



EUDAEMONIA **Nourishment, with Eve Turow-Paul**

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Kim Forrester 0:00

It's undeniable that most of us in this modern world have become ardent and often unconscious consumers, but how much of what we ingest into our bodies, brains, and souls actually enables us to thrive? I'm Kim Forrester, you're listening to the Eudaemonia Podcast and today we're going to explore the notion of what it means to be nourished.

Intro 0:24

Welcome to Eudaemonia, the podcast that is all about flourishing. Plug in, relax and get ready for the goodness as we explore the traits and practices that can help you thrive in life, with your host Kim Forrester.

Kim Forrester 0:43

Eve Turow-Paul is a globally recognised thought leader on youth food culture and the impact of the digital age. She is a frequent keynote speaker, a Forbes contributor and author of several books including her latest title "Hungry", which explores the link between modern food culture and our inherent yearning for greater connection and meaning. It's my absolute delight to be chatting with Eve today to explore what it means to truly nourish ourselves, and to learn how we can satisfy our hunger for physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being. Eve Turow-Paul, it is such a delight to have you with me here on the Eudaemonia Podcast. Thank you for choosing to come along and share your wisdom with me today.

Eve Turow-Paul 1:27

Of course, thank you so much for having me.

Kim Forrester 1:29

You are a Millennial, and much of your work centres on trends set by the younger generations, right? By Millennials and Gen Z. But I did notice that in your work you're very careful to include Gen X and the Boomers when you talk about food culture. To kick off this conversation, can you perhaps define what you mean by the digital generation and explain some of the habits and perspectives that these individuals have in common?

Eve Turow-Paul 1:55

So about ten years ago I became super fascinated by food culture, specifically foodie culture. And I was looking around at myself, my own food habits and those around me, and I began to question why it was that all the young people that I saw were spending so much of their limited discretionary time and income on food and food experiences. And I became completely obsessed with this topic; I

did a bunch of research, actually, for my Master's thesis, became a passion project after I graduated, and I wrote my first book called "The Taste of Generation Yum" on Millennials and food culture in the US. When that came out I had the fabulous opportunity to talk to lots and lots of people about my research and I found that when I was presenting it, I was seeing hands go up in the audience time and time again of people saying, you know, I'm a member of Gen X, I'm a Baby Boomer and these trends, these feelings that you're talking about, these behaviours they apply to me too. And it really made me push myself in terms of my own research and also in terms of facing the assumptions, the false assumptions that I had been making. Now over the last five years, I've had the great opportunity to delve into this research once again on a global scale instead, this time, for my book "Hungry", and what I found was equally if not more fascinating once I broadened my scope beyond Millennials, because what I realised I was researching was not just people who were born between 1980 and 1996, what I was researching was the impact of technology on human wellbeing. So I define the digital generation as anybody who is attached to a device. So these are people who are checking their email multiple times a day, who likely have multiple social media handles, who likely know that Kim Kardashian and Kanye West are married and they know who those people are. These are folks who also are able to get 24/7 news news certifications. Right? Because what I ended up finding is that technology is having a massive impact on our ability to find well being. And while millennials and Gen Zs are absolutely more likely to be tied to their devices, it's not exclusionary. The things that I am talking about are not just applicable to youth, it's really applicable to anyone who is engaging in this digital era.

Kim Forrester 4:26

So it's more of a case of how we are living rather than when we are born.

