

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

Shohreh Davoodi: Welcome to episode #73 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. For many people, their past experiences with meal prep involved cooking up endless Tupperware containers of sad, flavorless meals as part of various diet and exercise programs. That's why I invited Talia Koren, the founder of Workweek Lunch, on the podcast to talk about how to prep your meals without the side of diet culture bullshit. Talia and I talked about different ways to approach meal preparation, how to foster curiosity and flexibility as part of meal planning and prepping, adding more flavor to your food, and more. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/73. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/73.

This podcast is brought to you in part by support from listeners like you! While this podcast is completely free to enjoy, the time, energy, and money that I put into crafting each episode is costly. Thankfully, there are multiple ways you can show your support to help the podcast continue to thrive in the months and years to come. Joining my Patreon community at shohrehdavoodi.com/patreon is the best way to offer ongoing financial support and get extra members-only perks in the process.

If you prefer a one-off contribution, you can tip me for my work through the payment links located at the bottom of the show notes for each episode. Lastly, even if you're unable to support the podcast financially, you can always subscribe, rate, review, and share it so that more people can find and benefit from the show. However you choose to invest in the podcast, thank you for believing in me and tuning in each week.

[Music plays]

Welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I'm your host and resident rainbow glitter bomb, Shohreh Davoodi. I started this project because I saw how black-and-white messaging about health harms

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

everyone, and I wanted to paint a more honest and vibrant picture. This podcast is a space where we can reimagine health together by confronting limiting misconceptions, delving into aspects of well-being that are often ignored, and prioritizing conversations with marginalized individuals. I encourage you to take what you need and leave behind what you don't. Are you ready for this? Let's fucking go!

Welcome to the show, Talia. How are you doing at uh, holding off the existential dread during these strange times?

Talia Koren: Thanks for having me on, and honestly, I'm just taking it one day at a time, probably like most everyone else. Just doing what I can, doing my best. You?

Shohreh: Ooh, yeah, I feel that. That's exactly my approach as well. I'm like, if I can just get to the end of each day and then we start over tomorrow.

Talia: Pretty much [laughter], yeah.

Shohreh: Well, I've been really looking forward to having you on the show because I work with a lot of clients on leaving behind diet culture and adopting intuitive eating, and what to eat and how to prepare it is always a huge topic of conversation and something that people really struggle with. But before we get into all of that, can you please just tell me a little bit more about you and how Workweek Lunch came to be?

Talia: Yeah, totally. So I'm Talia. I live in Seattle. I just moved here from New York. I started Workweek Lunch in 2016 as a blog and Instagram, just with the idea that I wanted to build a side income and business. I wanted to marry my love of cooking and my interest in business, and then Workweek Lunch was born. I'm not ashamed of the fact that I wanted to make money,

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

that was my main motivation of starting a business. But of course I wanted to help people too—

Shohreh: As it should be [laughs].

Talia: Yeah. It's kinda weird to say, but it's like, yeah, I just really wanted to diversify my income. And at the time I was working at Elite Daily as a health writer, and I was a big part of the problem of diet culture, putting out articles like, "Are avocados gonna make you bloat," [laughter] and just like, kind of like trash!

Shohreh: Yep.

Talia: It was really bad. And at the time while writing I was like, this is not good, I'm not really contributing to society in the way that I want. So I think through the journey of working at Elite Daily, pumping out these articles every day, and cooking, I kind of realized that I wanted to focus on intuitive eating with Workweek Lunch. It did start as a clean eating type of thing. Not weight loss, not, you know, crazy dieting. Definitely like a meal prep helps you, could help you lose weight kind of thing.

But then I quickly did pivot, did like a 180 away from that two years into it when I discovered Food Psych and intuitive eating. I was like, oh, you know what, this is what I've been feeling. That was what I was feeling when I was at Elite Daily. That's what I was feeling when I was restricting all of my food and trying to be the smallest version of myself. It's wrong!

I guess in the process of having Workweek Lunch, talking with my community, building these products, I eventually ended up at this meal plan subscription that is the only one that is not for weight loss. It's been quite a journey.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

- Shohreh:** Yeah, I think that Food Psych was a pivot point for a lot of us, myself included [laughter], so that is not an unusual story.
- Talia:** Yeah, what a powerful podcast and resource Christy Harrison's created.
- Shohreh:** Yeah, I mean, without that podcast, probably this podcast wouldn't exist, so I think so many of us are grateful to her for the amazing work that she has done over the years and the awesome people that she's spoken to. And I love that Workweek Lunch is, to your knowledge, the only meal prep service that doesn't have a weight loss focus. And that doesn't surprise me at all because for most people, you know, meal prepping is thought of as being a more dieting thing, which we are going to talk about.
- Talia:** Yeah.
- Shohreh:** But first, I just want to ask you, like, how do you define meal prep and why do you think it's such a valuable practice?
- Talia:** Yeah, great question. I define it as getting organized with food to get more out of your life, whether that's more time because you're not cooking dinner every night, more money because you're not spending so much on takeout, or just more brain space because you've already decided ahead of time what you're gonna eat for lunch or dinner. So it looks different for a lot of us, but that's kind of what meal prep is to me. It's so valuable because there is just a lot you can get out of it.
- Shohreh:** Yeah, and as I kind of alluded to, for a lot of people, meal prep is practically synonymous with diet culture. I think especially people who got really into clean eating—and I'm raising my own hand here because that was me many years ago—or Whole30, or the whole “strong is the new skinny” type messaging. We all have very terrible memories of sad, sad Tupperware meals.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

Talia: Oh yeah.

