that, we have ferritin, which is a measure of your iron stores. Ferritin is an interesting one. So when we run ferritin, it can be a sign of inflammation if iron is too high. We also want to run inflammatory markers at the same time to rule out inflammation. Because if there is a high inflammatory load, we don't want to be supplementing iron.

We want to work on the inflammation, then supplement the iron later. So the inflammatory markers that we typically look at are C reactive proteins. So it comes up as CRP on your test and erythrocyte sedimentation rate, which comes up as ESR. So those can be telling us if there's

acute or chronic inflammation. And then the ferritin levels, we normally want them between 50 and 80 nanograms.

So most people aren't actually told that they're iron deficient until they're below 15, which is huge, like 50 to 80, right, versus 15.

And so that's huge because iron is needed for your red blood cells to carry oxygen around the body. So if you're deficient, your cells are basically going to be starving for energy. And it can manifest with anxiety, poor concentration, mood swings, depression, fatigue. And it's one of the biggest things and one of the easiest to fix and one of the most common in women, because we have a lot of women who are heavy bleeders in their menstrual cycle, and so they're losing tons of iron and they're not replacing it. So those three are big vitamin D.

I have yet to see one patient that comes across with adequate vitamin D. I usually like to see it between 125 and 150. Most patients come in and they're below 75. And we need it not only for things like energy, but we need it to regulate insulin in the body. For insulin, sensitivity actually acts more like a hormone in the body and it's implicated in everything from autoimmune conditions to hormone conditions.

We need it for a lot of different things. Another big one that I run a lot that most doctors won't run, I'm not sure why, but it's called an Insulin Glucose challenge test. It's like one of my so annoying, I was talking about this earlier, it drives me nuts. And they're not even running like, fasting insulin, they're just running fasting glucose. And I'm just like, what?

This is, like, incomplete. It drives me bonkers. And that's how I found out that I was kind of amongst my symptoms. One of the big, big clues for me was that all of a sudden, my blood work was showing insulin resistance. And there's nothing in my diet and lifestyle, at least in my diet, that should have pointed towards that lifestyle.

Obviously there were some lifestyle choices that pushed me into burnout that would explain that. But I remember when I got that back on my blood work, which I never would have gotten if I had gone through a medical doctor that really stood out to me. And I was like, oh, yeah, got to work on yeah, this is an interesting one. It looks at fasting insulin and fasting blood glucose. Then they introduce a 75 grams sugar solution at the lab, and then they test your insulin and your glucose at the 30 minutes mark, the 1 hour mark and the two hour mark.

And it gives us a really good indication of how the body is coping with blood sugar, whether your blood sugar is completely a mess after you eat a sugary solution, and whether your insulin remains elevated. So insulin has its hand in just about everything. High circulating insulin will cause fatigue. It has its hand in PCOS, it will up triglycerides, it will increase cholesterol, it will increase free fatty acids. And where that becomes important is that it interferes with mitochondrial production of energy.

So that will slow down just how much energy you're making. And then we've got other things that we can look at. We can look at your lipid panel, which can feed back into the insulin picture, and can do liver function tests, which is super important. Sluggish liver and gallbladder function

can not only be related to poor detoxification, but circulating bile acids are also involved in upregulating insulin, which can lead to fatigue and weight retention and a whole bunch of other things. And then the other big ones that we can look into are, depending on what phase of life you're in, are things like estrogen, progesterone, LH and FSH.

Because if you've got high levels of estrogen because they're unopposed by low progesterone, meaning like, maybe you're an ovulatory, that would mean that could lead to fatigue. And low progesterone levels can also lead to fatigue as well.

Ultimately a hormonal imbalance is a symptom and it's helpful information, but it doesn't tell us why those hormones are imbalanced, it just tells us they are imbalanced. Just like anxiety is a label as to what you are experiencing, but it's not telling us why you're experiencing that. Yeah, no, totally. We see it more, I think, with the lab tests for things like polycystic ovarian syndrome.

That's where that would become a really big factor. And I think the other two labs, or two sets of labs would be cortisol, either serum cortisol or ideally a four point cortisol with like a cortisol awakening response that can give us a good idea of your cortisol spike and how it comes down over the course of the day. And the thyroid panel is huge. Mainstream medicine typically only runs your thyroid stimulating hormone and it doesn't give us any indication of your active thyroid hormones or if the body's producing antibodies to the thyroid, which can be a major problem if that's left unchecked. Oh, yeah, I send my women to their doctors with an exact list of likes, this is what I want you to ask for.

When you ask for a thyroid panel, there's six markers on here. And then every single time they're like, yep, the doctor said they'd run that, and it's do I i don't know how it works in Ontario, but I know in the even if the doctor does check off all six, if the TSH comes back in range, they actually won't run the other ones. And the range for TSH is very wide. It's from, like, 0.5 to five, whereas ideally, we'd want you between one and maybe 2.5. So if it comes back within that 0.5 to five range, then they drop the other tests.

And so it's not necessarily the doctors, but it's more our provincial health care system that's, like, handcuffing what tests are covered, basically. Oh, yeah. It's a systemic issue, which is also a point that I really try to drive home. It's not your individual doctor trying to be a dick. They actually don't have a lot of control.

They work for the province, they work for the hospital. They work for their governing body. And we saw this happen with COVID where they were getting licenses revoked if they went against what the country was saying. Right? Like, this is a really big issue.

