



DR. KEESHA EWERS: Welcome to the Woman's Vitality Summit. This is Dr. Keesha Ewers, your wellness coach and advisor for the Summit, and I am so delighted to be talking today to Fran Sussman, who is going to be talking about the question "Can you detox stress?" and the impact of long-term stress on vitality.

Fran has been in holistic care since 1988 and in private practice since 1993. Apart from one-on-one consulting, Fran is sought after as a speaker, a workshop leader, and a meditation teacher. She writes a column on holistic health for The Times Herald Record and has been featured frequently in Natural Awakenings magazine. Welcome to the Summit Fran.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Thank you so much, Dr. Keesha. I am thrilled to be here, it's such a pleasure and a privilege.

DR. KEESHA: Now, I always start with a reminder for all of us about what the word vitality means. I did the Summit because I see so many women in my own practice lacking vitality. I've had my vitality drained in my own life through one thing or another that we're all confronted with as women.

So just circling to the top of it and saying vitality is actually your life juice, your life essence, the thing that brings you joy and passion, and how you get out of bed in the morning so that you can do your life purpose. If you're drained of that, it makes it hard to even want to get going in the morning. So, I would love to hear what you've experienced – in terms of seeing the women in your practice – about the number one vitality drainer that you notice people you work with suffer from?

FRAN SUSSMAN: I think this is a huge question, and I love your definition. I think we are really designed innately to be juicy and vital for our entire lives; that's certainly what I'm going for.

I see that women are drained in large part because they have too much energy going out and not enough coming in. So, I think of it like the tabs on a computer: you know what happens if you've got 25 tabs open in Firefox or Safari, and everything just runs a little slower and you don't get the good responses that you want. Our bodies and minds are very similar, in a way.

I see, developmentally, in our 20s we're just establishing ourselves and finding our place in the world. In our 30s and our 40s we're moving more into that part of our lives where we're taking care of others at work and at home. So it's important all the way through, but especially as we get older and past those prime reproductive years, that we start pulling some of that energy back into us because in a way it's infinite, and in a way, it really isn't.

If you don't generate your own energy, but rather leave it out on all those open tabs all the time, I think we really start to lose our vim and vigor.

So I encourage clients at night to actually do a little process where they shut all those tabs down one by one; where they look at where their energy is left out in the world and they pull it back. Even if it's to a loved one, you can pull it back and extend it out again the next day. But so often it's not even anything that is significant to us like that; there are all these little worries and the mayhem that goes on in the world these days, and we kind of leave that open: we leave that book open, and it tends to be so draining.

So one way to think about it is with those tabs, like on a computer, or sometimes the image works of just having a book of your days. Even if you don't have one literally, you can imagine at the end of the day, before you go to sleep, just closing that book. Really appreciating "I did what I could today. I did my best. I gave my efforts to these things and I'm ready to end my day" and just doing that will give you more of that restorative, regenerative sleep and rest that we all need.

DR. KEESHA: That is a delightful way to think about it, the tabs. I have a zillion tabs open right now on my computer, and that's a great way – mentally clicking them closed and turning off your computer.

I've heard Mary Agnes Antonopoulos, who gave a great talk on this Summit about keeping your kids safe online, and one of the things she talks about is actually disconnecting your computer from wireless and turning that off during the night when you're asleep, and I had never even thought about that. What you're doing is saying do that from inside your body and your energetic body. Ayurveda says we have five different layers to us, and drawing that in, that's a great way of thinking about it.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Yeah. I adore Mary Agnes, she's a very good friend, and yes, I tell all my clients to do it on the literal as well as the metaphorical level: turn off your Wi-Fi at night. For most people, that's just unplugging something or clicking a switch, and you turn it back on in the morning when you need it again. Giving your body that respite from the electromagnetic fields. People say "Well, it's not in my bedroom, it's downstairs" but if you're getting Wi-Fi in your bedroom, then it's affecting you in your bedroom, so yes, we want to close it down metaphorically and literally.