Eve Turow-Paul 4:31

Exactly. And you know, prior to this, especially if you look in consumer research and marketing, it's often... nearly always, in fact, divided by generation and people will categorise people, you know, others based on what year that they were born. And, you know, in the past, this has been a really good way to... a general way to generalise, you know, successfully to look at different trends because yes, we're all impacted by major historical events, and the technologies that are available to us. What's really unique though about what's happened over the last thirty years is that suddenly we now have these generations who are coming into adulthood or are being born with the ability to connect with others around the world. And it's not just about the impact on those who are growing up with this technology, but it's also how these technologies have transformed every facet of our being. And this isn't just something that's impacting young people, it's impacting anyone who is connected to the internet. It is changing the way that we converse with family and friends. It's changing the way that we see our place in the world. For a lot of young people I talk to it's changing the way that they evaluate their own self worth. And I've just been completely fascinated by the work that I've been lucky enough to do over the last few years and the researchers I've been able to talk to to really dig into what is the impact of these devices; of these new channels on our ability to find well being? And then, you know, the result of that is, well, okay, what's the impact on our well being, but then how is that showing up in the way that we choose to spend our discretionary time and money?

Kim Forrester 6:19

That's what I found so fascinating about your book "Hungry", because it literally explores how modern food culture is actually a mirror, right? It's reflecting back at us as a humanity our yearning, often our unconscious yearning for greater control and greater belonging and greater purpose. And I'd love to go through, you know, those three facets in this interview. Let's start with purpose in particular, Eve. In your experience, why many of us craving more purpose in our lives these days and how is food helping us fulfil that particular need?

Eve Turow-Paul 6:55

Yes. So finding a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives is a essential for anyone. And a core part of finding meaning is building a skill set and engaging our bodies in doing so. The other aspect of this is time in nature. And right now our screens are divorcing us from our own sensations of our own bodies, but also our relationship with nature. Another false assumption that I've heard time and time again from people is that we are the digital generation; an overstimulated generation. But once I dug into things I found that we know we're actually drastically under-stimulated; we are only touching things with the tips of our fingers, we're looking at things and hearing things, but it doesn't have the same multifaceted notes as going on a walk in the outdoors does, or hearing something sizzle in a pan, and a lot of folks today are starting to feel like they don't know how to define their lives as having meaning or purpose, when at the end of the day, they still have a full inbox. Or they're asked, well what did you accomplish today? And the answer is, well, I made a PowerPoint presentation. Sure you can feel good about, you know, putting together a great PowerPoint presentation, but it doesn't feel as good as baking a loaf of bread, or growing something in the garden.

Kim Forrester 8:21

Well, that's what I gathered from reading your book is that we've bought into the idea, Eve, that if we take a photo of our awesome, you know, avocado and feta on toast, and share that and it gets 100 likes on Instagram, then there is purpose and there's meaning in that. But what you're actually telling us, what you're teaching us, is that there's actually far more meaning and purpose if we go out into the garden and plant a carrot, right?

Eve Turow-Paul 8:47

Yeah, I mean, I think that society, a global society, is telling, especially this connected digital generation, that they're going to find well-being in all of the wrong places. They're telling us that we need likes. They're telling us that we need to be super productive by working all the time. They're telling us that we need to have a great personal brand. And what I found to be so interesting, but also disturbing to be quite frank, in the interviews that I was doing and the studies that I was reading, was the evidence that not just does it not give us a sense of well-being, but it in fact, works against our sense of well being. I read one study that showed that those who take selfies and post them online actually feel worse about themselves. Because, when you really sit down to think about it, it makes sense. You're taking a picture of yourself in order to get validation from mostly a bunch of people who you don't know. And what was most scary to me in doing this project was talking to people and analysing even just charts of how people spend their time; talking, I spent time going back to my old high school and shadowing students and talking to them. It really was somewhat terrifying to see that people are trading-in those in-person relationships. Those, what I call IRL

experiences of being in nature, of making something tangible, of having a meal with a friend, they're trading that in to post about it online.

Kim Forrester 10:19

I know that nature is really important for you and I know that there's a whole chapter about nature and how fulfilling it is for us as human beings to reconnect with nature, and the other thing I think that we're terribly disconnected from though, Eve, is each other. And I do find it really interesting that in studies of the Blue Zones in the places in the world where people live well into their 80s and 90s and their 100s, one of the most common facets of those societies is communal dining and a celebration of connection and society over food and over meals. It's really interesting to note that the modern food culture is actually starting to resemble though these Blue Zone practices, right? People are being drawn to home-cooked meals, communal dining, celebrating connecting over food. How has the digital age dismantled or disrupted our desire to dine communally? And how can we rediscover this vital component of a flourishing life?

