



Women's Vitality Summit

Dr. Keesha Ewers Interviews Debra Atkinson

April 2017

- DR. KEESHA:** Welcome back to the Woman's Vitality Summit, everybody. This is the summit for caring for yourself body and soul. It is my honor and privilege to be able to talk to Debra Atkinson today, who is the founder and author of Flipping 50. Welcome to the summit, Debra.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Thanks so much. I'm excited.
- DR. KEESHA:** So, this is all about living the last half of life with vitality, and of course vitality is the name of this summit, right? So, I always start with what is your definition of vitality?
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Oh, great question. I think it is living by choice; being able to do whatever it is that you want to do and feel good doing it.
- DR. KEESHA:** Fantastic. And so, what do you see as the biggest drainer of said vitality for women of our era? I'm fifty-one, so I'm in the Flipping 50 time, right?
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Yes, we are soul sisters.
- DR. KEESHA:** Yeah. So, in that period of time then--
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** I know what played at your prom. So, I could mention a lot of things physical, but I will have to tell you, for women I think it's what they ruminate between the years.
- DR. KEESHA:** I couldn't agree with you more. I think that is exactly spot-on. So, given that, your background is in fitness and really helping women maintain a good hormone balance. In fact, a prescription for joy, right? To be able to have that vitality in the last half of life that can even be better than what it was in the first half. And I have to say that I look better, I sound better, I feel better, I'm stronger, I have better energy and far more vitality than I did when I was thirty, so it is possible. So, with that being said, then how does exercise affect hormone levels?

DEBRA ATKINSON: Oh, in so many ways. So, one of the things I like to say is for females, you get to that point - and sometimes it's happening earlier; for women it may happen in their forties - but they get to a point where estrogen gets their attention, but I think it is really the diva cortisol that is doing all the damage. So, when we look at exercise and how it comes into play to help with balance or to hurt, because so often, we are unintentionally making wrong choices based on our old thoughts and our old habits that we learned when it's the science that we had, that's all we knew, so we went from it, but then we've learned it and we really default to those old habits. So, we continue to want to create the body we had when we were thirty using the exercise we had when we were thirty, but we don't have the hormones we had when we were thirty anymore, and that's where the challenge comes in. So, how does it help balance? If we can change the type and the timing of the exercise, I think a woman fifty and beyond can look and feel like she was thirty, and in some cases better, as long as she exercises right for the right now.

DR. KEESHA: Okay, just a point of clarification, because I actually have a little bit of a bee in my bonnet about this part of it - about looking like you're thirty. So, I really object to our culture's siren song of resisting the aging process. I think that we should be aging with grace and embracing it and becoming the wise women elders we're supposed to be, damn it. We're supposed to be wise women elders and there's so many women that are contracted and they're not in their power and shining because they feel like they're overweight or they don't look good or they have wrinkles and they don't look like whatever the model on the front of the Cosmo magazine in the grocery store check-out line look like when they were just there a half an hour ago, and it's very discouraging for them so that they get more discouraged and they eat and then they watch television and they don't show up. And every woman at the age of fifty, I don't care what their background, they have got wisdom to share and they need to share it. And so this is one of my big things is stop trying to look like you're twenty and wasting your time. So, now that I've just ranted, I want to have you talk about that.

DEBRA ATKINSON: And I believe that. I'm kind of in that same park, only I like the word racefully aging as opposed to gracefully, so it kind of depends on your speed, maybe.

- DR. KEESHA:** But menopause - and I always teach my patients this and my students - is that it has the word pause in it, and it is time to stop and take a little pause and really evaluate what is this next chapter? I really think menopause is an initiation into this next stage of life where you really are meant to be the wise woman now. You're the matriarch; you're the one that is the guiding light and force for this world. At twenty I was stupid and I'm so excited to be seventy because I'm going to look back at fifty and say, "Wow, I was coming along, but there's still more. It gets better." And that's what I've been finding, that we get better with age if we put our intention in that direction, which is why I love what you're doing, Debra. Flipping 50 is fantastic.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Yeah, thank you. And I think it's really resonated with a lot of women who are like, "Thank you. Somebody's talking to me."
- DR. KEESHA:** Yes.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** "And there is a trainer who gets me."
- DR. KEESHA:** Yeah, that's really important.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Yeah. And like you said, when you were twenty, we knew nothing, but we thought we knew everything. I think that's a perpetuation and I think trainers who are twenty and thirty, there are those wise souls that age early, but it's hard to put yourself in the shoes of someone if you haven't lived that and don't have the life experience. Definitely.
- DR. KEESHA:** So, there are a couple ways of looking at that, because probably as a trainer, you've seen also people use their age as an excuse.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Oh, absolutely.
- DR. KEESHA:** To not show up and to not work hard at maintaining a wonderful balance in their body so that-- you know, it's the car that's carrying your spirit around, and so you really need to take good care of your car. You don't want to be obsessed with it, but you do need to take good care of it. So, probably you've seen a lot of people using that as an excuse too, right?

