

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

Shohreh Davoodi: Welcome friends to episode number 11 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I am so excited to bring a true glitter bomb of a human onto the show today. Ginger Snaps, also known as The Tastiest Tease in Texas, is an award-winning burlesque performer and aerialist here in Austin. Ginger is a member of Black Widow Burlesque as well as the performance manager for Sky Candy Aerial Arts which is actually my aerial studio here in town.

In addition to performing, Ginger also produces because she is a woman of many talents. We talked about sexuality in burlesque, the fatphobia Ginger has experienced as a plus-size performer, the bullshit excuses aerial studios use to exclude people in bigger bodies, and more. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/11. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/11.

[music plays]

Shohreh: Hey y'all. Welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. I'm a certified intuitive eating counselor and a certified personal trainer. I help people improve their relationships with exercise, food, and their bodies so they can ditch diet culture for good and do what feels right for them.

Through this podcast, I want to give you the tools to redefine what health and wellness mean to you by exposing myths and misconceptions, delving into all the areas of health that often get ignored, and reminding you that health and wellness are not moral obligations. Are you ready? Let's fuck some shit up.

All right, y'all. So today on the show, I have the lovely Ginger Snaps. I know Ginger through my trapeze journey. I think most of you by now know that I've been doing trapeze for a little over two years now at a local studio here in town called Sky Candy. And Ginger Snaps is actually an instructor there and a program director there, and that is how I first met her. Ginger, thank you so much for being here.

Ginger Snaps: Of course. I'm excited to be here.

Shohreh: Yeah. So I would love to first hear kind of all about your journey from going by your birth name, which I assume is different from Ginger Snaps and whatever you were doing in your former life, to becoming Ginger Snaps, The Tastiest Tease in Texas.

Ginger: Okay. Well, it's kind of a weird, convoluted story, but I guess I originally adopted the name when I got into burlesque. And I actually didn't know what burlesque was at first. And then after I moved to Austin, I must have looked similar to some other burlesque performer around town because people kept thinking I did burlesque and telling me they'd seen me perform. And I was like, "Yeah. No. It's definitely not me."

But then I looked it up, and I was like, "Oh, hey, apparently, I've been

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

kind of training myself to do this for the past, like, five years and didn't realize it" because I started taking dance classes in college, and, like, I ran a Rocky Horror shadow-cast troupe and all sorts of stuff.

So yeah. I looked into it and decided, "Yeah. Sure. I should do that." So I auditioned for a troupe, and that was that. And then probably about three years into doing burlesque, I was working with some aerialists from Sky Candy, and they told me about that. And I was like, "Cool. I'll go try that now." So that was that.

Shohreh: So you originally auditioned for a troupe having zero experience with burlesque?

Ginger: Yes. [laughs]

Shohreh: That is amazing.

Ginger: I mean, I had some dance experience, and I had, you know, learned a little bit about burlesque, but even then, you know, this was over 10 years ago. So the scene in Austin was still really young, and there wasn't a whole lot of burlesque out there. And what was out there was very kind of classic rockabilly-style burlesque.

So that's kind of what I started in. And then after a few years got to a point where I better knew my own character and had a better idea of what I wanted to do and was able to more develop my preference and my style of burlesque.

Shohreh: What is it about burlesque and aerials that has kept you coming back and kept this such a big part of your life?

Ginger: Well, ultimately, it's just that it's a lot of fun and that you get to have this creative expression that's entirely what you make it. So there is no formula you have to follow. You get to put together your own act, put together your own costuming, do your own concept. It's whatever you want it to be, and I think that's a really important part of self-expression.

Shohreh: Yeah. And I guess for-- There's probably some people in the audience who don't really know burlesque that well or kind of what it entails. So maybe could you describe like what the-- I guess what some of the main aspects of burlesque are? Like, what makes it burlesque versus something else.

Ginger: [laughs] Well, and that can be a very big discussion topic for a lot of people. You will regularly hear people debating the definition of burlesque. But the way I discuss it with my class is that burlesque is theatrical striptease.

So as long as you've got some striptease and you've got some theater going on, the rest is entirely up to you. It used to be that what we consider like modern-day club stripping, and burlesque used to be the

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

same thing back in the '50s and '60s. And eventually, they split off into what we have now as like some modern-day strip clubs and then the more theatrical style of burlesque. But they used to be the same entity back in the classic burlesque days.

