



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 079 – Vibrant Living with Dr. Leslie Kasanoff
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Welcome to the Athena Wellness podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

00:30

Hello and welcome to Episode 79. Thanks so much for joining me.

I'm joined today by holistic health practitioner Dr. Leslie Kasanoff. Her experience includes more than two decades as a chiropractor. And before that she spent 10 years as a medical laboratory scientist. Most recently, Dr. Leslie has combined her vast experience and expertise to focus on health coaching and consulting, providing drugless solutions for women's health and wellness challenges.

Dr. Leslie follows her own good advice. She eats a whole food plant-based diet, gets most of her exercise through activities she loves, like riding her bike, and loves learning new things and taking on new challenges.



We discuss a broad array of topics and I learned so much, especially the impact of certain foods on our hormone levels and how the microbiome functions as a second brain.

Here's what we cover:

- How we can encourage the body's optimal state of self healing;
- Why some women feel the impact of menopause and how to ease the symptoms;
- The importance of good gut health;
- The microbiome's role in keeping our immune system functioning well; and
- What we can do to age with vitality.

We end this episode with our Dose of Inspiration segment, where Dr. Leslie shares some of the things that are lighting her up these days. And as always, I'll put links to Dr. Leslie's contact information and a free offer she has for the listeners of this podcast.

And now onto the show. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

02:24 Kathy

Dr. Leslie, welcome to the Athena Wellness podcast. Thank you so much for being here.

Leslie

Thanks for having me.

Kathy

So please share a bit about who you are and what you do.

02:35 Leslie



So I am a health and wellness coach and consultant. And I've morphed into this after being what I term a holistic chiropractor for 25 years. And then for 10 years before that I was a medical lab scientist. So this gives me the opportunity to combine both that more holistic part of me with that kind of science geeky thing that loves going down the tunnel and loves being able to do the research to help people.

And a lot of the people that I help are women over 40. And people with chronic diseases that don't want to have to take a lot of medication, they want to resolve their problems more naturally. So we do that with a combination of healthy eating, some lifestyle changes and some working with their, you know, their gut and their environment and a few other things here and there and combining it all in a package.

03:34 Kathy

Perfect, perfect. And you know, I have a soft spot for chiropractors because my dad practiced before I was born. So that was a long, long time ago. But you're the first chiropractor that we've had on the show.

So I'm curious, what drove your decision to become a chiropractor, because you were in the medical field, right?

03:52 Leslie

Right. So I did actually start out as a medical lab scientist. And one of the very last things that I had to do, actually, while I was still a student doing my internship. One of the very last things that I had to do was I had to assist at the bedside for a bone marrow biopsy. And basically my job was pretty simple. I just, you know, stood there. When the doctor got the sample, I made the requisite microscope slides and brought those and the sample back to the lab.



But the thing that I was not prepared for that happened in that room was first of all, I walked into that room and the little old lady that was laying in the bed looked to my 22 year old eyes like she was 110 and I don't know how old she was. And it was just a horrendous experience.

They don't use any kind of anesthetic because once you penetrate bone there's nothing you can do to anesthetize. Yeah, and I just saw that look on your face.

Kathy

(laughs) For those listening, I'm horrified!

Yes. Anyway, it was, you know, I mean, it was a horrendous experience, blood curdling screams that just sucked all the energy out of the room, just horrible.

And so he gets that sample, he hands it to me, I make the slides, I bring it back to the lab. I told the senior tech about this poor little old lady. And she looks at me and she says, "But Leslie, they don't even treat leukemia in patients that old." And my immediate question was, "What the hell am I doing here?"

And you know, and of course, 22 year old brain was a lot more... (laughs)

Kathy

Spirited!

Leslie



Yeah, spirited than that. (laughs) And I did go on to complete my studies. I was literally about three months from graduation after a five year program.

So I did complete that. It did serve me as a career for a few years. But I started researching then. And I knew that light bulb went on, and then the next light bulb went on, and the light bulb went on was, "You know, you can't do anything in the position that you're in or the position that you could ever hope to be in, grow into from where you are now. You can't do anything to alter that paradigm. The only way you're going to alter that paradigm is to alter it for individuals in a different setting."

