



## **Expert Voice Podcast - Dr Joe CONTENT EDIT.mp3**

**Victor:** Hello I'm Victor Tuballa and joining me today is Dr Joe Kosterich, an integrative GP, speaker, author, media presenter and health industry consultant. He is joining us as our Expert Voice with Eagle Natural Health.

Dr Joe is passionate about combining Western and complementary medicines to help his patients achieve the best health possible, including focusing on the foods we choose to eat. Our decision to be active, to get adequate sleep and to manage our stress. I'm pleased to welcome Dr. Joe to today's podcast. Dr. Joe, thank you very much for your time today and welcome to Expert Voice.

**Dr. Joe:** Thank you Victor.

**Victor:** Today we're going to be talking about modern lifestyles – how diet and exercise can help us achieve and maintain good health. We'll also discuss other helpful ways to improve everyday wellbeing and even the quality of your life. Dr. Joe, I mentioned in my introduction that you are an integrative GP, so can I start by asking you: what exactly is an integrative GP?

**Dr. Joe:** It's a good question and unfortunately, it's one of these jargon terms that does mean lots of different things to lots of different people.

An integrative GP means a GP or a doctor. It doesn't have to be a GP, there are also specialists who will look at a variety of different ways of helping their patients. A lot of doctors do this. We use pharmaceuticals and there certainly is a role for them: for

example, people who have very high blood pressure, or may have asthma or get blisters. But we don't have to reach for the prescription pad first. And pharmaceuticals are not necessarily the best and only way to go.

In simplest terms, an integrative doctor will look at your lifestyle. They will look at things like diet, stress management, sleep, and examine whether there a role for supplements. There are a whole range of things, in addition to what Western medicine has to offer, that can be looked at and recommended.

**Victor:** And that's the beauty of integrative medicine isn't it? Where you have such a vast array of options for your patients in terms of treatment. As you said before, it may not necessarily be about the medication. It could also be a simple change in diet, or the addition of exercise, or perhaps even a supplement when we're not able to achieve any sort of nutritional level through our diet.

I love that as an integrative GP you incorporate everything when it comes to health and wellbeing - not just the medications but also the dietary and lifestyle factors as well.

Dr. Joe, could you share with us your thoughts on the main challenges that Australians face in achieving and maintaining good health?

**Dr. Joe:** We have seen over the last hundred years, and perhaps more so in the last 50 years, real changes in prominent disease patterns. Once upon a time, infectious diseases were at the top. People died of conditions such as pneumonia and tuberculosis. That's not to say people don't die of infectious diseases today, but it is rarer. In Australia, and what we have in common with other Western countries, is that 75% of diseases are lifestyle-related conditions. This includes high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and even some forms of cancer. People think it's more complicated than just lifestyle, and it's fair to say that there are genetic factors involved. Sometimes a person

can become ill, even if they're doing everything right. There's no guarantees in life. But what we do know, is that the vast majority of the disease burden that we face with chronic illness has a very significant lifestyle component. And this is what an integrated approach involves. Despite 75% of illness caused by lifestyle, we offer pharmaceuticals as a solution. It's not wrong: there is certainly a role for them. But what we sometimes ignore is that if lifestyle issues have contributed to these illnesses, then perhaps we should be looking more seriously at how can we improve and/or change our lifestyle.

The biggest [health] issues in Australia are related to diet. Realistically, very few people go hungry. We can see that perhaps a lot of people are eating a bit more than what they need. In particular they might be getting more calories [than they need] without the nutrition. People are eating a lot of calories, but not getting a lot of nutrition. This means they might be deficient in vitamins or minerals, and/or they might be carrying excess kilos. Stress is a big factor facing society, coupled with not getting enough sleep. We're perhaps not as sedentary as is claimed, but we also may not be moving quite as much as we could.

**Victor:** Thank you Dr. Joe. You've mentioned quite a few different areas that everyone can look at when it comes to health and wellbeing. Areas such as sleep for example. Who would have thought that sleep could be such an integral part of one's general health and well-being? Especially in this day and age where a lot of people aren't getting enough sleep, due to many reasons. Adding sleep to that aspect of health and well-being plays such a crucial role, along with all the other factors you mentioned, such as stress and, obviously, diet and lifestyle.