DEBRA ATKINSON: That's true. And I think it's a delicate balance. I think if you are happy, you have energy, you are healthy, and you're comfortable, whatever that looks like to you, that's one thing, but if you're struggling and you're settling because you think you have to, then we've probably bought into what's been true of past generations that we're changing. I think we're going to raise the roof.

DR. KEESHA: I do too.

DEBRA ATKINSON: That ceiling is up, yeah.

DR. KEESHA: Yeah, I do too. In fact, I don't know what your politics are, or anyone that's listening to the summit, but I really think-- pardon? I am going there.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Are you going to go there?

DR. KEESHA: I am. I actually think that the more we have a president-elect right now this recording is being done, as we can tell with your background in December, we have a new president-elect who has had some sound bites put out there about women that aren't too complimentary in terms of honoring and respecting what they bring to the table, and what I believe about that is that that's going to make some really powerful women show up and raise the ceiling. It's going to make people stand up and really be seen, you know? And I really think that strong-- all women need to be strong and powerful in their own unique brand of power and just show up to say, "No, that's not okay."

DEBRA ATKINSON: I agree. So, you can't be quiet, and sometimes I think that's pushing to get a response. Yeah.

DR. KEESHA: Yeah. So, in order to be our strongest, best selves, I would love to hear what you-- I get all kinds of questions from my patients in my office, so I often get women coming in that are just wanting hormones. "I want hormones," right? Bioidentical hormones. "I hear you prescribed them for my sister - she feels fantastic, she looks fantastic, I want some of that." And so then I'll start asking some questions--

DEBRA ATKINSON: "I'll have what she's having."

- DR. KEESHA:** Yeah, exactly. And turns out that there are a bunch of reasons why there's a hormone imbalance that we have to address first, right? Get to the underlying root cause. And so, one of the things that happens is that I get these questions about, "Well, should I be exercising before breakfast or should I exercise..." That's so confusing. There is research that indicates both sides of that question. "Should I be fasting until 11:00 in the morning and should I have bulletproof coffee as my only source of anything that goes in my stomach in the morning and then go work out?" There's so much information on the internet that people have a really hard time sifting through, which is why I started my radio show is because of that. So, this summit is a really great place to also put some of these things to rest, so I want to hear what you say about that.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Okay. So, first up, we're going to come back to this, but I think the key thing is each one of us is unique.
- DR. KEESHA:** Yay. Perfect answer. There's no one size fits all, thank you. Okay.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Yeah. So, we're going to say yes, we're all females, we're all mid life, and going across that threshold or we've crossed to the other side, so we do have those commonalities, but even then, we all respond differently. And so, you're right, there is-- I just blogged, in fact, today about this - the fact that here's the research about exercising in a fasted state before breakfast versus after, but I think then we have to say, okay, those were twenty-year-old males that were tested, and does that apply to you? You're not male, you're not twenty, and you're not having a high caloric diet that's 50% fat, so you've got to look at what about the study really applies to you when we're talking about there's information on both sides, well let's really look at the individual studies - what are we talking about? Because you know how easily we can through around, "Well, data says," "Research says..."
- DR. KEESHA:** I know. And all these studies are done with these different kinds of pools of people and we actually are not the same as everybody in that pool, and so I think that's such an important point you're bringing up.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** So, it's test, don't guess.

DR. KEESHA: I always say that. Oh my gosh. All of my Academy for Integrative Health Coaching students are laughing right now. They hear that constantly. Don't guess.

DEBRA ATKINSON: You make an educated decision, I think, on "Which way am I going to test first?" So that you're as close as possible, and then you measure your benchmarks and look at what works. So, one of the things that I caution a lot of the women I work with-- because by the time they come to me, and I'm usually not the first pony that they've tried, they're struggling; they're already stressed, and part of that is hormonal and part of that is they've got life stressors causing some of it, and now they've got gaining weight around their middle because of estrogen changes, and that's a stressor now.

