



Conscious Life presents

# ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

## Hormones, skin health and anxiety

Guest: Dr Trevor Cates

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### [00:00:09] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Anxiety Super Conference.

Today I'm speaking with Dr Trevor Cates, author of the USA Today Amazon bestselling book, *Clean Skin From Within*, and founder of [thespadr.com](https://thespadr.com).

She received her medical degree from the National University of Natural Medicine and was the first woman licensed as a naturopathic doctor in the state of California.

She currently lives in Park City, Utah, where she helps patients from around the world with a focus on skin and hormones. Her new book is *Natural Beauty Reset: The 7-Day Program to Harmonize Hormones and Restore Radiance*.

Dr Trevor Cates, thank you so much for being with us today.

### Dr Trevor Cates

Thank you. It's great to be here.

### Meagen Gibson

So let's make the connection right away for people. How are hormonal imbalances tied to anxiety? We're at an anxiety conference, everybody's like, why are you talking to a spa doctor? So let's make the connection right away.

### Dr Trevor Cates

I think a lot of times people, especially women, think, oh, my hormones, I only really have to worry about them if I'm trying to get pregnant or I'm going through menopause. That's the only time we really think about our hormones.

But hormones rule so many of our symptoms. And if we think about it, hormones are also not just sex hormones like estrogen, progesterone, testosterone. We have thyroid hormones, we have adrenal hormones, we have our insulin, we have leptin and ghrelin that help with appetite. We have melatonin that helps us to sleep. We have all of these hormones.

And so when I talk about hormones, we talk about all of them. And they have this incredible symphony. They all work together, ideally. That's the key here, ideally.

**[00:01:49]**

I remember I had a question recently, but Dr Cates, can hormones really be balanced? And I'm like, you know what? It's a really good question because it is a constant state of balance and restoring balance.

### **Meagen Gibson**

From what I hear you saying, the balance isn't a rigid thing. It's not like we just pour it into certain pots and then it's just in homeostasis. It's just like constantly in fluctuation.

### **Dr Trevor Cates**

Yes. And part of it is our lifestyle. What happens in our life. Something happens, wakes us up in the middle of night, throws off our sleep pattern. That's going to throw off our melatonin, and that's going to potentially throw off other things. We eat, maybe not so healthy choices, and that impacts us, and our cortisol from stress. A lot of different things can be impacted by the lifestyle choices we make, and a lot of that is just out of our control.

But what I really love helping, women in particular, is having resilience so that we can have that body that bounces back so we can go through some certain issues, things that come up, we can go through them with ease.

And especially with major transitions like puberty, pregnancy, postpartum, perimenopause, menopause, postmenopause these transitions that we go through you see so many women going through a lot of symptoms and this includes mood.

We all know as women, cycling, we go through PMS and it's just such a common thing, but it's actually not necessarily normal for us to have PMS or to have moodiness around our periods or our cycles or certain phases and perimenopause or menopause. We can balance our mood, but a lot of that goes back to our hormones.

### **Meagen Gibson**

And we've normalized the PMS extreme symptoms as just something we kind of have to tolerate in culture. It's like, oh, everybody has this, so we're all just going to talk about the water we're all swimming in. When it could be a bit better with some attention and focus, if I hear you right.

### **Dr Trevor Cates**

Yes, absolutely. I think a lot of times people forget about their hormones when it comes to mood. Like I said, they think about it with related to their cycles or different things or they're trying to get pregnant. But it is really important to think about the fact that, for example, if our cortisol, if our adrenal hormones are kicking in overdrive and so we've got excess cortisol or maybe our body's not producing enough cortisol, that can definitely impact our mood, it impacts our resilience to stress.

And so when we go through stress, either our cortisol is not coming up the way it's supposed to or it's too high, that can impact our mood and make us feel like more agitated or just not being able to get through a stressful event and we might just feel more agitated.

[00:04:56]

Also, another big hormone is progesterone. And so as women start to go into perimenopause, I think it's funny, a lot of women think, oh, I don't have to worry about menopause until I'm 50 or in my 50s, but perimenopausal symptoms...

