

[00:00:00] **Mike T Nelson:** Welcome back to the Flex Diet Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Mike T. Nelson. On the podcast, we generally talk about things to increase muscle mass, hypertrophy, strength, performance, improved body composition, and do all of it without destroying your health in a flexible framework. Today, we are talking about all of those things, but we're also talking can you use to be happy.

[00:00:30] I think there's a lot or probably too many people who get into fitness, especially for body composition reasons, or maybe even performance, that assume it's not going to be fun and that it's always going to be hard. And of course, you're going to need to do work. It's going to need to be disciplined. It can be simple, but rather not always easy.

[00:00:52] A lot of times it's not a lot of fun. Doing a 2K on the horrible Concept2 rower. That's definitely not fun, but I think you can find the ability to be happier doing fitness And it is a key to making your lifestyle happier over time And actually I'm recording this from South Padre Island where this is one of my happy places Jodi and I get to hang out down here and do some kiteboarding, which is super fun.

[00:01:20] So I think there is an intersection between Working to be happier and the fitness And today's guest is Dr. Gillian Mandich, and that's exactly what we are talking about. Her work is actually in the science and surprising truth about happiness. She did a PhD from Western University in health science, specializing in health promotion.

[00:01:46] And her primary areas of research are happiness and health. So her work combines the latest research, practical wisdom, and using an engaging style for people to live much happier lives. So I've known Jillian for many years right now, and it was great to have this chat with her about things we can do currently to increase our happiness related to fitness.

[00:02:10] So make sure to check out all of her great stuff, her website, all wonderful stuff on Instagram there. And if you enjoy this podcast, go to MikeTNelson.com forward slash podcast, and you'll be able to see all the episodes I've been on in the past, some other guest episodes. If you scroll down, you'll be able to get onto the newsletter, where I have even more information, which is completely free.

[00:02:34] So go to MikeTNelson.com forward slash podcast for all of the information there. And enjoy this podcast about how to be happy with your fitness with Dr. Gillian Mandich Thank you so much for being on the pod.

[00:02:59]

[00:03:00] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Welcome to the podcast. Thank you so much for being here. I appreciate it. I am

[00:03:04] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** so happy to be here

[00:03:05] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** It's nice to see you. Yeah, I haven't seen you for a while. I think the last time we met in person was God, was it in Toronto? I don't know how many years ago, probably. Yeah.

[00:03:17] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** All the years get blurry with the pandemic in there, I have no sense of time

[00:03:20] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** anymore.

[00:03:21] Yeah, I think it was, when I was doing a talk for the NSCA Regional up there, what, 2017 maybe or something? Yeah, whoa, time flies. Around there, yeah. Yeah, and you're in Toronto, obviously. Yeah, I'm down in Toronto. You survived the

[00:03:35] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** summer. I loved the summer here. Toronto has amazing summers, so I've been like soaking in the last bits of it here now.

[00:03:42] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Nice. And you said you have to be very busy. You're presenting all over the world coming up, it sounds yeah, busy

[00:03:47] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** fall. People aren't that happy, so I'm very busy.

[00:03:52] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. Yeah. How did you get into researching happiness? That seems and we'll also define what we mean by happiness, but how did you end up going down that track?

[00:04:03] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** Yeah, you know what? It's so interesting how life throws you curveballs. My plan, so all of, I have three degrees, they're all in health science. I went to Western University, which is on in Ontario, Canada, and I was, I've always been passionate about health. I feel like we have one shot at life.

[00:04:20] How do we take our best shot? And so my mom's a professor and I always thought she had a great job and I love research. Like I love asking questions and learning new things and exploring different questions. And so my plan was to be, a tenure professor like my mom. And I was studying childhood obesity, so my master's degree is actually within health science, my specialization was child and youth health, and when I went into my PhD, I was still studying childhood obesity, and then in the second year of my PhD, I did my comprehensive exams, which as you know are a terrible time in your life.

[00:04:55] This is disgusting. I was looking at specifically parent and family focused interventions to address childhood obesity, and I was looking at the data and, attrition rates dropout rates are very high with those type of studies. And also, if you look at a six or 12 month follow up period. A lot of times, what we see is that as soon as you remove the intervention, people revert back to what they were doing before.

[00:05:19] And so I had this almost feeling of futility, like, why am I doing this? And so I was at Pilates one day where all good things happen. And I was having like this existential grad school crisis as one does. And my Pilates teacher had two reformers. And so that particular day, the woman next to me was a professor at Ivy, which is the business school at my university.

[00:05:39] And she was saying, Jillian, we have a health section in the business school and you seem pretty entrepreneurial, maybe switching to that would make more sense for you. And I thought, yeah, you know what? That's probably a better fit. And then she made this off comment. And you know what? Something makes like an off comment and it like totally changes your life.

[00:05:55] She says to me, or you might be interested in some of my sister's research. She studies sustainable happiness. And I said, what's that? And she said, go home and look it up. And so I did. And to be fully transparent, I didn't know until the second year of my PhD that studying happiness was even a thing, which is wild when you think about it.

[00:06:15] And so I started reading the research and so sustainable happiness has more of an environmental perspective, but because I'm in health science, I look at everything through a health lens. And so I started going down the, the research rabbit hole, reading all this research about happiness and health.

[00:06:29] And I started reading things like. When you compare happy people to less happy people have lower rates of cardiovascular disease, they have stronger immune systems, they heal faster from injury, they sleep better, they

make better nutritional choices, and I thought, at the end of the day, in a childhood obesity intervention, my goal is health promotion.

[00:06:47] And the problem with it, though, is that in order for a child to be in my study, they had to have a BMI a body mass index above the 85th percentile for age and gender. So that's how they then they're overweight or obese, depending where they fall in that. And. I thought, why am I using the number on a scale to determine if I can help a child?

[00:07:06] And so when I was reading this happiness research, I thought, wow, it's much more inclusive, right? It has nothing to do with the number on a scale. And there's a lot less stigma associated with it because, research recruitment, pardon me with obesity is very difficult because of all the stigma.

[00:07:18] But with happiness. It doesn't exist. And it's people want it inherently. And so halfway through my PhD, I completely switched topics that added an extra year. So my PhD took five years, not four. But I'm really happy that I made that decision because you have to be happy for studying happiness, right?

[00:07:35] I hope so.

[00:07:35] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** I'll

[00:07:37] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** talk about that later. But yeah, so it's been really cool to see how focusing on something that feels good can have positive implications for not only our physical health, but how we show up at work, how we show up in life, in our relationships. And so I think it's a pretty, it's a newish field, right?

[00:07:53] Like a lot of times when I tell someone I research happiness, they look at me funny and I get asked all the time if I have a real job. Or like how to study happiness. And even at the time of my university, there was nobody studying happiness. And so it was a difficult thing to get into. But it's been really cool.

[00:08:10] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** That's awesome. How do you, in research, we have to know definitions. So how do you define happiness?

[00:08:17] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** This is like the hardest, easiest question.

[00:08:19] Because, when we started this podcast if you're listening right now, you know what we're talking about, right? Everybody has a general sense of what happiness is. But if I was to walk... into the streets of downtown Toronto right now and poll a hundred people and ask them to define it, I might get a hundred different answers.

