

# **Bison Talk – The Truth About Nutrition, Mindfulness and Why Bread is Actually Good for You**

## **Cate Zenzen**

We all know how important nutrition is to our general health and well-being, but it seems like the rules and guidelines are always changing. With fad diets, exercise trends, and a market saturated with processed and convenience-based food, it can be difficult to really understand what a healthy lifestyle looks like.

In the midst of a pandemic, our health is even more important. How can we maintain a healthy lifestyle without being overwhelmed?

My name is Cate Zenzen and welcome to Bison Talk.

It can be a challenge to navigate all of the information available to us regarding nutrition and a healthy lifestyle. Fortunately, today I'm joined by Autumn Marshall, Chair of Lipscomb's Nutrition and Kinesiology department, as well as Grace White, Graduate Assistant for the Sports Nutrition program. Thank you both for joining me today.

## **Autumn Marshall**

Thank you.

## **Grace White**

Thank you for having us.

## **CZ**

I'll let you both introduce yourselves and share why you're passionate about nutrition.

## **AM**

I'm Dr. Autumn Marshall, I am a Lipscomb graduate, and then went on to A&M to do my Masters in Dietetics internship and then Auburn to do the PhD.

I love food. I love the idea of food as medicine, because I really do think you can eat your way to better health. And if you have the option to do that, why wouldn't you? I love to be able to help people find healthy ways to eat that also will benefit them both physically, mentally, emotionally.

## **GW**

My name is Grace White. I am the graduate assistant here for the Sports Nutrition department, I work under Ann Toy. I did my undergraduate degree at the University of Tennessee, where I studied Dietetics, and then I came to Lipscomb for my dietetic internship where I have a concentration with our Sports Nutrition department. I recently became a registered dietitian this past summer, and now I'm pursuing my Master's in the Exercise and Nutrition Sciences Program here at Lipscomb as well.

I have always known that I wanted to go into a career where I could help people, and nutrition is part of everyone's life. At minimum you're eating three times a day. Food is something that every individual has contact with and thinks about. Similar to Dr. Marshall, when food plays such an important role in overall well-being and health, and it's a critical role of every individual's life, it just seemed like a very worthwhile field to pursue. You can have that opportunity to touch so many individual's lives and it affects everyone differently. It keeps you on your toes and keeps life interesting, because each individual's view on nutrition and the role that nutrition is going to play in helping them is going to be different.

**CZ**

Absolutely. You both touched on this a little bit in your introduction, why is it so important to be attentive to our diet?

**GW**

Within athletics, nutrition is fuel. A huge focus in most of our conversations is, how can you build your plate to best support your performance? These days carbs get a bad rep, fats get a bad rep, I guess protein is the remaining component that people find is okay. A big part of what we like to focus on is how a whole diet, a well-rounded diet, is what you need to not only get through day to day life, but optimize your performance in the field or on the court, and how it can affect your immune function. That's not something that we're just worried about for our athletes right now, it's something that everyone is worried about.

If you're under-fueled or your diet is lacking in key nutrients, then you're going to feel fatigued, you won't recover as efficiently and your immune system is going to struggle to stay up to par. When your immune system is falling behind, then it makes you more susceptible to becoming sick. You've got to have some cognitive function, your brain has to be alert and awake, whether you're in the classroom or on the field, and nutrition is going to affect that as well.

Our brains love carbs, that's its preferred fuel source. A big part of what we love to talk about, in terms of why carbs are not the enemy, is that your muscles love carbs, they need them to function, they need them for energy, but your brain does too. Whether you're trying to focus in the middle of a midterm exam or you're trying to make a split-second decision on the court, those carbohydrates are going to play a big factor in providing that energy for your brain to make those decisions.

**AM**

Even just for the average Joe, if you're recreationally active, or if you're not active at all, nutrition plays such an important role in your health. It's providing all of, not only the macronutrients that you need to be well fueled, but all of the micronutrients that you need for normal body function. If you're not supplying those things with your diet, then your body's going to suffer as a result. Grace mentioned your immune system, cognitive function, and just your ability to get up and move around. Normal body function requires good nutrition. Everybody eats, but that doesn't mean that everybody eats well.

**CZ**

Absolutely. There are many schools of thought when it comes to identifying a healthy lifestyle, a healthy diet. Grace you mentioned the current fear of carbs.