Shohreh: So, from like a mindset perspective, how can people shift away from seeing meal prep as a diet culture trigger and instead start to see it as something that can fit into a diet-free life?

Talia: Yeah, I would say, meal prep, it's thinking about it as it's filling in the gaps. It's in a way anticipating your needs as a human. You know, we all have to eat a few times a day probably. If you know it's gonna happen, it's just a matter of making, like, I would say, home-cooked foods just as a more seamless part of your day-to-day. Versus stopping everything you're doing and cooking and it's like a whole thing and a whole production and cleaning and it makes people not want to cook.

Like with intuitive eating, you can't ignore the gentle nutrition factor of just like, hey you know what, eating a home-cooked meal can be a great way to invoke childhood memories, connect with other people, and of course, fill your body with nutrients [laughs]. So I'd say that framing meal prep that way in your mind of like, I'm killing a bunch of birds with one stone, I'm anticipating my needs, I'm going to be fueling my body with foods that I enjoy and they're probably gonna help things run smoothly.

I try not to overthink it. It gets really dangerous. People are like counting macros or making sure that they have a fat, and a carb, and a protein in their containers. It doesn't have to be so complicated. So I think that's kind of where the line is. It's like, you're prepping meals you are looking forward to. It doesn't have to be, like, a perfectly organized, balanced thing every time.

Shohreh: Oh my gosh, that is a conversation I have with clients so often because I feel like that is one of the most pervasive messages from diet culture is

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

that we have to micromanage our food down to the meal in terms of the calories, the macros, making sure it's perfectly balanced. There's all these messages about how it's supposed to look like that. And I really have to explain to clients, I'm like, look, from a biological perspective, if we had to balance our meals like that, we would be dead. We would be dead because we wouldn't be able to survive in the wild as humans if that was required for us to be healthy and happy people. You don't have to do that [laughs].

Talia: Yeah. I always say over and over, like, trust that your body will figure it out. That's kind of what I tell myself when I'm in situations where my diet culture thoughts are flaring up, especially with upcoming holidays. It's like, hey, if you're gonna eat differently day-to-day, like, my body will figure it out. So just trust that. So that's kind of how I get away from micromanaging what's in my meal prep containers.

Shohreh: And I want to honor too that if you have been dieting for a long time, of course that is easier said than done. This is something that takes practice to get to a point where you feel like you can trust your body, but that is the ultimate goal, is working towards being able to trust what your own body is telling you. Because your body is super fucking smart and it will be able to balance things out. You don't need a recipe sheet or instructions from a diet to make sure you're getting the exact right number of fats, proteins, and carbs, even though that's what diet culture tells us.

Talia: And the other piece of framing meal prep in a way that is not dieting is knowing that it's not all or nothing. You can just meal prep snacks, a couple of snacks, or you could just do dinners. You can just do a breakfast one day and a lunch another day.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

I think people immediately approach meal prep as like, okay, I have to do this every single week, I have to prep every single meal from Monday to Friday. It's like no, you just fill in the gaps. That's how I think about it. Just, I'm gonna probably want some dinners, I'm probably gonna have some nights where I just wanna plop on the couch and not do anything. But that might not be every night, and I leave a lot of meals open.

Shohreh:

That's a great segue because I think that's something that people really struggle with when it comes to meal prep is that it can be a flexible thing because so often it's talked about as being very inflexible. So what are your recommendations for people who like to have a lot of variety, for instance, and they have a strong negative reaction to the idea of eating the same thing all week, or on the other side of that, like, people who are down to meal prep, but they don't know what to do when all of a sudden they're not feeling the food that they prepped for the week?

Talia:

Oh yeah, there's so many strategies. I'll talk about, like, the three easiest ones to kind of approach it. I'd say the first one, for the variety thing that's a huge issue, that's where you want to do maybe a buffet meal prep, which is like when you're just doing batches of greens, and proteins, and vegetables, or whatever, and you're building meals as you go. So like, if you prep a batch of ground meat, you can turn that into so many different things throughout the week, but you don't have to cook the ground meat every time. So it's like, that's one way to approach the variety thing.