06:43 Kathy

Hmm, that is incredibly powerful. And how long did it take you? You said, you were a medical tech for a number of years, were you going to school at that time? Just help me with the timeline a little bit.

06:56 Leslie

Basically, I graduated and I worked for a year. And then I actually took off on a cross country bicycle trip after that.

07:04 Kathy

Okay, that I want to hear about.

07:08 Leslie

You know, I mean, and that was all about, you know, finding myself and kind of figuring things out and finally settled on the central coast of California. And eventually, you know, I actually didn't go back to school for about another four or five years after that.



07:23 Kathy

Okay. But there was a shift in consciousness of some sort. And you knew. I mean, I think at that young age, to be able to say, "I'm just going to take off and try to figure this out." So what were some of the surprises along the way that kind of unfolded that maybe shaped your destiny in a way that you didn't think about before you embarked?

07:45 Leslie

Hmmmm. You know, that's a really good question. Because, on the one hand, I took off to kind of get away from everything, which I obviously did on a bicycle, cycling through mountains and sea shores and everything else. I don't know there's any one thing that ever happened. But I did learn a lot about that whole independence versus interdependence. Um, because I was with a group of people. And there were stories to be told around that. A guy that decided that he wasn't going to ride to the campsite one night and had the tent with them. (laughs) So when we saw him the next day, it was like, "Can we have our tent back please?" (laughs)

08:39 Kathy

A lot about teamwork, or the lack thereof.

Leslie

Yeah. (laughs)

Kathy

So shifting from medical to more holistic... Can you speak to the body's natural propensity toward optimizing wellness, towards self healing, towards self correcting?

08:59 Leslie



Mmhmmm, well, you may have heard some of these kinds of things having been brought up with a dad who was a chiropractor. Chiropractic is very strong in the idea that the body is self-healing and self-correcting. If you look at it, it's like, you know, if you cut your arm, you don't have to tell it what to do. It knows. And it knows that internally too.

And one of the things that, you know, we kind of laugh at in chiropractic is like, you know, you don't have high blood pressure because of a shortage of high blood pressure medication. It's the whole cause and effect thing. We're not treating cause and effect in medicine. And so what chiropractic does, what natural forms of healing do, is more about getting back to that root and looking more at what is the cause.

Chiropractic says the cause is basically this connection between the nervous system and the rest of the body. And so it opens up the nervous system through adjusting the spine and getting things back in alignment. And then the whole thing about nutrition and exercise and adding the right food and adding natural things rather than chemically derived manufactured things.

10:24 Kathy

Hmm. So tell me what you've learned about your own health and well-being along the way, what's influenced your practice?

10:32 Leslie

Yeah, well, we all learn by doing to a large extent, right out there with everybody else. I've made the same mistakes everybody else has. I actually lost my gallbladder because I was eating too much fatty garbage. And then still didn't learn that lesson and continued eating it. And it wasn't really until the whole perimenopause thing set in that I really said,



“Um, let's back off of all this. Why are you consuming the milk of an animal that weighs a thousand pounds?” (laughs) Not a very healthful thing for a 120 pound human.

11:11 Kathy

So along the way, you've made adjustments.

Leslie

Yeah.

Kathy

And you mentioned perimenopausal and that you work with women like that. If you had to give them some advice as to either if they're preparing for it or they're in the middle of it, what are some things that you might be able to recommend?

11:32 Leslie

Well, the whole perimenopause thing in this society is a real dilemma, because we've been conditioned to think that there's nothing we can do about it, which there's nothing further from the truth than that.

And our diets have made it really, really difficult. Basically, what people don't understand about their hormones, is that your hormones, like most of the other things in your body, are very much determined by what's on the end of your fork. And so there's a lot that you can do with beginning to balance those hormones by paying more attention to that.

And, you know, I mentioned earlier about dairy. Well, when you take a look at it, dairy is loaded with hormones because it does come from a cow that, like I said, weighs a thousand pounds. And basically what you're doing is you're giving yourself the fluid that



that cow is designed to feed to its baby calf to turn it from a cute little 40 pound calf into a thousand pound animal in a year. It has tons of growth factors and hormones and estrogen and things in it that are not appropriate for humans of any age to be consuming.