DR. KEESHA: That's great advice. One of my teachers in Peru talks about putting yourself to bed and then enclosing yourself in an amethyst crystal, so I always do that. I always put myself inside of a crystal as I'm going to sleep, and that, of course, protects you from all of the other energy from around also. So, these are all great ways of letting you get full regenerative recovery during the night, which is so important. Sleep, we talk about it all the time.

FRAN SUSSMAN: It sure is. That is when we do repair and recovery. If you're not getting enough sleep, then you're not going to heal; it's really that black and white.

It's important too to get good, quality sleep. So many women I see are in bed eight hours, but they're not waking up ready to take on the day the next morning, and that's what I look for. I want that quality of sleep that you feel that regeneration where you can bound out of bed, ready to take on whatever your challenges are.

DR. KEESHA: Yeah, if you're waking up exhausted, then you're definitely not getting what you needed during the night. Often that's because you're processing things you didn't process during the day, which, of course, is why meditation is so important, so that you can process these things during the day and not during the night when you're supposed to be regenerating.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Yes. There are things that are going to go on in the background anyhow; our brains are always cleaning themselves at night. Did you know that they actually shrink down to about 70% of their daytime size so that the brain is physically squeezing out toxins at night? But it only happens if you're getting that really good, quality sleep and going through all the normal cycles of sleep.

DR. KEESHA: Very interesting. I was going to say that's great motivation to go to bed, because you're brain's shrinking, so you may as well go to bed anyway. All that work you want to do at 2:00 in the morning on the computer, you're just doing it from a stupid place, right? Your brain has shrunk down.

FRAN SUSSMAN: And we've all hit our heads against that wall from time to time.

DR. KEESHA: Absolutely. You and I have both had experiences in our lives where we've been confronted with our mortality. We've been drained of our vitality. We've had our bodies pushed to the limit because we haven't sat and listened hard enough to the warning signs that we were given really early on. I would love to have you tell your story – I'll share mine, too. I just think I want women to hear this because I call this the misery to motivation ratio.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Right. Well, as you know, Dr. Keesha, I have had the experience of struggling with my health for much of my life. It took me such a long time to really come to grips with this question of why do I always have to work so hard to be healthy, because people might think, looking at me, that I'm doing this work because I'm so naturally healthy and it just comes easily.

But the truth is that I'm in this work because I have always struggled – and my children had struggles when they were babies, and I had to advocate for them as well. What has really driven

me, to a great extent, are a lot of my own unresolved questions about my health and well-being. So, for me, I had a lot of trauma early in my life, and we know that affects the immune system.

I contracted Lyme disease – although I certainly didn't know it at the time – when I was 17 years old and rolling in the hills of Vermont for college. That had a tremendous impact on my physical well being for decades. It really took until my early 50s to understand that at that point I wasn't having repeated acute episodes of Lyme, but that I had chronic Lyme. Not really surprising since I lived in the lower Hudson Valley, which is kind of the seed; we're not far from Lyme, Connecticut.

I have also been through cancer twice now, and in a way, I was always waiting for that other shoe to drop. My mom had cancer when I was 17, and then again I think it was 12 or 15 years ago now. She's still kicking at 87. She's amazing. But, also her mother died of cancer that started in her breast and eventually metastasized.

So, long before there was such a thing as the BRCA gene, I knew there was something genetic in my family, and even at the age of 17 when my mom was going through this, I had an interest in nutrition.

In those years, there were two people on the radio that spoke to these kinds of things: there was Gary Null, and there was Carlton Fredericks, and these guys were my heroes, because nobody else was talking about using supplements and vitamins and food to get healthy. There was something in me that resonated so strongly with that, even as a teenager, that looking at what my mom went through and it was so brutal then. I mean, I went through breast cancer just in this decade when you can know ahead of time what you're going to be dealing with, to a great extent, but women at that point, they just went under the knife and woke up and found themselves without breasts. They really didn't have a lot of options.

