



Episode 10: Jackie Williams, NP:

Craig: Today's guest is Jackie Williams. Jackie is a nurse practitioner who works in integrative and functional medicine. I got to know Jackie originally through her husband. I met her husband Danny through spin class, and we struck up a conversation and became fast friends. I am super impressed with Jackie and the work that she does and her approach to her work. Jackie is a nine-time Iron Man triathlete. For those of you listening who don't know what that is, that means Jackie, on nine different occasions, has completed a 2.4-mile swim, then 112-mile cycle, and then a 26.2-mile full marathon. Not only does Jackie work with clients all over the south east to achieve optimal health, she practices what she preaches. So, Jackie, thank you so much for spending time with us and participating in this podcast today.

Jackie: Thanks for having me and I am thrilled to be a part of your efforts here and look forward to helping you and your listeners understand some of the aspect that we are going to discuss today.

Matt: Before we started recording, we just sort of chatted about what you do, and you mentioned functional and integrative medicine. What does that mean exactly?

Jackie: Well I have been a nurse practitioner for almost about 20 years, and initially I started out doing conventional medicine as we all do here and your coming in and getting an exam and prescriptions and somewhere along the line I wanted more. Is there something more? And actually, that's what functional and integrative medicine is, its more of a comprehensive look into medicine and understanding that one thing that happens in the body, affects something else in the body. I got to feel in my own practice that I wanted to try and bring those pieces back together again and really look at the whole person and adding an integrative viewpoint to it really takes a look at what's happening in my body as well as just physically.

Craig: So, everybody is stressed these days but certainly our listeners who are facing family crisis have heightened level of stress. How does stress impact a person's health?

Jackie: I think that stress, in my own practice, I see it as being the elephant in the room and patience may not even understand what is going on with them physically, but its that stress reaction that is so large and screaming to be taken care of. Actually, it is very interesting if you look at the stress hormones that we have in the body. I love to tell my patients that the stress that you are under today, no matter what it is, if its going through a divorce or family relations or financial problem, it's the same exact hormone as it was 3000 years ago or WW3 or ancient civilizations with no food, it's that same exact hormone going on in our body. What we see is there is this normal reaction to stress. Stress should be highest in the morning and as we see our day go on, we should see our stress hormones start to relax

and they should be low so we can sleep well at night. Initially, it always goes high. So, you can tell when someone is really stressed because they might not be sleeping, they have lots of energy just like the stress response of flight or fight that we hear about. These people are just boundless and just can't go to bed at night. They are thinking, they are multitasking, they are feeling like there is a high but what happens is that all of those stress hormones, cortisol being one of them, is very inflamed to the brain and our bodies start to want to shut that down and over time what you see is this high stress response starts to drop. So, high in the morning to low in the morning. Can't get out of bed in the morning or really tired. High all day long and you can't multitask or think straight and that is what we see those high cortisol, high stress hormones fall.

Matt: So, somebody that is experiencing an increased amount of stress, what are some symptoms that they start to notice in their everyday life?

Jackie: I would say one of the first things I start to see is some type of sleep disruption. They can't sleep well and that is a big alarm to me that something is going on and they are not sleeping well and they are stressed out at the same time or like I said, they are really tired and they can't think and they can't compute in the work like they used to and they can't think through problems like they used to or they can't trouble shoot and do all the things in the family going all at the same time. Those are some of the manifestations of stress that I see in my practice.

Craig: Jackie, I heard you mention WW3 and I was thinking maybe, an di don't watch the news very much but maybe I missed something, but what I think I heard you say was the stress reaction that we have are the same hormones that have been experienced throughout time so it doesn't really necessarily matter what the stressor is, the reaction in the body is the same.

Jackie: Exactly. That's exactly what I meant and you are seeing so many examples of that as you said the caveman that is cold and had no food is a stress response, as well as not having finances and staying up all night worrying where the next meal is going to come from or where the next job is going to come from. Those are all good examples of what the stress response is.

