



Food as medicine for healing trauma

Guest: Ocean Robbins

Disclaimer: The contents of this interview are for informational purposes only and are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. This interview does not provide medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or psychological condition.

[00:00:09] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Ocean Robbins. Firstly, Ocean welcome and thank you so much for joining me.

Ocean Robbins

Thank you, Alex. It is a privilege to be with you.

Alex Howard

We're going to be getting into a really important piece of the jigsaw here. We're going to be exploring the role of food and nutrition in healing.

One of the things I think is important to say in the framing in the outset is that obviously how we eat and how we live has a big impact on our ongoing sense of health. But also, when we've experienced the negative impacts of trauma, they aren't just psycho-emotional impacts, they are physiological impacts. And there is enormous power in food and nutrition to also help support that healing process.

Just to give people a bit of Ocean's background, Ocean Robbins is co-founder and CEO of the 700,000 member Food Revolution Network. He's the author of the bestselling, *31 Day Food Revolution*, which I've been enjoying dipping into a little bit over the last few days.

Ocean founded The Youth for Environmental Sanity (YES!) at age 16, whilst the rest of us were out partying and doing such things, that's a pretty impressive thing to have started, and directed it for the next 20 years. He's spoken in person to more than 200,000 people, organized online seminars and events reaching more than a million and facilitated leadership development events for leaders from 65 nations.

He serves as an adjunct professor for Chapman University and is the recipient of the National Jefferson Award for Outstanding Public Service, the Freedom's Flame Award, the Harmon Wilkinson Award, and many other honors.

Ocean, I'd love to start a little bit with your origin story. I know that your family has a pretty amazing history and journey that brings you to this point. So maybe just share a little bit about that just to give us a bit of a sense of you.

[00:02:11] Ocean Robbins

Sure. And given the context of this conference, I'm going to tell this a little differently than I normally do with even a little more context. So all 8 of my great grandparents were Jews in Eastern Europe. They all fled pogroms and persecution and starvation and a lot of violence to come to North America to try to build a new life. My last name is Robbins, but a few generations back it was Rabinowitz. It was Americanized to try to shed the baggage and the fear that came with Jewish identity and to try to become "normal" in quotes.

So I think that my parents grew up with a degree of inherited ancestral trauma coming out of that background, only a generation or two downstream from people who were literally struggling just to survive against all odds. Their families made it. My grandpa ended up founding an ice-cream company called Baskin-Robbins. It would have been Baskinovich-Rabinowitz if not for a couple of families changing their last names. And my dad, John, grew up with an ice-cream cone shaped swimming pool in the backyard and 31 flavors of ice cream in the freezer. He was groomed to one day join and running the family company.

But when he was in his early 20s, he said no, and he walked away from a path that was practically paved with gold and ice cream to, as we jokingly say in our family, follow his own rocky road. And he ended up moving with my mom to a little island off the coast of Canada, where they built a one room log cabin, they grew most of their own food, they practiced yoga and meditation for several hours a day, and they named their kid Ocean.

And at a certain level, I think what they were really trying to do was to heal generations of ancestral trauma and to try to find a way to live in a good way, in a healthy way, in their own bodies, in their marriage and on this planet. And it was trial and error a lot for them but they were on the path. And I grew up with a family that was committed to discovering what's possible for healing and for integrity.

My dad ended up becoming a bestselling author. He wrote a book that came out in 1987 called *Diet for a New America*. It inspired millions of people to look at their food choices as a chance to make a difference in the world. And the media had a lot of fun with the story. They called them the 'Rebel Without a Cone', they called him 'The Profit of Nonprofit'. Here's this would be ice-cream heir who walks away from this ice-cream fortune and becomes a health advocate.

And then the story gets really interesting because my grandpa, Irv Robins, was at the age of 69, he lost his brother-in-law, Bert Baskin, his business partner to heart disease when my dad's Uncle Bert was 54. And now my grandpa, at 69, was facing serious weight issues, serious diabetes, serious heart issues. His doctors told him he didn't have long to live unless he made big changes. And they gave him a copy of *Diet for a New America*, which my grandpa read, and he followed it's advice, and he ended up slashing his consumption of animal products, eating way more fruits and vegetables, giving up sugar, giving up ice-cream and getting tremendous results. He lost a bunch of weight. He reversed his diabetes and heart disease. He got off medications that he no longer needed. His golf game improved seven strokes. He started walking for 2 hours every morning, and he lived another 19 more healthy years.