So, we know cortisol is a big issue - well, to put them under more stress - dieting is stressful. We know exercising is stressful. Even the good exercise causes some stress on the body, so if you funnel it all down, all of that is landing in the same spot. So, I think for a woman who's going through hormone changes, I sometimes suggest, "Let's try starting with a little fuel before you exercise." In the last thirty years plus that I've been working with people, the one thing that is true, or has been, is when people exercise and they're more comfortable, they stay at it longer and they work a little more intensely while they're doing it, which in the end, ends up with more energy expenditure and having a better result. So, if you're fasting because you think you have to but you're really uncomfortable doing it and don't feel good, you're not going to want to repeat it. The goal is consistent, regular exercise that is joyful, not punishment, so you've got to find that fine balance so you want to rinse and repeat.

DR. KEESHA: Because if you're bonking, you're going to say, "Okay, I can't exercise," when in fact you're just not doing it with fuel in the tank.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Exactly.

DR. KEESHA: Yeah. So, this is really important because I run salivary hormone and adrenal tests all day long with my patients in my office, and I teach my health coach students how to do this too, and design protocols that are individualized for their clients. So, when I do that, if they're in phase 3 adrenal fatigue, I say, this is time for some weights, some restorative

yoga. This is not time to take an hour long run with a six-minute mile. It's not time to drive and push the cardiovascular system because it's actually becoming zebra being chased by lion, and when you're a zebra being chased by a lion and you think you're--

DEBRA ATKINSON: It's caveman and dinosaur, but I got it.

DR. KEESHA: Yeah. Then you're not going to lose any weight, because your body's saying, "Oh my gosh, I don't know if I'm ever going to be out of danger, so therefore I need to hold onto everything," right?

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yes, so true. Yep. And so quite often somebody will seek me out thinking, "I don't have any energy, I know I need to be exercising," and a lot of times I'm like, "Wait - actually maybe we need rest. You've dug yourself in a hole and that's like trying to write checks without anything in the bank account." We need to first fill that hole up and figure out what does rest feel like, and sometimes, I'm sure you've experienced this, what does hunger feel like? What does tired feel like? What's the difference? And getting back hunger and satiety for a lot of people, because they're not feeling that--

DR. KEESHA: Wait a second. You're saying that women are supposed to be connected to their bodies? I mean, I'm being completely flippant about this for a good reason, because this is something that I see all the time, is women so disconnected from their bodies. Their brains are like bullies dragging them around by the hair, and whatever their beliefs are about what their value system is, if it's, "I have to take care of everybody and I come last," or, "I have to look like I'm twenty-five and have a bodybuilder body and I'm not checking in with my body to see if it concurs or if its got any fuel in the tank," that gets everyone into trouble. It doesn't matter who they are and how old they are, if you don't listen to your body's feedback, you're in trouble.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Right, right. So, there's the meme I just put out this week on Facebook, so that's where all the truths go, which is, "I never realized I was a bully until I heard how I was talking to myself."

DR. KEESHA: Yes, perfect. Yes. And that is true, because the inner dialogue, I think, if you're exercising because you're trying to fill up a place inside of you that says you're not worthwhile unless you weight a certain weight or you

wear a certain size of jeans or you look a certain way, is there a way to fill that up through exercise? No.

DEBRA ATKINSON: No. And I think you talking about going out for an hour of doing anything, or for a lot of women it's jumping on the elliptical for an hour, getting on the treadmill for an hour, I often find women, what they're really wanting is to go back maybe twenty-five years ago to the time they did have that hour and it was relaxing, and they're after that frame more than feeling like this is what they need for their fix or knowing it's the right thing.

DR. KEESHA: They're just trying to carve out time for themselves, period.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yeah.

DR. KEESHA: Yeah, I see that. Yeah. Yes, oh, the days when... I can understand that. Drop the kids off in the little daycare center while I went and did jazzercise and go pick them up again.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Or not. Or forget them. Right.

DR. KEESHA: I used to love me some jazzercise. Definitely dating myself now.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yeah, I was just going to say that, but I'm so glad you did instead.

DR. KEESHA: It was so much fun. It's been replaced by Zumba now.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Are you going to go?

DR. KEESHA: Maybe. I mean, I'm probably going to get email about that. "No, there's still jazzercise." I don't know. All right, so now we've put to bed that question about to eat or not to eat before exercise, right? We kind of have to listen to yourself, listen to your own body, test, don't guess. These saliva tests are really easy to do.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Let me throw one thing out. So, one thing I do tell people, what we know about that study - actually the biggest one that keeps circulating - about fasting versus eating before breakfast is it was done in 2010 in Belgium, so it was males and it was younger males who were on a high calorie diet and it was 50% body fat, but the time of year when that's appropriate perhaps to look at, and maybe it's like your morning after pill - so, after

Thanksgiving day or after a buffet or your office cocktail party. It's not something I recommend, but if you have overdone it, you have overindulged, provided it's of adequate intensity, if you get up in the morning and you do some interval training for twenty, twenty-five minutes in a fasted state, it may actually help you burn that off, rev up your engine, and not gain weight because of that one event. So, that's really the only instance we can kind of say yes. If that's appropriate for you and you handle that okay with your blood sugar levels, that might be the time to do it.