Craig: Well, let's talk a little bit about that because I can see it on my clients' faces, I can see it in the way that they present in an initial meeting, the stress that people have. Sometimes there is a relief they are coming to see us and that they are actually doing something about it but often times they are very conflicted and say the person coming into my office is coming into your office and they are experiencing these life stressors. Talk a little bit about the process that you go through.

Jackie: I think the very first thing, when I see someone, is trying to determine where are they in their stress and how long have they been under that stress so for instance, has it been years and years of illness or relationship problems or financial problems or is it something that is suddenly happened and it is a newer type of response because there you will see when you look at that time frame and you look at the resilience and have there been other factors that influenced that. Are there factors like illness that might be making a stress response more pronounced in the patient versus not? The very first thing I do is looking at where that response is for my patient.

Matt: So, you go through and you have determined where those stress responses are, what are some ways you have people deal with that stress once you've identified it?

Jackie: Well I think that what we need to do is figure out are they on medications, do they want to stay on medications and that is my job, as we've talked about before being in functional and integrative medicine is my job to try and keep people off as much medicine as I can and try to look at what we can do from a more natural viewpoint but there are a lot of things that I work with my patients for stress reduction. If you are in the middle of crisis then maybe you need counseling and I know that you guys have spoken with counselors. I refer to counseling all the time because I think that talking to someone is a great way to reduce stress. One of the things I always talk about is even things like diet are huge stressors to the body. So, an unhealthy diet is just adding one more piece to that total stress level and then if you add, I always tell patients you really need to protect your sleep. What do you do to make sure you are getting 7 hours of sleep, that is the golden number that I look for in patients? There are tons of researchers that say if stress is affecting your sleep cycle and you are dropping to four or five hours, you are increasing your risk to so many cardiovascular disease in your general health and increasing your risk of mortality just by that one factor of not being able to protect your sleep.

Matt: So, if I understood you correctly, you are saying a poor diet can actually add to the stress that you are already under?

Jackie: Well, think of it about what happens to your diet when you are actually eating poorly. So, lots of sugar, lots of refined carbohydrates, lots of alcohol potentially, those are all stressors to the body, so you see a reaction from the body. You might see higher blood sugar, more inflammation going on and you might see cardiovascular cholesterol issues, yes then become a very different type of stressor than when we think of stress like a crisis stress or something like that, it's a body stress. It is exactly the same. It adds to that base stress.

Matt: And I am assuming all of that can turn into a vicious cycle because people are under stress are making poor dietary decisions and it's affecting their sleep, affecting their ability to move and function during the day which naturally leads to their stress being higher because they didn't get things accomplished that they needed to and it just all, one feeds the other.

Jackie: Yeah, so again, Craig's initial question was, yeah that vicious cycle, how do you break that vicious cycle and if you know you are stressed or if you think you are stressed that what can you do? That first thing we talked about is protect that sleep. What do I need to do to get 7 hours of sleep and work backwards from that? Everything else in your life has got to focus around that and then the second thing we talked about, the health, and then we talked about exercise. The benefits of stress reduction from exercise increases endorphins. I think that research says that you can take a pill like Prozac and its equivalent to 30mg and it's the same result in a research study as going out and exercising for 30 min from actually taking a pharmaceutical drug so it's like make up your mind. Let's go out and go for a walk, let's get out in nature, lots of research says that being in a forest of any kind immediately has an immediate reduction in your cortisol and stress level. So, a matter of fact, they actually found out that and it's very interesting, that you can take just the scent of the forest, so you can bring the scent of the evergreen in your office, and it will actually be a decrease of stress level as well.

Craig: I feel like we need to get the diffuser out right now

Jackie: Absolutely. Diffuse the evergreen and all of our cortisol levels are going right back to normal again.

Craig: So, Jackie, talk about some practical tools for sleep protection because this is a conversation matt and I have frequently. I am spent today, I slept terribly last night for whatever reason. What are some tools for the listener?

Jackie: When I say protect your sleep that means, what time do I need to sign out, what time do I need to get in bed to get good 7 hours of sleep and then what am I doing beforehand because that definitely sets the stage. So, if you are still up watching tv, you've got a lot of electromagnetic energy that is going on from your pad or your phones, you've got to unravel that. It's kind of like kids, do you have kids?

