

Christopher Wark (00:00.046)

People get so sensitive when you talk about weight, like we're trying to shame people or blame people. I'm trying to wake people up that there are consequences. And I don't mean just social ones, because most people don't feel that good when they have excess body weight, but there are real health consequences. Not so much from being overweight, but from the diet that you're eating that caused you to have all that excess weight.

Christopher Wark (00:26.23)

Hey gang, it's Chris. And today I'm interviewing Chef AJ. Many of you know who Chef AJ is. If you don't, well, you're about to find out. She has been a plant-based eater for 46 years. Very long time. And she was not always healthy. She was what we call a junk food vegan for some part of that time of her life. And eventually figured out.

what she needed to do to optimize her health and changed what she was eating and lost a ton of weight. And since then, she's helped countless people lose weight, get down to a healthy body weight and eat a whole food plant-based diet. And so yeah, she's just a wealth of information and inspiration and we've known each other, I guess.

I mean, I don't know when we first met, but it's been some years for sure. And yeah, I just think she's terrific. And so AJ, thanks for taking the time. Thank you, Chris. Yeah. You know, it's funny, I've been vegan longer than you've been alive, if you can believe that. Vegan longer. You know, you didn't have to admit that on camera. But the thing is, is it wasn't always healthy. As a matter of fact, this July 1st, July 6th, I'll be celebrating 20 years.

basically being a healthy vegan, unprocessed, off of sugar, off of processed food. And I don't know if you know this about my story, Chris. I never had cancer, but I was diagnosed with what they called pre-cancer. So I was bleeding and I had a colonoscopy and they said that I had pre-cancerous polyps. That's the word they use. And they couldn't remove them because my colon was in such a state of disarray. And so during the procedure with the caliper, so they said I'd have to come back and have like...

actual surgery and I'm so afraid of surgery and anesthesia that instead I changed my diet. I went to the Optimum Health Institute in San Diego on Sunday, July 6th, 4 p.m. 2003. And that's where I learned about the healing power of food. And I went from a junk food vegan diet of Coke Slurpees for breakfast and Dr. Pepper for lunch and all kinds of junk food to a whole food plant exclusive diet without sugar, oil, and salt and processed food and flours.

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And within six months, the polyps disappeared and the doctors didn't believe it. And when I told them I changed my diet, they said that was impossible because they had proof of where all the polyps were in their size. And I learned what you learned too, that the medical miracle. Yeah, well, I mean, look, we were both going through this at the same time. Wow. 2003 was when I was diagnosed with colon cancer. I was diagnosed in December. So...

And I was suffering, you know, for the better part of the year with abdominal pain. And that's pretty wild. Yeah. No, I, I did not know that about your story. And there we both were with some serious colon issues in 2003 and finding the same solution. You know, obviously through completely different resources, right? I don't know if they had internet in 2003. If they did, I mean, yeah, it existed, but there was no,

I talk about this a lot. It's like there was no social media and there was no video, right? Video was not on the internet. The internet was only text and pictures in 2003. I mean, if there was video, there were very short little clips, like a five second clip, you know, or, you know, it wasn't like YouTube or whatever. Now, like you can just upload hours and hours and hours of video, like, and it doesn't matter. And everybody had dial up pretty much. So the internet was slow. I remember it took like an hour to check it. Yeah, yeah.

So yeah, it was a different time. I didn't get any help online. Everything I learned was either from word of mouth or from books and cassettes and VHS tapes. You want to hear something funny. So I because like you say, there was no internet, I couldn't Google this. So when I got this diagnosis, I didn't know what to do. There wasn't that you were alive, but you weren't doing what you're doing now. And there was really no one to ask. I just knew that I didn't want to have surgery.

I had a job, I was an activity director at a retirement home, and I just wanted, I just needed some time to think. I don't like, when people rush me, I don't make good decisions. And so I thought, you know, I'll just take a week's vacation. And so I wanted to just go to a spa, you know, and just kind of chill. Well, you know, spas are kind of expensive. And I had this magazine that I had kept for years. I don't know, I actually think I kind of took it from a waiting room, which, you know, you probably shouldn't do, but it was a magazine on discounted spas.

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And in the magazine, they had talked about a place, and it's not really a spa in the sense like Rancho, the Puerto is a spa or the Golden Door, but it's called the Optimum Health Institute. And I didn't know anything about it, other than it was dirt cheap and that I could go for eight days for \$800. And I'm like, I can afford that. Well, that place pretty much saved my life because it's based on the Ascene religion or philosophy.

and you get there and it is truly a place of healing. I had not yet heard about the True North Health Center. I might've gone there had I known, but basically they're basically feeding you green juices, they're feeding you organic living food. There's no processed food at all. There's no sugar, flour, oil, alcohol. So there's no animal products. And what they teach you there, and they don't have medical doctors per se. They have some RNs there, they have some chiropractors, some allied health specialists like psychologists.

And so what they taught me like the first day was that all disease can only exist if your body's in

a state of inflammation and that everything I was eating, even though I wasn't having animal products, caffeine, sugar, all that stuff was inflammatory. And there were people there from all over the world. There were about 300 people there every week. So there were people there from Japan, you name it, all different countries. And every Friday they would give testimonials on how they healed from incurable diseases.

brain cancer, lupus, Lyme's disease. And these people had been quite sick. Also, we weren't allowed to talk about our illness. Never, ever, ever. They said, this is not an illness. This is a health opportunity, opportunity to get well. So no one was allowed to talk about what they had. They could have, you know, and we were just there to heal. And we were in these body mind spirit classes all day, just having, you know, basically green juices and salads. I mean, kind of like.

what you have in your book behind you pretty much, maybe, maybe not quite as delicious, you know, there weren't a lot of seasonings there. And it was amazing. And yeah, I just, well, you know, this you see this over and over. But you know, 2003, it was kind of new to me that people could actually heal from food. New to me too, right? I, you know, I read my first book on raw food in January 2004. And, and I was not aware of the

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you know, I mean, it was so hard to find any resources at all about places like that to go. And had I known about it, I probably would have gone at that time, you know, I mean, for that for that price, 100 bucks for what you say, eight days or something, not very much more, you know, it's still really, really affordable. And who

I don't know the history. I know they've got one in San Diego and one in Austin. I've been to both and Austin has only about 30 people. So if you want a more intimate experience, but if you want to meet people San Diego, I don't know who founded it, but I know it's based on the Ascene religion. That's all like that's because it's a nonprofit because it's considered like a religious kind of thing, but it's not really religious. So if you're not religious, you don't have to worry that they're going to shove that down your throat. The only thing they're going to shove down your throat is wheatgrass.

