

# HEALTH HISTORY

***Forward Note: I've extended this health history to include more details, as my health story is woven into the fabric of my personal story and, ultimately, into the fabric of who I am. Our family history, social structure, economic status, sexuality, and many other seemingly unrelated details all play into how we become ill and also how we get better.***

## **My childhood**

The short version of my childhood story is that I was unschooled until I was 8, with very little structure other than mealtimes and bedtime stories. I spent a lot of time in the forests of the Pacific Northwest and also on the beaches of the Central California coast, as my family was part of a small religious community who avoided urban development. I was placed in school only because my parents were going through a brutal separation and my home environment became an unhealthy war zone.

I went from an isolated environment with little structure to a public school environment - which was a shock to my system. So, I did what I needed to do to survive; I became really great at being popular and liked, and..... I went surfing. I stayed really physically active and social. I cut classes to skateboard with the older cooler kids, and I played basketball on an award-winning team through junior high and practically lived at the stable homes of my friends.

Everything I could do to keep that body of mine moving and processing all the craziness of my upbringing, I did it.

Physical activity has always been much more important to me than conventional education and anything I had to sit still to learn. I tend to learn better when I'm physically engaged and in motion. This made school pretty hard, yet kept my immune system from collapsing. I do remember getting sick a lot as we were all introduced not just to new germ sources through school, but also to antibiotic interventions, cafeteria lunches, and the novelties of television at night.

Of course, this whole time, I was eating complete shit and my folks were never around to help me learn moderation. They were the ultimate examples of excess and emotional indulgence as they separated.

So, I lived off of chili fries, crackers, frozen pizza, candy bars, kraft singles, and 7Eleven everything. When I had big emotions around one of my parent's fights, I would eat a candy bar or a whole cheesecake, even.

***One thing that I know for sure now is that when children are fed highly processed inflammatory foods as their precious organ systems are developing - they often have a lot of repair work to do later!***

I was never a fat kid. I was always slim and attractive. In fact, that was the crux of my attention with boys, so it became a focal point for me as well. When I was 16, I got my first job and altered my status as party girl. This is where my serious health challenges began to surface.

I worked at an ice cream parlor and ate my weight in hamburgers and ice cream. Soon I started to feel sick on the regular. I had consistent inflammatory reactions to just about everything I ate, only I had no one around at the time to give me this insight. I started breaking out really bad and developed eczema on my arms and neck. For a female of sixteen whom has always gotten the bulk of her praise for her appearance, you can imagine what this did to my self-esteem.

So, I did what any teen attempting to stay normal does - I went to the doctor. I felt safe with people who “knew how to fix me.” And I spent the following 3 years on antibiotics for my skin.

I have a memory of sitting in front of my dermatologist as she showed me a wall chart demonstrating how bacteria in our skin develops into acne. I clearly remember asking her point-blank:

“but *why* does the bacteria develop there? *What* makes one person develop it and not another?”

Ever the precocious child, I was. She told me that:

*“No one knows why... but we can kill the bacteria with antibiotics - potentially indefinitely.”*

**WTF?!**

Alongside my skin issues, I also struggled with anxiety, depression, and ADD. All conditions, of course, having one core component; *the gut*. I took medication for all of the above and spent the last 3 years of my teens acting as a poster-child for the pharmaceutical companies.

I developed an eating disorder along the way - partially born out of undiagnosed gut and hormone issues, partially out of my fucked-up perceptions of my own value to society.

I would go on one extreme diet after another, starving myself or eating nothing but low-fat cottage cheese and salad dressed with lemon. You can imagine what this did to my already crazed body.

Of course, I would eventually cave and eat a whole bag of cookies or a pint of ice cream to deal with the starvation mode I was in. This gave me stomach aches which eventually led to me throwing up - which I later realized is termed *bulimia*.

But I never felt like the extreme examples of bulimia quite fit my situation. I didn't throw up everything I ate. I didn't make myself throw up manually. I didn't hate eating. I always talked about it with friends and family - I was never hiding it. I just felt "off" most of the time and sugar seemed to be the thing that I would reach towards when I couldn't handle controlling my crazy body anymore.

I know now that I was severely hypoglycemic - probably from a really young age.... And my gut biome was totally out of whack - both issues which drive cravings and impulsive eating.

