

The Rebel Nutritionist Podcast – Episode 8 – The Epidemic of Disordered Eating

Meryl: Hey everyone. Welcome back to the rebel nutritionist podcast. I am really excited to have one of our amazing coaches on today.

Kirsten who's going to join us and talk about. A topic that has prevalence in society since who knows back when, how far it's dated, but disordered eating behavior is really a huge issue amongst society. I can't even say that it's specific to younger people because we see it in all age groups and it affects men as much as it affects women.

It affects boys as much as it affects young girls. And so, I think this is really a timely, always timely, but particularly important to address. Coming out of the pandemic, getting back into kind of this normalized world and, and helping people maneuver the way they eat and the anxiety around that. So, with that Kirsten, I will let you tell us a little bit about who you are, how you got into this area of work that you are so amazing at, and then we'll take it from there.

Kirsten: Sounds awesome. So, hello everybody. Hi Meryl. Thank you so much for having me on today on 2d on it, to be in the space with you and to share some really useful information that I'm sure that people will enjoy too. Yeah. So just a little background on who I am and where I'm from. So, Kirsten has the name from South Africa.

I've been living in South Florida for six years now. Always really been into health and nutrition, sports movement activity. Growing up was a super active child. Gymnastics was my passion. So did that for many, many years, probably starting at around the age of nine through do like 19 got married, had children exercise through all of that, but obviously attending to the family.

Some of my personal goals got set aside for the for the family needs, I guess. But once my kids were a little bit older, still having those absolute interests, love and passion for what health and wellness looks like. I actually went back to university at a very late stage in life. I was actually 38 at the time.

I got my degree in sports psychology. Prior to actually going to university being the kind of bored housewife that I was with my kids when I was at school that I had to wait too much time on my hands. I decided that I wanted to enter the fitness world and start competing.

So, I did that for approximately four years. I had a personal trainer and actually I had a nutritionist. But in hindsight, thinking back on what he actually taught me was so not what nutrition was all about. It was really based so much more in terms of what bodybuilding nutrition looks like.

Then, then that is so completely different to what I stand for now, these days there the diet is what about absolute restriction really? So yeah, you end up having this amazing physique that everybody, the ones on you about, but really your insides are probably a complete and utter mess.

There's nothing healthy about what that world looks like. And only after three years of competing in that world and stepping out of it. Did I actually take a look back at what I had really and truly done to my body? And I could honestly say my body was hooked through that process. Then I went into university after that experience and I decided to study sport psychology, no surprise, because I think from a psychological standpoint, I was so completely messed up.

I was confused. I had created the disordered eating. I was, if I wasn't starving myself, then I was bingeing. It was just so completely out of control. And I actually did not know. Or have the resources to help myself. So, I was like, let me go and study sports psychology because I love the sport and I need psychological help.

And hopefully that would help, set me at ease a little bit, which had absolutely died. The journey was just phenomenal. I learned so much, but through that process, having been educated a little bit in, just in terms of anatomy and physiology I really didn't feel like I had I had found more information about nutrition.

Shortly after that, I immigrated to the United States and I decided that I wanted to continue my journey, but with the nutrition swing to it. So I'll to some further studying and then obviously connecting with you, Meryl. Here I am today working in the most magnificent environment with the beautiful team of staff and Having Meryl as my mentor, thank God for her. She's taught me so much in terms of what I know today and yeah. Journey, which I've been on for three years, almost three years now with Meryl, I've actually probably helped myself. And in doing so help my clients because I resonate with them on. So, so, so many levels.

So yes, I experienced, the whole, disordered eating thing a little later on in life. So as an, adult, really, I was kind of like in my early forties, but I see it. So frequent in today's society, especially among the youth. they have the social media pressures so that they're getting it all over Instagram.

And if it's not Instagram it's TikTok. And they, and I have the social pressures from their friends and even from their family members to be completely honest, sometimes there's no support in the family. So, there's pressure there in terms of. What I should be, what I should look like, how I should be behaving.

So, I just feel like the youth of today, especially the teenagers to just have so many mixed messages coming in, they actually don't know where to turn to who to ask for help and how to actually work with one of those. it's just confusing for them.,

Meryl: You put that so perfectly because.

