



with all of the springs popping out and nothing was working, and I was doing everything seemingly right. I was eating what my half an hour med school lecture on nutrition told me was the right way to eat and I was exercising.

**Jen:** Yeah, we need to fix that half an hour nutrition thing in med school, yeah.

**Ellen:** Indeed. And so, I thought, why am I so unwell? It doesn't make sense and that required really going and doing creative approaches to research. Not just looking to my attending physicians or my professors but looking at other sources for thinking about how do we keep the human body healthy and well? And so those two parallel processes made me really take a different approach to health and that informs everything I do to this day with my patients.

**Jen:** And so, you're also an acupuncturist, so tell me a little more about that as well.

**Ellen:** Yeah, indeed. There was a phase in med school and then it continued into residency where just really out of a sheer state of crisis, I in disenchantment with what I had been taught and the limitations of how I felt it could help with mental health. I wanted to pursue other approaches to health and healing, so I studied Chinese medicine and acupuncture and a little bit of Ayurveda, functional medicine nutrition, probably a variety of other little modalities, like a little bit of hypnotism and integrative psychiatry. And so, all of that was born out of just wanting other tools. And acupuncture, I had actually never even experienced acupuncture when I decided I was going to study it, which is weird, but I had a strong intuitive hit that this was something for me to understand, and once I got into that training, I was so glad I did, because even just the act of taking an entirely different paradigm for understanding the body and human health was such a profound. It really helped expand my flexibility cognitively. And once you take on one new paradigm, I think it makes it easier to take on other new paradigms. And so, it really helped me think differently about mental and physical health.

**Jen:** Yeah, I love that and the reason I specifically asked about acupuncture is I I'm a breast cancer survivor and when I was going through my kind of traditional treatment, chemotherapy, radiation, surgery, all of which was absolutely necessary to keep me here and keep me where I am today. But I also, I'm not a medical practitioner by any sense of the word, but I did some of my own research and I started doing acupuncture during my treatment and I think it was certainly life changing for me and certainly in many ways, I believe made my treatment a lot easier. So just very curious as to how you got into acupuncture as well because I'm a big advocate for it.

But, as you were talking, I mean and you talk about this in your book, you take this whole person approach to mental health and I want you to talk a little bit more about that, because I think for so many of us, myself included for a really long time, we're kind of taught to believe that the brain and the body are different. Like what happens above the neck is something different than what happens below the neck, and that somehow, they're disconnected or not connected and right. There's like there's mental health and then there's physical health. But really the truth is kind of what happens in the brain happens in the body and vice versa. So, can you talk more about that?

**Ellen:** Yes, and I didn't know that about your health history, and I appreciate your sharing that. And I'm so glad you're okay.

**Jen:** Thank you.

**Ellen:** And it just compulsively, I want to address one aspect of that and then also answer your question. Which is, it's we are so all or nothing in our thinking and we think that it has to be one or the other and in your perfect illustration of how these can complement each other. Like you can say yes to all of the incredible advances that have happened in the conventional realm of oncology, and you can also get acupuncture. And it doesn't mean you're sort of flouting the advances of Western medicine, and I think that if nothing else, acupuncture reduces stress in the body. It tips the body into a parasympathetic nervous system tone, which is a precondition for healing. We heal when if you learn in high school biology, rest and digest and relaxation. We also called rest and repair when we're in the parasympathetic tone, which is the opposite of the fighter flight sympathetic tone. That's when our body can engage in housekeeping and healing. And modern life doesn't allow a lot of space for the parasympathetic tone. And acupuncture at the very least, at least tips you into that state and you can maintain that for a while. And that's if we're not even also recognizing potential psychospiritual realms of where we develop illness, where we develop blockages. And that's sort of the more rarified aspect of Chinese medicine. But I sort of, I find it all to be really eye opening in an interesting way of understanding health.

**Jen:** Absolutely. Yeah, when people ask me about acupuncture, I'm like listen, if nothing else, it's going to force you to like lay there and do nothing for like 45 minutes because you have needles in you. So, you can't move right? So, like if there's no other reason, then you just need to go somewhere and like lay and relax and like have a reason not to move, there you go.