My mom was remarkable and such a strong and optimistic woman. She really modeled for me that cancer doesn't have to be so frightening and I think that's helped me tremendously. I look at somebody like Angelina Jolie, whose mother died of cancer, and who said to her children "I don't ever want you to go through that, so I'm going to have all this prophylactic surgery" which, of course, doesn't guarantee that you'll never have cancer. It just breaks my heart.

I appreciate that some women will make that choice, but honestly, I had breast cancer. I have the BRCA gene. They told me that I should have my ovaries removed and a double mastectomy, and I declined. So, I did risk having ovarian cancer because of the BRCA gene, and in fact that happened, but you know what? The way I look at it is that my genes had their say, but so did my decades of healthy eating and exercise and meditation and appropriate supplementation and yoga, and all the other things that support me.

So even though I did have cancer twice, I have been able to reclaim my health fully. Part of that, of course, is also that you have to pay attention to what's going on in your body. I totally understand why so many women don't catch ovarian cancer until its third and fourth stage, because it would've been easy to just say "Oh, I'm getting older, no wonder I feel more tired" or "No wonder I have a little bigger belly." But for me, I knew that something was wrong: something had changed in my system and it needed attention, and so I was able to catch it at stage 1 before it metastasized anywhere else.

While I wouldn't wish this experience on anybody, I would also say it's not so terrifying. What's terrifying is feeling that you're at the random effect of life. When you do your part, you can't control everything, but you can have confidence then that you'll do the best you can; the best you're capable of doing when you take all these other measures.

I don't like to think that genes are definitive. I like to think they should be a ripple, not a tidal wave, and I can imagine somebody saying, "Well, they were a tidal wave in your life" but I don't actually feel that way.

I don't mean to make light of it, or anybody else going through cancer, but we know so much more – it's not in the mainstream – but we know so much more about ways to handle these things. In fact, I'm reading a book I would highly recommend – I don't have it in front of me – but it's called *Cancer Free! Are you Sure?* It talks about all these tests that we can access that show us long before our stage 1 what is going on in our body, and we can access that kind of information. This is what I want to share with my daughter and my sister, and all the other women out there listening who are concerned about the risk of cancer: there is so much more available to us in terms of having an impact on our own health, our own lives, on taking charge.

I am talking to integrative oncologists and other people all over the world to get more ideas about how we can best navigate this because most of the protocols that are used were established 50, 60 years ago and they really haven't changed. I didn't want to take chemo that was designed decades ago for somebody with fourth stage ovarian cancer, because I only had stage 1. So I'm putting together a different way of working with my health.

I am officially cancer free, I feel great, and I think it's really important not to brush away those little hints, those intuitions you get that something's off. You have to know your body, so you have to know what your normal and healthy is. Then you really have to pay attention when you get those signs, those indications that something has changed.

DR. KEESHA: I love what you're saying, and one of the things that you said in the very first part when you started talking about your own experience with cancer was that you had trauma in your background, and that there's research that indicates that that's a risk factor. Now, I talked to Dr. Alan Christianson when we talked about Hashimoto's and thyroiditis and

autoimmune disease on this Summit and I brought up the ACE study, which is the Adverse Childhood Event study.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Yes.

DR. KEESHA: This is so important, because – I've shared on this Summit already – I was sexually abused when I was 10 years old. My dad was in the navy and left many, many times as I was growing up to go out to sea. A couple of those count on the Adverse Childhood Experience test that you do. So I could be a 1 or a 2.

Now, I got rheumatoid arthritis when I was 30 - my immune system started killing me, turning on me – and I started asking the question "Why am I killing myself? Why am I doing this to me?" I went back to that experience at the age of 10 and realized I had told myself that this world's not a very safe place, I really don't want to be here, I can't trust people, they're not safe.