I always say we've taken the art or the science or both of eating and made it so complex and so difficult. And then you pile on top these social pressures and you brought up a good point that I also want to address is it is not just from social media. We hear often, so many times especially the girls, the younger girls, because there is that stereotype of what a girl is supposed to write.

And I say in quotes, supposed to look like, and whether, look, I remember my own stuff came from when I, we looked at magazines and models had long skinny legs and I wanted long skinny legs. Like that was in my head, ? And I was not tall. There was no way I was going to look like them. But that was what was beautiful.

Right. That's what people wanted to see. And so, you go after something that is completely unrealistic, so that's that social piece and it's just gotten worse, but, the family piece. That I think has come out that, especially why can't even say mothers, I will say fathers do the same thing. The language of how we talk to our children.

I think for anybody listening, this is so, so important because if we grew up with the story that we need to be thin and look I'm Jewish, we came from. That. Yeah, the Jewish grandmother was always like, oh, you gotta be skinny. You gotta be skinny. You gotta be skinny. And maybe it came from their grandparents.

So where are we living out, the generational ideal it's a problem, right? How many times do we have moms coming in saying, or the daughter has come in and said, oh, well, my mom had put me on a diet from when I was seven or eight. So maybe talk to that a little bit about what you see, because you do such great work, with these younger people who are seeing that.

and then we'll go onto the next question. What

are your thoughts?

Kirsten: That's definitely a relevant story in terms of what the whole family dynamics look like. And what comes to mind when I think about that is kind of like if you're looking at our age group of people. So, we were kind of like growing up in that, era of the 1980s and 1990s, where the mentality was like, don't eat fat and fat in food equals fat on your body.

And it was all the, low carb, low fat, high protein diets. And, so much has changed since then. And in terms of what, like the plate should actually look like and how important it is. I sat in on, in, on that plate. So, it's really just, educating, especially the youth. And then, and in fact, the older generation, my age and the forties in terms of lack of what that actual plate looks like.

And more to that in terms of like the whole role model situation. So yes, parents. They should be mothers, almost certainly role models to their younger children, daughters, and sons. And, often these younger kids feed off that energy. And that is where they're learning the information.

And that's often where the confusion comes in because, the adults out there don't necessarily know what they're doing either. And so, I really just think the kids need and little more education in terms of how to manage that whole situation. So often in our meetings together, we'll do interventions with the parents and kind of tell them to back off a little bit and almost in a nice way, I'll ask them to kind of step aside and really not have that conversation with their children whilst they're being

coached by us.

Because it just creates confusion for the youth, right. And I love working with the kids. It's such a true talent of mine. They come in with so much motivation and interest and enthusiasm that they want to get this right. And they want to learn. So, like, they're like these little spongers and more so than that, I mean, we just developed these beautiful relationships where there's so much bonding and there's so much trust.

So, in the work that I do with them, it's not always just about the nutrition and the exercise, right. I mean, certainly that is such a, huge part of it, but you can educate them on that pretty easily and get them on track with that and, have them understanding it. But more so than that, you, we need to talk about the stress in their lives.

Like what their relationships look like. talking, not just about the exercise and the nutrition piece, which is just such a small part of that, but all the other categories that make up what wellness look like, and that's, talking about their relationships, whether there's.

The relationships with friends and boyfriends, girlfriends' relationships with their parents, grandparents, even we talk about the stress element, which is huge. So, stress is not just a part of, the older group of society, whether they're managing maybe, home stress workspace, like these kids have real stress.

And that's a sad part of what our reality looks like today, but they almost don't know how to organize that. And then of course, how important sleep is, right? It's such an important part of what the wellness picture looks like. So, when it comes to the whole stress piece, for example, a lot of these kids are stressed with work.

There's just so much work being piled on them from a school perspective, they're stressed because they're actually not even sleeping enough like they're going to be super-duper late. They're stressed because they have the social stress as well. Right. And the social media stress, I always feel like they're on their phone.

So, a lot of the time, but then, we actually talked about time management strategies and the idea of like, put your phones down. We, your devices down 30 minutes to like an hour before you go to bed, because you want your buddy to get him to that calm, peaceful state. Right. It's so important for sleep that we.