### **Meagen Gibson**

It sneaks up on you.

### **Dr Trevor Cates**

It sneaks up on a lot of women in their 30s and 40s and they don't really realize that's what's going on.

As early as your 30s, you can start to have a drop in progesterone in relationship to estrogen, and that can create a lot of mood symptoms. And so that has a lot to do with those changes that you might notice around your cycles of feeling really moody before your period or as you go on, you might just really notice, I'm just more agitated, I'm more irritable, when something happens, I just snap. It can be that progesterone is starting to get low.

And then also especially if you're noticing difficulties sleeping at night, progesterone, lower progesterone, when it starts to lower, that can make it difficult to sleep. That impacts our mood and how resilient we are and how we are able to handle stress throughout the day. And so progesterone is another big one.

### **Meagen Gibson**

So for anybody listening at home, because I'm following probably 75%, 80% of all the hormones that you're naming. And it's such a sophisticated system that, as you said, we're not in direct control of. These are just responses that happen throughout our day based on what our day is structured like and what kind of experiences we have, which makes, from what I understand, testing for hormone levels really challenging because they're fluctuating all day, every day.

So how do people find support and lower and measure and be responsive to their cortisol levels, their progesterone levels, things like that?

### **Dr Trevor Cates**

So let's talk some more about cortisol, because that is one of the big ones that we want to be in a balance. Because really hormones are about balance. None of them are bad. They're all good and they serve as well.

So our adrenal hormones, adrenaline and cortisol in particular, those are ones that help us with handling stress. So they're actually really good because when we are trying to get out of a car coming at us on the road or something, they help us get out of the way, they help us get out of danger. They're our stress hormones, some of our fight or flight hormones that help us get out of danger. So they're really important.

Cortisol also, is again, released from adrenals, and it goes up in the morning. So in the morning, now that's what it's supposed to do. It balances. It goes up in the morning, so when we get out of bed,

we're like, yeah, ready to go! And let's get this day going. I don't need coffee because I'm good to go. But as the day goes on, towards evening, it should drop down.

**[00:07:54]**

And the problem is that not everybody has that. So not everybody has that morning high cortisol and then that lower cortisol in the evening. So if it's high at night, then you have difficulty falling asleep.

And then again, sleep is so important for our mood and for our hormones. And so if we're just that, especially that agitated feeling in the evening or this anxiousness feeling and you're wound up and can't really figure out why you can't just settle into sleep, you're like looking over at your spouse going, wait, why are they asleep but I'm still laying here with all the racing thoughts? There's a good chance it's cortisol.

But like you said, we can get testing to find this out. So for adrenals, you can do blood tests, but the problem with blood tests and adrenals is because they change so much throughout the day and also throughout our lives and at different phases of our lives and through different stressors and things, that it only gives you, blood work only gives you that snapshot, that one little point in time.

And so if you are going to do blood work, you want to do it in the morning because, especially if you're having trouble getting up and getting out of bed in the morning and you're just really relying upon coffee or something to get you going. So that would be a possibility.

But really the best way, I think, is doing saliva testing or urine testing because you can do the collection multiple times throughout the day. And so then that will tell you, is your morning higher? Is your evening lower where it's supposed to be? And what's happening in between?

And so then that will help with treatment, because what good is all this information if there's not something to do about it? So there are things that you can do.

First of all, stress management. Stress management is huge. It's so important. I think a lot of times we're so quick to be like, okay, what's the herb I need to take? Because we're so used to the conventional medical approach, which is take this medication for this symptom. So then we take herbs and nutrients, and we do the same thing. But it's really important to build a solid foundation for our hormones and our health.

And so stress management is a big part of that. And we could talk about stress management practices if you want, but that's a big part of it.

But then there are also nutrients that we need, like B vitamins help us with our adrenals, it helps us with stress. And then there are also certain herbs that can be helpful, like adaptogenic herbs, rhodiola, ashwagandha, ginseng. These are some of the good ones that can help us with our adrenals, with supporting them.

