



## Conscious Life presents

### Medicinal Mushrooms for Mental Wellbeing

Guest - Hania Opienski

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#### **[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow**

Hello, and welcome back to this event. My name is Jaï Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. And today, I am very, very pleased to be welcoming the wonderful Hania Opienski. Welcome, Hania.

#### **Hania Opienski**

Thanks, Jaï. Great to be here.

#### **Jaï Bristow**

Great to have you. So Hania is the founder of Supernatural Health and a holistic healer of many talents. So, Hania, today we're talking about medicinal mushrooms in the context of mental well-being and specifically around anxiety.

And so do you want to start by telling us just why talk about medicinal mushrooms in the context of mental well-being and anxiety? How do they work exactly?

#### **Hania Opienski**

Certainly, yes. Yeah, so that's a great question. I think a lot of people, when they're thinking about mental health or they're thinking about working with anxiety, they're looking more at talking therapies or at maybe working with emotions or mental-emotional.

There is a certain amount of interest in nutrition and maybe supplementation. But I think mushrooms are something that perhaps isn't so familiar to people. However, mushrooms are something that have been used for mental well-being for millennia since the earliest traditional medicine traditions. This is because they actually work in a number of ways.

One of the main things that we think about for medicinal mushrooms is the way that they regulate the immune system. But part of that effect is this modulating effect in helping to bring the body back into balance. They also do that with many different systems of the body, and that can include the hormonal system, the nervous system.

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And so, of course, these are both then systems that are very impacted when thinking about mental health. And they can also help with regulating the digestion and the microbiota, which, again, we're seeing from research, are more and more recognized as having an impact on mental health.

So they're actually helping in a number of different ways, both on the physiological level, and that then has the knock-on effect of having an impact on the mental emotional state.

### **Jaï Bristow**

Wow, they sound fantastic. I know you and I talked a little bit about mycotherapy, which is the use of medicinal mushrooms for trauma. People can check out that interview on the Conscious Life platform. What I'm hearing then, Hania, is that these mushrooms help in a number of different ways on a number of different systems.

You talked about the immune system, the nervous system, the gut, the brain. It sounds like it does it all. Do you want to tell us a bit more about what they are exactly? What are these medicinal mushrooms and why is it that they can support all these different systems at once?

### **Hania Opienski**

Medicinal mushrooms, you might also hear them or see them referred to as functional mushrooms. This is a slightly different category than the psychedelic or the magic mushrooms, where I know this is also a really interesting area of research for mental health.

But what I'm talking about today are these other mushrooms that don't have any psychoactive ingredients, but a number of other compounds that have been found to influence and benefit all of these different systems that I mentioned. These tend to be from the saprophyte family or types of mushrooms. This means they grow on rotting wood and plant matter.

They have a number of compounds that have been shown to impact and support different aspects of health. They tend to be mushrooms that are... There's a whole other class. Like the family, the kingdom of mushrooms includes things like mycotoxins, molds, yeasts, and a whole range of mushrooms.

But the ones that we're talking about are the ones that are actually the fruiting body. The fruit of the mushroom is observable to the human eye and often can be quite large. There's even some crossover with culinary mushrooms.

These are mushrooms that some of them can be... As I said, they can be eaten, but some of them are ones that have much too much chitin, which is like the equivalent of cellulose that you get in plants that makes them rigid. Which means that they will actually be a lot more woody, so not something that could be eaten, but something that would then be prepared into...

Originally, it would be like a decoction, it'd be ground up and boiled, so that then you could actually consume it like a medicine, like a herbal tea or a tincture, or in this powder form. Now, modern usage tends to use the powder and then actually make it into an extract so you can, again, further concentrate those active compounds.

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And so then medicinal mushrooms and functional mushrooms, people would normally be taking those either as a powder, a tincture, or in a capsule, and probably in a slightly concentrated form if they're trying to get a more reliable or consistent therapeutic effect.

**Jaï Bristow**

Right. I think it's really interesting that you talked about how psychedelic mushrooms can also be used or help in this area, right? I know that Conscious Life, we also have a whole conference on psychedelics, so people can also check out all those interviews on the platform.

And that, as you say, here today, we're not talking about psychedelics, we're talking about medicinal and functional mushrooms. Do you want to just say a little bit about, I've heard both terms used, about the difference between medicinal and functional?

**Hania Opienski**

Yeah, certainly. I think medicinal mushrooms came about as a term of wanting to qualify these as separate from culinary mushrooms, those that can be used to support health and have been shown to have benefits.

Then I think because the word medicinal sometimes isn't that comfortable in a natural health setting, that functional mushrooms, again, it gives it that separation from psychedelics, from culinary mushrooms, and is demonstrating that they are mushrooms that are going to have a specific function in the body.

So some people would define them slightly differently and maybe class some mushrooms as both medicinal and functional, and maybe separate them. But generally, those are quite interchangeable terms, and it will just depend on the context that they're being used in.