They don't literally shove it and actually they shove it somewhere else. So they do wheatgrass enemas. Talk about what their program looked like, the dietary program. It's a raw food program, right? Right. It's been almost 20 years but it was raw food and three of the days you're on a juice fast where you're basically getting green juice. At one point they would break the fast with this applesauce and a flax cracker but they felt that was just too much sugar. It was amazing. But you don't...

have to do that if you want. But the food is, it's completely vegan. There's not gonna be any animal products, any processed foods. It is pretty bland. So if you're used to having cheeseburgers every day, there's gonna be quite an adjustment. But it's like watermelon could

be the breakfast, for example. And salads, lots of sprouts. Everything there is grown there. It's organic. One thing they have that was really interesting is called, they make a seed cheese there.

out of soap fermented sunflower seeds and sesame seeds. And that's your protein. A lot of people didn't like it. I loved it because that's where the caloric density was. You kind of sense that you need some calories. Rejuvalac, they teach you all this in the program, how to make it. And they encourage you to do wheatgrass enemas, which it's a little weird, but you're not allowed to talk about your condition at meals, but you're sure allowed to talk about your enemas.

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Right. How was your end of it today? Fantastic. And we had a talent show at the end. It was I mean, it's you know, I keep thinking that I want I didn't complete my third week just because at the time I couldn't. And I feel like even 20 years later, I'd still like to go back and do that. And that's kind of on my bucket list. Just it's a it's a pretty cool place. I got to tell you. That's great. I love that. Yeah. So and we'll link to that folks in the show notes if you want to inquire and if you feel like maybe that's something that, you know, could benefit you going on.

a raw food retreat. I love places like that. It's just you can relax, you can unwind, you can de-stress, you can flood your body with nutrition, do some very specific things to improve and increase detoxification. Yeah, it's terrific. You're not the first person that I've met that had a good experience there. So, it's cool. Unless it's changed, because I haven't been there. I went to my first week in 2003 in

Austin in 2005. No technology. I mean, there's no television, no radio, no newspaper. I believe now they probably can't keep you from having a cell phone, but you certainly can't use it except maybe in your room. I remember I was such a food addict, Chris. I mean, I remember when I got dropped off there, like after the first day, I was really going through a detox. And I remember calling on a—

Payphone, this is how long ago it was. I didn't have a cell phone back then. This was 20 years ago. Calling first my husband and my sister saying, you've got to get me out of here. I'm so hungry. You've got to get me out of here. Yeah, yeah, I get it. I totally get it. Well, and so, but leading up to that, obviously that was your health crisis moment. Yeah, absolutely. But you were pretty overweight, right? Leading up to that. Yeah, I think.

five and so I've seen this your before and after pictures yeah and so people say oh you weren't that overweight well I mean like I was obese because I weighed almost 200 pounds so I weight you know the sad thing is I weighed 160 when I was 11 and 11 I wasn't even five feet tall so I had suffered with obesity you know really since I can remember which is from the age of five

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And now, you know, the way I look back then is pretty common to the way most people look

now. And I'm not trying, you know, people get so sensitive when you talk about weight, like we're trying to shame people or blame people. I'm trying to wake people up that there are consequences, you know? And I don't mean just social ones, you know, because most people don't feel that good when they have excess body weight, but there are real health consequences, not so much from being overweight, but from the diet that you're eating that caused you to have all that excess weight.

Yeah, absolutely. You know, I think one thing that I try to do is, is I talk about obesity a lot and, and obesity is the second leading cause of cancer. Cigarettes are still number one. But obesity is the second leading cause because it's such a tremendous burden on your body. It increases inflammation. You end up with high levels of cancer promoting hormones like estrogen.

There is a profound immunosuppression that is happening in your body when you're obese. That's why we saw in the last few years, that germ that was going around the world, well, the people that had some of the highest incidence of hospitalization and death were people who were obese. Right. And it's because of the immunosuppression. So these are real things. This is not about your body image.

love yourself how you are and you're beautiful at every size. Like that's a totally different conversation. What we're talking about is your actual physiological health. And and of course, there's a there's a cascade of diseases that come with obesity. Right. Diabetes, type 2 diabetes. That's that's a major one. Right. Autoimmune diseases, cancers and heart disease, cardiovascular disease. I mean, there are so many that develop in that pro-inflammatory state. So

Those are the reasons. I mean, the more important reasons, the mirror is the least important reason to lose weight. That's always seems to be the reason that most people want to, you know? Yeah, it's a good motivator, right? I get it. You wanna look in the mirror and feel good about what you see and all that. And I understand that society's beauty standards certainly have changed. At one point, obesity was a sign of wealth. And you look at all these pictures from...