[00:08:33] Maybe some similar ones, maybe some different ones, which is fine because at the end of the day, it is a very much a subjective experience. But as when you're a researcher, you have to define your terms at the beginning of a study. And so the definition that I use is one that's commonly used in the literature which originally was, cited by Dr.

[00:08:51] Sonja Libomirsky, and she's one of the leading happiness researchers. And the definition is that happiness is the experience of joy, contentment, and positive well being. Combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile. If you're listening right now and you hear snorting, it's my French

[00:09:07] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** bulldog.

[00:09:08] Oh, he's so cute. It's a tribute. He's a two year old

[00:09:11] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** little French bulldog, Jaco. So basically, happiness comes down to two pieces. So there's like how you're feeling in the moment, right? The joy, the contentment, positive wellbeing. And then the other side of it, which is more like the longevity, purpose, meaning, legacy, like how you feel overall reflective on your life, the feeling that one's life is meaningful and worthwhile.

[00:09:32] And the reason I like this definition is because it casts a really wide net. Right? Sometimes you can get more caught in the weeds with, what is the difference between subjective being and wellness and happiness? And I feel like the casting the widest net because at the end of the day, like I said, it is a very subjective experience.

[00:09:48] And oftentimes when we assess happiness, it's through self report measures. We ask people. And I think knowing what it is important, but at the end of the day, we all know what it feels like when we're happy and when we're not. And, so oftentimes we'll assess it using questionnaires, self report questionnaires.

[00:10:02] Now with technology, we're seeing a lot more push notifications sent on phones, and people can kind of report their happiness throughout the day. Because that's the other piece, is that... When you assess happiness in the moment, that gives you a snapshot, but as we know, our moods fluctuate throughout the day, right?

[00:10:17] We wake up and we're in a good mood and then we open our email and then we're not and then we go to the gym and we're feeling better and then something goes wrong, right? So it really does fluctuate because it's not a permanent state. But at the end of the day, I really think that for ourself personally, getting to know what makes us happy, that's the key piece of it.

[00:10:35] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Very cool. And I believe there's even different types of happiness. I've heard one referred to, there's a specific type in the research called eudaimonic happiness, I believe, and there's even different, I guess, subcategories of it. Yeah,

[00:10:49] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** so that one actually comes Way back, this is from Aristotle in Nicomachean Ethics.

[00:10:55] He talks about two types of happiness. So he talks about hedonic happiness, which is like the sex, drugs, rock and roll, the like, feel good in the minute, it's the cake, it's the, glass of wine, it's the whatever it is. And then there's the other part, which is the eudaemonic, and that's more that...

[00:11:10] Purpose, legacy, how do you feel overall meaning in your life, those sort of pieces. And so he was, I mean, that's an old book, right? So we've been trying to tease apart in this question about happiness has been fascinating humans, since we've been able to start thinking about it.

[00:11:24] And, uh, so I think about, no matter how you want to define it. And sometimes people want to tease out the difference between what's the difference between joy and happiness. And I just, my opinion is cast a wide net. See what it is. And overall, when we get in touch with our feelings and we start to actually pay attention to how we're feeling, that's the key part, right?

[00:11:43] Because a lot of us just go throughout our day on autopilot, or we're rushing from thing to thing. We don't actually even take time to check in with our emotions. And so even just noticing for ourself what different things feel like, I think, is a really important piece.

[00:11:57] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Very cool, and I believe there's good research showing like, I know this wraps into happiness too, but like sense of purpose in, I believe it was mortality studies was above smoking, I think, in terms of if you look at different, risks, like people who smoked, but had a good, kind of reason of why they think they're here in a strong purpose did better than people who are not smoking, but had no idea like what they were doing in terms of risks.

[00:12:24] Thanks. Yeah,

[00:12:25] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** it really does. And we see this a lot in research with people when they retire. So when people retire and their entire identity was attached to their job, or that was their purpose and their meaning, and then all of a sudden it's gone, then if they don't, can't find another outlet for it, for feeling purpose and meaning, then we even see like health deteriorate much more quickly post retirement compared to people that do have, purpose or meaning my dad retired.

[00:12:52] My dad's a fire captain. He retired last year. They have mandatory retirement at the fire department at 65. Here in Ontario and my dad took up woodworking and I was like dad, that's so amazing because he was able to switch and find another hobby or something that brings him joy. And I think that is very important piece because if we're just going through life on autopilot, what are we living for?

[00:13:12] But when we have that, something that lights us up or something greater than ourselves that we're working towards, that can actually play a really important piece in terms of our happiness for sure.

[00:13:22] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** And you mentioned like hobbies, like one of the things I worry about with Fitness professionals. I know my buddy, Dr.

[00:13:27] Ben House has talked about this too, is that it's great that they're into fitness, which obviously I love and I've been doing it my whole life, but I'm like, what do you do for fun? Do you have any recreation things? And it's gotten better, I think, over the years, but a lot of times they're like Why exercise?

[00:13:43] I'm like, yeah, that's great. Do you do anything else? Not really. I just exercise more. I'm like, okay. But do you do anything active? Do you have any other, what people kind of classify as recreation or hobbies? Do you, I mean, at this point now I'm even like, hell, even play pickleball.

[00:13:57] Like just do something. But it. It seems like that's gotten more condensed over time, where if I look back in history and maybe it's just the romanticizing of things many years ago before the internet or whatever, it was pretty common for people to have hobbies. That was like a thing, recreation seemed to be more of a thing people did compared to now, I guess.

[00:14:20] But maybe I'm inaccurate on that.

[00:14:22] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** No, you're absolutely right. I actually just did a TV segment a little while ago about hobbies and the health benefits of hobbies. Because... I, during the pandemic, I took up puzzling, like jigsaw puzzles. I got really into jigsaw puzzling. I would listen to audio books and jigsaw puzzle.

[00:14:38] That was my like new hobby. Some people learned knitting or made sourdough bread. I was doing puzzles, but I noticed that it really helped me relax. You can get to a flow state, right? It really, especially during the pandemic, and we had a lot of lockdowns here in Toronto it was really beneficial.

[00:14:54] And me being me, I'm like, what is this? So I went into the literature and I was reading, and when you look at hobbies, and one of the questions I get asked a lot in hobbies is there a best hobby for happiness? Is there a certain type of hobby that, brings more happiness than other types of hobbies?

[00:15:08] And when we look at the research, what we see is that it doesn't matter what you do, as long as you like it and you enjoy it. And it doesn't feel like a task on your to do list. Because, sometimes you can be like, okay, I have to, read for 30 minutes, that's gonna be my hobby. But it's almost like a check mark in a box, right?

[00:15:23] I did that. So it's whatever you enjoy. Some people love gardening or knitting, but it's really about making that time to do something. That gives yourself a break because we're on all the time, right? And so hobbies just give us this time to do something other than that. It gives our brain a break and it's enjoyable.

[00:15:40] I mean, our lives are hard. And so taking that time to find a hobby, whatever it is that you enjoy, it really does have positive and mental health benefits. Even like when we look at sleep, even how we sleep, it can have positive implications. When we look at stress and anxiety levels, it can decrease them.