So we really did see in this story, like what happens when we follow the standard American diet is that we get the standard American diseases and die the standard American death, as happened to my dad's uncle, who I never met because he was gone before I was born. Or we can also see that when we make a change, we can get tremendous results.

[00:06:12]

And in an interesting way, my grandpa I think embodied something remarkable in his own story. Because if you think about it, he had more investment than just about anybody in thinking there's no connection between diet and health. He's manufactured and sold more ice-cream than anyone who's ever lived on this planet. And when asked about my dad's uncle's passing, he said, 'his ticker just got tired and stopped working. There was absolutely no connection to diet'. But then when his own life was on the line, he ended up making radical changes and getting radical results.

And if my grandpa, who was one tough cookie, who would definitely have gone to the grave for what he believed in, was willing to make those kinds of changes, then I think there's hope for the rest of us as well. And honestly, I admire his courage to make those kinds of changes, in some ways more than his business achievements, because it lights the way towards greater health for a lot of us.

And ice-cream is a great way to have short-term pleasure. And it's brought a lot of smiles to a lot of faces. But news flash, obviously ice-cream is not a health food, and one ice-cream cone is not going to kill anybody. But the more ice-cream you eat, the more likely you are to get the diseases that are linked to a diet high in saturated fat and sugar. And that's not what we're looking for if we want to be healthy.

So I'm really proud of my grandpa for making that change. I'm proud of my dad for his leadership and helping to show that some things are more important than money, and to show that food can be a source of health. And also, he's done a lot to eliminate the link between food and our planet as well, and the way that we can vote for a healthy world with our knives and forks.

And so personally, I think I stand on the shoulders of a couple of giants in the work that I do. I founded a nonprofit when I was 16 to try to take this message of activism and social change out to my generation. Work with leaders in over 65 countries at the forefront of movements for peace and justice and human rights and sustainability, and ultimately saw that trauma informed so much of the work we need to do. As I watched peace activists getting so mad, they hit people over the head with their peace signs, and environmental activists burning themselves out because they're so worn out and exhausted as they fight for sustainability. I watched social justice activists get into insane power struggles within their organizations. And I realized when Gandhi said, 'we must be the change we want to see in the world', that's deep stuff.

And so in my own life, I started working with young leaders around the world, to really focus on deepening the root system so that we can actually be that change and bring consistency between our means and our ends. And eventually I realized food had to be a central focus. So I decided after 20 years running that nonprofit, to focus on food with my dad. We launched Food Revolution Network in 2012 and our mission is healthy, ethical, sustainable food for all.

So long answer to a question but that's the story up to now. We have 700,000 members and we're on a mission to change the way the world eats.

Alex Howard

As a student and practitioner of psychology, I find the story fascinating because to me, there's this common thread between all of these characters of whatever they're doing, going for it and showing up to it. Be it building an ice-cream empire, or be it going to the other extreme of living in a cabin in the middle of nowhere. I love that sense of, let's just live life fully.

[00:09:44] Ocean Robbins

Yeah.

Alex Howard

Ocean, the opening line in your book is, 'let's call it like it is. We live in a toxic food culture'. That's a great opening line. What is a toxic food culture? What do you mean by that?

Ocean Robbins

So we live in a food culture in which it's considered normal to base our diet around highly processed foods and factory farmed animal products, which are correlated in tens of thousands of studies, published in peer reviewed medical journals, with increased risk of heart disease, type two diabetes, dementia, obesity and suffering and cancer. And the reality is less than 5% of the people in my country, in the United States, get the recommended amount of fiber. We're ravaging our microbiomes. We have epidemic rates, not just of chronic disease, but also of gut inflammation, of chronic inflammation, and of mental illness, all of which are profoundly linked to the food on our plates.

And so there was a study done by the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation. They looked at the major causes of death and disability around the world and hundreds of factors that go into it, and they fuel these conditions. They ended up concluding that the modern diet is responsible for more than 650,000 deaths every year in the United States alone, more than 11 million worldwide from entirely preventable chronic conditions. More than 70% of our medical spending goes to treating chronic lifestyle caused illness.

And we have studies making it very clear we could slash our rates of cardiovascular disease by 90% or more with changes in diet. We could cut our risk of cancer by 50% or more with changes in diet. We could cut our risk of Alzheimer's by up to 90% with changes in diet. We could cut diabetes, type two diabetes down by 90% or more with changes in diet. And when you put all this together, we could save trillions of dollars, we could save millions of lives, and we could be healthier, happier, more robust people just by implementing what we know.