Eve Turow-Paul 11:22

Human beings are meant to be tribal. We are supposed to raise our children with one another, we are supposed to rely on one another, we're supposed to be relied on. It was very interesting in the research that I did; the finding that part of well-being is for others to see value in you; that you bring something to the table. This was like a part of... of community and belonging that I just hadn't thought of before, and I think that as a society, you know, we have for a multitude of reasons, been driven into this way of living that is far more focused on the individual, and food culture has, in many ways supported that new trajectory. Right? My mind goes to the TV dinners of the 1950s, and I think that the advent of refrigeration perhaps did accelerate this kind of individual nuclear culture. It has been very exciting over the last decade to see this desire to meet up with people in person for a meal and oftentimes to share a meal with strangers. You know, in the US, shared table, shared plates are just all the rage. I'm not sure what's happening in Singapore, but especially in... in the US, like every hip restaurant now has small plates that are meant to be shared with those around the table. That was not the case a decade ago.

Kim Forrester 12:48

It's interesting that here in Asia, that specific facet of communal living never went away.

Eve Turow-Paul 12:54

Yeah, right. Right.

Kim Forrester 12:55

In Asia, people dine, at the very least, as an extended family, but if you go out to dine here in Singapore, if you go traditionally to the hawker centres, the... you know, the food centres, you are sharing the table with strangers; with the community. But what I found really interesting in your book is that even when we dine alone, this yearning to be connected to humanity, right, still exist. And specifically, Eve, you mention in your book, that the more human contact is believed to have gone into the preparation of a meal, the more we find it tasting and appealing. Now, what's going on here? Why do we... Why are you drawn to food that we feel many people have touched?

Eve Turow-Paul 13:39

Right, well because there's love in food, first of all, but this also comes back to our evolutionary desire to know where our food comes from. I mean, there were so many of these studies that I unearthed that I was excited about, you know, the fact that grapefruit juice, people deem it to taste better if they think that it was hand pressed instead of pressed by a machine; the same identical product. At the same time there's other studies that show that if you're able to see who made your food, it tastes better. If you know the person who made your food, it tastes better. No one can really know what exactly the evolutionary origins of that are, like, why through evolution did we evolve to prefer foods made by those that we know? Eh yes, it's a safety issue, for sure, but there's something beyond that. And, you know, we are one of the only animal groups that will eat together for social reasons. I was able to talk to the researcher Robin Dunbar who came up with the Dunbar number, I'm not sure if you're familiar with that, but he came up with a number saying that essentially, we can't really know more than 150 people in our lives. But he had been spending some time over the last couple of years doing research specifically on dining together and what role that plays, because he even with his decades long research into community and human evolution wasn't really able to fully unearth, you know, how significant mealtime is for well being, and he walked away from the study that he conducted in the UK just a couple years ago saying, you know, this is really unique about us as human beings that we have evolved to dine together, but it is a conduit to greater connection. And sure we have communal dining, but everything all the way down to taking a picture of your food and posting it online, I now understand it to be a reflection of that yearning to share a meal with others, even when you can't share it in person.

Kim Forrester 15:47

Oh, that's profound. Yeah, I can see that. The more I speak to you, Eve, and certainly reading through your book, it has occurred to me that we're sort of living a veneer of human life, right? That a lot of the depth in our life seems to have been forgotten or misplaced, and certainly a reflection of that superficiality has come through, I think, in the food that we have been eating over the last say 40... 50 years. Very artificial, right? Very superficial, with fast food, processed foods, packaged meals, say... TV dinners that you throw into the microwave; unrecognisable ingredients. Do you think this is a reflection of something bigger going on? Do you believe that our perception of well-being... of what it means to nourish our humaneness, do you think that has also become superficial and artificial? And if so, can we reverse that cycle?

