

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

Shohreh Davoodi: Hello. And welcome to episode number 15 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. If you are a parent or someone planning to have children, definitely keep listening.

Today on the show, I have my friend, Gina Mateer, who is a certified eating disorder registered dietitian supervisor and certified intuitive eating counselor in private practice.

Gina also serves as the vice president of Central Texas Eating Disorder Specialists, a nonprofit to support the education of individuals working in the eating disorder field.

Gina and I talked about some of the do's and don'ts of raising kids to have a positive relationship with food and their bodies, the importance of deemphasizing weight with kids, and more.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/15. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/15.

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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. I am so excited to have Gina Mateer here on the podcast with us today. I met Gina when I was really starting to get more into Health At Every Size and intuitive eating. And I was trying to find like-minded people here in Austin. Austin is sort of the capital of wellness culture, as I like to say, so it was not easy. But thankfully, we have a strong and mighty group of people here who are fighting the good fight, and Gina is one of them. So Gina, thank you so much for being here.

Gina Mateer: I am so excited to talk with you today.

Shohreh: Yeah. So why don't you first start by just telling me how you got into your line of work?

Gina: Wow. I feel like that is a story in itself and could probably be a whole podcast. Like many people in the eating disorder and Health At Every Size field, I think a lot of people have their own story, so I like to say I

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

grew up a gymnast-dancer-cheerleader. And you can imagine the body image stuff that went along with that.

So I have my own experience with a family that diets and a culture that diets. And I went into college, actually, as a pre-med major with a nutrition background because I didn't want that super boring chemistry or biology degree that you don't know what you can do with if you don't end up going to med school.

Shohreh: Right.

Gina: And I fell in love with nutrition and the idea that you could help people out of disordered eating with a nutrition degree. So I decided immediately after, like, the first year I am going to devote to becoming an RD specializing in eating disorders, and then just kind of went with it. I went straight into my internship saying, "I want all eating disorder work. I want to learn as much as possible. And I want to basically be part of the group of people trying to end people struggling with body image and negative relationships with food."

Shohreh: That's so awesome. When you were studying to be a dietitian, did you always have that sort of Health At Every Size, intuitive eating bent, or did you discover that later?

Gina: That is such a good question. I feel like I went through my schooling with blinders on. That's sort of how I tend to describe it because I did not even notice, I don't think, how terribly fatphobic the education is that we get in the standard dietary program. I know some universities are trying to change that. UT (University of Texas) here in Austin being one of those, but I did not know about intuitive eating or Health At Every Size through my training.

So what I really did was sort of put blinders on, study for the exam, take the tests that were, you know, all about the O words and weight loss and all of that. And then, anytime there was a counseling class or something that I thought pertained to eating disorders, I sort of perked up and took extra notes and, you know, tried to memorize and hold that information for what I wanted to do in the future.

But honestly, so much of my training came after I finished my typical four-year degree. So I was so lucky to intern with some great dietitians who are working in the eating disorder field. And that really is where I started to learn about intuitive eating. My first preceptor in eating disorders actually gave me the book and told me to read it. And that is where the kind of launching pad towards intuitive eating, Health At Every Size, and nutrition work for eating disorders started.

Shohreh: That's awesome. I know most programs don't have that included. And thankfully, that is starting to change. But luckily for you that you discovered it so soon after 'cause I think for a lot of dietitians, it can

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

take, like, years and years of basically doing a lot of, like, weight loss work before they discover it.

Gina: Oh yes. And I will not say that I was perfect at any means by just going straight into it. My first job out of college, I was told I had to get a job to pay my rent or I had to move back home. So I took a job at a food program that basically offered quick, healthy meals. It was a little local Austin company. And they did calorie-controlled food plans. And I already knew and wanted to work in eating disorders, and it was so conflicting.

And so what I tried to do was council on, you know, "It's okay if you want to use these meals for convenience, but also, let yourself eat other things that you want." Yet, I know that that was definitely crossing the line as a lot of people say, sort of one toe into the Health At Every Size or intuitive eating work and one toe in dieting world as a dietitian.

And I very quickly, after the first couple years, just felt like I couldn't keep doing that. And I was working at an eating disorder treatment center at the same time. And then, eventually, was able to move full-time to the treatment center.