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you know, the Renaissance and whatnot, and there's all these obese women and they're considered beautiful. But it was a status symbol to be overweight back then. And of course, now it's swung, swung to like rail thin in the 90s. And now it's kind of come back to like full figured women and whatever. But the point is, look, you know, I know you're not doing this. I'm not either. I'm not telling here to tell anybody. They don't look good. Right. But

The truth is important and sometimes it's hard to tell the truth and sometimes it's hard to hear the truth, right? It's hard for both parties. It's hard to tell it and it's hard to hear it. But the truth is, yeah, if you're overweight or obese, you are headed down a road of disease, right? It's coming. It might be years. It might even be decades from now, but that is the disease path. So the encouragement is, you know, look, if you want to prevent chronic disease, you have

one of the number one things you can do is get yourself back to a healthy body weight. And so obviously you lost, how much weight did you lose in this? So when I, you know, if I weight, when I got to 180, which was in 1985, I kind of stopped weighing and I feel like I got higher than that because I could tell my clothes weren't fitting. But when I started my, when I call my permanent weight loss journey, which I remember the date, January 2nd, 2012, at that point I had.

just come out of the True North Health Center, I weighed 165. So I'm gonna call it 50 pounds, you know? Yeah. And, but I've cut it off. And the thing is, is I wanna tell people, like it may not be easy, but once you do it, and once you learn the tools, it's not that difficult. I mean, it's not rocket science. You just, you have to be willing to change quite a few things in your life, but the actual mechanism of it, once I really understood this concept called calorie density.

that I learned at the True North Health Center from Dr. Lyle and Dr. Goldhammer that it's been talked about a lot in the plant-based world. Dr. Jean Warnish wrote a book in 1980 called Eat More, Weigh Less, and Dr. McDougall wrote The McDougall Program for Maximum Weight Loss. When I understood these principles, it was no longer hard for me. So it's actually to keep it off these last, what, like 12 years now has been really easy. My weight has not changed more than probably a pound or two fluctuation in either direction.

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The best part is I love my food and I get to eat more of it than I did when I was having Coke Slurpees. Coke Slurpees, yeah. I know. I can't believe it. I mean what 43-0 woman has to go to 7-11 and when the machine was broken, oh my God, I would be like, I'd yell at the poor guy behind the counter because I had to get my fix. How could I go to work without my speedball of sugar and caffeine and not to mention probably all those chemicals that are in a Slurpee? Yeah.

some funky stuff in there for sure. So let's talk about calorie density. And I love it. Because I think there are still a lot of people who have this idea about a weight loss diet. And that is one that is either extremely restrictive. Like it's all about portion control, right? So there's one strategy where it's like.

like the Jenny Craig strategy, I guess, where it's like, oh, you can eat anything you want, but only tiny amounts, right? Only, you have to really limit yourself and you're hungry all the time, right? And that's kind of miserable. And then there's other strategies where it's like Atkins or keto or whatever, right? The low carb where it's like, you're not allowed to eat anything that's a carbohydrate. So it's extremely restrictive in that sense. And those diets come with a whole host of chronic health problems down the road that you can lose weight for sure, but.

You can also lose weight smoking crystal meth. Doesn't mean it's good for you. So will you talk about the calorie density philosophy and it's not even philosophy. I mean, it's just, obviously it's science. It's real science that was actually, there's a researcher at Penn State University called named Dr. Barbara Rolls, who has a laboratory where she actually studies human eating

behavior and she's done the most research on this subject of calorie density, which she calls energy density.

I think because the word calories in there, people think, oh, well, that's another counting calorie scheme. No, I mean, you can count calories and lose weight and weigh and measure your food and count points and things like that. But is it going to be sustainable? Because what I've learned, having hosted the Truth About Weight Loss Summit, which actually you were speaker the very first year, thank you for five years, is that pretty much whatever you decide to do to lose weight, you better like it.

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because you're gonna have to continue it during the weight loss, the weight maintenance phase. So a lot of people go on a diet, like as if it's a one-time event because they wanna look good at their high school reunion or their daughter's wedding. So they do something drastic, they go on this diet, and then they don't really change their lifestyle or how they eat, and they wonder, well, why did the weight come back and then some? So with calorie density, it's a little bit different than counting calories because you don't have to memorize how many calories in a cup of rice or a half a cup of blueberries.

You have to understand what's known as the average calorie density of really just a few major food groups. What Dr. Rolls discovered is that human beings eat roughly the same amount of food per day by weight. Now, I don't need as much as vegan bodybuilder Robert Cheek, but most humans eat between three and five pounds of food per day in order to feel full and satisfied. When you eat less food, you get more hungry. People can white-knuckle it and use willpower for a while.

If you're hungry all the time, you're not going to be able to maintain any kind of diet. But with calorie density, you get to eat more food because when you understand that there are foods that nature and God made that are not only extremely nutritious in high nutrient density but also low in calorie density, if you focus on these and either eliminate or greatly reduce the foods that are less valuable from a nutrient standpoint and high calorie density.

you can literally take in twice as much food, but still take in half as many calories. The problem is that Americans eat over 92 percent of their calories from two very calorically dense food groups, animal products and processed food. Now, animal products existed all throughout human history, but our ancestors didn't eat a lot of them and they certainly didn't eat processed meats like bacon and

They didn't eat any kind of cheese because cheese is a processed food. They ate some wild game, the weak, the slow, the sick, the isolated, the injured, but they weren't eating factory farmed animals that were force-fed hormones and antibiotics that are much higher in fat than what our ancestors ate. They didn't eat them every day. There was no refrigeration. They weren't able to do that very often because our ancestors may not have survived. They were in

search of greater caloric density.

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But it didn't exist because there wasn't a 7-Eleven on every corner. There were, you know, things like nuts and seeds. These were very seasonal. Nuts came in a hard shell. There were, you know, now we live in a world where anything is available 24 hours a day from whether it's in season or not. And so our ancestors had to eat the foods lowest in caloric density, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes, which have on average 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600 calories per pound of food.

Calorie density literally means calories per pound of food. And if you're eating three to five pounds of food a day, you can get that in a variety of different ways. But the foods that are the most calorically dense are the processed foods. Sugar, 1800 calories per pound. Whereas the beets that you could make sugar from are about 195 calories per pound. When you process a food, you make it calorie rich and nutrient poor.

