



Transcript of “Psychology of Eating with Marc David”

Bulletproof Radio podcast #114



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Dave: Hey everyone. It's Dave Asprey with Bulletproof Executive Radio. Today's cool fact of the day is the New England Journal of Medicine published the single largest study ever done on the health impact of coffee. Five different scientists followed more than 402,000 coffee drinkers for 13 years and they found that coffee consumption decreased the risk of dying. Simply put, a coffee a day keeps the doctor away, screw the apples.

Today's guest is a really interesting guy. His name is Marc David. I met Marc at JJ Virgin's events and I thought he'd just be a great guest because we haven't talked much about the psychology of eating. I focus so much on the physical side of food cravings with the Bulletproof Diet and how if you addressed the things that cause the cravings, the psychology becomes less of an issue. What if you still have the psychology? That's why Marc is on the show today, to talk about it, plus, he has about the coolest last name ever since it's my first name, so hey, Marc David, welcome to the show.

Marc: Thank you so much Mr. Dave Asprey. Glad to be here.

Dave: Now, you're the founder, director, and the main trainer for the [Institute for the Psychology of Eating](#). You actually have a degree in that, a master's degree. You've trained at the Harvard Mind Body Medical Institute. You've written 2 best-selling books, [The Slow Down Diet](#), and [Nourishing Wisdom: A Mind-Body Approach to Nutrition and Well-Being](#), and you've worked for Johnson & Johnson and big corporate companies. Tell me, what is the Institute for the Psychology of Eating and why did you start it?

Marc: What a great question. I ask myself that every day. It's like having 5 unruly teenagers. You know, I started out my journey as an absolute, unabashed, nutrition fanatic, born out of my own birth experience of growing up asthmatic and allergic and, just a sickly kid. This was back in the 50s, early 60s when I was raised on Fruit Loops and Kool-Aid and Marshmallow Fluff and Velveeta Cheese, talk about un-Bulletproof Diet. At around the age of 5, no kidding, I heard a rumor that fruits and vegetables were good for you, asked my mother to buy some, ate them, coincidence or not, my health

started changing, made this magical connection that food impacted my body. That led me on a journey into the nutrition field.

Really, back in the late 70s there wasn't a lot of us doing this and I kind of discovered at some point that no matter how smart and sharp my clients were, no matter what I would tell them about what to eat and what not to eat, they'd often come back and say, "I couldn't do it." I noticed that so many clients, I would do what was the right thing, whether it was for digestion or fatigue or for mood or for weight, and didn't always work. I started wondering what the heck about the mind of the eater and the psyche of the eater. How do we help people do what they say they want to do, and more to the point, is the mind impacting the body? Does the mind, indeed, impact nutritional metabolism when it comes to digestion, assimilation, calorie burning, all of that, so I started my own educational journey.

There wasn't a lot to read about it in those days and, sort of, life was telling me, "If you want to read a book on this, you got to write it yourself. You got to learn it." That started my journey, and many moons later, when the body of work developed, and you know what that's like, your own personal journey leads you to study and at some point, "Ah, there's something to offer back to the world." I have a long, crazy education in psychology and nutrition and the health profession. The Institute for the Psychology of Eating was formed as a way for me to get what I consider an interesting body of work out there. We train people to be eating psychology coaches. We teach the public and I'm guessing we're going to dive into some of what the material is pretty soon. That's the short answer, my friend.

Dave: That's a great answer because you had that same personal struggle that so many people who are in the, we'll call the health information field. It's kind of a new career for me. I'm a hardcore tech guy from Silicon Valley. I was there in the room when we built Cloud Computing and it's just so weird to me to realize that the stuff I did, out of self-interest really, I was really sick and I was 300 pounds and all that and all of a sudden the journey of recovering from that and working with an anti-aging nonprofit, it led me down the same path. You actually went and you got a official degree in it.

How did you find a degree in psychology of eating? Did you make it up yourself? Is it one of those self-guided things?

Marc: Yes, and no. The way I found it was I started looking all around the country for a psychology program and I wanted to do a masters or a PhD that had anything to do with eating psychology; there was none. There's a wonderful school, a state school in California called Sonoma State University that still does and at the time had a very, let's call it, a liberal graduate psychology program and they agreed to give me a nice, big scholarship and let me invent a master's degree in eating psychology. That's what I did. I put an ad in the newspaper once I got there and said, "Graduate student creating eating psychology support group. All are welcome." This was back in the day when there wasn't any internet so it was literally print in a newspaper.

I was shocked that 25 people answered. Who responded was probably 10 of the biggest people I've ever seen; I'm going to use the F word, fat. Who responded as well was about 5 clinical anorexics, 3 bulimics. There was 1 male in the mix. There was 1 professional model/actress who had the typical Hollywood good looks and maybe about 6 or 7 middle-aged women who you and I might look at and say, "They look good to me," who hated their bodies and thought they had a ton of weight to lose. Over the course of 2 years they, in part, were my laboratory, and learned a lot on the job.

Dave: Today you don't see clients, but you train practitioners to see clients. What's the typical curriculum to train someone about the psychology of eating versus, "Eat this, don't eat that," kind of stuff?

Marc: I don't see clients anymore. I cut my teeth on, arguably, thousands and thousands of client hours. Essentially, you know, I think in the big picture, eating psychology, or the field that I've originated, Dynamic Eating Psychology, looks at our relationship with food as a doorway, as a doorway to wherever. A lot of people have eating issues, binge eating, emotional eating, overeating, weight challenges, and instead of looking at these things as the enemy to attack, which is what most people tend to view, instead of

looking at extra weight as, “You poor willpower weakling. You loser, what’s your problem? What’s your issue?”

