

Nancy Cooper: Hi, it's Dr. Nancy. I'm coming to you almost live. We had a schedule change so I'm gonna go ahead and we're gonna record this today and I'm with Rachel Bennett, and she's a recent graduate of Bastyr University naturopathic school which is out in Seattle, Washington is it? Is that right?

Rachel Bennett: Yes.

Nancy Cooper: Anyway, Rachel's gonna talk to us today about stress and managing it and making decisions about life. She's very interesting so far from when I've talked to her, so go ahead, Rachel, and share with us what you'd like to talk about today.

Rachel Bennett: Hello, so I gave a talk at the women's conference for naturopathic medicine in November about stress management and whenever I talk about stress management, I like to talk about the nervous system and how we try to find balance in that fight or flight mode and that rest and digest mode. We can tell our bodies to go towards rest and digest just through deep breathing, and there's different ways for you to find relaxation and get in that wave of calm and balancing that fight or flight, which we usually go through our day in. It's different for everybody.

Rachel Bennett: For naturopathic medicine, it's all about individualized treatment plans and what works for you, because what works for you may not work for someone else. Finding that thing that can calm you down the most efficient way is something to harness and go towards. For me, it's deep breathing and really focusing on my breath.

Nancy Cooper: Yeah. It really calms you down when you do take the breath in and out. Do you have a technique that you use that you do it?

Rachel Bennett: It's ... they say do the count for six in and six out or four in and six out and when I really try to focus on that, the numbers never add up for me and I feel like I'm struggling and it stresses me out more that I'm not catching on, so I just focus on the exhale because the exhale is what stimulates the vagus nerve, which is the nerve that runs that parasympathetic, that calm state in our body. I'm regulating my nervous system by focusing on that exhale.

Rachel Bennett: I'll just inhale, get that deep breath, hold it for a second maybe and then just really let it go. If I'm in public, I'm not gonna just really let it go but I will kind of control it a little bit more but make sure I'm exhaling all that air out and it just really feels great.

Nancy Cooper: So is it just the lungs? Do you fill your stomach? What do you do?

Rachel Bennett: Yeah, I like to expand my ribcage, but it's about staying comfortable and not trying to do a certain thing and like I have to make sure I am tucking my abdomen in on the exhale, no. It's what do I feel comfortable doing and then I

let it happen and not ... if you get caught up on the details and being perfect, then it's really easy to then go back in that fight or flight mode and get agitated.

Nancy Cooper: Maybe that's my problem with yoga.

Rachel Bennett: It's not gonna be perfect.

Nancy Cooper: Yeah. I'm trying to do the perfect breathing and I end up messing up so it's over for me.

Rachel Bennett: It's the little tweaks, it's the ... and each time you feel a little bit closer, a little bit more comfortable in that position and you feel a little bit stronger and that gives you the confidence to then step into it again, and the uncomfortable is where we really grow. It's about building resiliency and stress is a good thing and that's kind of a huge point I like to make is that we all need stress because that challenges the system so that we can then exercise that part of ourselves to strengthen it and be able to access it when we really need it.

Rachel Bennett: A lot of people come to me and they're like, "What do I do for stress management? I'm under all these demands and everything like that." I give them tools, but what I really want is to catch people before they're in that overwhelmed state and they can learn what works for them and practice and exercise it so that when those demands become overwhelming, it's an automatic thing that they can go to and it feels more comfortable. It's something they've strengthened and they remember it and they'll go to it more readily, whereas if you're in a panic state, you don't even think about it. You don't even ... it doesn't even occur to you to take a deep breath unless you've really been practicing it and harnessing that and strengthening that part of yourself.

Nancy Cooper: Is there any other little tools they can do if they're really stressed out?

Rachel Bennett: You know, people like prayer, people have sayings, people have mantras, or people like to just exercise. I have a time with my dog every day where we go out on a walk and just being in nature I feel like grounds me and knowing I'm gonna do that every day, and when I don't, I notice how it ... it's something I need now because it really helps me step outside of the day and if I don't have that, it's ... I need to do something else. If you can't do what you rely on, then having the backup tools is helpful.

Nancy Cooper: Sorry. What do you think a mom can do during the day if she's got like a million things going on? Kids are going nuts all over and she's just wired. Step inside the pantry and take a few breaths or ...

Rachel Bennett: You know, what popped in my head was why not bring the kids into it? If they're going crazy, they're this source of panic and energy that ... how are you gonna ground yourself with them? Isn't it a nice way to bring a new practice into their

lives as well? Because we all need that and I think as children growing up, learning something, a way to manage and regulate them will help them as well. Making it fun, doing lion's breath, that's a crazy thing to do and it's awkward, but with kids I bet they love it and it would be fun. So bringing them in and making it a game and then everyone can kind of get loose and calm down and ...