Shohreh: And I always think of burlesque too as this...it's very empowering for people who are getting to do it. Because I think some people hear striptease and they're like, "Oh. Well, that's just for the male gaze. Like, how can it be, like, a fun and empowering experience?" But I'm sure that you have thoughts on how it definitely is a fun and empowering experience for people who are participating in it.

Ginger: Yeah. I mean, I think the way I look at it and the way that most people I know in burlesque look at it is that it's about presenting your sexuality the way you want to present it and having fun with it. Like, sometimes, maybe you're making a joke and kind of making fun of it.

Maybe sometimes, it's just you owning your own sexuality. Because we're in a society where they tell women, you know, "We expect you to dress a certain way and act a certain way, and if you express your sexuality, you're slutty. So you need to be puritanical, but also we're going to need you to wear as little as possible while weighing five pounds."

So it's a whole lot of mixed messages. And in burlesque, you get to present the sexuality the way it matters to you.

Shohreh: Right. And I think the best way I've ever heard sexual objectification, like, described as far as how to tell if it is objectifying or not is to ask who has the power in the situation. And obviously, in burlesque, you're the person on stage. You're the person making decisions about your own sexuality and the performance, so you have the power. So in that way, I don't see it as sexual objectification because you're the one who's getting to harness your sexuality in whatever way you choose.

Ginger: Yeah. I mean, no one's telling me what to put on stage, or telling me what I can wear, or what I can and can't do, you know? It's entirely based on what the performer wants to put out there.

And I think it's important for women to be able to own their own sexuality and present themselves in a sexual manner in the way that *they* want to be seen as opposed to the way they're told to be seen.

Shohreh: Yes. Yes. I love that. You spin, like, faster than anybody that I know. And I feel like I can't have you on this podcast without talking to you about your ridiculous spinning abilities. And again, for those who are listening, if you go on Ginger's Instagram or on her website, which I will post in the show notes, you'll be able to see some footage of her performing. And her spins are insane. So have you always been able to spin this fast, or did you work up to that?

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

Ginger: It was a little of both. Like, I definitely have always leaned into spinning and always really liked it. Like, I remember being six years old at Disney World, and it must be genetic because my dad and I, we're on the teacup ride, and my mom was there too, and my dad and I were like, "How fast can we spin this tea cup?" We want to go as fast as humanly possible. Meanwhile, my mom is like, "I'm going to vomit and also kill both of you." And we're just spinning our little faces off, right, going mad.

Also, my mom told me that when I was a baby, I apparently didn't crawl. I just went from, like, sitting to rolling to walking. So clearly, I have always had some sort of proclivity towards spinning and rolling and things like that.

So when I started doing lyra, and it was like, "Oh, hey. You can do all this fun spin stuff" that was when I really fell in love with lyra. And I do still get dizzy from it, you know, especially if I haven't been doing a lot of spinning in, you know, a couple weeks or whatnot. But it just kind of like it doesn't bother me.

So I can be aware of the spinning, but I can still kind of force myself to, you know, walk straight and just kind of work through it.

So yeah. There's definitely a genetic component in there, but you can train your spin and get it to where you're more and more comfortable with it as long as it's something you're doing regularly.

Shohreh: Yeah. I am your mom in the teacup scenario-

[laughter]

Shohreh: -where I literally, like, took Intro to Trapeze and Lyra and was like, "I want to do trapeze because that lyra thing spins, and I cannot deal with it."

Ginger: Yeah.

Shohreh: And it took like, I don't know, a year and a half of trapeze before I even wanted to set foot on single-point and, like, start dealing with that.

But it is true. Like, while my spins are what Julia likes to call "cake display spins", so like much slower than yours, I found that, like, I can do it a lot more easily now. And I've also found that, if you have choreography and you're doing it over and over, the spin, like you notice it less because the choreography is familiar versus, like, if you're just spinning on trying-- doing something new, your brain is so preoccupied with the new thing, but the spinning just makes you lose your mind.

