

# Episode 10: How to listen to your body to achieve your fitness goals

**Meryl:** Hey, everyone. Welcome back to the rebel nutritionist podcast. So happy to have you here. So today I want to follow up our conversation or my conversation with Matt Pack from our last podcast, because I think there's some really useful tips and tricks and just tidbits of information that we can fill in from what we both talked about. And I really loved our conversation and I've gotten such great feedback from all of you. So, thank you for that. I love the dialogue because Matt speaks as passionately about fitness as I do about nutrition and we really both weave in and out of both of those, right. I can speak a lot about fitness a long time ago. I was a certified personal trainer. Not all of you know that, but yes, when I lived in New Jersey before I was married, before I had kids, I was still in the nutrition industry, but really decided to take my passion for fitness into somewhat of a career. And did that for a period of time. So, for me, I have lived and breathed the nutrition and fitness dialogue for as long as I can remember.

So today I want to talk a little bit about my take on the holistic side to fitness and the combination of understanding that just as a nutrition, there is no one size fits all approach to fitness.

And I really use myself as an example because I often do. And in spite of what people think I really did struggle and I struggled for a long time. With how I looked, how I wanted to look and I share it in my YouTube story. I shared on the podcasts because I know that sharing my story is applicable to so many of you and it has helped so many of you in a way that, that it resonates.

So, I'm thrilled about that, but I often have people come up to me and say, oh, I want to look like you or want arms like you, which is hysterically funny because I always am like, I want arms, like somebody else or legs, like somebody else. And it's taken me a really long time to feel comfortable in my body.

And it's taken me this long because I have realized that loving who I am on the outside and what I look like on the outside was more related to loving who I was on the inside. And so, we all look different, right? We all come in different shapes and sizes. I will never look like the fitness guru, Tracy Anderson, regardless of how much I do her exercises, because that's not how my body is built.

So, I have learned how to eat and how to exercise that suits my body type. I joke in one of the first YouTube videos that I had ever done, when I was younger and going through some of my own weight struggles. I used to take pictures of legs like not even the whole body.

I would literally go through a magazine and tape up pictures of legs and of women's legs and, and stick them on my bulletin board. And that was my goal, you know, but I

am 5'4". There's no way I'm ever going to have legs of a model who is 5'9". Right? Tell that to a 15, 16-year-old, who is.

Just looking at these magazines in the image of what is beautiful. So, I've spoken a lot about the messaging out there and I don't want to digress, but part of the message that we get as both men and women from social media is so far from the reality of what we can actually achieve, that this is why we're seeing so many women and men struggle with disordered eating behaviors and an unhealthy fitness habits because we're really striving to achieve something that is just unattainable.

So that brings me back to the fact that I have learned to embrace my muscles. And I've learned how to love the inner sexy that comes as a result of working like that and realizing that yes, I will always have a more muscular body than a long lean body. And as lean as I can be it's still going to be muscular.

And like I said, I have really learned to embrace that. So, my response to people, when they say they want to look like me is why don't you come work out with me? And I'm half joking and I'm half not right. Because why do I give them this response? Because in order to get to where I'm at or where you want to be, it takes commitment and it takes consistency.

And I talk about these things all the time when it comes to nutrition, really, it's not just nutrition, its overall health, right? If you want to be as healthy as you can be, if you want to achieve wellness and longevity, you need to commit to yourself. You need to commit to those habits and you have to be consistent about them.

So, if we want to have an effect on what our physique looks like, or if we want to have an impact on improving our fitness level, then we have to approach our fitness in as much of a holistic manner as we do with our nutrition or other lifestyle factors. Right? Meaning that there has to be a well-rounded approach in the way in which we do things.

And really most importantly, it has got to be sustainable. And has got to be sustainable for us and no one else. What are some of the questions that we need to be asking ourselves? And let's clarify some things before we can really even understand what an exercise regimen or let's call it a movement regimen should look like, because I think that's a really important topic.

And Matt had, had emphasized that and, we had discussed that in the podcast. Because we can commit or often commit to an exercise routine that takes an hour, right? Typically, we're working out for an hour. So, if you think about it out of a 24-hour day, or if you think about the waking hours, so somewhere around 16 hours of our waking lives on a, daily basis and we move for only one of those hours.

I mean, it sounds crazy. So, what are we doing with the rest of those hours? I mean, that becomes a metabolic nightmare. So, what do I mean by that? Right. All of those formulas that we use for basal metabolic rate or resting metabolic rate, they were based on data that first of all is so outdated. I think the most recent BMR was updated in 1994.