So those buttons would get pushed frequently in my 20s because I didn't have enough self-knowledge and awareness and the practices that I do today at 51 when I was in my 20s. I still reacted to those early childhood beliefs that get ingrained in your brain when your brain's not even developed yet. Your brain's not developed until it's 26 years old. So you have all this worry and belief in there that comes from these adverse childhood experiences. You make up something to help you understand it, and it usually isn't correct, whatever the belief is.

Here's the other thing: there's a researcher by the name of Mull who looked at PET scans of brains and saw that actually trauma, the way we tend to define it and think about it is big, capital T trauma. Going through great, big acts of Mother Nature like devastating earthquakes and hurricanes, fires in your house, or war, devastation, rape, child abuse, things like that. But actually, what she saw was that daily chronic life stressors do the same thing to the brain as PTSD does. So if you're running around – the title of your talk is "Can You Detox Stress" – with the belief that you are too stressed out to actually take care of yourself, then your brain is likely lighting up in the same way that yours and mine would have when we were younger with that PTSD part of us.

So this is really important for people to understand, because to me food is so important – what you eat, what you put on your fork. Dr. Tom O'Bryan and I talked about this. You and I both teach this in our practices, that your food for your emotions and the food for your mind and the food for your soul is just as important.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Absolutely yes. That's why I define nourishment as learning to take in exactly what supports you in thriving in your life. That's on all levels. You're right, it's food, but it's also the people you interact with, it's where you live, what the environment is like. Is it supporting you in thriving in your life and in your goals, in your passions, in your dreams?

It's so easy if we just defer all those little decisions to end up way off track. We look at all the stressors that we experience and you're familiar with the studies that show that people coming out of the camps from World War II in the Holocaust. Those stress factors are passed on for three generations.

But then you also have the compounding of stress in our time. I'm sure you too are seeing so many more women who are just generally more anxious, more fearful, less secure that their lives are going to be okay. That's the kind of chronic stress that you're talking about that can really throw you off your foundation. So for me personally, it was a very robust combination of actual traumatic events, including being raped twice five years apart, in completely different circumstances, and having some very, very difficult situations at home as well. I was bullied a lot, I was picked on.

But I think that what saved me always is this desire to understand things, and then the second part for me was nature; nature was my savior. I could go look at the moon, sit in the grass, talk to the flowers and the animals. We know now too that listening to nature sounds decreases your cortisol levels. We know that looking at green grass decreases your cortisol levels. So, there are ways to bring in the natural world which, after all, is supposed to be part of our daily life, and yet so often isn't. That can go a long way towards modifying the impact of that stress. That includes, as I said, food and environment, relationships, all the things that we need to evaluate and reevaluate on a regular basis.

DR. KEESHA: It's so important, what you just said. I know that you're saying that all things I'm saying that happened around my childhood trauma are not being said from a victim's face. I want to say that for everybody listening. This is coming from a place of empowerment because my experiences in childhood that we're talking about, that were putting me at higher risk for disease manifestation from my genetics, which is exactly what happened, were the very experiences that I believe I signed up for when I came to this planet, so that I would learn forgiveness and I would learn compassion.

You and I are both on the path of the wounded healer. We have to have empathy, compassion and knowledge in order to be the most effective teachers and guides for others who are attracted to us. I think that that's an important distinction that I just want to make, to make sure people aren't hearing this as if from a victim, because it's not.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Yes, absolutely. My daughter said to me recently when I was talking to her about some of the factors that I thought contributed to my having cancer again. She said "But mom, always taught me not to blame anybody" and I said "I'm not. I don't blame anybody. This is just about understanding how things come together." There's no blame, there's no pointing fingers.

I always think of Caroline Myss, who I absolutely adore, and who was one of my early teachers. For anybody who doesn't know, she is an incredibly brilliant and insightful medical intuitive. I got to do some intensive training with her very early on, before she was as famous as she is now. Actually she was the one who told me I was on the right path at a point when I was thinking "I don't know if I can do this." I was a newly single mom with two young kids and I was trying to start a new practice. She said "Oh no, you keep doing this, this is what you're supposed to be doing." But one of the things that she always said was that we can't take these things personally. When somebody steps on your toe, you can't blame them for stepping on your toe: you needed your toe stepped on and it was going to come from somewhere. They just were the messenger, so don't shoot the messenger.