Ginger: Well, like, relative to you, your apparatus is still. So hey. [laughs]

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

- Shohreh:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, we'll go with that.
- [laughter]
- Ginger:** That's what I tell my students a lot in dance lyra is-- I'm like, you know, "If the spin starts freaking you out, first remember, relative to you, the apparatus is completely still." You could technically close your eyes, and that apparatus is still in the same spot. So look at your apparatus. Get a hand on it. Just take that moment to check in with your brain and be like, "Oh, hey. It's fine. I'm not gonna go flying off." And if all else fails, just come down. The ground is right there. You can touch it.
- Shohreh:** Okay. So if you'll indulge me, I want to do a little quick-fire favorites-round with you before we get into some of the deeper shit here.
- Ginger:** Okay.
- Shohreh:** Okay. So favorite burlesque prop?
- Ginger:** Oh, man. I knew this is supposed to be quick-fire, but that's hard.
- Shohreh:** You have so many.
- Ginger:** I know. I've kind of become like a prop-slut really.
- Shohreh:** It could be your favorite today.
- Ginger:** So probably my sphere.
- Shohreh:** Oh, interesting choice. Okay. Favorite burlesque persona you've taken on thus far?
- Ginger:** That's another difficult one. [laughs]
- Shohreh:** I know. I'm being really mean. This is hard for quick-fire.
- Ginger:** It is. Gosh. I think maybe from my Tenacious D show when I go to be the devil, but the devil a la Tenacious D, you know? So that was pretty fun.
- Shohreh:** I need to link to one of your Instagram posts that has that because I think the world needs to see that. That will be in the show notes. Okay. Your favorite kind of show to produce?
- Ginger:** Oh. I really like the weird shit. So for instance, my troupe, we just got done producing an entire Nicolas Cage-themed burlesque show, and it's probably one of the dumbest, yet most hilariously entertaining shows I've taken part in.
- Shohreh:** [laughs] That's incredible. Okay. Favorite aerial apparatus?

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

- Ginger:** My sphere.
- Shohreh:** I thought that might be it.
- Ginger:** Yeah. Because Spherey McSphereson is his full name.
- Shohreh:** Oh, that's amazing. And your trapeze has a cool name too, I think.
- Ginger:** Yeah. Trapeze is Black Phillip.
- Shohreh:** And the color is black in case those of you who are wondering out there.
- Ginger:** Black cotton ropes because my hands don't like that synthetic stuff and then the AmSteel core so yeah. Black Phillip is a nice trapeze.
- Shohreh:** Yeah. You and I have the same wonderful black ropes. Mine is purple though, so we differ in that way. Alright, the last one. So for those who don't know, Ginger also does professional makeup and wig making. So what is one makeup item you couldn't live without?
- Ginger:** Oh. For me, it's gonna be eyebrow products because like most true redheads, I have like five eyebrow hairs desperately trying to be an eyebrow. So I really need eyebrow product.
- Shohreh:** [laughs] That's amazing.
- Ginger:** Yeah. My favorite one right now is by Iconic London. And it's like this-- I feel like they should be sponsoring me now. But they call it an eyebrow cushion. It's almost like a liquid and a little cushion with a little brush. And so when you don't really have a lot of eyebrow hairs for stuff to stick to, that's a good way to go.
- Shohreh:** You just feel like whenever you have your eyebrows done, that's when you're your true identity in makeup.
- Ginger:** Yeah. Yeah. Like, if nothing else, I need to have eyebrows or I feel like a Muppet.
- Shohreh:** [laughs] That's awesome. Okay. Thank you for doing quick-fire with me. That was fun. But we are going to get into some of the deeper shit. So you are a plus-size burlesque performer and aerialist. And as such, I know that you are no stranger to fatphobia as well as, I imagine, being underestimated.
- So, like I know you as a performer and teacher. And I know, for instance, how ridiculously fast you can spin and how super-flexible you are, but I imagine people's reaction to your ability sometimes is surprise.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

So I kind of want to break this into two pieces. One, can you talk about your experiences with fatphobia coming from other people. And then two, can you talk about if you've had any experiences, like, with internalized fatphobia where you believed certain things, like, your body should be or should not be allowed to do?

Ginger: Yeah. Well, you get a lot of that from other people. And I would say there's two different kinds. There's the kind where people don't see you as a human and say stupid shit which is mostly online. And there's the kind where people think they're saying something nice to you in person, but really, they're using qualifiers, and it's really kind of weird. Because I've had people walk up to me at shows and be like-- you know, say stuff like, "Oh my God. That was so amazing for someone your size." And you know stuff like that. And I'm like, "No, no."