And then there are some herbs that help manage cortisol, they kind of bring it down to a normal level and then some that kind of boost it up.

But adaptogenic herbs, what's so cool about those is they're called adaptogenic because they help our bodies adapt. So whether it's high or low, it can help our body just reset and get it back into a balanced place.

**[00:11:10]**

But again, if you're not doing stress management and you're not addressing root causes going on with your health, then these aren't necessarily going to help that much.

**Meagen Gibson**

It sounds like you're doing road patches on a bridge that's about to collapse. You're not looking at the underlying issues. So I love that you're like... And a lot of people need that kind of data to take a hard, critical look at their lives. They do the urine testing or the saliva testing, and they're like, wow, my cortisol levels are up all day. No wonder I can't sleep. I've really got to look at my work life balance or family management or the things that contribute to all the ways in which we can be stressed and have stress.

So from that critical perspective of first analyzation of what stress is and then what you can do about it, and then those supportive elements, whether it be adaptogens or supplements to get you on the road to a better balance, if you will.

**Dr Trevor Cates**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Meagen Gibson**

Fantastic.

**Dr Trevor Cates**

And then as I mentioned before, progesterone, too, is another big hormone to look at. And you can have your progesterone levels tested, again, I prefer to do urine testing for a lot of the hormones, but you can do blood work with the progesterone.

Again, it's also not going to be as helpful first, depending on where women are in their lives. A lot of times we can go based on symptoms with progesterone. And there's also something called estrogen dominance, which can happen for a lot of women. And sometimes it's a genetic predisposition that causes that, but that means that estrogen is more dominant over progesterone. So then they'll feel those low progesterone symptoms more than other people, especially if they start to go through perimenopause.

So it's really good to do things to help with estrogen metabolism. And so there are things like DIM as a supplement that can help with estrogen metabolism. And DIM comes from cruciferous vegetables, so broccoli, cauliflower, kale, brussels sprouts, that whole family of vegetables help with estrogen metabolism.

So someone in an estrogen dominant kind of place, then that could help because you want to help make sure you're metabolizing your estrogen. That means breaking it down so that we can have more of that balance.

**Meagen Gibson**

And I love how you contextualize everything in a supportive way, not a shameful way.

**[00:13:54]**

My husband's family, for instance, they are all like Adonis'. The whole family is just the picture of health. They've all got muscle structure. And you look at them and you're like, those are what human beings are supposed to look like. They all have genetic high cholesterol. It's like the family joke. They're all eating nothing but vegetables. They're like the pictures of health, and they have horrible high cholesterol.

And so sometimes you're just going to be genetically predisposed towards something that you're going to need support with, and it's not something that you did or didn't do or a criticism of your lifestyle, unless we're talking about stress management, things that you can control. But there's a lot of things that are out of your control that you just need to have support for.

**Dr Trevor Cates**

Yeah, absolutely. And a lot of the patients I've seen have been actually living a pretty healthy life, but then they're like, what's going on here? Why am I still having any symptoms? Or why do I have it?

So that's why testing is really important, like testing for cholesterol. But one of the things that's interesting about cholesterol is we need cholesterol to make hormones. So cholesterol is also not a bad thing.

**Meagen Gibson**

Exactly.

**Dr Trevor Cates**

They probably have good hormones. That's probably one of the reasons why.

**Meagen Gibson**

That's the other side of it.

**Dr Trevor Cates**

Because we need our hormones.

**Meagen Gibson**

Exactly. My sister-in-law is a nutritionist, so she's constantly like, cholesterol is not bad. Please be mindful of what we're eating and how we're living.

I know that you alluded to it before, so I want to come back to that, but you were talking about, because there's a difference between stress and anxiety and when stress, and these symptoms of stress and the results of stress get exasperated to the point of anxiety.

And all of the things that you've been mentioning, whether it's your cortisol or the fact that you're not sleeping because it snowballs into something that feels out of our control. So what's the difference between stress and anxiety? And also what are those tactics you alluded to earlier for stress management?

