

## **That's a Hard No**

### **Transcript: S2 E4 "Rethinking Food and the Mind/Body Connection"**

00:00:09

*Heather:* Hello and welcome to That's A Hard No, the podcast about saying no and setting boundaries.

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*Heather:* So you can become the authentic and empowered you that this world needs.

00:00:20

*Heather:* I'm Heather Drago

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*Sarah:* and I'm Sarah Saunders.

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*Heather:* Before we start a quick reminder.

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*Sarah:* While I am a licensed professional clinical counselor, this podcast is in no way a replacement for one on one therapy with a mental health professional. If you notice the content in this podcast triggering some big feelings, please visit our website. [Hardnopodcast.com](http://Hardnopodcast.com).

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*Heather:* Thanks Sarah, ready to get started?

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*Sarah:* I'm so excited for today!

00:00:50

*Heather:* me too.

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*Sarah:* Before we bring Alie in, and I just want to forewarn you, that this content may be sensitive for some people. So please be mindful of how you're feeling while you're listening and know that the beautiful thing about podcasts is that you can pause, them, you can stop them and you can come back whenever you feel like you're able to digest this information.

00:01:17

*Heather:* Thanks Sarah. So hi Alie, It's so nice to meet you. Thanks for coming on the podcast.

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*Alie:* Yes, thanks for having me.

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*Sarah:* It's so good to see you all.

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*Alie:* Yes, you too.

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*Sarah:* So a little behind the scenes. So a is someone that I am actually working with

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personally on my relationship with food and my health and wellness journey, and I am so excited to share her with all of you.

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*Heather:* And she might be working with me soon too, now that I know more about it I was going. I want to do that, I want to do that, I want to do so Alie tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do.

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*Alie:* Well, thank you for the introduction. So I am a registered licensed dietician and I actually just finished my training in integrative and functional nutrition. So I am board certified in integrative and functional nutrition now. I've been practicing for the last 13 years. My background is within the hospitals, practicing clinically as a dietician and then recently started my own private practice.

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*Heather:* Yay, congratulations!

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*Alie:* Thank you. So that's called Wholistic nutrition and I've always kind of been into the integrative world and then, more so got into it personally after my first child was born, and that kind of just let me down this path. And that's you know why I am where I am now.

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*Sarah:* So for listeners that may not really fully understand integrative. Can you kind of break that down a little bit? What exactly that means?

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*Alie:* Yeah, so the very core of integrative nutrition is taking a mind-body approach and looking at the whole body as one system. So yes, my focus is on nutrition, but with that integrative background we're looking at things like sleep. How are your sleeping? How does that impact, You know things like mood and anxiety. Are you exercising? How are your relationships? Are you getting out in nature? You know again taking that whole body approach to understanding your body and you know essentially your story and where you are. You know why you got where you are right now

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*Sarah:* and I think, in the line of work that I do. It's just imperative to understand gut health and how it impacts mental health, and so I'm curious if you could just add some insight in regards to that.

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*Alie:* Yeah, so interesting, I'm little to admit, is that the cut in the brain actually start from the same cell in utero and then they split in two and they communicate via the vagus nerve, which you may be familiar with, and the gut's actually called the second brain. And that's because the gut actually communicates with the brain just as much, if not more, as the brain communicates with the gut. I'm going to get it communicates via that vagus nerve and then we also know that serotonin that feel good, neurotransmitter, that antidepressant hormone,

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over 95% of that is produced in our gut. So again, relation with what's going on in our gut impacts our brain.

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*Heather:* Wow!

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*Alie:* That that's I think, one of the big major gut/brain connections right there and just really understanding that the does communicate with the brain.

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*Sarah:* Absolutely. And, Heather, I'm looking at your face and both of us. You know our eyes are so wide right now and I think what's interesting is, you know, in the first episode, when we kind of reintroduced ourselves and the idea of boundaries, boundaries are a skill that you have to learn and this is the same type of thing Generationally, unfortunately, a lot of us did not learn a lot of these things in regards to understanding our body, understanding these connections, and so even that very simple language that you just used about our being our second brain. A lot of us aren't educated on this.

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*Heather:* Yeah, my mind is spinning right now because I have so many gut related health issue and while I feel that my mental health is in a pretty good state. I'm sure it's impacting me and I'm sure it's adding to my stress level and whatever. So I'm really fascinated at how the stomach is communicating to the brain as much as the other way around. So I'm really fascinated by that.

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*Alie:* And I think too, the vagus nerve again is that nerve that runs between the gut and the brain, and that's where that communication happens. A lot of people aren'T aware that we can get kind of poor vagal tone, which means that because of our chronic stress and the stressful lives that we live, we basically get into that sympathetic fight or flight state and that really weakens that vagal tone and something so simple we can do to kind of help strengthen that communication is just strengthen that vagal tone with things like humming, singing, lying on the stomach, meditating a little, practices like that. That helps strengthen that muscle and that nerve and those signals from the gut to the brain and that really activate that parasympathetic rest, digest state. It really helps with anxiety and stress

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*Sarah:* Absolutely, and I love what you're sharing, because I think as humans we're so inclined to do things more so externally. You know whether it's changing our workout routine or, yes, getting outside, doing all of that, but it's really healing from the inside out. And so with that being said and understanding, you know every body, everybody is different. I feel like the diet, language can be a trigger for so many people, but I'm also curious about the things that you're sharing and what are certain things that can aid our mental health and what are things that actually do the opposite?