[00:15:56] Even things like within ourselves, self compassion, kindness to ourself, because we're not always go. Having that time to do that can be really really beneficial, but it's one of those things where we often don't think. That it has a lot of benefits in terms of our happiness, right? Because it's just, oh, I'm just doing a puzzle.

[00:16:13] But really, when we take a step back, and the data is very clear on that, that it really is an important thing for a lot of people. And to not just have one hobby, like you said, right? Exercise is a great hobby to have, but it's important that we mix it up. What's very clear in the literature is that variety is important.

[00:16:31] And so if we do the same thing, it's the same as exercise, right? The same thing all of the time, it slowly starts to lose some of the benefits because we get into routine and habit and as humans, we like variety. We like seeing different things being stimulated in different ways. And so hobbies can be a great way to do that.

[00:16:50] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Do you think that's because of just the adaptation where if you started if you started a fitness routine, right? Let's say you're doing bicep curls and you can do 15 pounds on your right arm for 10 reps. If you keep doing 15 pounds all the time, there's no Overload to the system your body's just like I don't need to get better. It's the same thing where I've often wondered about hobbies and recreation where?

[00:17:13] The end result is almost like most people would probably never get to it. Like obviously I'm biased because I do a lot of kiteboarding, but kiteboarding would be one, surfing, jiu jitsu, golf, whatever. Like it just seems to reach the absolute pinnacle on those sports is full time for years and decades on end.

[00:17:33] There's always another progression where I think. Some, I don't want to say lower level, but other things are so simple where that progression kind of maxes out. And it's ah, you've kind of maxed out at that point. So there's no more adaptation. You're not asking your body to do anything more related to it.

[00:17:50] Yeah, the

[00:17:51] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** adaptation piece is really big. And so specifically with happiness oftentimes we'll talk about what's called hedonic adaptation, which is where we adapt to whatever stimulus we have, good or bad.

So it's like you get a new car and you're so excited about your car and you keep it like perfectly clean.

[00:18:06] But then two months later, there's like wrappers in your car and it's not right. We get used to things or. We start doing something and for example, like we're in a new relationship and it's so exciting. But then over time, we start to adapt to it because we're adaptive creatures. But it goes the other way, like when you have a breakup or something, for example, you feel like that's going to last forever, but again, we adapt and then we come back up.

[00:18:26] And so one of the things, knowing that we have hedonic adaptation, it's okay how can we slow the curve? Keep the slope going for longer, and that's where variety can be a really big thing. Like you were talking about, because when we mix things up as humans, we're creatures of habit. And so it allows us to have that.

[00:18:45] Another one that's harder to plan, but can be really effective is the element of surprise. Because surprise is like a really, it's a good example of variety, but the difference between surprise and variety is that you can't plan for a surprise, right? But what you can do is you can put yourself in different situations so that surprises are more likely to occur, right?

[00:19:08] If you take the same route to work every day, you go to the gym, you go to the same squat rack. What a You get into that routine. So mixing it up a little bit. It's so funny. I was in Washington DC a couple months ago I did the opening plenary for the American Society of Addiction Medicine conference So there was 2300 addiction medicine physicians and we were talking about, you know How do we slow this curve of hedonic adaptation and I was telling them about the element of surprise and then the day after my talk I don't know if you do this.

[00:19:36] When I travel, I try to go and at least see something in the city where I am. So it's not like you fly in, you fly out. Yeah. So I had never been to DC before. And so obviously I wanted to go to the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, see the White House, the whole thing. And so I went with a couple of psychiatrists from CAMH here in Toronto.

[00:19:53] And we saw the Lincoln Memorial and we walk up to the Washington Monument and we were taking a photo. And so when you look straight at the Washington Monument, the White House is to your left. And so we had to move. Because of the sun so that the white house was at our back when we took the photo. And then when we were done, I look over at the white

house and there was a 50 foot like giant blow up teenage mutant ninja turtle walking by the white house.

[00:20:21] I look at the psychiatrist and they look at me and they're like, element of surprise. And I was like, exactly, right? You can't plan to see a Ninja Turtle walking by the White House. But if you're not looking at the White House, you're not going to see it. And it really does give you that boost. And because it's unexpected, uh, it can actually, be something that's quite profound in terms of in terms of how

[00:20:39] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** we feel and our mood.

[00:20:40] Even just the way the brain is wired, I'll refer, I'll refrain from my long neurology lecture here. But. Would you agree that the brain is basically wired looking for novelty, right? Because in short, you've got all these representations of the world that's created via your senses. And if it's the same all the time, there's no need to update that sort of map of what's going on.

[00:21:07] But it's looking for things that purposely don't agree with the map or sort of the model your brain has generated, because that's the most efficient way to determine what's. different. So it's almost like we're wired for novelty, which you could argue goes all the way back to, don't touch the orange snake because that's new and it's probably bad, right?

[00:21:28] And there might be a evolutionary reason for it too.

[00:21:31] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** Yeah, and it's interesting as humans, we're funny creatures, we think we're these like, logical, rational beings. And yet when we look at the research, sometimes we see that we're not, and I feel like with happiness in particular, it's one of those things where We all want to be happy, but we actually, oftentimes, especially when I talk to research participants, we don't take the time to answer the question, what makes me happy, right?

[00:21:55] We sit here and we complain that we're not happy, but I had this weird pattern happen to me when I was doing one on one interviews and focus groups. And I would ask participants, what makes you happy? Or first of all, I'd ask them, pardon me. Are you as happy as you possibly could be? And I didn't have a single person say yes.

[00:22:12] Hasn't happened yet. So then my follow up question was, okay what makes you happy? And I started noticing this weird pattern that was happening,

where one of two things happened. Either before they started their exhale, they were giving me an answer. My mom, my dog, my cat, my sister. It was like, it was a reflex.

[00:22:28] There was no cognition put into the answer. Or, there was like a really long pause. And they really had to think about it. And I thought about that, and I thought, okay. If we don't know what makes us happy, like that's step one is answering that question for ourself. And it's a difficult question because it's an iterative process for our entire life, right?

[00:22:48] If we think about what made us happy when we were 16 versus now versus when we're a hundred, it changes. And so part of, if we want to be happy, it requires work and it requires some self inquiry to answer that question for ourself, because nobody can tell. Us, like personally, what makes us happy besides ourself, I can say here are a variety of things that the research says, for some people are, more likely to increase happiness, but at the end of the day.

[00:23:13] We're different people and different things make us happy at different times and for different people. And really taking the time, I think step one, if you want to be happier is thinking about, okay what are the things in my life that. Bring me joy that make me happy, answering that question because for a lot of people They've never answered that question

[00:23:32] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** is the inverse of that question then easier for some people to answer What if they're struggling with what things make you happy, but they could probably identify What things definitely make you unhappy?

[00:23:45] I feel like most people would know for sure what makes them unhappy

[00:23:48] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** yeah, and that's a valuable question too because sometimes If, we want to be happier, it's not about doing more, adding more things, practicing gratitude, going for a run. It's about stopping to do the things that are taking away our happiness too, right?