Shohreh: Yeah. And I think we've all been there with that straddling the line. Like, I think very few people have that advantage of, like, literally just jumping all in on this one area. Maybe more so now as this is becoming more popular, we're going to see a lot more, like, dietitians and trainers and coaches and all these people who-- this is like how they start their businesses.

Gina: Hopefully.

Shohreh: Yeah. I mean, we really need that, but I think so many of us who are currently in the field, like, at some point, we were trying to cross over, and we were being problematic in the process because we were still learning.

Gina: Yes. Absolutely.

Shohreh: So one of the reasons I really wanted to have you on the podcast is because you are one of my go-to people when I have questions about intuitive eating for kids and adolescents because I typically work with adults, but many of those adults have children, of course.

And I think, in this diet and wellness culture we're living in, it's children who are getting hit especially hard by all of this. And from what I'm seeing, parents are just so, so confused about how to feed their children and how to keep them healthy. So I was thinking maybe let's first talk about some of the less ideal options for how we can feed our children, and then we can kind of round that out and talk about some better choices and ways that we can raise, like, healthy and happy kids.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

Gina: Absolutely. Well, I think when we talk about maybe the less ideal options is really just thinking about, you know, our kids are growing up in diet soup, as I like to call it. Or I've heard some people even say, "Our diet culture is like diet stew." Like, it's so thick. There's so much going on. And it makes so much sense that parents are really, really confused because no matter what they do, they're getting information on really scary things about their children's health.

So they're hearing about the very big childhood O-word epidemic. And that is not something I believe in or agree with, but of course, parents are getting those messages from media and from doctors. So they definitely want to do what's best, and what tends to happen is they go to either the doctor or media to find that answer and a lot of that is dieting, is putting kids on diets, whether that be controlling how much food you give them, setting food rules for your kids, forcing exercise or movement onto children.

And really, what the evidence shows us is that any kind of dieting for children is going to lead to negative health outcomes in the long run. And actually, the APA recommends not putting children on diets of any kind. And so it's really unfortunate that this message is still out there that kids should diet when it's actually recommended by the American Pediatric Association that children not diet because it's associated with negative health outcomes, including increased risk of eating disorders.

Shohreh: And it seems like in general, any approaches that are very black-and-white tend to have very poor outcomes. So for example, the traffic light system or telling kids that foods are good or bad, right?

Gina: Absolutely. So children's brains are very different than the way our adult brains work. So throughout development, your brain is developing and growing up until about age 25. So it's going through a lot of processes and learning to look at the world in different ways. And when we are, you know, young kids, even moving through early adolescence, the brain really doesn't process the gray area. It really sees things as black and white, yes and no, good and bad. It can't really process all the different shades in between.

And so when we teach kids in that very binary way, it can become very, very confusing. So maybe, you know, you could talk to an adult about a food choice that they may want to make less often. And they can understand that, but a kid just sees that as, "Yes, you know, always," or, "No, never."

And what we're actually seeing in Texas and with the lovely WW Kurbo app for kids is a traffic light food system, which you mentioned. And what that is is labeling foods as green, yellow, or red depending on sort of an arbitrary determining of whether or not somebody who made these rules thinks those foods are healthy or unhealthy for children to be consuming.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

And it becomes very, very black and white. So I've actually had several clients with anorexia in my office, young children ages like eight to 12 that were in schools and found out about the red light/green light system and started to become very anxious about eating the quote-unquote bad foods or wrong foods. And it actually developed into full-blown anorexia because of the fear of eating food.

Shohreh: That breaks my heart to think about an eight year old in your office who is afraid of foods that their school is essentially demonizing. Like, that's so sad.

Gina: Yeah. And you can imagine, you know, different personalities are going to take that information in different ways, that if we have someone who might be highly sensitive, maybe a people pleaser is walking through the line, and there's a teacher standing over their shoulder, and they're feeling like they need to do the right thing, there's going to be a lot of anxiety about maybe putting a cookie on their plate, even though that's what they really want that day, or maybe it's even just a steak that looks really good. Maybe they want steak and salad and potatoes for lunch, but the steak is labeled as red.