### **[00:15:45] Dr Trevor Cates**

Well, first, stress management is good for all of us, whether we have anxiety or we're just stressed. The thing is that we're all stressed. Stress is a normal part of life. And again, that's partly why we have our adrenals and adrenaline and cortisol to help us with managing stress.

So we used to have to run from the tiger that was chasing us or lion or whatever. And then now it's more like the crazy dog in the neighborhood or the car that's not, they're texting and driving and not paying attention. We still need to get out of danger. So stress is not a bad thing. We need stress to a certain extent.

But the problem is that we have this ongoing stress that we're working crazy hours, we are not sleeping the way we probably should because we're not going to sleep when it gets dark, we're staying up with artificial lights, we're watching TV late at night, we're on our phones, and then we get up too early, probably, and not getting up with the sunrise or maybe sleeping in too late and we're not getting outdoors enough and connecting with nature and the cycles of our seasons and the sun and sunlight and all of that that we need for our healthy circadian rhythm. So we become less resilient. So over time that can set us up for when stress starts to go too far.

And with anxiety, something like a generalized anxiety disorder, I oftentimes see that there's a genetic, again, going back to genetics, a genetic component with that. There is a neurochemical imbalance, typically. And so they're real symptoms.

And when you have anxiety, it really starts to impact your life in a way that makes it hard to really function. And relationships, you definitely aren't as resilient to when things happen, when things come at you, you just don't have that same level of resilience. You're just in this heightened state.

And of course, hormonal imbalances work worse than that. And neurochemical imbalances are a big trigger for that. And remember, neurochemicals and hormones are very intricately connected.

So a lot of times we talk about serotonin, for example, as a mood hormone, neurotransmitter, but it also functions as a hormone. The big difference with neurochemicals is that they work on our brain and our nervous system. It was a little bit different than hormones, but really, they work together. And so we definitely want to be mindful of that when we're looking at the difference between being stressed and actually having anxiety.

### **Meagen Gibson**

And another thing, correct me if I'm wrong, but I seem to remember that serotonin, the signal for serotonin release, actually comes from the gut. So we think of it as a brain chemical, as a mental health chemical and hormone, but it's signaled from the gut. Your gut is actually what's telling your brain to release more, release less, absorb more, I guess I should say, absorb less. And so we have such a disconnect between our brain, our thoughts, and then our bodies, but it's so deeply connected.

### **Dr Trevor Cates**

Yeah, absolutely. You're right. The primary source of serotonin comes from the gut. And that's one of the reasons why gut health is so important for addressing anxiety and mood and hormonal imbalances.

[00:19:36]

And I also talk a lot about skin. As the spa doctor, I talk a lot about skin, and a lot of that comes from the gut, too. So when we address gut health, we're helping our mood, we're helping our hormones, we're helping our skin, we're helping our brain, we're helping so much of our body. So if there's one place you want to focus on your gut.

**Meagen Gibson**

I think, again, correct me if I'm wrong, but I keep thinking of all these things that I think are facts, and then I'm like, maybe I should check. But your skin is the largest organ on your body, right?

**Dr Trevor Cates**

Yes.

**Meagen Gibson**

I don't think we've ever, in the history of mankind, been more obsessed with topical skin solutions and products. It feels like everywhere I turn, somebody's lathering their face with something. But your skin is definitely connected to your gut and to your mind and your mental health. All of it, all of those hormones come into play and you just kind of see the results on your skin.

**Dr Trevor Cates**

Absolutely. I call skin our magic mirror because it's right on the surface of our body, and it gives us so much information about our overall health. It's probably why I wrote my book, *Clean Skin From Within*, because in my practice at the Waldorf Astoria Spa, people were asking me a lot about skin, and I was like, well, it comes from the inside out. You've got to address the root causes.

And what helps your skin helps your mood. And a lot of this is connected. And so it's really important.

The other thing to be very mindful of skin that a lot of people don't know is that it also absorbs what you put on it. And so this is another one of the most important things with hormonal imbalances goes to the toxins that were exposed to in the environment.