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*Alie:* Yeah, so I do want to back up a little bit and say with integrative nutrition, is that you

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know the motto as food is medicine. So the food that we eat really can either contribute to health or it can contribute to disease. And with that said, we want to focus on eating a whole foods, plant-based diet, kind of like a mediterranean diet. So lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, you know nuts, seeds, legumes, plenty of healthy fats, which really helps support the brain and really help support things like mood and anxiety. And then, in terms of like lifestyle practices that we can incorporate to really help. So I mentioned a couple in toning that vagal nerve. But things like yoga, gentle stretches really getting out of our mind and into our bodies, tai chii even things again, like meditating, deep breathing a pranayama, practice, some simple things like square breathing. Are you familiar with square breathing? Four by four, breathing where you breathe in for four, hold for four, breathe out for four and hold for four. Doing a few rounds of that really helps again strengthen that vagal tone and really helps bring down anxiety and helps with our stress level. And also fascinating about that too. When we do that again activates that parasympathetic rest and digest state. So that's really nice to do right before we eat, because then we digest our food better and then we get more nutrition or more nutrients from our food. And when it comes to food and brain health, something specifically looking at b vitamins. So foods really rich, especially b-12 and b-6. Those are really important for brain health. So things like you know, dark, leafy greens, spinach, kale, bok choy, dandelion greens, you know animal products obviously have b12 too. foods, rich and healthy fat. So avocados, olives, olive oil, extra virgin olive oil, I should say nuts, seeds. All of that majority of our brain is fat. So it's important to eat those fats to really support it and the culture that we grew up in. We were kind of told fat is bad. Don't eat fat, we don't want fat and we know that's far from the truth. Our body needs that healthy, the poly and monounsaturated fat.

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*Sarah:* I want to pause for a second because as very busy people, Heather I know you can relate to this, I feel like you said something that I just want to touch back on. Is the slowing down while we're eating.

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*Heather:* I actually wanted to pick up on that too.

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*Sarah:* Yeah, because I just feel like I am constantly multitasking. When Alie and I did meet, she had asked: you know, how do you eat most of your meals and oftentimes I'm like eating on the go, and so all. I want you to share a little bit about the benefits and why it's so important.

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*Heather:* I have a primo example of this. I'm gonna...

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*Sarah:* Yeah

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*Heather:* I'm going to give you a little behind the scenes. So we have this wonderful marketing and production coordinator Maura, who meets with our guests ahead of time and

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she records the meeting. So we can kind of get a sense of\ What they're like. I mean partially, it's for notes, but also it's just so we can get a sense of a person's personality and tone and stuff. So today, I was, of course, behind and rushing and I had a report. I had to get out to a client, so I ran downstairs, made myself some lunch, came back upstairs, put it on my desk. I'm making this report I've got this video of Alie talking and as I'm sticking a turkey roll-up in my mouth I hear her say you really shouldn't be multitasking when you're eating because your body can't...and I literally was like uhhh, with the thing sticking in my mouth and I thought: wow! She's talking about me and no wonder I don't feel like I'm getting nutrition even though I'm eating healthy, so that was a big lightbulb moment for me earlier today, and I would love to hear you talk more about it.

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*Heather:* Yeah, that's a big lightbulb moment for a lot of my clients that I work with, and that is one of the first things I dive into. Is: are you eating, standing up, in the car, are you multitasking, checking emails, and so many people are and even professionals. You know they don't break for lunch anymore. It's like ok, I'm going to eat while I'm doing x,y,z and that does impact our digestion. So we don't break down and digest our food fully when we're not paying attention to them. So then we don't absorb the full nutrition from them. And also when we do that, we're not eating mindfully. So we tend. You know our minds tend to be over here with work while our hand is shoveling food and our mouths. And next thing we know we've finished our plate. We're not satisfied. We want more. The sugar cravings come in or whatever, or we want that second plate of food because we're not satisfied, we didn't pay attention to it. So I really try to encourage my clients if they can just take one meal, if you can take one meal a day, sit-down have both your feet on-the-ground take a deep breath, you know, (deep breath) let it out and then just focus on eating. No distractions, no telephone, no computer, no TV, and it's amazing how people feel better. They digest their food better. There's less gas or bloating, you know less some of that GI discomfort we can get and then they feel more satisfied and like, oh wow, I felt that was really nourishing. You know, I don't need to have a second plate, grab something sugary after.

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*Sarah:* Yeah, I love that and even just you know, mindfully practicing that. I think it's so interesting because at least for me it's like I've lost sight of what signals my body's sending me because I, I'm not slowing down enough and so being able to slow down and really think like, is my body hungry? Where do I notice the hunger coming from? Because I'm someone that I do suffer from chronic migraines and I noticed that a big sign for me is a headache and oftentimes that's alerting me. I'm over hungry at that point and so to really be able to check-in with myself, acknowledge those signals and then also understand. You know, are you someone that likes crunchy foods? Do you like softer foods, like what really is satisfying, You know, those types of cravings, and I never realized, yeah, what it's like to really sit and be intentional and intuitive while eating, because we live in such a fast paced world.

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*Alie:* Yeah, and I think that's where we have a lot of good issue. Well, now is because we're

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shoving food and we're not taking the time to properly digest and absorb it, and it definitely has an impact on your health.