**Ellen:** You want to be multitasking with them rolling on your phone, you cannot, yeah and yes, that's right. So, to answer your actual question about a more holistic way of thinking about the body. You're exactly right, mental health, we have been taught to think about. It really from the neck up that we think our mental health is contained to the cranium and everything relevant to it is happening in the brain and it has to do with our brain chemistry and our thoughts. And there is validity to that. I'm not here to throw the baby out with the bathwater, or discard all of that. I just think that we owe it to the population of everyone struggling with mental health to pan out a bit and widen our lens and think a little bit more comprehensively and creatively because the real determinants of our mental health certainly include our genes. I suppose they include our brain chemistry, but we'll drop a pin on that for a moment. And these determinants of our mental health also include the quality of our sleep, our nutrition, how we're moving our bodies, whether or not we are inflamed, the balance of our hormones, all the way beyond the physical body to certain psychospiritual aspects of our health. The fact that we cannot avoid we're human beings with certain fundamental needs for community for a connection to nature, a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives. I think even to be of service and make our contribution. So these are also pertinent to our mental health and that can feel overwhelming sometimes because it's like, well, I thought it was just my genes, there was nothing I could do about it except taking medication, but my hope is that when we expand the menu of offerings that can actually be empowering and give people reason for hope, because many people, when you focus on just the genes and brain chemistry. For some people, our current offerings of treatment have been sufficient, and they've provided adequate relief, and that's great. I count that as a victory, but that's not been true for everyone, and I think a lot of folks are feeling pretty disenchanting, even demoralized. They think, well, those are the treatment options, and they haven't worked for me. So, I'm stuck. And I want those folks to know there's still reason for hope. There are so many more avenues to explore to support your mental health. And genes matter, but it was only ever a predisposition. And there's not a whole lot we

can do about our genes, but there's so many actionable things that we can do with regard to the environment that's bathing our genes. And that's where I think we can feel empowered to support our own mental health. And that pin I dropped on the brain chemistry, is that there's been a lot of focus on brain chemistry. We describe mental health issues as a chemical imbalance, but we now have this really interesting meta-analysis that came out last summer around how there's actually never really been a robust evidence basis for the idea of low serotonin contributing to depression, but I think that even the extent to which brain chemistry is relevant to mental health, I've always suspected that it's a downstream effect of all of these other upstream root causes of our mental well-being.

**Jen:** First of all, I love everything that you said and it just, it kind of it, to me it makes so much sense, especially if you kind of look around in our world and the number of things that are impacting our mental health. What do you think the state of mental health in America or just globally is today in the context of the way you just described it? Because again, I think generally it seems like we're not moving in the right direction, unfortunately.

**Ellen:** That's well said. Yeah, that we were already in an epidemic of mental health issues prior to the pandemic, and then of course rates of depression and anxiety have precipitously risen in the last few years. And I mean, on the one hand, that's just grim, that's have a big problem on our hands and accessibility and affordability of mental healthcare really are an all-time fever pitch problem right now. But I think that it does just further corroborate the idea that we need to move away from this idea that our mental health issues are genetic chemical imbalance, because genes don't change in the course of five years. We have had such an incredible uptick, and this just keeps pointing such a fluorescent arrow at environment. And our environment is really tough on mental health right now in a number of different ways and some of the well warned things that we look at are things like social media and burnout with work. I think that we're maybe just beginning to appreciate how we are so chronically sleep deprived as a society. I think that one is really impactful, really significant and quite actionable. That's one of my favorite things to treat. And we can talk about strategies and sort of pearls to help people with their sleep. I think nutrition is a fraught topic because it matters to mental health. So that alone for some people is a bit of a paradigm shifting idea, to say, wait, what I eat is going to impact my mental health. But then we get bogged down in really a lot of warfare on the internet around, this is the right way to eat this is the wrong way to eat. Don't tell me what to eat, sort of all of this shame and baggage and scar tissue wrapped up in choices around eating, and even that we emphasize this at all. So that's a big topic to unpack. I think that without any of those kind of moral layers to it, we do have to recognize that the brain is this piece of flesh. It's an organ like any other part of the body, and it requires certain raw materials to function well. And so if we want good mental health that means we need healthy brain function and to have healthy brain function, our brain needs minerals, vitamins, nutrients that we get it from our food. And we are operating in a nutritional landscape that's relatively nutritionally bankrupt. And so what we need to do is reclaim how we approach feeding ourselves. It needs to be with an eye towards nutrient density. And I think a really important balance to strike there is not to do that from a place of fear or feeling fragile or letting meal prep become an obsession and a part time job from a place of ease and pleasure and affordability and convenience, but really, it's self-love as the operating system that we make our food choices from a place of radical self-love.