So for example, flour bread, not that you can never eat bread or that all bread is unhealthy, but it's 1500 calories per pound, which is three times as much as the whole grain at 500 calories per pound from what it's made. Olives, I believe were about 600 calories per pound, but you process it into olive oil and it's now 4,000 calories per pound. And we removed all the beneficial compounds like specifically the fiber. So,

That's the thing. And even plant foods, there are some plant foods that are a little bit calorically dense, but they're certainly healthy, like nuts and seeds. These are between 2,600 and 3,200 calories per pound. And when you eat them raw and unsalted in like an ounce a day, it's probably fine. But then you start processing them further into nut butters and seed butters. And again, you're reducing the volume. And so in order to feel full, you have to satisfy what's known as the mechanisms of satiation, stretch, nutrient and calories.

these are receptors that line our digestive tracts. And so what happens is most Americans, especially Americans that are overweight, they're overfed, but they're undernourished because they're eating a diet full of calorically dense processed foods, but they're never activating their stretch receptors or their nutrient receptors because let's face it, processed food and animal products have no fiber unless like you somehow have added it back in.

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and they have very few nutrients. But when you start eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes, you're eating the foods that are full of fiber and water. This is another thing. Fiber and water, when they're together in the same package, creates what's known as bulk. If you took a dry sponge, put it in water, it expands. And when you have fiber and water together in a mouthful, you create this bulk, which creates satiety. So you can feel full on fewer calories. Many people, and I can get you this slide, have seen this slide of three stomachs.

You know, our stomach is about the size of a cantaloupe. It holds about a liter of food, which is about 4.22 cups. Well, if you filled it with olive oil, you wouldn't even see it full. If you filled it with 500 calories or 400 calories of olive oil, if you've put it with 400 calories of meat or cheese, the stomach's gonna be a little full, but you fill it with beans and rice and corn and fruits and vegetables. And now the stomach is full and distended, and you can do that several times. And so if you wanna lose weight with a full plate, you've gotta eat the food from a plant.

not manufactured in a plant, but in its whole food form, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes. And if you keep your average calorie density to like 550 or 600 calories a day, almost everybody can eat what's ad libitum. So you don't have to weigh and measure or count. You can eat as much as you want, as often as you want, whenever you want until you're comfortably full and not only lose weight, but maintain that weight loss. So for me, being able to eat like these huge meals, it's like every day is Christmas because I mean, I'm that.

full every day. It's like thanksgiving. It's like, Oh, I get to eat again. This is fun. I love that. I mean, you explained that so well, so articulately. And, and, you know, this is the same thing that we talk about in my community, too. It's like, look, there is no reason for you to be hungry. You do not have to be hungry. If you eat a whole food plant based diet, you can stuff yourself, right? You should stuff yourself eat until you're full, right?

And if you get hungry, eat again. It's fine because the calorie density is so low in whole plant food. And, you know, another sort of mental picture, you know, the most concentrated source of calories is oil and one tablespoon of oil is about 120 calories. Doesn't matter what kind of oil, right? It's 120 calories, olive oil, corn oil, soybean oil, it doesn't matter.

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A banana is about 120 calories, like a medium to large banana. So you think about that, like, which would fill you up more, right? A banana or one tablespoon of oil, right? And so oil is the sneaky source of

of calories in the Western diet because there's so much oil used in processed food, fast food, junk food, and restaurant food. Restaurants use more oil than you ever would at home and it's really insidious and it slips under the radar undetected by your mechanism satiety. They did experiments where they gave people two identical meals in terms of what they were composed of. It was like a pasta primavera and one was made with...

the traditional method of you cook the pasta in the oil and the salt. And then they took it out and they put olive oil on it. And they made a marinara with olive oil and they put like butter on the vegetables. And then they made it the way I would make it with an oil-free marinara, whether you buy it or make it. The pasta has no oil in the water or salt and the vegetables are steamed. And these were identical in terms of the way they looked and pretty much tasted in size, but the one with oil had 500 more calories and people could not detect any more satiety.

from the oil because you can't, it has no fiber. I mean, fiber, I mean, I know that my pre-cancer was caused because I didn't have any fiber till I was 43 years old. And fiber not only helps flush out these toxins, it binds to waste and cholesterol, but where weight loss is concerned, it tricks the brain into feeling it's full on fewer calories and it has few to no calories itself. And so that's the thing, you know, it's not about like what food is good or bad, or if you're right or wrong, it's about is this food?

a whole food is the fiber intact. I mean, the exception would be juicing, because I know you're a fan of green juicing and so am I. That's different when it's a green juice, or vegetable juice. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about fast food, processed food, restaurant food, where there's just nothing resembles what it came from. I'm talking about a strawberry pop tart as opposed to a strawberry, for example. When you eat broccoli, cabbage, right? Onions, mushrooms.

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you know, a giant salad or you eat an apple for you, you know, eat as much watermelon as you can for breakfast. It's really hard to eat 1000 calories of plant food. It's really hard. It's really hard. It's really easy to eat 1000 1500 calories, even 2000 calories of processed food. Like you get a double cheeseburger, fries and a milkshake.

You're pushing 2000 calories from that meal and you can get it down. Like no problem. You're full when you're done, but like you can get that thing down. Even a pizza, like I could eat a whole large pizza by myself. You know what I mean? I mean, that's, I don't even know how many calories a large pizza is, right? But probably pushing 2000 calories again, but a giant salad.

or a big bowl of fruit or several servings of fruit or even six bananas. Six bananas is like 600 calories, you know? Six, 700 calories. I mean, it's, and you're full. If you can even eat six bananas, I've never been able to eat more than two in a sitting. You know, when you go to an airport, you smell the Cinnabon, you know? One little Cinnabon is over a thousand calories. Wow, I didn't know that. It's incredible. Yeah, yeah, and I could eat several of those if I was hungry, right?

And so again, I think this is just such an important concept for folks to understand. It's like it really, the calorie density of your food really does matter. It really does contribute to excess weight. And what is a calorie? A calorie is a measurement of energy. A lot of people, you know, don't know this. It's a measurement of the energy provided to your body by food. And so I like to use this analogy, which is when you fill up your car, right?

You fill up full of gas until it's full, assuming you have enough money to fill up the tank. It's not too expensive. It's not five bucks a gallon. But you filled up you know, the handle clanks like okay, it's full. Like, and your tank is full of energy, right? Gas burns produces energy that runs the motor that runs your car. Okay, so gas is fuel for your car. Food is fuel for your body. Well,

what if every time you went to the gas station, after you filled up, you bought one of those red gas cans.