12:53 Kathy

And so these are natural hormones you're talking about. But then on top of that there could be other things that we ingest as well, right?

13:02 Leslie

Exactly, right, right. There is that whole thing with the fact that they also give those animals even more hormones that they can make more milk.

13:13 Kathy

So we're already imbalanced from an estrogen standpoint and then we're not taking into account what we're ingesting.

Leslie

Right, right.

Kathy

And then are there other things that are high in estrogen as well?

13:28 Leslie

Well, dairy is definitely the worst. Another thing that's also really high in estrogen that kind of surprises most people is eggs and chicken. Now the eggs might not surprise you too much. But chicken usually surprises people. And it's funny how we don't equate those for



some reason, because when we think estrogen we think milk related because we're mammals. Well, the fact of the matter is that a chicken lays an egg every day of its life. You need a hell of a lot of estrogen to do that.

14:05 Kathy

Wow, okay.

14:07 Leslie

Yeah, yeah.

14:08 Kathy

So the things that we may think that are healthy, having more eggs, having more chicken breasts, it's very counter.

Leslie

Yeah, exactly.

Kathy

So, you know, my next question is why some women feel the effects while others don't, but that could play a big part in it, right?

14:28 Leslie

It does. You know, the whole diet thing plays a big part. But the other thing that also plays a big part, and I apologize if anybody is going to get offended by this, but it's a fact of the matter, is weight and fat.



Because fat cells make an enzyme called aromatase, and what aromatase does is it actually converts other hormones into estrogen. So you've got this kind of hormone manufacturing machine in all of your fat cells that's producing more, even more estrogen. And then what does estrogen do? One of the byproducts of what have increased estrogen production is the laying down of more fat. So you get into this whole vicious circle.

So one of the things that I really advise women to do is to try and get down to more of their ideal weight before the whole perimenopause thing starts. And they're going to have a lot less problems.

15:33 Kathy

Do you find that those that are able to do that once menopause hits, they're able to be in that vicinity weight-wise? Because I know afterwards, sometimes that's an issue where it feels like there's a slowing of the metabolism. If that's the reason or not, I don't know. But that's kind of the belief. So do you find that if people do the work beforehand, it's not only easier to get through it, but also afterwards?

15:58 Leslie

You know, it's funny that you bring it up in that context, because actually, now that I'm through it, and I know more women who have been through it, it seems like there's a period of time, around the time you go through the process, that there is, you know, that there tends to be a weight gain. And I think everybody's different, maybe because we're all dealing with it differently. But a lot of us have also found that after you go through all that, that it's not as bad. So, um, when I was going through the whole perimenopause thing, I think I gained and lost the same 15 pounds probably five times. (laughs) You know, five



times in ten years, but then after all that, I dropped it all and I dropped another 10 pounds on top of that.

16:51 Kathy

There's light at the end of the tunnel, ladies! (laughs)

16:55 Leslie

There is. Yeah, yeah. I think the biggest disservice we do to ourselves a lot of times is thinking that what everybody else told us is true. And that that's the way it has to be.

17:06 Kathy

Mm hmm. It's a relief for a lot of people to know that, hey, if they are struggling at a point in time, that there is an end - and it's actually a beginning.

17:16 Leslie

Yeah. Right. And within that, there's an end, but it doesn't happen without you taking action. It doesn't just go away, you know, and people have a harder time figuring out what's best for their body, which is, you know, sometimes where that coaching comes in consulting with somebody like myself, because it is variable.

17:46 Kathy

So that just brings up, you know, this idea of mindset and how we're intending to experience something like that. So do you work with your clients around that as well?

17:56 Leslie



I do. Yeah. Yeah. Because they need that little bit of success to breed more success. And everybody is different in that realm. So it's a matter of figuring out what's going to work for them.

18:11 Kathy

Mmhmm, that's great. I heard you speak about our second brain, which is our microbiome, and how important it is to support good gut health. So I was wondering if you could share some thoughts with our listeners on that topic?

