Gina:

You're listening to the Healthy In Real Life podcast, episode number 53.

Speaker 2:

Welcome to the Healthy In Real Life podcast. Bite-sized tips for healthy living that you can implement right now. Join us weekly for interviews and real life advice for creating the happiest and healthiest version of yourself. Here's your host, fitness expert, author, and mom of two Gina Harney.

Gina:

Hey everyone, this is Gina, creator of the Fitnessista blog and brand. I'm so excited that you're here. Thank you so much for tuning in today. I missed you guys. Nice to get a little bit of time to hop back on the podcast. Today I am sharing an interview with one of my good friends, her name is Megan Olsen from the blog, Skinny Fitalicious. So, we'll get into that in just a moment. But before we hop into this interview, I wanted to share this week's five star review. This one says, "Virtual high five. The podcast is amazing. I've been listening for a while now, and I love each and every one of Gina's episodes. She has amazing guest and makes it easy to keep myself on track with a healthy lifestyle. Thanks for everything you do. Keep being awesome."

Gina:

That was such an awesome review, and a virtual high five, I love it. So, if you guys enjoy the show, if you wouldn't mind taking the time to leave that five star rating or review, wherever you're listening, it just really helps with the visibility of the podcast. And like I said, it's just a nice little like, "Hey, keep doing your thing." Little pat on the back to keep going because I'm up here in my podcast closet and Tom is downstairs, wrangling the kiddos right now, so I can get this published. But thanks so much for being here guys, and thank you to all of you who have left reviews so far. It means the world to me.

Gina:

So, I wanted to tell you guys about Les Mills on demand. If you've not checked out Les Mills on demand, what are you even doing right now? I have a free code for you guys to go check it out. You get 30 days for free as of the time this episode is going live. It's 30 days, it might hop back down to 21 days. Still awesome, if you just go to bit.ly/yaylesmills. So, it's B-I-T dot L-Y slash yay, Y-A-Y, Les Mills, L-E-S M-I-L-L-S. They have over 800 workouts on their platform, they're all led by these incredible instructors from all over the world.

Gina:

I did one of their certifications when we lived in San Diego, for Body Pump, and it was by far the hardest fitness certification that I've taken, and I've done over a handful of them. It was far and away, way more thorough and intense and educational and so much fun. They really take pride in training their instructors to be effective and safe. And all of these workouts are scientifically designed. So, they know exactly how many squats you should do in this part before it starts to go too much into your knees. They are so attentive to detail to making these workouts awesome.

Gina:

That was a long story, but if you go and check it out, I recommend starting off with Body Pump. I feel like it's just like the classic barbell workout, the movements all match the music. It's so much fun. I also really like Body Attack. I love their BAR. I love Body Flow, which is like their flow yoga class. There's so much to choose from, I hope you guys love it so much. So, head to bit.ly, so B-I-T dot L-Y slash yay Les Mills, to get your free trial right now. And I'll include a link to that in the show notes.

Gina:

Let's go ahead and get into this week's episode. So, in this week's episode, I'm chatting with my friend, Megan Olson, and she's from the blog, Skinny Fitalicious. She has an incredible health transformation journey story that she shares with you. She's a nutrition practitioner, she helps out with clients all over the world. She shares meal plans, recipes. She is so knowledgeable and she's someone who doesn't just talk the talk, she walks the walk. She is just such a great picture of balance and health and has so many great tips and ideas. In this episode, we're talking about her journey.

Gina:

So, how she completely transformed her health and how she was feeling in her life. And it started off by going for a walk, which I feel like has been such a powerful thing right now with everything going on. We have gone for a walk every single day, some days we've gone up to three times because the girls just love riding their bikes and scooters, we take the dogs with us. It's been a much needed little breath of fresh air and vitamin D and chance to shake our legs out and also for the girls to get their crazies out right before we go to bed.

Gina:

So, we talk about Megan's health journey, how she became a nutrition coach. We're also talking a little bit about her steps for first getting started, if you wanted to make some healthy changes. Also a little bit about weight loss and how this subject is a bit taboo and the difference between eating for health and deprivation, some of her favorite healthy meals, and so much more. So, I hope you guys enjoy this episode. Thank you again so much for being here and for tuning in and let's get into it. Welcome to the show, Megan. Hey Megan, thank you so much for being on the show today.

Megan:

Yes. Thanks, Gina, for having me.

Gina:

I'm so excited that you're here, especially since you've been a friend for, gosh, so many years now. But I would love if you wouldn't mind just breaking down your journey in health and fitness and how and why you became a nutrition.