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and then you filled it up and you put it in the trunk. Well, if you did that every time you got gas, in a short amount of time, your trunk would be full of extra gas cans. And then if you kept doing it, you'd have to start putting them in the back seat, and then you'd have to put them in the front seat, and then your car would be full of extra gas cans, extra fuel. And then you'd have to start strapping those gas cans to the hood, right? And strapping them to the trunk and the front of the car.

And so this is what we're doing when we eat processed food. We're taking in more calories than our body needs and can burn. And so it's just, it's piling up. Your body is storing that energy for later, right? That's what fat is. It's stored energy. So there's, you know, just removing all the demonization of body fat, that's all it really is. Is your body is storing energy that you consumed but didn't burn off.

So I think once you get a picture of that, it's like, okay, yeah, I, you know, if you want to lose weight, first of all, don't eat more energy, don't consume more energy than your body needs. And when you say don't consume more energy, don't consume more calories. And then you figure out, okay, what are the low calorie foods, naturally low calorie foods that I can eat that are delicious and that, you know, that takes time to figure out but obviously, fresh fruits and vegetables, giant salads, nuts and

Nuts and seeds are higher in calories, but they're still in the good category. But legumes are awesome. Potatoes are fantastic. Whole grains are wonderful. Like there are so many delicious, awesome plant foods. You've got a couple of recipe books. I've got a recipe book that are all plant-based, helping people, you know, make that shift toward delicious food that fills you up, that satisfies you, but also nourishes your body and doesn't give you excess calories.

doesn't contribute to weight gain. And so it really is easy. And there's so much delicious food out there. Once you just start down this path of exploration, you will discover like, wow, this isn't as hard as I thought. It's not that hard to give up, quote unquote, your favorite foods, when you're replacing them with foods that you also really like. Yeah, you know, I'm sure you're familiar with Dr. Joel Furman. He always talks about how when people eat a diet high in animal products and processed food,

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that they are definitely going to be micronutrient deficient. And anytime there's micronutrient deficiency, you will literally have cravings to eat more food because your body is in search of not more calories but more nutrients. But the problem is, is they're not eating more kale and collards and apples and brown rice. They're eating the food that made them overweight in the first place. And one of the things that's interesting about calorie density that I learned from evolutionary

Christopher Wark (32:58.93)

is that our species actually evolved at a calorie density of about 700 calories per pound, which is just 100 more than what I told you is needed for most people to lose weight and maintain it. Because remember, there was no processed food in the Stone Age, there was no oil, or nuts, seeds, and avocado, they were seasonal. Our ancestors did eat some animal products and once in a while got into honey, which had a high caloric density.

but they were eating roots and shoots and tubers. I mean, they were really more gatherers and hunters than hunters and gatherers. And so, I understand not everybody's gonna be vegan and that's their choice, but man, I just wish processed food could just go away because that I believe is the problem for people that are most people that are struggling with excess weight and the pleasure trap, whether they're vegan or not. I'm not a fan of animal products for many other reasons, but...

I don't think that is what made so many people so overweight so quickly, you know? Well, I think it's actually two things. One, yes, the massive surge of fast food, processed food and junk food that happened in the 20th century, right? In the 1900s, especially 1950s and up, you know, McDonald's.

It was like the first fast food chain restaurant. And then it was just, there was an explosion, right? Burger King, Taco Bell, KFC, Wendy's, right? All these fast food chains popping up everywhere, more grocery stores everywhere, more restaurants everywhere, even not the fast food, right? Even just to sit down. Just so that entire, the food service industry exploded, right? And the more food options that we have, the more convenient it is, you know, it just, the more variety.

And so that was a huge contributor for sure. But, but along with that came an explosion of factory farming. So going back to what you said, our ancestors didn't eat meat three times a day. Like they didn't like there, it just, it wasn't possible. There might've been a few days where they did it, but there might've been days where they did, but it wasn't every single day of their life. Like it is for us because factory farms have allowed.

Christopher Wark (35:11.742)

restaurants and grocery stores and everything to have chicken, pork, eggs, bacon, like any time of the day, anytime you want it, every meal and as, as well as cheese and dairy products, you know, like milkshakes and ice cream and all that stuff. So, so both of those things together, right? We're eating too much meat and dairy more than we ever have in human history. And we're eating too much.

fast food, processed food and junk food more than we ever have in human history. So, you know, those factors converging have created this epidemic of obesity, number one, and chronic disease. So like cancer, heart disease, diabetes, autoimmune disease, there's so many chronic

diseases that are rampant in rich countries, Western countries, countries that are well developed, where there's tons of money, there's tons of prosperity and there's food everywhere.

This is a byproduct of that. It's hard to make healthy choices. I get it, right? It's hard when you're quote unquote healthy to make healthy choices. And it can be hard when you're sick to make healthy choices, right? Especially if you're in a crisis, it can be hard. If you're hospitalized, like yeah, it can be really hard. And so I know you understand this too, like I get it.

But if you're just willing to, you know, step out of your comfort zone and make a decision to change what you eat, you will reap benefits quickly, especially if you're changing what you eat to a whole food plant-based diet. You know, the word comfort zone is interesting to me because I would argue that many people are not that comfortable.

you know, having a lifestyle disease or excess weight when they don't want it. If you're happy with your weight and your health, I'm, that's fine. It's not a court ordered program. I always say to people, but I don't know very many people that are truly happy when their health is compromised. I agree. I agree. I know people who claim to be happy, but, but in reality

Christopher Wark (37:23.798)

don't seem that happy. I just wish they knew it was possible, because difficult doesn't mean impossible, especially because there's so many people that are doing it. I have this conversation so many times with some of the wonderful doctors in the plant-based movement that don't believe in this concept of food addiction. I do, because I know I was a food addict and one in recovery, but I do believe that's a big piece of the puzzle, because why, if it wasn't an addiction...