As much as I resisted and struggled against it at times, I think there's so much truth in that. So yes, these experiences have all contributed to my understanding more and more. Then being able to put that at the service of my clients, which is certainly one of my true great passions in life.

DR. KEESHA: So when I send people out to go and do the little quiz and self-assessment about Adverse Childhood Events, that is not for you to cling to and say "Well, this explains everything." It is a validation of experience and how it turns genes on or off and how you manifest them. It's also a trigger for you to say "Okay, in order to really detox, this isn't just going to be about liver cleansing or coffee enemas or going off gluten and sugar and alcohol. This is going to be about learning forgiveness, about learning how to really speak to my body and listen to my body and be in collaboration with my body as a team." I think that's such an important thing for everyone to understand; that forgiveness is the detoxing of the kind of stress that you brought up.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Yes, absolutely.

DR. KEESHA: This is important.

FRAN SUSSMAN: And it's why my personal practice has been the Loving Kindness meditation for, oh I don't even know, 15 years now, because that is "May I be filled with Loving Kindness, may I be healthy and well, may I be peaceful and at ease, and may I be happy" and we say that when we practice this for ourselves, for somebody else who's a mentor or teacher, for somebody about whom you are neutral, and for somebody who's difficult for you.

I have practiced this for so long. I have taught it to hundreds and hundreds of people, and I find this is one of the best tools for really learning forgiveness and being able to feel the difference that it makes in your life. We do need daily detoxes for this. So often when people think about detoxes, as you said, they think "Oh, I'll do a liver cleanse once a year" or "I'll go do my one-day seasonal detox" but unfortunately there's too much to detox now to do it that way. So we have to find these tools that we can use on a daily basis in order to clean up the pyramids of stress that we are building in our lives.

I think we're all dealing with so much more. People are afraid of all the random violence going on right now. We didn't use to worry so much about somebody coming at us with a gun, and now, people are scared because the world seems less predictable. That is frightening; that is trauma, to feel that you don't have control and you can't predict that everything will run smoothly today. But the truth is, that's always the case, we just don't pay attention to it.

So we need to be able to develop a stable base for us with these kinds of tools, that you and I are both talking about, that start to establish a way to navigate these difficult experiences. That is perfectly possible, but it takes attention. It takes noticing that something is off and it's having consequences.

Often younger women say "I'm fine, it's not bothering me now." But you and I look at lab work and we can connect the dots in a different way, so we know that those kinds of things will show up one way or another unless they are addressed. Again, not to make anybody paranoid, I think this is just engaging with the process of life responsibly so that we can have that full, juicy, vital life that we're intended to have, that we're really designed to have.

DR. KEESHA: Beautiful. I'm going to return to Ayurvedic medicine, to these five layers of being, because your talk is in the session of the day that's all about eastern philosophy.

Eastern philosophy is very much about the fact that we're not all the same, we're not just our physical bodies. We have, in Chinese medicine it's called your chi, and in Ayurveda or yoga, it would be called Prana. This is part of your vitality, your life energy, your life force. After that, you've got an emotional layer, a mental layer, you've got your wisdom body, then you have this absolute bliss that you can access if you're not toxic in these other layers.

So there's this understanding that toxicity can get stuck in these other layers too, and I think that's just a profoundly important thing to bring up. You talk about nourishment in a beautiful way, and then you have a five-step process too, right?

FRAN SUSSMAN: I do, and similarly, I want to put the piece in also that one of my main medical mentors over the last nine years has been Dr. Dietrich Klinghardt, who is a German MD who practices primarily in Seattle now, and is one of the top Lyme specialists in the world. He also teaches us to work on those five levels.