Another thing that I like to do is when I'm making batch meals, I like to freeze a few portions so that then when I have hit a week where I can't cook or I don't feel like it, I just have a bunch of freezer meals that are all different. Like a hodge-podge of things that I've prepped over the last few weeks. So I get to have like a bunch of variety that way.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

And the third thing is also not prepping for the whole week. This, you know, goes back to what I said earlier. I only prep for half of the week and then things come up, like maybe my partner wants to go and get pizza one night, or maybe I'm just not hungry and I want to just eat a bowl of cereal. You can then easily just push things to the next day and you don't have to be locked in.

Shohreh: Yeah, so there's all these different options of how to do this in a way that feels good. The buffet meal prep made me laugh because—I'm actually vegetarian, so for me it would be like ground tofu or something like that, but—I was thinking about, well here in Texas for the different meals I would make tacos, and then I would make nachos, and then I would make lettuce wraps [laughs]. All different versions of the same delicious salsa happiness.

Talia: Yeah, it sounds delicious, and it's just enough to get the variety you need, you know? It doesn't have to be wildly different every night.

Shohreh: Yeah, and I think the other thing too, especially because we've been talking about diet culture, is that these meals don't have to be sad and depressing. Like, this isn't the meals of chicken breast and unseasoned broccoli. You can meal prep tasty things.

Talia: Yes, and that's something that we focus a lot on. My job is really just to make meals that people love meal prep-friendly. I'll take anything and I'll just figure out a way to make it so that they can prep it ahead of time. So we have hundreds of different recipes and it's so not the chicken, broccoli, rice. No. Nope! [Laughs]

Shohreh: Unless you like that, in which case good for you, but a lot of people don't want to eat that every week for months on end.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

Talia: Oh yeah. I mean, I guess I'm okay eating the same thing every day, and for me, my go-to is always salmon, broccoli, sweet potatoes. That's my version of that. Kind of boring, but I love it every single time [laughs]. So there is room for that. But it's different when you want it and you're not forcing yourself to eat it.

Shohreh: Right, exactly. I think that's often the hard thing for people is they're like, well, I'm worried I'm gonna waste food because I'm gonna prep these meals and then I prefer to have a lot of variety, so I'm gonna get to day two and then I'm gonna look at that food and I'm gonna be like, ugh, disgusting, I don't want this, and then it's like, why did I spend all that time meal prepping.

Talia: Yeah, I've been there, and honestly, I always have those moments when there's something in my life that is happening that's emotional. Like if I'm in a conflict with a family member or there's a work stress, I have no appetite, and that totally happens to me and it's normal. That's again, why I always recommend people don't prep for every single meal because then there is that flexibility. And if you're prepping freezer-friendly things, you can just chuck it in the freezer and forget about it until like a month later [laughs].

Shohreh: I'm all about the freezer-friendly things because it's just so nice to make something that was delicious and then be like, oh, I have another portion of this waiting for me when I have nothing here in the pantry.

Talia: Exactly!

Shohreh: Are there ways that people can sort of ease into meal prep so that it's more likely to be sustainable for the long-term versus just being like, alright, now I'm prepping everything, here we go.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

Talia: Yes. Trust me, there are so many people that I have in my community that just dive in full force having never done it and they love it, but I didn't start that way. I started with just three lunches every single week for work, you know, back when I went into work [laughs].

Shohreh: Right!

Talia: It feels like such a foreign concept now. But I would just prep burrito bowls or my salmon dish that I mentioned earlier. That was enough to feel the benefits, especially financially, which is the reason I started meal prepping in the first place. I was buying this salmon, broccoli, sweet potato thing at Dig Inn, if you're familiar—in New York City it's like a chain—and it was like 13 bucks a pop. So even just doing these three lunches at home, I felt the benefit.

So you don't have to go all in to have more brain space, have more time in the evenings, save money, and all that stuff. You could just go in with like, just one meal on a weekend, one batch meal that you eat a few times throughout the week, and you'll feel a lot better. And just start there.

Shohreh: Yeah, when you were talking about that place in New York, I was thinking about a place in Austin called Snap Kitchen, that I used to go to when I was an attorney and I would need to pick up meals. And there was a period of time where I would be like, alright, well let me just get some meals there. And it's like, you'd pay like 12 bucks for a meal that was not a meal-sized portion, you know? You'd eat it and you'd be like, cool, I am still so hungry, like what even was the point of that [laughs].

Talia: Yeah. Or, well for me, it was actually always too much. I did not feel good after eating some of these meals to be honest, and maybe I just have a more sensitive stomach—at the time at least I did, I think—and I just was

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

like, ugh, I always feel really bad after eating this, and I felt much better just doing it at home. I was like, wow, okay, I can do the same thing that I've been paying this much money for at home, and save and feel better.

Shohreh: Yeah, 'cause the overlap there, of course, is that someone else is choosing the portions. Someone else is deciding what goes into the food. And then there's a good chance it's not gonna be satisfying, you're gonna eat too much, and it's just like not gonna be what you actually want.

Talia: Yeah. And again, of course, if you're eating too much, it's not a bad thing. It's just like, if you're noticing discomfort day after day, like hey, maybe this is something to look into.