We’re going to walk through the doorway called extra weight, called binge eating, and see where it takes us. If you were my client back then, I might have discovered, “Wow, Dave is ... disembodied. He’s not present. He’s not in his body. He’s somewhere else. He’s not paying attention. He needs to get in.” Your extra weight might’ve been a beautiful gift from the universe, a divine symptom that’s kind of raising it’s hand and saying, “Hey, something’s up.” That led you to the path you’re on now, so in essence, eating psychology, the way I look at it, view it, teach it, is a positive experience.

Said in another way, food is a great teacher, our relationship with food is a great teacher and like any great teacher, let’s listen up. Let’s see what teacher is telling us. Another way to say that, and this comes from the ancient Greeks. This comes from the mystic tradition of Jews, Kabala, mystic Christians, they said every symptom was a whispering from your guardian angel. Every unwanted habit, every disease is trying to tell you something, and if we listen to the message, it has a chance to unwind itself and leave, and if we don’t listen to the message, the angel blasts its horn a little louder.

As an example, if somebody comes in to see me as we train our practitioners and they have fatigue, the first move, the first thought is, “Great. You have this fascinating symptom called fatigue. Yeah, we’re going to look at the nutritional pieces. Yeah, we’re going to look at what’s going on, metabolically, health-wise, but we’re also going to look at how is this a gift? What’s it saying?” Honestly, I’ve never met a person who has fatigue who, on some level, didn’t need it, you know? It’s like forced vacation. Eating psychology is like diving into the depth of the symptom, listening to it, letting it sit at the table, welcoming it on its own terms.

My own fatigue, I’ve gone through chronic fatigue. It stopped me. It paused me. It got me out of New York City. It put me in bed. It made me look at my life, my relationship, my then marriage, you name it. It made me say, “Huh,

I think something has to change,” so that’s kind of the first big answer to your question that eating psychology kind of gives the client a big hug and says, “You know, whatever challenge you’re facing has a correctness to it. It has a rightness to it. Let’s take away the judgment. Let’s find the gold in it.

Dave: If I wanted to tell this line of reasoning or this approach to, say, a computer software programmer, how do I translate the software concepts you’re describing into something that, you know, when you say, “You’re not in your body,” or “You’re not here.” What does that mean to a guy who’s maybe a little bit skeptical and extremely rational? How do you cross that divide?

Marc: Honestly, part of it is somebody has to even want to potentially maybe cross that divide. There has to be a compelling reason. When I start to talk about these concepts to that person you just mentioned if I met him at a party and wanted to impress him or her, absolutely not, but if that person said to me, “Oh, wow. You’re in the nutrition and eating psychology field. I’ve been trying to lose this 25 pounds. It just doesn’t come off no matter what I do,” or, “I have these digestive issues and I went and I got a full battery of GI test and the doctor tells me nothing is wrong.”

Usually, I need an opening. There has to be a complaint, quite frankly, because honestly, if I’m making enough money and having enough of the goodies that a guy wants in life, I’m not going to pay attention, necessarily. Life has to grab us and shake us a little to want to change, so I’m imagining you in your journey at some point, you were more open, vulnerable, willing to kind of dive in and say, “Huh, what else?” There has to be a complaint, quite frankly, otherwise I won’t even engage in the conversation, really.

Dave: You pick your target pretty well. That’s the secret.

Marc: Bingo.

Dave: It’s funny, because I work with CEOs and really high-performance people. As a matter of fact I can tell you my own experience. It was really tough when someone said, “Dave, you’re not in your body.” I’m like, “It looks like

I'm here to me," like we didn't even speak the same language here. Then I realized after a while like, "Oh, wait. There is like something at a worker thing," and she said "No. That feeling, that thing in your stomach, that actually is an emotion." I was like, "Oh, I guess I should pay more attention," because all I did was like, "That hurts," or "That doesn't hurt." That was kind of a binary setting and it turned out there was more awareness I could cultivate and that led me to understand a lot of things about how the world around us interacts with us. I just find it really difficult, personally, if I'm working with a type-A high-performance person to talk to him about body awareness and having value as a signal of data coming into the body. Your approach is find the people who are interested because they're real easy to get and that's a great approach, great hack. You also do something very backwards than the way I've approached a lot of this, is you say personal power equals metabolic power. You're basically saying when you reach your potential from a psychological perspective your body reaches full potential. Am I reading that right?

Marc: Yeah, you're pretty much reading it right. What I'm saying is that the more we become the guy or the gal that we're kind of genetically and cosmically and personally meant to be. The more you and I reach our potential in terms of who we are, how we operate in the world, our intellect, our heart, our soul, whatever you want to call it, the better the probability that the body can start to move in the direction that it wants to be. I'm heavily influenced by a number of different fields of psychology, including yoga psychology that comes down from the tradition of Ayurveda or the Hindus.

They had a beautiful line thousands of years ago from the Upanishads. They said that the mind is rarefied body and the body is solidified mind, their fancy way of saying, "Yo dude, we exist on a continuum, for goodness sakes. You can't separate it out." What I started noticing in my own personal journey was the more I cleaned up my life, the more I became more truthful, more honest, more authentic, the more I stopped lying, the more I stopped being a bull-shitter, the more I started getting into living life in a more honorable way. The more I started trimming out relationships in my life that were pulling me down, I noticed I was getting healthier, and then the more I started meditating.

I noticed I was getting healthier and the more I started doing right livelihood because there were points in my life I was making money. I wasn't so proud of the companies I was working for or consulting with, but they paid me well. The more I got an alignment with who I really am, gosh, my energy started going through the roof and I started noticing, "Huh, there's something to that." That same principal we can hear in traditions, such as alchemy, you know, the alchemist said, "Hey, you can take the lead of who you are and as you become more rarefied, more purified as you get on your path and your journey, something happens in the body."