**Jaï Bristow**

Right. And then they differ, like we said, from the psychedelic mushrooms and from the culinary mushrooms, even though I heard that there can be a little bit of overlap. Is that correct?

**Hania Opienski**

Yeah, certainly. You could certainly consider the psychoactive psilocybin containing mushrooms as medicinal because now we're seeing that they're not just for recreational use. They can actually be used therapeutically.

But generally, if someone is talking about medicinal mushrooms, they're probably going to be talking about the other mushrooms that we're going to talk more about today. And culinary mushrooms. So culinary mushrooms, of course, these are mushrooms that you eat.

But within those ones that are perhaps more familiar in the West, things like oyster mushrooms or shiitake mushrooms, these are ones that are also used medicinally. But once you're starting to use them medicinally, they will probably then be dried and prepared and used in a more concentrated dose. So there's certainly a crossover.

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And I know both for myself and my clients, I would recommend that people do include culinary mushrooms on a regular basis because this is going to be having a range of health benefits because they are functional food. So that's another way that we can use the term functional.

So they have these active compounds that are beneficial for health that have therapeutic effects, but they're also an amazing source of vegan protein. They also have high fiber, a lot of indigestible fiber, which makes them prebiotic.

It's partly how they're helping with regulating the gut. They contain B vitamins, minerals, a precursor for vitamin D, which also is a key thing to think about when regulating mood and hormones. They are functional as a food, but also therapeutically.

Then once you concentrate them for... There's some specific active compounds, then you actually are going to have a more profound effect on regulating all of those systems that I've mentioned. And actually even other systems or particular organs in the body as different mushrooms will have different compounds that will have more of an impact on certain tissues or systems in the body.

### **Jaï Bristow**

Amazing. You said that... You talked about the difference, and you said that the ones that we're talking about today are the medicinal ones. Do you want to name which ones we are talking about today?

### **Hania Opienski**

Yeah. I think when looking at anxiety and mental health, there's a few mushrooms that really stand out as being those that you'd want to consider. One of these would be reishi, and this is ideally... Reishi is a common name, which actually refers to a number of different species of mushroom.

And so ganoderma lucidum is the one that probably has the most historical use and the most research, and is probably the main one that you'd want to be looking at when choosing a mushroom supplement, and it's certainly the one that mostly is used in products.

Then another would be cordyceps. This again is a common name, and it can either refer to cordyceps sinensis or ophiocordyceps sinensis, and then also cordyceps militaris. There's definitely more traditional usage and reverence associated with the cordyceps sinensis, and it is harder to grow and more rare.

Cordyceps militaris is something that now you'll probably find is coming up in more and more supplements because it's much easier to grow and it can be grown vegan because actually the cordyceps sinensis is... You've probably seen, what was it... The Last of Us, the show about mushrooms that could actually take over a human and control their brain.

Well, luckily, cordyceps don't do that with humans, but they do actually do that with insects. So they're entomopathogenic mushrooms. In order to create what we think of as a mushroom, the fruiting body, they actually need to parasitize on an insect.

To actually grow that fruiting body, you would have to be killing a load of moth larvae, which, of course, people don't want to do. With cordyceps sinensis, we're just using the equivalent of the

roots of mycelium in supplements, whereas *militaris* can actually be grown without needing an insect.

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So you can get the fruit body, which is actually the ideal part of the mushroom. With cordyceps, it could either be *militaris* or *sinensis*. Then the other key one that I'll talk about is lion's mane, and there's just one main variety of lion's mane.

**Jaï Bristow**

Great. That's really interesting. I didn't know that these terms, like reishi and cordyceps, actually covered a whole bunch of mushrooms, and that that's just the common use and the umbrella term, and that there's certain ones that get used more or less within those.

We have reishi, cordyceps, and lion's mane that we're talking about today. I know that you've talked about some others with me in the past. Why these three mushrooms? What are their properties and why do they specifically help with anxiety and mental well-being in general?

**Hania Opienski**

They do this through a number of different ways. I'll talk first about cordyceps. This is actually one of the few... Well, I actually think the only fungi that has been officially classed as an adaptogen. There are a number of other herbs that would fall into this category. People are probably familiar with things like ginseng and ashwagandha.

Then reishi is considered a probable adaptogen and has a lot of the functions and characteristics of an adaptogen, but isn't officially classed because they just haven't done enough scientific research, even though it's been used for mental health and a whole range of calming and other things that would be relevant. Officially, in terms of scientific classification, it's still just a probable.

An adaptogen is basically either a herb or a mushroom that helps the body both adapt to stress so bring the body back into balance in terms of the creation and balance of stress hormones, but also to help the body to come back to homeostasis.

It's something that actually helps the body to self-regulate and can either have a preventative effect in maintaining homeostasis and stress management. But also once someone has actually been depleted and is out of balance, they're ones that will actually help to regulate and regenerate appropriate feedback loops in the autonomic nervous system.