Shohreh: Right exactly.

Talia: Like I definitely eat past fullness all the time consciously, it's fine, but back then I was not. I screwed with my ability to concentrate at work and stuff, so I had to change something.

Shohreh: And I always talk to people about how it's about being intentional about it, right? Like if you're constantly finding that you are overly full and feeling crappy, but you don't quite know how you got there, you're like, wait a minute, how did I get to this point [laughs]—

Talia: Yeah, exactly.

Shohreh: —that's the red flag of like, well let me look at this and figure out what's going on here because that means there's some kind of disconnect and lack of awareness happening while you're eating.

Talia: The same approach is used for meal prepping if you're starting. I always recommend people come in with that curiosity mindset of, okay, I ate this meal prep, how do I feel? Here's what was in my container, was it enough?

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

Am I hungry after? Like these are not bad or negative things. It doesn't mean you should stop or it doesn't mean you made a mistake. It's just like, how can I make this more satisfying, how can I meet my needs better next time?

Because there is no exact science, and people always ask me, "How much do you know how to put in your containers?" And I'm like, you have to figure that out on your own with trial and error because it's different for everyone and it's gonna be different every day, every week. There's so many factors.

Shohreh:

Thank you for mentioning curiosity mindset. We're all about that here. All about that exploration. Because some of it really is just trial and error. People are like, I should just get this perfectly on the first try, and I'm like, when in life does that happen? It's very rare, especially when you're trying to get to know your body and what it needs and you've been told your whole life that your body can't be trusted. It's gonna take time to figure out, alright, what is a portion for me and what are the different things that affect that?

Because I've had clients ask me before, alright, can you give me some indicator of what a good portion size might be? And I'm like, I'd need to ask you like 50 questions for that because I'm like, I need to know are you on your period? Have you exercised in the last 24 hours? How much water have you had? You know what I mean?

Talia:

Yeah.

Shohreh:

It's like, this kind of introspection that people just want the answer, which I think is why meal prep is really popular in general in the dieting crowds because it's like, you don't have to think about it. Here's what to do, just

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

eat this and this portion and you'll be fine. It's like, but that ignores so much stuff, including your own hunger, and your needs, and your schedule.

Talia: Yeah. Oh my god, you're totally right. And we really emphasize customization in my recipes. So when I give them recipes, I'm like, here's how to make it a little smaller, here's how to add more volume, here's what vegetables to use if you don't have asparagus. We throw every option at them so that they really can choose based on that week, or that day, what they're feeling, what they're needing.

Shohreh: Mmm, I love that. I think that's so helpful because again, everyone has a different palate, right? One of my favorite things about cooking is that through practice and doing it over time, I've kind of learned, well, what are my own tastes? What kind of seasoning do I want, do I need it spicier, do I need it less, do I want to trade out ingredients? And you truly cannot figure that stuff out until you're actually doing it.

Talia: Yes, and it's so much more empowering to be in the kitchen and making these decisions when you're out of the diet mindset because you're no longer like, oh, is this bad? Is this good? You're like, do I like this?

Shohreh: Does it taste good?

Talia: Yeah. Is this a risk I wanna take? [laughs] Am I gonna dump in this hot chili pepper? You know, it's more fun, it's playful. And when you're in the diet mindset, there's too much at stake and it's stressful.

Shohreh: It literally feels like it's life or death because that's what you're told. You're told, like, if you don't eat in this exact way, you're just working yourself into an early grave. I'm like, this is ludicrous.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

Talia: I definitely did most of my healing through cooking in my process from healing from diet culture.

Shohreh: It's funny because I sometimes will talk to clients or people on social media about what are some of the good things that came to you from dieting, which is sort of a flip because so often we focus on, alright, well let's focus on all of the bad things that dieting brought into your life. And I think that's awesome, but I also think that something that we don't look at as much is that yeah, dieting can do a lot of really terrible things for us, for our mindset, *and* a lot of times we do learn things that are helpful from it.

Like the reason I learned how to cook as well as I have is because I did clean eating for a period of time and then I was like hardcore vegan for a period of time, and the only way I was gonna be able to eat is if I learned how to do it myself. And so I've tried to see that as a positive that came out of that, even though it's not something I would ever want to go back to.

Obviously, I wish I could have learned those things outside of diet culture, but if I had to be in diet culture, I sure did learn a lot about my own tastes, and ingredients, and cooking, and that's something I've been able to keep with me even though I'm not doing the dieting thing anymore.

Talia: That's so great. I'm glad you had that experience because I think that for some people, when they start making the transition to intuitive eating, the kitchen becomes kind of a scary place because again, they don't know what to eat or what to cook. And it's like, what do I put in my skillet this time? What is allowed? What's not allowed? It can get really messy in the beginning.

Shohreh: I think a lot of people struggle with too is trying to neatly categorize foods. So I'll have clients who struggle with like, well, I think I want a salad, but if I

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

eat this salad, does that mean that I'm dieting? And kind of trying to navigate through that can be really tough at first too.