Dave: One of the transpersonal psychologist, one of the founders of the field that I've worked with, has said that many times they find people who couldn't dump Mercury, people with Mercury toxicity who were going through a medical program to detox, they get stuck, and then they do a bunch of psychology sessions and then all of a sudden they could release a lot more of the Mercury, that there is a link between the mind and body, and it is a 2-way street. In my impression I've found that doing the personal power work is so incredibly difficult when you have brain fog, when your metabolism is broken, that you're unlikely to achieve what your brain and your emotions and your spirit are capable of. I focus on shoring up and upgrading the metabolic side to get to the personal side, but you've flipped it around and said do the personal side first and then you'll get the metabolic side at the same time.

Marc: I'm saying both and all at the same time, maybe that first, maybe this first. I'm saying it's a piece of that, you know, multidimensional puzzle and I want to say to my mind, like in my languaging, when you said to yourself, "Hey, I'm going to do this metabolic piece first because how could I do personal growth my brain is all fogged up," to me, that is personal growth. For me when I'm 5 years old and I said, "Wait a second. I want to try something. I want to change my nutrition." That was a personal growth moment saying to the universe, saying to yourself, "I am going to shore up my metabolism, shore up my diet, as opposed to just kind of eat whatever's been thrown at me." That's consciousness. That's saying, "Hey, there's an exchange going on here between me and the environment." To me, that's

just one step in consciousness and it just keeps on getting more interesting from there, potentially.

Dave: It's true. Even if you eat well and you get your metabolism working, if you spend all of your time online, you know, kicking down people and trolling, you're not going to be a happy guy. It's like that. You need to live with integrity and eat with integrity and that seems to lead to that personal power that we're both talking about.

Marc: Yeah.

Dave: Let's shift gears a bit and talk about food addiction. What's the deal with food addiction? There's a physical side and there's an emotional side. Do you address both? What's your thinking on that?

Marc: I think it's all kind of one in the same, the physical, the emotional. Yeah, we can tease it out and break it down. I want to share with you what I think is a simple, powerful couple of points here that will help anybody navigate through the interesting terrain now called food addiction because it's become a pretty popular topic. What I want to postulate, or suggest, here is that yes, humans can get addicted to specific foods and substances. If we look in the food realm, one can very much have a powerful addiction to sugar. That is a specific substance. One can have a powerful addiction to alcohol. We've known that for a while.

Food technologists, I've worked with food technologists for decades now. They are some of the most interesting and smartest people I have ever met. In food technology they have figured out all kinds of ways, and have been doing this for decades by the way, to create a sense of how do you mix salt, crunch, fat, taste ... now crunch, also ... inside the ears, perceived decibel levels of crunch will release a certain amount of pleasure so they find a bliss point. They find a hook point so that indeed, you can get addicted in the moment when you're eating a potato chip or certain kind of corn chips or certain other foods; so yes, we can get addicted to certain substances.

However, what happens is, now here's the psychology part, people hear the word addiction, and addiction is a loaded term. Addiction comes with this big bunch of suitcases, depending on how you've been raised, what you've heard. Addiction often means, "I'm a weakling. I'm powerless because something's wrong with me." You cannot be addicted to food in the larger picture. Why? That's like saying, "I'm addicted to oxygen." It's like saying, "I'm addicted to blood flow." It's like saying, "I'm addicted to blinking my eyes." It's a natural function of the body. You and I need food. I can be addicted to cocaine. Do I need cocaine? No. Can I eliminate it? Sure.

You cannot eliminate food from the diet, so you cannot be a food addict. People will use that, that moniker, that label to support what they believe is, "Oh, there's something special that's wrong with me because I have challenges around food," and they want to pathologize it rather than look at their relationship with food, which indeed is challenging and painful and has suffering, they want to look at that relationship with food as the enemy rather than, "Wow, here's a challenge." We're going to walk through the door. We're going to see how it's a great teacher. We're going to see how your relationship with food isn't really about food. It could be pointing to your marriage. It could be pointing to your work. It could be pointing to your issues with your parents. It could be pointing to past history of sexual abuse or physical abuse, a million different things, different for everybody. That's my quick take on food addiction.

Dave: Why does it work that way? Why would sexual abuse change your relationship to food? What's the rationale behind that?

Marc: Big time. There's a number of different reasons and by the way, the research is very clear. It's not disputed in terms of many people who have a past history of sexual abuse will have weight gain, will have an inability to lose weight, will have digestive issues, will have eating issues, disordered eating, eating disorders, whatever you want to call it. Check it out, so here you are, you might be a young person and something happens and you are sexually violated. To the mind, the mind has a hard time, especially the young mind, grasping that, digesting it, managing it, and making sense out of it.

Oftentimes when the mind can't solve an issue we revert to instinct. We revert to survival instinct so you and I are brilliantly locked and loaded with the physiologic stress response, the fight or flight response, which is designed to help you fight or flee from an attacker. Here's what's fascinating. There's a version of the stress response called the survival response. In survival situations, such as famine, no food available, and such situations where all of a sudden you're thrust into an environment where you are threatened, the body does some interesting things.

To the human mind and to the animal mind, the bigger you are, the less of a target you are and the more, technically speaking, you are the toughest monkey on the block. The survival brain, not the conscious one, the survival brain certainly knows, "The bigger I am, the stronger I can be," and for the feminine mind, the bigger you are ... I'm going to use the F word again ... the fatter you are, the less of a sexual target you are, so unconsciously, the body's going to hang on to weight. Yes, it might be I start to eat a lot because eating also has a way to regulate our emotions.