Craig: Oh yes!

Jackie: You don't just have your kids, when they are smaller definitely, you don't just tell you kids its 8 o'clock go to bed because what is happening? Is it working? Do they run off and say alright let's go to bed? No. you read a book, you get them in the bathtub, they have a ritual and as adults we think we don't need that anymore and we are very wrong. You could use lots of herbs that I would say like melatonin to help with difficulty to sleep, you could use Kava Kava for sleep, you could use Valerian root for sleep, there are a bunch of natural herbs that God put on our earth that really help with sleep and relaxation for sleep. Deep breathing, and I can talk about that a little bit later, but deep breathing and meditative work is so good for sleep. I use that with my patience with my patience and teach them how to do it.

Matt: So right now we have a chronic problem in society, and I am certain that I am a victim of it but in terms of having our phones in our hands too much, how far, let's say I want to go to sleep at 10 o'clock, at what point do I need to have my phone out of my hand, the tv off, all of those things?

Jackie: You know I think that is an individual response. I would say start with an hour and see whether or not you fall asleep nice and easily or if you can't, you might need more than that and everyone, it's an individual instinct.

Matt: And so, I think this is probably important as just a general and also what you do, am I hearing that there isn't a specific answer exactly for each of these things? Every person is an individual and what might work well for me, might not work well for craig and might not work well for you, so we should be testing those things out. If I said I was going to start at an hour and I that didn't work move it and keep moving the needle and try to find a healthy balance or what calibrates as what is best for me?

Jackie: Yeah, and I think that you have to look at yourself and say you guys are young attorneys and busy during the day, and I can tell you and say that people that are stressed out during the day, they are not sleeping during the day because you are expecting your hormones to drop. Remember I told you they should be high in the morning, fall throughout the day and then gently fall off so you can go to sleep? If you are staying up in this high level of cortisol all day long and expect to just drop it and go, that is probably not going to happen.

Craig: For our potential listener, they might be in that season right now. That moment, that major life discovery, maybe there is an affair, maybe there is some significant amount of money missing from a bank account, there is something that has disrupted their world and they are in that stress. If we could use an automobile analogy, they are running in the red and we as Americans, we as Mississippians, Craig Robertson as an attorney, I run on red sometimes but a person who is in that position in their life, how would you counsel them about trying to restore balance?

Jackie: I give counsel a lot and I think in that crisis state where you may not ever fall off to that blissful sleep, you need to do some breathe work. You need that probably more than anything and ill talk about herbs too but breath work, there are so many cool apps that you can use to introduce you to the idea of balancing the nervous system that is so out of whack with high stress so for instance, you can do it right now, get on your phone and you can search the app of the calm app or for head space a lot of people have heard, actually Calm is advertised on natural tv right now. They are teaching you the idea of how to take that high panic mode and just start to calm it down and do it every day, do it more than twice a day and do it right before you are getting ready to go to bed. My patients tell me all the time "wow I can't believe this". I had a patient tell me and she said "I started listening to you and I almost started to do that calm thing" because she hadn't slept in years and she said she did that the first three days and nothing happened, she did it the fourth day and nothing happened and on the fifth day she said I'm going to give that lady one more shot and she goes "that's the best night sleep I've ever had" and she has been sleeping very well since then. So, these ideas really work really well. You don't always need to have a prescription medicine to sleep if you start to do some of these things. Take time out of your craziness that you are in, the panic that you are in, and just stop and get quiet and just make that stress response come down a bit throughout the day and that will really help at night time.

Craig: I hear you talk about intentionality.