DR. KEESHA: Okay. So, given that then, you said interval training - why don't you define and give people an example of interval training if they're not familiar with that term?

DEBRA ATKINSON: Great, okay. So, basically it's like-- think of stop and starting your car: what we know is if you drive around town versus you go out on the interstate, stopping and starting actually is harder on your car and uses more gas. So, what we're trying to do with interval training when you exercise is make your body work inefficiently so it burns more fuel as well. So, when you push on the gas pedal to either go faster or maybe use more resistance on incline or add more resistance to an elliptical, for instance, that's going to elevate your heart rate momentarily, and then you come back down and recover.

So, let's say you are used to doing the hour of exercise back in the day, and that's steady state we call that, so when you do interval training, we need your highs to go higher and your lows to go lower, and back and forth like that actually uses more energy. If we say twenty minutes of steady versus twenty minutes of intervals, that interval training uses more energy overall during, but the biggest power of exercise if we do it right, is how much more energy it makes us burn for hours afterward, so that sitting here, if you and I have done heavy weight training or interval training this morning, we're burning more calories just sitting here than we would had we not exercised today. Yet. Not exercised yet today.

DR. KEESHA: Oh, I'm the worst. I love to exercise, I love exercising, but I have these two dogs and I love to take them for a long run. I'm an old marathoner and I know it's the worst exercise ever, but I love being outdoors. I can't stand the gym.

DEBRA ATKINSON: So, science, but I think we have to agree there's an art and a science to everything, so there's something that I call the joy factor.

DR. KEESHA: That's my joy. I like to get outside.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Exactly. And if you're going at a level that is comfortable for you and you're outdoors, you're in nature, you're with pets, you have an awful lot of things saying "This is me taking care of me as well as taking care of these dogs." And I think whether you eat before exercise or you don't, you have to look at the joy factor. So, if you love that, I don't know that you can argue art with science, but I would try.

DR. KEESHA: It's what I love so much. I take groups to Peru every year and we trek up 13-18,000 feet, and when I go, people are always shocked, because I do not have a skinny-mini body. In the Ayurvedic medicine paradigm, my natural body is Pitta-Kapha, so I have that Kapha stance, right? Which means I'm like an elephant; I can go. And people are so shocked when they see me, because they'll go, "Wow, you can trek," and I can trek. My body's so strong; I love it. I am in love with my body, but it does not look like the front of the Cosmo magazine, but it's so strong, and that's what I really love is that I can go forever. I really can run out and run a marathon whenever I want to because I just have this amazing capacity, and it doesn't matter the altitude. The higher the altitude, the stronger I get. It's really weird, actually.

DEBRA ATKINSON: I'm in Boulder. You should come see me.

DR. KEESHA: Yeah. I used to live in Utah at 5500 and that's where I started marathoning, and I just figure it's a hangover from that. I don't know. I'm in Seattle now - there's no altitude here, so I don't know. But I like to hike. I like to get in the mountains and I can just go, and I don't take a break and I just love it. So, that's what I always say is okay, if my body's still managing to carry me around, and I do yoga but I don't do kick-your-ass yoga - I do yoga that keeps me limber and long and doesn't make me contract. My arms could look so much better, Debra.

DEBRA ATKINSON: I'm thrilled. I mean, rarely-- how rare it is to hear a woman say, "I love my body." That's refreshing.

DR. KEESHA:

I know, and I hear it too. I get women when I take them to Africa, there's this hot springs that we hike to, and they don't know that this is going to happen - now everyone that wants to come to Africa with me is going to say, "I'm not going to Africa" - but I put them in this hot springs that's in the Mukutan Gorge - it's this amazing, magical place; it's so mystical - we call it the yoni pool; it's this amazing, gorgeous pool, and then right across from it is this huge stone that's a monolith, so it's like the Shiva Lingam, and so there's this polarity of male and female, and so we work on that: healing the masculine, healing the feminine. And I get them in this pool and I make them take off all their clothes and we get in together. Women used to do this all the time. They would bathe together in the river and then get out and do their laundry and on the stones, you know?