**Dr. Joe:** These things are all connected. If we don't sleep well that increases our stress levels. If we're a bit more stressed, we may well choose to go and eat foods that are higher in sugar. These things are separate, but they also are a little bit connected.

**Victor:** This leads to my next question about some of the root causes of disease. This is, of course, an area that more and more people are becoming more understanding about: looking for the root causes of what ails them, but also what ails that particular individual. I guess you could say more and more people are trying to look for the truth. In particular, there are some areas which I want to bring up with you. Areas such as ageing, inflammation, oxidative stress and also immune dysfunction. I'd like to get your thoughts on some of those areas.

**Dr. Joe:** Slow inflammation is an area where a lot of research is happening. Now, inflammation is useful. If you cut yourself, you need the body to produce an inflammatory reaction because that will stop the bleeding and help it heal. Equally if you get a virus, you want an inflammatory reaction because you want to get rid of the virus. That's called quick inflammation. Slow inflammation is thought to be a factor in heart disease and stroke, and there are some theories around its potential role in cancer. What may be useful for treating slow inflammation in the short term could become counterproductive long term. And this is where our diet is involved.

If we're putting foods into our body – which what we call pro-inflammatory – such as those higher in sugar, rather than vegetables and lower-carb foods. If our stress levels are high, then we can be in a permanent fight or flight state. In the past, most threats were physical, so you needed blood flow to the muscles. You needed your blood pressure up, and the energy to either fight the enemy or run away. Today there really isn't a physical response to most of the stresses we face. You can't really run away from your power bills. You can't run away from problems at work. The problem is the same, but the solution isn't the same. This is where again, what can be useful in the short term can become counterproductive long term.

These are all contributors to chronic disease. Ageing, obviously, is something we're all going to do – we're going to get older and that's unavoidable. But we do know that different people age in different ways. We're a bit like cars – the ones that are better maintained tend to do better after 30, 40 or 50 years than the cars that aren't [well maintained]. It's the same with the human body. If we look after it well, it's more likely that we will age well.

People are not necessarily afraid of dying – that's inevitable. What they're concerned about is loss of function and facility. The better we maintain our bodies, the less we have to worry about ageing.

With our immune systems, if we're not putting in the right nutrients into it, and we're not tending our immune system, of course we're going to be more susceptible to illnesses. Autoimmune conditions are a massive topic, which we don't really have time for today. But we do know that the rise of autoimmune conditions and allergies are possibly also related to our lifestyles.

**Victor:** I think your point you raised before about ageing is something that is quite interesting given the fact that we have a large ageing population. But there are certain groups that are ageing well and those that aren't. There are groups which are ageing well in terms that they have still got their faculties, in terms of their memory, concentration and memory recall and so forth. Then we have individuals who are not necessarily strong in those particular areas – it varies from person to person.

These individuals, who are susceptible to these types of neurodegenerative type conditions, are looking after themselves with the right diet and the right lifestyle. Other important factors, such as keeping their mind active by solving puzzles, and other similar activities, has been proven to help slow the aging process.

It goes back [to a time] when we were kids, and our parents said to us, "Eat your fruits and veggies. Make sure you keep yourself nice and healthy by getting some exercise, and go to bed by nine o'clock to get eight hours sleep." Simple advice, but fundamental.

If we implemented some of these factors into our daily routine, it could perhaps play a definitive, or a massive role when it comes to our overall health and well-being. Maybe by targeting some of these areas, such as inflammation, immune dysfunction and the ageing process that we spoke about, we can make some relatively easy to apply changes.

**Victor:** What are the most common vitamin and mineral deficiencies you come across, and how do these affect us?

**Dr. Joe:** The most common is iron deficiency, particularly for women during their reproductive years. That's because each month there is some loss of blood with the menstrual cycle, and that'll take some iron with it. It's estimated that up to one in five, or even one in four women may suffer from this [iron deficiency].