Megan:

Yeah, so it was back in 2008 or so, when I literally just found myself in a job that I hated, I was working in consulting, and I was traveling every week, never home. And I literally just found myself in a place where I hated my body, I hated my life. I remember sitting at work in Torrance, California one day and I went to the bathroom and I was just in tears. I was like, I just hate my life. I'm 30 something years old, I'm not married. I don't have any of the things that I want in my life. And I remember one of my coworkers said, "You should just go down to the beach and just go hang out. There's a lot of people down there and they walk the strand and you just go down there tonight to blow off some steam." I went down there and I saw these people walking and I was like, "Maybe I should just go for a walk." So, I went for a 10 minute walk and that walk was literally life changing.

Megan:

During that 10 minute walk I just felt so amazing. It was like suddenly everything that I wanted to become became very clear. And I just made a commitment at that time that I'm going to come back to this place every night and walk after work, and I did. I said to myself, "Even if it's just 10 minutes, I'm just going to walk for 10 minutes." Because it made me just feel so good mentally and physically. And so I started walking and over time I was walking a little bit more and more, and then I was like, "Maybe I should like start tracking my food and see how much food I'm eating." And so then I started tracking my food and I'm like, "Whoa, I'm eating all this food. No wonder I'm really overweight."

Megan:

And at this time I was at my heaviest, at 210 pounds. I had always been overweight since I was a teenager, and I always did all these crazy diets and detoxes and diet pills and fitness programs and nothing ever worked. And so I was like, "Oh, well, I'm going to start tracking what I eat." And I was just really surprised, like how much food I was eating, portion sizes, how big the portion sizes were that I was eating. And so I literally just started tracking what I was eating, become more aware of serving sizes and portion sizes and reading food labels. And when I would go out to eat, I would, not restrict, but I would eat like half of my meal instead of the entire meal, things like that. And over time the weight just literally melted off. It was really just with walking and with paying attention and being self aware of what I was eating.

Megan:

And not restricting, I tell even my clients today that even back then I ate a cookie a day because I knew that I would never stick with it if I didn't allow myself to have that one treat every day. So, yeah, after a year I lost about 80 pounds and I literally just changed my life. After that I was like, "Why am I sitting around in this consulting job when I hate it?" And at that time I had started blog, Skinny Fitalicious. It was really just a hobby that I was doing to share recipes and tips with my friends, because so many people were asking me, "How did you lose weight? We love your recipes, where can we find them?" So, I was like, "I'm just going to put all this stuff up on a website so that everybody can go there and I can stop answering all these questions." It's my lazy way of helping people.

Megan:

And so I did that, and so I had this little website and then suddenly I started making a little bit of money off of the website. And I was like, "Well, you know what? I think that I could actually maybe do something with this." So, I left my corporate America job and started blogging full time through Skinny Fitalicious. And then a few years into that, I got really, really sick. I saw dozens of medical professionals and nobody could tell me what was going on with me. I literally felt like I was dying. I just had really a lot of trouble sleeping, extreme fatigue. I was losing so much weight, and I was eating 2000, 3000 calories a day, and I just was losing weight all the time.

Megan:

I eventually found out that I had Hashimoto's Disease, after working with a naturopath, and that was after spending thousands of dollars going to the conventional medicine route and just not ever getting any answers. So, once I healed my body and I kind of shared my story and my weight loss and all of this stuff on my website, I started to get a lot of people asking me like, "Well, how did you do this? And how do you lose weight and how do you start exercising to lose weight? And how did you figure out you had Hashimoto's? What do you eat for Hashimoto's?"

Megan:

And I started getting all of these questions and something that I felt responsible to do for the people that were asking for help was to have the right education and knowledge to really be able to serve them. I didn't want to be somebody who was just kind of sharing my experience, while I think that's really helpful, I recognize that the people who were struggling were really in a bad place. And if I was really going to help them and serve them, I had to have a nutrition education. So, I did go back to school, I did get a degree in nutrition and became a nutrition practitioner, and that's what I do today. I help women over 35 lose 20 to 50 or more pounds and keep it off for good.