And I don't even think that it really accounts appropriately for how little we move. So that means that most of these equations overestimate how much we really need calorically on a daily basis. Plus, if you have listened to me ever before, you know that I don't love those equations anyway, because just to count calories, first of all is unrealistic, right?

We're not going to walk around the rest of our lives, counting calories and not all calories are created equal and how we burn calories is not created equal. And if we have different muscle to fat ratio in our bodies, that will also matter. We need to really stop paying attention to those equations.

Maybe in certain circumstances, I won't say never, but in certain circumstances, but for the majority of us, we have to start paying attention to what our bodies are telling us and how we feel because we need to stop living by those numbers. I always say calorie counting is accurate. If you live in a vacuum and last I checked, none of us do so what my preference would be is listen to your bodies.

I always say our bodies talk to us. We have got to learn to listen. So, part of managing our weight, involves moving our body more. What does that mean? That means small amounts of movements and it should be throughout the day. So oftentimes I will tell my clients, if you are working from home and you are sitting in a chair most of the day, every hour, get up and walk around for five minutes, like literally get up, move for five minutes.

That will make a difference. The weather is nice in most places in the country right now, after dinner, when it's still light or after lunch or after any meal, get up and move, go take a stroll, go walk the dog. That movement matters. If you are taking your children to sports activities right there on the soccer field, instead of sitting and watching them go find a buddy to walk around with.

It doesn't have to be an organized fitness activity for you to get benefit out of movement. Right? There's a reason we say park the car far away. When you're going shopping, you can get more movement in, right. Take the steps. I mean, there's lots of little tricks that we can do just to move more because metabolically, that does matter.

So, we really need to stop with that all or nothing approach. Right. And keep our bodies moving. That should be the goal. Our bodies were designed to move and our metabolism was predicated on the need for fuel because we moved. If we are not moving and we are eating the way we think we're supposed to be eating, this is where weight becomes a problem.

So really think about where you can get more activity in during the day, even small spurts of activity or movement. I don't care of your dance, around your room, where you're, you know, doing your meetings, at least you're moving. So, the next question, I wanted to address was how long do I need to work out for? So, part of that is what are you trying to accomplish, right? But again, goes back to whatever it is. It should be realistic. So that whatever time you have to devote to your exercise will be consistent. Maybe some weeks you'll work out more. Some weeks you'll work out less.

How does it balance out in the long run? And so, one thing I often hear people say is, oh, well, I'm going to do, you know, two or three classes in a gym back-to-back, right. They're doing a fitness class, a cardio class, a weights class. So, some people do these back-to-back classes and think that it is to their benefit. So, what I want you to know is don't think just because you do these back-to-back classes that you're going to look differently, it also depends on the effort that you put in what your body type is and the type of exercise you're doing.

Remember. I said, I struggled and struggled and I was cardio queen. I'd run on a treadmill for 45 minutes and then I'd teach in aerobics class. And then I do something else. And I was heavier than I ever was before when I was doing that kind of workout. Why? Because A, I was running my body into the ground and my stress hormones were like through the roof and B, I was hungry and I was eating more than I was really probably burning. And it just was not the right kind of exercise for my body, but I kept thinking if I did more, if I did more, if I did more, then I would see better results. And sometimes less is more. And that really is as cliché as that sounds, it truly is and candy.

So, people always say to me, oh, what do you spend hours in the gym to look the way you do? No, I actually spend about an hour. Some days, a little less, some days, a little more in the gym. I do resistance at least four times a week, which means I'm using weights. I always make sure I have a recovery day. It could be an active recovery day where I'm walking.

It could be a recovery day of yoga. I have learned that I have got to do yoga. If I'm going to balance. Not just my body, but my mind as well. So, we really need to think about where the balance comes in because sometimes the higher, the intensity, the more of a stress it becomes, and it ultimately backfires.

So, definitely need to consider that also how many times a week, like I had just alluded to, you need to find a really realistic timeframe don't over commit and then set yourself up for failure because of time constraints or scheduling constraints, start small and start realistic based on what you can commit to.

Because the more consistent you will be over time, the less it matters. How many days a week you're actually working out. Right. If you're traveling and you're saying, oh, well, I'm going to do four days a week, but then one week you can't because you're traveling, don't beat yourself up. Right. Just get back on the wagon.