The typical sign of iron deficiency is tiredness. Sometimes though, it's a very slow reduction [of iron], and people get used to being just that little bit more tired. They don't necessarily think that something is wrong until the [iron deficiency] test is done.

Vitamin B12 deficiency is something else we commonly see. We may see it in people who are on a vegan diet, which obviously is something they can do. But unless they supplement with Vitamin B12 (and even vegan websites will advise people to do this), they will become deficient in vitamin B12. This is because vitamin B12 only comes from animal products.

Folate deficiency is probably not as common as it was, as [manufacturers] have put additional folate into some foods. However, it can create a separate set of problems perhaps if a person is eating too much bread.

A subtle deficiency such as vitamin D deficiency however, is where we're not absolutely sure what is the right amount required, particularly at different times of the year. It's estimated that 30% to 40% of Australians are deficient in vitamin D, and that's partly because we're avoiding the sun. We obviously do not want to get burned, but avoiding the sun entirely is a separate problem.

Other vitamins and minerals, whereby the person is not necessarily truly deficient but may do quite well if you give them a little bit extra, include magnesium, zinc and vitamin C. It's fairly rare on blood test to see a deficiency in magnesium, but people who exercise quite a bit will often find they get muscle soreness. Even though their blood levels of magnesium may be okay, a magnesium supplement may assist them.

Particularly in winter, zinc and vitamin C may be helpful for the immune system even if they are not technically deficient.

Which raises the next issue (which again is almost a podcast in itself), about optimal versus recommended daily intake. The recommended daily intake of vitamins and minerals is to stop us being deficient. That's great. We don't want to be deficient. However, don't know what is the optimal amount for human beings according to their particular circumstances.

**Victor:** That's very important to note in regards to the actual recommended daily intakes (RDIs). That's the main issue that we see when it comes to comparing nutrients and how much are we actually trying to achieve. Like a lot of the nutrients that are out there, when it comes to RDI my understanding is [that the guidelines are] just enough to help you survive, basically to help you live to meet the minimum standards. Yet when you're dealing with conditions particularly when it comes to chronic diseases, and particularly those you mentioned before, we need a regulation for the needs for zinc and vitamin C and so forth. When it comes to blood loss with iron, you do need that high level all of those particular

nutrients to in order to help reestablish those levels in the body and to drive the body further or better into general health and well-being, and hopefully possibly disease prevention as well.

**Dr. Joe:** That's exactly right. One of the criticisms, which I think is a bit false in my opinion, is the use of supplements. One of the criticisms is: "You'll just have expensive urine." If the body has enough that it can get rid of [a particular mineral or vitamin], I'm not sure that's necessarily a problem. The body does have a little bit of spare capacity – if we knew what the right amount was for each person, each day, then maybe we could fine tune it. But we don't. There's nothing particularly harmful with most vitamins, with a couple of exceptions. You can overdose on vitamin A, potentially on D, E and K, although you have to go out of your way to do so. In the interests of full disclosure, it is technically possible. But I'm not sure that's the biggest health problem we're facing in today's society.

**Victor:** I agree. When it comes to health and wellbeing, and the use of supplements and nutrient intake and so forth, I'd rather have more, rather than less.

When it comes to nutritional support, what evidence is there that supports nutrients for overall improvements in health and well-being?

**Dr. Joe:** We know the body has a whole host of requirements – it's a very complicated machine. To get back to the car analogy... a car needs the right sort of fuel. It needs the right sort of coolant. It needs air in the tires. There's a whole range of different requirements to make a car run optimally. It's not just one component.

We need vitamins and minerals. They're called essential because the body cannot manufacture or produce them, it can't make it. We have to take it in [through diet or supplementation]. The same applies to some essential fatty acids and some essential

amino acids. These form the building blocks of protein so the body doesn't need them for full functioning.

In an ideal world, maybe everybody would be on a fantastic diet, eating all the right foods, the soil would have enough nutrient in it and everything would be fine. We'd all be living in a Garden of Eden. But realistically it just isn't necessarily the case. If we're not getting enough nutrients from our diet – and this for individuals to look at their own circumstances and discuss them with their practitioner – then the role of a supplement is not to replace good diet or to replace a bad diet. It's about putting in some additional nutrients into your system if what you're eating may not quite be giving you what you need in order to function optimally.