Women are so frightened of showing their bodies to each other, so I get them in there and I make them actually say-- Okay, I want you to come up with ten things that you love about your body. You have to say ten things. And then you're allowed to say one thing that maybe you'd like to change, and then we get to love on you about it." And tears. Women that are over sixty that will just start to cry and say, "I've never had this experience." It's so sad, you know? And then I have twenty-year-old women from-- I had a couple girls last year that were from Europe, but I'm not going to say what country to keep them anonymous, but you have nude beaches in Europe and they're supposed to be more open sexually than Americans, and they would not get in the pool. Would not. These beautiful, beautiful twenty-year-old bodies would not get into the pool and so we really, really gave them a lot of crap for it. And then they got in and then after a while, they started to relax and say, "Oh, here's a sixty-something-year-old woman, here's somebody that's had a mastectomy, here's one with stretch marks all over her belly -" that's me - "and they love their bodies, so okay." It's really interesting.

I used to be a photographer years ago and I loved photographing kids and engaged couples, and the women that were engaged, they would be so, "Make sure my belly looks flat," or, "Make sure you get my good side," and I would always say, "Are you kidding me? Are you planning on having children?" And then if they said, "Oh yes, of course," I'd say, "You're going to look back at this photograph and you're going to say, 'I was stinking hot,' and I need you to say that right now. Embrace the time of life that you're in. You're in the maiden stage of life and you are hot."

DEBRA ATKINSON: That's so funny. What a coincidence; I just started this month of gratitude and I did a live video on Facebook, and my group is very engaged, very responsive, and so I've got tons of likes. I said, "This is body gratitude month, so I'm going to start. I'm going to say something that I'm grateful for about my body and I want you to follow suit. Put a live video or put a photo in here, or even just words if you want to." So, lots of likes, but like one response. It's so slow. People just are not used to-- women not used to saying, "I love this about my body." I so love that you said that. You just don't hear it and we've got to set the bar.

DR. KEESHA: I know. It's really important and I'm going to love my body when I'm covered with wrinkles too, you know? I mean, it's still carrying my spirit around in this life that I have this blessing to live and I just want all women to embrace that. We gathered a group of women together to watch that documentary by Taryn Brumfitt - have you seen that? "Embrace" it's called.

DEBRA ATKINSON: No.

DR. KEESHA: Everybody has to see this. You can--

DEBRA ATKINSON: Okay.

DR. KEESHA: It's called "Embrace."

DEBRA ATKINSON: "Embrace."

DR. KEESHA: And I won't say any more, but it's about really learning how to understand what the cultural messages are that we have imbibed in unknowingly and unwittingly that inform how we show up now and it's really messy and it's awful, and so it's about having that space to say, "Oh, I didn't even realize that was going on. Now I have the opportunity to embrace who I am."

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yeah. In addition to working with women who are kind of going through this transition and crossing the threshold of fifty, is what I call it, I also work with fitness professionals of all ages, and the reason being is so that we have better choices - so women over fifty have better choices - and really working with them, because I cringe when I hear fitness instructors

saying about exercise, "Let's work on those thighs. We're going to get those thinner thighs." No, we don't need to hear that. How about stronger? How about the ability to do certain things as opposed to the way we're going to look? I do think form follows function, but if we start with "What can I help my body do," and saying, "What do I want to be able to do and continue to do for decades?" Then we're on the right path.

DR. KEESHA: Yes. I want to be able to climb those stinking Inca trail stairs forever. Those Incas, they love their stairs. So, I always make my group start training, if we have a trip in August to the Andes, that they've got to get on StairMasters and stairs in June, and I give them a whole workout regimen for getting ready for that, because, whoo, it's a burn. It isn't about having skinny thighs, it's about having strong ones that will get your up those stairs.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Exactly. That is so funny. And if you're worried about the skinny jeans, you cannot necessarily have the strength.

DR. KEESHA: Because you can be skinny and completely out of shape.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Exactly. You can be skinny-fat, yes.

DR. KEESHA: Right. And there are plenty of people, it's called vat, that are that, and that's a high risk for heart disease. And I always tell people - I used to do hospice years and years ago - that if you get cancer and you have to go on chemo, you will die if you don't have enough body fat. I've just seen it happen so many times. You waste away. You have got to have something on your bones that will sustain you if you have to do that, so it's really important. And we lose our periods if we get too low in our body fat. The body has a feedback mechanism that says, "Oh, this is getting a little too low."

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yeah. Right.

DR. KEESHA: So, we can definitely go overboard. So, talk to me about different kinds of regimens that you do for exercise for women. You gave a number one clue is do something you love.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yes.

DR. KEESHA: You validated me.

