



THE SLIM GUT SUMMIT



Stress and Gut Health

Guest: Phaedra Antioco

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Dr. Nandi: Hi, everybody. Thank you so much for joining us on The Slim Gut Summit. It is an important one. I appreciate you guys taking the time to watch and then learn from some of our amazing experts. And none more amazing than my next guest, Phaedra Antioco, is an amazing friend of mine. And I've worked with her both -- she's been on a TV show and now she's on the summit and she is doing amazing things. And it's super busy but she still took the time to talk to all of us to share her wisdom. Phaedra, thank you so much for joining us.

Phaedra: Thank you, Dr. Nandi, it's great to be here. And I just love the concept of what you're doing, what you're doing for the world here and changing lives.

Dr. Nandi: I appreciate you saying that. Thank you so much. So I'll give you guys a little bit of an intro for those of you not met Phaedra. She is an occupational therapist, pain and trauma coach, and movement educator for over 20 years. Phaedra teaches her clients to overcome the challenges of physical and emotional pain, trauma, stress, and even a life that just doesn't seem to be working. I know a lot of you are watching and listening can relate to that. Now looking for the root cause of pain, Phaedra investigates the hidden traumatic events that may be preventing a healthy lifestyle, as she teaches her clients how to reset their nervous system. So her website is livemylifepainfree.com, and this is amazing stuff.

And we're talking about gut health. And I'd love to be able to talk about how we can make your gut even healthier obviously in the summit, but I want to get to ask you a question. I'll get right into it. We know that stress is harmful, right? So how could it lead to health challenges? How is stress going to lead to your health not being optimal?

Phaedra: Right. So we have to look at the fact that underneath our skin, underneath our muscles, is our nervous system. So we've got our brain and we've got all those nerves coming off the spinal cord that innervate all of our organs or viscera. So we look at gut health and gut symptoms and problems. And often they're looking at the organ. But really we have to look at the brain health and the cranial nerves and specifically, the vagus nerve. Because the vagus nerve really shoots down and sends all those signals to the bronchi, the respiratory or heart rate. It's important for parasympathetic and rest and digest. But if you're in a chronic state of stress, you're in fight or flight, what happens our pupils dilate, or nature is preserving us. We have to act and protect ourselves and we start to constrict. We tighten, our blood pressure gets affected or heart rate, all that.

So if we're living in a chronic state of stress, it's shutting down our organ systems, literally shutting them down leading to either constipation. If you are fighting for your life every day, the job that's challenging for you, or a relationship that's challenging, you're constricting, you're tightening up, right? Same as the involuntary muscles of the organs in the gut, we can have constant diarrhea, or we could have fluctuations with constipation and diarrhea. So it's super important to do the self-care, to have community connection with other people for different parts of our nervous system to really feel safe and operate the body in a healthy way.

Dr. Nandi: That's awesome. And you know, people talk about it, but I really love the way you bring it together. And I'll tell you, this has been talked about, you know, in functional medicine, integrative medicine even before we started even understanding the importance of gut health. But I'll take all of you watching and listening to the Harvard Medical School's health publishing tools, it's called Health Beat. And the title is The Gut-Brain Connection. And it says pay attention to your gut brain connection and may contribute to your anxiety and digestion. This is Harvard, this is mainstream and they talk about, "Have you ever felt butterflies in your stomach?" You know, we talked about that. And we use these expressions because it's really true, because the connection that Phaedra talked about from the vagus nerve, connecting the brain to the gut is really an important concept because what happens is that, for example, if you can think about it. Even before you eat, the very thought of eating can bring stomach juices into your digestive tract. And why is that? Those same relationships that have been existed forever. And so if those go

awry, meaning that if you're not in concert, if the stress in your body and the pain in your body and your mind is overwhelming, then your gut cannot function properly. And we know without gut health, there can be no real health in the entire human body. That's why it's so important about the concepts that Phaedra is talking about.

The other idea is that stress can be good if you have it once in a while, right. You get going like you're revved up for an athletic event once you're an athlete, or you're taking a test, and it's once in a while it's okay. But what about unresolved stress? Phaedra, what about unresolved stress and specifically trauma? How does it play a role in many problems, including digestive problems and gut health in your opinion?

Phaedra: You know, it's really a deep question and I'll make it as brief as I can. But I have a rollover car accident, right. So this taught me so many lessons because I don't remember the trauma. But my body sure did. So I started to investigate and learn in treatment modalities such as myofascial release, somatic experiencing, where I learned that the body holds on to trauma at a cellular level. So that's really important for people to know. And we've got to quiet down, quiet our nervous system down and really start to be what we call embodied, right. We spend so much time being up in our heads and busy, but once we pause and we go in, we can pay attention to our heart rate.