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*Heather:* So you talked about the mediterranean diet and leafy greens and lagumes and nuts and and oils. I have a very strict diet. I have a number of issues. I've tried to sort of navigate them, but I started with what's called a fodmap diet or low fodmap diet where it's basically an elimination diet? Right, and then you reintroducing things. And I can't have like seeds or nuts. I can't have legumes. So I feel like I'm always trying to find those healthy, feel good foods that replace some of those things and not, to like, get a personal consultation out of this, but what if you have some dietary restrictions, and you're trying to find some really, you know, kind of basic mood enhancing or, you know, general feel good foods, what kinds of things do you recommend?

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*Alie:* So the first thing is bone broth. So I don't know if you do bone broth, you're familiar. So bone broth is from simmering bones for long periods of time to really get all the nutrients out of the bones, specifically something called glutamine and glycine. So those are amino acids and those two are really nourishing to the GI tract. So those actually feed the cells of the gut lining. And that's why bone broth is so important when it comes to health, but also mental health. So that's one that you can do. Some people can sip it straight up in a teacup. I am not one of those, but I do prefer to make soups with it. Or you know anything that calls for a liquid. You know we can add-in that bone broth. So that's a really really good one that most people can tolerate. You know, given whatever therapeutic diet that they may be following. So that's a really nice one. And then omega3 fatty, healthy, fat, rich food. So wildcaught salmon is really important if that's something you can tolerate, having that once a week. Some other fatty fish that are good are mackerel, sardines, herring is another good one. So adding those. Tuna a lot of people like tuna, but tuna can be high and mercury because it's that bigger fish. So it eats the smaller fish and mercury we know is a neuro toxin and that can cause some other issues. Tuna is one that we want to be careful with just because of that mercury content. So salmon's a really nice, good one to add. Like you said, if you can have that once a week again, healthy fat. So if you can do olive oil or avocados and you know the fodmap. some

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*Heather:* thank you.

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*Sarah:* Well and as you're you're sharing all of these things. This you know the pregnant woman in me. I'm like salivating over here and speaking of that, though, I mean cravings are real, and so especially, you know, during, you know, pregnancy or maybe during your menstrual cycle, or even, you know, during certain times of the year people maybe they're feeling a little bit more depressed or anxious, and so they have certain cravings. So how do you support those types of cravings, honoring your body, but then also not turning up the volume with those mental health symptoms? What are some things that people can

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gravitate to when wanting some of those? Maybe sweet treats or you know, salty or whatever it is?

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*Alie:* Yeah, and you kind of touched on it a little bit too, with that intuitive eating. So that is a big component of it. And listening to our body. What are our hunger cues are we hungry or are we stressed, eating when our body is really calling for us to eat? And you're right, you know at times we could be craving certain. You know foods, and that might be because there's certain nutrients in it. Specifically, I'll say, with menstrual cycle, you know we can. We can crave chocolate and chocolates actually high in magnesium, and magnesium helps with menstrual cramps. It's natural relaxation mineral, so it helps to relax. You know pain. So again, you know, with craving around menstrual cycles, you know it's craving food because we need certain nutrients from it? Or sometimes we're craving it because it's a part of our culture. It's how we grew up here. There's something that you know is satisfying. Yes, food is medicine, but it's also more than just that we eat because it's a part of who we are and it's you know how we connect with others. So honoring, you know those cravings, but trying to put that more mindful, intuitive, healthier twist on it. So if it is something sweet, you're craving. You know, Sarah, we talked about the avocado moose. Can you make? Basically it's like chocolate pudding made with avocado and cocoa powder, which is really high in magnesium again, but it tastes like chocolate pudding.

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*Sarah:* It's delicious.

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*Heather:* I'm going to try that.

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*Alie:* Yeah, so if there's something we're craving, you know if it's pete we're craving. You know how can we make it a little bit more nourishing? Can we throw some more veges on it or have a side salad with it? You know again, it's it's honoring our body and its needs, but understanding that we also want to nourish our body and our mind too,

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*Heather:* I think about sugar a lot, sugar a lot. I love chocolate. Since having breast cancer, one of the things I was told is to reduce estrogen in my body. To reduce the amount of sugar I would take, so it's 25 grams. It's about six teaspoons of sugar, so I've been really good about just kind of kind of mindfully budgeting myself. I can have a little but in my coffee in the morning, or you know, whatever, I read somewhere that when you're craving sugar it's really that your brain is fatigued. I think what you're saying is: be mindful about why you're craving things, and I'm finding I'm having this dialogue with myself all the time. Well, why am I craving this sugar? Is it just because I'm bored? Is it because I'm tired? Do I need to just go to sleep? But not be rigid about it. I have. I have a couple of family members who eat zero sugar. They are just completely strict and one person said to me: it's harder for me to limit sugar than to just cut it out altogether, and so I guess I'm wondering what your take is on like. Super rigid boundaries around food versus I don't know what you would call it Mindful

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eating or budgeting or fudging the boundaries every now and then. Cheat days. What's your take?

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*Heather:* And I think you know I'm sure you're very well familiar with, like the 80/20 rule, like we want to eat healthy 80% of the time, 20% of the time, we can allow ourselves some grace to enjoy things again. Food is more than just nourishment for our bodies. But when it comes to sugar and it just depends. So when it comes to like strict diet rules, sometimes there is a therapeutic diet. We may have someone on, which means they're on it for a short amount of time to really help with their symptoms or their diagnosis. So we may eliminate something like sugar for a couple of months to really maybe help get rid of candida or yeast overgrowth in their track. So those again they're therapeutic, they're short-term they're not meant to be long term or for the rest of our lives. So in that sense there is a place for those therapeutic diets where it's said strict. We're following this for a medical reason, under, you know, medical supervision, and then when it comes to enjoying sugar in our everyday lives, sugar is something just to be mindful of again. Just because sugar weakens our immune system. And you know right now we're in the middle of FLU season and a pandemic. So it's important. You know that we're being mindful that we're not putting too much sugar in our bodies because it does weaken our immune system and sugar does play a role in anxiety and depression. And sugar again feeds the bad bacteria energy track. So getting back to that gut brain connection, sugar can feed the bad bugs in our gut and then that can impact or mood or energy the way we feel. So again, it's yes, listening to our body and being mindful, and maybe there's you know, healthier sugar alternatives, you know, can we use maybe some maple syrup or some raw honey that have a little bit more medicinal components to them versus white table sugar, which we do is not good for us.