DEBRA ATKINSON: You can do intervals; intervals are important. And you mentioned it earlier: weight training for females is a starting point. When we reach fifty and over, your strength training becomes much more important. When we're twenty, we can get by with a balance or doing more cardio and not having so much muscle or muscle work because we're peaking - at twenty-five our muscle mass is peaking. But we're like twenty-five years from that at least at this point. We've been losing muscle mass unless we've really been doing things to hold onto it. It's not too late - we can get it back. There's proof that in their nineties people can start lifting weights and get stronger and create lean muscle mass. So, weight training is one, and the reason is the strength, and I mean the inner strength, so it's the confidence; the way you carry yourself changes. And it's one of those things where people who haven't lifted weights will get compliments like, "Did you change your hair?" And someone can't figure it out - they can't put their finger on it necessarily, but they know something is different about you, and I think it's from the inside. It's not necessarily the aesthetics or the outside, although that's another bonus, but strength training has its way of putting it in your body.

DR. KEESHA: There's another reason too that it's inside, and that's the bones.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Exactly.

DR. KEESHA: The risk for osteoporosis. And the women I was talking about that in Ayurvedic paradigm, or especially that are Vata, which is that they've always had a thin frame, thin hair, thin lips, shorter or taller, are high risk of bone density loss. We all lose some bone density as we age, but Vata women really fast, and so it's important that they, especially-- and they're the ones that love the aerobics and the bouncing and the cardiovascular stuff, and so it's important that they have some strength training in there too, to prevent osteoporosis.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yeah. And the exciting thing, so if you happen to be listening, thinking, "I don't like to lift weights," or, "I don't like to lift heavy," and I can tell you I'm a real proponent of heavy weights and doing quality work, not quantity work - it's not about an hour, it's not about a half hour or how much time, it's about reaching fatigue - but recent research has shown that with lighter weights, as long as you reach fatigue, we can make some

changes in hypertrophy or muscle definition with that, at least in the first six months, and then if you've got a base, you may feel comfortable doing more. But the same is true for bone density: at first, you can impact bone density positively with lighter weights. Ultimately of the research base still shows it's related to lifting heavier if your joints allow it. So, lift as heavy as you can is generally my advice.

DR. KEESHA: Okay. And so when you say lift as heavy as you can, you probably need a trainer.

DEBRA ATKINSON: I'm sorry, I missed that. Say that again.

DR. KEESHA: When you say lift as heavy as you can, you probably need a trainer, don't you? To show you how to do that?

DEBRA ATKINSON: For good form and good technique, yes.

DR. KEESHA: Because that's important, form and technique, right?

DEBRA ATKINSON: Absolutely. And no one should start heavy. So, there's always going to be a progression. Big principle for fitness is you might start with body weight where you're least likely to get injured and your first dabble into weight training might be sitting and standing from a chair - that is a squat, after all. So, starting with great form and knowing, "Where do I put my weight? Is it in my heels or in the balls of my feet? Should I be feeling it here? Where should I be feeling it or not feeling it?" So, getting those technique cues, first with no weights, making sure you're going through a range of motion. And I'm going to break some news to you: you're not symmetrical.

DR. KEESHA: That is so obvious. But I'm a photographer, so I know that. I mean, any time that I've done a photograph and I'll put them together under an enlarger where it's the right side of the face and then left side of the face, it's two different people. It's amazing. We are so not symmetrical.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Your body isn't either, so it's important that-- you know, you could logically say to yourself, "Well, I'm an intelligent woman; I'm going to go and get a book and learn how to put together an exercise program."

DR. KEESHA: Oh, yeah.

DEBRA ATKINSON: If you begin to do a balanced exercise program, work your right and your left sides equally, work your front and your back sides equally, if you didn't start out balanced, you're feeding the imbalance. So, corrective exercise, for almost all of us, somewhere we need it. Hips - one hip or the other is tighter or looser - addressing that before you go on and do more will help you be stronger and fit and injury-free so much longer.

DR. KEESHA: Oh, that's so interesting. So, how do you find out if you need corrective exercise on one side or another?

DEBRA ATKINSON: If you find a good trainer. So, whether I do in-person or I'm doing Skype calls with someone, if I can see you do a squat from the front and the side and the back, I can tell a lot by the way you're moving. If I can see you do a lunge with both legs forward so I can see the difference between one and the other. So, just unique and small clues we're picking up can tell us a lot. We can look at what's going on with your shoulders. So, your shoulders right now, as I look at you, you are lovely, perfect, by the way. Perfectly imperfect. Right? One is slightly higher than the other.

DR. KEESHA: It is, yeah.

