

Jonathan Hunsaker: Welcome, everyone, to another episode of Inspired Health Journeys. I'm joined by our guest Cyndi today. Cyndi, thank you for joining us.

Cyndi: Sure. I'm happy to be here.

Jonathan Hunsaker: So, Cyndi, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Cyndi: Sure. I'm 37 years old. I grew up and still live in Long Island, New York. I met my husband while I was studying for my master's in speech-language pathology, and we married soon after, and we have started a family, and I have a 6-year-old daughter and a 4-year-old son. And I work, currently work as a speech pathologist in a school, working with school-age children with various language and developmental communication disorders.

I love summer. I don't work in the summer, so I enjoy spending it with my family, my friends. And we like to go on the boat and sit by the pool. I'm kind of a water bug, so anything that has to do with water, I enjoy. I take pride in my home and my work, but I do love being with my family and making memories with them, and I'm really thankful that I do have this time to spend with them.

I'm also very interested in knowledge, so I'm kind of like a natural researcher. I've always, if I didn't have any answers, I have to find the answers. I enjoy researching, but I prefer fact over fiction. A lot of times, people are like, "Oh, what's the latest book you read?" And I was like it's like a book about vitamins. That's what I enjoy. I like having knowledge.

I also try to balance my love of food and occasional wine with exercise and eating clean and being healthy. When I do have time, that's what I like to focus on, trying to be the best version of myself, and eating healthy, and taking care of myself is the best way that I can do that. So...

Jonathan Hunsaker: Excellent. So, you haven't always been in this place that you are now, health-wise?

Cyndi: No.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Tell us a little bit more about your health journey. What was—how did it start? What inspired it? And give us a little background.

Cyndi: Sure. Well, I always, since I was a child, struggled with mild anxiety, a little depression here and there. When I got into my 20s—it was always manageable. When I got into my 30s, it got a little bit worse, a little—I got a little more depressed, maybe not knowing which direction I was going in. Some

situational, but some, I just felt I couldn't shake. I was going to doctors, and they wanted to put me on all this medication for the depression and the anxiety.

I really wasn't about that, so I just tried to exercise. I think that was my first step I took was exercise. I'm very active, but just making it a habit of going to the gym daily and taking care of myself. After I had got—gotten married, I was getting my bloodwork done, and they found that my prolactin level was high, and that's indicative of pituitary adenoma.

So, I had an MRI done, and they found that I had a small growth on my pituitary gland. And they wanted to put me on all this medication. My cortisol was high, and then they did more tests, found that I might have Cushing's disease, which is like an adrenal—I think it's adrenal-related issue. And I wanted to start a family at this time, so I didn't want to take medication.

They wanted to put me on all this medication. And I thought—I felt like something was wrong with me. I didn't know why I was always sad, and I didn't want to be that way. I didn't always want to be anxious. I didn't always want to be sad. And I knew that I didn't want to take medication. And my dad had, he had a small stroke when he was 59, and it kind of affected his memory for 24 hours, then he was fine.

And he went on this kind of holistic journey to improve his health. So, we kind of went on that together, and we found a whole—like a naturopath in Long Island, and he tested my hidden food allergies. So, I came up sensitive in my IGG and on my IGAs, to gluten, dairy, eggs. So, at that time, he said that I couldn't have that anymore. And I cried, because I was like “How can I go without eating bagels and pizza?” And...

Jonathan Hunsaker: And being in New York.

Cyndi: Yeah and being in New York. And I did it, and a month later, I, my anxiety improved tremendously. **[0:05:03]** And I felt happier, and overall, just better.

Jonathan Hunsaker: So, did it affect you more than just emotionally? Was it just depression and anxiety, or did it—was it affecting your weight? Was it affecting your energy levels? Was it affecting other things, or just mainly your mood?

Cyndi: It was, it was mood. I'd never been overweight, but I definitely lost like 7 pounds, 7-10 pounds, just from removing those things from my diet. I did have the chronic fatigue, was one of my symptoms. And on top of the pituitary adenoma and the fatigue, I had Raynaud's and some psoriasis, like on my scalp. And after eliminating all those hidden food allergies from my diet, like all those symptoms went away.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Every one of them?

Cyndi: Every one of them.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Wow. And is it just eliminating those three things, was the gluten, dairy, and eggs, and you didn't eliminate anything else?

Cyndi: I didn't eliminate anything else. Nope. And I do notice that—because I'm not perfect and I will fall off here and there, and I notice now that if I do have a little bit of gluten, my—the next day or like a few days later, like I'll feel it in my joints a little bit, because it's inflammatory, so I'll get that inflammatory response from it.

