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Dr. Metzl: These super-agers are people between the ages of 80 and 100 who have no chronic disease compared to controls. There was a study looking at their genome sequencing. Were they genetically different because they were living so long, so healthfully? And people thought, "Yeah, well, you're just genetically superior, that's why." But in fact, that's not true at all, that these super-agers have no genomic difference from the average person. What they have different are habits.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Hey everybody, and welcome to Set the Pace, the official podcast of New York Road Runners, presented by Peloton. I'm your host, Rob Simmelkjaer, the CEO of New York Road Runners, and I'm reunited this week with my co-host from Peloton, Becs Gentry. Hey, Becs, I feel like I haven't seen you in ages.

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Becs Gentry: I know.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: We've been two ships passing in the night. Good to see you.

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Becs Gentry: What with travel, and then I took a week off and went to chilly Florida for a week.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Not as chilly as New York. But yes, I know it wasn't exactly the best.

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Becs Gentry: Well, that was it. As every Floridian is like, "Oh gosh, I'm so sorry about this weather." My aunt and uncle were like, "Oh, you sure you don't want to postpone your trip?" I'm like, "No, you guys, it is 60 degrees warmer here than it is in New York. I will take it." And I got to run outside every day, which I haven't done here in New York for like, two months. So, yeah, it was, yes, a long way of saying we have been like this, but we're back for a few weeks together.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, a little bit. I'll be traveling some too, next week, but at least we have this time together.

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Becs Gentry: He's traveling, and I'm traveling.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: And it's good.

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Becs Gentry: Exactly. And what an episode.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely. We have a great conversation coming up a little bit later on with my doctor, many people's doctor in New York, Dr. Jordan Metzl from HSS. Dr. Metzl has put out a great new book called Push, which is not just a book about how to not get hurt or to get better as a runner, but it's about the motivation that we all need when it comes to running or moving our bodies. Jordan's an incredible guy, great doctor, and that's a great conversation, which we'll talk about motivation and all that. And we'll talk a little bit about my story too, and the enforced break from running that I've had over the last couple of months. I'll tell you what, Becs, it's been a bummer not to be able to run, but man, I certainly picked a good time to not be able to run.

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Becs Gentry: You did.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: There have not been a lot of mornings the last couple of months that I've woken up and looked outside at the snow all around, the subzero temperatures and thought to myself, "Gosh, I really wish I could run this morning."

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Becs Gentry: It's disgusting. Yeah, I know. A friend of mine put up a post, I think it was yesterday evening, she went for a run and she was like, "42 degrees feels like a hug." I was like, "Yeah, I'm sure," because it's just been just, it's treacherous from what I saw. I wasn't here last week when the wind was howling through the city. And where we are here at Peloton Studios, we're on 10th Avenue, and I think there was a lot of Instagram videos of people getting literally blown over by icy cold wind. They couldn't walk. Or they say it's a wind tunnel when it's a still day, this road.

But oh my gosh, I can't even imagine running and that brings us segment... What's it called? Segue. It's a segue, a beautiful segue onto the unfortunate fact is that, to keep people safe and healthy, New York Road Runners has had to cancel a few runs, and it's annoying. Yes. It's really sad

and it's really annoying, especially if you've been training for it, but trust me, you don't want to be catching a chill when you're out there and having to take days off work when you only get a handful of PTO days anyway and sick days. Just, this is a be thankful for safety sort of thing. But you can talk more about that, Rob, because in the end, that's your final decision.

00:04:02

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, it is. But frankly, none of them have been hard decisions. The last three weeks now, we've canceled races. The Gridiron... Sorry, the most recent was the Gridiron four- miler, the Manhattan 10K the week before that, the Fred Lebow half the week before that. It just has not been runnable conditions. We've gotten a little bit unlucky. But you know, it's not the runnability so much as it is the ability for our volunteers and our staff, the ones who are not running.

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Becs Gentry: I was going to say, yeah.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Because let's face it, if you dress the right way and you warm up the right way, you can run in zero degrees. You can do it. You're going to warm up.

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Becs Gentry: Got to be smart.

00:04:40

Rob Simmelkjaer: As long as you're smart, and the way you dress and the way you prepare yourself, you can handle that. Most people can run in some pretty cold temperatures. But that's not the reason we've had to cancel these races. It's that we've got hundreds, or thousands in some cases, of volunteers and staff that have to be out there, and they are not running. They are standing around.

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Becs Gentry: No.

00:05:02

Rob Simmelkjaer: They are showing up at these race sites, by the way, the staff, at 2: 00 in the morning to start to set up. And so, we just cannot put people out there in those situations. It's not fair to them. It's not healthy. In some cases, just not even possible. I mean, if you set up a water station right now at 6: 00 in the morning , by race time, you're looking at a bunch of cups of ice, right? So,

what good is that? So you just cannot put people...

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Becs Gentry: Could tell you from personal experience, not good.

00:05:32

Rob Simmelkjaer: No, it's not good. So it certainly bummed us out to have to cancel a third straight race this past Sunday, the Gridiron Four-Miler, presented by the Flag Art Foundation. But we had some good news on the tail of that, which is...

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Becs Gentry: Oh, yeah?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: And this is a rare thing. With a great thanks to our friends in New York City at City Hall and the Parks Department, we were actually given a very rare additional permit to run an additional race on Saturday, February 21st. So, coming right up, coming right up in fact. And this is actually the typical date of the Al Gordon race. We had to move that because of a scheduling conflict. The scheduling conflict went away. We got lucky there. And so, now we're able to have a rescheduled Gridiron, now 5K, presented by the Flag Art Foundation on 9:00 AM in Prospect Park, Brooklyn on Saturday, February 21st. So, this is exciting.

