

Episode 13: Diet Fad - Fix or Fail?

Meryl: Hey everyone. Welcome back to the rebel nutritionist podcast. I am so thrilled today to have my friend, Howie Kra on from the, HowieDoIt Podcast. A podcast all about resilience. And so, Howie went from wall street to being a serial entrepreneur, to starting a podcast, all about resilience. And he has been an endurance athlete and marathon runner who has overcome all the odds or overcame against all the odds an accident when he was young and he was told he would never walk again. So, kudos to you, big time, marathon runner and athlete. And we'll get into that in your story in a little bit. But what we're going to talk about today is his front row seat into the diet world. And educate us a little bit about.

What caused him to turn and pivot and prompt him to become a health coach? So welcome Howie.

Howie: Thank you so much for having me here. I'm excited and I absolutely love the topic we'll be talking about today.

Meryl: Same here. Because you really have an amazing story for those of you that don't know Howie or his story. I encourage you to go listen to his podcast, the, Howie do in it podcast and listen to a little bit of his story. Cause it truly is amazing.

Howie: Thank you, Meryl. Thank you so much. Howie Doing it was really born when I relocated here a couple of years ago from New York and Washington DC. And because I've been through so many different things in my life, you climb a mountain, you get knocked down, you climb a mountain, you learn to be resilient.

And probably the biggest moment in my life to learn about resiliency was when I was a young teenager, I was involved in a bad accident, ended up on my back in the hospital and told that there's a good chance. I wouldn't walk again. So, I'm not here today to tell that whole story, but I overcame that.

Ultimately learned how to walk again against all odds, then learned how to jog, run compete over a number of decades in marathons and triathlons. And when I started to do that, which was in my latter twenties, I decided that. I would eat better that I would be healthier we all want to be happier wealthier, and healthier so I decided a long time ago that food and what I put into my body.

Or if somebody once told me it's a temple and that doesn't matter if it's a church or synagogue or temple, but that treat your body the way that you want it to be treated. And I started to see food differently and over the decades, it's funny. Lot of the things that we thought were healthy back then, are not anymore.

So, we constantly have to learn retrain ourselves to the point that we are doing the right things for our bodies. And if you want me to go into how the health coaching came about.

Meryl: Yeah. I'd love to hear that because that's, that's our topic today, right? I mean, the scoop on some of the fad diets and Gimmicky kinds of things that are out there.

And I think you've had

some experience with that. So yeah,

Howie: my experience and what I can tell you, because I am a wall street guy and I'm a numbers guy, is that, I don't have the facts, but this is what I've been told that the diet industry not talking about the health industry now, the diet industry is somewhere about a \$90 billion industry.

With a 90% fail rate. Let me say that again. \$90 billion are spent a year. And 90% of that, that's almost \$80 billion is going to waste. So, a lot of money is made a lot of emotions, a lot of different programs, a lot of advertising we're being inundated with. Quick fix. And when we look at the society that we live in today, when you get a text, you want it answered that apple was smart enough to put those little dots there, to let you know you're getting answered and people sit there and they send the text and they're waiting for the dots.

You send an email, you think that somebody you know, we're all guilty. We want instant gratification who doesn't want that. There are people that believe and coming from the world of wall street, great things happen over long periods of time. You know, you can feel good in the short-term moment. But building a foundation that's solid with great habits and a commitment win every time.

So present day, I was doing my speaking, building my brand and HowieDoinIt. Here in south Florida doing a bunch of traveling, actually in February of 2020, I was in two countries. I got to speak in Mexico and Columbia, and then I traveled, I lost count. It was at least 10 states. It was fun. My message was always about resilience.

And then the pandemic happened and I had to pivot. Because no one was traveling. There weren't any conventions or conferences and nobody to speak to. And everybody right away said, jump on zoom. You'll figure out a way to get. Classes and you'll put it up there and I'm thinking. Listen, Tony Robbins has a great message and he's given the content away for free during the pandemic.

Not that I'm not good, but you know, there's Tony Robbins and HowieDoinIt? So, I had to pivot and a family member had introduced me to a company about five years ago and they struggle with weight loss. And they found the program that finally worked. And I actually went to their convention and I watched these amazing people, tell amazing stories about their journey and their loss.

And then I watched these other amazing people talk about how much money they make. It was pretty good, but it wasn't for me. I never was a, someone who wanted to get into network marketing and I don't think it's bad because it's just a different way to sell things. And Tupperware is not a bad company.

It's just a different channel or Mary Kay cosmetics or Avon. That's also multi-level in network marketing. So, I was really in the pandemic, looking for something to do. And through social media, I started watching because I was doing at that time a daily video every day. And I was watching someone else do a daily video who was phenomenal and his values were in line.