We're not like a bicycle. You can't just take a wheel off and replace the spokes and put it back on without it affecting everything else. Everything affects everything else, and that's the beautiful complexity of our system. We have to pay attention to that. It's a very dynamic view of our bodies and our lives. So you can't just say your bones need calcium. Sure they do, but to get the calcium into the bones is a whole other process that has to do with absorption and assimilation, and even being able to receive. So again, on this other level, if somebody's really having

difficulty with absorbing and receiving, that's going to manifest not only in terms of nutrition, but in terms of other aspects of their life; with being able to receive kindness or being able to receive a gift, being able to receive the nourishment around them.

So it's very important to always work on all of those levels at once. I don't think you can work with food without also talking about emotions and mental health and spiritual health because food encompasses all of that. So yes, nourishment has to be on every level. You can't just change somebody's diet and expect them to get well.

Yes, I take clients through a five step process. We start by focusing on nutrition, including identifying and eliminating food sensitivities, and balancing macronutrients – that's protein, fat, and carbs – for each individual. Everything I do is always customized because not only do people have different foods that they will thrive on, but they also have different issues around food and eating, so we work with all of that.

The next step – and these aren't necessarily linear, these are just all part of what we work on – we do talk about detox. We talk about detox on all those levels. So we want to lower toxic burden and that can be through meditation. It can be through cleaning up some of your relationships and it can be through using an infrared sono or getting some foods out of your diet. You do need to look at all of those; you need to connect the dots. You cannot just work on the physical level because we are not merely physical beings.

We also look at hormonally appropriate exercise. Everybody knows exercise is good, but not all exercise is good for everybody, so we want to find the right kind of exercise for each person, not only on terms of their age and their capacity, but their hormones and their metabolism. You want to make the right fit so they get the best results. You want to look at stress management and sleep.

Again, we talked before about how important sleep is, so I teach people about sleep hygiene. That's not just going to bed before midnight and getting your eight hours. It's things like sleeping in complete darkness, turning off the Wi-Fi, having all these electronics away from you so that your brain will be able to do the nighttime work that it's supposed to do. All of these together working over time I find really help people change their lives.

I love working with people on an ongoing basis because what happens then is that you develop a relationship, and just as we are wounded in relationship, our healing is in relationship. So the relationship itself can be so important. My goal is certainly to give people the tools so that they can walk away from this and live a healthier life with more of their vitality accessible to them.

I have clients that I've worked with who come back like once a year for 20 years, because we'll just do a little tune-up and see what's going on. That longevity is really wonderful. I get to work with three generations in a family and to really see changes over time. Working with women

who are pregnant makes a difference to their children. So I love that privilege, that opportunity, to be able to guide women through this individual process that we really create together from my quarter of a century of experience, but brand new for each one of them, because each person is unique.

DR. KEESHA: Very well said. And you have a program that you do for people for regaining vitality.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Yes, I wanted to mention that, because I would love to offer this to everybody listening to the Vitality Summit: I have a class that is online, it's flexible, it is five weeks, and it will take you through all of these different levels – physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual – in a very practical, doable, concrete way.

I've had many hundreds of women go through the class and you can read the testimonials on my website. Now I would like to make a special offer for everyone listening: we're going to start again in the beginning of October, and if you use the code VITALITY (all capitals) on the class, then I will give you one-third off the early bird pricing. So, that's to start in the beginning of October.

I will take you through it, lead you through it every step of the way. I'm there really giving you daily support, plus you have the support of a wonderful group of women with like-minded goals of really turning their lives around and reclaiming their health and vitality. I called it Zen Vitality, because you'll get the calm from the Zen part and extra energy from the vitality.

DR. KEESHA: Beautiful. Now, like me, some of your inspiration in your life comes from your children, so I would love for you to share a little bit about what they've taught you.

FRAN SUSSMAN: I would love to, and I'd love to hear about your children.

My children have definitely been the reason I got into this work. They each had health problems early on, as I mentioned, and solving those problems for them – which no other practitioner I brought them to, medical or otherwise, was able to do – that really launched my practice.