You know, when we're relaxed, our stomach starts to gurgle and healthy digestion. But what happens is, I believe firmly because I'm trying to get to the root cause of why some people have pain and get better and others just really stay stuck. But if you think about all of our experiences in childhood, in our life, they create our mindset, our belief systems. So if you had a traumatic childhood where you didn't get your needs met, you didn't feel nurtured in love, right? Maybe you tend to be in more of a sympathetic dominant, anxious state. And then you go out into the world with these belief systems and it's just difficult to heal. Everything feels like a struggle. You know, if you had a parent who was chronically ill and sick, I see that a lot where people take on those behaviors of the parents.

So we have to look at our experiences in our lives, even if it's an old sports injury, and you fall and you hurt yourself. Especially even scar tissue. Scar tissue we can talk more about it. Anytime you've had even a laparoscopic procedure, it can really cause routing of scar tissue and adhesions in the body. And when I work with people, especially C-section scars, you know, they don't think about it. "I have my baby, I wanted it natural." But I do pelvic floor work and we work directly on the scars. I help them renegotiate the trauma.

What if your baby came out naturally and literally all the organs, everything in my hand just start to unravel. Yeah, it's pretty amazing stuff.

Dr. Nandi: It is. And you know, people have had physical reactions to stress. Many of us when we get stress, we get stressed to such a degree, or anxiety to such degree we are unable to do things, we're physically unable to do things you could normally do. You can't really feel like you can function. With gut health is the same thing. And again, stress that's unresolved, or I call it even chronic stress, right. So again, stress has been a mechanism for us to survive. We were able to -- be able to fight, hunt and thrive in environments that were not great because we had the fight or flight mechanism. And I think that we have to go back to that. When you have chronic stress and unresolved stress that fight or flight mechanism continues.

And this is again, not just us talking about it, there are multiple research studies. And I'll talk to you about one; the procedures of National Academy of Science. Just last year, this is one of the most preeminent journals. I remember my dad was a scientist, loved this journal; *Procedure of Natural Academy of Science*. You can look this up March 2018, and Gao and Associates. What they talked about is chronic stress and get guess what they're talking about? Promoting colitis by disturbing the gut microbiome and triggering immune system response. So what does that mean in English? In English, it means that the gut -- when you have inflammation of the gut on a microscopic level. You know, we can call that leaky gut or intestinal permeability. When it's macroscopic and we can't see with the naked eye.

Many of you were watching or listening may know about colitis; ulcerative colitis, idiopathic colitis, infectious colitis, colitis is inflammation of the colon. And in this research paper, what they're showing is that if you give chronic stress, and this is an animal model. Giving chronic stress to these animals actually promoted colitis. But how do they do it? By changing those trillions of bugs in your system, in your intestinal tract. To me, that's amazing, that's what Phaedra is talking about. You know, traditional medicine on the highest level is now showing that in the gut, if you have chronic stress, you cannot achieve good gut health and really optimal health in your life. And that's why when you talk about -- we're talking about the slim gut. You know, why are people having trouble losing weight or getting an optimal weight when they have unresolved stress, trauma in their life? Because this whole response that this paper is talking about and what Phaedra is talking about continues, this inflammation continues in your gut.

You have products from your microbiome and also bad organisms, like bad bacteria that go ahead. And actually can -- that inflammation can begin insulin resistance. It can begin obesity. It can begin problems with thyroid. All

these can lead to diseases and lead to physical problems. And that's what Phaedra is talking about. And we're not just talking about stuff that's happening now, you also talk about past injuries and trauma that can affect us over a lifetime. Talk about that, because I think people say, "Well, I'm good." And I'm not sure why it's happening now. But really your past doesn't always leave you especially if it's traumatic.

Phaedra: Well, I just had an experience yesterday with a patient. He came in severe...He had multiple mouth surgeries, wisdom teeth, implants, you name it. Neck pain shooting down, radiating down, and we were treating that, we were talking about that. And I have to really ask, and I have to ask again, and again, because they don't always report it. And here we are working cranially on his skull and all of a sudden he remembers, "Oh, I got smashed with a baseball, and I broke my nose and had to have nasal surgery." Not just jammed everything. And I will be happy to share. I have this skull here. And look at all of these deep parts. We don't think about these. But imagine this young teenager got smashed in the face, everything got jammed. The brain is there, the spinal cord is there. And he had a high impact trauma. And here it is, he's 32 years old and it's still showing up.