How can listeners determine for themselves what a healthy diet looks like without getting caught up in fads or advertising ploys?

**AM**

I don't know if you're familiar with Michael Pollan. He wrote several books, one of which is the *Omnivore's Dilemma*, but he has a food philosophy, which is really very simple. Seven words; eat food, not too much, mostly plants.

Unfortunately, we as Americans fill our lives with advertisements for all sorts of things, some things that we need, some things that we really don't, a lot of things that we really don't. I think that we put so much emphasis on what we perceive as physical beauty, what healthy looks like. We think that healthy looks skinny when it doesn't necessarily, at least not for everyone. We fill our minds with these crazy ideas of how to get to what we think is a healthy look and get away from that really very simple philosophy of putting a lot of fruits and vegetables on your plate. Put a lot of color on your plate, if there's a lot of color on your plate from fresh fruits and vegetables, you're going to be getting lots of good nutrition. It's important to be mindful of that.

I think people see some fad, and they think, 'Oh, this is a quick way to lose weight.' It may be a quick way to lose weight, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to be healthy as a result of it. It's important to be mindful of what you're eating. We're the instant generation, we have microwaves, we want everything right now. We get really upset when our internet is not as fast as we want it to be or if our remote control is not controlling the television as fast as we want. We think that way about nutrition as well, and about weight.

You didn't gain 30 pounds in one day, you shouldn't lose 30 pounds in one day. I think a lot of people would love to be able to have that magic bullet, a pill that they can pop or a certain food that's going to make them look like a supermodel overnight. That's just not possible. You really need to eat well, you really need to exercise and sometimes that takes work. Having a mindset of being willing to work for something that you value as much as your health is really important.

## **GW**

When listeners are looking at these fad diets and advertising ploys, taking into consideration the fact that the goal of nutrition should be to promote health, and keeping that as the central focus can help discern what's beneficial versus what might be harmful as well. A lot of times that line gets blurred. When different diets are marketed towards consumers it's not always with health in mind. That's not the cheap promise that's being made. When we're evaluating our food choices, how we're building our plate, or what diet we're deciding to try, keeping in mind, 'Is this beneficial to my cardiovascular health or to my mental health? Or is this something where it's promising a quick fix that might not actually be healthy for me?'

I think that a lot of times those quick fixes actually pose more problems and potential harms than they do good. Nutrition and the science behind it can seem very complicated, but at the end of the day, it's actually pretty simple. We get back to the old concept of it's a balanced plate. You need protein, you need carbs, you need fat. Increase your fruit and vegetable intake and get some color, like Dr. Marshall said, and you're doing a really good job. That's a really solid foundation. I think a lot of times we try to make it more complicated than it needs to be.

## **CZ**

You're right, it seems so simple. Eat plants, eat less, add some color. Unfortunately, knowledge is not always enough for us to change our habits.

Why is it so difficult for the health-conscious part of our brain to win?

## **AM**

Unfortunately, we in America have added a lot of sugar to our foods. That satisfies a center in the brain that is like the addiction center.

There was some research done, I think at the University of Connecticut, several years ago. They were looking at mice and Oreos. The mice do the same thing that humans do, they split them open and eat the filling out of the middle first. The result of the research on the brain was that cocaine and Oreos have equally addictive properties. Just to be aware that when you go to a restaurant that's adding a lot of sugar to their foods, they're doing that so you will want to come back and eat more food.

There is a very definite method to the madness of the things that we put in our bodies. It's very difficult to overcome that, especially if you're stressed and eating as a comfort. We need to recognize that eating is a form of comfort, and that's okay. When you let it run wild and you're consuming 40 pounds of something, even something that on a level that is healthy can be normal, when you consume too much it is not normal and is not healthy. The extremes are where we run into a lot of problems, and your brain is no match for an extreme amount of sugar. That's just the bottom line.

Having fiber along with the carbs helps to control your fullness. If I could convince people to eat when they're hungry and stop when they're full, if I could get them to pay me to train them to do that, I'd be the richest woman in America. We as Americans learn from a very early age to eat past full, and we don't always recognize those signs of physiological hunger and physiological fullness. It takes your body a good 20 minutes to get through digestion of food to the point where those hormones can start to signal the brain and say, 'Okay you can slow up now, not that hungry anymore.'