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*Sarah:* And Heather, and as you're bringing that up, it's it's such a good point, because having that label of restricting yourself from something that can take a toll on our mental health and so being really mindful about the language that we are using when we're talking about foods, because when we tell ourselves I can't have something the way that our brain is wired is, it's going to make us want that more. So being able to do it in a safe and respectful way to our body is really important.

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*Heather:* We'll be right back.

00:24:16

*Sarah:* So we are back with Alie and I wanted you to elaborate a little bit more on the mental messaging and the narrative around food.

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*Alie:* Yeah, so you are talking about how you know it's a mental dialogue and when it comes to eating certain foods, it really matters what we're telling ourselves and what we're saying in our mind, because those thoughts can be more damaging or just as damaging, if not more, than the food themselves. So you know we're eating a candy bar or something. You know it's Halloween and you have a little minnie candy bar and then you beat yourself up

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about it. That self talk is more damaging to your body in the long term. Versus, if you were like, oh ok, it was Halloween. You know I had some candy. All right, I'm going to have a really healthy, nourishing dinner and and kind of having again that positive dialogue with ourselves.

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*Sarah:* I just want to pause there because I think that that is something that we just don't talk about enough. Is that the messaging that we send to ourselves? I heard out of your mouth, a registered dietitian, that the, the narrative, the labels and the messaging that we are saying to ourselves can actually be more damaging than the actual sugar or food we put in your body.

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*Alie:* Yeah, yeah, and then it creates that vicious cycle. You know we ate something and then we feel guilty about it, you know, and then we feel shameful. So then we, you know, then we were strict and then you know we're really restrictive, and then that doesn't work. So then we binge again, so it has. It's that vicious cycle of again. It's really important to pay attention to our thoughts. What are we telling ourselves and kind of stopping them and reframing them into a more positive way?

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*Heather:* I love that and on that note. Let's talk about fad diets and some of these extreme diets we hear about. You know, I know people who've been on Atkins and they've been on weight watchers and they've been. I've been on noom. You know. I see people lose a ton of weight. They stop then, they gain weight again and then they're unhappy. Then they try the next thing, and it's just this vicious ongoing.

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*Sarah:* yo-yo

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*Heather:* So how do you talk to your clients about that kind of thing?

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*Alie:* And I think you know if you look at the dieting statistics for our nation, they're pretty depressing because you're right, these fad diets, they work short-term but they're not sustainable and people come off with them and they end up gaining more weight, coming off with them. And again. It's because we're not getting to that mindset. We're not really working on their relationship with their self and their body and their relationship with food. Instead, it's focusing on this fat diet and giving everything on that, and in the long run that does not work. So when it comes to, you know again, if the goal is weight-loss just it comes down to mindful eating and intuitive eating and really listening to our bodies, listening to how we're talking to ourselves, having that positive dialogue and working on that relationship with ourselves and the relationship we have with food again. What are we telling ourselves about food? What are we saying about food? You know what are our thoughts and feelings and really kind of diving into that,

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*Sarah:* and it's so interesting that you bring you know that into it, because oftentimes we don't trust ourselves, and so we don't trust ourselves with having certain foods in the house. We don't trust ourselves with being able to enjoy one by listening. Is this worth it? Is it? How do I feel, and so really being able to pause, to slow down and to trust yourself enough, that I can have you know, these sweet treats or whatever it is, but I can do it in a way that is mindful and when we can start to develop that trust within ourselves, which starts in the inside, were then going to be able to start to exhibit that through our eating patterns.

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*Heather:* Also, Sarah a lot of times you talk about the seasons of our lives. That's also a physical thing. And I know. You and I are in two completely different seasons. Here you are about to have baby number four. I'm post-menopausal and I just read this article in the New York Times about how. Why women gain so much weight around the middle when they're postmenopausal and as I read this long article about what nutrition is say and about doctors, about exercise and stuff, I was so. Relieved I just felt like I can give myself, a little bit of grace. This isn't just a result of me. Bad about the way I eat, there's an actual season I'm going through, and so now I can think about this a little better, and I think people forget that just because you see some skinny 25-year old on TV doesn't mean your body can do the same thing.

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*Alie:* And you hit the nail on the head. You know when you said: offer myself grace, and I think that is something I speak to with so many of my clients. Offer yourself that grace and you at first-hand how that allows you to take a step back and kind of relax and think about. You know the season of life may be in an, how you know that impact things versus beating ourselves up, and you know saying the worst things we can say to ourselves.

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*Heather:* That shitty committee gets real loud sometimes, especially around food.