18:25 Leslie

Sure. We're finding out more and more every single day about the gut microbiome, and how intricately it's connected with the rest of everything else that goes on. And it's now starting to look like most of our hormones aren't actually made by our brain, like we always thought they were. Most of them are actually made by our gut microbiome. And then they're absorbed into our system. So you know, all of your neurotransmitters that dictate your moods, whether you're angry or sad, or happy or hungry, or depressed, or whatever. All those neurotransmitters are actually made by your gut flora.

And your gut flora, there is, for lack of easier terms, there's good guys and bad guys. And the good guy got microbiome flora, like the same food that is good for your body, namely, your fruits, your vegetables, your beans, your complex carbos. And so that's what they eat. That's what they thrive on. And when you're eating those things, you're feeding them and that in turn, helps feed you the appropriate amount of the appropriate hormones.

Now on the other side of the coin, if you're eating animal foods and a lot of fat and things of that nature every single day, you're feeding the bad guys that cause inflammation and



that upset all that balance, and don't make all those hormones that you need to keep your body in balance.

20:12 Kathy

Interesting. And what's the role, the microbiome's role, in keeping our immune system functioning well?

20:21 Leslie

It's very intricately connected. And we're still, you know, we're still parsing out a lot of how all that interacts together. You know, there's still so much that we don't know. But there's a definite connection between having a healthy gut microbiome and your immune system.

20:41 Kathy

So one of the best things that we can do around these times is, as you said, it's at the end of your fork.

20:47 Leslie

Exactly. Yeah. Now, one thing I do want to say within all this, because some people get turned off very easily, they make assumptions. I'm not saying that people necessarily need to be vegan, okay? What I'm saying is that, if you're not eating animal food on a daily basis, it's going to be a lot easier for your body to balance itself.

And the other thing that I'm saying is that if you look around the world in places where people live longer, healthier than we do, so you're talking about the Okinawans and the Sardinians in Italy, and you might be familiar with the Blue Zone regions of the world, you know, the Ikarians in Greece.



You look at those cultures and they mainly eat whole complex carbs and fruits and veggies. And they may have a little bit of animal products, but they don't have the quantity that we do - both the quantity in numbers of times per day and the quantity in amounts that we do. It's like a condiment. Whereas, you know, with the American diet, it's like the main part of the diet.

22:14 Kathy

And for them, too, it's smaller meals, smaller bits to digest throughout the day and not as often. Is that fair?

22:22 Leslie

I would say generally speaking, yeah. It's like, you know, if you look at a traditional Sardinian meal or something, you know, they may have some goat cheese or some goat meat in that meal, but they're not having the amount that we have. And if you look at places, like in Africa where they eat more traditional diets, there's their splitting, you know, a six ounce piece of meat can feed a family a meal.

22:54 Kathy

One more question on the microbiome and that's the impact that sterilizing our environment this past year, beyond good hygiene. What might the impact be when we start to emerge more after having exposed ourselves to a bunch of antibacterial products?

23:17 Leslie

Yeah, you know, that's a whole bag of worms in and of itself. (laughs) Because not only are we damaging our microbiome that's part of our skin, we're also ingesting a lot of that stuff, because we're breathing it, and we're sterilizing, you know, a lot of people are



sterilizing a lot of the things that they're cooking on and cooking in, and you're going to be getting micro amounts of that as you ingested it as well.

So all that stuff is going to be affecting multiple parts of our microbiome, not just our skin microbiome. And there's so much that we don't know. But the thing that we do know is just going back to, there have been so many studies over the past 20–30 years, that basically show that the children who play in the dirt are healthier than the children whose parents run and go wash the plastic toy before they hand it back to them every single time.

It's like people have to kind of parse out what works for them. But there's so much fear out there right now, that is, I think out of proportion with what's going on.

24:47 Kathy

And that's a topic in itself, right, of what that does to the nervous system, and then in turn, impacts our immune system, right?

24:57 Leslie

Exactly. Yep.

25:00 Kathy

I'm curious to know your wellness routines these days, as far as exercise and moving. You said you had done this amazing bike trip. And I think there may have been one recently, if I recall from your blog that you took a little road trip.

25:15 Leslie

Yeah, I did. I took most of the month of June and did about 600 miles in Colorado and Utah and Montana.