If you have not eaten all day and then you go through the drive thru on your way to another busy meeting and inhale the burger, fries and coke in five minutes, you haven't given your body a chance to recognize that it's full and that you really should have stopped 15 minutes ago. It's very challenging, and our brains are not designed to have the instant response that we would prefer.

### **GW**

Because our brains don't have that response to instant design, when we are stressed and we are moving at such a rapid pace we don't consume with mindfulness. That's why, especially in our field of nutrition, there's this push for more mindful eating, like Dr. Marshall was talking about. Where you do try to pay closer attention to those hunger and satiety cues.

If you're just going through the motions then you get used to routine. If you eat dessert every night after dinner, then it suddenly becomes a habit and you're doing it more out of behavioral conditioning than whether or not you're hungry or craving that dessert. Falling into patterns and not always being aware of how we're consuming also can play a huge role in the food decisions that we make and the amounts and quantities of food that we are consuming.

### **CZ**

You both touched on the impact that food has on our coping mechanisms when we're stressed and we're anxious. Obviously, right now is a time of higher anxiety and stress.

Why do we tend to eat more when we're overwhelmed and stressed? How can we be more mindful of that in this time of uncertainty and in the middle of a pandemic?

### **AM**

Have you ever noticed the effect that a lot of carbs have on your system? When you eat a Thanksgiving meal, for example. A lot of people will say, 'Well you ate too much turkey and all the tryptophan in the turkey is making you sleepy.' It's not the tryptophan in the turkey, it's the carb overload that makes you sleepy. One of the things we don't recognize is that our bodies also crave rest, and having that carb load induces a desire for sleep. Maybe that's one of the things that you need more of when you're so stressed and anxious, and you load up on carbs without really thinking about it. Your body uses that as a mechanism to get to the rest that you really should have been focused on, as well as your nutrition and your hydration.

We tend to crave the things that make us feel good. Carbs make us feel good, caffeine makes us feel good, or we think it makes us feel good until we crash on it. When we are consuming those things they make us feel happy, they produce endorphins that make us feel comfortable in contrast to the anxiety. It may stem the anxiety for a little while, but it's not a long-term fix. There may be other, more healthy options for controlling your stress, like getting out for a good walk, breathe some air, breathe some air without your mask on, get some vitamin D and enjoy being outdoors. Find things that bring you comfort besides just loading up on carbohydrates all the time.

## **CZ**

Grace, you touched a little bit earlier on routine. When we're out of that routine, maybe we're not working in the office anymore and we don't have those set breaks, that can be detrimental to our diet as well.

## **GW**

Especially when a lot of us are working from home, or maybe quarantined at home, and you don't have your normal work routine and eating patterns in play, it does become more difficult. Either you have consistent access to the kitchen, and it might look like a lot more snacking or eating out of boredom, or for some individuals, it may mean that they're struggling to find that time to make themselves a good breakfast or a good lunch. Because unfortunately for a lot of people, working from home has become more stressful and more time consuming than what their previous routines look like.

I think you've got a dual edged sword there. Where for some individuals it means that they've got that continued access, and so they feel like their eating patterns have gone out of control. Where for others, they're under consuming. I think the first thing that they can do is be aware of that. Having that self-recognition of, 'Oh, since I'm not going into the office or into the classroom each day, I've noticed that I'm not caring for myself in the same way that I was before.' Making it a habit that when you wake up and you get ready for the day, you do go ahead and make yourself a nice breakfast.

The fact of the matter is, you still need to use your brain. You still are showing up for work or school in some capacity, and that means you need good protein and good fiber to keep you full and satiated so you can focus on the task at hand. You need those carbs to fuel your brain, and you need those healthy fats to keep you full and take care of your brain. It's just a matter of creating the time.

You still deserve a lunch break. Instead of eating mindlessly in front of our laptops or at our desks, let yourself have that break and be fully aware while you're eating food. Take time to digest and enjoy your lunch. That can be a great way to take care of yourself too. At night it's difficult too, because when you have work inside your home it's easy to work all day long. Allowing yourself to shut down for the day and really take a step away from work or school, enjoy time with friends or family and take care of yourself becomes really important. Working your meals into your new routine is huge, but then also

creating that routine where you really are taking care of yourself. Those work life boundaries become even more important so that you don't get to the point of high anxiety and high stress.