So the system that regulates what we often term the fight or flight and the rest and digest, and also in terms of homeostasis, actually rebuilding, having a tonic effect on regulating the body. And adaptogens are also those that have been proven to have no harm or no side effects. Cordyceps is the one mushroom that is considered a true adaptogen, and reishi, a probable adaptogen.

That's just one of the ways that mushrooms are... These specific mushrooms are really useful when thinking about mental health, is that capacity to regulate stress, to either bring, to maintain a healthier balance of the nervous system and the hormonal system and how those work together.

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There's adaptogens are found to regulate the HPA axis, so the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis. That, of course, is regulating the central nervous system with hormone production. And so that's one of the key ways that mushrooms are regulating mental health.

**Jaï Bristow**

Wow, that's incredible. I love how there's these things that are completely natural, like you say, vegan and gluten-free, all the rest of it. You mentioned that they have no side effects, that they don't cause harm, and that they adapt to different individuals, that they can be preventative and curative.

And really help people who are overstimulated or struggle with stress, which we know is directly related to anxiety and a lot of other mental dysregulation. It's fantastic that these very natural products can support all of that.

So I'm curious about how to take them, right? How does one get started with incorporating these mushrooms into one's daily life to support either in a preventative way or a curative way.

**Hania Opienski**

Yeah, certainly. I'll say just a little bit more about the other two mushrooms that I didn't mention so much. Where cordyceps are a true adaptogen, so it's really helping with this stress management. It's also one that helps with cellular oxygenation and cellular energy production. It's actually enhancing the body's capacity, the mitochondria's capacity to make ATP.

It can be really helpful not just for mental emotional stress, but also for physical stress. It's certainly something that people who are athletes or exercising and want that maintenance of the impact of physical stress on their body.

Whereas reishi is more calming and grounding, and it's going to regulate hormones, and both of them actually will slightly regulate blood sugar. They're both anti-inflammatory, antioxidant.

Then the lion's mane comes in as well as having these regulating effects. It's specifically thought of as a gut and brain mushroom, so it actually affects the gut-brain connection and helps regulate both.

It's an amazing prebiotic, so it regulates the gut microbiota, and it's also known to stimulate the production of some compounds such as nerve growth factor, which actually stimulates the production of nerve cells. So it can help with regeneration and maintenance of basically brain cells, but also nerves. I know, amazing. Nerves throughout the body.

And so it's going to depend what function you're actually looking for. So again, when we're thinking about mental health... Something that people are probably familiar with are things like IBS, where we have this gut-brain connection where there's often dysbiosis.

There's irregular gut microbiota, often bloating, discomfort, pain, which is then exacerbated by stress or can contribute to stress, anxiety symptoms, etc. If that was something that someone is struggling with, then lion's mane would probably be the best mushroom to choose.

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Whereas if someone is dealing with... They're under a lot of stress from work or study or relationship or whatever it is, but there's a constant mental strain or there's a need to have high output.

And maybe they don't want to rely on caffeine or stimulants or sugars or things to keep going, then it might be that actually, cordyceps is going to be the one that's going to give them that energy and that stress regulation without further depleting their adrenals.

And then with reishi, it might be that if there's someone who is struggling with anxiety, stress, maybe insomnia. There's too much activation and stimulation and agitation, then reishi has this very calming grounding effect, and it's also slightly hypnotic and sedative, so it has the capacity to really support sleep.

Again, it's going to depend on the severity of symptoms. With mushrooms, they're what we call dose-dependent. What that means is the stronger your symptoms, the higher the dose of mushrooms that you need to have a benefit. Or also the smaller you are, the smaller dose that's going to be effective, or the bigger you are, the bigger the dose that you're going to need to actually have an effect.

Dosing is actually going to be a little bit individual. Most trials on mushrooms have been animal trials. So again, they're extrapolating... Or cell studies. So it's like, "Oh, we can see it has this function within the cell, or we can see it does this to these animals."

But unfortunately, there isn't that much money in human trials. And so human trials, we do have some suggested dosages of what people have used and what has been effective. But I think it's really important to check in with yourself and how you respond. And also it's going to be different if someone is looking at something occasionally and they just want...

Say, they know that they've had a really stressful day and their mind is racing. And they're thinking, "Okay, I really want something that's going to help me calm down and have a good night's sleep because I know when I feel like this, I might be up all night rehashing stuff and feeling over-stimulated."

In which case having a reishi cacao at night would be something that... You're going to have just a powder dose, and you want a nice strong bitter one. Maybe a couple of teaspoons, and that could be something that is going to have that immediate calming effect, which is going to allow for a calmer mind and better sleep.

But if someone has chronic anxiety and they're looking at something that they want to be helping to bring their system back into regulation. They know that, say, they're under high levels of stress on an ongoing basis. Then they'll probably want to... Rather than going for a powder supplement or something that you might do as a one-off, you might want to get a more concentrated product and then go for a capsule.