If you drive your car into a brick wall the death certificate might say impalement by brick wall. But, you know and I know that really it was bad driving that caused that death. So what I'm asserting is that if you eat the modern industrialized diet, you are on a collision course with chronic disease. And I can't tell you whether it's going to be cardiovascular disease or diabetes or cancer or Alzheimer's or autoimmune conditions or something else. But I can tell you that predictably, if you put the wrong fuel in the car, it's going to break down eventually. If you drive headlong towards the brick wall, it's going to crash eventually. I don't know exactly how many seconds it's going to take. I don't know exactly which part of the car is going to hit you in the head. But the reality is that's what we're creating.

And I think that's really good news, because what it means is that we can turn it around, that we have incredible power. And the really good news here, too, is that your food choices don't just affect your own personal health, they affect your world. I'm a dad. I've got kids who are 20 years old, they're twins, and they suffer from something a lot of, especially young people suffer from today, which is eco-anxiety. They're scared about the future that they are going to inherit and the world that they're going to live in. They're hearing about all this climate change stuff, and they're like, wow, is Florida going to be underwater? Is New York going to be underwater? What's going to happen to droughts

and floods? Like environmental refugees? Are we going to be able to grow food? These are serious questions that kids today have.

[00:13:46]

And it's terrifying because we're humans on a planet that we care about each other. And when we look at a future that looks bleak that is terrifying and crippling to the soul. And so I think that the antidote to cynicism is action. And when you realize the power that food can be to make a difference, it's incredibly empowering in terms of those very dynamics. And just to illuminate that point, worldwide 70% of human agricultural activity is going for animal agriculture right now, and most of that could be freed up if we ate lower on the food chain. It takes a lot more calories to produce a calorie of animal flesh or milk or eggs, than to eat it directly. Because most of the calories that animals consume turn into hoof and hide and bones and feathers and energy they use to move and body heat and manure, and not into the food we're trying to get out of them.

So cumulatively, the reality is, if just theoretically the whole world went vegan tomorrow, we could save an area of land equivalent to the United States, China, European Union, and Australia combined. That's how much land would instantly be freed up, which could go to forests, which could go to other forms of carbon sinks that would help to sequester carbon out of the atmosphere, which would go to windmills or solar panels or growing food organically for a growing human population. We don't need to be wasting all of this. And when we make these kinds of changes, we can help save rainforests, aquifers, water, top soil, ecosystems and the climate for future generations.

And I think it's important to include that. When we talk about a toxic food culture, it isn't just killing us, it's also killing the hopes and dreams of future generations. But the good news is we can change that.

Alex Howard

And I want to come to, in a little bit, some of the more specifics in terms of food, but also, I think it's helpful to name a bit more some of the resistance that we have to change.

Part of my story is that I suffered from chronic fatigue syndrome as a teenager, and a couple of years into that journey I realized that what I was eating and what I was absorbing was a really important part of that. So at 18 years old I was on a completely different diet to all of my peers. I was at University, the only person not drinking alcohol, which, trust me, in the UK is a really big deal. Going to University and not drinking alcohol. And the resistance that I just met in my peers like, are you crazy? Are you an alien? What's wrong with you? There's individual resistance. There's a cultural resistance, but there's also a corporate resistance to all of the vested interests. There's a lot that's in the way of people making these changes. I'd love to hear you speak a little bit to that.

Ocean Robbins

Absolutely. Habit is so powerful. And you're right, we have collective habits as well as personal habits, and it can feel like you have to swim upstream just to do the right thing for your family. It costs more to eat organic food. It costs more sometimes even to eat whole foods that aren't hyper processed, and certainly it takes more time and energy and upstream investment. We've got some uphill journeys to take for sure.

The good news is that anything that you develop as a skill gets easier. I mean, if you try to learn to play the piano it may not sound very good on day one, but with practice you get better and eventually it's easy to do things that were really hard at one time. Same is true with healthy eating.

You may have a whole lifetime of practice and a certain way of eating, which makes that easy, it's the path of least resistance. But you can build new habits, and the best time to repair a roof is when the sun's shining. The best time to build healthy habits is when you have some space and time, not when you're stressed out and exhausted at the end of a long work day with 5 minutes to eat.

[00:17:46]

So plan ahead. Shop in bulk. Make friends with healthy recipes you love that fit with your culinary interests and your time capacity. Cook in quantity. Share with friends, potluck style is awesome. So is rotations like food carpool equivalent. Like, I'll make you breakfast tomorrow, you make me breakfast the next day. Make friends with leftovers. Cook extra. It doesn't take twice as long to make twice as much. If you can make friends with leftovers then you're paying it forward and you've got something there for a tough time. Get rid of the bad stuff. The best way to not eat potato chips or have late night cookie binges is to not have them sitting in the cupboard.