## **CZ**

A buzzword that we hear when we think about nutrition is mindfulness, and that can be hard when we're packing things into our schedule. Or maybe we have the whole day to just lie around, and it's hard to fill that time with good things too.

There are ways that food can be a healthy distraction from our stress. I don't know about you two, but I definitely jumped in on the baking craze over quarantine. I had a sourdough starter.

What are some ways that food can be a healthy distraction?

## **AM**

Food provides those nutrients that are anti-inflammatory, that are helpful for de-stressing, if you choose your foods wisely. Maybe you're learning to eat a food that you've never eaten before. Maybe you've gone to the grocery store and looked through all of the fresh fruits and vegetables and said, 'I've never tried ugly fruit before, I'm going to take that home and learn how to do something with ugly fruit.' Or, 'I've never researched the benefits of dark chocolate for providing antioxidants, for reducing your blood pressure and reducing your cholesterol levels.' People don't think in those terms. Of course, we also don't always think in terms of moderation. I think you can work some of those things in to your plan, to your routine, so that you're learning to incorporate new foods into your meal planning. You're trying to emphasize foods that are high in antioxidants, foods that are going to naturally lower your blood pressure.

When you look at some of the diets out there that have been very beneficial for controlling blood pressure, controlling blood cholesterol levels, they're full of fruits and vegetables. You're getting the benefits of the whole fruit or the whole vegetable if you're eating the food as a whole, rather than getting some pre-packaged snack. That provides a healthy distraction that gives your brain something new to learn about. It gives you the creative side to put a lot of color on your plate, and I think that's just really beneficial for reducing stress levels overall.

## **GW**

A big portion of what people are struggling with right now is not having the same social interaction that they had in the past. Having new skills that you're focusing on learning can be a wonderful distraction from old routines that you don't currently get to engage in. You and your roommates can come up with creative stir fry meals or following along with cooking shows, maybe. Honing your skills in the kitchen so that after college you've got this great repertoire of recipes that you can try.

Cooking can be a really fun and therapeutic distraction from the daily stressors in our lives, and it gives you a sense of pride and appreciation for the meal that you have too. We've talked about mindfulness

throughout this conversation, and when you have to spend the time chopping that bell pepper and dicing that onion, there's a lot more appreciation for the food that you eat when it's in front of you. You know about the hard labor that went into it. It gives you not only a distraction, but an added appreciation too.

#### **AM**

It gives you a creative outlet as well. It gives you an opportunity to do things with your family or with your roommates. One of the emphases of the slow food movement is that you should spend time eating slowly so that you can savor your food, so that you can have a conversation face to face with people you like. Eating all by yourself is not such a great idea. When you do that, because you've been working all day, you're out of a routine and eating while you're working all the time, you miss out on the creative outlet. You miss out on the opportunity to talk about your day with people that you enjoy spending time with.

It's really important to slow down to give yourself a break to enjoy people, even if you're not able to be physically with them in the room. I have had conversations with people where we were eating, we were having zoom meals, so it's okay to eat while somebody's looking at you on the computer screen. You can talk about what you created for your individual dinners. You can talk about the new recipe that you learned, and it's a nice distraction. It allows you to digest your food slowly so you're not rushed going through it. It gives your brain a chance to say, 'Hey, I enjoy this nutritive stuff you're putting in here!' It really is a wonderful therapeutic option on a lot of levels.

#### **CZ**

You are so right, food is such a unifying thing. We all eat, we all enjoy eating, so we might as well be in that together. As nutrition experts, what are some of your favorite sources of recipes? Where do you turn to find healthy food to eat and ways to be creative yourself?

#### **GW**

My mom and I love to send each other recipes that we find on Pinterest. Especially with baked goods, that's our number one resource. There's also a blog, it's "Pinch of Yum." That food blogger in particular has a lot of really nice soup and stew recipes, and as we get into colder weather I find myself checking out her latest recipe releases quite frequently.

#### **AM**

The internet is a storehouse of all sorts of recipes. You can find a recipe for just about anything that you want on the internet. There are a lot of dietitians who do have blogs and you can find great recipes there. Grocery stores are doing a great job with their mailer media and also with their websites to post great recipes, again, featuring the seasonal fruits and vegetables that they've got in the store at that particular moment in time. Take advantage of Pinterest, take advantage of Google, take advantage of your grocery store's website and see what's there this week. A lot of grocery stores are hiring dieticians, they'll walk



you on a tour through the grocery store and talk about what's beneficial for you in that particular season. Take advantage of all of those free opportunities that are available.