There's a group of chemicals called endocrine disrupting chemicals. These are hormone disrupting chemicals, and they're in a lot of different places. In our air, water, food, personal care products, in our homes. And when we get exposed to these chemicals, like pesticides or heavy metals, for example, we get exposed to these, they bind the hormone receptors and really create a lot of problems and imbalances.

So they can turn on these hormone receptors, making our body think that it has hormones when it doesn't, and so it starts behaving a certain way. We'll behave like we have high levels of estrogen, for example, when our body actually is, it's an endocrine disrupting chemical. Or behave as if we have high thyroid or actually create more imbalances with these.

Because everything in the body is a feedback mechanism. So when the body thinks something, our hormones are high, then there's a whole cascade, or when it's low, there's a whole cascade because the body is constantly trying to recover and rebalance.



**[00:22:23]**

And so it's really important to do what we can to reduce our exposure to these groups of chemicals. And these have been linked to mood problems as well, a number of mood problems, as well as infertility, problems with early puberty, pregnancy issues, fertility issues, thyroid problems, breast cancer, prostate cancer, a lot of different hormone related conditions.

And so the first thing is to try and do your best to reduce your exposure to those. And then we also want to look at how we can improve our body's detoxification pathways? And as I mentioned, estrogen metabolism, how can we improve those kinds of things with our liver, our detoxification pathways to help get rid of these toxins out of the body?

### **Meagen Gibson**

Because your liver's job is detoxification, but if you're not supporting your liver, it's not able to do its job in the correct way.

And in the realm of what you were saying, absorption, I'm thinking back to what you said about genetic predisposition. If you've got a penchant toward generalized anxiety disorder because of genetics, things like that, you're going to have, as Cathy Malchiodi would say, Dr Cathy Malchiodi, she should say, your circle of capacity is a little bit lower.

So your resiliency, as you were talking about, is already, you're predisposed to already have a lower resiliency. And all of this absorption, endocrine disruptors, things like that, they're adding to the stress on your system.

It's not that you are perceptively aware. All of the products in my household are causing my body stress. You don't really know. It's just an accumulative effect. It's not like one thing is causing, I mean, that can, of course, happen, but it's the accumulation of all of these things, products and things in our environment that we don't consider, that add up to be a stress on our system.

### **Dr Trevor Cates**

Yeah, absolutely. And it can be a sudden event. It could be you get some mass exposure to something through your work or through a hobby, jewelry making or something, like if there was a big spill. You work in a lab or something, and something happens. Of course, there could be gasoline spilt or something like that. You could get a big exposure.

And sometimes people can make the connection to go, ever since that one thing, it sent me over the edge. And sometimes it's a combination of environmental toxins and other triggers, like a virus or getting sick. A lot of times it's a virus, and then the combination of those is what changes those genes and turns them on or goes the wrong way where we start to develop symptoms.

And then with other people, it is like you're saying, we get that ongoing exposure. And so much of our exposure, we just don't really think about.

Like the skin care products that we're using, a lot of times we don't think about what we're putting on. The lotions or perfumes, deodorants, hair care products, all kinds of things that we're putting on our body because we don't really think of our skin as being permeable. A lot of times we just don't think about it because it's just such a normal part of our life to use lotions and soaps and different things and not really look at the ingredients.

**[00:26:01]**

But we also know that we use hormone creams as a route of administering medication or nicotine patches. We put them on the skin because we know that the body absorbs those.

And so these endocrine disrupting chemicals are showing up in human samples. Things like parabens in personal care products or diethyl phthalate and other types of phthalates that you might find in synthetic fragrances that are in personal care products, as well as cleaning products and various things, air fresheners.

There are also these forever chemicals, these PFAS that are, it's really unfortunate. And there are so many nonstick things, like nonstick cookware, but also packaging, like to-go packaging that has been non-stick, even waterproof mascara, long lasting lipstick. And unfortunately, they're called forever chemicals because they don't go away. They bioaccumulate, meaning they accumulate in our tissues, and they also don't go away out of the environment.