Shohreh: Oh fuck.

Ginger: I know. It's like, "we don't use qualifiers. It was amazing no matter what. So let's try again." And I will make them start over and redo the compliments the correct way

Shohreh: Yeah. That's such a backhanded compliment. That's bullshit.

Ginger: Yeah. And the sad thing is I don't think they even realize it. Like, they're not intentionally being passive aggressive or backhanded. It's just, when you constantly are in a society where everyone tells you that, you know, fat people don't have value and shouldn't be able to do things like that, it's internalized in them too, you know, so they are not aware of it most of the time.

But then I have stuff like when George Takei shared an article about me, so that had a ton of shares and a kajillion comments. And there were all sorts of comments on there where people are like, "This is a bad example," and, "Her health. Oh my God." Blah, blah, blah and all that kind of shit, which is completely unsubstantiated.

So I kind of went at it from the point of like, "You know what? I'm going to read through all these comments, and I'm going to approach them from a point of education." And I replied to these people. I was just like, "Hey. Fun fact--" Okay. So I had one woman who was talking about how I was a drain on the healthcare system.

Shohreh: Oh God.

Ginger: I don't remember what her name was, but I'm quite sure I referred to her as Becky. And I was like, "Fun fact, Becky. I actually haven't used my health insurance I have been paying for all year even once this year. Why? Because I'm really fucking healthy. So good luck with your life. Go home. Take your blood pressure medication. Leave me alone."

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

Shohreh: And not like it would matter even if you were unhealthy because you don't fucking owe people health.

Shohreh: Exactly. Exactly. Like, it's completely beside the point, and it's just this weird fucking assumption they're making. I mean, I've even had assumptions when I go to the doctor. Like, I'll go in, and I'll have, you know, a nurse who's got to be, you know, my size or similar. And they'll take my blood pressure, and they'll be like, "Wow. Your blood pressure is really low." Like, they're just shocked that it's so normal.

And it's not like I have abnormally low blood pressure. It was perfectly normal. I'm usually like 117 over 79, like, super boring. And even the nurse is like, "Gee, you couldn't possibly have good blood pressure at your size."

Shohreh: Yeah. It's really shitty how we just live in a society that just is like, "Health equals thinness." And it's like, "No. No, no, no, no. This is so wrong for a million reasons." And I've talked about this on plenty of episodes of this podcast as well, but I always like hearing people's lived experiences because people don't realize how different it is to go to the doctor's office when you're in a thin body versus a fat body. Like, how people treat you is totally different.

Ginger: Oh yeah. I definitely had some weird doctors' experiences where it was clearly not at all useful. I finally found a general practitioner I really like. But I don't really go to the doctor that much. And I think part of it, even for like regular stuff, is because I am just used to someone being like, "Oh. Well, if you lost weight--" And you're like, "Yeah. Good point. Gee. I bet my rib would stop sliding out of place if I was thinner." That doesn't make sense.

Shohreh: Right. Exactly. Like, that has absolutely nothing to do with this.

Ginger: Yeah. It's like, "You're right. My migraines are totally because I'm fat." Good point.

Shohreh: So you've all these experiences with other people which are clearly super frustrating. And then, what about with yourself, particularly maybe when you were first getting started, like, did you doubt your own abilities because of your size?

Ginger: Yeah. I mean, I think I always did. And even now, I still do. You know, it's been years, and I have a lot of great stuff happening, but you still tell yourself, "Well, gee. If you were thinner, this would be easier." Or, "You'd be more likely to land certain types of gigs." Or this and that. And that's a really hard thing to get over when you've been bombarded with that since you were tiny.

But I guess things still happen that surprise even me, so I try to make sure that I don't back away from any opportunity even if, internally, I'm assuming it was something I would never get, you know? Like, I'm

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

getting ready to go to Europe on a four-month contract, like a circus there. And I'm still shocked by it. And I still feel like, "Hey, does somebody need to tell them that, you know, I'm 37 and fat? Because I don't know if they know that." It's like, clearly they saw videos of you. They're well aware, girl.

Shohreh: Right. That is your brand. I'm pretty sure they know.