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Becs Gentry: Hilly.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: And it's going to be... By the way, what's great about this, Becs, is it's going to be free, as well. So, anybody who missed one of these races that we had to cancel over the last few weeks, or pretty much anybody, we're going to open this up to public registration, and anybody's going to be able to sign up and run this. It is not a 9+1 race. And if you listened to the episode a couple of weeks ago where we did our town hall, Becs, I missed you grilling me, but I had Juliette Morris, our chief marketing and digital officer talking to me.

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Becs Gentry: She did a great job.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: She did a fantastic job, and she knows, because she's in there on the inner workings of a lot of this stuff, she knows exactly what to ask as well. So we

had a great conversation about some of these things. And one of the things I said is that we want to have more not- 9+ 1 races, or at least the nine part of it, which is, it doesn't count for your one of nine if you're trying to qualify for the Marathon. It counts for the plus-one volunteer opportunity, but not for the one of nine. So this is going to be a race like that, which is great because it's going to make it accessible and easy for folks to sign up, because we're not expecting this to sell out in 30 seconds flat as so many of the races do. And so, it's going to be a chance for folks to get out there, and hopefully by then have a more reasonable set of temperatures to go out and run in on February 21st. So, check your email.

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Becs Gentry: Absolutely.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Stay in touch with our socials. There'll be a lot more information coming out about opportunities to register for the Gridiron event, now a 5K, presented by the Flag Art Foundation.

00:08:04

Becs Gentry: We love that. And I'm so glad you mentioned the volunteers, because it is truly not something that you think about. And I'm not saying that's a selfish thing with runners. It's just, you think about you, literally, of like, "Damn, this is my... I trained for this." And we say this, hundreds of episodes, the volunteers are what makes it happen. So, so grateful for them. And I just wanted to do a little Peloton update for you all, because if you listened to our live podcast from Hard Rock Cafe a few weeks ago with my colleague Alex Kowalski, he was training and was going to be competing in the Fred Lebow half, and I messaged him when it was canceled. I was like, "Dude, no, I'm so sorry. I know you've really worked your behind..."

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I was thinking about him when we canceled. That was such a bummer.

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Becs Gentry: Such a bummer. He went out that morning by himself, of his own accord, because he's just that type of guy, which is kind of why I messaged him, because I knew full stop that he would have definitely still gone out to try and run. And he... I want to try and show you guys this picture, because...

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Look at that.

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Becs Gentry: There he is.

00:09:11

Rob Simmelkjaer: For those watching on YouTube, you can see a very frozen face. So he ran, did he run the 13.1 that morning?

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Becs Gentry: He did. He did. He did it in just under 80 minutes. He said the first seven were doable. "First seven were okay, but the conditions were garbage." I'm quoting him here. I'm reading the text message. "Ended up just under 80 total, look like this at the end," and sent that picture. I was just like, "That is a trooper." And so, if you're an Alex fan and you were following along, there's your little update for it.

00:09:44

Rob Simmelkjaer: I love that. Thank you so much. And I hope a lot of folks did go out and do that, because again, you can run in these conditions. And by the way, I appreciate the understanding. We've seen, people really do get it, on social media, in the various places where we've been posting these cancellations. People have understood. They've gotten it. They know the volunteers and the staff and the role they play in these events. So, want to appreciate everybody out there for understanding, and hopefully this is it. This is like a year's worth or more of cancellations we've had in like a month. So I really hope that we're done with these for a while, as the weather does show a bit of a warming trend.

And speaking of warming things up, we're going to be inside with club night tonight, the night that this podcast drops, on Thursday, February 12th. This is such a fun event for all of our club community runners out there. Every year, we have this event where the clubs and others who are not in clubs all come together for our big awards night. We give out awards to some of the most accomplished runners in all the various age groups in our running community. We give out awards to the clubs for team spirit and things like that. We give out a great award for athletes with disabilities, presented by Achilles.

So, we just have such a fun night. It's the chance for all the runners to get dressed up and have a great time together, celebrating each other, their clubs, and one of my favorite nights of the year. So that'll be happening tonight,

and if you're listening to the podcast and you see me out there, I'll be kind of there with Ted Metellus. We'll be doing our dog and pony show, giving out awards. Please make sure to come up and say hi. I always looking forward to seeing folks on club night.

00:11:24

Becs Gentry: Peloton's most advanced tread yet is here. The new Peloton cross-training series, Tread Plus, powered by Peloton IQ. Designed for runners who want top tier performance, it features premium hardware that makes every run and workout more efficient, effective, and motivating. And it accelerates your personal growth mile after mile. The rubberized slap belt cushions every single step and creates an energizing running space for each stride. And with strength workouts, you can stack right into your routine. You'll build lower body muscle to support stronger runs. With auto incline adjusting automatically to match instructor cues, your intensity stays exactly where it needs to be, so you can stay in the zone and focus on your workout. Experience our most advanced tread yet at onepeloton.com. Peloton, the official digital fitness partner of New York Road Runners.

00:12:21

Rob Simmelkjaer: Dr. Jordan Metzl has spent decades at the intersection of medicine and running. As a sports medicine physician at New York's Hospital for Special Surgery, he's treated thousands of runners, and as a runner himself, he's completed dozens of marathons and multiple Ironman triathlons. His new book, Push, looks at why staying consistent with movement can be so difficult, even for people who already identify as active. Drawing on science, patients' stories and his own experiences, Metzl, Dr. Metzl, focuses on motivation, fear, and belief, and how they show up over years of running. Dr. Jordan Metzl also happens to be my doctor right now at HSS. And so, Doctor, it's a pleasure to have you on Set the Pace. Welcome.

00:13:07

Dr. Metzl: Well, thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here, and I hope this is helpful for people as they listen and hopefully run along in the process.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I hope I get a free appointment for this podcast. We'll talk about that after the show.