What happened over the years that I was trying to figure out their health issues was that I started getting phone calls and people would call me up and say "Can you help my daughter? Can I give your name to my cousin? My next-door neighbor has a seven year old with this problem, can you help me?" So over the course of a few years, I found that I had a practice, and I went from when my children were two and five and I was working part time while they were in preschool to a practice that is really more than full time and is a great love of my life, truly.

My children are now 25 and 28, and I was curious to ask them what were some of the best tips that I'd given them as a mom and as a health practitioner. So I loved what my daughter said. As I

said, she's 28 and she said "Develop discipline, but don't be rigid." Now, I can't remember ever saying that, Dr. Keesha but I love it, if that's the message that she got, because I think it's such a brilliant formulation. We want to balance effort and grace. We have to do our part, but we don't want to be so rigid that we don't allow the grace of the universe to step in for us.

I think that often what happens is that when we become disciplined, we do become too rigid, and so then we're kind of stuck, like in one of those children's toys. We used to get them at Chinatown, those toys that you put your finger in and the more you pull, the more you're stuck? So that's often what happens: we get ourselves stuck in these corners where we're putting tremendous pressure on ourselves to do things in a particular way.

I will tell you that one thing that cancer taught me is to be more flexible, less rigid; to be able to be a little more spontaneous and kind to myself. Discipline can be harsh, so we definitely want a routine, we definitely want to develop integrity by being reliable to ourselves. If we say I'm going to eat this way, or I'm going to do this kind of practice, we want to do that, but we don't want to be unforgiving, to go back to your theme of forgiveness.

The second thing that she said was "Learn your body so you can trust your body. You have to pay attention." Again, I'm so glad that I conveyed that to my daughter because it's true. We can tell people to pay attention to your body, but first you have to learn what normal and healthy is for you. I find most of the women I see don't have a clue.

We're creatures of accommodation; we adjust to everything. For a couple years in my 20s, I lived next to the entrance to the Holland Tunnel in downtown New York City. The first day I lived there I thought "Oh my gosh, I made a mistake. I can't stand the fumes and the noise" and it was a six-floor walkup too. But you know what? After a few weeks, you don't even notice anymore. We adjust to everything; even things that aren't good for us. So we really need to pay attention to what's going on and to learn what makes us feel better, what makes us feel worse, so that we can then adjust appropriately.

My son, who's 25, said the most important advice I've given him was to follow his passions, and I certainly agree with that. Often when I work with people, I have to have them think back to their teens, their adolescence, their 20s when they still had dreams about what they wanted to do with this life, and as I said, it's so easy to get off track with those little decisions that accumulate and take us too far from where we really wanted to be. But you can reclaim that. It may not look the way you thought it would earlier in your life, but it's so important to pay attention.

Sometimes our passions and our cravings are what I call our personal moonlight because they illuminate things, but indirectly. So if you had a passion to be an astronaut when you were 10, maybe you don't want to be an astronaut now as an adult, but it'll tell you something about what you truly did want and what you're yearnings are, and that is so important in understanding really what gives us our aliveness, our vitality.

DR. KEESHA: Really, really lovely. I loved the piece about developing discipline, but not being intractable with it. I saw a movie recently called *Captain Fantastic*, have you seen that, with Viggo Mortensen?

FRAN SUSSMAN: I haven't, but I heard it's great.

DR. KEESHA: It is fantastic. I mean, it really is a phenomenal movie, and it illustrates that.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Okay, no spoilers.

DR. KEESHA: Yeah, no spoilers. But it's a great illustration of what you just said about developing discipline, but not being intractable with it and having some flexibility, because, of course, we know in all the anti-aging literature and research that's been done over the past few decades that resilience and flexibility of mind are two of the greatest predictors of having an old age that you will enjoy.

Rigidity in your mind translates to rigidity in your body, and that makes us more likely to have bones break and have injuries and things like that. Flexibility and juiciness and passion and all the things we're talking about that mean vitality. It's really important to have that resilience and flexibility of the mind and to translate that into the body.