Ginger: Yeah. Yeah. I think they figured it out. They have your passport information. Everyone knows.

Shohreh: Yeah. But seriously, congrats on that contract because that's, like, a really big deal. I mean, this is, like, a legit professional, circus contract. You get to go overseas which is going to be such a cool opportunity. I'm sure when you were first starting out, this was not really what you imagined would be happening in your burlesque and aerial career.

Ginger: No, not in a million years. And still, if I don't hear from my agent, like, every day, I'm like, "Oh. They're just going to ghost me." Like, that is still in my head, and I just have to tell it to shut up. But yeah, I never for a moment would have thought something like this would happen, you know. I always assume, "Oh, you know, I'm entertaining, so I do well, but I am not nearly skilled enough to be impressive to the circus world in general."

So yeah, I think a lot of that was just that internalized transphobia and that assumption that everyone would feel that way. But the reality is, I think a lot more people and a lot more companies are really embracing diversity and understanding that, "Hey, people want to see people that look like them. And people want to see entertainment, and entertainment does not need to exclude fat bodies."

Shohreh: I think that's one of the really wonderful things, too, about your social media as well is that there are so many people out there who can look at what you're doing, and maybe that gives them some encouragement to be like, "Wow. Maybe I could try aerials or do something like this too."

I mean, I have people in my own life who have been like, "Hey, do you know any plus-size aerialists that I could follow online just for encouragement?" I'm like, "Oh, yeah." I can, like, list off you and other people that I know. So that's one really cool aspect of it too is that you kind of get to be a role model in this space being one of the first people to be really visible doing this.

Ginger: Yeah. And it's kind of an interesting thing because it's not like you ask to be a role model.

Shohreh: Ha right.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

Ginger: So I feel like I'm always kind of, like, balancing that fine line of trying to be myself but also being aware that other people are watching it. So I kind of, like, put it in this space of, like, even if I'm feeling down on myself, that isn't something that I should let leak into my public stuff unless it's specifically a discussion about, like, "Hey. Let's talk about our internal issues."

But yeah. I don't know. It's just a weird dichotomy. So I've been trying to, like, put more useful stuff on there, for instance. Like, I'll have people that will message me on Instagram and ask about, "Gee. I want to get into this, but I'm afraid I'm not strong enough. And do you have conditionals things that can help?" And stuff like that.

So now, I try to, like, once a week, just post one of the exercises that I do for conditioning on my Instagram. So it's like, "Hey. Here's something anyone can do, and this will help." And just, you know, things like that so that it seems more attainable, and people better understand that there is a lot of work going on behind the scenes as well.

Shohreh: Definitely. I think it's really awesome that you do that. And I also want to discuss too weight stigma specifically at aerial studios. So when it comes to rigging and who is being excluded, I know you have some thoughts on this. I know you have seen some bullshit out there. So please share.

Ginger: Oh. I have some strong thoughts on this. Incidentally, part of the reason I was having phone issues when I first called in was I was trying to read a post in an aerial arts group about someone who was like, "Well, I'm 311 pounds. Can I do this?" That kind of thing.

And I was definitely just going through the comments to make sure no jackass said something stupid. Because there are studios out there. and I hear this every single time I go to a new place, about someone saying that they wanted to go to an aerial studio, but they were told that they had, like, hit a 200 pound weight limit or a 250 pound weight limit, things like that. Which is complete and utter bullshit because it means that either (a), you have inappropriate equipment that nobody should be on because that equipment should be rated for 2,000 pounds.

Or (b), you have poorly-trained instructors who have not been taught how to spot because you don't have to wait someone's entire weight to spot them. That is not how this shit works.

And lastly, (c), you're just completely full of shit and don't want to deal with it. And it's just really problematic and really pervasive.

Shohreh: I think it's (c) so often. Just a lot of really fatphobic people big people who are like, "Eh, people in larger bodies don't belong in this sport."

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

And it's like, "Fuck you."

Ginger:

And people in (c) like to use (b) as an excuse all the time. And they're like, "Well, we don't want our instructor to get hurt trying to spot this person." And I will just reply to them point blank, "Maybe you should train your instructors better because that's not how this works," you know? It doesn't matter what size you are. In any of my classes, I am not lifting you onto something, unless you are a very small child who is just trying to find the pose and doesn't quite have all their motor skills in place yet.