We all have stories like that hidden in our body. And that's where we have to inquire, we have to go in and tune in. And sometimes you might not be able to do it alone. Some people have a hard time. They can't self regulate. They need someone there to co-regulate. And that's the type of work that I do. And that work is the ventral vagal system. And that's connection really being social, not isolating and being alone looking at people's facial expressions laughing. Like you teach, Dr. Nandi, in your book and just getting socially connected. It's really important for our nervous system and then changing those parts in our lives that aren't working. And sometimes it's so hard and you just need the courage to make the change. They're waiting you down. They're suppressing you. And as soon as you have the courage to make that change, this freedom happens, your nervous system opens up because you feel safe, because you made the changes.

Dr. Nandi: That's awesome. And you know we're talking about not just stuff that happened again today, but it could have happened decades ago. Just in 2017 -- I want to make sure I quote the article correctly. UCLA 2017, the author is Labus, you can look this up. The article is *Childhood Trauma Your Gut Remembers*. You're talking about how you can My know, my wife had a baseball, she was at Tigers game and a baseball hit her and severely injured her. You know, no matter what, I'm sure it affected her. And every time we go to Tigers game, she tells me about it. And so this article is talking about when you experience the death of a loved one or simply went through a difficult childhood, that your gut remembers, your gut micro biome remembers.

To me that is just mind blowing that the gut-brain connection is so strong that it will remember -- and here what happens is that it's almost programmed activity. What I mean is this, is that when you have that situation and it comes to your mind or something close to it gets reproduced, you get the same program reactions. And that leads to unbelievably -- for people who don't live in the system where they talk about the gut and the brain, but that leads to your microbiome and your gut health to be impacted. And so if you don't deal with it, because of the inner wiring between the brain and the gut, both remember these traumatic experiences. So if you keep it inside, what happens is not only do your brain and your psychological health suffer, but your gut health suffers.

So you know, when this study looked at the way the gut organisms are created and how they're sustain this chronic level of trauma even from childhood made a huge role. So people who have this, how do you deal with it because it's easy to talk about it. We're talking about it as kind of you know, looking at some of the relationships. But when people actually have it, what kinds of tools can be used to be able to release themselves of these types of chronic trauma on childhood, you know, childhood pain, or whatever traumatic event happened in their lives. What do you suggest for your patience?

Phaedra: So I treat basically the nervous system and the body. And I've done so much training based on my own experience. So I do a blend of somatic experiencing which was created by Dr. Peter Levine. I studied with him for three years, it changed my life. So somatic experiencing, and then myofascial release and cranial cycle because we have to unlock the nervous system. Our bodies get tight, we look at, we're sitting too much, we're not moving as much these days, we're more sedentary driving everywhere. So our body starts to get tight and hard and putting pressure on our nervous system. So I feel you have to release the body, you have to release the facial and the muscles of the body that are stuck.

Sometimes massage isn't quite enough, all right. And then really what I do the first thing anyone comes to me, I work their stomach, I work their belly. We have to free up all those muscles that are tight from sitting too long then we can get the heart flowing better down to the lower extremities. All of that is so much important. But really, it's about shining the light on your situation and pausing and having a little break of safety. So I teach techniques such as orienting where if you just look out the window and look at a tree. If you can look around the room right now and find something pleasant, it's so easy, simple. But if you really incorporate it in your day, it could help you feel so

much better. So if you're stressed, I have these things, they're squishy, I love them. They're yummy to hold, like you've touched it, you have to buy one.

And I realized too, it's just orienting and this is different textures. And if you look at things and you just slow down to smell the roses, and realize that the tiger isn't chasing you, that you're safe right here right now in this moment. But some people have a really hard time doing it alone, especially if you have that anxious attachment as a child where you didn't get all the love and nurturing that you needed. Or you've had some type of traumatic event where you were locked in a closet or something like that where you're just kind of anxious, and it follows through with our lives. So we definitely need to free up the body, we need to move more. And then we need to find whether it's a Somatic Experiencing practitioner or coach working with someone who will be there for you to help hold your hand, right. Because you're in that ditch, and I don't want to come in and take it out. I want to put the ladder down to help you get yourself out. But you have to believe that you can get better that you can make the change, right.

Because also with weight loss and a slim -- got literally slim, what are the comforts of eating those foods that are not good for you that are putting the weight on, right? So why are you eating certain meals at certain times? You know, we had an ice cream store right across the street from my house when I was growing up. So when I'm sad, I love ice cream. Because it was such a wonderful memory, my family went all go there together. So there are lots of things in our brain wiring that show up even in current day.