Why would somebody continue with the behavior they knew was so self-destructive? It's because they can't stop. Whether it's smoking or alcohol or junk food, if, if it was easy to stop, you probably would have done it already. And it's not easy to stop because it was made on purpose to be addictive. Does that mean it's addictive to all people? No, alcohol is not addictive to all people. I know I growing up, I had friends whose parents could smoke like at a bridge game, you know, once a week and not smoke.

So not all addictive substances are addictive to all people, but I would argue that processed foods, specifically ingredients in processed food, like sugars and flavors and some of the artificial flavorings and even all the salt, to a large majority of people have an addictive-like process that makes it really difficult, if not impossible, for some to not only stop, but to even cut back. Yes, we agree. We agree. Food is addictive.

Sugar and fat especially, they light up the pleasure centers in your brain. I mean, any doctor, any person who's saying food isn't addictive, I mean, they just are ignorant of the science. I mean, humans have been brain scanned. Like we know what happens. I mean, it's like doing cocaine, right? It lights up the pleasure centers in your brain, concentrated sugars and fats. So like, that's why ice cream is like, considered like the most addictive food, you know? Not that

people are just eating ice cream all day, you know? But it-

it rewards your pleasure centers and as does like pizza. Right? I think it's the number, I think it was chocolate and pizza were like the two most addictive foods to most people. Think about it, pizza, that white flour is akin to white sugar. It's your body metabolizes it in almost the same way as white sugar. So you got sugar and fat, the cheese would be being fat. So like major stimulator. And not only that, we know that people use food as medication. Absolutely, to relax, to celebrate.

Christopher Wark (39:46.278)

angry, hungry, tired, lonely, stressed. And you know, you talked about the pleasure centers, all eating, even lowly kale, and I mean lowly kale, lowly in caloric density at 100 calories per pound, stimulate the production of the neurotransmitter dopamine, the pleasure chemical in the brain. But the more calorically concentrated the calories, the more dopamine is released. So of course people prefer, they say tastes better.

foods of a higher caloric density, especially if they're using food to medicate. And we use it for every reason except for what it's intended for, which is to nourish us and sustain us, foods to celebrate, foods to medicate. And so many people had just a rough start. I know that they're showing now that what your mother ate before she even got pregnant with you is going to affect this. I don't know if you ever go to Costco, but I see these kids.

that don't even fit in the cart anymore. They're two years old and their moms are pouring Coca-Cola into sippy cups because you can get free refills. And it's like, I don't know. I'm really worried about our kids today because they don't seem to have a chance. I do like Costco. I do go to Costco because they have giant bags of organic berries. Powered greens too. And organic vegetables. And they have got a really big selection. And look.

The farmer's market is the best place, but the next best place is a grocery store, right? I mean, you know, and so for yeah, we do buy a lot of produce at Costco. And but yeah, you know, they got this thing they've been doing for 20 years, the dollar 99 hot dog and coke or whatever. Free refills. You mentioned sugar and fat and salt. And you know, somebody once said to me, whenever there's a problem, look to nature for the solution, sugar, fat and salt only exists in nature in whole foods. They don't exist.

You don't have any Celtic sea salt or Himalayan sea salt. You know, you have greens if you want sodium in nature. You don't have agave or, you know, I don't know, all these other, you know, powdered sugar in nature. You have fruit and you don't have oil in nature. You don't have coconut oil. You have nuts and seeds and avocado. But we were never meant to have sugar fat, sugar salt, sugar fat and salt or salt and sugar in the same mouthful. There's no food in nature.

Christopher Wark (42:04.374)

that activates the dopamine pathways of all three of these at the same time. But that is exactly

what processed food is. That exactly what restaurant food is, is a hyper activation of these dopamine pathways. And I believe that people become addicted to this artificial stimulation of dopamine in the brain, which never could happen in a core density of 600 calories or less. Yeah, that's right. There's no high fat, high salty food that you can pluck off a tree or a bush, right? You can get high fat food. There's no high fat.

Yeah. High sugar food, although, mamey sapote might be close. But most of us- Maybe the closest thing because it's almost like a sweet avocado. That's delicious, by the way. And it is amazing. But, I mean, but generally, right. I mean, it's like- But avocados aren't salty when you pluck them off the tree, right? No, no. And, you know, berries aren't fatty. You know, we've hyperconcentrated these foods and mixed them together. There's a great book that explains this called-

Salt, Sugar and Fat, How the Food Giants Hooked Us by Michael Moss and another one called The End of Overeating by David Kessler. That's where I learned all this stuff. And you know, I started becoming unprocessed and stopped eating processed food even when I was overweight, just because I was so angry to learn that the processed food industry purposely hijacked our brain chemistry and taste buds for profit. And that got me so mad. I just didn't want to give them any more money. Yeah. And also you mentioned the pleasure trap earlier by.

Lyle and Goldhammer. Dr. Lyle and Dr. Goldhammer. And so yeah, for anybody that wants to go down those rabbit holes, I'll link to those books in the show notes. We have an explosion right now in processed vegan food, right? Processed plant based snacks and fake meats and cheeses and you know, all this stuff. And, and I've more than I've

been able to, you know, I mean, there's so many brands now and so many items and, and I'm not a purist. I do enjoy those things from time to time like a good veggie burger, like I can really enjoy a good veggie burger. But generally speaking, like, this is not the kind of food you want to be eating every day. It's still processed food, it still has a lot of salt, it still has a lot of oil, it still may have a lot of added sugar, and other funky stuff, additives and preservatives. So don't assume because it's like

Christopher Wark (44:21.654)

vegan and stuff that is actually healthy food. Right, calorically dense too, you know, and that's the other thing. You know, genetics does play a role, but the food that most people are eating is just too rich for their genes, you know? Well, I think, again, it's just good to come back to the very simple truth that the amount of calories you consume matters, right? It is going to contribute to excess weight if you eat more calories than your body needs. But

doesn't mean you have to eat less food. You just need to eat different food. Differently, that's right. And so, you know, I mean, to me, I could not feel satisfied eating small portions of anything really. And the foods that I eat, especially like sweet potatoes or kabocha squash, I mean, these to me tastes, they're so sweet, they're so delicious, especially when roasted. I don't

feel I'm giving anything up by not having Coke Slurpees or Dr. Pepper. I mean, I'm giving up disease, debility and a shorter life.

but I feel like people have to be willing to go through that little bit of detox and withdrawal at the beginning and learn to like the food and maybe learn some preparation techniques. That's why it can be so helpful to go to a place like True North and maybe do a water fast or go to an optimum health. Cause then you're with like-minded people going through the same thing. It's very hard to do at home when you have to work full time and have a bunch of kids running around and they're all eating junk in front of you, but it can be done. It definitely can be done. It can be done.