But overall, it's just—it's amazing how different my life changes. Because I never felt, growing up, that I was reaching my full potential in life, and I didn't know—understand why. I'm like “Why is this—something's holding me back?” And I didn't know what was holding me back. And it was food. And I did have—food kind of ran my life, because I really did enjoy eating.

I worked in restaurant business. Like food, I love food. And I was kind of—food ran my day. When am I going to eat? What am I going to have for breakfast? What am I going to have for dinner? And then after I eliminated all those—all of those things, it was like freedom, like I felt free. And it's just—

Jonathan Hunsaker: So, what are some of the biggest tips that you can give that allowed you to eliminate eggs, gluten, and dairy? I mean because that's—you're pretty much eliminating any and all bread, you're eliminating pasta, you're eliminating most things, right?

Cyndi: Right.

Jonathan Hunsaker: I mean not most things, but most breads, or carbs, or that kind of thing, right?

Cyndi: In the beginning, I did find some substitutes. So, I found some good, like good gluten-free bread, but it was difficult, because I had to find egg-free, too. So, gluten's hard enough, but then you have to add egg on top of that, and that was challenging.

Jonathan Hunsaker: So, I'm just curious, I'm just curious what—what else did you do to replace it all? So, I mean because you can't have that stuff now, early you found substitutes. What else did you do to just implement not eating those three things?

Cyndi: So, it was really kind of increasing my vegetable intake, finding healthier grains, like ancient grains, like quinoa, amaranth, things like that. And protein. I find that my body thrives on protein. I know the next step for me is kind of reducing meat products, but for now, I'm kind of just—I am eating meat at the moment. But it is difficult to also find like plant-based. And it's difficult.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Here's what's interesting, is there's a lot of people that are gluten sensitive, right? And they need to go off that. And there's—my niece, she cannot have dairy, she cannot have gluten. I think those are the two main things. But I mean it's challenging to have to find solutions.

Cyndi: Mm-hmm.

Jonathan Hunsaker: And so, I think there's just a lot of people who, after they listen to this, might go get tested and find out what they're sensitive to, and it's just going to be great to understand what did you replace them with? And do you ever have times, I know you said you kind of slip here and there, but do you have—are there certain little rituals that you do, or little replacement things that you do that just make it a little easier so you don't feel as deprived and things like that?

Cyndi: It takes a lot of planning; I feel like at first. I've been doing this 10 years now, so it's kind of easier for me. But in the beginning, you have to do a lot of meal planning. Your shopping list, you have to get it all together, because they're all going to—all new ingredients that maybe people have never heard of. But going back to what you had said about people might be going to get tested, when I talk to people, they're like “Oh, I eliminated gluten, I didn't eat it for a week.”

And I was like “Okay, that's good,” but I was like “but it's a hidden food allergy, and sometimes, that takes like 20 days, or a month to get it out of your system.” So, you wouldn't really have—see improved symptoms in a short amount of time. You kind of have to do it consistently, and inflammation affects people differently. Like I never get any digestive symptoms. **[0:09:59]** It's all—it's all in my brain. It all goes right into my brain, the fogginess, the fatigue, the mood. So...

Jonathan Hunsaker: Yeah, I think that's a really valid point, because a lot of times, I think we judge by how our stomach feels, how our gut feels. Definitely energy levels. I can tell if I end up having too much gluten, or if I had breads or things like that, I crash hard afterwards.

Cyndi: Mm-hmm.

Jonathan Hunsaker: But I don't know that we always pay attention to the mental aspect of it and how it's affecting us emotionally, mentally, and all of that. Let's talk about the test. One, do you remember what you paid for it? Was it expensive to have the test done?

Cyndi: Well yeah, that's another challenge, because like if you go to the doctor, your mainstream doctor, they're going to do your IGEs, and they're not going to find—like I don't come up sensitive for anything in my IGEs tests. So like, when I went to the naturopath here in Long Island, I believe it was \$600 for both of them, but then you have to pay—because they're not—they don't accept insurance, so you have to pay for the visit, and then you have to pay for the tests.

And I'm sure if you go—now, if I would request to have my mainstream—if I just said I wanted to get an IGG/IGA at the mainstream, my mainstream doctor, they may do it, I'm not sure. I'm not sure if they—and that's another challenge, is the pushback from the mainstream, like “Why do you want that done? That's not going to tell us anything.” So...

Jonathan Hunsaker: Yeah, just it reinforces the fact that we have to take ownership of our lives. And the unfortunate part is not necessarily accepted by insurance if you go to a naturopath, some of the things there. I think the good news is 10 years later, it's likely less expensive. I know that there's definitely food allergy tests that are probably half that now, through a naturopath.