Eve Turow-Paul 16:42

So I think we can reverse that cycle. And yes, I do think that we have lost touch with what makes us feel well. In large part because we have a lot of very loud companies telling us that other things are going to make us feel well when in fact it does exactly the opposite. In many ways, I see tech, the big tech companies these days in a similar vein as big food of 10 to 20 years ago saying, you know, eat this, it's gonna make you feel good. And, you know, we now see the rising rates of heart disease and diabetes, and these companies are being forced to change. I am hoping that a similar thing does happen in the technology space, and we are starting to see inklings of that happening. But right now we are being told that upvotes and likes and a really great social media profile are the things that are going to lead to love and belonging and a sense of purpose in our lives and that's simply not the case. Along the same lines, we have become misdirected in terms of the food that we eat. And the COVID pandemic has been, in many ways, uplifting to me in this one specific area of food, because for the first time time, many people are thinking about where their food comes from. Those who have traditionally just walked to the grocery store, picked up their items, scanned them and gone home, or ordered delivery food on an app, many people have not taken the time until now

to think about the fact that there is someone who's harvesting their food. Someone who is at a meat factory who now is exposed to COVID who's cutting up that chicken, you know, I've heard from friends saying, "Oh my gosh, I you know, I never thought about the fact that the chicken breasts I buy in the... in the grocery store are cut up by a person and that they come from multiple chickens." and it's starting all of these questions, like where did the other chicken parts go? And who drove that to to the supermarket? Where'd the packaging come from? Who's the person who's putting it on the shelf? We are again so innately wired to find pleasure in the eating experience with others but also to have a relationship with where our food comes from, be it the people or the land itself. And there are a number of food trends coming out of the pandemic that are giving me hope, such as people learning to bake bread, who are starting to garden, those who are reacquainting themselves, even with their local food systems; finding local farmers to be getting food from. And at the end of the day, these are the types of food behaviours that are more likely to lead to well being.

Kim Forrester 19:28

Really interesting there 'cause that makes me think about our relationship with time and how we choose to spend our time, because certainly I think, through the pandemic with a lot of people... most people in their homes with a lot of time on their hands, except for those really struggling parents and my heart goes out to you. Many, many people I think would rush home, right, from work or from... from the gym or wherever it is that they've been, from their busy schedule, they will pick up a package meal or they'll pick up some fast food on the way home and they'll sit down on the couch and they'll shove that food down their throat, and then those very same people might spend the next hour scrolling through Instagram, or watching something on Netflix. Do you feel that our relationship with time has been warped? Do we have an addiction to busyness and the internet that is undermining our ability to feed our body, our mind, and our soul?

Eve Turow-Paul 20:24

Yes, but, you know, it goes back to what we were just talking about in terms of these companies and technologies, a lot of them leading us to the wrong behaviours. And the way that most social media sites now are structured is through an algorithm that's attempting to keep you hooked, right, and most apps that we use are doing the same things. And actually, you're talking about parenting; my daughter has a number of toys that are electronic, and some of them will start playing a song. When... when like the toy has not been touched for a while to bring her attention back to the toy. Yeah. And I thought about getting rid of these items and I think that I might, or I think I might just keep them off and she can, you know, play with it without the sound on. But there are so many things in our lives that are cueing us to stay attached and become addicted. And that's exactly what we're doing. But to go back to your previous point about the food that we're not taking the time to be mindful with. You know, a lot of what this current moment is forcing people to do is slow down. Even if you are running after your kids and running from job to job I do think that there's still a moment of, well, there's less to distract yourself with, in many ways; we have to cope with what's happening in this moment. And I do think that people are having to be more mindful about their food, especially when all of this started you know, it was about using what you had; making the most of what you had; less trips to the grocery store; how do I stretch this out? How do I use every single bit of this food? And, it has, I think led to a bit more mindfulness, but, you know, regaining that connection with where our food comes from is absolutely essential for mental well-being but also physical well being and planetary well-being.