The nice thing is, is the body has muscle memory. And so, you can be off for a few days and then get right back at it. The other question I really want you to consider, because I think this is important and people don't address this is am I working hard enough? And what does that mean? Okay. If you're doing three classes back-to-back, that doesn't always mean you're working hard at each of those classes, you could spend an hour.

And work out harder than you've done in three separate classes. And so, we really need to be honest with ourselves. You know, when I'm in the gym, I am focused. I'm not just focused on the weight that I'm lifting. I am focused on body alignment.

People always say to me, oh, do you do AB exercises? You know, your abs are so ripped and whatever, I will tell you, I do zero dedicated AB exercises.

Why? Because most of what I do is balancing and core. And so, if you are focused on your core and you are focused on the proper body alignment, you don't need to be targeting individual muscles. So, I will watch people in the gym and sometimes they're even working out with a trainer and they're literally just going through the motions.

Right. It is not enough to just show up. You need to focus on the exercise. You need to pay attention to body alignment. You need to make sure that you are challenging yourself. That is the only way we see progress. Otherwise, quite frankly, it's a waste of time. So oftentimes you can go to these classes and I'm not knocking the classes.

Look, I think it's a great way for people to socialize. I think it's a great way to keep consistent because you have other like-minded people who are supporting you and they do act as a support system. But when you are in these classes, don't just go through the motions. Don't use the same three-pound weights that you've always used.

Challenge yourself and go up to five pounds, challenge yourself, go up to eight pounds, right. If we are just going through the motions, then we're going and doing endurance muscle work and endurance muscle work does not change the shape of our body. So, if you want progress make sure that you are putting in the effort.

And then of course, the last question that I want to address is how do I feel myself for exercise? And of course, this is a big one. People ask all the time; how should I eat for how I'm exercising? So again, this is as individual as creating an exercise routine for yourself. Because for me personally, I cannot eat before I go work out.

I just don't feel well with a full stomach, even if it's a banana. Okay. But if you're that person who needs to fuel yourself and needs to put something in your body, then do that, and it doesn't need to be a big meal. It could be a piece of fruit. It could be a yogurt. Remember full fat, plain Greek yogurt people, not these flavored yogurts with all the sugar and not non-fat right.

Why non-fat because. You don't want to eat non-fat yogurt, whole other reason, but you want all the fat because it is satiating and it has all the fat-soluble vitamins that you need. So, stay away from the nonfat Greek yogurts. Anyway, that's a conversation for another day, but if you feel like you need to eat something, maybe even an egg, if you need something a little more sustainable,

Happy to give you other suggestions if you guys want, want to reach out to me, but it is still not a one size fits all approach because not everybody goes into exercise, feeling the same or needing the same kind of fuel. So, I do much better with having my coffee in the morning, big glass of lemon water, and then I am out the door.

The other thing is, is find the best time of day that resonates with you because and this is not necessarily related to the eating part, but people often say, well, when

should I work out? And really, it's when you're going to be consistent. So, for me, first thing in the morning, go on an empty stomach.

And then I come back and fuel myself. So, again, small bite before you work out. So, there isn't so much in your stomach because if your body is busy, digesting than it is not building muscle, right? You cannot focus on muscle building while your body is trying to digest. So, the other misconception is the protein myth.

Everybody thinks we need so, so much protein. Okay. If you are. An average woman working out. And that's what I would consider myself. Right? Average time working out. I'm not spending two, three hours in the gym. I'm not competing for some competition. Then really, we only need about 0.8 grams per kilogram of body, weight of protein.

Right? So, if you are 150 pounds, that means you are about 68 kilograms. Cause you divide your pounds by 2.2 to get kilograms. So, a 68-kilogram woman. Would need to consume about 54 grams of protein a day, each one ounce of protein, right? Meat, chicken fish poultry has about seven grams of protein per ounce, which means in a four-ounce piece of some kind of flesh.

It has about 28 grams of protein, right? So, you're going to only need about eight ounces a day to meet those needs. Sometimes it's more, or sometimes it can be less, but truth be told we only need a small amount to keep our bodies going. So don't over consume protein because then it will get metabolized and stored as fat.

The other myth about muscle. I want to reiterate the importance of resistance training, especially for women. I think men have less of an issue. They are more comfortable in a gym. Again, I am generalizing. Not all men are, but typically most of the women I talked to are a little more intimidated about going into a gym than most of the guys.