DEBRA ATKINSON: I'm sure I'm the same way, but we don't know it. And whether it's from carrying the purse over here or carrying a child over here, we've got these repetitive habits that have caused those little things, and they're probably also causing little pulling things where if I said, "Based on that, do you ever have a neck issue? Is it mostly on this side?" And when you've got a good trainer, they can do that for you. So, find someone who is asking you the right questions and is almost intuitively knowing where you might have a niggle, I call that - a whisper before it starts to scream at you.

DR. KEESHA: That's interesting. My massage therapist who works at my clinic will say that: "Oh, you're riding up on one side," and then work on loosening everything up, because I don't actually have back, neck, or anything pain, but I've had a shoulder rotator cuff injury twice - going out on a rope swing over a body of water. After injuring it the first time, not a good idea.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Tell me, was this in Peru also?

- DR. KEESHA:** No, no. Lake Tahoe. So, with that then, no trainer, though, has ever said anything to me, but I do get yelled at about my form every single time. Every single time. But never that I should be doing something different on one side than the other, so that's interesting.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Yeah. And sometimes we need to pay a little more attention to stretching. If I were going to stretch my neck, for instance, on both sides, if I knew I'm a little tighter on one than the other, I'm going to favorite and maybe stretch that one twice until things are a little bit more in balance. So, likewise, if you've got a stronger leg, you're going to do a little bit more on that one weaker leg until things are more even. And you can tell that by lifting light weights to fatigue: is one not as comfortable, the movement painful, or is it just that I'm weaker; I fatigue sooner? And then it'll show up really easily.
- DR. KEESHA:** Interesting. My husband has a leg that is probably half the size of the other one.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Wow. Because of surgery or what?
- DR. KEESHA:** No. I have a theory: he sits in full lotus position. He's sixty-four and he's been doing that for the last forty-five years for meditation, and he does it with the same leg every single time with his foot in his groin. Full lotus is-- he's like Gumby: he can do the Chinese splits still, he's crazy limber, far, far more than I am. He has this leg that I think has just not gotten blood flow from the hours and hours and hours of sitting that way in meditation.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** Wow.
- DR. KEESHA:** I know. It's really fascinating. He has no problems with it, but it's just this skinny, skinny, little calf.
- DEBRA ATKINSON:** And I'm sure you're going to say this to him or on public television at all.
- DR. KEESHA:** Oh, he knows. And I've wondered about it, you know? "I wonder if that's from lotus?" And he said, "Probably." I can't think of anything else that it would be, so yeah. So, how we sit, you know how our moms used to say,

"If you do this too much, your face is going to freeze that way?" Actually, it's kind of true.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Mom is always right.

DR. KEESHA: She's always right. All right, so what kind of wisdom do you want to share now as we get to the end of this for women that are Flipping 50?

DEBRA ATKINSON: I think that you're not textbook. You need to realize that. Years ago we were all told, and you may still be told this, that you need to be doing at least three times a week cardio, you need to be doing at least twice a week strength training - that's a good guideline, but like you said, if you're in adrenal fatigue, those rules change, and so you need to really look at, "What's my current status? What's my current energy level?" And if you're already feeling down under, gentle exercise, things that help you relax and add to you as opposed to pull energy away from you are the smarter start. You'll get to the point where you can do more, but trying to push to more before you're ready is not a wise decision. It's that listening to your body. So, eventually your out-here goal is definitely most days a week to do something movement-wise. The value of neat, non-exercise activity time is underrated.

DR. KEESHA: I agree.

DEBRA ATKINSON: We sit way too much, but at one point we didn't need gym time. We didn't need the exercise time and we could bring some of that back to us. Get some small, short spurts of high intensity exercise. Small, short spurts of strength training that's quality work for what's going on in your body right now and to maintain bone density and lean muscle mass, and then be active the rest of your life. That's the goal is to move more frequently. Get up every hour.

DR. KEESHA: That's great advice. Now, we have a bonus from you on our bonus page for the summit, and then I want to direct people too, because you have a podcast, you have Flipping 50 TV, so tell us about those.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Okay. So, the podcast you can find, as well as the exercise checklist - it's ten things you could start right now to measure yourself against. "What am I doing right now that really is the most helpful for women in my stage of the game and what could I change?" And there are even three

things to stop doing forever, as far as exercise goes, that you don't need to be doing, that we kind of thing sometimes we should be doing that, should be doing that, and you can let go--

DR. KEESHA: Okay, you have to go ahead and spoil it. I have to know what those are.

DEBRA ATKINSON: No more crunches, no more sit-ups, please, ever. Ever, ever, ever.

DR. KEESHA: Really?

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yes.

DR. KEESHA: So, plank?