But any adult, at no point am I like, "Yeah. Let me just hold you on there," or be prepared to take the entirety of your weight. That's not how spotting works. Spotting is about keeping you as safe as you can reasonably be.

So I'm not gonna have you go super high off the ground so you can hurt yourself. And ultimately, I'm focusing on protecting your head. And that's the part of your body I'm going to hold up and put support under. I am not gonna put anybody in a position where they could gravely injure themselves because I couldn't catch them.

Shohreh:

Right. Yeah. It seems like it's more of a problem of just, again, these instructors just don't know what to do with it and have a general misunderstanding of what spotting entails. So, you know, if you ever stop performing, I think you have a future in consulting work for these shitty studios who clearly need help understanding their rigging requirements for weights and, like, how to spot people in larger bodies.

Ginger:

Yeah. It's just such a crap excuse, and I'm so tired of hearing it.

Shohreh:

You are an aerial instructor. And in fact, you have taught a plus sized aerials class at Sky Candy. So what are some of the differences between someone doing aerials who is in a smaller body versus a larger body? Like, are there certain things that people should be aware of going into it?

Ginger:

I will say the number one difference I run into is people in larger bodies just don't have the confidence. They don't think they can do it, and so they're afraid to try. But I have not seen any student significant-- Like, if I were to compare a side-by-side chart of percentages of people successfully executing skills, it would not be lower with my plus-size students versus my average-sized students. People just have, you know, different challenges getting to different skills.

So in my plus size class, a lot of it is focused on psychological stuff and just taking your time and realizing, "Oh hey. You can do this, and you can trust your body." And then taking your time to find adaptations or if there are certain things that aren't working for you. But it by no means means people can't do it.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

Shohreh: I always think it's funny that people's immediate assumption is like, "Oh. If you're smaller, like, you're automatically going to be better at all of these aerial skills." And, like, as an example for my own experience, like in trapeze, like, there are students in larger bodies who, for instance, have much bigger calves than me, and they could just, like, rock these ankle hang skills that, like, took me months and months to learn because, like, my body was not shaped to do that very easily.

So the reality is, like, all different body shapes are going to have different skills that are more suited to their body that come more naturally to them. It's not just like, "Oh. If you're thin, you're magically going to be good at everything." No fucking way. It's very different depending on your body, in general.

Ginger: Yeah. Like I have just a weird body. Like, besides being plus-size, I'm very swayback. I have some pretty severe lordosis. And my pelvis is tilted, and so my legs kind of shoot out. So I say I'm shaped like a swayback starfish which means, like, under the bar entrances are never gonna work for me because I can't curve my back that direction. It doesn't even go flat, much less curve the other way.

And it does mean though some things are gonna be a lot more comfortable. Like, I can hang out in a back balance all day long, and I am perfectly happy there. But other people, that's gonna be really uncomfortable for them or they have a hard time getting that arch in their lower back to make that nice shelf and hang out there.

And it entirely depends on your body shape and your flexibility and not just size. It's just so different. And everyone has their strengths, and everyone has their things they need to work on. And expecting everybody, no matter what their size is, to have the same standard of things that work for them is unrealistic because all of our bodies are different.

Shohreh: Yeah, I mean, even, like, I've noticed with smaller students who have, like, really big boobs, for example, they're like, "Man. These things get in the way." And I'm like, "Oh. That's not something I've ever had to think about because I have really small boobs." It's just, like, everyone's body is so different, and because it's, like, a physical apparatus that you're trying to move around, like, it's just going to be a different experience for each individual. And I think also that's why some people are attracted to different apparatuses that feel better for their body.

Ginger: Yeah. And I think that people think that, well, you need to kind of-- everyone will have the same, very specific skills, and everyone absolutely must have those same poses and those same shapes and the same tricks. And why? Like, how boring is that? Why would you want to watch the exact same thing on a different body over and over and over?

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Ginger Snaps

Shohreh: Right. It's much more interesting for everybody if everyone kind of figures out what works best for them.

Ginger: Yeah.

Shohreh: Do you have any advice that you would give for other plus-size people who are interested in getting started with any fitness or athletic pursuit but have any number of fears about doing so?