Even though we know that would be such a nourishing, amazing meal for a child to eat, they pick something else that maybe they don't want as much in the moment because of the fear of doing the wrong thing and this red light being so demonizing.

Shohreh: I know too with the Weight Watchers Kurbo app in particular, from what I was seeing of the screenshots and everything, people going through the app, was that a lot of the choices for, like, red, yellow, and green also seemed pretty arbitrary. Like, I was confused about some of these designations just from, like, a general nutrition standpoint, a lot of them didn't even make any sense. And I was like, "This is confusing to me as an adult. This is terrible for small children."

Gina: Absolutely. I know exactly what you're talking about. I think it was like, "Almonds are a yellow light," and, you know, we think about almonds as a very, you know, protein-rich and nutritious food, and thinking of it as a good/bad or you shouldn't have that much of it and being very, very arbitrary. It was based on portion sizes, and how can we determine how much a child needs if we don't know that child, we don't know their situation.

So an app can make it so black and white when there's so much nuance to what a child needs to eat. And I think another area that this brings in is children's distrust in their parents who really should be able to be the support in raising healthy children and kids that have eating competence which—

We can talk more about what that means, but when a kid is at school and hears that a food maybe is red or yellow or this Kurbo app teaches them that, then they may start to say, "Well, mommy feeds me that. Is

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

Mommy, you know, not educated on what good nutrition is? And maybe I can't trust my mom anymore." And that can be, you know, a really, really dangerous rupture in the trust between a parent and a child.

Shohreh: And for me, something that I think is really frustrating too is that, of course, an app like this Weight Watchers Kurbo app is going to have the most effect on marginalized families. And a black and white app like this is obviously not able to take into account, for instance, cultural differences in what kinds of foods are being served, or class differences in what kinds of foods are available.

Gina: Oh. 100 percent. As I mentioned, you know, there's no nuance when we're looking at just an app or a black and white image. We don't know what is available, access to food, financial ability to have different foods, what's available in the community and also what the individual needs. So is this a really active child who needs maybe more? Is this a child who, you know, has food preferences or even allergies, and none of that is taken into consideration.

Shohreh: I have so much empathy for parents of course who are trying to figure all of this out because, like, parenting is freaking tough. And the messaging out there about food is just absolutely horrific and confusing and, you know, you see all the stuff about, "Oh. If you give your kids any sugar, like, you're going to ruin their brains and their lives." And it's so dogmatic.

So, like, I feel for these parents. And also, we do have approaches and methods that we know work for giving kids a healthy relationship with food or helping them be competent eaters, as you said. So I'd love to talk about some of those so that parents who are out there listening and who are like, "Well, how the hell am I supposed to feed them, then?" Can, like, have a better sense of that.

Gina: Yes. Oh my gosh, the compassion you have for the parents. And I am feeling it so strongly right now because I have a three month old, my first child. And even just figuring out how to breastfeed a newborn, I was bombarded with so much information. It is crazy how much media, and-- I mean, gosh. These days, everybody knows what stage of life you're at, and the targeting with ads is so amazing.

But being told how to feed my child, you know, "Should I breastfeed? Should you use supplements or formula?" What you should do. What's the right way? What's the wrong way? It starts with just a newborn, literally. And it, you know, can just go on from there. What's the best way to start introducing solid foods? How do you introduce solid foods, and then just ooh-- it goes. It takes off from there.

And just watching my newborn has actually been a really fun experience as we talk about how do we apply really good tips and skills towards raising competent eaters. We are born with the ability to

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

eat intuitively. It is such a fascinating, amazing thing to watch a newborn be able to cue you to when they need food.

And most people who are parents, or who have ever been around children, have heard that cry that says, "I'm hungry." And typically, with a newborn, what most parents feel comfortable doing is just feeding them when they're hungry. And then letting them fall asleep. And you know that's when they're done, right?

So we can see in that beautiful moment that we are able to eat intuitively from birth. We cry when we're hungry. We maybe get the breast or the bottle, and then we fall asleep when we're full. And as kids start to grow into maybe toddlers, you know, young children starting to eat solid food, they will usually start to eat, and then you'll notice something starts to happen. Instead of putting the food in their mouth, they start playing with it. They start smashing it. They start throwing it on the floor or feeding it to the dog, you know, getting in trouble maybe for the big mess they're making or the schmear that's all over their plate. But that is their way of saying, "You know what? I'm done." Or if you've ever seen a kid clean up a plate and just big smiles and kind of put their hands together and say, "More. More." You know? And that's their way of saying, "I'm not full yet. I need some more of this food. My stomach's not full yet."