And then again, it's going to depend on your symptoms. So reishi is something that if you take it in the morning, it's not going to make you sleepy. But if you're anxious and over-stimulated, it's going

to have a calming and grounding effect. But if you're anxious and over-stimulated in the evening, then it's actually going to help you calm and support sleep.

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So you might decide, okay, actually, I'm just going to take it in the evening, or I need it 24 hours a day. I'm going to take one capsule in the morning, and then maybe I have this nice soothing drink in the evening, or I take a second capsule.

Whereas something like cordyceps... If this is, say, someone is anxious and depleted, wired and tired, then cordyceps is going to be something that's going to be helping to build up energy again.

But because it has this energizing effect, you wouldn't want to take that in the evening because even though it's not like caffeine or an adrenal stimulant, it might actually cause wakefulness and then interrupt your sleep. Of course, you need sleep for mental health, for energy, so cordyceps, you take in the morning. There's a slight variation.

But for dosage, I would generally say if you have a chronic complaint or a really acute complaint, then you're probably better to take an extract. Most extract capsules would be about 4/ 500 milligrams in a capsule, and you really want to look for standardized levels of the active compounds.

The key active compounds are something called beta-glucans. These are mushroom-specific beta-glucans. 1,3/1,6-D beta-glucans. This type is one of the key active compounds, and you'll see that in all of those mushrooms, reishi, cordyceps, and lion's mane.

But when we're looking at a good, say, reishi supplement, the other key compound is the triterpenes. These are really bitter compounds. Again, if you're taking reishi, if you're not good with bitter, take it as a powder, you may end up not taking it because it's bitterer than coffee, and it doesn't have all the lovely nuances of... If you like coffee.

But if you're happy with that, then you know you've got a good supplement if it's really bitter, because it means it's high level of triterpenes. But then taking it in a capsule means you don't have to taste it, but you want one that actually lists this percentage. 2, 3, 5, 10% of triterpenes.

Whereas with cordyceps, even though the beta-glucans are important, it's actually something, a nucleoside called cordycepin or adenosine. This is the compound that's really having that energizing, regulating effect.

Again, you want your supplement to be listing that. And you could either take that as a powder, like people are doing a morning coffee or coffee alternative or a smoothie, or they just want to take it as a capsule.

Then as a morning or lunchtime thing, cordyceps would be really great. And again, that similar 4/ 500 milligram dose, or of its powder, a teaspoon or two. And you can adjust with a powder, you can play around and see what serves you.

And then with lion's mane, because a lot of people would be taking this not just for its regulation of the nervous system, but say these would be maybe people who also have some gut issues.



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So then you might want to take it as a powder so you get more of the prebiotic effect. So you're actually balancing your gut. So you could choose to take that as a prebiotic, in which case, again, a couple of teaspoons a day, or even as a concentrated extract, the beta-glucans are also prebiotic.

So you will get those in a capsule. Again, that's 4/ 500 milligrams is going to be enough for most people. And if your symptoms are severe, you might want to take two a day, or if you feel like, "Well, I've got a mix of those things", you could take cordyceps in the morning, lion's mane at lunch, reishi at dinner, to just give you that broader spectrum effect.

### **Jaï Bristow**

Wow. There's a lot of fantastic information there. What I'm really hearing is that mushrooms, like you say, they're adaptogens, and different ones have slightly different properties, and there's different ways of taking them.

For some people, it will make more sense to take them in the morning or evening. For some people, it will make sense to take one. For some people, they might take multiple ones.

It's good, like you say, to take punctually. If you've had a really stressful day and your nervous system is revved up and you need some help coming back to baseline in order to sleep, you could take some just then. For some people, it's useful to take long term or for a while. For people with chronic stress, chronic anxiety.

I'm wondering as well if you could say a little bit about taking it as a preventative. If I know, oh, I've got a big deadline at work next week and it's going to be a really stressful couple of weeks, would it be supportive then as well?

### **Hania Opienski**

Yeah, those are really good questions. Thank you for that. Certainly, like I mentioned, reishi, particularly, can be helpful if you want quite an immediate effect. Then taking a powder drink, you're probably going to get that effect. But the same could be true of a capsule.

Same with cordyceps. If you want that energy boost, maybe I certainly would use it as a coffee alternative for me to give me energy. I know that it's often used by my clients and clients of my peers for if you're going to exercise and you're like, you want to...

Because cordyceps also help with performance and also recovery. So it can be useful to take just before a workout or just after a workout, and it's going to help the body to re-regulate.

But with mushrooms in general, the recommendation is that you take them over a period of time, and you might have immediate effects in the short term. But actually, if you are looking at regulating your stress, or say you have been burnt out, or you feel like you're burning out, and you know that you actually need ongoing support, you really want to take mushrooms regularly.