00:13:17

Dr. Metzl: Always. Always.

00:13:19

Rob Simmelkjaer: It's great to have you on with us, and I've had a chance to come to some of your book launch events. You and I know each other pretty well. So I guess I want to start with the fundamental question, Dr. Metzl. Why? Why did you want to take the time out of your really busy schedule as a doctor, you do a lot of other things in the running community here in New York, to write a book right now?

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Dr. Metzl: Well, thank you so much for showing up for those things. I mean, I feel like... This is actually my fifth book about the intersection of medicine and fitness and preventive health. And each of the previous four books have been kind of somewhat specific, targeted to taking care of your achy knees, or a book for runners, or a book on the medicine of exercise in concept. But this is the first book which is basically focusing on the neck up, which is basically the brain. And the reason I wanted to do that is that I see literally thousands of people every year, in both my office and in my fitness communities, around the idea of kind of they want to be active and want to move. And what I've kind of become increasingly interested in is what keeps them going, and how, from my vantage point as a doctor, can I help get them not only on the road and on their field of choice, but keep them there?

And that really boils down to motivation. What do we know about motivation? And I'll tell you, it's much more challenging than looking at a torn ACL on an MRI. An ACL shows up, it's torn, you have a torn ACL. Motivation is so... It's slippery, because you don't even know exactly what it is. Some people have it, they've had it, they lose it, they regain it. It comes and goes throughout our lives. And so it's a nebulous subject that I find really interesting, so I wanted to kind of learn more about it.

00:15:02

Becs Gentry: It's so interesting. I've admired you from afar, as we've never really met in person, and read a lot of the things you've written. And as a runner who runs a lot of miles, both on camera and off camera, it's really incredible to have a physician of your caliber, and you're an athlete yourself, so you do get it. But to be putting out a book there, which is talking about the science behind the brain. And because perhaps you've seen a lot of people, I would guess, who know exercise matters and certain things do matter and still struggle to get it done, right? So, was there a certain runner or patient who changed how you personally thought or felt about motivation and helped you kind of

craft and shape the ideas for this book?

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Dr. Metzl: Yeah, great question. Different than some of my other books, which were very much like, all right, Patient X hurt their knee, this is why their knee hurts, and this is what we would do to fix their knee. This was a much longer project. This book took about five years to work on, and the reason it took so long was that I wanted to try and pull patient stories and try and learn from those patients' stories, and to give the information I learned from those patients.

The book starts with a woman who basically lost her husband and received a breast cancer diagnosis in a two- year period of time, and she was profoundly depressed and she basically was thinking like, this may be the end. And so, what she did ism she tied on her shoes and she went out the door and started walking. Then she started slow jogging. Then she joined New York Road Runners club, and eventually she ran her first marathon at age 70. By her mid- 80s, she'd run 14 marathons and is teaching a kettlebell class for 80- plus people, 80- year- plus people.

And the whole idea of her, and the reason I start the book with her, is she is the embodiment of motivation and the embodiment of my message, which is that, listen, in the Exercise Cure, the book I did 15 years ago, I went through the science of the medicinal benefit of exercise and why it's so beneficial for you. And I think people largely know it's great for your brain, it's great for your heart, it's great for your blood pressure, it's great for your cancer prevention. People know that information now. The problem is, even if they know it, how do they then start to do it, and what can we get them to do it? And that really taps into motivation.

And so people like her, and I start the book with her because she's an exact example of what I want to talk about, which is, listen, she was depressed and recovering from breast cancer, and so she started walking and then started jogging and then started becoming part of the Road Runners Club community, and then started goal- setting, and then started inspiring others. And it's a whole process of that wheel starting to turn from a negative situation to a positive situation.

And that process is so interesting to me that I wanted to learn more about the people that I was seeing here every day, like John Smith with a hurt knee. Yeah, it's his hurt knee, but it's really affecting how he does everything else in his life. And that becomes a really interesting discussion for me and something I want to talk about.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. Jordan, you know, because we've talked about it, and Becs knows, and everybody at New York Road Runners knows that this is a key area of focus at Road Runners right now, is this, the mental health benefits of being active and running. And I'm really interested in that patient's story that you just mentioned, and that moment that a person is experiencing depression, whatever's going on in their life that's causing them to feel that weight, and that first kind of decision, the first spark that gets them to move their bodies, right? Which you see so often, and this story is another example of that kind of flipping a switch, right? And all of a sudden, you create a little positive momentum that you can build on and build on and build on. And the cumulative effects of doing that over time.

What do you think, for someone who's listening who is in that place right now, who needs that spark, maybe they had it and maybe they had an injury that's knocked them out for a while, maybe this winter is getting to them, and that's a lot of us right now, right? What can you say to them about finding that spark to kind of like get them moving again and flip that switch?

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Dr. Metzl: It's interesting, both in the book, I have an illustration, and in the lectures I go out and give, I have a video, and the video I have is of about a three-year-old kid trying to get a tractor tire off the ground, because his siblings are off camera and he wants to get this tractor tire up and roll it across the playground. And in the book, I have that illustration of what I call the exercise wheel. And the concept is the same, which is the biggest amount of effort is getting that damn thing up off the ground. And that's the hardest part, is getting the wheel up and starting to turn. And once that wheel starts to turn, there's almost like a follow on effect of all of the positive behaviors which start to feed on themselves. And so it's exactly like the momentum. You can think of yourself like a ping pong ball in a river that once you're in the river, just everybody is pushing you along.

And it can be frustrating, because if you're someone like me and many of our listeners who have been doing fantastic events with you guys and others over decades, you may look and be like, oh my God. Like, I was looking back, I'm like, I ran a 3: 04 marathon. How the hell? I can't even smell 3: 04 anymore. What do I do now? I'm like, if I can break four hours, I'm so happy. So I look back where I was, and it was so easy, but then I think 15 years from now, I'll give my left foot to be able to run as fast as I am now. And you can focus on I'm slower.