And the beauty of that is if somebody is able to move through their life without interrupting those natural cues, they are the person who is an adult intuitive eater, meaning they've lived their life knowing they can eat what they want and they can trust their body to feed it nourishing foods and to, you know, help them a healthy relationship with food. These are people who usually don't think about food too much because they just trust their body.

Shohreh: Yeah. You know, I was actually having a conversation with a client this past week who is working on, like, reconnecting with hunger and fullness cues. And she first said, "It was so cool. Like, I actually started to notice them, and I was really proud of myself." And then she was like, "But I felt really silly, like, being proud of myself about that because it felt so basic." And I was like, "Well, if you were a child, yeah. It would feel really basic or, like, feel really 'duh'," I think is how she described it. But I was like, "But you're not. Like, you went through diet culture and wellness culture and, like, all of this other stuff that took you away from being able to connect with your body. So it is a big deal that you're able to reconnect in a world that's basically trying to tell you not to."

Shohreh: Yeah! Go! Snaps for her for actually connecting. And also, such a great job on your part of letting her know how difficult that really is to get back there in the culture, as you mentioned. I think there's a lot. I'd even like to start with some common things that can disrupt, you know, that innate connection to hunger and fullness.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

So if we think about a kid who may be just moving along with their great intuition. And then all of a sudden, their parents say-- very well-meaning parents, might say, "Well, you have to clean your plate before you can have dessert." And what little kid isn't going to want at least a bite or two of that sweet, yummy thing?

And so instead of listening and stopping eating dinner when they're full and then maybe just having a couple bites of a dessert, they kind of force-feed themselves to clean the plate so they can have that dessert. And already, they're starting to distrust their hunger and fullness cues and listen to what mom or dad says or parents say.

And then moving through, you know, maybe in schools, they are getting told what they should or should not eat via a traffic light system as we already discussed. Maybe, as a teenager, or even younger, they're starting to feel maybe concerned about their body and looking to media for answers on what or how they should eat. And they're getting their hands on really disordered diets or food recommendations that might not be appropriate at all for someone at their age, or even for an adult for that matter because we knew how crazy the diets are, but definitely not for a growing teen who then maybe tries to follow a diet.

I mean, I know when I was growing up, there was teen magazines or whatever women's magazines looking at diets and then trying to follow them. But of course, as a young athlete, my body needed way more. And I felt like a failure when I couldn't do what the magazine said. I thought my body was wrong and immediately lost connection to what my body really was trying to tell me and thought that I just needed to listen to these external cues. I've seen that with so many teens, just kind of ignoring their own cues and listening to somebody else to tell them what to do.

Another, you know, thing that could get in the way would be any kind of trauma or, as you were mentioning, you know, any kind of marginalized community who may not have access to food. If you are shopping, and you get food from food stamps, maybe once a month, you have the ability to shop and get a lot of food, and then at other times of the month, you have less access to food, you're going to eat in a way that is more dictated by access and not by your internalized cues.

So things like trauma and access is really going to disrupt that innate connection to hunger and fullness as well.

Shohreh:

And those really linger into adulthood too. Like, I have a lot of clients who dealt with food scarcity as children who-- that is still there even though they don't have those food scarcity issues. It's like, so ingrained, that they still treat food as if they do.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

Gina: 100 percent. I think any deprivation that happens throughout childhood, whether that be because of food scarcity, because of a diet that someone was put on, or trying on their own as I mentioned, even as a teen, that is going to lead to the deprivation factor. And when we are deprived of food, our body is so amazing, it will actually overdrive and change the hormone levels of our food that dictate our food cravings and our hunger and our fullness and actually drive us to eat more food to survive. It's really a survival mechanism. And that can continue throughout life, but hopefully if someone wants it, intuitive eating can help them find their way back to their body and kind of trust again.

