

Matthew Berninger

Jonathan: Matt do you mind saying your name, your age and where you live right now?

Matt: My age is 43, I live in Jacksonville, Alabama and what was the other...?

Jonathan: Well you already said your name so yeah. How do you feel today?

Matt: I actually feel really great. I do have a little jet lag because of the two-hour time difference...haven't dealt with that in a while, but I feel really good.

Jonathan: Tell me a little bit about what got you here today, more globally, tell me about your health and wellness journey

Matt: Well my health and wellness certainly started off course. I lived on a reservation and seeing a lot of how would you say...just you know, learning patterns that I've seen now in my adult years that I saw growing up. Then moving away from the reservation, moving over to Europe and some of the more high calorie health, high fat foods. I guess, you know, coming from a clean plate club you learn habits where you eat the food, because on the reservation sometimes you would go without. Food would be scarce for a while, so you try to eat everything you could. Then living in Europe with, you know my dad and everything, he still had that mentality and so it was a clean plate club all the time. He ate everything. Moving on, I was very athletic in high school so the more I ate the more I bulked up and that was a good thing, it was a very good thing. Then moving from high school, joining the military, very active. The PT test, weight was always on your mind because I never fit into army standards. I had to be taped, I had to meet a certain neck to stomach proportion to make sure I fit in their weight standards. Then of course I'm doing physical training every single day, you know, it wasn't really so much of a concern until I left the army and started with law enforcement. Law enforcement actually got to the point where, once you got done with your initial physical evaluation and training test, that was it. There was no more physical activity, there's no push or anything so stress took over. I hate to say it, but I was a slave to fast food and

it always seemed to be my comfort coming off a hard call or something. You'd go grab something, sit down to do your report, same thing happening...grab something go do a report. It got up to where I was absolutely unfit and diagnosed with high blood pressure and what really actually changed it was the look in my wife's eyes when we discussed it. I had high blood pressure, stage 2 hypertension, and it needed to be controlled and I think at that point it was just a fear in her eyes. I had a fear of mortality when I've really never experienced it before because of, you know, young and athletic and being able to do everything. Now it's more of mortality setting in and I needed to do something so that started my path to sanity and it's been a great path. So that's what got me to where I'm at right now.

Jonathan: So, Matt when you were at that low point, or high point, however you say it do you mind sharing? You had a diagnosis tell me the diagnosis and tell me what your weight was.

Matt: Diagnosis was simply stage 2 hypertension and I had gotten up to 326 pounds.

Jonathan: So, you had that experience, you started your path to sanity. Let's kind of skip to the end. Tell me about your hypertension, or lack thereof, and weight today.

Matt: My hypertension is, well let's put it this way, my blood pressure is back down to normal, I'm not on any medication. Keeping a good diet has maintained that and to a point where I'm free of worry from it, and I don't know about my weight. That always used to be something that was a measurement and it's kind of the most depressing thing to do, get on scale. Work so hard and not see any movement and so I've taken a different approach of how I feel. I know I fit in the jeans I haven't worn in so long, so about six sizes I have dropped down. Another measurement of my progress is I'm playing ice hockey and I'm not worried about having a heart attack, so I guess that's a win right there! When you can get on the ice to play, and play hard, and not have to worry about having a heart attack or anything.

Jonathan: So, you used to have hypertension, stage 2 hypertension, you don't anymore can you talk about that a little bit? What happened there like you went to a doctor and they said you have this disease?

Matt: I think what really the whole thing was, I went to the doctor because I was anxious, stressed out, of course, you know, during the time in law enforcement law there was a lot of political change and there was a lot of stress. I believe there was just a racing heartbeat, and the headaches and sometimes swelling in my hands or my feet. This is something that I really feared. What drove me to the doctor was my family's history with diabetes, high blood pressure and, you know, having my grandmother pass away from a heart attack at age 50. So, it was just, you know, really that focus of you need to do something. So, you know first thing is let's go see what's wrong 'oh yeah you're overweight, yep you have high blood pressure' something needs to change and so moving from there the biggest thing was learning how to do it all over again. Learning how to do it all over again? Who knows that? Who knows how to do it again and that's when I came upon sanity, it was there. Good steps, easy-to-follow steps, and I realized it wasn't just you know drink the shake or you know stand on your head and do some other weird stuff...it was just to eat regular food, just wholesome nutrient-dense food. From there the small things I took from sanity, it just helped me learn how to eat better, how to take care of the emotional side as well as the sustenance side of what I needed to live.