Talia: Yes, absolutely. I definitely went through a lot of that, especially with baking [laughs]. That was my big one because with meal prep you do a lot of muffins and stuff because they prep so well and they freeze well and all, so it took me a while to get comfortable with going back to using sugar. But then also, sometimes I did just want to use a replacement that would have been in a diet recipe because that's what I had. And I'm like, am I going back to diet culture because I'm using coconut sugar [laughs] because I have it, instead of sugar, you know? But sometimes it's just what you have and then you just have to go with it.

Shohreh: Yeah, if you can learn to see all ingredients as neutral and just choose to use them because you want to or you have them on hand, that's how you get out of that power of diet culture where you just say, this is a food, this is an ingredient, and I'm gonna use it for the reason that I choose, not because it's supposedly better, or healthier, or more pure.

Talia: Exactly!

Shohreh: Another thing that I know people struggle with when it comes to meal prep is the proliferation of posts on social media that are like, here's what I eat in a day. And I feel like they definitely create this pressure to compare yourself and conform your eating according to this person. Do you have any thoughts for how people can kind of keep their focus on their own plates when they're doing this?

Talia: Yeah. I actually am someone who posts those, but I do it in a distinct way that's like, don't eat what I eat, this is literally just what I'm eating today. And I even say like, this isn't even what I eat in a day, this is what I

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

photographed on the day that I had all these meals [laughs]. Like I just had them all in my fridge and I laid them out on this backdrop and I photographed it. I don't think I even ate all of this in a day, you know? Like I'm very transparent about that. I always try to check myself before posting those. Like are people going to compare themselves to me? How can I share this?

So I think that when people do encounter these "what I eat in a day" content, like videos, posts, reels, TikToks, whatever they are, I would say look at the meals as ideas. That's how I approach it. These could be new ideas for you that could inspire you in the kitchen. That's it. Like kind of breaking it down that way, does that make sense?

Shohreh: Mmhmm.

Talia: So that's my advice for that. Just stripping away the comparison and just being like, what's on this person's plate? Would I eat that? Does that appeal to me? Should I try to do my own version of this? It's a much more neutral way.

Shohreh: Yeah, it's going back to that exploration of like what can you gain from this and is it helpful for you because the reality is, if you look at something that someone is eating and you're like, wow, that sounds disgusting, yeah, definitely you probably don't want to prep that for yourself [laughs].

Talia: Yeah, totally. And I still get comments on my posts that are like, I get two camps. It's like, that's it? Or, that's for like four people! [laughter] And it just goes to show that, I don't know, you're not the one eating it, why is this comment necessary? [laughs] Like, this is what I'm eating, leave me alone!

Shohreh: Yeah, it's like nobody can have a clear view into your life and your needs for your body, but unfortunately, again, we live in this world where there's

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

this idea that everybody should eat the same and that's the way to do it. And then the problem, of course, is that everybody's idea of what that standard is is different. So that's why you have these different comments of people who are very confused.

Talia: Oh yeah. It's pretty funny at this point to be honest.

Shohreh: Yeah, I can only imagine what it's like for you because you're running, essentially, like a meal prep account where of course you're gonna be posting food pictures, and then you have people coming across it who don't know what you're all about who are getting kind of triggered into it by their own diet thinking [laughs].

Talia: They're like, where are the macros? Where are the calories? I'm like, we don't do that here, [laughs], sorry. You know? And then my core community, they always laugh. They're like, you have to talk about this every day because I have new people coming every day.

Shohreh: Oh my god, that's so true. That reminds me of like, whenever I'm going to look at new recipes online and I'll scroll into the comments to just hear from people who have made it to see if they liked it, and there's always comments from people who are like, "Um, excuse me, can you tell me the calories? I need the Weight Watchers points." And I'm like, this is not their job to give you these things. Go figure it out yourself [laughter].

Talia: This, really...but here's the thing about recipes and calorie counts, and this is the truth—it's impossible, like if I was a blogger that had calorie counts on my recipes, it's impossible for you to make it at home with the exact measurements, the exact brands, the exact ingredients, and have the same result. It's impossible. You're gonna change stuff. You buy different brands and things that are different calories.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

I don't see the point, honestly, of putting the calories in recipes. We know that even on packaging, it's like, there's a 20-30% margin where it's like incorrect. So I just don't understand the point of adding calories to recipes, honestly.

Shohreh: Yeah, and it's funny too because again, people think it's this very simple like, calories in, calories out calculation. And it's like, the way your own body uses those calories is different from how other people those calories. That's why when you get these calorie counts on a Fitbit or an Apple Watch for instance, those aren't the pinnacle of accuracy. In fact, they're based on numbers from labs. But you're a real person out in the real world, so when we put all this stock into these calorie numbers, whether it's in a recipe, or on a package, or on our Apple watch, it's just setting us up to be depressed because it's not accurate.