So, I reached out and joined in on a bunch of Zooms. Learn more about the product, the company. And I'm like, I could easily do this. I do a, HowieDoinIt every day, I have an audience and I care about health. And here I am, I probably was carrying 10 pounds more than I wanted to carry. Even though I'm still running and doing my exercise.

It gets harder to lose weight as we age. Right. So, I'm like, you know what, what's my risk. I'm at home. There's a pandemic. What's the cost? I'll try anything for 30 days. Right?

Meryl: Absolutely.

Howie: So, I signed up, I went on the program and the thing that I loved about it was that it was goof proof. So, during a pandemic.

Tell a guy like me eat this five times a day and make one of these and watch your waistline go down.

Meryl: So, there's your instant gratification?

Howie: Instant gratification. The 10 pounds came off so fast. So, what do I say? Let's go for 20. I didn't even need to lose 20, but there I was down 20 pounds. So, I got involved and I became a health coach.

And during that journey of being a health coach, I learned a lot about people, right? Because you gotta want to do it. What you were doing here at the Brandwein Institute for Nutrition and Wellness, you're dealing with health, you're dealing in getting to the root of the problem. There. We care about the scale.

Right. And I had to convince people not to get on the scale three times a day, forget once where they recommended one time a week. But in this world that we live in myself included. I want to know how I'm doing on my program every day. Yeah. Wake up. I got to weigh myself the same way without clothes, without going and having a cup of coffee cause you wanted results and you could get results.

So, I was excited being on social media, having a following, having a podcast, you could see there was a transformation. So, I had others follow along, but they didn't have the discipline. They didn't have an accountability partner and they just wanted a quick fix and there's education that goes with what you eat.

If I'm eating what you're telling me to eat, or I'm eating one of these quick fix diets, there's an education behind it because if you're just there to lose the weight, it's probably not going to stick. You need to know why you're doing what you're doing, why you eating, what you're doing, how to hydrate yourself, how much sleep to get.

Meryl: Right. But most people in that type of mindset or at least if they are in this sort of quick fix mindset are not looking at education. They just want to say they just like, give me the food. Right or, or is that wrong? I don't know. We're on the other side of that.

Howie: So, I would say that a lot of people didn't even want the books that came with what we called it fueling.

Right. They didn't want the books. They didn't want to go on zooms. They just wanted to give me follow instant gratification. There were a few that wanted to embrace the program, read the books. Go on zooms, find accountability partners. And I guess maybe that's the 10%, right? Because if there's 90% that are failing at 10% work, we didn't own a hundred percent of the 10%.

Right. We had our own share. And for me, who was working it. The amount of people that started and stopped and didn't follow even for a week. Like how could you sign up for something paid for it, make a commitment and can't even do it. So. I always say, how bad do you want it?

Meryl: Well, right. And there's the, how bad do you want it?

But I always ask, and we ask here, what is your why? And if weight loss is your why, then that's the wrong answer. Because weight loss is not the why weight loss is a result of the why, but really you got to go deeper, right? Why do you want it?

Howie: There's so much failure because a lot of times, even during a pandemic, even though there weren't weddings, somebody would say, we're going to have a small wedding and I need to get into my dress, or I need to get into my tuxedo.

I got to lose 35 pounds and I have two months to do it. Can you help? So those people, I always said. If somebody came to me and said, I want to lose 30 pounds, 35 pounds two, three months. And they went on the program and they follow it. The night after the event where they got back into that tuxedo and they're in the kitchen and they're having Jackson's Rocky Road, ice cream, right.

Nothing changed. They didn't any habits. You know, I, one of my podcasts, Dr. Tamsin Astor, she has a PhD and she's a habit scientist. And I think it's, she said it's around 66 days to create a new habit. So. If somebody goes into these things, so the quick fix, and they think they could do it in 60 or 90 days, it's not going to stick.

You need to develop real long-term healthy habits. So, for myself, we come out of the pandemic and I'm back in the real world during the pandemic. I actually cooked I know that you probably would find that hard to believe, but I was blessed that my daughter stayed with me and we bonded over, cooking

Meryl: right? Like so many people did over the pandemic, but it was, there was a side to that.

Howie: It was amazing. I'm missing that now. And so, once you start going out, I always said, what makes their roasted chicken. Better than mine and, they used three ingredients that I stayed away from butter, oil, and salt. Maybe they didn't put it in their roasted chicken, but they put it in everything else.