**Jen:** Yeah, I, I think that's so powerful and that really resonates with me. I want to not necessarily shift gears but talk more specifically about your book. And that your book is called, "The Anatomy of Anxiety". So, tell me why you decided to focus specifically on anxiety?

**Ellen:** I decided to focus on anxiety for two main reasons. One was that that whenever someone walked into my office, anxiety seemed to be a pretty recurring theme. So, I saw the scale of the problem and there was a lot of unmet need, both on social media platforms where I was engaging with a population there, but also in my own private practice. And then the other factor is that I really like treating anxiety. I find in contrast to a lot of other mental health issues which are a little more challenging to treat. There are a lot of quick wins with anxiety and what I would consider a lot of low hanging fruit aspects of how to approach anxiety that we're not thinking about it correctly yet. And it only requires a little bit of opening our eyes to new strategies and then you can bring somebody an enormous amount of relief relatively quickly and easily. So that's fun for me. And yeah, I mean it was just a book, I felt like, well, I thought I could just write this in my sleep, which may have been true for the first draft. But then there's a process, as you know. And I think that that's been true. For me, I thought the big part that we've been overlooking when it comes to our mental health is that the physical body plays a role in our mental health. There's a colleague of mine named Will Cole and I believe he says mental health is physical health. Like we just need to own that. And we can't really support our mental health adequately without focusing on the balance of our physical body, our physiologic balance. And with anxiety, there are a lot of little ways that our body gets tipped out of balance and it triggers a stress response and that creates the experience of anxiety. And it's creating a lot of unnecessary suffering. I think of this as avoidable anxiety. In the book, I refer to it as false anxiety, which through the course of the book tour I recognized lands a little triggering and invalidating. But I don't mean this at all to dispute the very real suffering of this type of anxiety but really just to point to the fact that there's a straightforward physical basis for it, and a straightforward path out of it. So, this is the stuff of avoidable anxiety. We can do a survey of ways that we might be out of balance. Address that at the route and eliminate a lot of unnecessary suffering.

**Jen:** So, I wanted to dig in more into the topic of false anxiety or avoidable anxiety, but I guess before we do that, can you define for me like few things about anxiety. Like what is it and what is it not, right, because like I actually think there's probably some confusion there. And then, like how common is it? What causes it, like kind of take us on that journey. But then I do really want to talk about avoidable or false anxiety because I read your book and it really resonated with me. It didn't trigger me; it actually was very enlightening to me. Like, oh okay, wait. That makes a ton of sense. This is what I'm experiencing. So, I do want to go down that path, but I think kind of stepping back and helping people understand, what anxiety is what it isn't and what causes it and how common is it?

**Ellen:** Yeah, and I mean that certainly my hope is that it's resonant and gives people a hope and a feeling of ok. There's something I can do about this, and I can be less anxious. But it doesn't always land that way the first time around, which I get and we can unpack that a bit. I've experienced that myself, even when someone pointed out one of my false anxieties, I was like hey you know well.