So, I'm not trying to stereotype, but that's what I've seen. So, trust me, I pushed many of my male clients to do a little more cardio, a little less resistance or vice versa. So, I'm just kind of giving you the typical. But you definitely need a mix of both, right? We need a mix of that cardiovascular piece because we want to improve lung function, keep heart function healthy, but getting women to lift weights is often a nightmare, right?

Because we're intimidated or maybe they don't know how to do it and are uncomfortable being in a gym. And of course, most women think that they are going to get big. So, I want to clear this up once and for all, although I'm sure I'll talk about it more. If you are a woman, you do not have enough testosterone to get big.

And there is a difference between looking defined and looking big, right? Muscle looks long and lean. Whereas if you just have body fat, it is flabby, right? We all know that so muscles will look different, but it gives a long lean sexy look, as opposed to just not having any muscle and, and then it being flabby.

So again, depending upon your body type and depending upon how often you are in the gym or in your garage or wherever it is that you lift weights that will determine ultimately how much muscle you put on what your physique looks like.

But I really want women to get more comfortable lifting the weights. Not only because it makes us look so much better, but it is so important. As we age for bone health, we have got to recognize that bone health is just as dependent. On how much muscle we have as how much calcium you're putting into your body.

Actually, it's less important about the calcium and more important about muscle, because it's really about how do you hold your body. In space and in time. So, I always give the example, if your muscles and your tendons and your ligaments and your joints cannot support your structure, then that's where instability comes from.

So, we don't always fall because we get older and break things and break bones. We fall because we are unable to support our body structure in space and time. So, when you're young, you step off of a curb, you don't think about it, right? Your muscles keep you strong and straighten. You don't have a problem.

As we get older, our gates change our muscles change. And if you don't have the core support to step off of a curb, as crazy as that sounds, and as silly as that sounds, that's really the difference between the make or break when you're going to fall, how do you withstand the fall? How do you hold yourself?

So having strong muscles, having strong ligaments, having a solid core and a solid back is so important for longevity. And that's going to be something that I continue to talk about. So, if you are uncomfortable lifting weights, if you don't know how to do it, I would suggest in listing the advice and expertise of a trainer.

It doesn't have to be three times a week forever and ever, maybe just find a trainer who is capable and can put you on a program for a month and then go back a month later. And redo the exercises.

There's some really good websites that have YouTube videos about how to do it properly.

And I will try to find those links so that we can connect those here. We have a few different ones that we do recommend. But I do think it is a good idea to have someone educate you about what you are doing, why you are doing and how to do it properly. It is not enough to just go in, go around the machines and say, I have worked out.

Right. Don't blindly follow someone around a gym, be proactive with your workouts, pay attention to the body parts you are working in how you're working them, because that is what is going to help you improve and help you change what your body looks like. So, here's the fact weight training builds muscle and muscle burns more calories than fat.

As a matter of fact, it burns up to three times more calories, according to some research estimates. Okay. So, muscles are our fat burning machine. And so, the more muscle you have, ultimately, the more calories you burn that is metabolic

efficiency. Right. So, and it doesn't end after you leave the gym, your body actually still burns those calories from 24 to 48 hours as it repairs the tissue to stressed muscle tissue.

Right? So, strength training is the only way. And one of the best ways to do that. Right. With weight training, you are revving up your calorie burn and you're boosting your metabolism possibly up to 5%, which I think is pretty significant for most of us. So, the net net here is don't go in to your fitness. A routine with lofty unattainable goals, be realistic, understand that it takes time for the body to change. There's all these challenges out there.

There have been. Right. I know my kids are embarking on some crazy challenge that has just come about and I looked at them and I said, well, you're going to do this crazy workout for 75 days. And you are going to eat in this unrealistic way. So of course, you're going to lose weight. Of course, you're going to change your body, but what happens after the 75 days, if you don't adopt some of those habits and make them consistent habits and really practice those things over time, then what was that worth to you?

It was just 75 days of really kicking your own ass in a way that is not sustainable. So. What I really want to leave you with is the consistency, because here's the thing being consistent, even if it takes you months and months to achieve what you want, those habits will then be ingrained in you and you are still going ultimately in the right direction.

And so. Success is not defined by the number on the scale. Remember that I say that all the time, success is not defined by the number on the scale, but how consistently you can practice these healthy habits. And with that, I'm going to leave you for today. Wishing you all well, make it a healthy day and look forward to seeing you next time.