And so, you don't know what you're eating when you eat out. So, if you were disciplined, you really have to ask the waiter or waitress to bring your food the way you want it. Not the

way they make it. And some people feel uncomfortable doing that. And some people say, well, I was good. The rest of the day.

What's the difference? Rationalization is incredible. I, I always came back to 90% of the people who go in for weight loss. Aren't going in for health gains. Some are, but really one of the things that's driving me to working with you here is that I take a couple of prescription pills. I, I don't want to take them and I don't even know why I take them

so, I'm having you look at all my blood work and we could look because I know that I am healthy. I could be healthier, but do I need these pills and why they're the same amount of prescription for a few years now? Shouldn't they be tweaked or changed? Right. And I have to tell you with healthcare, I spent the last.

Twenty-five years in the Washington DC Bethesda, Maryland area. I had phenomenal healthcare. I had great doctors' relationships that were long, when I went for a physical, it was a physical, I moved here. I'm trying to get new doctors. The physical that I recently took was a joke. What you have me doing is I want to say a thousand, it's so much more in depth than what you get from just a doctor.

That's on your plan. It gives you your only physical,

Meryl: well, look, my, the conversation that I always have with people is really, we don't have a healthcare system. We have a disease management system and it goes back to why are you on medications? And I've often spoken about the fact that we're put on medications, but it doesn't fix the problem.

Right. It just band-aids a symptom. So, if you were on a high blood pressure pill, it doesn't make the high blood pressure go away regulates blood pressure, but it's not getting to the root. Of where your blood pressure issues coming from in the first place, or a statin for cholesterol that everybody seems to be on.

, it's not just cholesterol. It is. If we're not looking at the other fats in the blood and the other lipids. Right, and all of those kinds of things, and we're not looking underneath the hood, then you're really just, band-aiding a symptom and that doesn't make us healthy.

Howie: No, it just keeps you from your cholesterol running high, which could lead to heart disease.

If you're on a Statin one, it'd be great to not be on the statin and know what's better to put into your system to not elevate your cholesterol.

Meryl: Absolutely. And people don't realize people say, well, why does it matter that I'm on a blood pressure pill? Or why does it matter that well, right. But the fact is, is all of these medications have side effects, right?

And you may not be feeling the side effects. But at some point, down the road, they certainly have side effects. So

Howie: look what happened to my hair, or should I say lack of it? Is that a side effect?

Meryl: I don't know that that's a side effect of any of your medications, but so take us back to, you said you became a coach, right.

But you had no training, this is a bone of contention that I have because there's people like you and you're brilliant. So, I'm not taking that away from you, but who have no expertise, let's say. And real training in terms of what health coaching is. Right? So, you're labeled a coach, but you have no, let's say credentials in terms of what, what does that substantiate?

Right. I want my coach. So, you're basically a cheerleader.

Howie: So, you are required to take an exam. There is a book and they are aligned with a name brand university. You know, to, to go out and get your insurance license or your brokerage license. It's, it's a grind. Right?

Meryl: Listen, I spent years and tons of money on my nutrition license.

Right. I mean, and then there's people who read a book and say, oh, I'm a nutritionist. So, yeah.

Howie: So, so I can only imagine someone in your shoes. Looking at someone in my shoes and say, you're a what? Now again, it lended some credibility. But it really came down to selling. Right. Right.

Meryl: Well, and that's the difference and I want people to understand that again, it's, it's really, what is the marketing that's out there.

Right. So, when we see coaches right out in social media, oh, I'm a coach for this, or I'm a life coach. And I'm not dismissing that people haven't worked hard at it. Right. Because they have. But at, at, at if they've gone and done the work and done the credentialing, but I think we have to be very careful because there are people who, who misrepresent what they're really credentialed for and they overstep the boundary of what they should be doing.

And that can be, dangerous.

Howie: Well, I think you find that in any industry, right. Any industry is going to have. People who are going to tout themselves as something more than what they are. I think really in this world, whether it's companies like Weight Watchers or neutral systems, and I don't want to go down the whole list of them, but there are coaches there, but what does that really mean?

It means they're experienced, they know the program, hopefully, but most importantly, that they've lost weight because imagine I always said that. If I go to a cardiologist for a stress test and I walk in the smell, some cigarettes and weighs 325 pounds. And I see some junk food on his desk.

Is that the guy that I want to be my cardiologist, but they're all cardiologists like that blows my mind. So, I think that in these companies, it helps to be in shape. It helps to have great

before and after. And I think there's a big difference between I want to get on top of my health. I want to get on top of my meds.

I want to know the root problems versus I just got to lose some weight.