And so the same dose every day for at least a month. Ideally two or three months, to really give your system a chance to start coming back to balance, because mushrooms are, basically they are functional foods that are helping the body to self-regulate.

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And if you're just generally healthy and balanced and you're just slightly thrown off, then of course, you're going to come back into balance more quickly.

Whereas if something has been going on for a chronic amount of time and there might be some depletion in the function of your adrenals or in your circadian rhythm and your sleep cycle might be out, that is going to take a number of weeks for your body to actually come back into regulation.

But certainly, if you know that you have a particularly stressful work week or exams coming up or something like that, certainly starting beforehand is a really good way to approach it.

Because then you're actually providing your body with the compounds, with the support to actually be regulating your hormones, regulating your gut microbiota, strengthening your adrenals, helping you to have better quality sleep leading up to this stressful event.

So certainly, I would say that would be a good way to do it. And I'd say, yeah, like you suggested, at least a couple of weeks beforehand is a good amount of time to allow your body to actually be building up some resilience.

So certainly you could just be like, well, cordyceps is my regular thing because I know that I have to perform under a certain level of stress. So I take cordyceps in the morning, and I do that two, three months or so...

For me, some cordyceps are something that I've been taking because I had burnout a couple of years ago and I started taking cordyceps and reishi. And cordyceps has definitely been one that I just now consistently take because I know that it helped with recovery and now it's also helping me with maintaining my energy capacity and maintaining my physical as well as mental health.

But then it might be that you have this work meeting coming up and so you're like, okay, so I'm going to do a couple of weeks of reishi in the evening to actually just make sure that I'm getting good quality sleep, that I'm calming down after maybe being very mentally active or more stressed in the preparation period.

It might be that that's just something you do short term, and then you just stick with your main mushroom, or it could be a combination.

### **Jaï Bristow**

I love the way you talk about how it can support physical regeneration and support people going through physical exertion, like a workout or something like that, as well as mental exertion.

You've talked about these three main mushrooms that are supportive for the brain-gut, yes, the brain-gut connection and mental well-being, so reishi, cordyceps, and lion's mane.

You've talked sometimes about using one, using more than one. You've talked about your own experience using cordyceps and reishi, for example. What is your suggestion? You've talked a lot about dosage, but what is your suggestion for people who want to get started and who don't know which ones to take?

**[00:28:32]**

Is it good to take a mixture of all of them at the beginning? Is it good to focus on just one? I know you've mentioned the different properties of each one. But if someone's watching this and is like, "Yes, I struggle with anxiety, I struggle with stress, I'm a bit burnt out." Where does someone begin in that case?

**Hania Opienski**

Yeah. It could be that you just decide, okay, I want to see how this one mushroom works for me, and you just pick what is the main symptom that you want to address. Actually, the nice thing with mushrooms is that they actually work on a number of different levels.

You might be choosing one key symptom, but actually find that a number of others improve as well because they're working on so many different systems in the body, and they're also helping to bring your body back into balance.

Then, of course, that's going to have a knock-on effect on a whole range. If you're trying to see, okay, well, I'd like to know how each mushroom works for me, you could decide, well, the main issue is that my anxiety means I don't sleep well.

So I'm going to start with reishi, and I'm going to do that for two or three months, see how well that regulates my sleep and my anxiety levels. You might decide that you're just going to take a capsule in the evening or take a drink in the evening, reishi powder, to help with calming down before sleep, and you're going to trial that out.

And then once your sleep is better and you're feeling like, okay, so now I feel like that's more under control. But I still have this... Feel panicky or feel completely washed out during the day, then you might go, okay, now I'm going to try doing cordyceps to address the fatigue and the brain fog and feeling not focused and wanting to have caffeine or sugar to be functional in the morning. It might be then you try cordyceps.

But certainly, it's also okay if cost isn't a factor, then you could decide actually, I have all of these symptoms. I want to get a holistic benefit as soon as possible. I'm going to start taking all three. In some cases, you will find combined products that will have maybe even all of these mushrooms.

If there are other mushrooms in there as well, it doesn't mean that those aren't going to help. It's like I'm talking about these key mushrooms. If you're looking at specific symptoms or maybe you want one mushroom.

You'll find that there are a lot of blends out there that will combine maybe some maitake or some shiitake or some agaricus or some oyster. These might be geared at being an immune blend or a gut regulation blend or a sleep blend.

It's like these other mushrooms are going to have companion effects. They're also going to be prebiotic. They're also going to... Certain ones will be supporting the immune system, and will be supporting blood sugar regulation. It could be that you find a blend, and that's actually also fine.

**[00:31:25]**

Mushrooms have a synergistic effect. Often, a lower dose of two or more mushrooms together can have a more profound effect than a higher dose of just one mushroom. So it is fine to start with a combination.

But if you really like... I want to get clear on which mushroom, how each individual mushroom functions for me. Then I'd say, pick the most disturbing symptom and the mushroom that best addresses that, and do it for at least a month, maybe a little bit longer. And then you could try cycling it with a different mushroom or adding something in, depending on how you're then feeling after that period of time.