So clear out your kitchen and treat food as medicine. It's time to treat it seriously. And your palette gets a little smaller. If you think about it like painting, you have less colors to work with if you take away a lot of the foods you may be used to that are not so healthy, but you will find that there's plenty left to make an exquisite painting with the foods that you're left with when you just limit yourself to whole foods. But you've got to draw some sharp, bright lines and you may do that in stages. I recommend not going cold turkey unless you're clearly solid in that, but allowing yourself to ease into it, crowd out the bad stuff with the good stuff. Make friends who have healthier meals and options and just keep going. Think of it like this is a lifetime trajectory, not a diet fad.

So those are some of the top tips on the personal level. On the systemic level I will acknowledge that we have government policies in the developed world that, for the most part, are subsidizing junk food, commodities crops as they're known. So in my country, in the US, we have tens of billions of dollars a year in taxpayer money that's bringing down the price of corn and soy and wheat and other major so-called staple crops. What this is doing is it's driving down the price of factory farmed animal products, of white bread and of high fructose corn syrup, and it's creating a competitive disadvantage so that fruits and vegetables and nuts and seeds and legumes are all more expensive in the marketplace.

And this is crazy if you want to know the honest truth because it's like you're being fined for wearing your seatbelt. You've actually got to pay extra to do the right thing for your family. And so I absolutely want to see policy change that makes it easier for everybody to have access to healthy, affordable, delicious food that's good for them and for their world. And I also recognize that until we get there, it's up to individuals to do the best we can with what we've got.

The good news is you don't have to spend an arm and a leg to eat healthy food. You can eat really well on very little money. I learned that growing up in the log cabin in the middle of the woods. My parents lived on, like \$1,000 a year through my first few years of life. They were pretty much self-sufficient. We grew almost all of our own food. Every penny was counted and tracked carefully, and we ate really well. And we weren't splurging on \$30 a pound Himalayan goji berries, but we based our diet around legumes, around whole grains, around lots and lots of cabbage and carrots and other veggies from the garden. And it worked out. We would can stuff and preserve stuff for the winter and when it was in season. And you know what? It's possible to live really well and eat really well and be super healthy without spending a lot of money. And I think that's an important thing to remember for those of us who are struggling monetarily right now.

[00:21:22] Alex Howard

It's also true to say, just thinking about what you're saying about making the change, is that one's taste buds also change. That one gets so normalized to food that's full of salt and sugar, they get desensitized. One of the things that happened for me was that suddenly foods that would taste bland suddenly exploded with flavor because you actually get to taste the food.

Ocean Robbins

Absolutely. It's so true. And this is actually scientifically proven. Alex, there are studies that show that people's saliva will change when they get comfortable with certain food. Kale is a good example. So if you eat kale for the first time it may taste bitter, and if you eat it 6 to 10 times your saliva will change and you'll start to secrete enzymes in your saliva that makes it taste sweeter. It's fascinating how practice makes perfect in terms of human absorption of healthy foods as well. Now, I can't promise you kale is never going to taste as good as doughnuts. I wish it did. It doesn't, but it can taste a lot better as you get more comfortable with it. And also as you learn to season things well.

And it's well known with salt, for example, that if you eat half as much salt over time, your food will taste just as salty because your taste buds will adjust. And then I have a friend who never put salt on his food and if he eats food that I consider very normal and not salty, he can hardly stand it because it tastes so salty to him. It's like if I dumped a pound of salt on my food or something, he just grimaces. And he's not making it up, that's what he's gotten used to. So your taste buds adjust.

And sugar is similar. For me I notice if I don't eat anything sweet for a week I don't crave it, and I have no interest in dessert. But if I do eat it regularly then I start to think, oh, when is dessert coming? When's dessert coming? And obviously everyone has their own biochemical reality. Some people have susceptibility to food addiction, other people, not so much. If you do have that susceptibility then it becomes critically important to get some support around that because food addiction is a real thing, and a lot of people are not the authors of their food lives.