Listen, the joy is just getting out and being part of a community. And so, that idea of getting that tractor tire up off the ground and starting to roll is the real differentiator. Once that thing starts to roll, it starts to really take on a life of its own and keep rolling. And I love that video and that concept, and it's a great question.

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Becs Gentry: Yeah. It's really interesting, from my perspective as somebody who is not qualified as a doctor of science, sport, anything, just a lot of years of practice and a lot of years of teaching, I find that we as instructors talk about motivation as confidence as a different word, really. And I love that analogy of the tractor, because it's sort of like, I used this analogy the other day of you can't expect confidence to be the most impressive thing. Good doesn't mean impressive, right? You can't say that you're good at running if you run only 26.2 miles. That's not it. And I use the analogy of if you want to learn guitar, you're not going to associate good with being able to play the whole, I don't know, Beatles, whatever, Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds song. Good is playing one chord really, really well. So, why is it not just good for running is lacing up and doing five meters of running? And I love that, that motivation is... I love that, the tractor, the wheel, just getting up.

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Dr. Metzl: Getting it up and getting it going. And in my world, I talk about the holy grail of fitness is compliance, and the holy grail of compliance is smiling. If you look at all these fitness and wellness influencers that are kind of all over social media, and the one thing I'm really struck by, none of these damn people are smiling. They have great muscles, they look good, they're jacked up, but they're not happy. If you go to a Road Runners Club race or any running event, everybody's having a great, smiling.

I cannot emphasize enough how actually smiling, it will keep people involved, not because you'll have great biceps or whatever, just because you're out being healthy, that the benefit of health is moving and the benefit of moving is community. And I just feel like that's a piece that is lost on these discussions of like, maximize your protein intake and do your red light therapy and all this other crap. The real benefit is being part of a community and smiling, and that's what will keep people coming, going out. And that's why people come out in January and February when it's like 10 degrees, it's because they're part of a community and they like it. It's a positive reinforcement. And that's all about getting that tractor tire up off the ground in the

first place.

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Becs Gentry: It really is. Isn't it proven though that smiling, like scientifically proven that smiling, it doesn't mean you're "happy," quote unquote, but if you use the muscles to smile, it actually makes your perceived effort drop down when you're working out.

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Dr. Metzl: Yeah, that's functionality, definitely. And so you see a lot of, from Kipchoge down, smiling. It never seems to work very well for me, but I fake it, but that's fine. But I'm talking about smiling, the smile of just feeling like I'm part of something that brings me joy. And I just can't emphasize enough. And that's why I tell people, listen, what I want you to do is something you like to do, be that running, swimming, yoga, whatever it is, that if you're smiling, you're much more likely to be consistent with what you're doing.

00:24:18

Becs Gentry: Yeah.

00:24:18

Rob Simmelkjaer: Dr. Metzl, you were just talking about, and I've heard you talk about some of the longevity experts out there, right? Which are people who are really focused on living longer, right? And people have all kinds of theories about how to achieve longevity. Maybe it's intermittent fasting, or maybe it's sleeping in a hyperbaric chamber, whatever it is. You-

00:24:42

Becs Gentry: You don't do that, Rob?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I haven't gotten into that yet. I thought about it, but it just doesn't seem like the return is there for that. I don't know. We'll see. Maybe Jordan can give me some ideas. But you have this idea of health span, right? What's the difference between a lifespan and what you call health span?

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Dr. Metzl: Yeah. So I try and go into that in detail at the beginning of Push, because I want people to understand these different terms, because everybody hears about longevity, years lived, and health span is years lived during health. Muscle span is maintaining your muscle mass, which is very

important. But we've heard a lot about this kind of longevity. I want to maximize longevity.

And I find that quite ironic, because in the last 150 years, we've done amazing things at extending people's longevity. The average lifespan used to be about 42, 43 years old until the beginning of the 1800s, so about 150, 160 years ago, and then clean water and food and vaccines and antibiotics really changed this. So now we've got double the life expectancy, almost 80 years old.

So the longevity movement, maybe it's like people that want to go faster around Central Park on their expensive bike. The bike may make a small bit of difference, but the vast majority is actually you, in your legs and your body and your condition. Longevity is a lot about the things that have got us to this point.

What I want to focus on is healthy longevity, or health span, meaning I want you to maximize the years where you are healthy. And we can do so much to basically shape that discussion and keep people healthy through diet and sleep and regular exercise and being part of a community, and all these things that we know, which are free, by the way, and we know can tremendously affect healthy longevity.

The problem we're running into is what's called the health span-lifespan gap, which is the number of years where people keep living in poor health is getting longer, not shorter, in the United States. And so, I want people to think about what can I do? And so, I go through different patient stories, such as the guy who I just saw about a month ago now, who's 91, that's out in Central Park every single day moving around, walking. He rides his exercise bike at home. He is on zero medications. He's what we call a super-ager. He's basically, he's living on no medication, very active. And these super ages are people between the ages of 80 and 100 who have no chronic disease compared to controls. Most people over 80 have two or more chronic diseases.

And so, there was a study looking at their genome sequencing. Were they genetically different because they were living so long so healthily? And people thought, yeah, well, you're just genetically superior, that's why. But in fact, that's not true at all, that these super-agers have no genomic difference from the average person. What they have different are habits, and the idea of being consistent with movement and community and smiling and sleeping and eating and all those things. There's no guarantee you're going to live one day longer, but the idea is maximizing your healthy longevity, and I think there's a lot we can think about in that realm.