***I have a few memories as a teen of going to the ER for totally random things (an infected earring piercing, an allergic reaction to cooking spray)... and the ER doc mentioning casually in passing that my blood-sugar was abnormally low. So, I'd get some OJ on the way out.***

*You cannot live off soda, candy bars, and wonder bread.... and have healthy blood glucose levels.*

The problem for me was - and often is for many people - a lack of understand as to what was really happening inside of me, leading to a sense that I was crazy and needed to be "controlled."

Unfortunately, I now see this all a lot - particularly in women's behavior... and particularly in vegans and vegetarians, due to the over-consumption of starch, gut irritants, and the little bio-available protein often consumed. This all plays out without any awareness as to the neurodysregulation which is driving us to feel and act insanely. Basically, it's not our fault.

***As you might guess, not once did any of the specialists I frequently saw ask me WHAT I WAS EATING or what was happening in my family life.***

I broke down once when I was 17 and told an attractive younger male doctor that I think I might be bulimic. He got really uncomfortable and told me to see a psychologist. I asked him if I was doing any harm to my body by eating cake and then throwing it up and he said "No, but you might need medication for OCD."

***Again, WTF?!***

By age 21, it was clear that the pharmaceutical route wasn't healing me. I dropped out of college half-way through and moved away from home, thus away from all drugs, except the occasional joint. I researched holistic health schools and moved to San Francisco to study at one.

This was a decade ago and my health, unfortunately, got a lot worse before it got better. I went through a year-long holistic health practitioner program, and this provided me with a huge source of community and inspiration. But I became totally confused and misled by extreme and unscientific health fanatics. I spent the first 4 years of my twenties predominantly vegan and partially raw foodist, as my health got progressively worse and worse.

I finally found my first functional medical specialist at the age of 25. I'd seen a few naturopaths at this point, yet they didn't offer me much insight and seemed to use supplements in the same way a Western doc uses meds to suppress symptoms. Not only did I instantly love my new functional physician (a reminder that we really do need to trust and feel connected to our doctors) but he also offered me the insight and the support which changed the trajectory of my path.

### **My health at 25, as a vegan**

*At this point I'm:*

- super underweight
- barely bleeding each month
- have all kinds of inflammatory symptoms
- barely sleeping more than 4 hours at a time despite being exhausted
- having constant low-level anxiety.
- Having to eat every few hours to function, which included waking up each night to snack.
- pretty much running off of green tea.
- My metabolism was so sensitive that I would have a full-blown panic attack if I drank coffee and I had had a few minor seizure-like episodes from having dangerously low blood-sugar.

I was the "healthiest" sick person I knew!

I didn't eat any processed food.

I juiced vegetables daily.

I sprouted and soaked my grains and nuts.

I ate all organic.

People often commented on my glowing skin and I was told several times that I "looked" healthy. This reinforced my deep-seated beliefs that if I *looked good*, I must be doing something right.

*Clearly, I was wrong, as my life became unmanageable. This new specialist insisted on testing me.... And also insisted that I start eating animals again.*

*The test results revealed:*

- severe hypoglycemia (my blood-sugar was consistently low, yet spiked every time I ate or produced even the slightest bit of cortisol)
  - Major gut bacterial imbalance, plus a permeable gut lining - which led to me being intolerant to everything under the sun. Even things as seemingly harmless as celery and chicken were triggering an inflammatory response.
  - Massively HIGH cortisol at times when I should be resting and NO cortisol at times when I needed it to function.
- ..... And to top it all off, the insomnia (a common result from all of the above) made me feel like I was losing my mind.

Translation: I WAS A FUCKING MESS WALKING.

**This was when I was 25 and I am now reaching 31. My life and my health have done a complete 180.**

After receiving this first round of test results, I did a whole number of things - some of which were game changers and some of which were probably a waste of time and money.

For a while, I was so overwhelmed by the amount of change needed to heal that I felt like I was taking one step forward two steps back. I wanted more information, yet it took me a few years to really be in a place where I could digest (pun intended) much of what was going on in my body in an empowering way and not revert to overwhelm or dogmatic thinking.

I didn't have a health coach to work more thoroughly with, so the overwhelm won out more than I'd have liked it to and I often felt isolated from social events. But I didn't give up!

I worked with a few different specialists over the years after this and saw tremendous improvements - both in my labs and in my general metabolic strength and resilience.

I worked with some amazing nutritional coaches based in San Diego, whom do work similar to what I'm currently offering folks. They insisted that I focus primarily on healing with food, sleep, and lifestyle before spending arduous amounts on supplements. This made sense to me.