### **Jaï Bristow**

I think that's really good advice. I know that a while back now, you recommended reishi for me because I was struggling with inflammation. Actually, it helped with a lot of my other symptoms. It helped regulate my sleep, it helped regulate my digestion, it helped with hormones and all those things.

I was suffering from long COVID, post-COVID fatigue, and I have other long-term chronic conditions. It really, really made a difference. I like what you're saying about start with one based on one symptom and then seeing. It might help with other things and then see which symptoms are still present a month or two or three in, and then maybe try something else as well as that.

But I also really appreciate what you're saying about the blends and how different mushrooms are companions to each other and can support certain things. I'm wondering about, I've noticed in the blends that there's sometimes other ingredients as well.

My Instagram feed at the moment is advertising a lot of things like, mushroom blends to help with ADHD or focus or fatigue or immunity and those things. They can include ashwagandha or maca or some other powders. I'm wondering if you have anything you want to say about combining mushrooms, not just with each other, but with other plants as well.

### **Hania Opienski**

Yeah, certainly. I mean, this is something that has been done since the earliest natural medicine. Traditional Chinese Herbal Medicine has been using mushrooms since its inception, or at least since the earliest texts, almost 2000 years ago.

In that pharmacopeia, what you're doing is you're looking at the whole person and the range of symptoms, and then you're combining herbs with mushrooms to get a holistic effect. I think that now modern supplements are maybe not founded on that same level of understanding of herbal medicine.

Well, mushrooms would fit into that idea of herbal medicine, even though, of course, they're fungi mushrooms rather than herbs. But mycotherapy is now coming as a standalone. Now people are looking at wanting these more specific, focused products that are going to have a range of benefits in combining different herbs.

There are certainly things that will combine well with mushrooms, but there are some things that don't combine so well. I'd want to know a little bit about the company because some companies

have really done their research and they've actually chosen herbs that will combine and enhance the function of the mushrooms very well.

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But then there are other companies that have just thought, "Oh, well, this is good and this is good and this is good, and so we'll just stick them all together and it'll be even better."

And that's not necessarily the case. So I'd say, as you said, there's more and more things coming out, and I'm definitely noticing there's more and more mushroom brands coming out. But when I actually... And people will say to me, "Oh, I heard about this new one. This looks great. Should I take it?"

When I actually go and look through their production or their extraction or their sustainability or their other ingredients, I can actually see that, okay, it may look good on paper, but it's actually missing some key things or even in the processing.

Actually, mushrooms, traditionally, when used in herbal medicine, would normally be ground up and boiled, so a decoction. That's, of course, called hot water extraction.

The key active compounds, the beta-glucans that I mentioned, are stable under heat and will be released into hot water. But things like the triterpenes that I mentioned in reishi, which are really important antioxidants. They are also helping with regulating the hormones, which therefore, of course, is working with stress hormones.

These are only solvent-soluble. There's only a small amount that's there in hot water, so a single extraction mushroom. Whereas one that has been what they call dual-extracted, where they've used a solvent... Often alcohol, which should then be not in the final product unless you're getting an alcoholic tincture, then you actually don't just get the hot water soluble ingredients.

You also get the triterpenes and things like ergosterol. I mentioned, precursor to vitamin D, which is also important for hormonal health, regulating immunity and stress, etc. A full spectrum dual extract is going to give you a greater and broader benefit.

Then the herbs that then are combined with it... You want to make sure that those are clean, that they are good quality, and that they are ones that actually harmonize with the mushrooms.

Adaptogens do tend to support each other. So mushrooms combined with other adaptogens like ashwagandha, I think you mentioned. That can be a good combination, and certainly for myself as separate products, but in the same taking of supplements. I will often do that, and it's certainly something I've recommended to clients and get good feedback from.

Now there are products that are coming out that have these. There's definitely evidence for things like having a small amount of vitamin C with mushrooms actually enhances their absorption.

Other high antioxidant things like resveratrol, grape seed extract. There's a little bit of evidence, but this indicates that they actually work well. But a lot of the supplements that are coming out, there are things that haven't really been tested or maybe aren't coming from traditional uses.

**[00:37:31]**

They may be totally fine, but they may not be as beneficial than just taking a good quality mushroom product by itself. I'd say there's not enough evidence to say that they're all great. In a lot of cases, they will work well together. In a few cases, it will actually enhance the mushroom's effect.

But I would say do a bit of homework and maybe do a bit of reading about traditional usage or what the function of those other herbs is in the body, and that will give you a bit more of an idea of if that's going to be a good product for you and your needs.

### **Jaï Bristow**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Just making sure that the company itself is reputable, looking up reviews and experiences from other people, seeing what it's combined with. You've already talked about how different mushroom extracts can work slightly differently, it would be more or less potent, and making sure it's the right extraction.