00:27:47

Becs Gentry: That's incredibly interesting, and I've never sort

of heard them put like that. It's similar, but so not, in a way. And we are flooded with longevity experts. If you can't see me, I'm air quoting "experts" because there's a few people out there who put that facade on. And to me, it sets up people for disappointment and failure, the more things you add, when, from what I'm hearing from you, it's actually quite simple, really. It's getting the motivation to get out there and move and smile, and just get your body functioning in quite a... I don't want to say basic, but my brain's failing me for a better word right now, but a basic manner. We're not telling people to go and run miles every day. Walk around Central Park like that gentleman does, and he's aging gracefully, and not that we don't know this, but probably not sleeping in a hyperbaric chamber and putting his red light mask on every night.

00:28:49

Dr. Metzl: Correct. He's not. I can vouch for that.

00:28:53

Becs Gentry: So let's talk about the motivation, the side of things that people are probably going to look to Push, your book, for, Dr. Jordan, because as a runner yourself, have you actually ever gone through a period of time when running did not feel fun for you, and when you didn't want to go out or you didn't have that motivation to get out and smile and do it? And what did you learn from it if that happened?

00:29:20

Dr. Metzl: All the time. The idea of titling the book Push was that I wanted people to think about learning to evaluate their motivation and learn to push themselves physically, psychologically and physiologically, so three different things. So physically, being able to kind of push their body, and the reason I talk about that is that we know that if you build and maintain your skeletal muscle mass across your lifespan, called your muscle span, that is linked to kind of healthier longevity and healthy longevity going forward.

If you push yourself psychologically, I deeply believe that those pushes teach people how to push in all aspects of their life, so in job and in relationships and in their life in general. So learning to basically become comfortable being uncomfortable is very important.

And then physiologically, we increasingly know that exercise intensity, why is it that if you do kind of half mile repeats around the reservoir and you're like, this sucks, but you're huffing and puffing and you're training, and then when you start running a pace, it's like, oh my God, I feel so much better because you are physiologically pushing your training to make your race pace easier because you start

pushing your physiology. So it's kind of physical, mental and physiologic pushing. And so, the idea of push is learning how to push yourself in all those different categories.

That being said, to your question, I have a lot of times when I'm like, dude, I just do not feel like doing this. And that's where, for me, I've found that things like many of the running organizations around the world do a marathon, maybe a half-marathon and that's it. But the beauty of New York Road Runners Club is that we have events almost every week, all year long. Nobody gets that.

And so, to be able to do that and to have those things, giving yourself a little goal means, all right, I got this 10K coming. I've got the New York City Half coming up. I want to make sure I don't totally mess the bed. I have that goal coming up. I want to make sure I'm somewhat ready for that.

And so, giving yourself a small goal for me has been very, very helpful, and for a number of my patients as well. It does not have to be a running goal, though for me it is. It's just some kind of goal. And that's what I've used to help get me over these kind of motivational troughs in my life.

00:31:32

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, absolutely. We'd love to get back to having an event just about every week, if we could stop canceling every weekend because of this extreme cold weather. That would be nice. Hopefully.

00:31:42

Dr. Metzl: It's coming.

00:31:43

Becs Gentry: Back to virtual races, Rob.

00:31:45

Rob Simmelkjaer: Exactly. It's been a rough winter. Jordan, you talk also in Push about literally that idea of pushing ourselves a little harder, closer to the limits. And this is something that I find interesting. We've talked about it over the years on this podcast. The difference between, okay, movement, which is great. And we had a New York Times journalist on once who had written an article about the difference between walking and running. And she said, and I've heard you say, that there's a huge step up in terms of the likelihood of you're living a healthy life. If you go from sitting on the couch to walking, that's a huge improvement, just moving, and moving your body. But what about that additional benefit that we get from pushing ourselves to the limit of our exertion, even if it's just

for short periods of time? Can you talk about that a little bit and what that does for us when we really push ourselves and our heart rates up to something close to our max?

00:32:53

Dr. Metzl: Absolutely. Great question. First of all, from a health point of view, there's two things, just kind of health and fitness. From a health point of view, going from being a potato on the couch to walking is the biggest delta in terms of health metrics in general. So heart disease, cancer, diabetes, neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's, those things, from nothing to something, that's the biggest difference.

And we used to think that going from moderate intensity, like walking or slow jogging, and there are kind of the several zones of training, maybe some of the listeners are familiar with their training zones, but I like to break it down into like, I can talk comfortably, zone one, I can huff and puff a bit, but I can still have a conversation, kind of marathon pace, zone two, and I'm like, don't talk to me, I'm going to puke, that's zone three. Those are the kind of three zones, mild, moderate, and intense.

And we used to think that basically, if you were in this kind of moderate zone, or mild to moderate zone, that 150 minutes per week of exercise, 30 minutes a day, walking, slow jogging, and then if you did intense exercise, it was kind of a two to one conversion, meaning that if you did something like burpees or sprinting, you could do half the amount of time. And that idea was based on the relative energy expenditure, called the MET, which is used to calculate how much energy you spend.

It turns out that from a health point of view, and this study just came out recently, looking at the energy expenditure and the effects of health, and it turns out there's like a six to one for metabolic disease and heart disease prevention, meaning that if you're intense, it's six times more valuable for disease prevention, not two or three times more.

So the whole idea of exercise intensity is that intensity from a health outcome is very beneficial, even different than just walking, better than nothing. Getting your heart rate up much better than just doing a slow, steady state. So I want people to think about, how can I get my heart rate up during the day? There's a concept called variable intensity lifestyle physical activity or VILPA. And that acronym is basically, how do I get my heart rate up during the day?