And you know, it's funny because when we eat dinner, I eat oatmeal for breakfast almost every day, a giant fruit smoothie for lunch. And then dinner is usually a bunch of cooked veggies, maybe a giant salad or whatever. So I'm consuming a ton of plant food every day and very large portions, like large portions because I'm active, I have a high metabolism, I work out almost every day doing like CrossFit kind of stuff. It's very intense exercise. I burn a lot of calories. I sit in the sauna.

multiple days a week burning calories doing that, you know, so like I'm constantly in motion. And so I have to force feed myself like I have to eat a dinner like I have to make myself I'll eat like a normal plate of food and be satisfied. Right? I'm like some sweet potatoes, brown rice, black beans, you know, or quinoa or collard greens or, you know, squash, it's always a variety of veggies. And again, plug for the beat cancer kitchen. There's lots of great recipes in there.

Christopher Wark (46:49.346)

But anyway, it's a variety of veggies. I eat a plate full or a bowl full and I'm satisfied, but I have to force myself to go back and fill up another bowl full or another plate full because I know I need the calories just for me. But the whole point of that story is like, I'm satisfied with one plate. Like I don't need another plate. Like, and that's what happens when you eat starchy food has been demonized, right? It's been demonized. When you eat potatoes, beans,

brown, black and red rice, corn, right? When you eat these wonderful starchy foods, they fill you up. Satiety, baby. They satisfy you. Like you mentioned earlier, they're bulky, right? They fill up your tummy, and then you're not hungry. You're satisfied. And if you don't pile like sour cream and butter and oil and cheese on top, then you will be full, but also not be consuming.

excess energy from calories that your body may convert to stored fat. Yeah. And I should mention Dr. Greger, he wrote a book called How Not to Diet. And one of the coolest bits of research that he uncovered as he was writing his book was they did a study on humans where they fed them the same meal for breakfast and dinner, same exact meal. And then they measured, you know, took blood samples and all that and measured their insulin response.

And what they found was that they had twice the insulin response at dinner than they did at

breakfast. And so what does that mean? Well, what it means is that when you eat breakfast, because of your circadian rhythm, your body is in a different mode in the morning. It is in, it's a new day. We have work to do and we need to fuel our muscles. Right. That's the mode that your body's in. So there's hormones.

There's different hormones pumping, there's different biochemical reactions happening in the body. And so when you eat a meal at breakfast early, your body takes those calories and sends them to your muscles. It sends that fuel to your muscles to prime them for work. But when you eat that meal at dinnertime, your body's response is, well, we're not going to work, right? We're going to bed. So let's store this for tomorrow.

Christopher Wark (49:11.282)

And that's why you had this double insulin response from dinner. And so it's like eating twice as much food, right, which is kind of crazy. If you think about it, eating a same meal at dinner versus breakfast is like eating twice as much food, twice as many calories. And so that's why and the later you eat, the worse it is. So that's why late night eating is especially bad, because it interferes with your sleep, you don't get good restful sleep. And then also, you are storing a lot of excess energy is body fat. So

I'm not saying don't eat dinner, but I'm just, it's just cool. And it's good to be aware. It's cool to know that that's that research exists and how your body's designed. Right. But also, you know, there's a sort of an adage like eat like a king for breakfast, a prince for lunch and a pauper for dinner. Yep. There's a lot of people in the Seventh-day Adventist community, including my friend who's almost a hundred, he's an Adventist doctor named Dr. John Scharfenberg. He is wonderful. And he just never eats dinner. That's just his, that's one of his secrets.

You know, it's interesting, Chris, like when you think about gastric bypass surgery, they're taking your stomach, which is about the size of a cantaloupe, and they're making it really, really tiny so that whatever you eat, you're going to feel full because your stomach's so small. Well, instead of surgically and mechanically making your stomach smaller, what we're proposing is you make your food bigger, you know, and then you will feel full. And that's the thing. You don't have to resort to that. You got to learn to change what is on your plate.

It always sticks with him. He says people are not overweight because they eat too much food. It's because they take in too many calories because their diet is higher in caloric density than their species evolved at and that we're supposed to be eating at most of the time. It's right on. Yeah. And you know, we should talk about fruit too, because this comes up all the time. I'm asked almost every day. What about fruit? Fruit has too much sugar, you know. And the reality is fruit is, first of all, it's delightful.

Right? Fruit is delightful. It's delicious. When you eat it, it's, you know, sweet and savory, and you get all these wonderful, you know, sometimes it's tart, whatever, like you just get all these wonderful taste sensations from fruit from berries or apples or oranges or pineapples or papaya,

whatever. Right? So it's delightful to eat. It does light up your pleasure centers. It gives you energy in the form of various carbohydrates and sugar, which your cells need. They want it. Right? So that's good.

Christopher Wark (51:38.078)

It gives you water, which your body of course needs, H₂O. It gives you fiber and enzymes and good bacteria. So like fruit is an incredible food. And I've said this before, if you go to the hospital and you go in the waiting room and you survey all the sick people in the waiting room and ask them what they eat, I promise you they're not fruitarians. Okay. They're not.