**Jen:** We all have them.

**Ellen:** My stressors are real. What do you mean like invalidating what's bothering me right now? Like no, but maybe less coffee and then let's see how much it bothers you and so it was true. So, I think that, I have bristled with the question of what is anxiety throughout this book tour, and I haven't made any progress toward having a better answer. There are themes of anticipating a potential negative consequence, themes around uncertainty control, all of this is relevant to anxiety, but I think part of the reason I bristle at the question is that we are so of a cultural moment where we think the word anxiety it says something about our identity that it's a permanent state, a fixed trait and something genetic and

sort of handed down on high. It's our destiny. And I just don't want to participate in supporting that way of thinking about it. I think anxiety is often temporary subjective state of worry and really the kind of subjective experience of a stress response in the body. And there's so many things that can cause that. And some are our stressors, and some are physical states of imbalance. And so, and in the book, I try to approach it with a new system of nomenclature, a new categorization rather than what I was taught, which was to think about anxiety as generalized anxiety disorder or panic disorder, with or without agoraphobia and OCD, and so on and so forth. I thought the most meaningful distinction and what steers management in my practice is to identify two types of anxiety. What I call true anxiety and what I call false anxiety. And false anxiety, especially if that term doesn't feel good. It's interchangeable with avoidable anxiety. It's based in the physical body. It doesn't serve us. It's not our deep inner truth. It doesn't need to be happening. Nobody wins with false anxiety, and to the extent that we can identify what's causing it and address that and reclaim a state of balance. We can walk away from all of that unnecessary suffering and just feel better. And then true anxiety, on the other hand, is not something that we should be pathologizing. It's not something to suppress, and it's not something that we could gluten free or decaf coffee our way out of. It's in many ways our true north and inner confidence that's nudging us and urging us to slow down, get still and pay attention. There's usually some kind of call to action baked into it where it's basically saying, you know this, but you haven't slowed down to really know this, but there's something, some area of your life or the world around you or your community where something's out of alignment. And you're being asked to do some form of a course correction. And it can be so minor, it can be so grand. It could be that you know there is some activism cause that you're meant to step into the front lines of and it could be that you're supposed to call your grandma more often, and everything in between. But that true anxiety is a state of uneasiness that pertains to something very real, very valid. And once we listen to it and honor it and transmute that feeling into purposeful action, we don't feel quite so anxious. It feels like we are then imbued with purpose. And we're there's momentum. And we don't just feel mired and stuck in our anxiety.

**Jen:** And you talk about this in the book that understanding true and false anxiety or being able to navigate or identify, you actually talk about it as a superpower. Anxiety is a superpower which, like my whole life I've lived with anxiety, and I've never thought of it as a superpower. So, of course I loved being told that I now have this incredible superpower, so can you tell me more about that?

**Ellen:** That, and I'm truly not just pandering to.

**Jen:** No, and I don't mean to be making light of it, it was actually very empowering for me to kind of change the way that I looked at it, as something that there's always been something wrong with me or why can't I just overcome this? Or why can't, like, especially when you have anxiety when people in their best interest or always like, well, just calm down or just stop thinking about it or just do this, all the that you get, right, and like when you have anxiety, you live with anxiety, like over time I think learn to just not express it because I didn't want to hear people telling me, oh we'll just do this or just do that and so honestly, when I read your book, it was really empowering because I was like oh wait, what well now I don't have to like hide this or be ashamed of it like I have new a new mindset and new tools and new ways to actually think about it and deal with it. So, I don't mean to be making light of it at all. I just love the fact that you told me I had a superpower.

**Ellen:** I am so emphatic about that, partly to push back on the ways I think culturally we've been getting this wrong. So, there are so many ways that we exist on these spectrums, dualities. There's Yin and Yang