Shohreh: Yeah. So let's talk about for-- I guess we can kind of divide this up between, like, sort of younger children where the parents are still making most of the food decisions and then more of like teenagers, adolescents who are starting to make decisions for themselves as far as how do we parent that? How do we help them have a healthy relationship with food?

Gina: Absolutely. So there are definitely some methods out there that I turn to quite often. So for young children, there is the Ellyn Satter approach which is the Ellyn Satter division of responsibilities. The Ellyn Satter Institute, I'm sure we can link to that in the show notes, is a great, great resource, as well as her books, are great resources on feeding children.

And the theory of the division of responsibility is that parents are in charge of what is served, so what kind of food do you want to put on the table for your children? When are you guys going to eat meals and snacks? And where are those meals going to be served? So parents have a lot of control at a young age for children to be making choices around, again, the what, when, and where of feeding.

And then, it is the job of the parent to allow children to determine how much and whether or not they want to eat the food that's provided. So for example, if you put on the table pizza and salad and fruit and a box of milk, it's up to the child to decide if they want to eat all of those foods, some of those foods, and how much of each one they are going to eat. And if we continue that method from newborn throughout, this kid should be able to develop internal regulation cues and really eat a variety of foods overtime.

I think what happens sometimes for parents when they think about this is they take one meal into consideration. Maybe the meal where there were cookies on the table, and the kid only wanted the cookies, so they think, "I must control the food and never put cookies on the table again," instead of maybe thinking about, "Well, what did my kid eat this week? You know, over time, over this week, did my kid have a variety of nutritious foods, as well as play foods, that made for a very balanced diet throughout the week?"

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

Shohreh: I hear so many parents say that their biggest fear, if they're not currently using this method about switching to it, is they're like, "Well, my kids are only gonna eat junk food. Like, they can't be trusted." And the reality is, like, as anyone who is restricted, at first, yeah. They may only want those cookies, and they may only want the pizza or whatever. But just like we see in adults, eventually they get sick of that, and they start reaching for other options. And it really starts to even out.

Gina: That's so, so very true. And I think, depending on the age of the child, if the child is very young and not really able to have a conversation, then this might be a change a parent can make without having to really discuss it with their kid. However, if the kid is a little bit older, and that's going to be individualized, so I can't really say an exact age, but this might actually be a conversation a parent could have with the child, letting them know that things are gonna be a little bit different.

If a child is, you know, able to have a conversation, then it might be time to actually have a conversation before making any change where you lay out, as a parent, "Hey. Mommy made some mistakes, dad made some mistakes in the way that I've been feeding you and I want to try to do it differently. I've learned something new. You know, I read a new book, or I talked to a professional, and we're gonna do food a little differently now."

And really lay out what the guidelines are gonna be. "All the foods are gonna be on the table at dinner. And, you know, we're gonna sit down at these times to eat, and you're gonna stay at the table throughout the meal time. And I'm gonna trust you to eat what you want of what I give you."

And what's gonna happen is, you know-- and that's just one example. It may look different depending on the family or how this needs to go about for each individual. That would actually be a great time for an intuitive eating counselor or dietitian support, how to have that conversation with the child.

But what's gonna happen is the kid's going to say, "Cool. I'm gonna test the boundaries," just like they would with anything else, right? So if you put chips on the table, and they've never gotten to eat chips before, and chips have never been in the house, what are they going to eat? They're going to eat all of the chips and not touch anything else.

And they're going to keep doing it for a few days, maybe weeks, maybe months depending on how ruptured their relationship with food is, but they're going to eventually see, "Wait. My parents haven't changed the rules. All the food is there. My body actually wants this other food right now." And they're gonna fall back into that intuitive relationship with food if they're given the opportunity.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

Unfortunately, so often, what I see is, "Okay. We're going to try this." And all the food is on the table, and the kid eats maybe a food that is more of a fun food, and the parent gets scared and backtracks and doesn't allow that food in the house again for a few weeks.

So the kid is getting a lot of distrust. And every time there is access to that fun food or play food, they are going to want to eat all of it because it's been forbidden or keeps getting taken off of the table.

Shohreh: Right. And we see this with kids too, not even in your own house, but, like, going to other houses. Like, I think about certain things that my parents didn't allow in our house like soda, and so when I would go to friend's houses, and they stockpiled soda in the fridge, you know, I'd have like three Dr. Peppers in a single night because that--

Gina: Shohreh's bouncing off the walls and running around.