Talia: I didn't know that.

Shohreh: Yes!

Talia: Oh my god, I didn't even know that about Fitbit, and I didn't think about how different bodies burn calories differently. That's crazy and fascinating. My philosophy has always been, if there are vegetables on my plate, I really don't need to worry about anything [laughter]. And also, if there aren't vegetables on my plate, I probably don't need to worry either.

Shohreh: Because eventually you're gonna eat some.

Talia: Yeah, exactly.

Shohreh: I like that, 'cause it's like you create your own standards and ideas of what works for you outside of these other things. And that actually reminds me that a lot of people too, I think when they first are coming out of diet

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

culture and they're trying to get into feeding themselves, there is really this baffling question of, well, how the heck do I decide what to eat without someone else telling me what I should eat and what I should shop for? How do I navigate the grocery store without this special list of exactly what I'm supposed to do?

Talia: Oh man!

Shohreh: And obviously I know that Workweek Lunch is designed to help people with that, but outside of that and in general, what are your suggestions for people who are just like, what the hell do I eat?

Talia: Yeah, this is where the principle of intuitive eating of like challenge the food police comes into play. Like when you're in the grocery store and you're looking at things in packages or things that diet culture has deemed unhealthy, that's when you want to be challenging your inner food police. So like why would I not want to put this in my cart? It's useful, it's practical, it's probably delicious. That's just one angle.

But in terms of deciding what to eat also, I recommend people think about what they order at restaurants, think about their favorite takeout meals, and start there because you can probably recreate it or some version of it at home. There's a recipe for everything. Like even if you have the most random ingredients in your fridge right now, I bet you could find a recipe for it online. So that's where I recommend people start when they're like, what do I eat? What do you order at restaurants? What do you like at takeout places?

Shohreh: Ooh, that's a really good idea. I'm a big Pinterest person, so I spend a lot of time looking for recipes on there. And y'all, copycat recipes are a thing,

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

and they can be really great. Like last year I was looking for a copycat version of Olive Garden's Zuppa Toscana recipe.

Talia: Oh, that's a big one! That's a really popular one.

Shohreh: It is. And I was specifically looking for a vegan/vegetarian version of it, and not only did I find one, but it is the best soup that I've ever had in my life. I think it's better than the restaurant version, and I make it all the time—

Talia: Amazing.

Shohreh: —during the colder months of the year. I'm absolutely obsessed with it. So it's like, yeah, that's a wonderful place to start. If you know there are things that you like at restaurants, just start typing that into Google, or Pinterest, or other recipe finders and seeing if you can find copycats.

Talia: Yeah, that's how I started developing my own meal prep system was like with the Dig Inn thing I mentioned earlier and Chipotle with like, I can make this at home, and that's where I started and it worked out really well.

Shohreh: I also have clients sometimes, I mean, we're in the pandemic right now so people aren't spending as much time in grocery stores, but pre-pandemic I would often have clients go to the grocery store and literally just walk around, up and down all the aisles, all of the sections and just look at the stuff. Kind of like what you were saying, of just like, what looks interesting to you? What looks good? What's a food that maybe you used to love as a kid but you haven't let yourself eat recently? And just kind of see what's there. And that can generate a lot of ideas of different things to try too.

It's all an experiment. It's just like being like, do I still like this? Do I not? Because sometimes you try a food and you're like, well, this was great when I was a kid and now it tastes disgusting to me.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

Talia: Yes!

Shohreh: And other times, like me and Lucky Charms, you're like, oh, I still have a love affair with this and I need to buy it at least once a month.

Talia: Love it! Yeah, for sure. I would say the hardest transition for me was reading recipes and then going and buying, like, breadcrumbs, or things that weren't gluten-free, [laughs] and things that had real butter and dairy in them, you know. I had to kind of force myself at the beginning to just buy them and not worry.

Shohreh: If you're not a big cooking person, it does take time to sort of start stocking up a pantry of typical cooking things, but the reality is, it's like once you buy those items once, especially something like breadcrumbs or whatever, they tend to last for a long time through a lot of different meals.

Talia: Oh yeah!

Shohreh: So, it's a helpful thing to have. But yeah, I get it, at first people are like, ugh, this is so weird to buy all these ingredients when you're not used to doing that.

Talia: Yeah. I grew up with a family, or, one of my family members has been a clean eating person forever, so when I was building my own pantry—I moved out, I had my own home—it was really weird for me to buy certain things. I felt like I could hear this person's voice in my head being like, "Oh, it's so processed," and that was just really hard in the beginning [laughs].

Shohreh: Yes, those food police voices always in there trying to tell us what to do. Because we are talking about cooking, I also feel like we should talk about flavor enhancers because I feel like a lot of people just, maybe, I'm going to call out white folx who have maybe not learned how to flavor their food

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

growing up [laughs]. I'm Iranian, so I grew up with very seasoned food, and I was always surprised when I'd go to people's houses and they'd have salt and pepper as the only things in their home. So what are some of your favorite ways to make foods taste better?