A friend of mine, Dr Susan Peirce Thompson, has really cracked the code on this. She wrote the book *Bright Line Eating*, I highly recommend it if you're somebody who is struggling with not feeling like you're the full author of your food life. If you sometimes find yourself on the wrong end of an empty bag of cookies or chips, you may need some support. It's not just about willpower. It's not just about knowledge. Sometimes it's about having the tool set to actually break that addiction. So Susan combines internal family systems with 12 step work, with her own neuroscience work and background in food psychology and has put all that together into a program that's been proven to work far better than anything else out there.

Alex Howard

Yes, I'm really glad you made that point, because I think often what can happen, particularly by the way, when there's a background of trauma, is that one is self medicating himself emotionally with food. And then there's a whole shame cycle that comes in and then people become, they have to hide the behavior. And it's not about judging or shaming oneself, it's about understanding what need they're trying to meet and finding healthier ways of addressing that.

Ocean Robbins

Absolutely. And I want to say, like a lot of people, food is love. Food is self love. Food is a pleasure. 44% of people in the US report saying that food is the number one source of pleasure in their life. And

so the last thing I would want to do is take that away and sound like I'm standing for austerity and self harm even, in some way; like you've got to give up your pleasure and your love and your joy so you can be healthy someday in the future. Because you know what, if that's your mentality, you will never succeed. You'll have parts that will sabotage any effort in healthy eating.

[00:25:17]

But here's what I do want to say. Healthy eating can also be an act of incredible self love. You can say to your cells in your body, I love you, I care about you and I want you to be well. And it's literally possible that if you're tired and stressed after a long day, you reach for some steamed kale. You snack on blueberries. These things that are proven to actually help. Because a lot of times what we do with junk foods is that we create temporary dopamine hits in the brain, we create temporary comfort with so-called comfort foods, but we're actually dragging ourselves down deeper into cycles of depression and misery when we eat this way.

And this is really critically important because the link between food and mental illness is overwhelming right now. We're seeing more and more data showing that statistically, when you eat certain kinds of foods, you're more likely to suffer from depression or anxiety. When you eat other kinds of foods, you're more likely to feel self love, joy, happiness, to make choices that fuel positive feedback loops. People who eat certain kinds of foods exercise more, and they cultivate healthier relationships. And all of these are positive feedback loops that in turn, make them want to eat more healthy food.

So it's very hard, though, when you're in a downward cycle to break it. And so any of these can be ways to break it. Reaching out and building social connections, exercising, eating healthy food, therapy, support, all these kinds of things can be ways of breaking negative feedback loops. And then the other things get easier, too. And so since I focus on food, a lot of what I like to talk about is how we can break those cycles. But I think it absolutely has to come from a foundation of self love and self respect and self dignity rather than masochism.

Alex Howard

And I appreciate you putting it in that wider context as well as the other ingredients that can be important.

So much of the narrative around healthy eating is around what we shouldn't eat. And, of course, that's important to be informed. But I find what can be particularly helpful is to focus on what we should eat, like what actually is going to sustain and nourish us? I'd love to hear you speak about some of those core principles.

Ocean Robbins

Absolutely. The four principles of The Food Revolution Diet Plan that I promote in *31-Day Food Revolution* are, number one, eat less sugar and processed foods in general. Number two, eat less animal products, especially from factory farms. Number three, eat more whole plant foods and number four source consciously, which means look for organic, fair trade, local, humane, natural foods from farmers and food systems that you want to invest in. So those are the big core principles.

Now, as far as point number three, eating more whole plant foods, that's the fun part, really. And the good news is there are lots and lots and lots of wonderful foods that are linked to better mental and physical health. And the same foods turn out to be better for the planet as well. Probably top of my

mind when we're talking, especially about trauma healing, we have to look at inflammation. And the way that inflammation and trauma go together. And it can really support healing from trauma to bring down systemic inflammation in the body. And nowhere is that more important than looking at your microbiome and particularly what's going on in your gut. There are bacteria in there that produce the serotonin for your brain, and neurotransmitters that tell you you're feeling good. There are bacteria in there that digest your food but also protect your intestinal walls from gut permeability, which can in turn fuel more levels of inflammation and autoimmune conditions.

[00:29:08]

The best way to, people talk about probiotics a lot, which are good bacteria, but I think that what's actually even more important is prebiotics, which are the foods those bacteria eat. Because right now you've got lots of bacteria in your gut, but you might not be feeding the good guys. And there are certain bacteria that thrive on sugar and saturated fat. And it seems that those bacteria are the ones that tend to be the worst for our overall health. There are certain bacteria that thrive on fiber, and those are the ones that you want to encourage because they're linked to better intestinal health and better metabolic health and better mental health.