Ginger: First of all, just don't be afraid of it. Just go in and try it out. And I think one of the big things is not being afraid to ask for alternatives and ask for assistance. And I think one of the reasons I stuck with it is my first lyra instructor, Andy, who may have been before your time. I don't know if you remember Andy.

But, you know, there were certain-- like, for instance, I couldn't get the transition to the upper bar of my lyra because I couldn't get that tuck under and reach my foot up there because it shoots out to the side like a starfish. So getting anything that is strongly in a piked position is really challenging for me.

And so I, you know, expressed my frustration, and Andy's just like, "Well, let's figure something else out." And so we figured out a way for me to go from my straddle back balance position up to the upper bar. And all the sudden, it opened up all this other stuff for me.

And it was like, "Hey. You don't need to have the same entrance as everyone else. You can still go up there and do all these other things." So that was really important. And learning to be vocal enough to ask those questions I think is a really huge part of it.

Shohreh: Yeah. And I think then on the instructor side, being willing to recognize that your students are the experts on their own bodies and being able to talk with them about, "Hey. Like, what is it that you're experiencing? What would make this better for you?" So that you can give them more options is really important, too. Because I think instructors are so used to being like, "I'm going to teach everything the exact same way for every person."

And I see this, you know, in the strength training world too. People are like "Oh. The squat should always look the same." I'm like, "No. A squat looks fucking different depending on what your body is like," if you're really tall, or you're short and round. Like, it's going to look a little bit different on each person. That doesn't mean that it's wrong. It's just a different way of approaching it so that someone can do this movement or realizing like, hey, this specific movement maybe isn't right for this person, and let's find an alternative that can work the same muscles or something like that.

Ginger: Yeah. And I think a lot of people love to say "circus for every body", and they don't really understand how to enforce that. And they don't

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

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understand that if somebody doesn't get a move, it doesn't mean you just keep trying to make them do the same thing over and over for months on end. It means you look at alternatives.

And it doesn't mean you have to drop the initial thing. You can still keep training it and keep trying to find ways to check in on it and see if some strength improvements have made it more attainable, but there needs to be alternatives in the meantime. It's not just sit there and do nothing while the rest of the class moves forward.

Shohreh: Absolutely. When it comes to circus and burlesque in general- I know those are kind of two different areas that you've crossed over into- do you have any thoughts on how both of these industries can become more inclusive, not just of different sizes of bodies, but I think just of different people in general? Because there does tend to be this typical, like, thin, white, cis bodies tend to dominate in most spaces, but I think these spaces as well.

Ginger: Yeah. And I think it's-- a lot of it has to do with the people producing shows and handling casting. And a big part of that is in the corporate world, too. I never get corporate work because I'm not that "body type". But what cracks me up is this is the same audience you're trying to appeal to otherwise.

Like, it's not that they don't want to see that body type. It's that the people producing these events and putting these contracts together assume that they don't or are afraid of losing a gig over it.

But the reality is, like, I've won Best Burlesque Performer in Austin for three years in a row. That's your audience. That doesn't come from anybody else, anyone in the industry. This is strictly from audience. So clearly, they do like seeing that, but producers are afraid of it and won't cast it or won't hire for corporate gigs. And you need to just fucking, like, take a chance. Put it out there. See what happens.

Shohreh: It sounds like it's probably a matter of getting more diversity in people who are doing these casting and producing roles as well because those are probably going to be the people who are more willing to take that risk and bring in different individuals.

Ginger: Yeah. It's less excuses and more just doing it. To quote Nike-- No.

[laughter]

Shohreh: You are obviously an athlete. You do a ton of exercise. And I think, generally, you are very well aware of your body, and you try to take care of your body as best as you can so that you can do these athletic pursuits. And this kind of flies in the face of what society says about plus-size people, right? Where people are like, "Oh. If you just exercise and take care of yourself, like, everybody could be a size two," which is, like, utter bullshit.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

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And it's, like, you're someone who-- like you said, you're in really good health. You're taking great care of yourself. You are an athlete And, like, people just can't fucking wrap their heads around that, and that must be so freaking annoying.

Ginger: Yeah. It's definitely challenging. I mean, I have this body type, and it's more so as I get older where I can think about lifting something, and I will start to build muscles for it, but my body is gonna hold onto a taco for-fucking-ever.