[00:24:04] And so that can be a great like addition, yes, add things, but also subtraction, right? If I don't like something, then why am I doing it? Even for me. I do not like going to the grocery store. I just don't like it. I like end up with things I don't need. I don't like going. And what is it like 10 to have groceries delivered and that 10 brings me so much happiness because I don't have to go to the grocery store anymore.

[00:24:27] Like little things like that. They seem little. Cumulatively, that impact does add up, and when we don't do things that we don't like, that can boost our happiness. At the same time it's not realistic to never do things that we don't like, right? But can, are there areas of opportunity where I can outsource or delegate or stop doing or do less frequently?

[00:24:48] Because all of those things can impact our happiness too. Yeah. For sure.

[00:24:53] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. Similar, I think about just in physiology, the idea of expansion and contraction, right? So like when I'm looking at programs for people, like I may, we may go through a period of, okay, let's try. More supplements. Let's do more work in this area.

[00:25:07] Let's do more stuff. But you can't do that indefinitely, even with elite level athletes like they have other commitments. They've got time. They've got families, etcetera. So you reach a point where, okay, now we've hit this point. We hit this kind of new level where we want to be. And instead of adding more things, now let's try to pull stuff away, right?

[00:25:26] Let's get rid of this supplement. Okay, let's change this training. Let's decrease this time. And can we do less and then still keep the same results or get a little bit more? You get kind of back down to a baseline and then you kind of go back through expansion again. Yeah, similar idea. Yeah,

[00:25:42] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** I love that.

[00:25:42] Yeah, it's so

[00:25:43] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** true. How is happiness related to health? Because one of the mistakes I made As a trainer early on is, people generally come to you for, body compositions, probably still the number one thing. And they're like, in the interview, they would basically say I'm not really happy with the body composition I want, and they'll want to lose 30 pounds.

[00:26:04] It'll be happy. And at the time I just went, okay, great. We'll, work on getting you the 30 pounds fast forward. They hit their goal, and this happened with a bunch of clients early on, and I realized I'm like, oh crap, they're not happy. I, it was, part of it was my fault, because I assumed that this would lead to that, and what I realized was a lot of times It didn't.

[00:26:28] And so one of the little phrases I have is that you, you can't just hate yourself lean. Like a lot of people think that, oh, if I had a better body composition or if I bench rest this amount or deadlift this or whatever insert, whatever physical goal it is that I'll be happy at that point. And rarely have I ever seen that's true.

[00:26:48] And I think it's. A weird thing to realize that your goals are just the goals you want to do for yourself and not assume that a whole bunch of things will be different later. I mean, I remember the first time I deadlifted 400 pounds, which took me many years to do. I kind of thought at the time everything would be different.

[00:27:09] No, not a damn thing was any different. So what are your thoughts just on that concept overall?

[00:27:16] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** This is a really common thing. We think I will be happy when, fill in the Right? When, I, my body fat is at X percent, when I can deadlift X amount, when I get married, when I get divorced, whatever it is.

[00:27:29] And so the thing that's interesting about that though, is that say we get that thing, you get the job, you get the house, you get the partner, you get PR, whatever it is you want. What we see in research is that two things. One, That doesn't bring us as much happiness as we anticipated that it would.

[00:27:47] And two, that happiness doesn't last for as long as we think that it will. And it's because when we get that thing, it's not like happiness, we get it. And then we're good. It's a habit. It's a practice. It's just like fitness. Like I often think, okay, you would never go into the gym after this podcast and have the best workout of your life and text me and be like, Hey, Jill, I just had the best workout of my life.

[00:28:10] I've reached fitness. Yeah. Because what's going to happen tomorrow or the next day, you're going to go back to the gym because we understand with fitness that we want to be strong and fit and healthy. We have to move our body on a regular basis for our entire life. It's like nutrition too, right?

[00:28:26] We would never like, I would never make a green smoothie for breakfast and put like all the superfoods in it and then drink it and be like, I've reached nutritional wellness. I'm good. It even sounds silly when I say it out loud, but we understand with nutrition that. After breakfast, lunchtime is going

to roll around and we're going to be hungry again, and we're going to have to eat.

[00:28:42] And so a big piece of happiness is seeing happiness, not as a destination, but as a practice, just like nutrition and just like physical activity. And when we can see happiness through that lens, what that allows us to do is to think, okay, what can I do today to build that habit? And when we look at what actually constitutes a happy life, often we think it's like, Oh, the trip that I'm going to go on, or the big party that I'm going to have, or when I move to this new place.

[00:29:08] But really, when we think about what makes a happy life, when we look in terms of the research, it's about creating small bursts of happiness throughout the day, because cumulatively that adds up to more overall happiness than the week you're on vacation, for example. And the good thing about that. Is that what that does when we understand that happiness is not something that we're going to arrive at that it's something that we have to look at what can I do today to make me happy.

[00:29:33] It also makes it more manageable and it doesn't put our happiness contingent on something that may or may not happen in the future because in my day to day, there's probably something I can do that will make me happy and it's a small thing. In terms of time, the impact of that is not small because the thing is, we live our life every day and it's almost like happiness is a muscle, right?

[00:29:54] If we want to do things to make us happier, we have to put in the reps. We have to build that muscle. And so looking in our life and thinking where areas of opportunity, and even it's just one thing. Can I do one thing today? To make me happy. And then once we get into the habit of that, we started to build that muscle.

[00:30:11] Then it's okay, what else could I do? Or what else could I subtract? That's making me unhappy. And then over time, as we build the habit, it's just like exercise, right? It's just like nutrition. It's something that we have to work at and build that habit. And when we do that, it helps us understand that.

[00:30:28] We're never going to arrive at happiness because we see it through a different lens, right? Because like you said, especially in fitness, we see this a lot where, I want to be weigh X amount of pounds, have the body fat at this percentage, whatever body composition things people want, but when they get them, they want something different, right?

[00:30:44] Because that's how we work as humans. And so instead of seeing it like that, it's okay, What can I do today to make me happy? And what is it about exercise that's making me happy, right? And creating those small bursts, that's really the key. If we really want to think about how do we live a happy life?

[00:30:58] We have to put in the reps. We have to do it for the rest of our life. The problem with that is that it doesn't sound sexy. It requires work and effort. And people just want a cute Instagram card that says choose happy, right? But the reality is it's not how

[00:31:10] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** this works. Yeah, I think it's a weird thing because one, I have my goal. So one of my lifting goals is to pick up the 175 pound Thomas inch dumbbell which is probably still many years out. I mean, at best case, I'm still probably 40 pounds off the lift. But the weird thing is I already know it's going to be incredibly anticlimactic, right? So from the outside looking in, people would think, Oh my God, it took you, 12 years or whatever to do this.

[00:31:38] This is gotta be the most amazing thing ever. Yeah, I'll be happy and it'll be cool that I hit it, but I already know from hitting other goals that it won't last very long, right? The next thing will be like, oh, okay, how often can I do it? Can I do it on my left hand? Can I do it on my right hand?