Jackie: Absolutely, and that is such a hard thing to do in the midst of crisis, bringing back that intentionality like attention to your diet. I thought about this today before I came, I can't tell a patient in the midst of crisis to say "oh you need to eat a perfect diet" but you can say "listen, grab the healthiest food that you can" and that is such a step in the right direction and revisit it when you are on the other side of all this craziness. That is that advice that I give. Remember how good it feels to get outside and take a walk even if it's in the middle of all the craziness, get out and take a walk and go out with your kids or walk while you watch at the baseball park or basketball game. Get outside and walk around while they are warming up. There are so many ways we can sneak a little bit of exercise, that is so boosting to our neurotransmitters and chemicals.

Craig: I feel like we need to take a break now and let our listeners take a deep breath and relax. I feel like I need to relax I feel like I need to get in a tree pose or something like that because we run at a crazy pace, we as Americans. This is really encouraging and good to hear that we can take ownership of our own help with some simple intentionality and I am a patient of Jackie's, my wife and I have seen her from quite some time and I remember Jackie, in one of our early interactions with one another, you said "alright Craig let's do the elimination diet" and my understanding of the elimination diet was cut out for 30 days, all the things that people are allergic to and then slowly introduce them back into your diet and see what your body's response is to that. For me that was very revealing. I realized that as much as I love dairy and ice cream before I sleep at night, that's not good for my body. My body is not wired that way. If I eat a sandwich and the bread, I'm going to feel a little bloated. So, was my experience working with you? Is that typical? Is the food works something that many clients do that see you?

Jackie: I start almost all my clients on an elimination diet. I would say that one of the things I see in patients is, I will do a score of how do you feel, and when someone is really in a crisis mode, I will see those scores way up to 100 which is a very high number. I will typically without doing any research, I would say that at least a 50% reduction in how you feel, 50% better by just changing your diet if you are eating any standard American diet.

Craig: Well, I in my own life, we go on vacation, we eat out a lot. We get out of our little routine. We might be having an extra glass of wine and over two to three days you can really feel the sluggishness associated with that. We live a pretty healthy lifestyle. My wife is very healthy and very conscious and there is a little recalibration that happens at least in our family.

Jackie: I think that you are spot on Craig. You are spot on about how diet is such an important part. It is fatigue, the sluggishness, you see it in your elimination patterns, your skin will get clearer, all of those things are reflected and directly often to some of those foods. I will say also that the most part of the stress responses does affect the gut so part of functional and integrative medicine is the understanding of that eating is connected so your gut and your mind are two things in our world that are very much connected and your immune system so what we see is that stress is the top one two three of things that bother the gut lining that causes some of those responses. We think, why do I feel so bad and it's because I'm eating something I shouldn't be. The research continues that it is evolving the GI tract opening allows that to enter the body.

Craig: So, commonly when people are faced with divorce, there is sexual dysfunction in the household and what if any tools, can functional medicine offer to a person who is experiencing that?

Jackie: I think you are really right about the differences in hormones I see in patients that are going through relational problems of all kinds and you are seeing different types of libido in partners. High libido, low libidos, and in an integrative functional type of viewpoint we are really going to access the different levels in a lot of different hormones to see whether or not we can bring them back into balance when the hormone balance is there, you are seeing improvement in so many different functions. I think biochemically the female and the male hormones have between 2 and 400 uses each of the body besides libido, besides menopause and besides birth control. There are uses for all the hormones and in the past, conventionally, I never understood that and now with my functional training at George Washington University, I am really able to take that patient and try to figure out where that imbalance is and so I spend a lot of time trying to balance hormones for patients.

Craig: What I hear you saying, from a holistic standpoint, breathing is very important, slowing down is very important, healthy dietary choices are very important but also knowing where one's body is through testing.

Jackie: Absolutely and we have some very state of the art cutting edge testing that we do for hormones for men and for women to see where they are and to see where the imbalance is, yes.

Craig: Yeah so a health assessment if you will.

Jackie: A health assessment for your hormones. It is part of any patient that I see.

Craig: Let's talk about that person that is in the midst of crisis, what do you typically see and what is the typical treatment protocol when there are uncontrollable factors contributing to a person's stress.