Shohreh: [laughs]

Ginger: So I have openly gained weight since doing aerials, and my body shape has changed a lot. But it's funny 'cause I'll look at old pictures of me from when I first started doing burlesque, and I can just see how soft my midsection was. And now, my midsection is, like, pretty fucking hard. It is solid.

And I talk to my classes a lot about the taco to ab ratio and about just finding the ratio that works for you. And so I say, "Right now, my abs, it's like 70 percent abs, 30 percent tacos because there's always gonna be that lower belly taco that's just gonna hang out there, but there's a lot of abdominals in here.

And you know what? My abdominals happen to really grow outwards. I am not ever one of those people where your abs are going to sink in. You can even see it on my brother who definitely was blessed with the thinner body type. But he's got the same thing. When he bulks up, his abs bulk out, not in. And that's just how it is. But the more muscle I get, the more I grow to appreciate it and really enjoy it.

And for instance, I've lost waist definition since gaining muscles, but it's because my obliques got a lot bigger in there because they're working really hard. And my obliques are a lot more fun than having my waist be three inches smaller, so whatever. Yeah. They do cool tricks. I'm not mad at it.

Like, a couple years ago, I remember, like, looking in the mirror, and I'm like, "Why has, like, my neck gotten fatter? Like, suddenly, none of my necklaces fit right anymore. And my trapezius got bigger. That's just how it is. Like, I have much more upper body now than I did before, but it does really cool shit. So if I'm sad about it, I just flex and pet my bicep for a little while, and I feel better.

Shohreh: I think people forget, like, how much genetics play into our body shape. So I love that you mention your brother as well because it's so true. Like, I think, again, people assume everybody who does a certain sport is going to look the same way. And, like, to a certain extent, things are true, right?

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

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Like, pretty much everyone who is in aerials gets a lot of lat development. Like, my lats got way bigger over the last two years. There are certain clothes that, like, I will freaking Hulk out of. And you also have super strong lats, but we look completely different. So it's so individual to each body, and people need to stop having this image in their mind of like, "Oh. Everybody is going to look this certain way if they do a certain sport." That's bullshit. And it's just not true.

Ginger: Yeah. It's not realistic. And, you know, what I tell people is just because your body is bigger doesn't mean it can't do something. It just means you're going to get bigger muscles while doing it. That's all.

Shohreh: Yeah. So I think it's a good segue into the wrap-up question that I ask everybody on my show which is how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

Ginger: Oh. That's a good question. For me, it's about finding that balance between mental and physical because there is more stuff I want to do physically. I want to work more on my endurance because aerial tends to be, like, these quick spurts of, you know, really heavy work.

So I've been trying to work more elliptical and more cardio into my workouts. And at the same time, not be so hard on myself if I don't see changes in my size or weight that I might want to because yeah, the reality is I'd love to lose *BEEP* pounds. It would make my ass a little bit easier to lift in the air, but not any more than that really.

And I need to focus more on my fitness and what I can get my body to do as opposed to numbers on a scale. So finding that balance is a really big part of it.

Shohreh: Definitely. I think that's so important. Well, thank you so much for being here, Ginger. How can people find you, work with you, see you on stage?

Ginger: One of the best ways right now really is just following me on Instagram. I always post my shows, my next upcoming show on there and, you know, post videos and discussions and things like that. And that's @gingersnapsburlesque.

And there's also my website which is gingersnapsburlesque.com. And if you look up gingersnapsburlesque on Facebook, you'll find me there too.

Shohreh: Wonderful. So I'm going to post all of that in the show notes so everyone can go and follow you. I love following you. You always have such entertaining videos. Ginger takes on a lot of characters in her burlesque work. Like she said, she really loves the weird shit, so if you are also into weird shit, you're gonna really enjoy her social media.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#11

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Ginger: I just posted a video of The Wicker Man routine. So a small video from it. Yeah.

Shohreh: And there you go.
[laughter]

Shohreh: Awesome. Well, I appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to come onto the podcast today. Thank you so much.

Ginger: Of course. Thanks for having me.
[music plays]

Shohreh: And that's our show for today. I appreciate you listening to and supporting the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast.

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And if you're looking for more information on what I'm all about and how to work with me, head on over to shohrehdavoodi.com.

Hope to see you for the next episode.