[00:31:54] Can I do it in this condition? Can I do it in that? I already know what the next progression is, which I think is probably a good thing because you're not putting all your eggs into that one basket and trying to be happy at a certain point, but it's also very, Difficult when you explain this to new people where it, it sounds like you're just pissing on their leg and trying to tell them it's raining, right?

[00:32:15] Because they're all excited about their goals. And I feel like I'm kind of conflicted where I want them to be excited. I want them to have motivation and to do the things. But I also. I don't want them to be almost too motivated where they're putting all their eggs in one basket and assuming they'll be happy when they hit their goal in a year from now.

[00:32:34] Yeah,

[00:32:34] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** and even with whatever goal it is, asking the question of why? Why do I want this? What am I looking for? Because oftentimes, with women in particular, right? They want to lose some body fat,

for example. But it's not that they actually want to lose body fat. It's that they want to feel good in their clothes.

[00:32:50] Or they want to feel sexy for their partner. Or they want to feel fit and healthy to lift their kids, right? So tapping into the deeper why of why we're setting that goal can be really important. And I, to your point I was talking about this idea of I will be happy when. When I was writing my PhD.

[00:33:03] And we all fall into this trap, right? So we have to notice it and then... change the thought, but I caught myself thinking especially towards the end of my dissertation, when you're like doing like editing. I thought I will be happy when I finished writing a PhD about happiness. I caught myself and then I had to think about, okay, Julian, why?

[00:33:23] Why will you be happy then? Is it be, what is it? And it's okay, I've worked at this for 11 years in school. This is something that I want to help me with my career. I still want to be a professor at the time. But tapping into that deeper, why? Because if it's just a very top level superficial goal, then we see that we don't get that amount of happiness when we get it.

[00:33:41] And to your point, then it's okay what else can I do? And the other thing with that is really celebrating the small wins along the way to we often focus on the big goals and forget all the parts at the end and happiness is not a destination we don't arrive at happiness one day.

[00:33:57] And really, and we think about if you want to live a happy life and we see this a lot in the workplace with success people think okay, I'll work really hard. And then I'll be successful and then I'll be happy. But all the research is clear that it actually goes the opposite way. And if we're not happy along the way, when we get to that place, when we're quote unquote successful, whatever that means, we're not just poof one day going to be happy, right?

[00:34:17] So it's about enjoying the process as well and celebrating the small wins. Sometimes we call it milestone where you pick smaller goals along the way, and you actually take the time to appreciate those things. And with happiness in particular, this is really important. And I saw this during the pandemic, because I'm always asking people what makes you happy?

[00:34:35] And so before the pandemic, I'd ask people all the time what makes you happy? And I would hear things like, oh, uh, this new promotion that I got, or my new purse, or, my new boyfriend, whatever it is. And After the pandemic, when I'm asking people that question now, I'm hearing answers more

frequently, such as going for a walk with my mom, seeing a movie in a movie theater, hugging my friend.

[00:34:59] And so the other piece of it too, is that with happiness in particular, there are a lot of things that bring us a lot of happiness, but we don't notice them or pay attention to them and we take them for granted. And when those things were removed, we realized, oh, wait, hey. These things actually did bring me happiness.

[00:35:14] And so looking at those things along the way, not just the outcome, especially in terms of how it impacts our happiness is really critical.

[00:35:24] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Yeah. It makes me think about, I was the pandemic had a lot of negatives associated with it, but the one thing I'm super interested in is. Everyone had a massive amount of variability injected into their lives, whether they wanted it or not.

[00:35:40] Not necessarily in a good way, not necessarily in a bad way. But I'm curious what your thoughts would be. My, my thought would be that would be a net benefit for most people because of the amount of novelty to make them realize different things that they may not have realized otherwise because without that amount of shake up it would be very easy for them just to keep continuing down the same path.

[00:36:08] Yeah,

[00:36:09] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** you know It's a really individual experience too, right? But a lot of it comes down to, so autonomy is actually a huge factor in our happiness. So autonomy is essentially the fancy research word for there are some things in our life that we can control, and there are some things in our life that we can, cannot control.

[00:36:26] And choosing to give more of our attention, more of our focus, more of our resources to the things that we can control is really important. So much so that Is more of a predictor of our happiness than how much money we have, how popular we are, how good looking we are, or how good our sex life is. So I'm listing those where I'm like, yeah, I see how those affect our happiness.

[00:36:47] But autonomy is actually more of a predictor than all of those things. And so while we cannot control what's going on in our life, especially during a pandemic. The people that found autonomy throughout and focused on the things that they can control were able to cope more resiliently because, we may

not even when we're in lockdown control where we go, but can I control what in my day can I still control and choosing to focus on those things is really important.

[00:37:13] There's a really cool study that was done in nursing home. And what they did was they gave some of the clients in the nursing home autonomy over small things like what movie they watched or what plants they had in their room. And what the researchers found, uh, was that the participants that were given autonomy and even little things like that had more positive health benefits and even an increased lifespan.

[00:37:35] So this idea of asking myself, what can I control and what can I not? Is really important. And for a lot of us, there are a lot of things that we can control, especially when we look at like media and social media, right? How much time are we spending? Who are we following? How do we feel? What audiobooks am I listening to?

[00:37:51] What podcasts am I listening to? What am I reading? What is on the background? When people commute in what's, what are you listening to in the car, right? Are you just listening to the news? Or are you listening to, hopefully you're listening to us right now on a podcast, right? But focusing on those areas of opportunity, uh, is something that we may not think.

[00:38:08] Has a lot of merit or weight in terms of how we feel, but it

[00:38:11] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** really does. Do you find that autonomy is more even highly rated by entrepreneurs and people who own their own business? My guess would be yes, because I, the reality is that probably couldn't make a lot more money working in the corporate engineering environment that I did for 10 years.

[00:38:30] But the thing that bugged me the most was. I had very little control over time or money. I could work more, maybe I get a promotion, maybe not. Maybe they have budget cuts at the end of the year, so now I don't get anything. My schedule was very fixed, I was on call. But, running your own business, then you have the variability, the volatility, you've got all these other issues going on.

[00:38:54] But to me, for myself, I... Would much rather put up with that because I feel like I have the autonomy to somewhat Control my time and money like if I wanted more money, I could you know, pick up different projects I could do different things. I could take on more clients Obviously that's

give me a trade off because it's gonna consume more time, but I realized I was much happier making far less money, but feeling like I had a lot more control over my schedule.

[00:39:24] We could travel, we could do different things. And I found planning those things out into the future. I felt like I know kind of what I'm doing now. And I have that goal that I can work for. And one of the worst things that ever happened to me when I was doing my PhD was. I was super stressed out, it was towards the end of the PhD, and I had set up to go kiteboarding in South Padre.

[00:39:48] I was going to leave on Thursday night and I was going to come back on Sunday night. So incredibly short trip, just fly down, ride for a few days, fly back. I had the lab covered, I had everything done, I checked with the guy who was my immediate supervisor, he said yes, I did the other guy's lab work, and then my advisor found out and he's you can't leave.