Jonathan: So, let's talk about that a little bit because you are, just to be clear, you are a veteran then you were a police officer and you just said, "take care of the emotional side". To many men out there who don't get it, and aren't willing to go through it, to have the strength to tap into that emotion and instead they just go to the bottle or they just go to unhealthy outlets...talk to these people. What can they do instead of having shaky hands, instead of being depressed or instead of becoming alcoholics?

Matt: Well as far as alcohol is concerned of course I've had my bout with that and you know definitely see that there is a lot of emotions that are tied to alcoholism, to overeating and in my case, both applied. There's sit down in front of the TV with some huge meal just junk, and you know and watching something that is just completely

mindless on the TV throwing back a 6-pack or a 12-pack. There's more that deals with physical side and those are found in your emotions and those outlets are hard, well not even through outlets, but it's hard to admit that you need those outlets. You need to find a new way to deal with the emotional side of everything and food, just like alcohol, was self-medication absolutely. I had to realize that I'm here trying to medicate myself for emotional issues I didn't want to deal with and the hardest thing about that is actually taking the step to admit that, okay, I do have some emotional issues. I'm sad, you know, I'm sad, I want to throw a temper tantrum. It's hard to admit that, it's absolutely hard to admit I have emotions and before you can even deal with any type of emotions you have to admit them, and I think that was one of the hardest things, was admitting to my own emotions. So, once I admitted to my own emotions I realized there was other outlets that I can use to do it. One, is you know there's exercise that's why I picked up ice hockey again. I didn't play it in ten years, I was surely out of shape for it I shouldn't have done it right off the bat, but I did and that's a great outlet. Working at home, picking up new hobbies and obviously taking the stress out of my life that I had allowed in and so that was a career change. I was 43 when I was trying to do a career change, that then emotionally tie me up and so now it's focus is on my family, watch my stepdaughters grow up and am getting ready for them to go to college. Taking all, you know, in a nutshell, taking all my negative and turn it into a positive outlet is one of the things that I've learned. Taking that same approach towards my healing has been absolutely helpful, progress over perfection, that's one of the things that's you know stay with me not only does it apply to my eating it all supplies to my life as well. So, it isn't like oh this is a diet you know, I can't wrap my lifestyle or my life and say it's a diet either. It's all combined, it's a lifestyle you have to take care of everything and so with that you know I am happier. I am I'm you know fully alive today. I am more alive today at 43 than most I would say, a lot of people in their 30s or even in their late 20s and so it's uh it's absolutely amazing the feeling that I have this vitality and it's almost got to the point where naps were a necessary thing. No, it's like I got to find something to do okay well let me go find a model to put together, well you know what, let me go put some rollerblades on and skate outside. I mean I'm the only kid that's 43 years old on my block that rollerblades I mean so it's just weird it's the 43-year-old my wife likes seeing

Jonathan: So, tell me a little bit about what you like most about this new you, this child joy and curiosity and energy that you've rediscovered

Matt: What I really enjoy the most is and that's how you said it's the curiosity. I really like the curiosity there is nothing that can stop me it's I mean, the only thing that's stopping me is my mind. If I put my mind to something I can do it. Somewhere I want to go I can do it, I don't just even think about that. One that's the greatest thing that's really, it sounds silly, but to actually be able to sit in the chair and not be embarrassed by it. That used to stop traffic lands for me and, I don't know why that just came to me right now, but it was. I don't have that fear anymore. I can get into a seat now I'm not embarrassed to get up and have the chair dragged with me and so it's just yeah nothing can stop me, nothing can stop me. I really you know the curiosity has grown and I want more

Jonathan: Matt it sounds a little bit like when you started to take control of your health both physical and emotional it gave you a new control over your life?