And they're not even eating. They're not even gonna tell you I eat a lot of fruit. They're probably gonna tell you they don't eat fruit. Okay. Like fruit is not the cause of major chronic diseases. It's not because we're eating too much fruit. It's because we're not eating fruit. And I know a lot of people who have lost tons of weight all the way they wanted to lose just eating fruit. Yep. Well, caloric density is like 200 to 300 calories per pound with some fruits.

being 67 calories per pound, people don't realize things like eggplant, tomato, cucumber, okra, zucchini, and bell pepper. These are fruits. Yeah. 67 calories per pound. Avocado. Although it's higher in calories. But like you mentioned, the 120 calories in a tablespoon of olive oil, well, you can have two pounds of zucchini and you can grill it or air fry it or steam it. And it's just, you know, I always think what's going to fill me up more? Yeah, exactly. Like at the end of the day.

What does it does it taste good? Does it fill you up? Does it give you energy? And is it supplying your body with tons of nutrition, vitamins, minerals, enzymes, antioxidants, and all these wonderful nutrients? You know, if you're checking all those boxes, you're doing it right. Vegetables do it, fruits do it, legumes do it, whole grains do it, nuts and seeds do it. And so we can go really complex on the nutritional science, you know, which is fun, but.

It all is coming back around. It all comes back around to say the solution is very simple. Yeah. Well, Jack Lillane, he summed it up in about 13 words many years ago. He said, if God made it, eat it. If man made it, don't eat it. That's right. And I heard Jack, so people who know my story, Jack came out, I was in the cancer clinic waiting to see the oncologist and the television was on and Jack came out on one of the morning shows and said that.

Christopher Wark (54:01.742)

And I had just read my first book on raw food. And then Jack comes out and says that while I'm in the cancer clinic waiting room. And I was like, oh my gosh, like this timing is divine. I can't believe. You should tell his wife, I know his wife, you should tell her that. I'd love to. I'll introduce you to his. I'd love to tell her that because- He's lovely. Yeah, his presence in that moment of my life was like, it was a little mini miracle for me. Because when you're, you know, when you're sick,

for me, when I was sick and I was trying to figure out how to get well. And I was, I had an idea. I

was starting to learn about raw food and healing and nutrition. And, and it made a lot of sense, but I still had a lot of doubts too. And I was desperate for encouragement. You know, I mean, really, I was really desperate for some validation, for some encouragement, for some testimonials. Has anybody else out there done this? Like have people can, can cancer really be healed?

And, and so yeah, I mean, just Jack coming out there in that moment was one of those like, it was that little signpost on the trail, you know, just to remind me like you're on the right path. And so yeah, I'm super, I'm just super thankful. And I love Jack LaLanne. Yeah, he's amazing. He's a he's a legend. Yep. Legend. So, well, I want to be respectful of your time. We've burned up about an hour and it's been it's gone by really fast. It's been really fun.

Thank you for what you do. I know you've encouraged countless people. You've helped so many people get on the healthy path, lose weight, reverse chronic diseases. I mean, it's just so cool. I'm so glad we're on the same team. I'm so glad to know you.

How can people connect with you? Just, you know, my name's Chef AJ. Chef AJ.com is my website. And you know, I do a live show every single day. I've done it for over three years, usually 11 a.m. Pacific time on YouTube. So if you just hop over on YouTube, I have just interesting people like Chris, like some of the doctors that we mentioned. And it would be my pleasure to have you watch the show and learn some more things that can help you in your journey to optimal health and wellness. And you know, you say about on the same team, you know, when I think about it.

Christopher Wark (56:19.966)

And I was thinking about this in preparing for the interview, even though your focus is mainly cancer and my focus has mainly been weight loss and Robbie and Cyrus's focus is mastering diabetes. You know, we're all eating the same diet pretty much with some maybe cool tweaks. It's pretty much the same diet. We're all recommending. It is the same. It's whole food, plant based diets. I mean, there's, I mean it's 98% the same.

You don't need one for cancer, diabetes or weight loss. You need to eat real food from the ground. Yeah. Eat whole food from the earth that God made for you and the more of it you eat, the better. Right? Literally, the more you eat, the better. Of course, Dr. Brooke Goldner, her focus is lupus. Same diet. Same. Right? Dr. Sarai Stancic healed multiple sclerosis. Same diet. So it's like...

That's the cool thing is when you flood your body with nutrition, when you really flood it with nutrients like you never have before, you activate healing mechanisms, right? That just, that need activation, right? If you're not healing, it's cause you need a little help. You got to help yourself. Your body needs a little help. So, yeah, that's awesome. Again, thank you. Thanks for hanging out, for doing the interview. It was really fun talking to you.

Fun to talk to you as always, Chef AJ. And everybody, I will link to Chef AJ to connect with her, books we talked about, all that kind of stuff in the notes below this video. Thanks for watching. Please share this with people you care about, especially if there are folks that you know that maybe are struggling with their weight, right? If they just need, you know, if they've done all the crash diets. And by the way, I know a lot of people who are serial crash dieters. And we talked about this earlier, but.

You know, crash diets don't, they work in the short term, right? Because anybody can kind of do something for two weeks or a month or something and restrict themselves, but they don't work long term because they're so restrictive, right? They're so unsustainable, as Chef AJ mentioned. And so what we're talking about is not a crash diet. It's, it's literally changing your lifestyle, like really choosing to eat differently. And I want to say one more thing that I didn't say earlier, that I think this is a really important concept is like, it's not about

Christopher Wark (58:45.206)

Forbidden foods, right? It's not about like oh these foods are bad never eat these foods Uh, right. Yes, I can make the case never eat junk food and fast food and processed food But but really what I want to encourage you to do more is to raise your standard Right to set a higher standard for yourself on What you put in your body? Yeah, what is food, you know, right? That's a different mindset when you decide You know what? I am better than this right like

My body deserves better than this than a Twinkie, right? It deserves better when you compartmentalize food in that way of like, where am I drawing the line here? What's the food that I wanna be eating that I know I should be eating that I really deserve to eat? And what's the food that is, this is below my level now. It's an epic self love to eat well. It is, it really is. You wanna take care of yourself, start by what you're putting in your mouth. Absolutely, amen.

Amen. We'll stop right there. Thanks everybody. We'll see you on the next one.