If I have a trauma, if I have a stressor, I want to relax myself. I can go to alcohol. I can go to TV. I can go to gambling. The best emotional regulator you can turn to, arguably, is food. It's free, just about. It's easy. You can get it anywhere if you have a little money in your pocket. It regulates our emotions, so I have this terrible thing happen to me, don't know how to process it, post-traumatic stress, eat, relaxes me, and makes my body bigger, therefore I am now protected. At the same time let me just say one more thing, somebody can have an eating disorder. They can become a binge eater for decades. What that binge eating or that overeating is, it's a placeholder.

When you study characters like Carl Jung, he'll talk about the psyche and how it's a playground, how it's symbolic, so the mind works symbolically. If I can't work my life out over here, I'm going to work it out here with food. If I can't control my life and the people around me and all the nutty stuff here, I can certainly control my eating or I can use my eating to play out, to

act out what's going on inside me out of control, despair, upset. Does any of that make sense for you?

Dave: That does make sense and it's strange because it's not intuitively obvious to someone who hasn't seen the studies or looked at psychology that there's such a strong connection between what your body does when a trauma happens. It doesn't have to be a sexual trauma. It can be emotional abuse, shaming, whatever. There's all kinds of stuff that leads to that. There's a difference, though, between men and women, so the incidents, say, of anorexia in women versus men, it's way more of a 'girl problem,' not to say it's less of a problem or not, but why is it more common in women than men?

Marc: I think that's a beautiful question and I have a lot of answers to that but I'm going to keep it brief. I think, in part, you can go back to the Old Testament. You can go back to a primal creation myth. It's kind of interesting because a lot of psychologists and historians and great thinkers will tell you, you can understand a culture better when you look at their creation myth. The creation myth of western civilization, whether you believe it or not, one of the first stories you ever heard was about Adam and Eve and it's the first food rule, "Don't eat the apple." Who breaks the food rule first? The woman; tempts the man.

Interesting how from the beginning our primal creation myth is about a forbidden food. It's about eating it. There is a special connection, whether we like to admit it or not, between women and food. The female of the species is the biological nourisher. She carries the gestating child. She is feeding it through a tube going into the child's belly. That kid pops out. She is feeding it with breast milk. Mother and infant are genetically bonded for eons of time. We have that wired into the system that women and food have a unique connection, plain and simple.

Fast forward to modern times, we are in a lot of information overload where, in an information world, there's a lot of fascinating concepts that are hurling out of us from the time we pop out of the womb. There's a lot of concepts and a lot of meanings, a lot of toxic beliefs that are hurled at

women when the feminine mind, the feminine mind in women, the feminine mind in men is particularly vulnerable to criticism about beauty and about the body, just is.

Dave: What is it about anorexia in men particularly that's different than in women? Are some of these bodybuilders potentially male anorexics? Is that happening, or what's your take on that? Because I always thought, you know, the ... Number one, I'm in awe of the guys who can weigh 350 pounds of solid muscle, super lean and ripped and I'm like, "That's cool and it's an achievement." At the same time, a lot of those guys die in their 50s. Can you talk about the psychology of bodybuilding versus anorexia? Is there some overlap there, or am I just out on a limb here?

Marc: Yes, you're out on a limb, but I love the limb and I think it's a great limb, and, in a lot of ways ... I'm making generalizations here ... By the way, anorexia amongst males is increasing. It is still massively more prevalent in females. For many years I have viewed anorexia more as the feminine eating disorder and for many men, not all, who get heavily into the bodybuilding universe, sort of the weight-lifting, bodybuilding, almost hyper, you know, testosterone-induced, taking the steroids kind of bodybuilding is a reverse eating disorder for men. Women are taught, "The more I shrink my body, the more attractive I am," so we get the message through culture that skinny and pretty equals desirable, equals you will be loved.

If I am not secure in myself weighing 150 or 140 or 130 or 120 if I'm a woman, the world seems to be telling me that, "Oh, get skinny. Get skinnier, and then even skinnier," that somehow I will be loved and I will be adored because look at all these skinny models who get all the attention. Now, what are men told, for goodness sakes? I grew up with comic books. I grew up with Spiderman and Ironman and all these dudes, and, man they're big. "So wow, if I can only be big, then I'm the man!" I didn't notice this, and I'm a little guy. I'm 5 foot 8, and I was a football player when I was in high school.

I was one of those small, fast running backs, and when I first started going to Gold's Gym when I lived in California and I saw these huge guys. I was shocked when I started noticing that they were extremely insecure, that I was often the most secure guy in the gym. I thought they would be way more, kind of grounded, and just way more self-assured than I would be and it was a stunning realization. Oftentimes, to me, what this teaches us, it doesn't matter what the body looks like. I bet you've met a lot of people, let's say, women who had all the Hollywood good looks, who still didn't feel good about how they looked and were still upset about their body, likewise with men. The looks mean nothing but we attach ourselves to this goal of, "Well, if I become this ..." either skinny for a woman, bulky for a guy, "... then I'm going to have it all."

Dave: There's some merit to that and I've noticed differences, say, between a strength coach or someone who's going after strength versus someone who's going after bulk and looks. It's different. There are just different personality types attracted to those things. I'm not sitting here to judge any one of them as being superior or better or worse than others, I look at it from a longevity, like an anti-aging perspective. I'm like, "What's the practice that's going to work for me?"

The one that I can recommend to people as being science-based and leading towards feeling good the vast majority of the time, having lots of energy, having your brain turned on and all that stuff. I find that I gravitate towards the strength side, you know, having explosive power when you need it versus the bulk side. That said, I wouldn't like it if I walked around with super-scrawny arms and I outright reject the anti-aging, starve yourself to live forever approach, which is pretty far out there. Any psychology interpretations on the extreme caloric restriction in terms of living very long periods of time?