Dr. Nandi: That's awesome. And you said a number of things. You know, I'll talk about the abdominal massage and myofascial release. We rarely talk about gut health about lymphatics. The lymphatic system -- the gut lymphatic system, also called GALT, is the largest lymphatic system throughout the body. And so when you are not having the correct lymphatic flow, you are not able to reduce some of the toxins that the lymphatic system actually can get rid of. So by doing something simple that Phaedra talked about, abdominal massage, you could actually increase and stimulate lymphatic flow. Just that alone -- there's multiple benefits of this. But just that alone can help to reduce some of what we call inflammation, microscopic level.

Gut inflammation can really wreak havoc in your body. And so just techniques like abdominal massage, like myofascial release, this is super important. And the other thing that Phaedra really touched upon was super critical, is that the wiring that we're hardwired, right. Hardwired for often negative feedback. So Rick Hansen, a friend of mine he's in the West Coast. He talks about hardwiring your brain. So it's easy just like in your lawn to grow weeds, it's just as easy in your brain to grow these weeds of negative thought. And guess

what, those weeds of negative thought are connected in the entire body including your gut. So visualizing and reinforcing and making new connections of positive thoughts. So instead of talking about something that's happened, like you talked about being locked in a closet, or some negative emotion and negative experience and then that leading to negative motion.

You visualize and you train your body to plant what we call, you know, beautiful flowers in your mind so that you break that whole cycle that you the whole thinking pattern changes. And that leads to not only your brain improving, but your gut improving, because the signals that are going back and forth now are healthier and you're not chasing the tiger as she mentioned. You can then get off the tiger, once you get off the tiger -- you know, your cortisol decreases your inflammation and your gut microbiome changes. It's all a beautiful concert. None of this is isolation, but I want people to understand is that it's not just your brain or your gut, or your lungs, it's really a concert. And to me the beginning and the end is with gut health, that's what we talked about.

We've been talking about lots of important topics here and it can be overwhelming for people who are watching and listening. If folks are watching and saying, "You know what, I need one step." The first step that you would recommend vendor to really achieve better health. What would you tell them? What would you give them as the best advice as a first step in achieving better mental health? One of the head trauma that they recognize or not. What would you recommend to them?

Phaedra: I would definitely recommend seeking out help. You can't always do it on your own and find a good practitioner of myofascial release, or cranial psycho therapy first and foremost. That is number one where you can get your help. We definitely work the belly. Most massage therapists aren't familiar with that I have to kind of -- they go most to get that treatment. But that's where I would start, really just moving your body, moving your fashion, moving your muscles because you're going to treat at the cellular level.

Dr. Nandi: What's amazing is that people don't even know this exists and you're introducing these concepts. And that's why I was excited with Phaedra, her website is *livemylifepainfree.com*. And it's such a pleasure to talk to you because you're the real deal. You know, when I met Phaedra -- a lot of people talk about stuff but you really walks the walk, she really does what she says and she's just a wonderful human being. So thank you so much for taking the time and really giving us some so many pearls of wisdom.

Phaedra: Well, thank you, Dr. Nandi. I appreciate you and all the efforts that you do for creating this. Because I had an accident, I woke up from a coma,

my world changed. I learned what scars were and I learned what emotional pain was. And so I made it a mission. And I know that if you're struggling, if you're having challenges, you can definitely break free from it absolutely.

Dr. Nandi: Phaedra, you have so many clients. Have you had a recent experience with a client, a patient, a family member that's really changed their health with some of the techniques that we talked about?

Phaedra: Yes, just yesterday actually. And usually people find me through word of mouth. And so I had a woman come to me simply with hip bursitis, right. No MRI, nothing, just my hip is inflamed and it hurts. And the first thing she said to me was, "I've had so much stress. My husband died suddenly. And then three months later, my mother died and then three months after that my father died. I had three deaths of dear loved ones, and my hip is hurting so bad." So we had to uncover. We got into a patient client relationship. She feels safe with me. I start asking the questions. She had been -- she's 65, she has two amazing boys. She had tried most of her life -- were married life to have babies. And she went through everything.

She had several miscarriages, DNCs, you name it. And literally did in vitro finally where they had to harvest her eggs, they had to stick needles in to get the eggs out. So she had tons of scar tissue which ended with the C-section delivery. So it wasn't until we addressed all of the trauma of trying to get pregnant, really making it -- really known that while you have your two sons, they're healthy, they're doing great. So capitalizing on what is wonderful in our life, though good, not the negative. We freed up her abdomen which is linked to the hips and all the pelvic floor muscles. And she is amazing. She left my office just light and that was in one session.

Dr. Nandi: How awesome is that? Thank you so much.