So some of the best ones, you're looking for certain particular kinds of fiber that are really good for feeding the good guys. Top foods for that are going to be chicory root, Jerusalem artichoke, dandelion greens, garlic, leeks, onions, asparagus, jicama, apples, flaxseed, it's got to be ground because whole flax seeds just go in one end and out the other, and burdock root. So you really want to emphasize some of those.

Then you also want to get into eating your veggies. I mean, leafy greens are incredibly potent, they're packed with calcium which is good for mental health and lots of other vitamins and minerals. You want to get your mushrooms. Mushrooms have incredible anti-inflammatory potential, and they can also promote the suppression of autoimmune diseases and break down allergies. Onions and other alliums like garlic are incredibly potent in anti-inflammatory properties. They're also rich in quercetin which is an antioxidant that inhibits inflammation in the body. Squash, the squash family, like butternut, zucchini, pumpkin, has huge anti-inflammatory benefits and is also rich in antioxidants that are really good for cancer prevention and overall well being. Turnips and rutabaga are high in glucosinolates and carotenoids as well as vitamin C and potassium and magnesium and zinc and iron. And these are root vegetables that are really healthy for bringing down inflammation.

And then lastly, I've got to say spices. Like a lot of us flavor our food with sugar, oil and salt, but really you want to be flavoring your food with spices because these are incredible. It's counterintuitive that foods that are hot and spicy would bring down inflammation, but that's exactly what happens. And they also boost your body's immune response. So you're more prone to not get sick as much. Particularly, I'm talking about ginger and turmeric being top of the list. Amazing spices to eat lots and lots of. But also cayenne pepper, cloves, garlic and cinnamon. These are some of the top foods that you want to eat lots and lots of. Again, leafy greens, mushrooms, onions, squash, turnips, rutabaga, spices. And then, of course, the really gut healthy foods, the chicory root, some artichoke, dandelion greens, garlic, leeks, asparagus, onions, jicama, flax seeds that have been ground, burdock root, apples. These are all awesome.

Alex Howard

You're making me feel hungry. One of the points I really think it's important to land here is that there is so much choice that's out there. I think people's fear can be that if I'm going to give up processed

food and I'm going to eat less of this and less of that, then I'm either going to be hungry or I'm just going to be left with this really bland, boring diet.

[00:32:53]

I remember when I first changed my diet, going back, whatever it is now, 25 years ago, and going out for a meal and asking for a salad. And this still happens in certain places where you get a miserable looking lettuce leaf and a couple of bits of cucumber and half a tomato and that's a salad. I think often people's idea of clean eating is that's what they're going to have to eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And as I hear you talk, part of what I think is hopefully exciting to folks, is there is so much choice that's out there.

Ocean Robbins

Yeah, absolutely. There really is. Nature's Farmacy, with an F, is well stocked. There's a lot of good stuff. And so people sometimes think, oh, what do I eat if I give up the foods I'm used to? The truth is usually the culinary world just expands in so many ways because there's so many amazing foods in the plant kingdom that we may not even know about.

And statistically you want to base your diet, you want to get a lot of your calories from legumes if possible, as well as whole grains. And then you want to get a lot of your volume in the form of vegetables as well as fruits. And then nuts and seeds are awesome, too. And if you do include animal products in your diet, some people have ethical reasons not to, some people have environmental reasons not to. Purely from a health perspective, the data I think is mixed on whether the optimal diet purely for health is like zero or a little bit. It seems like there's some good research showing that fish can be healthy, unfortunately not so healthy for the fish or for the oceans, but for human health, there's some benefits there.

And then a lot of people do well taking an algae based supplement to get their EPA and DHA fatty acids, which are an important thing to make sure you get enough of. You also want to get B-12 if you're going to be vegan, which you can easily get from supplementation. And even people who are omnivorous often don't have enough B-12 in their bodies because they don't absorb it so well as they get older. Supplementation is really helpful in that case as well.

So there are a few things to look out for, but the broad picture is eating lots of whole plant foods is really the way to go. And getting away from sugar and processed foods and animal products as much as possible for your own well being and for the planet.

And I should also mention gluten, because if we're talking about inflammation, not everybody, some people seem to do fine on gluten, but there are definitely some people for whom it can be linked to autoimmune conditions, leaky gut issues, chronic inflammation, and they cut out gluten and they feel a lot better. So it's worth experimenting with, especially if you're dealing with any chronic health issues or have excess inflammation in your body, to cut it out for a certain period of time, 3 months, even 6 months, and see what you notice. It's not that hard in today's world to go gluten free and still eat really well. Just don't load up on the hyper-processed wheat substitutes that have no fiber in them because that won't be doing your body any good favors. But replacing bread with quinoa or amaranth or buckwheat or millet is probably a good step anyway.