I even believe there's some online that you can do, that can help you. And so, I think we're getting better. For those of us that have to spend our own money to figure it out, at least it's getting cheaper. You brought up a good point about somebody going off of gluten for a week. How long did you have to stay “clean,” we'll call it, off of gluten, dairy, and what was the third one?

Cyndi: Egg.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Gluten, dairy, and eggs. How long did you have to stay clean of those before you started feeling a difference?

Cyndi: Probably about a month. Like I felt better. It was progression. So, I felt better, but I didn't feel really good until about a month later. And then that's motivating. That's a motivating factor to keep up with it. Because—and people would apologize for eating in front of me, and at first, it was a little difficult, but now, it does not bother me. I don't crave the food, because my mind just looks at it like that's poison for me, because then it's going to make me feel bad. And I don't want to feel bad. I don't want to go back to that place. I want to feel good.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Yeah, I think that's another thing that people don't realize is the turnover of our taste buds. I think it's a two-week turnover on our taste buds.

Cyndi: Absolutely.

Jonathan Hunsaker: So, you get rid of something, and after two weeks, it's all mental. It's just you wanting to eat that cake. It doesn't mean that you necessarily need it to touch your tongue.

Cyndi: It's addiction.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Yeah, it's absolutely an addiction. What was your biggest obstacle along the way here?

Cyndi: Probably like building a support network. I feel that finding the information, or finding a juice place that uses organic, clean vegetables, and having people to kind of talk to about it. I feel like that was a challenge. Financial, financial burden was a little bit of a challenge. I know my husband always kind of pokes fun at me, that our grocery bill is so high because I have to buy organic, and it takes him 10 hours at the supermarket just to get what I need. Yeah, I think—and eating clean. I think eating clean is very challenging.

Jonathan Hunsaker: And I mean you bring up a good point. I mean it is more expensive. And I guess the second question is, what—how much more are you able to do in life because you're not having the depression and the anxiety? How much more are you able to earn? I hate to put it that way.

Cyndi: No, it's true though.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Because you're not struggling with that and you can be happier and pursue different goals and different dreams and things like that.

Cyndi: Right, and unfortunately, I wish—I mean I'm so grateful that I found out when I did, but when I was 28, I had already pursued my—I established a career. And thinking back, I'm like “Oh, I would have...” Because I loved, I loved health, and I was like “Oh, I should have went into some kind of medicine.”

But I always was anxious, and I was like “Oh, I can't do that. If I can't do it perfectly, I can't do it. I might fail.” And now, just learning and educating myself, like it's okay. It's okay to fail. You're going to fail. And that was a big, major piece of anxiety, because anxiety just tells you all the negative things that your mind wants to just grasp onto.

So, now that that's gone, I mean I'm not going to say it's gone 100 percent, but it's definitely improved tremendously, and I feel that I can reach my potential now. **[0:15:03]** And I do things that I wouldn't have done. I go places that I wouldn't have gone before. I'll go out and do more social things, just

because I feel happier and I'm not depressed, I'm not sitting on the couch binging on pizza and gluten products.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Fantastic. Have you inspired others in your life? I mean have you come across other people that say, "Hey, I've suffered from depression, anxiety," and sharing your story has inspired them to go make a change in their health?

Cyndi: I do. I have a few people that I—I don't like—and I try not to be pushy. I feel like sometimes I don't want to be "Oh, this is what happened." I just give little tidbits here and there, just to kind of put like—point people in the right direction. I did refer a few people to my naturopath, and they saw, and they saw a difference.

One was a friend, and her children suffered from eczema. And they went off the gluten and the dairy, and it improves the eczema. So, and people that have—it's mostly like a lot of the people with the skin issues. They're like "Oh, I have this," "I'm battling my psoriasis," or "my eczema." I'm like "You know what?"

I was like "You really should think about going gluten-free." And I was like "I'll help you put together a list," or see them off. But I definitely try to. Sometimes I feel like people don't really want to hear it. They're like "Oh," they'll say, "Oh, you don't eat anything. You're so thin." And I was like "I, like I'm not trying to be thin, I'm trying to be healthy. Like this is me being healthy. This is me being my best me."

And I'm like—because people, I think what people don't understand sometimes is that inflammation is an individual thing. It goes to like to different places in different people. For me, it went to my brain. For other people, it might go into their skin, or they might have acne, or might struggle with their weight. I think that—my husband has heart disease, so his inflammation goes into his arteries. So, I think that's what people struggle to grasp. They can't grasp that concept of the inflammation affecting different areas. So, again, like we're getting rid of all those different foods, will eliminate their inflammatory response.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Yeah, I think that was the most profound thing you said this entire interview, is that it—inflammation affects all of us differently and in different places, right? Some of us, it's in the gut. And for you, it was in the head. For arteries, different places on your skin. And I think that we always quickly go to find the cream at the drugstore that we can rub on our skin, right? Or we go take the medicine or drink some caffeine to help give us an upper. We do all of these things rather than just let's back up a little bit and see, is there something causing the inflammation?