and masculine and feminine. And I think there is a spectrum of being more or less sensitive and our culture will always place value on one end of that spectrum and not the other. And we're living in a moment of I would argue, young and balance where we value productivity, and we devalue rest and receptivity. And I think that when it comes to sensitivity, we've been in a moment where we say don't be so sensitive, just as you say, just pull up your bootstraps and get it together. We've been shaming anxious folks forever and saying don't be like this and we've got it wrong. So, nobody's better or worse than anybody else. But we exist on a spectrum, and we need all types of people. We are omnivorous by design and one person is unflappable and thank God for that person. We need them as a pilot or a surgeon. We need their steadiness and the same breath we have someone else on the other end of the spectrum who can't watch the news without crying. Who viscerally feels connected to the suffering of all sentient beings in the world. And they will sometimes struggle in this very loud world, but that is not a worse state of being. It's a very vital function that they serve. And so I encourage people with anxiety to recognize. It's a liability cause our world is very loud. This is a form of being sensitive in every sense of the word. You're sensitive to other people's emotions. You might be sensitive to gluten. You might be sensitive to crowds and loud noises. It's sensitive in every sense, and that's a liability because our world is noisy, but it is also an asset and I think that the sooner we can embrace that both the people who are struggling with anxiety can embrace it for themselves, but the people around them can also recognize rather than saying like stop being so sensitive, can we tell the anxious folks like tell me what you know, because I think when somebody has a lot of true anxiety, this is not what's wrong with them. This is very much what's right with them when they are viscerally connected to what is wrong with the world. I think this is maybe a little superlative, but I think they are sometimes here in a prophetic sense. They are tuned in to something that the rest of us might not yet be noticing.

**Jen:** So let's talk about that kind of, specifically, in the workplace. Mental health, for a long time was something that didn't get talked about at all in the workplace, and people were even afraid in some sense to use resources if they had any provided to them. I think, maybe because of the pandemic in a lot of ways there has been much more of an openness and a focus in the workplace regarding mental health and more and more companies are providing great resources for people. But when we talk specifically kind of about anxiety and what you were just describing. How does that come to life in the workplace, and how can teams like teammates, colleagues, leaders actually lean into those different ways of being or different ways of thinking and seeing the world with our teammates and with our colleagues?

**Ellen:** I think that there is this beautiful movement happening right now where we're destigmatizing mental health. We're talking about it more. Gratitude to the younger generations for really ushering in that conversation. Yeah, and I think that we have to get real about a fact of life like in certain ways there was an untaxed benefit that corporations got in the past, which was we're going to work you really hard, and you're going to get burned out and then your problems are going to be yours to deal with. It's not our problem. And I think that we are increasingly seeing companies basically not only care about the sort of most precious capital which is their people and care about their well-being, but also even recognize that for the functioning of this overall organism of a company, we need good morale. We need people to feel that their needs are met. We need less turnover, less burnout, and so really everyone benefits when employees' needs are met. And so, we're talking about it now. Finally, how do we fix this? I think that there's the simpler hand wavier explanations, like, at Createspace we're talking about it. We build in breaks, we set boundaries. We have time off and we participate less in the 24/7

responsivity culture and top-down modeling of that. I think all of that is impactful and I think that there are bigger questions to ask right now about how do we truly keep ourselves intact while making a meaningful creative contribution? And I think the sky is the limit in terms of how we can rethink the balance of how much are we working and how much are we resting. I know that we've got that balance slightly off right now. I think the question is how much off, but I really look back to the wisdom of Daoism and the symbol of the Yin Yang, which always appreciated that Yang or masculine or sun or doing energy exists in a 50/50 dynamic equilibrium with the in aspect of resting and non-doing and we are in a culture that is obsessed with Yang and productivity and we devalue yin and we're all burned out. So perhaps part of the strategy to go forward is to value rest in its own rate and not as a function of our productivity. When you catch us being like I'm going to pick up a meditation practice so that I can be more focused at work. There's something kind of that's Yang in Yin's clothing. So, I think that you want to really actually start to fiercely and unapologetically defend and protect your rest and your leisure for its own sake because we are inherently worthy of rest and leisure and then to find the face of what I just said, Yang in Yin's clothing. It does actually end up making us more creative, more motivated, more. Engaged, we are happier, more intact humans, and I think that there is an important insight to recognize here, which is that, maybe sitting for I got a few things wrong, but I think he got it right when he recognized that happiness is foundationally built on to love and to work. And we feel good when we are industrious and when we are making a meaningful contribution, but we just have to do that from a place of balance and that's where I think we're all rethinking what does work look and feel like. How do we feel satisfied but not overstretched?