25:24 Kathy

Nice. Good for you, that's awesome. And when you're home, what's your normal routine? Is it walking? Is it swimming? Biking?

25:32 Leslie

It's mostly biking. As far as my general exercise, yeah. I try to ride at least four days a week. That's my main form of aerobic workout. I do supplement that with doing some strengthening work and some stretching work and that kind of thing. That I probably don't do as regularly as I should. (laughs)

25:57 Kathy

(laughs) You've got to follow doctor's orders there. (laughs)

26:02 Leslie

Actually, I've been doing better with some of that more recently. You know, it waxes and wanes, because it's not as much, it doesn't give me as much of that, you know, when I get on the bicycle and it just gives me that feeling of freedom. And it doesn't have to be, it doesn't have to take up a ton of time.

One of the things that I've gotten used to doing lately is, when I get up in the morning, usually after I take the dog out, one of the things that I'll do is I'll do like 15 push-ups, and 25 sit-ups. And it takes all of five minutes and it's done for the day. And it's not something that I really enjoy doing. But I just do it because I know that my body needs it, needs to keep up with those muscles. I get plenty of lower body workout. I don't have to worry about that so much. But the other never hurts.



27:06 Kathy

Especially having that core strength as we all get older. And that was actually my last question here about how do we age with vitality? Because I know that you have these foundations of empathy and compassion for your patients, as well as a love of science, but the last one is living life to the fullest, which I just think is amazingly lovely. So share with our listeners, how they might feel or how possible it is to feel more engaged as we age?

27:40 Leslie

It very much ties in with a lot of things. First of all, when you're eating more healthfully, you don't get a lot of those blood sugar surges and dips and that kind of thing. So that's going to help. Exercise really helps feed fresh energy into your brain. It feeds fresh blood flow into your brain, so that's good. The social aspect, you know, is huge. As far as on a physical basis, I tell people that basically, you know, they need to be doing stretching, strengthening, aerobic workout and balance workout. And if they can do those things on a regular basis, then they're going to keep things going in the right direction as long as they can.

28:33 Kathy

And there's a lot of leeway there, right? You can check those boxes off in a lot and a lot of ways, right?

28:40 Leslie

Yeah, you can. And you know, and one of the things that checks them off really better, checks more of them off more quickly is yoga, because it works with the balance and the flexibility and the strength.



28:55 Kathy

And do you find that's where a lot of your clients kind of migrate toward as they get older, that it's less of the running and all of that stuff and more of that yoga-like activities or Tai Chi or something like that?

29:08 Leslie

Yeah, it can. It depends on the person. And those kinds of things work very well in a classroom setting. So there's your social aspect.

29:19 Kathy

Nice. Love it. I was listening to something today and they were saying how a lot of these big companies, Apple in particular, have really doubled down on wearables. This seems to be a trend for the future of trying to spot disease earlier in the process through technology. And it just made me pause. We can do that. All of the things that you have been talking about is feeling how your own body feels whether it is perimenopause, or whether as we're getting older and we're deciding what activity to do to check those broad boxes that we can kind of guide ourselves to what feels right.

30:04 Leslie

Exactly. Spend a little bit of time in quiet solitude and you'll figure out what you need to allow you to feel more youthful, more invigorated.

30:19 Kathy

Here here. I love it.

Leslie

Yeah. (laughs)



Kathy

So we like to wrap up these episodes with what we call a Dose of Inspiration. It's just a quick Q&A to have our listeners get to know you a little bit.

Leslie

Sure

Kathy

So, the first question is, what is a favorite wellness practice or a recent wellness win?

30:43 Leslie

Ah, well, on a physical basis, it's the cycling. But also on a mental emotional basis, it's always continuing to learn and continuing to inspire others, to be in contact with others.

31:01 Kathy

I love that, it's a great answer. How about a recent struggle or a place where you were focusing your wellness efforts?

31:12 Leslie

For me, that is probably the discipline around getting to bed at a decent hour so that I can get up at the hour I need to and have the energy that I want to have in the morning. And that's always been a struggle for me.

31:27 Kathy

Interesting. What new experience or new thing are you looking forward to trying?