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*Sarah:* Well, and it's it's so interesting because, as you're sharing this, you know, being a mom and having my third baby, you know, during a pandemic I realized how often I was going to get coffee through a drive-through because I would put all of the kids in the car. They were all strapped in. So it was like finally a change of scenery, some place to get out of the house, but to be safe, and I really started to unpack like I wouldn't even always finish the cup of coffee. I did notice that the caffeine did heighten my anxiety through some of, like the deeper work I was doing. But what I was noticing is that it was so nice to be able to drive-through tell someone else my order for them to serve me, and it was just the act of doing that that I was like. It's really not about the coffee, it is about the, the service that I'm being provided and feeling as though someone is taking care of me. And you know I always talk about self-care and how self-care can look very different in different seasons. And self-care shouldn't hurt us, it shouldn't hurt our bank account, it shouldn't hurt our body. But I also have this narrative in my head of like what is wrong with me? Why can't I, you know, get my shit together, that I have to pack my kids in the car. I have to go and get this coffee and it's

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like it wasn't about that. It was about this sense of like I needed to give myself, grace, recognize I was at capacity, I needed to get in the car, I needed to know my kids were safe and I just needed that like interaction of someone, to do something for me.

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*Heather:* Also, I mean we've all had to give up treating ourself in so many ways. And just going mindlessly somewhere to do something we enjoy. So why shouldn't you strap the kids in and go for drive and get coffee?

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*Sarah:* You know, like one was able to write that permission slip to myself, giving myself permission to do that. It was so much more enjoyable rather than telling myself something's wrong with me. I can't believe here you are again doing this, and so shifting that narrative also made what I was drinking so much more nourishing to my body.

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*Heather:* Enjoyable, you weren't feeling guilty. That makes sense. Speaking of seasons, we were talking about seasons. We're in a season that's really dark right now. Like physic, we live in the Cleveland area, December, January, February. It's just gray, it's just gray. Here. I once had a doctor tell me that we have more people percapita with seasonal affective disorder. We're only second to the Seattle area. I don't now if that's true or not, but that's what a doctor told me, and I know I have a vitamin d deficiency. My, my kids both have it. Also, we have this physical season. We also have this mental season. We have this sort of grief and trauma. Everyone's going through through this whole pandemic thing and like we think we're over it and then wait a minute, everybody go back inside.

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*Sarah:* I call it the bracing for impact.

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*Heather:* That's true. So can you give us some idea of like either food? Will help us feel good. I know you touched on some of this already. Or was. Think about. Food or ways to gather around food does anything? Relating to nutrition, that might help boost some of our energy or some of our spirits. Short-term things, long term things.

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*Alie:* I love that you bring that up, especially like you said, being here in Cleveland, Ohio, and and you know the start on some feel good music when you're making yourself your food, even if it's something as simple as putting together smoothie. Put on some feel good music right there. We know the impact that music has on our mood, in our energy and how we feel. But play some feel good music and and make your meals while you're doing that, the other thing is enjoy your food with company if you can. So, Sarah, I love that you brought up just the act of going out of the house and having connection with other people. It wasn't necessarily just the coffee, it was just getting out and having someone serve you in that connection. That's another piece of the puzzle when we think about mental health or health in general is connecting. That's hard. We're in the middle of a pandemic, but that's been going on for too long now.

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00:34:39

*Heather:* For ever.

00:34:41

*Alie:* But finding ways to connect. So maybe you make a meal for a loved one or you know, can you make a meal for our neighbor, someone, or Sarah's about to have a baby, you know bring her food? You know how can we do things that make us feel good around food again. So playing, feel good music, connecting with others, sharing a nice meal with others, if we can, even sharing a meal over some, you know, or some hot tea over some with some friends. So that connection piece is huge for mental health and when it comes to food. So I will go back to sugar, just because sugar is, you know, one, that it really does impact our gut, in our mood, in our energy. So we can really try to stay away from those you know heavily sugary processed foods like nuts, cakes. Yes, it's okay right now and then it's okay. We're celebrating and we want to have grace for ourselves, but it's not something we want to be having every single day and understanding that that impacts our mental health. And when we're setting up our plates too, thinking about adding in those healthy fats at all of our meals, because that really supports our brain and our feelgood hormones, being food rich in magnesium, magnesium again, it's that relaxation mineral which I think so many of us are depleted in that right now because of chronic stress in our daily lives. So stress really depletes that magnesium. So eating foods rich in that again, like dark leafy greens, chocolate is good, but dark chocolate. So we want something with the high cocoa content

00:36:12

*Sarah:* That HU brand. That you suggested is amazing.

00:36:17

*Sarah:* Isn't it so good? HU is one of my favourite chocolate brands. It's really clean, it's made with coconut sugar. It doesn't have inflammatory oils in it and you notice it doesn't have. Chocolate usually has, like a shiny layer on it, and that's chemical that we don't want. So you notice chocolate does not.

00:36:36

*Heather:* How do you spell it?

00:36:38

*Alie:* HU, it's like get back to human.

00:36:41

*Heather:* Okay.

00:36:42

*Alie:* Yeah, it's got that dark cocoa content that's high in magnesium. So again, that's really nice for a little boost when we're having, you know, more anxiety or more stress and then also being mindful again with with our plates and how we're setting them up. So having a nourishing plate with those healthy fats, healthy protein, high fiber carbohydrates, and you know those fruits and vegetables and being mindful of eating things that are, you know, maybe glycemic or empty carbohydrate foods or carbohydrate foods that don't have much fiber in them. Again we talk about, you know, like the donuts and cakes and things like that,

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because that has an impact on our mood. So does that kind of give you some things to do, kind of, you know, turning up the music, connecting eating with others?