Cyndi: Right.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Let's quit trying to treat the symptom and look back at the cause. And so, I think that was brilliant, and I'd never even thought about it that way until you just said it. So, thank you for sharing that. Let's wrap this up. I want to ask you, what are the three health tips you'd like to share with the listeners to help inspire them? What are the three top things you could tell them?

Cyndi: I think that being your own health advocate is very important, doing your own research. For me, knowing my genetic makeup. I know that I suffer, my family has a long line of cancer. So, I try to make sure that certain vitamin levels are maintained and higher, so I can prevent my inflammation. I mean cancer, what is a cancer? It's an inflammation.

And I try to reduce the inflammation, so hopefully, I can prevent some of those cancers. And so, I think definitely being an advocate and knowing your body, listening to your body. If something's wrong, you want to find out, again, the root cause of what's wrong. Don't cover it up. You want to fix it. You want to figure out what's causing that problem.

I think for me, self-care is important. Sometimes I struggle with like the mind and body balance. Like I'll exercise every day, but I'm not really taking care of my emotional state or being a mom and working. Like sometimes it just gets so busy in the hustle and bustle. And you just have to remember that you need five minutes just to recoup.

Plan those meals for the next day or take a breath. Don't forget to breathe. So, things like that. And then also, living healthy is kind of—it's a lifestyle change. It's not a fad, it's not something you can just jump into and jump out of. It's you change your life. It's a lifestyle change. You have to adopt. You have to believe in it. And that will—pursue that and help you move forward.

Jonathan Hunsaker: I think it's amazing advice. I agree with you 100 percent. And I think that—I think one of the biggest things is people who are looking to make change, is do it long enough to feel a difference. **[0:20:04]**

Cyndi: That's exactly right.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Yeah, do it. Once you feel that difference, it makes it a lot easier to keep going, right?

Cyndi: Yep.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Once you drop 5 pounds, or once you notice that your head is more clear, that you woke up not groggy and were able to go 12 hours straight without a nap, whatever it is, feed off of that. And then do the next little thing, and the next little thing. And I think everybody wants to tackle everything at once, and they expect results tomorrow, because we can pick up our phone and Facetime our best friend in 2 seconds, we can call and order a pizza. Like everything's instant.

Cyndi: Right, it's rat race. Yeah.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Yeah.

Cyndi: Yeah, so I definitely agree with that, and that, it comes back to, again, like finding that support system, calling that support system. Find that one friend that's going to go get juices with you at 6:00 in the morning, or go to the gym, or cook with you on the weekends. Like that support system is so important.

Jonathan Hunsaker: I agree with that, too. And I think—and understand that your support system may not be a person, right? And especially if you're suffering from depression, anxiety, things like that, you may not have a lot of people around.

Cyndi: Right.

Jonathan Hunsaker: There's a lot of support systems online. You can get on proper Facebook groups, you could follow the right people on Instagram, right? You could do different things. I highly suggest you get away from the circles that drag you down, stay away from the friends that want you to go out and drink beer with them and eat pizza. And "You'll be fine, you're skinny." They don't understand what's going on in your head and your heart. So, just leave them be for six months, you know? Get your stuff together, and then you can hang back out with them.

Cyndi: And it definitely changes your way of thinking, again, and you start seeking out those more positive influences. Like again, I changed my—I'm not a big social media person, but on my Instagram, I don't follow people, I follow inspirational sites, certain things that just inspire me, like you guys, and just creating that online presence, network, feeling of support.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Yep, I agree 100 percent. Cyndi, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to share. I can imagine you've helped a lot of people. And I just greatly appreciate it. I know it requires a lot of courage to come out and be vulnerable and to tell your story and to share that "Hey, I haven't always been in a great place."

But the more that we do that, I think in life, and the more that we're all more vulnerable and share, the more we're going to realize that everybody around us struggles with stuff. And we can all lift each other. And so, I just greatly appreciate you taking the time and sharing your journey.

Cyndi: Sure, I'm glad to do it. And I just want to reiterate that I think that is so important, what you had said, like being brave. You have to be brave. It's not going to be easy. Life's not easy. You're going to face challenges. And just remember to just be brave, be brave and breathe. That's really just—

Jonathan Hunsaker: Be brave and breathe. I like that. We are going to end it on that note. Cyndi, thank you again. For those of you listening, leave your comments below, give us a big thumbs up wherever you watch this, whether it's on YouTube or through our podcast channel. And hopefully we catch you on the next episode. Thank you, Cyndi.

Cyndi: Thanks. Thanks so much.