[laughter]

Shohreh: Seriously. Like, there were foods that I was like, "Oh. These are special foods that I can't have in my own home," and so when I go to other places that have them, I would just, like, over-eat the hell out of them because I knew that, when I went back to my home, I wouldn't have them anymore. And that is the problem with restricting and with saying like, "No. These foods, like, aren't allowed in our home" is because, like, your kids are going to find them anyways. And when they do, they're not going to know what to do with themselves. Like, they're going to have no self-control whatsoever.

Gina: Oh my gosh. Yeah. I was talking to a girlfriend the other day. And she was like, "I'm raising my kid on no sugar." And I was like, "Girl. You said that to the wrong person. Now we're going to have a conversation about this." And really, you know, kind of realizing, I was just like, "What do you think is going to happen when she goes to a party or a friend's house?" Like, the food is there. Food of all types is available. Kids are going to get their hands on it, just like you said.

So why not help them see that that is a food they can have just like all other foods and teach kids about nutrition, and what makes them grow strong, and what makes them feel good, and what tastes super yummy that we want to have for fun sometimes, and cultural aspects of food, and what family meals look like, and all sorts of the fun of food instead of this very black-and-white, or restrictive, or punishing idea about food.

Shohreh: Definitely. Division of responsibility is a great option for younger kids. And then, if you have teenagers-- I mean, obviously if they grew up eating intuitively, and they haven't had any issues, amazing. But of course, that's probably not going to be the case for most people. So if you have been restricting, and you have teenagers, how can you help them kind of get back to eating more intuitively?

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

Gina:

Yes. Teenagers are a different battleground for sure. No. I say battleground. That's probably not the right term, but I know it can feel that way for parents sometimes because, as teens, they start to individualize. So this is when they're going to start doing things to kind of test parents and kind of become their own person. So maybe political or maybe the music they listen to, you know? They're gonna try to do the things that the parents don't like.

And so if there are really, really strict rules around food, we're gonna see that rebellion come out quite a bit more, or on the opposite end, we might see that people-pleasing tend to come in where the child tries to do the perfect eating to please the parents. And that's all just kind of things that can happen around teenage years for sure.

But I think, at this age, you know, Ellyn Satter's definitely has some resources as well, but this is also where we can move into intuitive eating. And the initial book of intuitive eating written by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch is a great resource for parents or adults and for teens as well. But in addition, there's a new, which is an amazing, resource that we have. Elyse Resch wrote an intuitive eating workbook for teens, and it is just a beautiful workbook that targets teens directly on how to have an intuitive relationship with food if that has been disrupted. I recommend that resource to really any of my clients who are teenagers who are working on healing their relationship with food.

So that is definitely something to look into. If there's really, truly a disordered relationship with food, I think help from a professional: a therapist, dietitian, maybe personal trainer like yourself who specializes in intuitive eating to be a resource.

And I think something that can help more than anything else as a parent is to look at your own relationship with food. Teens are gonna do what they're gonna do, but they're also going to have the modeling of what you set up. So ideally, yes, you're setting this up from a young age, but if you already have teens, you know, think about how do you talk about your own body? How do you talk about food?

I have had several adult clients who say, "Oh. My kids don't see me dieting," or, "They don't know that I don't like my body because I never say anything about their bodies, and I don't say anything about my body in front of them." But kids and teens are so perceptive. They notice you stepping on the scale. They notice the way you carry yourself. They notice the way you eat even if you think you're doing it in secret or in a way that they're not gonna find out. I have had so many teen clients talk about the way their parents eat and the way their parents look at their bodies.

So I really think the main thing that you can do is look at your own relationship with food, get some of your own support to heal maybe any disordered relationship with food that you have, you know, not

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

weighing yourself, not having a scale in the house, not talking about foods as good or bad, not dieting or having dieting resources, like books, in the house.

And I say all of this with the, you know, utmost respect for parents trying to do the best that they know how. I mean, I grew up in a household where everything was fat-free. There were diet books and diet pills in the house.