31:33 Leslie

Well, I actually have a milestone birthday coming up in just a couple of days. And I wanted to do something that I've haven't done before. And this isn't a big thing, but it's something I haven't done before. I'm going paddleboarding with a friend.

31:51 Kathy

Good for you. Nice. Love it. Envision the perfect road trip - where do you go, what do you do?

31:59 Leslie

Where do I go? What do I do? Well, first of all, the mode of transportation would be my bicycle. (laughs) And so that's a lot of the what do I do. (laughs)

32:09 Kathy

So you can bike anywhere in the world, where would you go?

32:12 Leslie

Well, I'm still waiting to do my European bike tour that was interrupted by COVID last summer. The trip that I had planned, which I would still love to do when I can, is about 4500 miles actually, and I do the whole thing.

32:31 Kathy

And Europe isn't exactly flat, either.

32:35 Leslie



Yeah. And this starts up, this is actually a north south route, and actually starts up at the very north end of Norway, in a place called Nordkapp, which is the northernmost point in Norway and actually goes all the way down through the Italian peninsula.

32:53 Kathy

Beautiful. How long does it take to do something like that?

32:57 Leslie

It would probably take about four months. So it would involve doing some creative things as far as visas and that kind of thing.

33:09 Kathy

And having had the experience, you know to keep your own tent. Don't give the tent away! (laughs) What has you feeling inspired these days, what's lighting you up?

33:24 Leslie

I'm actually doing a coaching certification program. Having moved from being in the clinical setting for 25 years and having basically all the medical knowledge and the nutrition knowledge and the fitness knowledge and all that kind of stuff, I didn't really "need" to have a coaching certification to move into coaching. But there are skills that I wanted to develop in terms of being able to help people go from Point A to Point B that were not my core skills. Because it's a very different conversation being a coach than it is giving somebody advice in a clinical setting.

34:11 Kathy

Absolutely. I was speaking to a retired nurse turned coach. And she said people know what they need to do whether they want to admit it or not. It's how.



Leslie
Exactly.

Kathy
How do I fit it into my life? How do I do this? How do I keep motivated? How do I... How, how, how?

Leslie
Yep.

Kathy
So I certainly understand that. Yes, I have all of this knowledge, but how do I make it accessible for somebody who's coming for me for some accountability?

34:44 Leslie
Right. How do I make it accessible and how do I make it accessible in a way that I'm not telling them, "You should do this?" Because it's gonna, they're much more likely to maintain that if they can figure it out for themselves why they want to do that and they can internalize that change.

Kathy
Yes. Beautifully said.

Leslie
So that's a lot of what I'm learning now that's really lighting me.



35:09 Kathy

Nice. That's wonderful. And then the last one, what has you optimistic about the future?

35:18 Leslie

Um, that might be a tough one to answer these days. (laughs) Um, I think the thing that has me optimistic... I'll say it this way. The less I listen to the news, the more I'm able to keep my optimism. Now, that doesn't mean I'm burying my head in the sand. But that does mean, I'm not going down that tunnel multiple times per day.

35:48 Kathy

That's self care. You're being very discerning with your boundaries and good for you. And I think that's a good reminder for all of us. We have the ability to close that door. And as you say, not to bury your head in the sand but to take good care of yourself, of your soul. So tell me, what's the best way for our listeners to get in touch with you? Where can they find you?

36:12 Leslie

Well, my website is drlesliek.com. My Instagram is [dr.lesliek](https://www.instagram.com/drlesliek). And I have a public Facebook group that's Vibrant Health over 40. And one of the other things that I do - I can offer them a little freebee. If they text the word *wellness* to the number 41259 and then follow the prompts, they will get 30 free days of inspirational messages that are nutrition and health related. And they'll also get a short little phone call from me before they get started on that.

36:56 Kathy

Lovely, I love it. It's wonderful. I'll link all of that stuff up in the show notes. Such an inspiring conversation, thank you so much for being here. I really appreciate it.



Leslie

Thank you.

37:07

Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

If you'd like to access the show notes, have a question you'd like addressed on a future episode, or would like a transcript of this episode, visit www.AthenaWellness.com/podcast. Until next time, be well!