DEBRA ATKINSON: Plank types of things, yes. Anything that's more stabilization based. And the reason being injury risk goes up with crunches and sit-ups, and actually the return on the investment of time goes down. If you're really doing sit-ups or crunches that are too ambitious, you potentially are pulling on your neck doing a lot of strain here, but you're also running into your own internal organs, and your abdominals cannot contract. So, if you think about this, if you were to pick up a weight and curl it like a dumbbell, your bicep pops up, right? And we want to see that little bump when you're going sleeveless in your little black dress, but you don't want to be crunching and have your belly pop up. We don't want to see that, right? So, the way that we exercise when we do crunches and sit-ups doesn't actually train what we want. Most women will come to me first and say, "I want a flat belly," so you have to train it in a way that it makes it brace. So, if I were going to throw you a ten-pound medicine ball right now, you'd be bracing, and that's the kind of work we really want. So, you can actually do more core work going for interval training or doing weight training, it's all core work, and stability work like the planks or some, even lying on your back - simpler exercises that look simple until you're the one doing them - can be so much better for your back and for the female abs.

DR. KEESHA: I'm familiar with those. Actually Julie Tupler was on the summit last year and she-- do you know her?

DEBRA ATKINSON: I don't.

DR. KEESHA: She talks about diastasis recti, which is the pulling apart of those muscles at the abdomen, and she said that's what's causing all these women to have these poochy bellies. And diastasis recti is, first of all, childbirth begins the whole process, but then those crunches where you're trying to get your body back, not good.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Right. Yes, exactly. So, when you think about it, what we need to do is tone the deep, deep core muscles that lie next to the spine, and it's like building your house: you've got to put the foundation in, otherwise those crunches and sit-ups are kind of designed really by figure competitors and bodybuilders to get the six-pack. I mean, most of us are really happy with a four pack. Just give me a little bit, right? So, it's more about let's start inside and that will really help it become much more flat, and it's your personal girdle, or it's not.

DR. KEESHA: Right. Yeah, that's great. That's the second time on this summit someone has said, "Stop doing the stinking crunches."

DEBRA ATKINSON: You know what? Even the United States government finally got on the bandwagon and stopped using them in testing for the military.

DR. KEESHA: Oh, wow.

DEBRA ATKINSON: The last six months, yeah.

DR. KEESHA: So, they're not pounding out sit-ups anymore?

DEBRA ATKINSON: They're not, and I don't know that they have a substitute yet, but I know that they made that call back in May or June of last year.

DR. KEESHA: Wow. Hey, that's so interesting to know. Okay. That is. That's good progress. So, you've got this free opt-in for people that they can get, and that's the exercise checklist, right?

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yes. So, that's at ForeverFitandFab.com/exercise-50.

DR. KEESHA: Okay. And we have the link on the website too.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yeah.

DR. KEESHA: All right, well thank you Debra, so much for joining us and sharing your wisdom. It was so fantastic to talk to you. I feel like I have a sister from a different mister.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yeah. So, then I'm going to go spread the word, so what we want to hear is, "I love my body."

DR. KEESHA: That's right. Really. I mean, gosh. All you have to do is listen to someone over ninety who says, "I wish so much that I had the mobility that I had when I was fifty or sixty," right?

DEBRA ATKINSON: Right.

DR. KEESHA: And then just really appreciate it. We need to be writing in an appreciation and gratitude journal every day and your body's got to be on the top of the list, because it's the one that lets you go live your life.

DEBRA ATKINSON: So true. So true.

DR. KEESHA: I have a sister-in-law that's in a wheelchair. At sixteen she was in a car accident where someone was driving and totaled the car and rolled it, and she wound up a paraplegic. She's so upbeat and so positive and so lovely and kind and sweet, and she would say, "Get over yourself already," you know?

DEBRA ATKINSON: Right?

DR. KEESHA: And that's what-- in the "Embrace" documentary, she interviews a lot of different women including burn victims and people that have had neurological disorders and things like that - they say the same thing: "Stop it. Why are you wasting so much time on this stuff?"

DEBRA ATKINSON: Yeah.

DR. KEESHA: Yep, so love yourself. Love your body. Keep it strong. Work with Debra.

DEBRA ATKINSON: And come over and watch the Flipping 50 TV show. So, if you have an iPhone, you have an iPad, or Apple TV, you can download from the Wellness TV app in iTunes and get all of the episodes for free. And we tackle questions from women just like you about, "How do I tone my

legs? How do I get stronger? How do I lose my belly fat?" And really look at nutrition and exercise and what's in here.

DR. KEESHA: All right. Beautiful. Thank you so much.

DEBRA ATKINSON: Thank you.