Meryl: that is my mantra all day. Because I always say, if it's not realistic and it's not sustainable, then the 35 pounds that you've lost, or however many pounds 35, it could be 135, whatever it is,

whoever right. Specifically in your case, but, but when people lose weight with the idea of it is just about weight and it's not realistic, that the habits that are forming are really realistic, it's sustainable because you're eating boxed foods or you're eating chemicals foods, or you're not even accountable to what you're

making.

Howie: Well, what I can tell you too. And I had the weight loss success. Then as we came out of the pandemic and like I said, I started to live a more normal life. I found it really hard to stay on that kind of diet, right. That kind of program.

Meryl: Right. Because it wasn't realistic.

Howie: And the thought of, if I could stay on that for the next five years, I don't want to, I, I'm not a big foodie.

I like my food. I love my pizza. I definitely love a bagel. I mean, but I know I can't have a lot of that, but in moderation you can have anything. And I just felt where it really failed for me is I got to my weight loss more than I ever imagined. Then what do you do?

That's where my family member was, had incredible success and very involved in community being with others that are in the same similar situation.

And I recommend for anybody that's in any program, whether it's a workout program, whether it's a filmmaking program, whether it's a diet. To have accountability partners, especially in this area where we're trying to change what we've been to something we want to be, how do you not share it with somebody?

Right? So, if you're a couple, isn't it great to make the same kind of meals to together work towards the goal of eating better. And if weight loss is part of that eating better or understanding which foods might irritate you. Whatever it is. You're I don't even say allergic that just don't agree with you.

And that we minimize so much of this and the advertisers. I mean, the other day, somebody handed me a bottle. Ketchup I won't say the brand and it's the reason why it's so good. It's good. So, it's got fructose corn sugar in there. And a little bit of my business background is a serial entrepreneur. I was involved in the very early days of a beverage company called honest tea.

The founder was very early into the whole green movement. Sustainability fair trade in organics. It was the late nineties and it was really weird to be drinking an organic tea. Now you probably won't buy a tea, not you, if it isn't organic and. Whole foods was called Freshfields back. Right. And we remember when we were in there and we'd stand in there and sample it and people wanted no part of it, but eventually they did.

And eventually Coca Cola bought the company, but the founder, he went head-to-head with Coke. The minute they wanted to mess with the formula. and put in fruit dose, corn sugar. Right. And he stood, told it, told when he won. And I'm sure Coke is glad that they didn't do that because it would compromise the brand.

But. There are so many, 100 calorie packages of junk that are low calorie, low sugar, gluten free, who knows the packaging is amazing. I've been privy to go to expo east and west year after year and the companies and the products and the packaging. Think about apple.

Meryl: Right? Well, look, it, it goes back to marketing. It goes back to the marketing, back to the message back to the diet culture message.

And so, part of what I recognized early on and much to the accountability piece is that unless we create some kind of program that has support and accountability, people won't be as successful because they need that. Especially if you were talking about changing habits, right? So, if we're talking about, forget about the food piece, cause I always say the food piece of what we do here.

Is the easy part, giving people a meal plan is the easy part, teaching them to change their habit? If they're not used to cooking, how do we get them into the kitchen? Right. If they're used to eating out fast food, how do we shift their mentality of, I can't have fries and soda with my burger kind of thing.

So that's where creating the accountability, creating this support. Is huge. And that's why companies, let's say like Weight Watchers have been so successful because they have a community. And so, I think what people really need to hear, because the whole point of what we're trying to, or at least I'm trying to convey.

And I think you agree with is, if we really want to be successful at health and

health

is really the message

health is

Howie: so much more than weight. Listen are really unhealthy skinny people. I say that all the time. And I remember I had a cousin who had a big belly, but he was in great shape.

And he'd always say to me, I'm the healthiest fat guy so health does not equal weight. Weight is a by-product of how healthy do you want to be?

Meryl: And I love that. And the thing is. Drilling that into people's head, because then you are pushing back against these big companies who have these big dollars who are promoting these fad diets.

And as a little person like myself, right, you're fighting an uphill battle. So, you know, getting someone like you to continue, that message has been great, but it is the struggle that we come from to try and convince and not even convince people. Like I don't need to convince people. You sit in that chair and you go through our program.

Nobody needs to be convinced because they feel better and they're maintaining their weight loss and sustaining their health. So, it's not even something that I have to convince someone of it's the realization that you come to at some point,

Howie: I just think though, that people just want this instant gratification and coming here.

Takes a little work.

Meryl: It does. I always say, listen, I, I, my message every time is consistency and commitment, but it's no different look, you worked on wall street. You did all that. You don't just walk in and go, oh, I'm going to make money today without, without

Howie: trading Bitcoin.