[00:40:04] And I'm like... What do you mean I can't leave? The lab's covered on Friday I exchanged with the other guy. I'm not trying to weasel out of my work. And he gave me this long lecture that if I go, I'm basically kicked out of the program, whatever. And the thing that upset me the most about it was, one, I lost a shitload of money.

[00:40:20] Two was, I realized, I'm like, oh, I hate this because someone else... Is controlling what I do with my free time, even though I wasn't trying to, shirk my responsibilities. And so I realized at that point, thinking backwards, I kind of decided at that point that yeah, I'll finish my PhD, but I'm probably never going to work for anyone again, just because I didn't like the idea of that sort of controlling aspect either.

[00:40:47] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** Yeah, and different people have different values, I'm definitely where I highly value autonomy as well, which is why I couldn't, I had to leave the original plan that I had of, being a tenure track professor because for me, and it's what happened is to like, different things make different people happy.

[00:41:04] Some people love the structure of that, right? Yep. But I, yeah. I don't know, but like you, I would be willing to guess that people that choose more of the entrepreneurial path probably value autonomy more than other people that are in a corporate nine to five type job. But the key thing is, and some people love that too, but it's really about asking yourself, what do you value and what's important to you?

[00:41:26] Some people love the consistency of a nine to five and a paycheck every other week. is what they like. And so it's not about what's right or wrong, but different personality types have different needs and different values. And like you said, really making sure that our values are lining up with our actions and our behaviors, because when there's an incongruency there, that's a recipe for unhappiness, right?

[00:41:48] Because we're not doing the things that we enjoy most of the time, and we're not living the life in line with what we truly

[00:41:54] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** value. Yeah, and just understanding the trade offs, like I know some people who own businesses who are just very upset about the volatility and they're like, man, if I could just get a check every two weeks, it's you probably should just go work for someone.

[00:42:08] It's all the headaches are not worthwhile otherwise. So do you think happiness is a choice?

[00:42:20] Yes. I know.

[00:42:22] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** So when we look at our total capacity for happiness, there's three big players. So there's genetics. There's environment, and then there's our thoughts, our actions, and our behaviors. Those are the three main ones. I mean, when we think about genetics, we do have, some people are predisposed to be more like Eeyore type people, and some people more happier people.

[00:42:41] But I think the important part of knowing that is that the conversation doesn't end there. It's not like you're born with a certain amount of happiness. Or you're not, uh, our environment plays a big role, which I think, especially living through a pandemic when we were all had to stay in one environment, we understand how our environment can affect our mood.

[00:42:59] And then there's this third piece, which is our thoughts, our actions and our behaviors. And that's the piece that my research focuses on because that's the piece that's most amenable to change, right? We live in our head every day. And for the most part, we control what we do. And that plays a big part. So our thoughts, our actions, and our behaviors, that, a lot of that, is our choice.

[00:43:17] At the same time, there is a certain level of life with things that go wrong. A happy life doesn't mean that life is like smooth sailing all the time, right? Challenges happen. Difficult things happen. Pandemics happen. Job

losses happen. Divorces happen. Illnesses happen. So it's not about not having those things.

[00:43:34] When we think about actually living a happy life it's almost We start to do the reps, right? We start to grow our happiness muscle so that when hard things happen, which they will, we're stronger. So we're able to cope with them in a more resilient way. So we don't have a choice over a lot of those things that happen, but we do have a choice in terms of how we respond.

[00:43:52] The other thing of this is it's not about putting on rose colored glasses and going around and like pretending like everything's happy all the time.

[00:43:57] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** That doesn't work. Those people annoy

[00:44:03] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** the piss out of this, but last. summer, I went through a breakup. It was very painful. I was very sad. And so I thought to myself, okay, Jillian, like now is the time to put into action all the things you talk about. And so I did, I talked to my therapist, I would talk to my friends and they would ask me how I'm feeling.

[00:44:18] And I would say, Oh, I'm sad. And then they would get confused and they were like, how can you be sad, Jillian? You study happiness. And I was like I'm going through a breakup that's sad, but what I didn't realize is one people think that because I study happiness, I'm happy all the time, which is not true, but nor would I want it to be because what we see sometimes in the literature, it's referred to as like the dark side of happiness.

[00:44:41] And we see that people that set their goal as to be happy all of the time, and it kind of put their blinders on and that's their main focus. Those people are less happy. Yeah, that's not gonna end well.

[00:44:58] Say I had a weight loss goal, right? And I'm working towards a weight loss goal. Even if I don't reach the goal, at first I thought at least I'm trending in the right direction, right? But then I thought about it some more and I'm like, wait, what happens when we don't reach our goal, right? Our negative self talk comes in, we get very critical of ourselves, we may not speak as kindly or compassionately towards ourselves.

[00:45:17] And part of Being happy is accepting that being happy all the time is an impossible goal. And it's not about that, right? We have hard things that happen. We have a full spectrum of emotions. Like I love, uh, Dr. Susan David

has this quote, which I love. And she says it's normal, healthy, and a good thing to experience the full range of the emotional experience.

[00:45:39] And I think that's part of it too, is happiness is one. Yes, we can do things to make us happy, but we also have to accept that And in terms of healthy, psychological functioning, We have a variety of different emotions, and part of it is that we don't know how to cope with those because we just don't.

[00:45:54] And with happiness, we just pretend to be happy all the time. That's actually paradoxically a recipe for unhappiness.

[00:46:01] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Yeah, I think of that as a concept I just called HDR, human dynamic range, but in pretty much. All physiologic systems, you want a greater range within limits than a smaller range. Within that, you also want macro and micro variability.

[00:46:19] So like in life, you want the high points. You probably consequently need some of the low points. And then the tool set then is how not to get stuck in any one area, right? Is to feel like you have leverage or maybe autonomy in this case to change where you're at. I don't know what your thoughts. And then how do you, what would be some leverage points to teach people who are maybe in one of those points?

[00:46:48] Because I agree, like the people who appear to be constantly happy all the time, I don't trust those people at all. There's something weird about them. I don't know about you were, I have some other friends who are even just people I visited, especially in different cultures where on the outside, they seem very.

[00:47:06] Unhappy, but I don't think they, they are, if that makes any sense, like they're more, I guess, for lack of a better word, even, but I've seen them able to transition in and out of different points. So I guess I view the transitioning in and out of the points better than being stuck either at one of the two areas.

[00:47:26] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** Yeah, I love that because I think sometimes, too, when we feel an emotion, especially a more difficult emotion, like anxiety or stress or fear or sadness, it's almost like we feel uncomfortable and we think that it's bad, or oftentimes you hear people label emotions as negative but I don't think necessarily an emotion is negative or positive.

[00:47:45] But when we get into some of those challenging or difficult emotions, we almost don't want to feel it. We just want to push it away. And so I think it's about one allowing oneself to feel it, but then to your point, not marinating in it for an extended period of time. I think that's the key piece, right?

[00:48:00] We have to allow ourselves to feel, for sad and we want to cry, like it can feel really good to have a good cry, right? It's an emotional relief. So I think that is really an important piece is really letting ourselves feel because what happens if we have a difficult emotion and we don't want to feel it and we bottle it up or we push it away, it doesn't go away, right?