Marc: Yes. This ethic, this understanding, this belief comes from numerous animal studies, rats, mice set up, you know, probably started back early as the 1930s and it's an oft repeated experiment. You'll see different results over the years. Here's what I want to say about that. I think, in part, there's a little bit of inaccuracy in the research and I'm going to tell you what I mean.

In the animal models, here they are. They will calorically restrict lab rats, lab mice in certain studies. They have used primates. You look at the normal rat laboratory diet, the mice laboratory diet, the primate laboratory diet. I've worked in scientific labs, you know, Purina makes the food. It's essentially junk food for animals. It's not their natural food so then you cut down their food, you're essentially cutting down junk food.

If you are on a pure junk-food diet right now, and let's say it was 3,500 calories of junk food a day, I guarantee you, if I cut it down to half that amount of calories, same junk food, you would be healthy or you would have less weight and you'd probably live longer. In animal studies, kind of what's happened is they don't take into effect the freaking quality of the food, crazy because they feed animals animal junk food. It's the equivalent of animal junk food. Next, in terms of human studies, have we seen this born out, not quite.

What's fascinating in viewers, listeners ... Google obesity paradox right now. Scientists have known about this for a couple of decades. It's a black eye in the face of obesity and weight because the obesity paradox is essentially saying that within a certain range of being overweight, those overweight people are slightly longer-lived than their lesser-weight counterparts. It's a mindbender. It's an absolute mindbender. Scientists hate this because we have an immune response to this thing called extra weight. We are so fat-phobic that it colors our intellect. It colors our scientific thinking.

You Google health at every size, you'll see fascinating research that states the other piece of, "Well, the research about if you're overweight," If you're in either end of the spectrum, either end of the bell curve, extremely obese or extremely skinny, expect to have a shorter lifespan, expect to have more health challenges. Once you get slapped in the middle it's a weird zone. What happens are people are using weight and weight alone as the health measure, and yeah, well what about percent body fat and percent muscle tissue? What about just, let's look at your metabolic parameters. Let's take a blood test and let's see what's going on. Let's look at your emotional health.

As far back as about 30 years ago, studies done looking at Zulu and Bantu women in Africa. These are some big women and they have a lower rate of diabetes, heart disease, blood pressure, and a longer life span than their American counterparts who weigh the same. Then you take those women, those Zulu and Bantu women, they come to this country. They come to the United States of America, excuse me, and then you'll start to notice diabetes, heart disease, blood pressure start to shoot up. Interesting, so there's other factors that we don't always look at because the scientific mind is very biased towards certain measurements, quite frankly, there's certain things we can't measure. You can't measure love, but for goodness sakes, we might agree that it exists. You can't measure personal passion or commitment, but we know it exists. To me, these things impact our health, impact our weight, even. I've seen it. You can only observe it sometimes.

Dave: Yeah, that's why I talk about the Bulletproof state of high performance and there's this state, and it's maybe the same as a flow state. I had a really influential discussion with [Steven Kotler](#) about that and, whatever you want to call it, there's some state you're in where you're like, "Wow, I feel really good and I feel passion," and I think you're going to live longer if you spend more time in that, but getting there requires kind of a careful dance. It is harder to get there if you're 300 pounds like I used to be and I've never been 3% body fat, but understanding what I understand, I don't think I want to be at that level either.

Like you're saying, somewhere in the middle, 15, even 20% as long as it's in the right places and your blood panels look good, it seems like that middle path is the one that's going to lead to the most energy and the most longevity. The problem is, we don't have all the science. There's a question I want to ask you because I'm fascinated by this. Chewing and crunching as you're related to inborn aggression, so okay, you've actually written about this recently. What's the deal with chewing and crunching and aggression?

Marc: There's a term that scientists will use and evolutionary biologists will use the kind of characters who study this weird arcane stuff, which I find a little fascinating. The term is used, dental aggression, and you can see this most

basically if you go to a zoo and you look at a poor lion in a cage and the zookeeper throws a lion a nice, big piece of meat. That lion just doesn't sit there and eat. Actually, after a bunch of years it will, but for the first handful of years it will attack that piece of meat. Lion's not stupid. It knows the meat is dead. It will ravenously tear it up because there's an evolutionary energy that for animals and for humans comes through the jaw.

The jaw is what most creatures will eat you with. When your dog wants to let you know, "Sorry, Dave. I don't like what you're doing, grrr!" It's going to jaw you. It's going to show you, "I got teeth. I got a jaw." You make that jaw big and tough to show aggression, to show, "I can hurt you." What happens is, there's a certain resolution of aggressive energy when that lion tears up the piece of meat because we have an aggressive nature in us from the instinctive animal level. The lion has an instinctive animal aggression. It ain't angry. When a lion rips apart a springbok, that's the African equivalent of a deer, it doesn't rip apart the deer because it hates it, quite the opposite. It loves it, but it has this aggressive energy.

You and I, as humans, we build up a little aggression. You know, I had a rough day at work. Some guy cut me off. Some guy grabbed my parking space. They shortchanged me at the supermarket, and we have aggression. We work out our aggression in different ways. Some people like to work out their aggression through exercise. I love that way. A lot of people work out their aggression, unknowingly, through chewing. We chew gum.

Dave: The football coach constantly chewing. You always see him on the sidelines just about ready to tear something apart.

Marc: Totally. They don't have their act together. They're not a cool, calm, customer. They are so nervous. They are so angry. They are so aggressive that the gum chewing helps regulate their experience so they can continue on and make good decisions. A lot of times if we are not aware, what we will do is we will use crunch as a way to release aggression. I'm not saying that's bad. It becomes challenging when we start to get attached to it.

Years ago, Lay's potato chip was the first company really to capitalize on this.