They taught me the value of a grain/dairy-free diet before I ever heard the terms *paleo*, *primal*, or *ancestral*. They had me eating liver once a week, making bone broth, adding collagen protein to all my smoothies and soups, and taught me the value of saturated fat.

**How science and health training influenced my personal healing**

I became my own science experiment. I went through a nutrition consultant program and found research scientists which I began to trust implicitly. I learned how to conduct sound scientific research and how to combine this with my own anecdotal results to develop confidence in my choices.

I also began to learn that making mistakes would not kill me and that my relationship to food is actually *much more* chemical in nature than it is emotional or psychological.

I don't need to have a healthy *relationship* to food - I just need to eat for biochemical sanity while enjoying my food - as nature intended. There are no set *rules*, there are simply choices and results, therefore there is no "cheating." I began to see the ways we perpetuate the story that eating disorders are more psychological than biological.... which is largely bullshit.

I found Weston A. Price and later the paleo movement. And although I had a lot of resistance towards this seemingly extreme "fad diet" culture, it didn't take long for the legitimate results of this way of living and eating to speak for itself.

I realized it wasn't a group of hedonist meat eaters who just wanted to get beefed up for their crossfit competitions - it was truly a movement born out of anthropological observations - a field of study I'd always found interest and meaning in.

I discovered Chris Kresser (my medical unicorn), and fell in love with the work he's doing. I began following the work of people like Mat LaLonde, PhD - a research chemist at Harvard who ditched a potential career in pharmaceuticals to help people understand how their bodies react to chemicals in plants. I found other heroes like Robb Wolf, former research biochemist, Chris Masterjohn PhD, nutritional scientist, and other health entrepreneurs like Dave Asprey, all whom had not only reversed their own autoimmune and debilitating chronic issues, but also made a career out of helping others do the same. I found my mentors and my tribe leaders.

After I graduated from my nutrition consultant program, I immediately enrolled in an integrative health coaching program so that I could explore the lifestyle factors of illness more and develop tools to work with others outside of nutritional guidance. This helped me further face the aspects to my health which consistently fell on the back-burner; intimacy, sexuality, and career purpose, to name a few.

I'm currently studying at Chris Kresser's new training institute (online), where he combines the three core principals of his work: functional medicine, clinical training, and ancestral nutrition. Everything that I learn from him and others are used towards my own self-healing first and foremost. As they teach us in coaching training - we are our first and lifelong clients.

Although I have no intention of working in a clinic, many of my clients *will* be working at some point with other clinicians and it's important for me to understand what some of the choice tests and protocols are.

**Where I'm at right now:**

I prioritize sleep like I'm on vacation - despite building a business! It's just that damn important. Therefore, I sleep 7-9 hours a night and definitely have no need to wake up and eat, unless I drink alcohol.

I have no problem knowing when or what or how much I should eat, as I have (for the most part) healed the neuroregulation of my own appetite and energy. I still tinker with what foods work for me and which foods don't, as well what I can get away with without throwing myself off too much. I'd say, I'm 95% better compared to where I was 6 years ago, and this is reflected as much in my resiliency and biological understanding as it is in my symptoms, or lack thereof.

I eat animal products daily, often in the form of collagen, bone broth protein, high-quality whey protein, organ meats, grassfed local beef, and cheaper things like canned sardines and oysters.

I don't eat much grains, nuts, or legumes, as they just don't leave me feeling all that great due to my phytate and insulin reactions. The only grains I avoid entirely is gluten-containing grains.

I eat mostly starchy & nonstarchy plants, wild greens, fats, herbs, spices, and animals. My diet varies based on factors like: sleep, monthly cycle, activity level, emotional demands, caffeine/alcohol intake, etc. I often veer towards more fat, low to moderate carbs ... as this is what seems to support my blood glucose best.

I'm also about to get a glucometer so that I can go deeper into what carbs do and don't serve me, as I'm learning that blood glucose underpins EVERY other health challenge - particularly gut and hormone problems.

I haven't had recent lab work, yet the last extensive round of labs I did (about 2 years ago) proved that I've healed about 80% of the issues I had at 25!

I'm currently getting excited about eating for gene expression, thus healing the discordance many of us face between our diet/lifestyles ... and the genes we've inherited.

I'm tinkering with light and temperature regulation and exploring the roles intimacy and community play in our evolutionary health needs.

So, I have gotten - largely so - past the basic survival threats and am currently in the Explorer, Tinkerer mode. My main goal from here on out is to keep growing stronger and to inspire others to do the same - offering them the coaching support which I never had when I was in the thick of it.