Meryl: But but you have to put work into it.

You have to put work into anything. So, there you go. Anything

Howie: and everything, but people, for some reason, want, a magic pill when it comes to their appearance or their weight, it doesn't exist. And in this world that we live in with the amount of disease that's out there, we have tools that are available to us to hopefully allow us to live a longer and healthier life.

And the way that we treat our bodies. I live near this new thing that opened like a food court. It's really nice. And they have like 20 restaurants in there and I'm trying to find something healthy to eat. But while I'm trying to find something healthy to eat, the size of the people eating the things that are so unhealthy, where did they go off the beaten path?

And we, we talked about it, like, why is in the world? Is there a program about 600-pound people? How bad do you want it? You know, in the triathlons, you'd die in on the run at the end, you got nothing left. And our mantra on our team, you would just say to yourself, how bad do I want it?

You didn't do all that training, not to get to a finish line, one foot in front of the other when you were swimming. It was the next buoy. When you're on the bike ride, it was the next electrical pole. And when you were on the run, how bad do I want it? And. It doesn't come easy. Right. But to think that people have curable problems, if they just change their diet, they just changed their habits.

It would be a better world. They'd be better

Meryl: off. Well, listen. Absolutely. You know, we know the metabolic diseases, things like hypertension and high cholesterol and cardiovascular disease pre-diabetes diabetes, obesity, all of those things are treatable.

Howie: I remember this statistic and don't hold me to it, but in 2000, Obesity was about 30% and right before the pandemic, I believe it was close to 40%.

Right. And so that's, that's, I can imagine what happened after the pandemic, because I did this health coaching during the pandemic, there was the freshmen 15, and then it became the COVID 19. And I did notice though, that people. It was easier for them to try something. Because nobody was leaving the house.

Right. But then the excuses, I mean, excuses kill me living a life in denial, knowing that you shouldn't eat cheese because it it's weighed on you. It gives you hives and it gets short and breath. And then you're going to a cheese shop and you buy like month's worth of cheese for a weekend.

Meryl: But again, here's the thing, you and I have had challenges you with, your injury. I had cancer and I think. We've been there. Right. We've been on the other end and we've come out the other end and we can speak to that. And I think what we try to do is prevent people from having to go there. Right? You don't want someone. I always say if I can help someone and prevent them from going through a debilitating illness.

That is my biggest gift, but sometimes people gotta go there first and, and it really is. And it's unfortunate, but it is, it goes back to the how bad do you want it? And what is your why? And, and really it isn't about why do I walk into the cheese shop? Cause I know I shouldn't, it is what is the behavior that pushes us to do that.

And how do I stop myself in my tracks from doing. And, and that's the work.

Howie: That's really what you said. You know, you had your period in your life where you fought cancer. I fought a bad accident, but here we are many years later. We're still fighting to stay as healthy as we can with exercise. Oh, we didn't even talk about that part of you know, I talked about hydration, drinking, water sleep, but that's the other thing.

There is no excuse to somebody not moving. Somebody's not walking every day. And it blows my mind when I would be coaching people that they just on top of wanting instant gratification. They don't want to do any exercise. And these programs work without exercise. You gotta be kidding yourself in the long term of life, you know?

You need to move and I'm not telling you to go run a marathon. I'm just saying, get up and walk around the block and then walk around the block twice. And before you know it, you're going to walk around three times, get out, give yourself attainable goals, measurable goals, identifiable goals, and accountability partner, and take care of your health.

Meryl: I love that.

Howie: And some place like here and I'm going through it. I I'm so excited because I know what's waiting for me on the other side of all that, you're going to advise me because I'm not

the first person to walk through this door. And if I have a little bit of elevated this, that, or the other, you've seen it before.

Right. You know where to direct me. And it's definitely, I could see that here already. It's not one size fits all, which is, that's the thing in that world. How could it be. That we're all doing the same thing. Exactly. So, remember, 90% of the people fail at these other things. Why not? Do it the right way, right?

Save yourself the burden of the Seesaw and the yo-yo. Absolutely.

Meryl: And you know, we do know that people who go on and off and on and off end up on more unhealthy on the other side, so on and off these diets. So, I love the conversation. This will not be the last time we have this conversation. I am sure.

Thank you for being here.

Howie: My pleasure. Thank you for having me here. So happy to have you. And I appreciate all that. The Brandwein Institute for nutrition and wellness is doing for me. So, thank you

Meryl: Well, this is your before, so then we'll get you on the after to, to really get the full experience. But again, thank you.

Thanks everyone for listening. We hope you enjoyed it. And until next time, the rebel nutritionist signing off.