It doesn't have to be exercise. It means like, I take the stairs at work, or I get to a red light and I do squats, or air squats at work when I'm sitting around for a while. Just getting your heart rate up for little periods of time

throughout the day, it adds up and that's very beneficial. We increasingly recognize these exercise snacks, or small bouts of exercise, can be much more impactful than we previously realized. And so, thinking about that around this idea of starting to get my heart rate up, both with my training and with my daily activities.

So I want people to be comfortable thinking about, how do I start pushing my heart rate? How do I do my cat hill repeats, even though it sucks and I want to throw up at the top? Because that idea of getting comfortable being uncomfortable, pushing your physiology, is very important, not only for your run performance, but I think for your overall fitness and/ or health as well.

00:35:43

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. And you mentioned the cat hill repeats, and for runners, right, that to me is a big part of the takeaway, is you'll have some coaches who will give a workout and say, "Hey, I want you to run 30 minutes, whatever at such and such pace," but maybe add in those, what they'll call strides at the end, right? Just give me 10 really hard strides, or give me something really hard here and there, right? Just that little bit of push, and the impact that that can have above and beyond what you're doing on a typical run.

00:36:17

Dr. Metzl: And I think that piece, by the way, Rob and Becs, that's where the community piece comes in, because I've been teaching these fitness communities now for 15 years in addition to my other stuff, and what I've noticed is that people, no matter if they say like, "I want to do three sets of 10 burpees," and you say you want to do it, but it's impossible to do it consistently with intensity by yourself. You may say you want it, but you get to the first set and you're like, "Forget it. I'll just do like five." But if there's people around you...

So what I have started doing in my classes is I'll have one burper and I'll have one yeller. And basically, if you're in a partner with somebody, one person's doing burpees, one person is literally kneeling on the ground in front of them, screaming their name. And people knock off those 10 much easier when they're accountable to somebody else and they're part of a group.

And so, those kind of dynamics are in play with all types of communal involvement, and the idea of pushing yourself becomes much easier. That's why I'm a big fan of group activities as a big piece of this idea of learning to push yourself, because it just becomes much easier in a group to push.

00:37:19

Becs Gentry: Absolutely. Okay, we've got ourselves pushed out the door, for want of a better word there. We've got the motivation flowing, but you then, continue the journey with us, Dr. Metzl. You have taken it even further, and you talk about this thing called the boring middle. And this is my favorite. This is just my favorite thing to talk about, because this is when people, I think, especially when they're new to running, this is when they fail. And failing, if you've ever listened to anything I've ever taught in classes, which is probably not something you've done, but I say FAIL as an acronym for first attempt in learning. And it's when people want to bail, because it gets boring and we forget that endurance is actually a boring set of repetition over and over again. But talk to us from a scientific standpoint, what does that moment actually look like physiologically, rather than physically, which probably a lot of our runners know about?

00:38:23

Dr. Metzl: One of the things I learned in studying motivation, motivational tendencies, a couple things I'll throw at you. Number one is I have a lot in Push about what's called lowering the cost to act, which is a behavioral economics term about becoming consistent with my choices. And so, things like joining a group, or having fun, or getting a new pair of running shoes, or joining a Road Runners club, running class or organization, group run, those kind of things make me want to go and be consistent.

And then, as we kind of get to that boring middle piece, some combination of people get used to what they're doing, the actual process of getting involved in an event and/or getting involved in a training cycle, and they kind of feel like they have no oomph to keep going. That's where all these kind of lowering the cost to act concepts, I think become really important for people. That's where they can kind of lean into the things that make them want to go and keep being part of what they're doing.

I think all those are ideas around the idea of how I can kind of mastermind my own motivational intent. I increasingly believe that motivation is something which is largely based on setting up the right behavior patterns and not, I'm not motivated. It's easy, well, she's not motivated. I got my sister and I'm doing these things and she's not doing it. She's just not motivated. It's easy to kind of look at that negatively. I don't believe that. I think people have to think about what are the motivational tendencies and wins they can put in their lives or somebody else's life to help keep them active.

And so, I do a lot in terms of talking around what are some of the barriers in the people I see and what's kind of standing in their way, and what can we start thinking about in terms of making their motivational tendencies successful? And I believe in that.

00:40:05

Rob Simmelkjaer: Jordan, I want to shift a little bit and talk about you, because you're really incredible and unusual in the range of things that you have done. Obviously, you're an accomplished doctor with our great partners at HSS. I first met you as the chair of our medical advisory committee at New York Road Runners. You lead a group of medical professionals who have been helping advise Road Runners on matters of health. We put together a great conference, the first ever conference before the marathon last year, which was focused on runner health and safety, and that did incredibly well.

You've also created these communities as well, the Iron Strength community, which is something that you help create, does exactly that. And I didn't even know this until I went to your book party the other day. You've got these parties essentially out there around New York, where hundreds and thousands of people are showing up to move their bodies together, and that's truly a community you've created. Where does all this come from, Jordan? What is the motivation that you have to do all of this stuff? Because it just seems like you're living like, three lives at once.

00:41:25

Dr. Metzl: I don't want to get bored. I don't know. I just feel like... That's so kind of you. I'm blushing over here. But I feel like... I come from a family of doctors. I dedicate Push to my amazing dad and just, I guess, it's a wonderful question. I think it starts with my dad's story, because my dad was born in a small little town in Austria in 1935, and he and my grandparents luckily escaped the Nazis and escaped to Switzerland, where a lot of our family was killed in Europe, but they escaped and survived and came to America in 1948, got sent out to Kansas City.

And with that kind of backstory, coming here, he ended up embracing life and embracing every positive thing about life. People with that kind of trauma in their past sometimes go the other way and they end up feeling very negative about life, but he did the exact opposite. And so, by the time he came back out here to New York and went to medical school, came here for residency, met my mom, they moved back to Kansas City, had four boys, all Doctors Metzl.