It sounds like mushrooms are really, really helpful, and to be a little bit careful about where you get them from. Are there any contraindications to taking mushrooms? Are there any supplements or medications they can interact badly with?

### **Hania Opienski**

Yeah, that's a really important question. The only absolute contraindication for mushrooms is if you have an allergy to culinary mushrooms, you can't take medicinal mushrooms. That's the only, definitely you can't take it. Unfortunately, they do have enough similarity with the culinary that the same proteins that they will cause an allergic reaction. That's the only absolute.

But then there are certainly a few areas of caution. The main one would be if someone is taking other medications, and particularly when looking at reishi, if someone is taking either blood-thinning medications. Because reishi actually is a natural blood thinner, or if someone is taking blood sugar-lowering medication. Because again, reishi helps you to regulate blood sugar.

Now, we talked about mushrooms having this modulating effect, and that's either immuno-modulating or adaptogenic. But of course, medication has a fixed effect. If you're taking a mushroom that has the same effect as a medication. We call that an additive effect.

Now, the mushroom might be helping your body to modulate, but the medication is just going to be working in a specific way at a specific dose. If suddenly this mushroom is coming in and it's doing the same thing, you might get too much blood thinning or too much lowering of your blood sugar, which, of course, potentially could be dangerous.

It's not so much that the mushroom is bad for you, but that combination could mean that you get more of an effect than is actually therapeutic. There is potential if someone is working with a practitioner and with their doctor, that they may be able to track...

Say, if someone has blood sugar issues and they're finger-pricking before they medicate and they're taking mushrooms and their body actually starts improving, then they can modify their dose of blood sugar-lowering medication.

**[00:40:33]**

But if you're not doing that, we just say with blood-thinning medication, if you're taking two or more of warfarin or any of the strong ones, don't take reishi. You can take others... Cordyceps, lion's mane, should be fine, but not reishi. And yeah, that's the main thing, is that additive effect.

Otherwise, there isn't really any particular research that indicates that mushrooms are not helpful or are going to have a negative interaction. Again, you've got to look at the quality of the product. So if you're getting a really good quality pure mushroom extract or mushroom powder, then this shouldn't be interacting with other medications and changing how they affect, how they work in the body.

But if the product has other ingredients in there, those may be things that will interact with your medications. And there's definitely herbs that might come under that. Be mixed with mushrooms and have adaptogenic or other stress or mood-supporting effects that can actually be contraindicated.

If, say, someone is taking SSRIs or other antidepressant medication, there are definitely herbs that you can't take together, which might be in a mushroom mix, whereas you could take mushrooms alongside those medications, and they might improve the symptoms. So it's good to track the medication and the impact because you may need to adjust that.

But it's really just blood sugar, blood thinning for reishi of the mushrooms that we've been talking about that you'd want to look at. Otherwise, just check if you're taking a product that has other herbs in there. Do make sure that you check because that might be an issue.

### **Jaï Bristow**

Right. What I'm hearing is if you're allergic to mushrooms, medicinal mushrooms aren't for you. If you're on blood thinners or medication to lower your blood sugar, then don't take reishi.

And otherwise, just make sure that the mushrooms you're taking aren't combined with other things because those other things might have an impact, but the mushrooms themselves are unlikely to do so. Is that correct?

### **Hania Opienski**

Pretty much. I would say, it's not don't take reishi. It's just to make sure you're working with a practitioner because it might be that actually you can take it, but you need to modify the dose. Or that actually taking the reishi is going to help your body to self-regulate, so you could actually then work with your doctor to see if you can actually modify or reduce your medication.

Of course, we can't ever recommend that it's like, say, "Oh, take mushrooms, get rid of your medication, or reduce your medication." But there is a possibility that that could be the case.

It just means it's a caution rather than a contraindication. It's also a potential opportunity for people to find a way to actually manage their symptoms in a way that can reduce the need for pharmaceuticals, possibly, but with that support with a practitioner.

**[00:43:28] Jaï Bristow**

Fantastic. That makes a lot of sense. Hania, there's so many more questions I want to ask you, but unfortunately, we're running out of time. And so before we come to an end, I want to ask you a little bit about cost, right? Because people might be hearing this and be like, "Great, fantastic."

But we've talked about making sure that the mushrooms are high quality and from a reputable source and aren't combined with other things, not just grabbing anything off the internet that you see.

Sometimes it can be helpful to work with a practitioner. But it sounds like it's also okay for people, if they don't have any other contraindications you mentioned, to start just experimenting based on their symptoms with one or two of these mushrooms you've mentioned today.

And so what are people looking at cost-wise? Is it going to be another one of these things that we're like, "This is great. Now go spend \$10,000 on this mushroom." How can people manage this in a cost-effective way?

**Hania Opienski**

Yeah, so certainly good quality mushrooms can be expensive. But then again, it depends on what you think of as expensive. But certainly, it doesn't have to be something that breaks the bank. You do want to choose a product that has...