00:37:35

*Heather:* That connection thing is so big. I mean during the Thanksgiving, Christmas 2020 when we were all so restricted. We ended up cooking holiday meals and we packed them just like you would like if you were ordering a big meal from takeout, we sent them to, like my father-in-law and my mom and then we ate over Zoom together And it really made it tolerable. I mean, of course there were like technical glitches and people couldn't hear each other and stuff. But you know it was a way, it was an attempt at least to connect, and you know I know it was appreciated and stuff like that. So I think food can be very comforting in times of stress, but I know that there are also foods we should all avoid too. Right, besides sugar and processed foods, are there any others that you would suggest?

00:38:23

*Heather:* It really comes down to an individual level. So Sarah you mentioned, you know some specific functional lab tests we can do to really understand what the individual needs, and that is again what it's at the core of integrative and functional nutrition. It's really understanding what you need on an individual know biochemical level, not what you know the textbooks say or whatever guru out there says. Really understanding what your body needs. So we can do testing and understand specifically food sensitivity testing. We can look at and say, oh, there's certain foods that you're reacting to, that are contributing to inflammation, which can contribute to brain fog and again, many mood disorders, and I know a couple specifically like dairy and gluten, are big ones for a lot of people. Not everyone, but some people...

00:39:15

*Heather:* I'm waving, yep both of em.

00:39:16

*Alie:* Yeah and dairy for some can definitely trigger mood disorders and because it's the case, it's one of the proteins in dairy actually binds the opioid receptors in our brain so that can affect some people's mental and emotional wellbeing. Gluten another one. So there's something called non celiac gluten sensitivity. So you can be reacting to gluten and have again. You can have all sorts of symptoms: skin rashes, but again more so the mental health piece. There can be a lot of, you know, anxiety or depression, schizophrenia, things like autism, you know, with that gluten. So it really comes down to an individualized, personalized care plan. It's not one thing for one size if it's all.

00:40:06

*Sarah:* And that's what I think is so interesting too. Is that recognizing, being mindful in those moments, slowing down when you are consuming certain foods and understanding how does it make you feel afterwards. And so I know, as I mentioned before, and you know coffee, you know the caffeine, I noticed I felt like I needed it and it was. I did enjoy, you know the warmth of it. But then I noticed, like the future, need did not enjoy, like the crash of the side-effects and so being able to still meet that need but do it in a healthy way. I've been doing a lot of matcha. I've been adding like ghee, you know, even like coconut oil and that

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oat milk, to kind of help sweeten it a little bit. But those types of things have then helped me. You know, gain, have the fat, so it has. You know some of that brain clarity, but really being intentional about is this food serving my body or is it not? And also, I think, being very mindful of water, you know rule of thumb and there's a lot out there. But you know taking your bodyweight, dividing it by two, drinking half your body weight in ounces, I think, is something that you know has really helped me and does help a lot of clients, especially using a straw. The deep breathing is so important and so when we are feeling like we're triggered in some way, maybe are we feeding the feeling? Are we feeding the hunger? What's going on for us? Taking your water, you know, drinking out of a straw, gulping, you know, taking that good deep breath and pausing before we make the choice.

00:42:00

*Alie:* Yeah, and Heather, you know, you ask us there are certain things we can do at this time of year to kind of help support our brain health or our mental health, and Sarah you mentioned so caffeine is one we know caffeine definitely plays a role in anxiety. So being mindful of not getting too much caffeine or making sure you know we're earlier enough in the day, staying hydrated. It's definitely really important. You know our brain needs. You know that that fluid. So, yes, getting plenty of water in having things you mentioned, like matcha and green tea, specifically to have something called altheanine, which is an amino acid and that helps with relaxation too. So that's another nice one that you know we can add an now, maybe replace the caffeine or the coffee with that, but also keeping our blood sugar stable. So people don't realize that we're not eating balanced or nourished meals. We can spike our blood sugar, then our blood sugar crashes and an hour later we're hungry or hangry or where we might. 4:00, we might have fatigue or brain fog, and that impacts our brain and our mood and our energy as well. So again really focusing on mindfully intuitively creating those nourishing plates again. We talked about the healthy fat, the protein, high fiber carbohydrates, to really help keep that blood sugar stable, which has an impact on our mood and how we feel.

00:43:27

*Sarah:* A quick tip for those people that do hit a wall around 4:00pm like What would you encourage them to do instead of, you know, picking up that energy drink or getting that coffee? What do you encourage?

00:43:42

*Alie:* Go for a walk, you know, do some quick stretches, do some jumping jacks, do somethin, forward folds. You know it's a yoga pose, just bend at the waist and have you know your your head below your heart. You know just some of those kind of again. Just kind of get you that quick jolt of energy, naturally, versus reaching for something sugary or sweet or caffeinated, and I will say too, with caffeine, you know a lot of times when we have caffeine in the morning we hit that wall or that crash later because our bodies, you know, burn through all of that. So consider maybe even getting off the caffeine and doing decaffeinated or again the herbal teas, and you'll be surprised by how much more energy you actually have and you stop hitting that four clock wall.

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00:44:30

*Sarah:* Which is all mindset right. We think I'm hitting that wall. I need to. You now get my caffeine, get my fix and I'm hearing you say this is a time to be very intentional, to recognize. Let's move our body, let's change the scenery, things like that, yeah.