Way back in the 1970s they created this apparatus where you can measure the perceived decibel level in your ear when you ate a chip and they were able to find the pleasure point of perceived sound in your ears. Depending on the level of crunch, they standardized their potato chips to a certain crunch level and then they aimed a commercial at you and said, "Nobody could eat just one," because you're going to love how this sounds, feels in your mouth. We want to release that aggression. The jaw does that and there's a pleasure in it. There's a pleasure when we release energy, any kind of energy that's bottled up in the system. That's the kind of short answer here.

Dave: For bio hackers interested in cognitive performance or meditation or somewhere in there, more crunch or less crunch? How do I use crunch to hack my awareness? Should I be crunching my [Bulletproof coffee](#) somehow, [chocolate-covered coffee beans](#)? I don't know.

Marc: I'm going to say no. I'm going to say watch your relationship to crunch. Some people are just all about the chips. They're all about the crunchy foods and if somebody is attached and they're getting kind of really into the junk food/carbohydrate snacks, I'm going to say part of it is the crunch. A way to hack into that is, "How can I get crunch in another way?" My favorite thing, because I was brought up on junk food, so there's almost this memory inside me, I just want to eat chips, which don't work for me, so if I do carrots, and that sounds so nutritionally predictable, but the carrots give me that sense of crunch.

I don't really love carrots that much, but I love that sense of, "Man, I am crunching this. I'm getting what I want, and I happen to be getting a real good food in my body that has a lot of fiber that's going to clean me out. It's about watching your relationship to it, not that you're crunch deficient. I find a lot of people are crunch excessive and it comes in the form of being hooked on crunchy junk foods. That's when you want to hack in and say,

“How else can I manage that?” Even gum chewing would be better because it’s giving your jaw that experience of what it needs.

Dave: It’s interesting that the only nerve that goes into the brain itself is the 5th cranial nerve, which comes right off the back molars and that’s the only nerve that gives it awareness of itself. All the other nerves that go into the brain are looking outside, but the only data that’s basically about what’s happening in the brain is that one weird nerve that goes to the molars. I’ve actually done work on my own molars to change the height, to change the angle of my jaw because the way my jaw was was putting my body in a sympathetic overdrive in my nervous system all the time.

The way I was chewing was actually causing biological stress and I couldn’t turn it off if I was going to eat anything besides like a Slurpee. I was shocked at the change in my mental cognition and my overall well-being, even my posture, just by moving my lower jaw forward. I believe there may be some connection between the crunch and the 5th cranial nerve, but maybe someday science is going to tell us more about that.

Marc: There are so many people, and now there are more and more dentists diagnosing TMJ where we lock the jaw. The jaw gets locked. The jaw gets tight. There’s a lot of reasons why that can happen. Some are dental reasons. A lot of it is lousy dental practices year after year after year. A lot of it is emotion that gets locked in the jaw. Think of people that you’ve known or you see or who kind of have like a jaw that looks like it’s about to bite you. That’s anger that’s not getting expressed, so then when you eat it’s actually, as you say, it’s reproducing, once again, that sympathetic dominance.

One of the brilliant maneuvers that we can do, one of the hacks you can do that’s real simple and real easy is to eat slowly. Let’s do it in reverse. The act of eating fast, by itself, is considered a stressor by the brain. You could be the most happiest, relaxed guy in the world. You just got a big, fat paycheck. Everything is great, and if I say, “Here Dave. Here’s this nice meal, your favorite meal. Eat in less than 5 minutes.” You will do it, and in that 5 minutes your body will go into some degree of stress-induced

digestive shutdown. You will have less blood flow to your gut. You will have less enzymatic output in your gut, and what that means, you will also have decreased nutrient assimilation, which means increased nutrient excretion simply because your body is shifted towards sympathetic nervous system dominance because the stressor of eating too fast has hit your nervous system.

Why is eating too fast a stressor? Kind of how we're designed. The dietitians figured this out a while ago through a bunch of research. It takes the brain approximately 20 minutes to realize it's full. Really what that means is that it takes the brain, head brain and gut brain, you have a separate, yet, interconnected nervous system in your gut called the enteric nervous system. It takes these 2 talking heads, so to speak, about 20 minutes to scan the meal, to understand the nutritional profile of what you've just ingested. "How much essential fats does this guy have in his system right now? Do I have enough amino acids? Do I have enough micro nutrition, macro nutrition? What the heck is going on? Do I need more liquid? Do I have enough bulk? Is there enough fiber in here?"

That's a complex process. It takes time. The brain is saying, "Whoa, stressor!" If you try to do that fast, digestive system will literally shut down and that's why people complain, "Oh my god, I'm an overeater. I can't stop eating." You don't have a willpower problem if you overeat. You just aren't driving your vehicle properly. The manual says, your DNA says you need to eat slowly so your brain has time to scan because when your brain says, "You know, done. You've got what you need," appetite regulation kicks in and says, "Complete." You don't need willpower. It's a natural mechanism that takes over. All I'm trying to say is we need to be in parasympathetic nervous system dominance because the way brain ... okay, here's brain wiring.

This is the easiest hack around nutrition and digestion and if viewers get nothing else from this conversation, take away this. The way the brain is set up, yin and yang, 2 halves, sympathetic, parasympathetic. Sympathetic nervous system is in it's extreme. It's fight or flight stress response. In the extreme stress response when you are truly running for your life, digestive

system totally shuts down. Why? Because when that lion is chasing you, you don't need to be digesting your Fruit Loops. All your metabolic energy wants to go into survival. Now, when you shift into parasympathetic nervous system dominance, that's the state of relaxation response, but it's a switch that flips. When parasympathetic nervous system is activated, full, healthy digestion assimilation and, check it out, day in, day out calorie-burning capacity is activated. Yes, you and I burn calories more vigorously in the hour or maybe 2 that you exercise, but you burn the bulk of your calories in the other 22, 24 hours a day.