Matt: Yes absolutely, taking control my life has been probably the biggest gift I could give myself, as well, you know with the emotions taking control of me and what I control has taken a lot of blame that I used to put it on other people. Let me take care of me I no longer look for other people to blame I take responsibility for my own actions and the same thing with eating you know. No one forced anything on me or made me eat anything. I took control and took responsibility for my life I always give 110 percent of what I do. I'm honest, at least you know I want to think I'm honest, and integrity is a big thing and so at the end of the day I know I put everything that I could into it and I can keep my head high and be proud of what I've done. So ultimately taking control of my life, it has been that greatest gift I've been able to get myself

Jonathan: Matt you said early on you were part of the clean plate club some people might think that now you're not a member of the clean plate club do you do you just starve yourself now

Matt: I'm still a member of the clean plate club. I still clean my plate and what's really great is I don't starve myself. I do eat the same quantity of food but what is really awesome is the quality of food is improved so much that the more I eat the better I feel actually, which is really crazy.

Jonathan: Have you found that higher quality eating has led to higher quality in other areas of your life?

Matt: My quality of food improving, the greatest thing I've realized or one of the best things I've realized, is my sleep has improved. I used to suffer from a lot of heartburn that would wake me up at night. I would toss and turn because I felt absolutely and uncomfortably full and felt like a hot air balloon trying to cool down. I felt actually hot, uncomfortable, and it really was not a good feeling going to bed with the way I felt. With the quality of food that I'm eating now even if I do overeat I do not feel that, and I don't wake up with heartburn or anything it's really great as far as sleep is concerned.

Jonathan: How has the quality of your eating improved the quality of your relationship with your wife?

Matt: The quality of food that I'm eating, you know, it's improving and it's really great. I think with my relationship with my wife one of the greatest things about the quality of food is having the energy to do things with my wife. She's not worried about me waking up in the middle of night, you know in a heartburn type of an acid reflux situation, that would scare her a lot. With the sleep we're not uncomfortable, not miserable laying together and snuggling. We're not wanting to jump down to each other's throat because we're miserable, because you know, bad food choices. So, it's brought us a new level of being comfortable with each other. Especially you know in some of the things I've dealt with in the past, with heartburn, acid reflux and being uncomfortable, not only has the improvement in food or in the quality of food helped me with my sleep it also helps in the daytime as well because I'm not cranky, I'm not tired and when you're not tired and cranky of course your spouse is going to not be upset with you. So yes, it's absolutely improved our relationship as far as communication and stuff.

Jonathan: Let's talk a little bit about how so you've got a daughter who's getting ready to go to college, you have another daughter who just bought a car. You're 43 your mother or your father died at 50.

Matt: My grandmother

Jonathan: Your grandma, your grandmother died very young. How has the quality of your eating and your life improvement affected your relationship with your children?

Matt: My relationship with my with my stepchildren it's a very good relationship. We have one of the greatest things, that I have noticed about the quality of our food or our food choices, is the relationship that I have with them because we can bond together and cook together. It's great cooking with my children because we're in the kitchen laughing together and it's almost like a like a club because we're all eating sane so we you know we make the things that we like, and even with our kids having the weirdest choices, we make sane substitutions and what brings us together is the fact that we do it all as a family. I think that's the biggest thing, when your children also eat the same way that you do, and the family just becomes all together sane.

Jonathan: You talked about eating with your family can you give me an example very specific specifically what do you eat for breakfast

Matt: In the morning I have a smoothie which consists of spinach, celery, protein, some strawberries, and some low-fat Greek yogurt really love it.

Jonathan: What do you eat for lunch?

Matt: Lunch, really, I like having a salad for lunch sometimes with some protein in it or a smoothie or I like to do cauliflower rice with beef and that's really good and really simple to make.

Jonathan: What about dinner?

Matt: Dinner, what we normally have for dinner obviously comes from the Sane recipe library and it's a matter of whatever we choose. It's got our protein, we have our non-starchy vegetables, a little bit of a whole food fat and what's really great is we have a gazillion choices to make, so it's like there's not really one mainstay. It's actually a lot of discovery.