And our bodies. Are calm. And then again, backing into the sleep thing. it's important that we educate them, like, try not to be eating like two hours before you go to bed. You want your body in a calm rested that state, when you're climbing into bed, not in the digestive States where it's working. these are some of the things that talk about in our sessions and, I helped to put it all into perspective to them because if you think about all of these categories, it seems so overwhelming for them because they're like, Oh my God, we're talking about stress.

And we're talking about sleeping. We're talking about food and we're talking about exercise and it's just, it's so much information. So, we break it down into these smaller chunks. So, every week there's little goals that I'll give to them. So, the goals are super easy. They're

realistic. I don't stretch them beyond what I think that they're capable of, but we'll challenge them most.

certainly. every week we go through the goals, what were the challenges? What were some of your successes? And we, we build on from them in terms of what are the challenges and we work with them a little bit more.

Meryl: And that is true as much as we always talk about, and it is about getting. to the root of where these things come from. It is also about setting up their foundation and it really is no different what their foundation should look like from anybody else's spelling, all of those.

That is right. The myths about, what they should be eating should not be eating. I mean, so it is no different, but I think. When we're talking about disordered eating and the reason, we say disordered eating as opposed to eating disorder is because so many people fall in to the gray zone of that and more in the gray zone.

And then they think, well, wait a minute, but I'm not really anorexic, but I'm not really bulimic doesn't matter. If you don't have a good relationship with food, if you don't have a good relationship with your body and you are either using food in some way or not eating in some way, and then whole-body dysmorphia, that's all lumped into disordered eating behavior.

So, whether you are listening and you are a parent, whether you are listening and, you're, a younger person a teenager, a young adult, Disordered eating is any kind of behavior where you're trying to fit into some kind of semblance of what you think society wants you to look like and something that I want to talk about.

And we've heard about from, especially our college students. Both of the guys the girls is how it is normalized, especially if you're in a sorority or fraternity. I remember hearing one of our clients say, oh, they all the girls went into the bathroom together. Like they ate and they all threw up together.

And that was so disturbing to me that it's normalized. So, can you speak to that, and I love the idea of what you said, right? How we tackle all of these little pieces without overwhelming them, but speak to, some of the psychology.

Because what we do is highly psychological and it's different than with a therapist, right? There's a differentiation there that makes it more about being realistic with these kids and finding what they can do. That's sustainable. So, speak to what we call now, the normalizing of disordered eating and how that is just so dangerous.

And then that other piece of, how do you work with that?

Kirsten: Well, yeah. And it's like you say, this is definitely dangerous point. Especially for a young woman, they're feeling like they're competing with their friends, they're competing with all the images on Instagram and it's kind of like a one, it looks like that.

And then if they're not solving themselves, because they think that that's the right thing to be doing there, then doing that for a while. And then I ended up beading. Then James. So

really what I wanted to tell all the young people out there is that first of all, stop the comparison, like be your own person, be your individual unique being that you are and own your story, right?

Because whatever your story is, it's unique and it's beautiful. And, it encompasses everything that you are. And really also it's about building that self-confidence and self-worth, that is so important and appeal is lacking and especially in the young girls especially when it comes to comparing themselves to their best friends or their idea of what they should be looking like.

We need to get away from all of that. And I feel like if they're able to kind of show vulnerability a little bit. So, there's a lot of that that I talk about as well as vulnerability is not a negative thing. it's been put out there into society is like, vulnerable people on weak, but really it's.

So, the complete opposite of all of that. And, that comes into speaking about some of the things that they're struggling with and then owning that story. Right. And by owning that story. Doesn't shame you in any way. It just tells, of the story of your life and who you are and how you've developed.

And when, backing into that whole own, your own story thing is also teaching them that it's not about perfection. It's okay. Humans are imperfect beings. if you're aiming for that perfection status, that will ultimately kill you, honestly, because perfection is almost unattainable.

And when you're aiming for that, the chances of you actually failing in that achievement is so, so high because you just don't have these realistic goals. So yeah, we need to get away from what that whole perfection thing looks like.

Meryl: Yeah, no, I feel like I, and in theory, right?