Dave: One of the Bulletproof team met you at an event recently and you talked about the slow-down method of eating and she started doing it and said, in fact, the reason we have you on the podcast, she said that just that one, simple adjustment made her more aware and helped her track how she was eating, what she was eating. It kind of changed her relationship to food. That's kind of cool. One conversation, probably not as long as this podcast, shifted her behavior to just sort of pay more attention. I think people are in a hurry. People want to perform well. They want to get it done, but there is something to be said for sitting down and having a real meal and I'm glad that you're bringing it up as a psychology behavior and a nervous system behavior. It's something that people looking to upgrade themselves, bio hackers, can use as part of what they do to not just eat the right ratios of nutrients and whatever else, but to eat them from a place of parasympathetic dominance. Is there a value that you've seen to, instead of putting yourself in a state of high heart rate variability, praying, meditating, or something else right before you eat?

Marc: Thousand percent yes, so let's look at it this way. If we want to just keep it in the realm of simple science, or if we want to refer to simple, beautiful science, again, we're understanding relaxation versus stress response, sympathetic versus parasympathetic nervous system dominance, a prayer before meals, whether you believe in a higher power or not, will generally put you more into a relaxation response. Meditation, essentially is designed to put us into relaxation response. Deep breathing, 5 to 10 long, slow, deep breaths; you could be the most stressed guy right now, in less than a

minute, if you do some simple, deep breathing you can shift your body from sympathetic to parasympathetic dominance in less than a minute.

It's kind of profound, so 5 to 10 long, slow deep breaths. It doesn't even have to be super deep. It could be moderate, you know. If you're at a business lunch and you're with a bunch of people who, you know, deep breathing would be socially unacceptable, if you're just sitting there kind of looking at everybody and deep breathing, they think you're listening, you're just changing your brain state, which is changing your body state, which is changing your digestive in an assimilative and calorie-burning capacity.

By the way, also, as you slow down and get into parasympathetic dominance, when you eat, you're in the natural state of appetite regulation and what people begin to find is, "Oh, I'm here. I'm present," because when we are eating, in sympathetic nervous system dominance, part of what's happening ... let's go into another bio hack here, which I think is really important, slightly more advanced ... so the main stress hormone is cortisol. Cortisol does a ton cool things, and it's not bad stuff. Cortisol is circulating in our body right now. It's keeping us alert. It's keeping us on target.

David: I supplement an extra Cortisol when necessary, so it's not a bad hormone, just too much at the wrong time is bad, right?

Marc: Bingo, so excess Cortisol has an interesting feature. It will skew time perception. Right now if you're the most relaxed guy in the world and I give you a hypodermic needle filled with Cortisol, within less than a minute, you're going to be going, "Man, when is this podcast going to be over? What's going on? Why is it taking so long? I've got stuff to do." Why does Cortisol do that? Because when you're running from the lion, time is running out. Nature wants you to know, "Hey dude, you don't have time to write the next great novel. You don't have time to daydream about your wife or your girlfriend. You need to get moving here. Time is running out."

Whenever there's Cortisol circulating in the brain, we become really fast, and when you become fast you become more instinctive, but you don't

notice the nuances. This is what you do, to me, your work is all about nuances. You're saying, "Hey, taste this coffee. Experience this product. This is different." I can't believe you until I try the supplement, try the product, and go, "Huh, I notice something." If I'm moving too fast, if I'm watching TV, if I'm multitasking and I take one of your products or if I drink [Bulletproof Coffee](#), I'm not going to know the difference.

Dave: That's very true.

Marc: Most people are in that time-skewed, excessive, cortisol driving me into doing the next thing, and we're not in awareness. Awareness happens in meditation, but more to the point, awareness happens when we're present and we're here and we're in more parasympathetic dominance.

Dave: What's kind of funny, before I created the bean process, the [Upgraded Bulletproof](#) process for making the coffee beans, I did the [40 years of Zen](#) training, which really develops incredibly focused awareness powers and I kind of caught myself noticing the difference in the different types of coffee. Eventually, I went out and I created the Bulletproof process, but then, I'm really worried about the power of placebo, because maybe I just tell people you'll feel better and then they do. I haven't even published this yet, but I have a study where we had people try other coffee versus the coffee with my process and instead of relying on the inner powers of awareness where our conscious brain might tell us what we wanted to hear. We looked at objective psychological measures of executive and cognitive function, and, what do you know, there is a difference, a very measurable and quantifiable difference between the coffee processing I'm doing and a typical store-bought coffee.

The problem that we all run into when we're bio hacking and just, people who are thinking, smart, rational, scientific people, is that, "How do I know that I can trust that inner voice?" Do you have some final words of advice for people about, "Okay, I think I sense something. How do I know that I sense it and I didn't just tell myself that I sensed it?"

Marc: It's a beautiful question and I think if we look at, you know, again, let's go back to the yogis. Let's go back to the Buddhists. Let's go back to the Taoists. In part, they saw the mind is a tool. The mind is a tool. If you don't know how to use the tool, it's going to be like a jackhammer that's just going crazy and it runs itself and it says all kind of dumb stuff and it tortures us. It goes in any direction it wants and it gets distracted, so we train the mind. You train the mind by learning language, by learning math. You train the mind by meditating.

There's a million ways to train the mind so it becomes leashed. We yoke it so we can be in more charge of it rather than it be in charge of us, so when you asked me the question, "Well, how do I know if what I'm sensing is true?" You are training the body and then part of it is trial and error. I'm going to pull out from your story. Here you are in a foreign country and you drink the tea with the yak milk and you go, "Whoa. Something's different here," and so your company, therefore, started as a sensation in your body.