**Jen:** And it's very hard to make a meaningful contribution on any sustainable basis if you aren't resting. Anybody that's been burned out can tell you that. So, I want to kind of end our conversation today and talk to you about maybe there's some simple daily habits, even some not so simple daily habits that people can try. That people can do to increase their mental health, their mental wellness to manage anxiety. I know before you mentioned talking about sleep, which happens to be one of my favorite topics to talk about, so I'm happy to dive into that. I want to get tactical here and give people some things that they can really do or try or do differently?

**Ellen:** It's my favorite conversation, but the first half of my book, the actionable Mr. FixIt approaches to anxiety. So, I do start with sleep as well, partly because some of the things we might get into, like caffeine, gluten, alcohol. Nobody wants to have that conversation, but sleep, we want to sleep. We have shifted as a culture. We no longer think I'll sleep when I'm dead or sleep is for the weak or the lazy. We want to sleep, I think to the credit of people like Arianna Huffington, we've really had a shift where we recognize that sleep is critical. It is our secret weapon, so now we're doing all the right things and sleep still eludes us, and that's infuriating. And so, I really love to tackle the issue of sleep and my central thesis, when it comes to improving someone's sleep, is to see this through an ancestral lens that your body wants to sleep. It knows how to sleep, but we do have to give it the right inputs and not irritate the system. And this centers most of all around light cues. And basically, this was a system that evolved over millennia on the proverbial Savannah of evolution, where light caused us to release cortisol, and that made us feel awake and alert, and darkness allowed us to secrete melatonin, and then we were able to get sleepy. And that system was foolproof until we harnessed electricity and we got the light bulb and eventually the phone and the social media platforms. And now nobody sleeps anymore. So, what we need to do is fix our light cues and I think it's so powerful to recognize our body the way it has a 24-hour clock, is based on light cues. There's a part of the brain called the suprachiasmatic nucleus, and it is



connected to the eyes and constantly scanning the landscape for light to understand what time of day it is. And if you were just in nature, it would see the sunrise. It would see solar noon. It would see the sunset. It would see the darkness. It would see the waning moon and the full moon and the waxing moon and all of this would set a clock, both a daily clock and a monthly clock, and that helped our bodies maintain its own rhythms. And these days we are indoors during the day. If we're working from home, we might not go outside at all. And then in the evening, we're surrounded by this psychedelic light show of modern life, with screens and overhead lighting and ambient light pollution outside our windows. And then, of course we bring our phones into bed with us. And it sits on our bedside table. We glance at it when we wake in the morning, or when we when we wake up in the middle of the night. And so, all of this is suppressing our melatonin and disrupting our circadian rhythm. And we can correct those cues. It starts first thing in the morning with a circadian walk, but to make sure that as early as possible, you're getting actual sunshine into your actual eyeballs to start the clock, and then after sunset it's really critical to block blue spectrum light from getting into your eyes and suppressing your melatonin. So, you can achieve that by moving off the grid and homesteading and raising chickens, and defenestrating your phone into the ocean or you can just get a pair of blue blocking glasses and I love all the things like flux on the computer or all of the different modes you can do on your phone like night shift mode or night mode. Those are great, but I think that they are necessary, not sufficient. And what really makes the difference is a pair of blue blocking glasses that will block all blue spectrum light from giving them to us.

**Jen:** And they make some really cool looking blue, black and glasses. They used to be like these big clunky things that maybe all your grandfather would wear, but now they make some really cool ones.

**Ellen:** This is exactly right. I'm actually still going strong and wearing the ones that make me look like I'm about to do metallurgy, but if you want to look normal and trendy, you can these days. You have that power.

**Jen:** There's no excuse.

**Ellen:** And so, I think the use case for most of us is to just put them on at sunset, wear them till bedtime as a rule. And that goes a long way to protecting our sleep. And perhaps the next best thing is to just also pile it, not bringing your phone into the bedroom at night. You don't keep it on your bedside table overnight. You set up your charger somewhere else, kiss your phone goodnight at a reasonable hour, and then you enter your bedroom phone free, and that's protective of sleep along a number of dimensions. Protecting you from the attention economy and the endless scroll without a natural stopping queue from the blue light from the fact that when the world is a mess, we can feel surrounded by danger and it makes it really hard to surrender and to sleep. And I think as the activist Brittany Packnett Cunningham says, we need rested warriors. So, if we want to show up in a vital way for everything that's wrong in the world, we need to protect our rest.