And the idea was that we were kind of pushed, but we didn't know we were pushed. We were pushed to go to every

event, go to baseball games, football games, classical music, family trips. Every experience was about pushing. And I didn't realize I grew up being pushed. I just was raised to basically try and be like a sponge and just soak up everything, and then as a family of healthcare professionals to give back.

And so to me, I think I'm, as I kind of reflect on his passing this past year at 90, and I'm so lucky to have had that influence as my dad. I think that his influence on my life and my brothers' lives really helped teach me about the joy of not only having every experience, but then both my parents, my mom is a psychotherapist, and the idea of giving back to others. And so, I think everything that I do is an extension of learning how to give to others.

And so, when I started my sports medicine practice and then realized that we talked about getting people out and moving, but there wasn't really a mechanism to prescribe the medicine of exercise, beyond saying exercise a half hour a day. I'm like, you know what? I'm going to start getting people exercising with me, because it's more fun to do it together. And I know that plyometrics make me run faster and feel better and my knees don't hurt, but they kind of suck to do by myself. So how do I start a community?

And so, we started really small, and then started experimenting with different types of exercise classes and venues, and our Iron Stream community now has about 55,000 people, and we get to do these great workout classes all over the place, on different great venues, and they're always free. And it's all about this exercise prescription. And so, I guess it's a long way of saying that I feel like I'm lucky to be in a position to influence other people's lives by giving, and that I find it really gratifying. And so, I feel like this is an extension of that.

00:44:34

Becs Gentry: That's amazing. And congratulations on such a huge number, as well, of people training with you. That's just so great to see people hearing what you're doing and taking action into going together as well.

So, by nature, you've spent such a long time around real people actually moving, which I haven't been around that many doctors, thank goodness, touch wood, I'm not... But you seem like the real deal, as opposed to a lot of doctors who, as you say, way back when, you were just having to prescribe the textbook exercise for 30 minutes a day and see what happens sort of thing. Whereas now, you're living and breathing it as well as it being your practice. So, when it comes to running and how you mentioned the mental reward that it gives you, how do you think that running helps people stick with something in their life when reward isn't

immediately palpable?

00:45:47

Dr. Metzl: Yeah. I mean, I think that running for me, and for many of my patients, and I think we have good evidence on the effect of running on anxiety, depression, et cetera, but it's beyond that. I think it's running and/or exercise, getting out first thing in the morning for me, is a lot about kind of centering and focusing my day. And I'm lucky that everybody that comes to see me in my office, from kind of seven-year-old gymnasts to 85-year-old marathoners and everybody in between, all want to move, and they all really value the benefit of movement on their both mental and physical health, but particularly their ability to focus. And so if you want to see somebody cranky, see a runner with a hip stress fracture, haven't been able to run for three or four weeks. That's the definition.

And so, that's why I always try and keep people moving in my practice. And I increasingly recognize how important movement is to help me focus. And when I was in medical school, I made the realization that my brain just worked better when I moved. So I would go in the back and I would study and then jump rope, and study and jump rope. And I noticed that when I got my blood pumping and I got my heart going, I could just absorb information a lot better.

And I've really taken those lessons throughout the course of my medical career, that I consider movement and being a sports medicine doctor part and parcel of the same thing. And so, I want to figure out, not just broken body part, but that body part as part of a bigger person, and how do we get that person going? Because yeah, it's like, I got an achy knee, but if my knee aches and I can't do the events I want to do, and I'm less active... So that's what Rob will tell you. I'm all over him. It's like, fine, you can't run right now, but let's keep you going on your strengthening. Let's keep you going, because you'll be a better CEO if you are able to move every day, and you'll be much less happy if you're not.

And so, I think all these things work together. I just can't emphasize enough how important daily movement is to those types of things.

00:47:37

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, 100%, and I am living all of this right now, as Dr. Metzl knows. And for those who follow the show, you know I ran three marathons in about 15 months after Chicago, where I didn't have my best day. Really started to feel some weeks after, just, the pain in my knee changed. Something was different, from a little bit sore when

I started to run, but then it would go away, to sore all the time, right? Sore when I was sitting, sore when I was getting out of bed, a lot of pain through the holidays.

And so, fortunately I already knew Dr. Metzl and was able to get an appointment to go in. And this is, I know, Jordan, pretty common, the sort of thing that brings people in. And by the way, my HIPAA rights are waived. You can talk about it all you want on the podcast, but like, talk about the kinds of things that you typically see people coming in for on the medical side of your practice. And you, for those who don't know, really focus on non-surgical solutions to things, right? You're trying to give people tools and treatments to keep them out of surgery for the knee or the hip or whatever it might be. How do you approach someone like me, who walks in, having run themselves into a knee injury?

00:48:57

Dr. Metzl: Quote unquote, "walks in" in air quotes there. Kind of limps in. And I guess I would first say that people, if someone like an injury, like I twisted my ankle and I heard a snap and I came limping off the field, nobody ever wonders, did I hurt my ankle? They know they can't walk and something's screwed up. That's an acute traumatic injury. Runners get some of those, but more commonly in running, we see repetitive use injuries, pain that worsens over time.

And so the first thing I would say is, if it's a shin or a knee or a hip or whatever, all the types of things we see, if running doesn't hurt a little bit, you're not going hard enough. So it's got to be a little bit sore, right? It has to be. It's designed to be uncomfortable. That being said, unhealthy pain changes your mechanic of movement. And that's true for kids, parents, grandparents. If pain is changing how you're moving...

And so, in Rob's story, the first thing that he told us just by saying this is, something felt different and I was moving differently. And so, for people listening, the first telltale sign is, I am moving differently because something hurts or feels uncomfortable. Back off and get that checked out, because you can make a little bit of a problem a much worse problem by continuing to push through the pain.