Gina:

That is incredible, and I'm so glad you shared that because I feel like it's so easy to look at someone and just assume, "Oh, they've always been healthy. Oh, they've always been fit." And with you, you're like, "I've lost 80 pounds." Which is significant. And I just feel like your story is just such a Testament to balanced, healthy living. You started off with walking and paying attention to your food intake, whereas it's so common to see people who want to accomplish these really big goals, and they're like, "Okay, I'm going to run a marathon even though I've been sedentary my whole life. I'm going to do all these juice cleanses and never eat food that I like again." It's just so unsustainable for the longterm, so I think that that's so incredible that you just had the awareness to build slowly and do it in a way that was so sustainable.

Gina:

And I love that you mentioned the cookie in there too, because I think that's so important to have that as part of your life. Like if you love cookies, like I love cookies, I love cake, and a life without cookies or cake is a sad life to me. So, I'm not going to do anything that makes me completely delete them from my life. So, I think that's so amazing. What else was I going to ask you? Oh, well, since you work with clients now, what are some of your first starting points that you recommend that they begin with, when they have these huge goals?

Megan:

Yeah. It varies depending on the client, strangely enough, or oddly enough, I don't get a lot of clients who are the fast food eaters, they're drinking soda and fast food. Those are not the kind of clients I typically see. The people that I typically see are women who have been dieting or trying to lose weight for a really long time. So, they've been doing things like Keto, low carb, Weight Watchers, all of these different things. And so one of the things that I first have these clients do is really make sure that they are eating enough food. That is probably 90% of what I see when I initially see a client, they're not eating enough food. I mean, just last week I had two new clients who were eating 900 calories.

Gina:

No.

Megan:

Yeah. I don't know who came up with this whole 1200 calorie number, but I'd like to find that person and hunt them down.

Gina:

Right? Seriously.

Megan:

1200 calories is just not sustainable. And it's frustrating for me, as a practitioner, when a client comes to me and says, "Well, my doctor told me that I should be eating 1200 calories." And I'm like, "Well, that's like your doctor prescribing the same amount of a medication to any person that." That just doesn't work. Our body and our physiology is all different, right? So 1200 calories is not going to be right for every single female on the planet. I don't know where that never came from, but most women need more than 1200 calories. So, when somebody comes to me, the first thing I have them look at is how many calories are you really eating? And calories are not everything, but eating enough food is so important for hormonal balance. And when I'm talking about hormones, I'm really talking about the metabolic hormones, those are the hormones that increase our hunger and our cravings and determine whether or not we're going to store or release fat.

Gina:

Absolutely. It can also affect our stress hormones, and for women, like we can get hangry and just irritable when we don't eat enough. I do feel like what you said, it is so common, a lot of people feel like if they want to lose weight or go after any type of health, fitness goal, that they do have to slash calories and actually has the opposite effect of what you would think. So, at a certain point, you could start to hit diminishing returns and you get swollen and puffy and you feel terrible and you're tired and irritated. And just turns out, you need to eat a carb, like you should eat carbs and fat and make sure that you're fueling your body because your basic metabolic rate is the amount of calories your body needs just to be alive, just to perform everyday functions. And so many of us are active on top of that, taking workout classes, housecleaning, chasing our kiddos around, you likely need more calories than you think that you do.

Megan:

Yeah, absolutely. And the other thing is it's not all about calories either. Calories in, calories out, there's [crosstalk 00:15:55] that. It's all calories and it's all a number, our bodies are not a number. We're more like a thermostat, it's kind of always adapting and going all up and down all the time. And you brought up carbs too, Gina. I think that is a fascinating topic. There's so much confusion about carbs and to me it's kind of unnecessary because carbs are a healthy lifestyle. It's something that every woman should have in their diet, especially the fibrous carbs, and that's usually the ones that are missing.

Gina:

Exactly. And like you said too, it's about the quality even more than the quantity. So, if you eat a cup of broccoli, it's going to have totally different effect on your body than eating a quarter of a donut or whatever has the same amount. Like they might have the same amount of carbs, but the response that your body will give from your immune system and all of your cells and all the vitamins and nutrients that you're getting from the broccoli compared to a piece of a donut, it's totally different. So, you're right, just going after the number isn't really the goal. And that's kind of why I try [inaudible 00:17:01] people just to focus more on whole, fresh foods, and I feel like that makes it a little bit easier. Because if you just focus on the numbers, you can be like, "Well, I ate five granola bars. I hit my calories for the day." It's like, "Well, need a little protein in there too, buddy. And some fruits and vegetables."

Gina:

But yeah, it can be tricky. So, I would love if you would chat a little bit about the difference between eating for health and quote dieting because I feel like that's kind of a tricky line to toe between quote dieting. Because a lot of people, they do want to go for a more healthier weight. So, I feel like it's become taboo to talk about weight loss, but for some people that's part of their goal to becoming healthier. So, just the difference between all of that and deprivation, because if I could, I would love to eat cake for every single meal, but I know that eating a salad or eating some chicken or eating some pizza is going to make me feel completely different.