So thinking that your doctor just has the power to do whatever they want and that's why you're not getting answers for your health is incorrect. They actually can't run a lot of the labs, even if you want them to run a lot of the labs, and even if they're like, I would love to do this, but I literally can't. Which has happened to a few friends of mine who have gone to their doctors, and the doctors have said, I would love to do this for you, but you have to go to a naturopath,

because I literally can't, like, I can't write this on a the. No, I was just going to that. I've always said to people, if you want optimal health in Canada, amazing that we have free healthcare.

It's awesome. I don't take it for granted, but if you want optimal, it has to be a combination of paid and free. Yeah, the free health care is sick care, which is great, because if you get really sick, it's amazing that we have that and we have those resources for people. Like, same thing. I'm extremely grateful for it.

But it's not a health care system. It's not an optimal health care system. And so there's severe, severe limitations. And this is why people are staying. They're not getting the answers that they're looking for, because that's not the system you need to be looking for these answers in.

And I actually have a few people who live out like colleagues who live out in Vancouver, and they lie to the lab and they tell the lab that they have an autoimmune condition and that they need to have their full panel run. Not that I'm saying go ahead and do that. I did know this about Vancouver, and I do have colleagues who, like me, like to get frequent blood work and complete blood work. And so they just tell, like, a little fib and they really push for it. But again, I'm not saying do that, but the average person is not going to advocate for their health in the same way that you or I would advocate.

I would be throwing a fucking fit at the lab in Vancouver. If they were not going to run a full fibroid panel, maybe it would not be like a total fit, but I would be sitting there being like, I would lie, I would say I need this, but I think people have to be their own health advocates. And I think a big part of me, working with patients, I always make it clear why we're ordering all the labs and why they're super critical. Just in the last few months, if we hadn't run the labs that I had run, people would have been so confused. We were able to diagnose so many different things with their lab testing that explained their symptoms, explained their situation that they hadn't been able to get help with before.

Yeah, for sure. Okay, so wrapping it up, we could talk about this forever. We could. So if anyone's listening to this and they're thinking like, oh, my gosh, I think this is me, my adrenals need support. To be completely honest, if you are a woman in the modern world and you didn't know this information prior, your adrenals probably need support.

Because when we know better, we do better, and we can't do things we don't know to do, which is how I lived my life until I was 25. I had no idea about any of these things because nobody had told me. It's not like in our school curriculum. So what would it be like if you had to pick three to five kinds of steps for somebody to take to support their adrenals, to get out of Burnout, to get the answers they need? I'll kind of leave the floor up to you.

But what would you say would be like, your three to five first steps based on this conversation? I think I would start with awareness. So listening through everything that we just said and sort of talking yourself through where you think you're at, I think is a huge first step. Once we're aware, we're sort of like, halfway there. So awareness is a huge part.

And I think taking the steps forward, we would start with do you mean like, treatment options or do you mean like, steps that they would take to see somebody? I think there are more treatment options. Okay, so I would start with that. I would start with a lot of my Burnout patients skipping meals, and that's a huge thing that actually leads to fatigue for them. So we're trying to aim for regular, high protein, consistent meals throughout the day.

Even if you're not able to make it regular at first, trying to aim for a protein rich breakfast within an hour of waking is huge. Another big one is avoiding our phones. Like, at night or in the morning is like an easy first lead step. So taking the time to either turn off your notifications or turn your phone on do Not Disturb just in that hour before sleep and focusing on more like reading in bed or doing something that's electronic free or even using Blue blocking glasses to read on your phone. Something where we're limiting the amount of invasive stressors right before bed because especially in that alarm phase, you're going to have trouble sleeping.

And we're trying to optimize sleep. Same thing in the morning. One of the best ways we can reset our nervous system naturally is to get ourselves exposed to natural sunlight. So it doesn't even need to be a walk. It could be like sitting on your balcony, sitting in your backyard, or just standing outside.

And then another trying to think where I would start next.

Probably somewhere between taking breaks and doing something to sort of work on optimizing sleep. Either making an appointment with somebody because I think sleep needs to be like the first thing we talk about. The foundations of health and sleep, nutrition, hydration, elimination are the basic five, and sleep is like paramount out of all of those. So if you're not sleeping, that's really where we need to start first. And if it's not something that you can accomplish on your own, then working with a nutritionist, functional medicine doctor, naturopath, somebody who can help you understand why you're not sleeping and help get you there just to begin with.

Yeah, perfect. Okay. Thank you. You're welcome. Where can people find you and connect with you?

And I think you have a Burnout Quiz, something like that, right? Yeah. What resources do you have for us that I will make sure they are all linked in the show notes because people are going to be running for these, especially the Burnout Quiz. So you can find my website is Dr. StephanieCawey.com and my Instagram is Dr. Stephanie Cowie, and there you can find links on both to the Burnout Guide so you can help figure out what stage you're in. And then there's also a Bloating quiz. If you're somebody that experiences chronic Bloating and Burnout and Bloat are connected they are. People might see that and be like, oh, she focuses on Burnout and Bloat. What do those have to do?

They actually have a lot to do with each other. They do? Yeah. Mega gut health, hormone health mindset. Those three are what I'm all about.

And that's a wrap! Thank you so much for listening to today's episode. I have one quick favor to ask you before you go. If you love today's episode, I would so appreciate it if you left a review

on whatever podcast platform you are listening to right now. My goal with this podcast is to reach as many people as possible. To spread awareness that anxiety is not this incurable disease. It's not something we just have to live with. It's definitely not just part of your personality. And there are body based imbalances that need to be addressed in order to truly be free from chronic anxiety. With awareness comes action, and the more people this podcast can reach, the less people will struggle with anxiety, and positive reviews are the number one way to help new people discover the show. You are the best. Thank you so much for being here. I appreciate you so, so much.

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