Talia:

Oh my god. First of all, I just wanna say, I am very envious of people who have these strong cooking backgrounds because I definitely was in a family, I have a vegetarian mother and a meat and potatoes father, who's from Israel, but still, doesn't cook. So I didn't have this cooking background. And my grandparents are Jewish, so I would say Jewish cooking is not necessarily the most flavorful, but there's a lot of heart in it [laughter]. I really enjoy it, but I don't really think flavor when I think about it. I'm always really jealous of people who come from these families and are used to ingredients that add a ton of flavor.

But to answer your question, I would say to start small with, like I would say fill your fridge door pantry, right? Everyone has a fridge door pantry. You have your ketchup, your mustard, your mayo, whatever else. But then you're gonna want to throw in some other things. I think some of the best flavor enhancers I use are oyster sauce, chili garlic sauce—I love the Asian cooking—miso paste.

Shohreh:

Miso, yes! I love miso.

Talia:

Yeah, miso paste is a big one. Like, man, that stuff is so good in so many different things. I always use fresh garlic, but people definitely like to use the pre-chopped garlic and that could be great. Dijon mustard is excellent in dressings and sauces, can add, even in mac and cheese, it just adds a punch to a lot of different things. So those are just a couple of ingredients that I would say to start small, and they're all very versatile and a lot of

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

recipes call for them. So, I don't know. What are yours? What are your flavor enhancers?

Shohreh:

I definitely use miso a lot, that's a favorite. I'm a big seasoning person, so I literally have, like, The Container Store, like on my pantry door, the racks. I mean, I probably have 50 different seasonings that are in alphabetical order that I use a lot. So I love that kind of stuff. I like vanilla if I'm baking. Mmm, so delicious. I think too people forget about butters and oils and all the different flavors that those can bring in. And again, because a big part of that is sort of the diet culture idea of oh, that's going to add fat and it's so bad. And I'm like no, it's gonna give your food flavor, which we want. It makes it taste better and make you want to eat it.

Talia:

Yes, and on that note, there's a reason why butter and sugar are so great. Sugar in recipes, especially savory recipes, does a lot for a dish, and I'd only realized that when I started taking cooking classes. Like how important just regular sugar can be in savory cooking even. And the idea that I've been leaving it out this whole time and ignoring the sugar, just not buying sugar, I feel like I've kind of lost out on some flavor in my earlier years because of it.

So in the process of testing tons of recipes over the years, I've learned that there is a lot of value in just using regular sugar, regular butter, and flour, if you can, unless of course you're allergic to gluten and need to use all-purpose gluten-free, that's ideal. Rather than, you know, trying to piece together different almond flour and coconut flour. Like all these other "clean substitutes" can really screw up baking and cooking in a lot of different ways. So I'd say regular flour, regular butter, regular sugar are just so reliable, and I'm really happy I've embraced them and I hope other people can too.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

Shohreh: And again, sometimes substitutes are great and there's a wonderful reason to use them, and, it's like, a lot of times when the substitute is just because this one is "bad" and this one is "better," it does not yield the same results. And I know for me personally, baking was kind of like the last frontier of diet culture that I had to conquer because I...like seriously! [laughs] This honestly was, true story, more of a pandemic thing for me.

Talia: Oh wow.

Shohreh: Because I had been letting myself eat anything I want for years, but what I didn't realize is that I hadn't been baking all of that time. And it wasn't like a purposeful choice. I wasn't like, you cannot bake, baking is bad. It's more that it was just something that I had gotten so used to of like, oh no, we don't bake at home. We can eat whatever we want elsewhere, but we don't need to bake. And then the pandemic comes around, of course a lot of people get back into baking, myself included. And I remembered how much I fucking love it, and how fun it is to bake treats and give them away to friends.

And I was like, wow, I think this was like a subconscious diet culture thing that was still stuck in my brain, trying to tell me that oh yeah, you don't need to bake at home. Because I'm like, yeah, I can make cookies if I want to, or I can make a cake if I want to, and use sugar and flour and all of these things. So I really upped my baking stores. I have a wonderful sprinkle collection—

Talia: Love it! Ooh!

Shohreh: —from Fancy Sprinkles. Huge plug for that brand. They're amazing and they also have tons of vegan sprinkles for those who prefer to have those. But yeah, so that was a really joyful exploration for me, where it's like,

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

sometimes these little diet culture things, they're stuck in your brain, you don't even realize it until you have a reason to get out of it.

Talia: I have actually a really random one in the same vein. I thought cornstarch was bad for years for some reason. But it's an important ingredient in Asian cooking. Like, for sauces, it's like, I can't believe I was making my life so much harder and eating these gross stir fries because I wasn't using cornstarch in the sauce, which thickens it and gives it that nice mouth feel and stickiness. Cornstarch is used to speed up that process rather than just sitting at the stove and using heat to thicken the sauce. So that was a really big one for me [laughter].