What a person might need depends on several factors. If you're training or playing sports, then you may need different supplements to somebody who's in their 60s or 70s, or somebody who is not doing as much training.

In winter time, if you're prone to colds and viruses and you want something that may help, then a supplement may help. This may also be different in winter to what you may need in summer.

There's no such thing as one size fits all. It's about finding what is best, or most useful for you in your circumstances. Your circumstances today might not be the same as they were six months ago, and they might not be the same again in six or 12 months.

**Victor:** That role of supplementation – you mentioned iron for example, is ideal, when you can combine the benefits, of not just iron (a well-absorbed form of iron) with good quality B12 and folic acid. An activated folic acid, for example, could make that particular supplementation ideal for an individual to be able to consume and to not only utilise iron, but to also make sure that the red blood cells for example are supported.

That's the beautiful thing about supplementation. If you know that an individual is not eating vegetables, or won't eat fish, or their vegan and not getting enough protein. They're missing out on omega 3 fatty acids, and essential amino acids. Appropriate<sup>3</sup> supplementation can, and I believe is crucial in the role, of that person's overall health and well-being.

**Dr. Joe:** You're very right in what you say Victor. It's a little bit like a house. If you're building a house and you just get bricks, but you don't get any mortar, and you don't get the components to the mortar, and you don't get tiles and you don't get the taps. It sounds a bit silly, but you need all of those components to make a house.

A single supplement is going to have a role and there may be times when really there is just the one you need. But often they do all work in together. It's about getting the right combinations. It's about what's best for the individual in their circumstances. This is why discussing your needs with an integrated practitioner is the best way to go.

**Victor:** What should Australians priorities when it comes to diet?

**Dr. Joe:** There's 25 million people in Australia – I'm not sure there is ever going to be, and neither should there be, a one size fits all. That said, I always recommend people eat whole foods. Basically, foods that our ancestors ate. Foods that were growing somewhere, or perhaps moving, or running around.

Try to eat less boxed and packaged foods. Less refined carbohydrates in particular. This doesn't mean you can't have any, but eat less of those and more of the foods that don't come out of boxes and don't have labels.

When you go to the supermarket shop mainly around the perimeter. That's where you find the fresh sections, and where you'll find the meat station and dairy sections. If people are sensitive to, or not wanting to eat dairy, there are alternatives for that.

Keep it fairly simple. I think if we can really focus on that, on real foods. Jamie Oliver uses the term "real food" is ingredients rather than having ingredients.

**Victor:** And that's the other concern. Some of these processed ingredients that are in our foods, particularly packaged foods, potentially could be doing more harm than good. They may be even contributing to the ill health that society is suffering from. Again, that's a potentially major concern. It's all about going back to basics: eating that apple, that orange, having a piece of fish, enjoying a dose of extra virgin olive oil with your salads. Our patients would be more than amazed as to how these simple changes or simple additions to our diet can make such a massive difference.

I'm pleased that you as an integrative GP are advocating and recommending the addition of simple foods to our diet, whole foods, and as you said, real food. It's great and refreshing that it's been mentioned.

We're touched upon stress, and unfortunately stress is one of our biggest health challenges in the 21st century. Could you take us through the concept of stress and how it can impact our health? As an integrative GP, what is your approach to treating stress?

**Dr. Joe:** Stress can come in many ways and forms. We have spoken before about the 'fight or flight' mechanism, which is the body's way of dealing with threats. Stress essentially comes about when in some way shape or form we feel threatened.

These day it's not likely to be a predator or an enemy brandishing a knife. It tends to be financial, work or family stress.

When we're stressed our body releases hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which are stress hormones. These are ideal if we're about to go into battle, or if we're going to run away. But if we're trying to figure out how to cover our expenses next month, or if we're trying to deal with our problems in the family, [these hormones] probably doesn't help us quite so much. These hormones can be also be pro-inflammatory.