So the problem is we're exposed to more of these endocrine disrupting chemicals than we ever have been. And so again, it's not the whole doom and gloom of it is that just being aware of it, doing your best, so doing things like trying to drink filtered water and using glass, stainless steel, using those kinds of containers rather than plastics or styrofoam or coated papers and things.

Looking at what you're bringing into your home. What kind of clothing, what kind of furniture, what kind of carpeting. When you do a remodel, what are you putting... I'm doing a remodel on my house right now. What are we using in there, because those could be big exposures.

Choosing organic food as much as possible so we reduce our exposure to pesticides. Using skincare products, personal care products. That's why I created this product or skincare line was because I wanted natural non toxic skincare products for my patients that are also enjoyable, and they work well.

We want to educate ourselves on some basics to reduce our exposure. And just being mindful of thinking, like, okay, I should take my shoes off. I'll have people take their shoes off when they get to the home because you've been at the gas station, you've been walking through gasoline, you've been in the park where they spray pesticides. And you don't have control over these places, but you do have control over your home. So how people remove their shoes at the door so you're not tracking all that into your home.

And the water that you drink, the air, having air purifiers in your home, things like that. And then the foods that you eat, the personal care products, those are the places where you have control of reducing your exposure. And it does make a difference.

And don't be afraid to ask. I think we're so used to just trusting, like, oh, we've been using these products forever, we've been eating these foods forever and I'm okay. Well, the thing is that over time, people aren't okay. And I've seen it. I know you've seen it, too, I'm sure, that people get to a point where they're not okay. And then they gosh, I wish I had started making these changes sooner.

So the sooner you start making these changes, hopefully before you have major health issues, but certainly if you have anxiety or any other health issue, this is something you definitely want to pay attention to. And this is not something your psychiatrist or your family practice doctor is going to talk to you about.

**[00:29:49] Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. I've gone that route.

And it's okay for people if it needs to take a little bit of time. I remember when I transitioned all of our storage containers to glass, and it just took time. It was an investment. I had to transition into glass.

Most people, it's not accessible for them to just go through their house with a big trash bin and toss everything out and start from scratch. But as you're doing things, like you said, remodeling projects, being mindful of your choices, things like VOC and paint and the products that you're using to clean and all of those things, they add up.

**Dr Trevor Cates**

Yeah, absolutely. They do.

And then also, again, another big part of this is detoxification pathways, too. Making sure that your gut health is at a really good place. Because we have these toxins we're exposed to, we want to make sure that they're getting out of our bodies. The ones that our body is able to remove pretty easily, that those are able to get out through our urine and through stool and through perspiration.

So we want to be really careful that we're having regular bowel movements, that we're drinking plenty of filtered water, that we're taking good care of our livers and our kidneys because we want them to last.

**Meagen Gibson**

And your adrenals are above your kidneys. It's all so close to each other. Our filtering system and our stress response system are very close together. Let's keep all that healthy.

**Dr Trevor Cates**

Absolutely.

**Meagen Gibson**

All right. So, Dr Trevor Cates, fantastic. This has been great. So I imagine people are going to want to give you a call and figure out how to get started on this journey with you. How can people find out more about you and your work?

**Dr Trevor Cates**

Yeah, absolutely. People can go to [thespadr.com](https://thespadr.com) and I also have a *Hormones, Health & Harmony Docuseries* and we have that launching at different times so you can take a look for that at [hormoneseries.com](https://hormoneseries.com).

I'm also on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), all the social media places [@thespadr](#), and just remember that doctor is abbreviated to Dr.

**[00:32:13]**

And my book, *Natural Beauty Reset* is coming out in September. It's available for pre orders right now and I also have a book, *Clean Skin From Within*. Like I said, a lot of the things that we do for our skin and our hormones are going to help us with our mood and our brain.

**Meagen Gibson**

Fantastic. Dr Trevor Cates, thank you so much for being with us.

**Dr Trevor Cates**

Thank you.