And really, none of it was done in a shaming way. It was all done because my parents thought that's what was best. They were doing what they thought was healthy, and they wanted to raise healthy children, healthy kids. So I know parents are doing the best they can. And so this is not said in a shaming way. If you have a scale, if you talk negatively about your body, that it's your fault. It's really just part of the culture that you've been raised in. And that's a huge, huge thing you can do to change the relationship for your kids and teens and their relationship with food and body.

Shohreh: Yeah. I think that people forget that a bad relationship with food and body is something that can just easily get passed down in generations. I mean, I've had so many clients where the dieting and weight concerns that they're experiencing are things that their mom and their grandmothers experienced, you know? And so breaking that cycle can be really hard, but doing so ultimately is going to lead to happier and healthier kids.

Gina: Oh. 100 percent.

Shohreh: And I think you mentioned too, parents are just doing the best they can, right? So obviously, at the end of the day, parents really just want their kids to be healthy. But of course, we live in a culture where there is a misplaced emphasis on weight instead of health.

I mean, we even saw this with, like, Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" program. And I adore Michelle Obama, but the emphasis of that program wasn't literally like, "Let's move and eat healthier food." It was, "Let's attack," quote-unquote, "childhood obesity," which obviously is really othering for children who are in larger bodies.

So I wanted to ask you, do you think that parents should be concerned about weight, or do you think they should be focusing their energy and attention elsewhere to help their kids be healthy?

Gina: Oh. Such a good question. And I hope that, like, literally every parent in the world can hear you ask that question and get the answer to this because I think our focus on weight is ruining our children. Kids are not allowed to be kids anymore because so, so young, they're focusing on their bodies. And I really think that weight should be just taken out of the picture.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

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We live in a world where human bodies have body diversity. And what that means is that we have a variety of different sizes that are just natural and normal growth and development. And as adults, you see it as kids, there is just a variety of sizes for different humans.

And if we place focus on weight, what we tend to do is create shame and end up leading to a negative relationship with food and body whereas if we place the focus on maybe health behaviors, we can help kids grow up in a very, very healthy way.

And we think about, you know, Michelle Obama, as you were talking about. I do love her too. And that whole program, I think some of the focuses, like, "Let's get moving. Let's move our bodies and see what's fun, what's joyful. Let's get outside. Let's play. Let's eat a variety of foods, and let's eat the rainbow," and some of these different messages, when done in a way that isn't about weight, can have a huge impact on the health of the individuals in our community.

And so it's just such a shame that the focus is on weight when really, we don't have control of our weight. About 90 percent or so of our weight is pretty predetermined by genetics. And our weight does not actually dictate our health. So many other things are a picture of what makes up our health. Our sleep, our mental health, how we nourish ourselves, how we move our body, our community and support that we have, these are all the huge picture that adds up to our overall health, and weight is such a small, if any, impact on that. There are definitely some correlational studies, but it's not causation by any means.

Shohreh: I think that's really important to note because, obviously, there is so much fear-mongering out there about weight and health. And especially with children, this has become such a stigmatized thing. And like you said, it's leading to so much shame and blame on kids.

And the reality is, like, there's a whole lot of things that you can do to lose weight. But a lot of those things aren't necessarily healthy. And a lot of the things that parents are doing, ultimately, is putting kids on diets which, you know, leads us back to where we first started.

So if instead, just like Gina and I do with our adult clients, we take the focus away from weight, and we focus on, "Okay. What are health promoting behaviors that we can adopt?" regardless of what happens with the weight, health is improved. And that is the thing that really matters, and that should be the focus.

Gina: Absolutely. You know, if someone wants to pursue health, there are absolutely ways to do it that don't have anything to do with the shape or size of your body.

Shohreh: For sure. So we've covered many wonderful topics today. I'm sure there are going to be some parents out there who are going to want to delve deeper into this. We've mentioned several resources, but are

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

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there any other ones that come to mind or maybe even like Instagram accounts or anything like that that you really like that might help parents solidify some of the things we've talked about?

Gina: Absolutely. Yeah. So I know we talked about Ellen Satyr's website as well as the intuitive eating resources and the intuitive eating book. There's also a workbook for adults, so if you are a parent wanting to dive in a little bit for yourself, that might be an additional resource.