A small amount of stress can be helpful, it can get us out of bed in the morning. Being stressed for too long can be a problem. We know that stress is a contributing factor to a number of conditions, it's not generally the single cause of any particular one. But we know that a lot of mental health problems can be related to stress, including depression. We know that that heart disease and high blood pressure can have a stress component.

How can we offset and circumvent this? Dietary changes, getting enough sleep and making sleep a priority is important. Exercise is a very good form of stress management. It's a physical movement, so even though it's not fighting the enemy, it disperses some of those stress hormones.

There are raft of other things including meditation, yoga tai chi, Pilates, guided relaxation, walking in nature, or listening to music, that people can do to help them relax. Even just taking three slow, deep, breaths in can be useful. Y

There are some herbal formulations that can be of assistance with stress management as well.

As you can see, there's a number of different ways that people can approach stress relief.

**Victor:** Nothing beats relieving stress more than taking your stress out on a punching bag or a boxing bag, followed by a nice gentle walk afterwards to recover. Dr. Joe, I've had the pleasure of reading your book titled, *Dr. Joe's DIY Health*. You suggest actions we can take, which you refer to as pillars, that can contribute to good overall health and physical and mental wellbeing. Some of these topics that we've covered today during our podcast

conversation, such as nutrients from our foods and supplements, and the importance of relieving stress, and sleep and relaxation. Apart from what's already been discussed, what other actions would you suggest that our audience could consider when taking steps towards optimal wellbeing?

**Dr. Joe:** Get enough water to drink, so that you're not even slightly dehydrated. We spoke about exercise as important part of that is getting outdoors. Being active outdoors can be as simple as a walk in the park. It doesn't have to be strenuous, because we know that even a little bit of sunshine makes us feel better. It can lift our mood and a little bit of vitamin D from sunshine is also very helpful. Relationships are important: tending your relationships, spending time with the people that you want to spend time with, such as your family and friends.

Avoid those who don't make you feel good about yourself, or you don't get on with them. It may not always be possible to completely detach yourself, but try not to associate with people who bring you down.

Have fun on purpose! Martin Seligman, an American psychologist, talks about authentic happiness as having fun, facing challenges and finding a purpose. I think a lot of us would like to sit by the beach or just relax and do nothing. But eventually that will become boring, so do things that make a difference. It doesn't have to be changing the whole world. It can be volunteer work; it can be looking after your family; it can be the job you do day-to-day. It doesn't have to be earth-shattering, but doing activities or doing things that make a difference in the lives of others and in turn, yourself is good for you.

Finding some purpose and enjoying what you do is very important. Those that do generally report better levels of mental health and well-being.

**Victor:** It's been interesting to hear about the important role that a lot of these lifestyle factors play, in particular nutrients and exercise, stress, and a sense of purpose. All these areas play an important role when it comes to improving our overall health and wellbeing. Before we finish today, is there anything else you want to say or any sort of comments you want to add to this afternoon?

**Dr. Joe:** I think the key thing is that there's never just one thing to do for health. We spoke about good nutrition, about exercise, about stress management, sleep and some of the other factors as well - each is important.

We don't to have tunnel vision and say: "Just eat well and nothing else matters or if I'm exercising nothing else matters." The whole range of things matter, and they're all important.

We can't always tick every box, every day. Obviously we don't want to be stressing about that! Over the course of weeks and months, focus a little bit on each area, without overdoing it. Don't beat yourself up if you have an ice-cream, or a treat sometimes, or you didn't go running yesterday. It's about balance. Pay attention to your health, think about all aspects of your health, without going over the top.

**Victor:** Wonderful words of wisdom Dr. Joe. It's been an absolute pleasure to have you join me today on Expert Voice and I do thank you so much for your time and for the wonderful points of advice for our listeners.

**Dr. Joe:** Victor it's been a pleasure talking with you.

**Victor:** If you've enjoyed what you've heard today we'd appreciate you jumping onto iTunes to provide us with a rating and a review. If you have a topic that you'd like us to

cover, we want to hear from you. Get in touch with us via the Eagle Natural Health website, which is [www.eaglenaturalhealth.com.au](http://www.eaglenaturalhealth.com.au) in the Contact Us section. I'm Victor Tuballa, thanks for listening.