Megan:

Yeah, absolutely. I love that you said that there's this taboo about weight loss. There really is, and what's really interesting about that is there's what, 70% of Americans are now overweight. It's a significant amount and it's very concerning. And for those who are listening, who are overweight, I want you to think about this. If you were diagnosed with stage two breast cancer, would you wait until you had stage three breast cancer to do something about it? Probably not, right? And what most people do is they wait. They're like, "Oh, well, I know I'm overweight and I should do something about this." But they don't really actively do anything about that. So, it really does lead to longterm health problems, higher medical costs and those types of things.

Megan:

It is really important not to just survive, but to also thrive. And I think that one of the things that a lot of people confuse in this space is eating healthy, or healthier, versus how to lose weight, how to eat to lose weight. There is a difference. And what I see out there, is there is a lot of programs that teach you how to eat healthier, but they're not teaching you how to lose weight and how weight loss actually works in your body. There's a difference. And so a lot of women will come to me and they're eating paleo, for instance, tons of healthy, fresh food, whole foods on a paleo diet. But they're really confused, like, "Why am I not losing weight on this diet?"

Megan:

Well, because it's not really intended for weight loss. There's a difference. And so when you're approaching weight loss, you want to be having the right education and what really does stimulate weight loss in the body. We know from science that a slight calorie deficit, not an extreme one, is one of the ways that we achieve weight loss. But we also know that the types of foods that we eat influence our hunger hormones, influence our fat storing, influence our cravings, things like that. So, if we did just eat carbs all day long, we're going to be hungrier because we're not getting enough protein and fat to balance everything out.

Megan:

So, we have to learn how to eat to lose weight, and we also have to learn about these important hormones and metabolic hormones. I call them the really important hormones that females really need to become aware of, [inaudible 00:20:41], as well as cortisol, the stress hormone, because these four hormones will your hunger, cravings and your ability to lose weight. And your lifestyle, the amount of stress you have, the amount of sleep and the quality of sleep, as well as the types of foods you're eating, are going to influence those metabolic hormones. So, when we're thinking about the difference between eating healthy and eating for weight loss, we have to be thinking about that slight calorie deficit, with nourishing foods that get us into that deficit, but also balance the blood sugar, as well as keeping those cravings in check. Because losing weight and having cravings all the time and being hungry all the time, it's just not sustainable.

Gina:

That's a terrible way to live.

Megan:

Yeah. And it's why most people really struggle. I have a post on my website that's called Why You're Always Hungry On Weight Watchers, and it's one of my most popular posts. People on Weight Watchers, what I see them eating is a lot of these foods that appear healthy, but really are not that healthy. So, Danone Light And Fit yogurt is kind of one of my favorite foods to pick on. It's only 80 calories, so everybody thinks, "Oh, this is a great food. I should eat this." And really it's got a ton of added sugar and that added sugar is going to increase cravings and hunger and make it really hard for you to feel full, satiated and to stick with whatever regimen that you're on.

Gina:

Absolutely. How much protein is in there. Do you know?

Megan:

I don't know offhand, but it's not as much as Greek yogurt. I know that.

Gina:

Exactly. It's almost just like a sugary treat and then you want more sugary treats, I feel like, because you haven't had really any healthy fat to go in there, or much protein, which is satisfying. But I love that you mentioned like the different pieces of the pie too, because if things like sleep are off, or you're extremely stressed or you have a hormonal imbalance, all of these things can impact how you can achieve those goals as well. So, it's just important to pay attention to the whole picture.

Gina:

And like you said too, it can be so overwhelming because there is so much conflicting info out there. You'll read one website and they're like, "You should be paleo." You go to another website. It's like, "You should be vegan." You go to another website, "You should be gluten free." It's so much, especially when you're first getting started. And that's kind of what happened to me. When I first started my own weight loss journey, I tried all of these random diets and they made me feel terrible. I was hangry. They were all completely different from one another. And I liked that you mentioned Weight Watchers, because that one was just the worst ever for me. I'd eat like a Subway sandwich and then I'd have like 10 points left for the day. And I'm like, "Oh, great." I'm just hangry and angry at everyone.