Kim Forrester 22:15

So let's talk about planetary well-being, and the well being of humanity, because a lot of people I know have a desire to feed their bodies and their values at the same time, Eve, so they may avoid genetically modified foods or they may shun animal products. The uncomfortable truth, though, is that when we make these personal choices, as honourable as they may be, there are real world impacts out there. So regardless of how we may feel about GM foods, they have the potential to feed millions of undernourished people in developing nations and a vegan diet, sadly, often requires food to be shipped across the globe at a huge environmental cost. This sort of leaves us in an almost untenable moral position. Is it possible for us to be guardians of our bodies and our value systems, and still contribute to the nourishment of humanity and the planet?

Eve Turow-Paul 23:13

Mhmm. Yes, the answer is yes, but our food system has to change. One of the areas that I'm spending a lot of time on now is looking at our current food system and how it does and does not support a climate-smart diet. So over the last year I actually founded a nonprofit called the Food for Climate League, and we are working on creating new narratives related to food and climate. And part of what I've learned through this process is it's not just about the globalisation of our food system, the fact that the same foods are available everywhere, part of what I've learned about is just how few foods we actually eat. You know, there's 12 grains that make up I think 70% of the global diet, there's like 5 animals that we eat. It's so boring. And what you were just saying about a vegan diet that we have to ship things in, it's like well, yes, we have to do that because we have lost the traditions and the biodiversity of the plants that are able to grow where we are. Instead, we have created a system where, in Chile you can farm a lot of salmon, in Iowa you can farm a lot of corn, you know, it's every single country has the few things that they rely on as commodity crops and all the land has been turned over to grow those few things. I've read this... this kind of interesting article at the start of the pandemic about a farmer in Iowa who realised that he couldn't feed his own neighbours during the pandemic because he grew things that weren't even edible; they were going to be turned into fuel, or it was going to be turned into high fructose corn syrup. To me it just kind of drove home how misdirected we have become with our food system, but also how many missed opportunities there are for outrageously delicious things. Right, I mean, the foodie inside of me is just like, what are we doing? We're all eating the same foods over and over again and we are not celebrating what diversity there is around the world, where... and also the talents and the soil of where we are. And if we can begin to invest more in our local food systems, if we can open ourselves up to eating a greater variety of foods, we can, as eaters, supercharge our own nutrition; it will make us feel better because we're more likely to actually know the people who raised our food and where it came from, and, by the way, this is also the best thing we can possibly be doing for the planet because by growing a greater diversity of foods we are nourishing the soil and returning all the carbon... the excess carbon in the air down to the ground where it belongs.

Kim Forrester 26:08

Just another of the innumerable examples of how we are interconnected with our own planet, right, we see ourselves as... as humanity and then, sort of, nature and the planet is out there, but what nourishes us nourishes humanity; what nourishes us most, nourishes the planet over all. As you've undertaken your research, Eve, over the past few years... what has surprised you most about modern food culture and it's link to well being?

Eve Turow-Paul 26:38

I think that what has surprised me is the ability of food to address our physical, mental and planetary well-being. It really is what we were just talking about. You know, I walked away from this work a couple years ago, and I said to my, now... now he's my husband, and he was I think my fiance and I was like, "There's a single solution here that addresses all of these problems; we need to eat better food". And I do think that there are many facets of popular culture today that are heading in the right direction. I think there's a lot of what people are doing today that is showing a greater interest in questioning our food system, wanting to learn these skills, you know, taking the time, you know. I went to the farmers market yesterday for the first time since the pandemic started and we had to wait in line for a half hour in order to get in, you know, people are starting to value more and more these more authentic food experiences and I do believe that as this continues, people are just going to uncover all of the gorgeous ways that we are innately and intimately tied to the Earth. And you know, there's a lot of interest these days in, you know, biohacking and nutrition and supplements; the best supplement we can possibly have is healthy soil. You know, the healthier the soil is, the more nutrients there are in the food, and by the way, also more flavour, but it's also better for our gut microbiomes, and at the same time, again, healthy soil is bringing carbon back into the ground. And I... I just remember making this connection and feeling flabbergasted. I was just like, wait a minute, we can solve so many of these problems by just eating really great food, and I hope that we as a global society are able to come to that conclusion and it's... it's okay if we want to Instagram about it, in my opinion, and tweet about it, whatever; as long as we are investing more in one-another, and realising the immense potential we have by showing greater respect for a greater variety of cultures, a greater variety of people, a greater variety of plants and animals, and heritages that we have begun to ignore in this modern world; to our detriment.