I have a cookbook collection. I've been trying to go through and find things that I haven't tried before and make some new recipes. My family has to be the guinea pig and I find out very quickly what they really like and what they really don't. You have the option, you have the license, to try something and if you don't like it, you don't have to eat it again. Give yourself the freedom to try something new and to not be afraid of it, and maybe learn a new way to prepare something that you've eaten for years and just hadn't thought about trying it in a different way.

**CZ**

I love that.

Dr. Marshall, do you want to touch on the changes that Lipscomb has made to make sure that students are getting the nutrition that they need?

**AM**

Sure. Of course, we've made a lot of changes for COVID, and students are not able to serve themselves the way they used to, but there are still lots of fresh options in the caf. You can go and get a salad, you can put just about anything you want on the salad. We have a section of the caf that is dedicated to those who need gluten free items. We have nut free areas, we have areas that cater to the vegetarian and vegan options, and they try to do a good job of having a variety of food always available.

The variety is so much better than it was years ago when I was a student, you just can't even imagine. Kudos to Sodexo for providing so many different options for the students. Lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. Lots of new recipes, and they'll put out survey cards for the students to be able to say, 'Yeah, I really liked that,' or, 'Oh, why did you put that together?' It gives the students the opportunity to be the celebrity judge, I guess, and make comments on the recipes, what they really liked and what they really didn't. It gives you an opportunity, again, to try something new. Try something that you haven't ever had before, or try it in a new way. Maybe you've always eaten something fried and they have it grilled. Try it grilled, see if you like it that way.

There's so much color, there's so much variety. Lots of options now, even at the level of having to deliver boxed lunches over to Bison Hall if you're happening to quarantine over there. They're trying to provide a lot of variety for the Grab and Go section over in the Hall of Fame room, and lots of tents outside. You can go, grab your food, then sit outside and be able to have your mask off, eat with your friends and try something new together.

**CZ**

I love that. There is no reason that food cannot be a unifying thing for us even in the middle of a pandemic.

**GW**

The Sports Nutrition department at Lipscomb has an Instagram account called “Fuel the Herd.” We try to put out informational nutrition posts and fun, easy recipes. Most of them can be recreated in a dorm. We really want it to be a resource for our athletes and for our student body.

Every Wednesday, we have a fun little competition where anyone can submit a picture of their “winning plate.” Typically, that looks like fruits or vegetables, some form of color on your plate. We love a good source of lean protein. You can get a grilled chicken breast from the caf, a turkey burger or it can be a deli sandwich, even. We like to have some form of your carbs on there too, so potatoes, sweet potatoes, rice, pasta, those all fit, or even the whole grain bread on your sandwich. There are plenty of Grab and Go winning plates too. We encourage everyone to take a picture on Instagram and send it to “Fuel the Herd” or tag us in your Instagram story. We love to repost and highlight how everyone around campus is having a “winning plate.” It's a fun little competition, but it also is a good way to highlight everyone's efforts and the way that they're taking care of themselves with their nutrition.

**AM**

Another thing that I thought I would mention; our Lifetime Wellness classes are also trying to cover information about nutrition. I was having a conversation with Dr. Ruth Henry the other day, and she said, “It is so discouraging to find out that so many students are afraid of carbs. How can I convince them that they shouldn't be afraid of carbs?” The bottom line is your brain runs on carbohydrates. If you don't provide them in your diet your body can make carbohydrates from things that were not, but it has to break your body down to do that. You're actually destroying yourself to supply your brain with the carbs if you don't put them in your mouth.

Eat your carbs. They're good for you. Just don't eat too much. Stop when you're full.

**CZ**

We all love to know that we can still eat bread. That's very encouraging.

**AM**

Yes, whole grain, full of fiber, bread. Eat it. It's good for you!

**CZ**

Thank you both so much for talking with me today, and thank you for the work that you do with students at Lipscomb.

**AM**

Absolutely, and anybody who wants to contact us we're open anytime.

**GW**

Absolutely, we'd love to hear from you.

**CZ**

Bison Talk is an award-winning podcast that takes a deep dive into today's current events and news with some of Lipscomb University's most interesting people.

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