Shohreh: Yeah, the demonization of corn is fascinating [laughter].

Talia: I know, oh my god.

Shohreh: So tasty. Yeah, I feel like I used, god, maybe tapioca flour for a long time in place of cornstarch for that reason.

Talia: Oh my god, yeah, it's not quite gonna do the same thing, but it's like, okay fine. If that was the only thing left on the shelf so that's what you have to use, like fine, but man, I'm so happy I embraced cornstarch [laughter].

Shohreh: Oh my gosh, me too. Yes, cornstarch is so good. Aw man, this has been wonderful, Talia. If you could leave people with just a couple of your top meal prep tips that could make a big difference for them, what might some of those be?

Talia: I would say to have an open mind, be playful, take the pressure off yourself, and just be like a scientist in the kitchen. Experiment with what works for you and know that you can try again every single week or you

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

can take breaks—it's really up to you. I would say if you are a person who is putting all this pressure on yourself, it's not gonna be fun.

Oh, and speaking of fun, here's how to actually make prep fun for yourself, ready? You want to get comfy clothes on when you're doing your cooking session. You wanna have your favorite beverage, depending on the time of day, if you wanna bust out the wine, you wanna get a kombucha, or coffee, or whatever else—

Shohreh: Psh. We will mimosa in the morning, ma'am.

Talia: There you go, mimosa in the morning, whatever you want, that also makes it really fun. Get out an audiobook or a podcast like this one while you're chopping and prepping. These are just some of the things I do every single week to make it relaxing and fun for myself, and people in my community love these tips. So definitely try that.

Shohreh: Those are great ideas 'cause I know one of the things that people have a problem with with meal prepping is they're like, ugh, but I really don't wanna give up a piece of my weekend to do this.

Talia: I binge watch so much TV while cooking. And I listen to so many books. I would say you don't have to lose out on that. [Laughs]

Shohreh: I am the same way. I love putting on TV when I'm cooking 'cause it's like, you know, there's those shows that you don't have to watch them every second of them. I like to put on, amusingly, cooking shows while I'm cooking. So I'll put on Great British Bake Off while I'm making my own stuff.

Talia: Yes, that's the best one.

Shohreh: It is the best one.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

- Talia:** Yeah, that's a really good one. I miss MasterChef, I hope it comes back soon because that's also a good one.
- Shohreh:** I love that. I love this idea of, we want to make this fun, we want to make it something that you can look forward to as opposed to something that you dread. And again, if you're making food that you like and that is actually tasty, that's also gonna be a really motivating factor versus, ah yes, time to make my sad, sad meals for the week.
- Talia:** Yeah [laughs], no. No sad meals for the week. Only ones you look forward to.
- Shohreh:** Exactly. Alright, for our final question which I ask to all of my guests, how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?
- Talia:** Health and wellness for me means treating my body and having a day-to-day routine in a way that allows me to live the life I really wanna live in the moment. Like right now that is just showing up at work every day and being my best focused self because we have a lot going on. Other times that could be setting my health and wellness routine stuff in a way that allows me to go hiking and engage in outdoors activities more. So it's kind of being able to adjust based on what I really want to be doing in my life at that time.
- Shohreh:** Yeah, so it's that same flexibility that you were talking about in meal prep.
- Talia:** Yeah, exactly.
- Shohreh:** Awesome! Well, thank you so much for being here. How can people find you and support the awesome work that you're doing?
- Talia:** Thanks so much. I really love talking about this stuff, thank you so much for all your work that you do and all the time that you put into this. People can

Redefining Health & Wellness

#73

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Talia Koren

find me at www.workweeklunch.com and my Instagram is @workweeklunch. We have tons of free recipes and resources for you to try. You don't have to be a part of our subscription to use our meal prep resources.

Shohreh: And I believe that y'all have a seven-day free trial, right, for people who wanna try it out?

Talia: Yeah, we have a seven-day free trial for the Workweek Lunch Meal Prep Program, so you can find information on that on our website.

Shohreh: Awesome. I will put links to all of that in the show notes so it's really easy for people to find. I so appreciate you coming on here, talking about meal prepping because I feel like this is one of those topics that people are like, argh, how can we do this and still do intuitive eating, and I saw that you were doing it so well. So I'm glad we got to have this conversation.

Talia: Yay! Thank you so much. I'm so excited to share this.

Shohreh: And that's our show for today! If this podcast has taught you anything or helped you in any way, I hope you'll consider supporting me in my effort to keep it going. You can join my Patreon community and receive members-only perks by going to shohrehdavoodi.com/Patreon, or you can tip me for my work through the payment links located at the bottom of the show notes for each episode. I would also encourage you to subscribe and submit a rating and review through your podcast provider of choice. I love hearing from listeners, so feel free to screenshot from your podcast player, post on social media, and tag me. Finally, if you're looking for more information on what I'm all about and how to work with me directly, head over to shohrehdavoodi.com. Hope to see you for the next episode.