[00:48:18] We call this emotional suppression. It doesn't work. It just amplifies it, right? And one is allowing oneself that range, but not spending an extended period of time in it. And so I think, if you're sitting here and you're having a bad day, it's okay, what do I do? And one, sometimes we have bad days.

[00:48:34] Sometimes I'll just be having a bad day. Things aren't going my way. And I'll just I say to my friend all the time, I'm quitting my day. I'm quitting my day.

[00:48:43] It's just, whatever, I'm quitting the day. And then you wake up the next day. And it's different. And I think that part of being a human is understanding that we have good days and bad days. Can we do things to have more good days than bad days? Absolutely. But really it's this weird thing where when we allow ourselves to actually feel emotions, it opens up the door for more happiness.

[00:49:01] And It's really, I think it's uncomfortable for people sometimes to feel some of the more difficult emotions. But yet they can be very good teachers, and sometimes like stress and anxiety are not bad things, right? If you have a deadline and you didn't meet your deadline and you're feeling anxiety because of it, that's a pretty good signal that you were not accountable to what you said, right?

[00:49:19] And so there's some checks and balances in there too, but I do think that especially with Things like how do we actually shift our mood when we're in a bad mood? And some of the things we can do, like a lot of the things when I talk about thoughts, actions, and behaviours that we can do are habit building.

[00:49:35] So it takes time, right? If someone starts practising gratitude, it's not one day they practise gratitude and then they're just grateful all the time. But if

it's 2pm in the afternoon and like you're on your email and you're getting snarky, like what do you do? Sonja Lyubomirsky, who I shared her definition of happiness at the beginning, and she's one of the most widely published happiness researchers.

[00:49:53] And she says that exercise may be one of the most effective. Instant mood boosters, right? Because sometimes we just need to shift our mind. So whether that's, taking a break and going for a walk, putting on a song, having a dance party. When we need to shift our mood, oftentimes when we start to move our body, it can start to change things.

[00:50:11] And so that's something like I do myself. You'll notice and just take my, take Jocko for a walk or something like that, because exercise and the connection between exercise and our happiness. It's very clear and happiness, exercise affects our happiness in a couple different ways, right?

[00:50:27] Like we have endorphins that we release, right? We'd feel good hormones that changes our mood. But even things like when we look at self confidence, when we start to exercise more and we're getting stronger or we like the way our body's looking, it changes how we show up in the world. I do get asked a lot the question what's the best exercise for happiness, right?

[00:50:46] And fair question, is it better to be doing yoga all the time where you're just zen and blissed out? Or should I be going and doing going and deadlifting as much as I can? Or, is a group fitness class the best? And what's interesting. Is that there was a systematic review that came out a couple of years ago in the Journal of Happiness study.

[00:51:04] And the main conclusion, the punchline, is that there's no particular exercise that's better for happiness. Then another one, it's what you enjoy you doing the things that you enjoy is the key piece. So if you love golfing, go golfing. If you don't love yoga, then find something else, but it's really about Finding the exercises that you enjoy.

[00:51:25] It's not like for example, a certain one is more potent in terms of our happiness It really does come down to doing the things the movements and the exercises that we enjoy

[00:51:34] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Yeah, I'm sure if most people look to my garage here at doing deadlifts and weird grip stuff to death metal, that would probably not be their idea of enjoyment.

[00:51:42] But to some people it is, and consequently doing something else, might work better for them, so that's great. But

[00:51:47] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** different things, right? I love that some days. And then some days I want to go to a yoga class, but some days I need to put on like hardcore, like gangster rap and go pick up something heavy, right?

[00:51:56] It just depends on the day. And so it's really about doing the things that you enjoy and also creating that environment, right? Like I talked about how environment. So if music is something that you like, why not add that in? Or, if being outside training is something you enjoy, why not do it there, right?

[00:52:11] So really thinking about and asking ourselves those questions what do I enjoy? Because exercise. And what's interesting is that there's some research that was done that found that even 10 minutes of movement per day can increase our odds of being happy. And the same researchers found that on days that we exercise in this one study, so they had participants exercise on some days and not on others, and they evaluated their mood and what they found that our mood, their mood was elevated.

[00:52:35] on the days that they exercise and not on the days that they didn't. And we see this like in the moment how we feel, but even like it is a very powerful tool in terms of one of the main things that impacts our happiness for sure.

[00:52:48] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Do you think there has to be kind of almost a requirement of some movement output?

[00:52:54] So I think of exercise as a prime example. The other weird thing I think about is, so I've been on the interview a fair amount of people in, very hardcore death metal bands, and it's an overall. Probably generalization, but most of them, like on the interview, they're All pretty relaxed, like pretty chill people.

[00:53:14] But if you watch their stage performance, it'd be like, Oh my God, I'm never going to talk to that person in my life. They look like a bunch of fricking psychos. And I asked one of them once, I said kind of why that was. And he's I get to run around in the stage for 90 minutes every night, screaming like a madman.

[00:53:28] So he's I get everything out. And by the end of that, I'm like, chill the rest of the time. So I think of exercise also kind of as the same way of

processing, especially I know when I was under a lot more stress early on and especially doing my master's like I had to relearn at some point how to exercise not being under a mass amount of acute stress.

[00:53:49] Which was very different experience.

[00:53:55] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** Yeah. And different things at different times. Like when I was in grad school so I paid for all my grad school myself. So I had to work like a million jobs in order to afford tuition. And one of the things that I did was I would teach yoga to UFC fighters in an MMA gym.

[00:54:08] And so then I would go in sometimes when I wasn't teaching. I hit pads with the guys. And punch things, right? And especially if I had a bad day at school or something, like I would think, but what do I want to do? I just want to go punch something. So I'd go to the gym and just hit pads for a while.

[00:54:19] And it would, afterwards, I would feel so much better. But then some days I didn't even feel like it. I'd rather go outside for a walk, right? Different things. But I think the key piece is that. Exercise really teaches us that our behavior matters and what we do is important. And it's often like what I, like a keystone habit.

[00:54:35] If you think about an archway, right? The keystone is the piece in the middle that holds up everything else. And one of the other really benefits that extrapolates beyond just the movement of whatever it is that we're doing is that it's often like the first domino. It's okay, I exercise today, so I might be more likely to make a healthy choice when I eat.

[00:54:51] And I might be more likely, especially if I want to go the next day, maybe I'm not going to have that glass of wine tonight or that second piece of cake or whatever it is. So it's often a behavior that can then influence other behaviors that are also contributing to our happiness. So it has that cascading effect

[00:55:06] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** too.

[00:55:08] And last question as we wrap up, how much of that do you think is almost a learned response, right? Because acutely, and to people who are new to exercise, and even now sometimes, it's not fun. I don't like doing a 2K on the rower. That's the most hideous thing ever. I have people I've had over here who I think probably still have PTSD from me making them do max, 2Ks on the rower and all these heinous things people do all the time.

[00:55:34] Sitting in, cold water that's, 42 degrees up to your neck it's not fun, but over time... You learn to like them because I think you associate the long term benefit outweighs the acute Discomfort and I always find it fascinating. It seems like happiness is also similar like you can't avoid all the acute discomfort to be happy you almost have to process the acute discomfort is part of the journey to get there, just like with exercise, right?