FRAN SUSSMAN: I will confess as a long-term yogi, I have always been very flexible, but that rigidity can be applied even there. I used to be so harsh to myself about my practice: it had to be 90 minutes six days a week, unfailingly, no matter what, no matter how I felt. I don't do that to myself anymore. I will always love yoga, I will always have a home on my yoga mat, but I don't treat myself as harshly now.

I can ask myself "Is this nourishing for me right now?" and if not, we can find some other form of nourishment, or we can modify it in some way. But I think it's so important that we heap loads of kindness on ourselves and one another, because we are all so hungry for that.

DR. KEESHA: That's very good self-care advice, because of course, the subtext of the Summit is Caring for Yourself, Body and Soul. Yoga is not asana only, it's not just the physical aspect of it. There are seven other steps in there. One of them is meditation, one of them is focus, one of them is study; union with God comes through recognizing God in another person and being kind and of service. So there are so many ways of practicing yoga that people don't really recognize in our culture. I think that that's one of the greatest ways that you can care for yourself.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Absolutely, and same thing with meditation. People think you need to be able to sit in a full lotus unmoving for an hour without a thought in your mind. No – meditation

is so simple, in fact, one of the gifts I'm giving away for the Vitality Summit is a little cheat sheet on meditation and how simple it can be. These are tools that can change your life and I do think it's so important to have a practice, because that practice – which really just means showing up for yourself every day – is the way that we become trustworthy to ourselves. It's the way that we know that we have personal integrity by saying "Yes, I'm going to meditate for three minutes a day this week."

You don't have to say an hour and then increase the risk of failing, you can just engage. You don't have to do it for long periods of time. It's more important to show up. That relationship with ourselves is nourishing, is nurturing. Meditation, yoga; these are things that can support us, and of course, like everything they can be used against us as well. So we have to find our way to them with great kindness and compassion.

DR. KEESHA: O course, Dr. Ajayan Borys is a meditation master, and he did a session here for the Summit and has a free guided meditation within his session. You can listen to him and just sit and do a guided meditation with him.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Wonderful.

DR. KEESHA: So I know that I am more caring of myself and of others when I sit in my practice. Today it was an hour and yesterday was an hour, but the day before that was 10 minutes, and tomorrow might be 10 minutes again.

I do carve out, fiercely, this space that I get to care for myself because that's what fills up my well so I can dip into it for others. Otherwise I don't really have anything to give. It's not genuine, it's not authentic, and it's not coming from my spirit. I think that it's important for women who are over-care givers – rescuers is another way of saying it – not to forget this and show up in our offices all broken down and a mess because they're so busy taking care of everyone else.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Yes, it's so true. I think it's really important to just drop anchor every day. Take a moment to just find a still point for yourself. Sometimes just looking out the window or getting up and stretching or calling a friend, little things that don't have to be taking a trip to another part of the world or a two week vacation. You can revitalize and regenerate your energy. You can just take a few long, slow, deep breaths and that drops your cortisol levels and does a reset for your nervous system.

There are so many more ways that we can work to take care of ourselves during the day. It doesn't have to be intimidating. You don't have to need dad's special equipment or go anywhere special. You just need to take that time for yourself and turn off the rest of the world for a little bit. Even moms with demanding kids, or women with busy jobs, or both, can find the time to do that a few times during the day.



DR. KEESHA: I think that's a great place to end. Thank you so much Fran, for sharing just a tiny part of your wisdom in this short period of time with our participants here.

FRAN SUSSMAN: Well thank you, Dr. Keesha. It was such a pleasure. Now I'm even more excited to hear some of the other speakers that you've mentioned. I will look forward to that, and thank you for doing this incredible work. I'm really thrilled to be part of it.

DR. KEESHA: Thank you. Remember, everybody, to live, love, laugh and keep on learning and be the most fabulous version of yourself, until next time.