David: Fair point ...

Marc: They're exhausted. "Oh, let me do a scientific study to find out if Tibetans actually have more energy and more cra- ..." No. It starts as an observation and we, as humans, for some weird-ass reason, or we can talk all day why, we've lost trust in our intuitive function, and at the end of the day it is a PhD skill to be able to, let's say, hear information and discern if I'm going to follow that information. It's a PhD skill to take in food and notice, "Huh, how does this make me feel? Wow. I don't feel so good. I don't know if I want to eat that again. Wow. I took the supplement. I feel better. It's a practice like Zen meditating.

You notice and you notice and you notice, "Huh, how do I feel right now based on what I ate then? How's my energy? How's my thinking?" and we begin to refine ourselves because refinement is the name of the game, whether you want to make more money. No matter what you want to get better at, it's refinement. It's practice. It's skill, so that would be my answer. Endeavor, be curious, and be a scientist of a faculty that is essentially, by definition, non-linear, non-scientific, but that doesn't mean

it's not as potent as any principal in physics or chemistry and biology. Just cause you can't measure it doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

Dave: Those are wise words and I'm looking for a few more of them because our final question on all the podcasts is, what are your top 3 recommendations for people who want to perform better in all walks of life? It doesn't have to be from the [Institute for the Psychology of Eating](#), just what you've learned walking your life's path, the top 3 recommendations people should know?

Marc: Thank you, what a beautiful question, and I wish I could give 20 of them, but if I narrow it down to 3, probably the first one would be authenticity/truth. It's just being the truth of who we are. I think what I've noticed is, you know, I've noticed this in my own life and I notice this in friends, loved ones, clients, students, whoever, who are often conditioned to be a good boy, be a good girl, do this, do that, here's how you're supposed to think, act. Here's what your sexuality is supposed to look like. Here's what you're supposed to eat. Here's your career path, and who am I actually, really, if I was expressing myself?

Do I dare say the truth of who I am? Do I dare be who I'm being compelled to be, what feels like it's just growing out of me but I'm trying to suppress it because you might not like me if I say what I really want to say. I might lose my friends. I might lose my partner. I might lose everything. I might lose my job. I might be dangerous to people. Authenticity, to me, is great power, and it's great power on all levels when we live the truth of who we are.

Next, I would say that we got to bring love into the equation and more the kind that's slightly less conditional. Yeah, you know, I love people and I love my partner and I love my relatives and friends and sometimes I want something back. We tend to put a lot of conditions on love, "I will love you if ... I will love myself as soon as I lose weight, make more money, whatever it is ..." You know, the mind is brilliant, but there's so much research that, for me, should be headline news about how the heart is its own brain. It's its own thinking organ. There is literally brain tissue, its own brain tissue, its own nervous system tissue within the heart. Did you know that there was

as much neurotraffic going from heart to brain as there is brain to heart?
We think this is central command.

Dave: It's a 4 to 1 ratio, if I remember right, from the heart to the brain ...

Marc: Really, I didn't know that.

David: That the [HeartMath Institute](#) data, yeah.

Marc: I like that. That's a new statistic for me. I love it. In America, if we go, "I think," we go, "I think," you know, you go to Japan. When they go, "I think," they point to their belly, for god's sakes. They point to their center, their dan tien.

David: It's all about sushi, right?

Marc: Yes, and then there's the thought of the heart. The heart thinks too, so for me, the next piece of that is love, and I guess the last one, for me, is to be inquisitive if you're not already, about a higher guidance system. I think we're conditioned to believe that, you know, this brain operates because I make this brain better and I squeeze out more things from the brain or I could take things like good food and good supplements to make my brain better, and some say that the brain is also a receiving station, so it's pulling information. Where might it be pulling information from? Is there a guidance system? Are we being guided? Is there a north star to orient ourselves to?

I'm 55 and the older I get, the more I feel that there's a, you know, physicists will call it a chaotic attractor, we're being pulled by something out there, so I think there's something happening. There's a greater intelligence in the universe that has its own hidden architecture, that has its own kind of rules. I think it's interesting to explore that greater intelligence because if we're intelligent, then there might be greater intelligence because intelligence exists. I think it's a profound and interesting exploration. I hope I answered your question.

David: You absolutely did, and thank you. Where can people learn more if they want to become a practitioner for the [Institute for the Psychology of Eating](#)? What's the url, how can they learn about you?

Marc: Thanks for asking, my friend, we are [psychologyofeating.com](#), all one word, psychologyofeating. If you could spell psychology right the first time, give yourself a gold star. You come to our website, we have a great audio, guest, you just sign up and you get into email system and it's probably a good hour and a half of me talking more eating psychology principles. Also I talk a lot about another field that I developed called mind-body nutrition, literally how the mind influences the body. We've talked a little bit about it here. We have an eating psychology coach certification training for professionals.

It's a distance-learning program, pretty beefy, 250 hours. It's an 8-month training you could do from anywhere in the world. We have online programs for the public, transform our relationship with food, brilliant program, very life changing for a lot of people, tons of free resources. For those who just want the freebies, get the information, go on the blogs. We got lots of videos. The information flows these days, so we have a lot on the website for those who just want to tap in more, that's the way to go, [psychologyofeating.com](#).

Dave: Thanks, Marc David, for being a guest on [Bulletproof Executive Radio](#) today. If you enjoyed today's show please do us a favor of going onto **iTunes** and telling the world that you like it, and while you're at it, if you go over to [Upgraded Self](#) and you [click order on a bag of coffee](#) or something like that, that is what funds this show and funds a lot of the other work that I do to get good information out there. Thank you for your time and we'll see you on the next show.



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