And then, I definitely can say, just for myself as an intuitive eating counselor and a dietitian, I think working with a professional, if this is something you're struggling with, it's just so, so helpful. There's just so many amazing dietitians out there, certified eating disorder, registered dietitians who really specialize in feeding children, feeding adults, you know, relationship and emotional relationship with food, and really helping parents target that if that's something they're more interested in.

Shohreh: Yeah. And there are a couple of accounts out there that I really like too. In particular, the Instagram account @feedinglittles is a really good one.

Gina: I was thinking of that one.

Shohreh: Yeah. That one's such a good one. And I really like Dana Suchow's Instagram as well which deals more with, like, body image and kids and, like, helping them grow up with better body image. And then, I'll give a shout out too to Austin-based Sex Positive Families which is a little bit of a different place, but also really, really important for raising healthy, well-adjusted kids.

Gina: Yes. And then, I will also mention Dr. Katja Rowell who specializes in more of selective eating and picky eating. She's The Feeding Doctor and really works more with picky eating or avoidant restrictive food intake disorders. So she's also a great resource and has a couple books more targeted towards if you're struggling with children with picky eating.

Shohreh: Oh. Good to know because I know that comes up a lot.

Gina: Yeah. Absolutely.

Shohreh: So as you mentioned, you just had your first baby. Congratulations, by the way.

Gina: Thank you.

Shohreh: So your life has changed a lot, I imagine, between the pregnancy and now having an infant in your house. So given all of that, how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Gina Mateer

- Gina:** Such a good question. I mentioned before, I think I've listened to all of your podcast episodes. And I love that you ask everyone this question because I think it's so great to see a plethora of different answers on what is considered, you know, health and wellness for individuals at different points in their life.
- And right now, mine is all about sleep hygiene. So my partner and I are constantly navigating who needs sleep and how are we going to get that. And I'm so lucky that my partner thrives with a little less sleep than I do. So I've been able to get a little more.
- I am super protective of that. And I find that sleep, you know, seriously impacts, not just physically how we feel, but also our mental well-being. I'll step back a little bit further and say just going into pregnancy and then the postpartum period, I was concerned a little bit about postpartum anxiety and depression and what that might look like because it is so common and so not talked about. We could have a whole other podcast episode about that.
- Shohreh:** Seriously.
- Gina:** So being very protective of my mental health by going to therapy regularly, getting support from friends and community and being really protective of my sleep has been my main focus. Trying to get outside and move my body a little bit in the sunshine because it's summer in Texas. It's also being good just to uplift mood and, you know, really give me some energy. But definitely sleep and mental health have been priorities.
- Shohreh:** That makes a lot of sense to me. Especially, again, you have an infant. Like, it's not like you can focus on every single area of health. So you kind of have to triage and be like, "Okay. What is the single thing that is gonna have the most impact?" And it definitely makes sense that sleep would be that thing.
- Gina:** Yes. And, you know, I definitely think that I want to raise a kid who has a parent who has the energy and emotional bandwidth to be super supportive and do all the lovely things I wanna do. And so I really got to focus on those areas right now.
- Shohreh:** Well, thank you so much for being here today, Gina. This is going to help so many parents. How can people find you and work with you?
- Gina:** Yeah. I know you'll put all of this in the show notes because my website is hard to say, but it's Nom-Nomaste. Nom-Nomaste is the name of my business, so it's nom-nomaste.com. I'm @nom_nomaste.llc on Instagram where I love posting lots of little tidbits about Health At Every Size, intuitive eating, and probably some more feeding children things going on as I'm raising my little one.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#15

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- Shohreh:** Perfect. And I know that you have now switched to a virtual practice. Is that correct?
- Gina:** That is correct. I return to my practice in October. And I'm gonna be working as a certified eating disorder registered dietitian in the state of Texas as well as doing intuitive eating coaching worldwide, virtually. And I would love to connect with anyone who feels like they need some additional support, especially in the family feeding area. It's definitely a passion area of mine right now but also, you know, adolescents/adults with eating disorders or just wanting to heal the relationship with food and their body.
- Shohreh:** Fantastic. Well, I know how hard it is to schedule things with a little kiddo so I really appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to make this happen today.
- Gina:** It was my pleasure.
- Shohreh:** Thanks.

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.