Like we all say that the problem is, is how do we create? And this is sort of rhetorical. Cause it has to start from the top. How do we even do that? Right. In terms of, if you're in a sorority and it's, oh, it's all about looks, how do we create a shift in that mentality? And I really feel it is really about these young girls.

Learning how to use their voice. It's almost like

me too movement in the disordered eating world,

right. Someone and saying, what?

This is not helping. This is not normal. and I wish we could do that. I mean, we've had some, young girls who have really. I think through the work that they've done with us, been able to find that voice and be able to set their own boundaries.

Right. We're big on setting your, use your voice. and so they're not able, I guess the next question is, if someone's really having our time right there, they're doing the work with us

and they're coming out of it and they're feeling so much better yet. They're going back into that environment.

And even though we say, try not to go back into that toxic environment, sometimes it's enough. How do we teach them how to use the voice? How do we, some of the strategies that you use, to set the boundaries, because they're like, I didn't know about boundaries until, a couple of years ago.

Kirsten: Yeah.

Meryl: If we can help them. Is speak to some of that? If you can,

Kirsten: and, and so many of these, these youngsters' kind of like a living in this little bubble, I am living. According to what the expectations are. So, it's kind of like breaking that bubble and giving them that confidence to skip forward

and like you said, find their voice. And so often when they actually do that, they often come back to me and say that. initially, how anxiety provoking. It was by like speaking up because when you're the person who's speaking up, you're different. Right. And a lot of them don't want to be different.

They want to be accepted and they want to belong. But so often when they actually put that step forward and they show up in a different way, other people actually kind of liked that because it comes across as well. How brave and how courageous. Right. And that in of itself is a huge boost of confidence for someone.

So, yes. There's fear in doing that, but what is fear, right? Really is just false evidence appearing real. So, it's that whole perception of what could be, but really, it's the story in our head. And so, yeah, just take that one little step forward and speak up and you'll actually be surprised at the reactions from the people around you often, especially when it's like close friends, the interaction is really, really positive.

Because friends are saying that, wow, you're seeing it from a different perspective. Like you're telling us your opinions. Let's talk more. We like what we're hearing.

Meryl: But I feel like that's how we create the movements. Yeah. Because yes, your friends, they don't want to be following along anymore, but we need that one person, all you need is one person to raise their voice and have the courage like you say, and be brave because it's amazing.

That all their friends are probably thinking the same thing and they're feeling they all you're feeling anxious. Right. And all of a sudden, you're brave enough to say it. I mean, it's kind of like, let them be rebellious right. To the real, let them be rebellious because it wasn't until I found my voice, that my life changed and it wasn't until I embraced the rebel.

So, I've always been the rebel, but I was afraid it was like the backlash. So, I feel like, let them embrace the

Kirsten: rebel. Yep. Definitely. I love that whole idea because yeah, there's not enough of us in the world. so, we can all use the support and encouragement and motivation and yeah. Then also work together and create this movement.

No, but something else I actually wanted to Bring to the table here is just in terms of like, I hear it all the time. These are cravings and the emotional eating thing that comes up all the time. And so much that, of that emotional, eating is related to the stress. So, when we have stress in our lives, that's kind of like, that rain says, like I need each sugar.

But it's interesting because I've seen it time and time again. And I feel like. When we're talking about cravings, it's often related to. insufficiencies in the diet. Right? So, like, that's why often I talk about what that plate looks like, because that macronutrient balance is so, so, so important.

You don't need to be skipping the carbs, carbs are important. Like we need them in our lives. We need them for energy. they're grateful for gut function as well. So don't think that by ditching the carbs is, it's going to help you be, if you're on this low carb diet. So definitely not necessarily.

So, try to ensure that. Each of your meals, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You're going to have half the plate, the vegetables. You're going to have some, a quarter plate of protein and there a quarter plate of carbohydrates. So, if you start your meal by right, it's not the vegetables, that's what we want to see.

And then those root vegetables. So, bring that in and make sure that each meal has that because just through the learning and some of the research that I've done it's so important that we have all those macronutrients on the plate because kind of at the end of the day, if your body can do this, Self-check-in and realize that that it's kind of missing something often.