So basically, there's different ways of telling if a mushroom is a good quality product. And we've talked about some of these key active compounds. Now, if a product is actually standardizing those active compounds, then you know that you are going to be getting...

You have an idea of, well, this is going to be a consistent level of these compounds. So I know if I take one capsule, I get this percentage of triterpenes, this percentage of beta-glucans. So if I'm not getting the desired effect, I take two.

Whereas if you're taking a product that might be cheaper, but it doesn't standardize those active compounds. Then it might be cheaper, but you don't know how much of those active compounds you're getting.

So it might be that one batch has a great amount, and so you're taking one capsule a day or one teaspoon a day and you're getting effects. But then the next batch, because it's not standardized, it has a lower level, and then suddenly you're like, "Oh, it's not working for me so much anymore."

So it can be a false economy to take a product where there isn't some level of standardization. I would say, powders, because they're not concentrated, they will tend to be cheaper. Certainly, if you're looking at health improvement or mild symptoms, or like we talked about, occasional use, then a powder can be a really good way to start.

You're probably looking at a 100g packet, but somewhere between £20 and £30, and that's probably going to have at least 20 plus doses in there. That then is cheaper than getting a coffee every day.



**[00:46:13]**

Even actually, if you think about it in that sense, a concentrated extract like those... A good quality one, you're probably looking at somewhere between £30 to £60 for a bottle of 60 capsules.

Again, depending on your needs, you might be taking one capsule a day. So again, that's like a pound. 50p to a pound a day. So spending £60 on a bottle of mushrooms, if you're not sure if it's going to work, can feel like a lot.

But if you're thinking about it in that sense, and if you're actually going to start seeing benefits, after a couple of weeks. Then I'd say that certainly for me, I think it's really worth the investment.

And definitely with my clients, I mean, I obviously work in a holistic way and with other things, but mushrooms tend to be one of the supplements that I recommend to most people because they have such a broad range of effects.

And even though I said, pick a key symptom and choose a mushroom that works with that, the nice thing with mushrooms is that they're not just working on that one symptom. They're going to specifically work on that symptom, but they're going to work on a range of other things. Like you mentioned with your experience with reishi, it helped on so many different levels.

So inflammation is a key aspect related to mental health, but also related to joints or skin or menstrual issues or pain. So you may find that if you're taking a good quality concentrated extract mushroom, you might be able to stop taking other supplements because then it's going to be helping you with skin management, pain management, digestive management.

I often find with clients that rather than taking two or three herbs and some vitamins, taking a mushroom and maybe one or two other things actually replaces a whole range of things because they have so many different benefits.

So we've really talked about these three mushrooms and their impact on mental health. But actually, if you're interested in these mushrooms, go and look at them. Because it might be that you have anxiety, but you also have eczema. Or you have anxiety but you also have IBS. Or you have anxiety, but you also have arthritis.

And then it's like the mushroom might actually also really be helping with that other condition as well and mean that you don't then have to take your other supplements because that actually helps your body to self-regulate not just the key symptom, but these other tissues in your body as well. I hope that answers your question a bit.

### **Jaï Bristow**

It does, absolutely. For me, just to give people another bracket, I take these reishi. I buy... There's 70 capsules in a pot, and it's roughly €50 or 50 US dollars for the 70 capsules, which... Sometimes I take one, sometimes I take two, depending on my symptoms.

Like you say, it can help with other things. Like I've mentioned, I have chronic health conditions, I have ADHD. I have a bunch of other things, and it's really helped me.

**[00:49:04]**

Just to remind everyone that nothing said in this interview replaces medical advice and to always check with your medical practitioner or a professional practitioner if you have other conditions or if you're on medication and that kind of thing.

Hania, this has been amazing. Like I said, I have many more questions, but they'll have to wait till next time. How can people find out more about you and your work, especially if they would like to work with you?

**Hania Opienski**

Yeah, certainly. Thank you. So I'm on social media under my name on [Facebook](#), under Supernatural Health, both website and [Instagram](#). And then also TryLivingForAChange is another Instagram that's a combined project with a friend of mine that works with Fungi, Botanicals, and Energy Medicine.

So any of those channels are ways that you will be able to interact with me. I actually have a free guide on my Supernatural Health about how to choose a good quality mushroom supplement. So that's something that people can go to get a little bit more information, and then you'll have my contact details, so you can certainly get in touch with me.

I'd say also for mushroom supplements, either through me or if you have a health practitioner, most practitioners will be able to have access to the good quality brands and have some practitioner discount that they can forward on.

So if you work with a practitioner, ask them about medicinal mushrooms because they probably already have access to some and could help you with a discount, or of course, you can contact me.

**Jaï Bristow**

Amazing. Thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate it.

**Hania Opienski**

You're welcome. It's been a pleasure discussing this with you.