Kim Forrester 29:15

Can we start making those changes... can we gently guide ourselves towards that kind of nourishment without sort of becoming overly invested to the point where we're anxious and stressed about our food choices, Eve? You do write in your book that a lot of dietary choices can be linked to a need for autonomy and control, so in our quest to nourish our bodies and our sense of morality, can we do so without undermining our well being in other ways?

Eve Turow-Paul 29:45

Yes, that's a really good question. And it's an important question to be asking. Because a lot of the restrictive diets of today are feeding a desire for control. And we live in a world that feels increasingly chaotic, increasingly scary, increasingly out of our control, and many of us are just grasping at whatever we can to give ourselves a feeling of autonomy to put ourselves in the driver's seat, and for many people saying yes to a certain food and no to others is helping them feel that sense of control. Now, the difficult thing is that because it's so satisfying to draw those black and white lines, I think that it's often hard for people to see the nuance in the ways that we eat, because the food system is incredibly complicated, and you alluded to this before, but what's "right", right... I shouldn't say "right", but what is sustainable in one place or one time of day or one season may not be so in another. I think it's very hard for people to cope with that complexity, you know, they say "Well, I just want you to tell me what to eat."

Kim Forrester 30:57

Eve, my final question is one that I ask every guest on the Eudaemonia podcast; can you offer a simple morning reminder, now this may be a practice, or a mantra, or an affirmation; that can help my listeners better nourish themselves and start quelling that hunger that we have for profound well being?

Eve Turow-Paul 31:16

I do have a mindfulness practice that I do believe... at least it helps me focus on these things, and I do believe it can help others, which is; when you are putting together a meal or sitting down to eat a meal take a moment to pause and look at the food that you're about to eat, and think about where each ingredient came from. And if you can take the time, just quickly visualise how that plant or that animal got its nutrients; got its flavour. What was the sun or the temperature or the rain that it was exposed to? I like to actually visualise the nutrients coming up from the soil into the plant because those are also the nutrients that are going to fuel my own existence, as I eat them. And for me, it doesn't really matter in a sense what it is that you're eating, if you are going to be mindful enough to take the time and sit and appreciate your food, and think about those things... if you're thinking about those things, you're going to make the right food choices. And it's okay if every once in a while you want a bag of Doritos, I think that's something that people also need to understand, is that this isn't about perfection. What's going to make you feel good in one moment is going to change, but even if you're being mindful about that indulgence, I think is really important.

Kim Forrester 32:41

Eve Turow-Paul, I have just got so many other questions running around in my head, I could sit here for like three hours and just explore this topic with you. I'm so incredibly grateful for you coming along and joining the Eudaemonia podcast. If people want to find out more about you, the work you do, your new book "Hungry", and your other works, where can they find you?

Eve Turow-Paul 33:01

Yeah, sure you can find me online at www.eveturowpaul.com and you'll be able to find everything there. And thank you so much for having me; this was such a pleasure.

Kim Forrester 33:16

It's been a delight having you, take good care. As the author Alexandra Stoddard once said, "You can't be a resource for others unless you nourish yourself." You've been listening to the Eudaemonia podcast. If you'd like to learn more about how to live a truly flourishing life, please subscribe and check out www.eudaemoniapod.com for more inspiring episodes. I'm Kim Forrester. Until next time, be well, be kind to yourself, and nourish your body, your mind and your spirit.