[00:36:13] Alex Howard

And you touched on it there, but maybe we can speak a little bit more, the fact there is an element of biochemical individuality, that different people's bodies do respond to different foods. I think sometimes the danger can be that there can be a very overly prescriptive, everyone should eat this or not eat this. What I'm hearing you say is that part of this is also listening to how your body responds.

Ocean Robbins

Yeah, absolutely. You're the only you on the planet. And one of the beauties of really taking charge of your health journey is that you start paying more attention. I think that what you appreciate appreciates and things become more beautiful and we love them. So appreciate your own inner signals. Learn to listen to your body. Learn to notice how you feel with more subtlety and more clarity, and over time that will inform your choices.

Alex Howard

And I think also it's worth saying, I say this as someone whose body has been very clear over the years that a certain amount of animal products has been important to my health, but with that comes, for me a great responsibility, because I do also hold heavily that ethical responsibility. And I'd love to hear you speak a little bit about, again, people have different needs in their bodies but if one is eating, for example, animal sources of protein, how they can do that in the most responsible way possible.

Ocean Robbins

Absolutely. So if you're going to eat animal products I would say, number one, wild fish, particularly lower, smaller fish, lower on the food chain fish like sardines, herring. Those are going to be low in mercury, low in heavy metals, less environmental impact than larger fish that tend to bioaccumulate toxins in the food chain. If you're going to eat eggs, then make sure they are not just cage free, which means very little. We could have 10,000 birds in a giant warehouse, each of them in a space too small to lift a wing. You want them to be actually pasture raised specifically, not just free range, but pasture raised. That means they actually ran around outside. They had 108 square feet per bird is the minimum for pasture raised. Free range is like 2 and a half square feet per bird, which doesn't sound like a lot to me.

So pasture raised for the eggs. If you're going with dairy products, you want to go with absolutely organic. You want to, if possible, have it come from a small scale local dairy, not some mega farm. There are factory farms making organic milk now. They still drag their baby calves away at birth from crying mothers. They still have the animal standing on concrete for their entire lives and living in abject misery. It's not my vision of the world I want to live in, so going with truly grass fed.

If you're going with beef, grass fed and grass finished is important and certainly organic as well. You don't want it full of hormones or antibiotics. And ideally regenerative, there's still a lot of argument about what that actually means. Honestly, it's a little more talk than anything. It's all hat no cattle in a way. There's very little regenerative beef, if any, and there's no real certification for it. And so people can put that, slap that claim on there and you really have no idea what it means. But the reality is, for the most part, beef is terrible for carbon and environmental and climate impact. And there are a few test cases where they're testing out ways of doing it that may have some drawdown element. It may not be a net positive, but it may have some contribution to make, certainly to lessening meat's environmental impacts, or regenerative is certainly a buzzword to watch out for, and it could have some meaning in the future.

[00:40:13]

I mean, those are some basic principles. Pasture raised, grass fed, organic, hormone and antibiotic free are all positives to look for, local. If you can visit the farm that's the best or get stuff from farmers markets. And also, I say less meat and better meat. If you're going to eat meat make sure that it's not factory farmed and you are going to pay more for it. And that's okay, because quite frankly, we should be paying more for it. It's being heavily subsidized by governments right now. Factory farms are being subsidized through cheap feed inputs and all kinds of tax breaks, and not having to be responsible for the pollution they cause and its impact on their communities and ecosystems.

So animal products are expensive. They're a concentrated thing that goes way up the food chain. They're very resource intensive, and it should be a luxury or a treat, not the cornerstone of your meal, if you choose to eat it at all. And you may also choose to go 100% plant based. And for a lot of people that's fabulous and really does work.

Alex Howard

And I think again, there's an important point here around being actively suspicious of marketing around food. One of the things that, as organic and free range and these things have become more popular in a sense, there's a weaponizing of that in marketing by companies that want to push the edges or make things look, put things in nice green packets with pictures of animals running around, when actually that's not the reality of what's going on. So there's certainly a responsibility on the behalf of the consumer to really read between the lines of that.

Ocean Robbins

Well, it's very true. It actually says a lot about human hearts that it works to market food as coming from happy animals, because people want that, they actually care about where their food comes from. And most people, most of the time would rather support a healthy world rather than a dead one. Would rather support a humane world rather than a cruel one. And unfortunately, the livestock industry exploits that to take advantage of unsuspecting consumers by looking at pictures of happy cows.