00:44:48

*Heather:* And speaking of movement, I wanted to ask you about the role of exercise versus movement, and because I know those can be two different things along with all my list of many ailments. One of the other things I have is fibromyalgia, which I know is all related to the gut stuff. So you know, one of the things I've been told forever is: you need to move more, you need to exercise more so that you will feel better, but when you have fibromyalgia and you do a lot of exercise, it's painful. More so than just the normal fatigue of muscles, right so so I've had to try to find things that are gentler on my body, that are you know that I can handle. Doing on a regular basis, and you know know when I'm hitting my limit and when I should take a pause and maybe go for a walk later or something like that. So I know they are other people who feel like you need to do a huge amount of really rigorous exercise to burn off calories and other people say you need to eat less calories in the first place, and then you don't need to exercise as much. So like what's the role of exercise versus movement when it goes hand-in-hand with nutrition?

00:45:58

*Alie:* Yeah, you bring up a great point and I think a lot of times I actually use exercise and movement interchangeably and I think you know people think exercise. You've got to be running, you know 5k and dripping and sweat or doing a high intensity interval workout, and that's not true. So you know exercise can be gentle, things like walking or yoga or tiao chi again. That's movement for our body and just like when it comes to nutrition and eating. Movements should be mindfully done and intuitively. What feels good for us. And you kind of touched on that Heather listening to your body and what feels good for you. What can I do right now and honoring that? And kind of you know, working with what we have and sometimes it's it's all about different seasons of life too. So depending on where we are, we may be able to do more or less in honoring that and offering ourselves that grace and again finding things that serve us right now. So yes, we know exercise secretes, those moral transmitters, those feel good hormones and it helps with sleep. And and you know that's exercises, another movement and other good things we could do right now to support our moods in the middle of winter, but doing it again with what our body, you know, is telling us or what we feel, feels good to us. And again, I really like yoga just because it gets us out of the monkey brain and it really helps us to connect with our body and be in the moment and being present, which carries over into other areas of our life. So yoga is a nice one and then it also incorporates that deep breathing. So we activate that parasympathetic, that rest and digest nervous system. We oxygenate our body more too with those deep breaths, tai chi another one, especially you know, Heather with fibromyalgia, just doing gentle movements. It's more like meditative, but that really helps to kind of calm the gut, calm the brain, calm that anxiety, stress or inflammation and things like that. But we're still getting that movement in.

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00:48:00

*Heather:* I have to try that.

00:48:02

*Sarah:* I think this is probably one of the ones that I've struggled with the most, just because I think there was a narrative for a long time in my mind about how you know the more calories you know that you eat than you need to burn more calories and you know calories in calories out type of thing, and I am someone that I really enjoy: workouts, high intensity interval training and being pregnant. Having that mindset of you know you just got to keep going, you know, push yourself and having to slow down is really hard. This pregnancy, specifically it being my fourth, I was noticing you know some pelvic pain, some sciatic pain, and I switched to barre workouts, was recognizing, you know some of the running I was doing or even some of the cardio like. It was just painful, and so again that permission slip, being able to write the permission slip, understand the season that you're in being gentler with your body. It's just amazing. You know how you'll feel overall.

00:49:12

*Alie:* Yeah! So Alie, often people focus their energy about eating towards losing weight right. But really from what I'm hearing you say, I feel like you might suggest we need to think about it in terms of feeling good or physically feeling well right. So correct me if I'm wrong on that. With that in mind, what would you say to people? Who feel like they've made all these changes in their life? They're eating what they deemed to be healthy, they're exercising for whatever suits them and they're not getting where they want to go. They're either not losing weight or they're not feeling any better. What do you suggest they do?

00:50:02

*Alie:* Mindset. I think that's when we really start digging into the inner dialogue and a lot of time. That's some of the hardest work or more difficult than the eating. But really digging through that and unpacking. You know our past traumas or unpacking past experiences are things that were said to us and really understanding that and how that's impacting. You know ours and our health moving forward and you're right. You know some people we do need to lose weight for certain medical conditions. Maybe they have sleep apnea, they want to get off the c-pack so we want to get that extra weight off their chests and their legs. And again when we can really what's nice about functional nutrition as we look at the whole picture, the whole story and really kind of peace that together to understand what's going to work for you. And sometimes we can do that with trial and error and other times we can do that with testing. So really again, getting back to that individualized, personalized nutrition and understanding what's going on on a genetic level. Or you know for you, how can we best support your body? Or you know, let's do food sensitivity testing and see oh you're really reacting to these foods. Maybe that's why we're not shifting the scale, or maybe we do something like checking different labs, specifically blood sugar and fasting insulin and hemoglobin a1c, and making sure that you know your metabolic health is in good shape and that we've got good blood sugar control. That's going to impact, you know, weight and things like that.

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*Heather:* So if someone is feeling frustrated in their their health journey, or they feel like they've sought out treatment or therapy for their mental health issues, but they're kind of hitting a wall like do you suggest they talk to nutritionist to see if there's a more like holistic approach? Where should people start?

00:51:56

*Heather:* Yeah, I think that's a great a great place is. Yeah, find registered dietitian that you can work with or find, you know a functional medicine doctor you can work with, you know, and even better if you can find an integrative or functional dietitian just because we have that training and that knowledge that you know. My traditional college education, my traditional clinical education, you know hands-on experience did not teach me what I've learned in my integrative training. So find someone that looks outside the box. That really again helps you unpack your story, looks at the whole picture and really works with you. And if you find that you're just not connecting with someone, then that's okay. Find someone else, find someone until you feel like. Yes, this is someone who's going to partner with me and be on my team and help me, you know, navigate my health. So there's someone out there. So yeah, definitely you know. Find that someone for you and and don't be afraid to advocate for yourself, healthcare professionals is something that doesn't work for you. Then again, like you said, find someone else. There is someone out there to help you unpack it all.