What the brain screams is sugar. And then not go with my thoughts. Like, why am I craving sugar? Like I eat healthy all day, but like eating fats and what are you eating carbs? So, like, everyone's always paying attention to is their protein on the plates and maybe they're doubling, but like they're not really paying attention to the carbohydrates and the fats.

Like we don't need to be excluding that. So, at the end of the day, when your body does the self check-in and like something's missing. The body's like, hey, I need sugar. So that's so often where I find a lot of the sugar cravings come in. And when I teach my clients to include all of these great macronutrients in their diet, nine times out of 10, they're like, oh my God, my sugar cravings gone.

Meryl: So I, and I love that because it's a great point because I, have the conversation all the time. Like it is not about, is this individual food good? Is that individual food, right? Our diet needs to be made up of the collective. Of what we get from a nutritionally supportive standpoint.

Oh, wait, you eat pizza, you eat ice cream. Not often. Right? Because I don't like how I feel, but we have got to go back to yes. What is on the plate? And it goes back to. Teaching people and educating people giving them the strategies of how do I create my food

foundation, right. It comes back to what is my own unique makeup and yes, with these, people, adults, young adults, whomever they are with these disordered behaviors.

They're eliminating so much that it's completely affecting their brains, right. and their gut. We are all one being so. Yeah. There's so much to talk about in that, but really to help them rebalance both the mind, both the emotional piece and just giving them that support in that way.

And, and you do that so beautifully and. I love all the points. I mean, this was a great conversation, it's a conversation that could continue on and on and on, because, I think there's just a lot of shame around it for these people. And there's a lot of fear and they're afraid to speak up.

And so, if we can encourage them to do that and seek out the right help and let them know they are not alone. And that it's not just, oh, I have to run to therapy and I need to see a therapist. No, you need to learn how to balance all of it. Like you said, mind, body, the spirit, the soul, all of it, the nutrition, the sleep we can't, we can't leave any of those stones unturned.

Any last thoughts that you want to leave us with?

Kirsten: Yeah, actually, there is so something that I speak with my clients all the time, especially the young girls who are kind of like get frustrated off the two weeks when they're not seeing any changes. I'll always try to remind them that this is a process and to believe in the process.

And also, what I really tell them is like, you need to give yourself one whole year. So, give yourself a whole year to change these behaviors and to change them slowly, right? They don't have to all happen in simultaneously, it's taking one little step forward at a time. And when you look at it in the collective, after a year, you'll look back and be so accomplished that would have these amazing results that you've achieved in one year.

So, in one year, in the big scheme of things, it's such a short amount of time. But if you could set aside that year to get your health and nutrition and check, you will be so pleasantly surprised after that year's journey in terms of what you have accomplished. But in my opinion, it takes a whole year to get all of those things together and to get you on the track because, changing behaviors is hard, especially when you've been doing it for like your entire life.

We're not going to change overnight. So, it's believing in the process being patient with yourself and yeah, setting that time aside in terms of I'm giving myself one whole year to get my life in check and you will probably. Which that goal I have absolutely no doubt, but there is no quick fix.

Meryl: Right. And

I love that because I think what people really need to hear is that because we think it's supposed to happen yesterday, right. I mean, with TikTok and with Instagram, all these

influencers, especially the young ones. That Ooh, you can accomplish this. Oh, just take some chlorophyll. Right? That seems

perfect. Right. Or whatever, go on this. Go or go do this workout for two weeks and you're going to be in the best shape of your life. Like not real. Right. And I love that. That it's a process though. I am going to leave on that because I want people to really hear that. And really processed that because we talk about that all the time and changing behaviors is really about teeny, teeny, teeny tiny changes.

And, and, and that's where the success lies and the teeny tiny changes. I'm practicing them every single day. So, with that, I love, love, love this conversation. Thank you for being on. Thank you for being the amazing, amazing coach that you are. you learn from me. I learned from you. I think that's what makes our team just so wonderful is just the sharing and the empathy and the energy.

Thank you for all that, that you bring. And until next time,

Kirsten: Thank you for having me. Right. All right.

Meryl: Thank you so much. We encourage you to share this with other people because we know this message needs to get out there until the next time. This is the rebel nutritionist signing off, make it a healthy day.