[00:56:06] Over time, if you do it long enough you learn to enjoy it, but that's a weird learned response.

[00:56:16] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** Yeah, it's interesting too, because happiness doesn't always mean that stuff is easy, right? Oftentimes, when we work at something, it's more rewarding. And sometimes in the moment, it may not feel great, but then afterwards.

[00:56:30] It does, right? Like you think about a full plunge or a hard workout, like I was at the gym this morning and I was just like halfway through and I was just like, Oh, I just want this to be over. And yet you push through and then afterwards I walked home and I was like feeling the endorphins and I felt great after because I think sometimes we have to remember that.

[00:56:48] Smooth sailing, easy all the time doesn't mean happiness, right? We actually like challenge and we like to be stretched. And when we look at like growth and we look at things like, as we learn new things or as we develop new skills or we develop new habits, that challenge, that little bit of stretch actually benefits us.

[00:57:07] Because I think sometimes we just feel like if we're not feeling good in the moment, we almost imagine like that's how we're going to feel forever. Like it's a permanent state, right? But it's not. And so I think that especially with hard things. It can be rewarding. And we think about like how I talked about happiness being the experience of joy, contentment, and positive wellbeing combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.

[00:57:27] And we think about what's worthwhile and what's meaningful. Sometimes it's when we're really challenged or we're pushed to our limits and then we look back and we were like, wow, I'm capable of that. And we show ourselves. What we are capable of and that while we may not choose that or may not want that, I think, especially when we're in those places, reminding ourselves.

[00:57:45] And so I do this thing because nobody wants to go to the gym every single day. And so because I'm a researcher, what I've been doing, I like data. So I collect data on myself and especially on days that I don't feel like going to the gym. I note that I'm like, OK, today I don't want to go. I feel tired.

[00:58:00] I just feel lazy. I like, how do you feel now? And you're like, wait, Jelaine, you feel good. And I store up this bank of memories of feeling good. And then when you're in it, you're like, okay, you don't feel good now, but you know, you've done this many times before and you feel good after. And sometimes it's really about doing the hard things, getting in that ice bath and sitting there and breathing through it.

[00:58:22] To really push us, to allow us to show ourselves what we're capable of.

[00:58:27] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Yeah, and that's one of the things I did right when I switched from training at a gym to training here with people out of my garage was, My whole thing was, as long as they leave feeling better than when they came in I'm on the right path.

[00:58:40] And I had a guy once, he lived all the way across town, drove 45 minutes across in traffic. And it was at my house. So he, comes into the living room, like literally passes out on my living room floor when he's lying in the fetal position, groaning and he's Oh, I don't feel good. I'm like, why did you drive 45 minutes across town in traffic to just pass out and lie on my living room floor?

[00:59:07] And he's cause I know when I leave, I'll feel better. And at the time I didn't understand the statement, and I'm just thinking, Oh, what am I going to do with this guy? So do some mobility, do some bodyweight stuff. OK, let's go to the gym. And, like an hour later, he set like a PR and bench press and walked out going, Hey, it was like the best training session ever.

[00:59:25] And what I realized was that. Oh, because he had been, doing this for two years straight he didn't even know what he actually said. He just figured, if I get to this weirdo's house and pass out in his, living room floor, I'll somehow feel better when he left. And it was actually true, right?

[00:59:40] So I think about how much of those things become more subconscious in the time we have to do the action becomes less and less, right? So over time, you just kind of show up at the gym, even though you don't feel

that good. And like you said, you feel better when you leave. And then, the second part to that, I think, about what you said about autonomy.

[00:59:59] So one thing I have to remind myself of is... Okay, I'm literally choosing to inject harder things into my life because it's too easy. I'm literally choosing to sit in cold water because it kind of sucks. Or to do a 2K on the rower, or to do something difficult that I don't want to do, but trying to remind myself that I am actively choosing to do this.

[01:00:22] I have the option versus the extreme other situation of being forced to do something without having that optionality.

[01:00:31] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** Yeah. And reframing it too. And I think sometimes especially in the moment, things can feel really hard, but you look back, we talked about like the hedonic happiness versus the eudaimonic happiness.

[01:00:39] And so sometimes the hedonic happiness is really low, but in the end that eudaimonic happiness in the end is actually higher than the hedonic one would have been. And sometimes it requires the negotiation with yourself, coaching with yourself, but I mean, also knowing that some days. It's just, when to push and when not, right?

[01:00:55] We can't have the foot on the gas all the time force. But getting in touch with yourself. But I think that for a lot of people, having those opportunities to stretch, to grow, to do new things, to push themselves, to be challenged. In the end, especially when we do something hard it's hard for a reason.

[01:01:08] It's not easy, right? When you look back, you're like, Oh, wow. And the satisfaction or the personal pride or the sense of accomplishment that we feel in the end. outweighs that momentary sort of feelings throughout,

[01:01:21] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** right? Yeah, because if it was easy, everyone would do it. And then there's almost no reward.

[01:01:27] Yeah, it's like this weird thing where you're almost like intrinsically wired to do hard things because of the journey and of the fact that it's actually hard.

[01:01:39] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** Yeah, it's fascinating as

[01:01:41] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** humans, aren't we? Yeah, it's just all that stuff. I find very fascinating. So thank you so much for all your time. Where can people find out more about all your great work you're doing?

[01:01:50] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** This is so fun. Thank you so much for having me. I love the work you're doing and to be able to have this conversation was such a joy. My website is GillianMandich.com. I'm Gillian with a G, so it's G I L L I A N M A N D I C H. And my Instagram is at Dr. Gillian Mandich, but it's D R Jillian Mandich.

[01:02:08] Those are the places I hang out.

[01:02:10] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Awesome. And do you have a newsletter or anything else that can sign up for different programs and stuff coming out? Maybe one day. Maybe one day. , I You have some books to get some stuff going on. That'll be out soon. I know.

[01:02:22] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** Yep. So All in the works. All in the works.

[01:02:24] That's good. I'm being

[01:02:25] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** challenged right now, . Oh, that's all right. Good. Awesome. Thank you so much for everything. I really appreciate you and thank you so much for sharing everything today. I have some very good tips. Thank you.

[01:02:35] **Dr. Gillian Mandich:** Thanks for having me.

[01:02:36] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Made me happy, . Yeah. Awesome. Thank you.

[01:02:41]

[01:02:42] **Dr. Mike T Nelson:** Thank you so much for listening to the podcast here. Huge thanks to Dr. Jillian for being on the podcast and getting to discuss this very important topic related to happiness and fitness. Make sure to check out her website and her Instagram and all the great things she's got going on there. If you enjoyed this podcast and you find someone else who might enjoy it also, please forward it to them.

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[01:03:54] It's MikeTNelson.com forward slash podcast. Thank you so much for listening. Big thanks to Gillian for coming on the podcast. We will talk to all of you next week.

[01:04:10] You know something? That was a sweet number. It sure was. You know something else? What? I hate sweet numbers!

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