And so, in my office, the first thing is, what's the diagnosis? What do we do? We listen to your history, we examine you, we get x-rays, we maybe get an MRI. We figure out a treatment plan to fix the problem you have. And then we want to think about, how do we prevent this problem from recurring? Why did it happen? Did I violate the rule of too much, too fast? Is there something screwed up with my run mechanic? Do I need a run analysis? Which we thankfully have here at HSS and other places, too. How do I

look at my run mechanic? Do I look at how my body alignment is when I'm running? What's my training program? Am I doing enough strengthening? Nutritionally, am I kind of locked in? Am I running too many big endurance events in a short period of time? Those are all things we would start to think about when we start figuring out why this injury happened in the first place.

The benefit of all that is that as you get better, someone like you gets better, they are less likely... First of all, they're more likely to recognize unhealthy pain on the backside, and they're much less likely to reproduce that same mistake again. They will not do the same thing twice. They'll say, hey, listen, I feel this. I'm going to back off.

00:51:19

Rob Simmelkjaer: Oh, yeah, that's definitely true, because I can certainly say I do not want a repeat of what I've been dealing with the last couple of months.

00:51:29

Becs Gentry: Absolutely.

00:51:30

Rob Simmelkjaer: It's not fun. And then, Jordan, the motivation side of it really, it's real. And I know it's real because I've been through these ups and downs in my life before, where you have, for whatever reason, you're not as physically active. It could be because you're really busy with work or with school. It could be because of travel or something that's kind of standing in your way. And the role that that can play, which can be so hard to see and feel sometimes in impacting your mental outlook.

And of course, there's lots of things impacting our mental outlook every day. We had a fight with a friend or a spouse. We had a bad day at the office. Something in the news was bothering us. There's a million kind of inputs that we're all experiencing every day, which can kind of bring us a little bit down or bring us a little bit up.

And the role of exercise in creating that resilience to help us manage those emotional ups and downs is so huge. And when something like running is taken away for a while, it's really important. I can tell you right now, I have had more moody days. Hopefully, my staff hasn't seen me too much, but I've had more moody days... My kids definitely could tell you this, in the last month, than I really have had in the last couple of years. So, finding ways to express that exercise and in some other way. I'm doing more hit workouts, I'm certainly walking a lot more, which is great. It's so important, Jordan, right? And we've talked

about that.

00:53:03

Dr. Metzl: Yeah. I can't emphasize enough. I'm spot on with everything you're saying. And I love that concept of resilience, and emotional resilience and physical resilience. How to basically absorb the stresses of everyday life, and that running and quote unquote "decompressing" through exercise really helps us with those types of things.

And then, I guess I would also make a shout out to the importance of muscle. In the second half of Push, I have a whole series of strength exercises like these kinds you've been doing, which can be done with body weight anytime, anywhere. And that's because muscle is a huge storage reservoir in our body. And as we get older, if we're not actively strengthening our muscles, we end up weaker, more achy, but also less resilient physically. And so, I'm a big proponent of muscle strength as part of what we do.

Runners used to only run. Increasingly, I think we've gotten the message out that strengthening is very important for runners for physical resilience. But I think your comments are spot on both psychologically and physically about the importance of resilience.

00:54:02

Becs Gentry: Absolutely. Okay, so if a runner said they only have energy for one thing besides running, what would it be?

00:54:12

Dr. Metzl: Listen, I think that I'm a big fan of strengthening and plyometric-based strengthening. I love people to do that. I have a whole series of things people can do in the back on their own. But if they hate strengthening, they can do other strength-building things that they like. I want them to do something they enjoy, because they will not be consistent if they don't like it.

And strategies, like Rob said, like my kids feel like, whatever. So they feel like I'm less happy. So I have plenty of people, like I get my kids involved in a strength training program with me at home. Thinking about ways to lower the cost to act, as I mentioned before, to make strengthening a piece of what we do, family strength sessions. I get great videos of people doing my strength workouts. I had some guy that was in the Peace Corps in Kenya, and he sent me a picture of him and all his little kids he was teaching at a school doing, he called Metzling in Kenya. I was like, that made me so happy. So, I get great videos of people doing this stuff all the time. And again, it's free and it's super-effective.

00:55:06

Rob Simmelkjaer: All right. Well, the book is called Push. Dr. Jordan Metzl from HSS, thank you so much for joining us. Congratulations on the book.

00:55:15

Becs Gentry: Thank you. Yeah. Can't wait to read it.

00:55:16

Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely. I highly recommend it. Thank you so much for spending some time with us, Jordan. It was great. And I'll see you in the office tomorrow.

00:55:25

Dr. Metzl: Lovely, guys. It's truly a pleasure, and I hope you can listen. And also, we have an audio version, if people want to listen when they're walking or running. I hope they like that as well.

00:55:34

Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely. Dr. Jordan Metzl.

New York Road Runners is a nonprofit organization with a vision to build healthier lives and stronger communities through the transformative power of running. The support of members and donors like you helps us achieve our mission to transform the health and wellbeing of our communities through inclusive and accessible running experiences, empowering all to achieve their potential. Learn more and contribute at nyrr.org/ donate.

All right, folks, that does it for another episode of Set the Pace. We want to thank Dr. Jordan Metzl from Hospital for Special Surgery for joining us for a great conversation about his book, Push. If you like this episode, make sure you go ahead, subscribe, rate, leave a comment on the show wherever you listen. We love hearing from you. We've gotten actually some great questions from folks who listened to our town hall episode a couple of weeks ago. Some of them have come in through the runner services email address at New York Runners. You can put your questions in the comments on your Apple podcast app or wherever you happen to be, and we'll see them and answer them as well.

So, thanks for joining us. Hopefully we're going to get a little warm up here. Hope to see you out running soon, and enjoy the miles. We'll see you next week.