Jackie: I think that we address a lot of those earlier in our podcast but I think one thing I haven't addressed is the ideal of really using some herbal supplement, nutritional supplements can really help the crisis time in our lives and are not habit forming and are not controlled substances and I often use them in my practice. For example, L-Theanine is the amino acid from green tea and you know green tea is pretty harmless. Probably not going to kill any of us and if you use it in a higher isolated dose it is very

calming. It is great for sleep and great for anxiety, people start to think clearer, it's a go to herb that I think that in the crisis mode we might need more than just exercise and diet and its nice to know that there are those things out there to kind of help us over come.

Craig: So, CBD, are we for or against?

Jackie: I think that Hemp, which is a derivative, is something that is very good for calming and has been shown to work with Gaba and is a great tool to have.

Matt: Jackie, in our practice, we are commonly encountering people who are suffering from depression, anxiety, there moods are all over the map. What affect if any does stress have on a person's mood?

Jackie: I think that brings me back to what I do for a living. Bring me back to balance in the body so again with stress we see so much depression and anxiety. We see those mood swings going up and down to the circumstances that are uncontrollable to understand that the neurochemicals that make those hormones are actually made during the night while you are sleeping. So, what happens when you are not sleeping? Serotonin, dopamine and such are made in the gut and what happens if you have GI issues and you aren't eating properly, you are not having a normal elimination process, your body, see how it is so balanced? And so, the idea of going back to basics and understanding what nutrition does and what that good sleep is and how that actually affects your mood is very important. What my goal is in my practice is for my patients to understand that. That I can almost always get to your brain issues by working on your gut because that is where those chemicals are made and often that is one of the strategies I use.

Matt: So mood swings, is that, if I am hearing you right, that is a side effect that some people may experience because all these different hormones are all out of whack so people can use that as a red flag if they are noticing their moods are all over the place, that is a sign that they have some issues they need to address hormonally?

Jackie: Absolutely, hormonally, or GI wise, or sleep wise, all of it is connected and the million-dollar question is what is it for you? What is pushing your buttons because we are all different?

Matt: Could it be more than one thing?

Jackie: It always is more than one thing so sometimes people will come in and it's like man you are an absolute train wreck, it's you sleep, it's your diet, it's the stress, its all of it?

Jackie: then it is about, CSI medicine, it's trying to figure out what is the biggest pusher that we have to work on and it is in kind of a step wise progression understanding that if you are in the midst of a crisis than you can't do it all at once and you have to bite off one little piece that hopefully has a ripple effect for the rest of it.

Craig: Right, just small steps towards better health because we do work with folks and I like to use this analogy, I've gotten into not being a mountain climber but interested in the heroic feel almost like the Iron Man triathlon. I think that climbing mount Everest would be like 4 iron man triathlons like back to back but when they get high enough after climatizing their body, there is a point called the death zone and the death zone is like over 25 thousand feet. I think mount Everest is a little over 29,000 feet tall and so people who are in the stress and post trauma associated with marital breakdown are in that

place. What are some practical tips that you can give someone who is in the worst place they have ever been in that they can take small steps towards better health?

Jackie: I think the goal is to really get that patient to be whole again and how do you get them to become whole again because they are not whole when they are walking through this crisis part in their life, they are not. That is where it is a very innovative and accomplished plan that brings that person back from being shattered to being a functional mom or dad moving on with their life in a healthy pattern that is not making her ill or affecting her mental capacity and that is the key of what we are trying to really get back in someone's life. That is like you said, on top of the mountain and totally unbalanced.

Matt: Jackie, thank you for being here today and everything that you have brought to life in the podcast and I know that I have learned a lot and I do feel like one of the big take aways is that this is all very based on the individual. There is not just one book or one answer that anyone can read or address to fix it all. For someone who is in this type of crisis with stress, where can they find you? How can they come see you?

Jackie: Well, you can learn more about what I do from my website and it's just www.ih.life

Matt: And if they wanted to make an appointment with you, do they do that online?

Jackie: They can actually go to the website and make it an appointment and reach out to us or they can call us at our office at 601-968-1960.

Matt: Thank you so much for being here and for all you do for our community.

Jackie: Thank you so much for having me!