Nancy Cooper: So what is lion's breath? What would you ...

Rachel Bennett: Don't make me. Google it.

Nancy Cooper: I'll [crosstalk 00:07:09].

Rachel Bennett: It's the deep inhale and this force exhale where you are just like "Ah" like a lion.

Nancy Cooper: Oh yeah, they would love that.

Rachel Bennett: Right, right. Just calling it lion's breath is fun .

Nancy Cooper: That is good. That's a good one. Great. Anything else you wanted to share with everybody?

Rachel Bennett: Well, I think that like I said, we're all under stress and we're always going to be under stress. We tell ourselves things all day long like, "There's not enough time in the day. I'm so busy. I'm never gonna get all this done," but is that really supporting us in what we want to achieve? What I find myself really striving to do is when I say, "Oh my god, I'm so busy," I say, "Oh my goodness. I am so productive." If I'm busy that means I'm doing things. I'm being productive and I think that's more of a positive way for me to see it and it motivates me and it gets me out of that stress state of I can't, I'm overwhelmed.

Rachel Bennett: So how can you ... you notice you're saying things that are negative or not as supportive as they could be and engage yourself, then how can you reframe that? Write it down if it helps, and rewrite it in a different way. Try to focus on that more positive motivating I can attitude. It can be very challenging when you are in it and you are so stressed and you're so overwhelmed, you're just like, "I really can't."

Rachel Bennett: But that's when ... that's why building the practice can be so helpful and then you can just harness those tactics and those tools a lot more readily. Having a way to remind yourself, you know it's different for everyone and working with your clinician and whoever supports you on coming up with things that work for you and talking about it. Social support is huge. We're social beings and we need that and I think it really helps us connect with others, but also feel supported, feel like we're not crazy and a totally different beast. It's like, no, everybody is going through the same stuff and I think having that social support can kind of put it into context and just relieve a lot of that anxiety.

Nancy Cooper: Yeah, that makes sense. My husband is sitting here looking at me.

Rachel Bennett: We need each other. It's hard to reach out when we need things.

Nancy Cooper: It is.

Rachel Bennett: It really is hard, but once we start doing it and feeling more connected and feeling more supported because we're doing these uncomfortable things and realizing it's actually good for us, the more we step outside our comfort zone, the more it's gonna come easily. It's all about exercising right? Not physically. Of course that's good and you get endorphins and you feel better, but exercising those pathways of your nervous system and building habits and exercising those habits and having social support only helps strengthen that even more, and I think it comes more quickly.

Nancy Cooper: Then you rewire your pathways neurologically too when you start thinking that way.

Rachel Bennett: Exactly. You start telling ... you start restructuring the things you're saying, then you're firing different pathways and you're telling yourself positive things.

Nancy Cooper: Right. Great. Really, really, really good info. I also know you wanted to mention something about supporting a bill coming through legislature. Do you wanna mention that real quick?

Rachel Bennett: Yeah. I hope we can put a link in the bottom. In Indiana, naturopaths are not licensed and I went to an accredited university and in certain states, like the state of Washington, I can practice as a primary care physician and as a licensed doctor, but in the state of Indiana we are not recognized. We have a bill that's gonna be coming up and being voted on, and we need support for that. We need to talk to our politicians so that you have more access here in the state of Indiana to naturopathic medicine. There's not a lot of licensed naturopaths in this state. The ones that are here and are licensed, they're not licensed in Indiana, they're licensed in other states, but they're practicing here in Indiana within a scope that isn't there. We can't do a lot of things. I can't even take a blood pressure on somebody.

Rachel Bennett: But we are trained in so many things, counseling, nutrition, botanical herbal medicine, physical medicine, but we cannot employ these things in this state so we really want your support and we'll provide the link to be able to support us and learn more about what naturopathic medicine is and how we can help Indiana.

Nancy Cooper: There is a lot of moms out there that, or parents I should say, that are looking for more natural alternatives and they're looking for natural doctors or some of the medical doctors that are more natural minded, well they're filling up.

There's just no one to recommend anymore so this having naturopaths licensed in our state would really benefit I think a big community here.

Rachel Bennett: Exactly.

Nancy Cooper: I definitely encourage the support of that bill for sure.

Rachel Bennett: We appreciate your support, for sure.

Nancy Cooper: Well thank you, Rachel. I really appreciate you coming on and talking to us today. Really, really good information and I think it's gonna be really helpful, and I'm gonna practice that breathing myself. Not that I'm under stress, but ... Right, well thank you so much and then we'll put the link below the video...

Rachel Bennett: Thank you so much.

Nancy Cooper: And for the bill. All right. Thank you.