00:53:05

*Sarah:* And you bring up such a great point because I think it's really important to remember that advocacy part and to remember that you have to shop around to find a good fit. It's kind of silly, but I always try and remind people that I work with that pills don't teach skills, and so, if you're meeting with.

00:53:29

*Heather:* I love that, that's great.

00:53:30

*Sarah:* I am not anti medication by any means, but I also feel like, especially in the world today, practitioners and providers are being ambushed with so many things that oftentimes you know they'll ask you what your symptoms are. You tell them and they'll prescribe you something. And that's me just very gently reminding you that's a red flag and to really make sure, and I'm curious, all are there, maybe like three specific questions you know to ask when you are meeting or interviewing a potential provider.

00:54:07

*Alie:* That's a good one, you know, I think, just understanding. You know when you're meeting with someone what's their approach. So say, like Heather you're going to someone with fibromyalgia, like asking them, you know what's their approach, but also understanding, like how long do you spend with with your patients? Do you spend five minutes, ten minutes? You know most doctors don't and nutritionists don't get much time to spend with. You know their their patients. So asking them how much time do you get to spend with your patients Upfront? understanding that and then you know I think time is

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probably the biggest one; and understanding again their philosophy for whatever it is like. Like I said, fibromyalgia, IBS or anxiety, understanding what kind of process they take? Do they look at the full picture? Or is it referring out to constant? You know all these different specialists, someone really going to take the time to help you unpack again your health.

00:55:09

*Heather:* I would think, also like what services do they offer? Because I looked at your website briefly and I saw you, like go grocery shopping with people. And I was like I want to do. I can help you make a meal list. I mean, you know, if you're doing meal plans, I can help you with your ordering and I was like that's genius. I Guess what knowing the full spectrum of what they offer and if that's what you need or if you actually need something else.

00:55:37

*Alie:* Yeah, absolutely, that's another great point, understanding the services that they offer. And again, when we look at just because the way our current hospital systems are set up, providers in the healthcare system aren't given that time to do that. So you know we got to offer them grace too, because they're up against and they're only allowed a small amount of time with patients. But maybe you find someone who again can take the time or has services, grocery shopping and meal planning and things like that that I wasn't able to do in a hospital setting, and that was the reason I laughed, is because I really wanted to be able to help people and not be restricted, which I felt like in the hospital. There's so much more I could do, but I wasn't allowed to.

00:56:24

*Sarah:* Absolutely, and we also know that finances trump all stressors, and so there are certain things that we aren't able to do, because maybe insurance doesn't cover that and there are a lot of things that insurance does cover and just briefly circling back to those individualized plans. If someone were to meet with their primary care physician or even their OBGYN or whatever it is, are there certain labs that maybe you would advocate for? You would say you know, as a woman or as a man, ask your doctor about these to run these specific labs for you.

00:57:07

*Heather:* Wow sounds like there's a lot of layers and facets to look at.

00:57:12

*Alie:* Yes, with integrative nutrition it's like peeling an onion. You're peeling the layers of, you know, because we don't get sick overnight. We need to understand what led us to be where we are.

00:57:23

*Heather:* Well, thank you. For all your time and insight, it's really been an eye opener for me and I'm sure, a lot of people who feel confused or isolated, I'm sure, like me, they appreciate all this information. So thank you so much, and where can our listeners find you?

00:57:42

*Alie:* Check out my website, its [Wholisticnutritionbyalie.com](http://Wholisticnutritionbyalie.com), and holistic is spelled like whole food. So it's so [wholisticnutritionbyalie.com](http://wholisticnutritionbyalie.com).

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00:57:55

*Heather:* And we'll put that on our website.

00:57:57

*Heather:* Thank you, instagram as well, wholisticnutrition, although I'm not good about posting you and me both, you know if you have any questions. Let me know if there's resources you're interested in. I'm happy to share those.

00:58:17

*Heather:* Well, thank you again all. It's been a wonderful having you here.

00:58:19

*Alie:* Yes, thank you so much.

00:58:36

*Heather:* That's it for today. Thank you so much for listening. Visit our website [hardnopodcast.com](http://hardnopodcast.com) for this episodes show notes, past episode, downloadables, and links to resources. Also, you'll find links to each of our websites [clevergirlmarketing.com](http://clevergirlmarketing.com) and [purposefulgrowthandwellness.com](http://purposefulgrowthandwellness.com)

00:58:56

*Sarah:* Make sure to follow and get in touch with us on social, and we're @HardNoPodcaston facebook, instagram and twitter.

00:59:07

*Heather:* And please do us a huge favor. If you like what you heard here, please subscribe, rate and review our podcast wherever you listen so others can find us too.

00:59:17

*Sarah:* Thanks to our friends and family or villagers, for listening, and for all your continued support.

00:59:24

*Heather:* That's a Hard No is a joint production of Clever Girl Marketing and Purposeful Growth and Wellness.

00:59:31

*Sarah:* Marketing and production coordinator Maura Del Rosario.

00:59:36

*Heather:* Production support: Evergreen podcasts Noah Foutz: producer.

00:59:41

*Sarah:* Music by GG Riggs.

00:59:43

*Heather:* Until next time. Thanks for listening.

00:59:46

*Sarah:* And remember saying no isn't just okay.

00:59:50

*Heather:* Saying no is the key to living an authentic fulfilling life.

## **That's a Hard No**

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00:59:54

*Sarah:* So do it, find you no, then say it apologetically. That's a hard no.