Megan:

Yeah. I think the other thing that's really important to understand all of these diets that are out there, is they don't really teach you skill power. And by skill power I mean, the difference between eating what you enjoy versus deprivation and restriction. A lot of times we have this all or nothing mindset, "I have to restrict all the pizza, cookies, cake, everything, and I can't eat any of that stuff because I need to lose weight." Then we feel like we failed if we give into those things.

Megan:

And so when I talk about skill power, I mean none of these diets really teach you, "Well, what do I do if I walk into a restaurant and my whole family wants to order a pizza? What do I do when I have a bad day and I want to go into the pantry and raid the chips? What do I do when I'm going to a holiday party and I know there's going to be a ton of cookies there, what should I eat to set myself up for the best success and how do I not restrict and deprive myself?" That's one of the things I really stress with my clients, is let's make sure you have the right skills in your toolbox so that you don't feel like you're dieting, but rather creating a lifestyle around healthy foods.

Gina:

Yes. And if you really want something, I just think there's so much power in just letting yourself have it and enjoying it and then moving on instead of feeling defeated or like you quote, fell off the wagon. There's no wagon. Just eat it, enjoy it, and then you just move on with your life.

Megan:

Yeah. I tell my clients all the time, "You can have any food you want, anytime you want." And it's literally life changing to all of that because they're like, "I've never thought about it that way." Because when you think about I can have any food I want, anytime, it literally means, oh, well that food doesn't really matter as much as I thought it did.

Gina:

I love that. Just ditching the quote good food, bad food mentality, there are no good foods and bad foods. There are foods that are more nutrient dense than others, but there are other foods that just make your soul feel happy and make you feel like you're in a warm, cozy blanket and that's worth something too. So, just letting yourself have all things is so important for a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

Megan:

Yeah. Absolutely. Listening to your body and paying attention to how food makes you feel, is it giving you a lot of energy, making you feel vibrant and great, or is it really making you feel sluggish and fatigued, can be really powerful in helping you choose what foods to fill your plate with.

Gina:

Yes, absolutely. What are some of your favorite go to healthy meals?

Megan:

Some of my favorite meals, and they're kind of boring, to be honest with you, I think that easy and boring is the best way to do it because we live busy, crazy lives. So, I try and keep things really uncomplicated for myself and for my clients. I like to just have a basic egg bake in the morning with a bunch of vegetables, whatever I have thrown in there. And then for lunch, I call it a big ass salad. It's just every vegetable you got, throw some protein in it, throw a little bit dressing on top and you're good to go. And then for dinner, it's always a protein, a carb and some vegetables. Really it's just super easy kind of stuff, throw some salsa in the Crock Pot with some chicken and throw it over some lettuce and you're good to go.

Gina:

Delicious. I love that salsa chicken combo, it's so good and easy. I like it on a sweet potato with some guacamole, delicious. Delicious. So, tell us about your new book. What can listeners expect and how can they find it?

Megan:

Yeah. So, my cookbook, my first cookbook is coming out June 30th and you can find it either on my website or Amazon or Barnes And Noble. It's called The Low Calorie Cookbook, I know it's a super generic name, but that was what my publisher came up with. There's 60 lower calorie recipes that are balanced in nutrition to keep hunger and cravings balanced, and they're going to help you lose weight and not feel deprived. And I also talk a lot about weight loss in my cookbook too, talk about some of the things that I work on with my clients and some of the tips that can help readers actually lose weight as well.

Gina:

I love that. So, you're also providing that skillset, like you chatted about, teaching them instead of just following recipes, understanding the why behind it. Or like you said, if you do go to a restaurant, some ideas of things that you can have. And I love that you have meal plans on your site as well, so you guys can check it out for meal plans and recipes. Her photos are so beautiful. So, I'll include links to that. Do you want to do a cookbook giveaway in the blog posts for this?

Megan:

Sure.

Gina:

Okay. So, if you guys head to the blog post related to this podcast episode, I'll link to it in the show notes, we'll give away one of Megan's new cookbooks, so that will be super fun. Where can everyone find you online?

Megan:

Yes. So, they can find me at skinnyfitalicious.com and that's on Facebook and on Instagram.

Gina:

Awesome. I'll include links to those, so you guys can find Megan and connect with her online. Thank you so much for being here today.

Megan:

Yes. Thank you for having me, Gina. It was great chatting with you.

Gina:

Yes, it's always great chatting with you. I'll talk to you soon.

Megan:

Bye.

Speaker 2:

Thanks for listening to the Healthy In Real Life podcast. For more info, check out Gina's blog at fitnessista.com.