I mean, there was a Happy Cows campaign for California milk some years back. California Milk dairy industry ran all these ads with pictures of cows on a big grassy field that had so much grass so little time. Turns out those ads, those billboards were actually pictures taken in New Zealand because California's dairy comes from a central valley where it's hot and dry and dusty, and a lot of them are on dirt and concrete. Some of them never see a blade of grass in their entire lives. So I mean, talk about lack of truth and marketing. They're literally taking a photograph from the other side of the world and using it from marketing in the state of California, it's insane. It's an illusion.

And so as consumers have to be willing to do the uncomfortable work of digging a little deeper. Yes, it makes us feel good to tell ourselves a happy story. We think about farmers tucking chickens in before bed and reading the bedtime stories but the reality is really far from that. And Old McDonald's got a factory farm nowadays where the chickens are cooped up in such close quarters that they try to peck each other to death and the only way to stop that is to cut off their beaks so that they try and fail. They're standing in feces for their entire lives, generations of feces in barns that are covered in poop that are cleaned every few years. Most of them get so morbidly obese that they can't stand up anymore, and they wind up lying in their own manure, and they have sores. And 5% of the birds die before they're killed. So the warehouse with 10,000 birds, 5% of them are literally dead by the end,

lying there. And so they're surrounded by corpses and open sores and morbid obesity, and they can't even walk. And this is where our chicken is coming from, like 98% of the time.

[00:44:23]

And so I personally want no part of that. I don't want to contribute to it with my dollars. I don't want to take it into my body. And I want to spread the word folks, this is what's going on, even if it's a pretty looking picture of a chicken clucking around in a field. And I have to ask, what does it do to us as human beings who want to recover from trauma, who want to heal our own lives, to take into our bodies the products of abject misery? What does it do to take into your bodies the stress hormones of an animal that lived and died in terror and misery? And how does that affect the likelihood of depression or anxiety or stress in your body?

So we can look at all the statistics and see the correlation between eating certain foods and inflammation and suffering and mental illness, but we can go a step further and say, is it possible that there is a karmic and a practical element to this that's also at play? I don't believe you can create a healthy and thriving life or world on the back of cruelty and violence towards others. I just don't. So personally I say no to that, and I say, let's spread the word and let's change it.

Alex Howard

And I think also just like if there is something happening in our community, being ignorant to it is not an excuse to not do something about it. I think it's also true that what you're speaking about, there is a responsibility that we all have as citizens of planet earth to be aware and to act appropriately from that.

Ocean Robbins

Yeah, absolutely so true. George Bernard Shaw said, 'I'm a member of the community. As a member it's my privilege to do for it whatever I can before I die'. He said, 'I'm not a feverish clout of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world won't devote itself to making me happy'. I think we all get to be a member of the community. And I think there's an incredible joy in that. There's incredible satisfaction in that and knowing that your life is on the right side of history.

Alex Howard

There's something also about feeling part of a community that values things in a certain way that is also part of our healing. You spoke at the start about some of your own family narrative, and there's something that's transformational about the generational evolution of those choices and we all have our responsibility in a sense around that.

Ocean, there are many directions we could go here, but I'm also mindful of time. For people that want to find out more about you and your work, I certainly recommend your book, *The 31-Day Food Revolution*, but say a bit more about where people can find out more and what they can find when they do so.

Ocean Robbins

Sure, probably the best single resource is if you go to foodrevolutionsummit.org you can actually register. We host annually the world's largest gathering of healthy food lovers on the planet. It's called The Food Revolution Summit. My dad and I interview 24 of the top food experts on the planet every

year. And so you can opt in and join in for free for that summit any time and hear some of the latest breaking insights about food and health.

[00:47:29]

Or you can go to foodrevolution.org, I first mentioned foodrevolutionsummit.org but there's also foodrevolution.org which is our main website. And we have thousands of articles on there about food and health topics and social justice and all sorts of other themes that could be of interest.

So browse around and learn and grow and join the movement. Really, you work with us every time you choose real food over processed junk. Every time you choose whole plant foods over animal products, every time you spread the word and share healthy food with someone you love you're being a food revolutionary, and I thank you for it.

Alex Howard

Ocean, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. It's been great to chat with you.

Ocean Robbins

Thank you as well. And everybody watching, thank you so much for your attention and your participation. Let's do this.