**Jen:** Couldn't agree more. I love that. Thank you. Any other quick daily habits or things that people can do to. Increase their mental health and well-being.

**Ellen:** I mentioned that we didn't want to have the conversation around dietary intolerances, alcohol and caffeine. I guess I'll say the very lightest touch on a couple of these things, which is that with caffeine, no shame, I'm not throwing shade at caffeine. I just think that we do have a lot of bio individuality when it comes to caffeine tolerance and some of us are slow metabolizers, which means

we're very sensitive to caffeine. So, we are pretty jittery and hopped up when we consume caffeine. And of course, we do because it's a real drug. It has a real physiologic dependence, and we wake up every morning in caffeine withdrawal. So, coffee of course feels like our one true friend in the world and our salvation. It is, of course just correcting a problem it itself caused, but it's, I can understand why we love it. But if you are someone who's sensitive, maybe you just decrease the overall amount by switching in with some half caff or to black tea and pushing it a little bit earlier in the day to protect your sleep. Because caffeine has a long half-life. With alcohol, I'm one of these people that is compelled by scientific explanations and for me what actually move the needle for me to make different choices around alcohol was to recognize that part of the reason we like alcohol is that it rushes our brain with a neurotransmitter called GABA, gamma immuno butyric acid and that's very relaxing. It's our primary inhibitory neurotransmitter of the central nervous system. So, it makes us feel calm. And if the story ended there, I would say alcohol is a great treatment for anxiety and insomnia. Like the story doesn't end there and our brain and our body doesn't really care whether or not we're relaxed. It's concerned with our survival, so it sees all that GABA and it thinks we must reclaim a state of homeostasis for that original state of balance. So, it achieves this by converting the GABA to a different neurotransmitter called glutamate, which is actually quite excitatory and activating. And I believe this accounts for why, when we've had a few drinks at dinner, inevitably we wake up at two or three in the morning, and then we proceed to toss and turn and feel kind of racing thoughts and an agitated feeling.

**Jen:** I was going to say my heart's usually racing.

**Ellen:** Yes, exactly, and so we have lousy sleep. It disrupts our sleep architecture and that contributes to really every mental health struggle under the sun, just that impact on sleep architecture alone. But I think that that GABA to glutamate conversion cumulatively over time has a real impact not only on anxiety or the handover anxiety the next day, but even cumulatively over time, and so I think that with alcohol, this is such a tricky pickle, but the more that we can just make a choice once again from a place of self-love is tonight a night where savoring a glass of wine with a special meal is the act of self-love, ok, or is tonight the night we're ordering a seltzer with lime, is the act of self-love. And just to make sure we're making those choices consciously, eyes wide open and not from a place of feeling peer pressure or shame for our choices or habit, but really just from a place of reflective self-love.

**Jen:** Yeah, and if we could all, I think make all the choices of our life with that as the backdrop, maybe it would be a better place for all of us to live in. I love that. Well, Ellen, thank you so much. This was so meaningful to me personally. Like I said your book just kind of showing a big bright light on a lot of things for me and change so much of my thinking, so it was a real treat to get to talk to you and to have you on the podcast and dig deeper into some more of these topics. I know that so many people are going to get so much out of this, so thank you for your time today.

**Ellen:** Jen, I'm so glad to know that and I have so much admiration for the work that you do and having all of these conversations that are really shifting us in this area of life that matters the most. And so, thanks for doing what you do.

**Jen:** Thank you so much. I'm so grateful Dr. Vora could be with us today to talk about mental health. Thank you to our producers Rivet 360 and our listeners. You can find the WorkWell podcast series on [deloitte.com](https://deloitte.com), or you can visit various podcatchers using the keyword WorkWell, all one word, to hear more. And if you like the show, don't forget to subscribe, so you get all of our future episodes. If you have a topic you'd like to hear on the WorkWell podcast series, or maybe a story you would like to

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