

# Sarah Doyle

## Behaviour Change, Body Image Psychology & Investing in the Process



Episode 127



Danny Lennon:

Welcome to Sigma Nutrition Radio. I am Danny Lennon and you are listening to Episode 127, and on today's show I am happy to welcome back my friend Sarah Doyle of The Better Life Project. And this episode will be a slight deviation away from our usual detailed nutritional-science-based discussions to focus on an area that many of you listening have been asking about. So whilst we can have all the research and knowledge of how to construct a diet and program that, when we are actually trying to induce positive health and nutrition habits in our own lives or in the lives of others there are so many other factors to consider. So how do we form habits? How do we get clients to buy into that process? How do we assess our behaviors and understand what's getting in our way? How can we cultivate happiness before getting to that endpoint that we believe we desire? How do we include nutrition exercise in our lives as things that enhance our lives as opposed to be something that's purely motivated out of fear of not doing it? And how do we instill a positive relationship with food in ourselves or with our clients or our patients or whoever we end up working with? And these are all questions that in one form or another have been discussion points with many of you who are listening, and so hopefully plenty of those will get answered today, and hopefully Sarah can help us answer a few of these questions as she works day in and day out with people who are attempting to make positive changes in their lives, and so she's developed a number of different strategies which helps them work through this stuff. And I think there's a massive crossover from

doing anything positive in our lives and then particularly when we try to apply that to maybe the realm of health and nutrition. So hopefully you pick up a couple of things that are useful that you can either use or that maybe change your perspective on something or that you can use with others if you do work in some sort of coaching capacity. And so let's just jump straight into the episode, Episode 127.

Hey Sarah, welcome back to the show.

Sarah Doyle: Hi Danny, thank you for having me. It's good to be back.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, it's my pleasure. It's been quite a while and I think we have plenty of stuff to get through because there are a number of topics that as I was mentioning to you in some of our conversations that are I think quite important when we're looking particularly either at the coaching for those who are listening who are coaches, working with people or even people trying to make themselves. But before we get into any of those topics that I want to bring up, just to give people some insight into your background, how would you describe it is what you do or how should people perceive it is what you do? And particularly in a coaching capacity, like what is your aim when someone comes to work with you or how would you describe your overall work?

Sarah Doyle: So I guess I cofounded a business called The Better Life Project with my boyfriend James about three years ago. I'm a life coaching, so as part of the business I work with people to, very broadly speaking, help to make their awesome business and life happen. If you wanted to unpack that a little bit, I work with people who want to demand higher standards of their life. So that might mean the need to increase in confidence. It might mean that they need to understand motivation, become successful in specific areas. Goal-setting is a massive one that I do. It may appear random but a huge part of what I also do as part of that is a lot of work around body positivity, self-love, body confidence, body image, that sort of stuff.

For me, my journey really started to kick off when I was I guess able to look in the mirror and go, "You know what, Sarah? You ain't half bad. Why not cut yourself some slack?" For me, I never allowed myself to progress in life or to feel like I could be successful, but as I always felt for a very long time, my wobbly bits were a bit too wobbly and I needed to get those sorted before I could pursue other goals whether in my professional life or in relationships. So a huge part of what I do is helping people develop and strengthen their relationship with themselves with a

view to kicking ass in the rest of their life. So basically I'm a life coach who, if you are serious about achieving your goals, creating success, being happy, healthy, confident, I'm your go-to.

Danny Lennon: Awesome. And just when you mentioned that term “life coach,” sometimes I think maybe people maybe misinterpret exactly what it is or maybe they have a stereotypical idea of what that is supposed to be.

Sarah Doyle: Of course, yeah, yeah.

Danny Lennon: What would you...like what is it that you think that term encompasses and that you try and do?

Sarah Doyle: Life coaching is a future-focused practice that helps people identify, set and achieve their goals. Life coaching can often be confused with other therapies like psychology, CBT, NLP therapy, and all that sort of stuff. Now, it's important to acknowledge from the outset that every therapy is vital and needed at various points in people's lives. But quite often, when you are feeling like you are stuck in a rut in some way, when you want to increase in confidence, if you're struggling with your relationship with yourself, talking ain't going to help. Sometimes you just need to set a goal, cut the bullshit and take steps forward, and that's what a life coach can help you do as well as you possibly can. So if you're looking to get a promotion in work, a life coach is going to be the best port of call. The right life coach will have an awesome array of strategies to support you, take steps forward. So it's a very action-based practice.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, and I think that's exactly why I wanted to get you on to talk today so that we can give people some actionable stuff or some kind of tactics to make some change. And the whole idea of I suppose making change is probably a good place to start and there are like just so many elements to this and, for me, obviously I'm coming from this with the context of nutrition and working with clients, so maybe I can use that as an example to start, but I think it really probably translates to everything else. But within that process of trying to make changes whether that's dietary or otherwise, like I said, we tend to see different elements to that, so there's like a knowledge piece of actually knowing what needs to change. Then there's the kind of habit and behavior piece, which I'll certainly talk about with you later in the podcast. But what I've noticed is, with certain people, there seems to be some sort of piece that precedes that and I'm not really sure how you define it, whether it's a mindset or some sort of cognitive conditioning they have or what you'd call a...but it's essentially this

ingrained belief that holds that person to a point where they may be doubting if they can actually achieve the thing in the first place and it almost short-circuits anything I try and do with them. So I don't know if any of that is making sense, but how do you view that concept and how can people work through that if that is they're kind of issue?

Sarah Doyle:

So I guess in order to frame my beliefs around weight loss or goals related to nutrition or exercise or changing your relationship with food or exercise in some way, I do come from a body positive background and approach towards that. Body positivity was born from I guess the shame or the guilt that men and women feel about their bodies or are forced to feel about their bodies because Kim Kardashian's ass is this way and mine isn't, so it must be wrong, or the Victoria Secret model looks this way and that's what everyone loves, so my body must be wrong. Body positivity is basically helping you to feel that nobody is broken, that your body doesn't need to be fixed in any way whatsoever.

And from a goals perspective, from I guess working with clients who are trying to set goals around that sort of thing, I look at the point at which they're starting. That's what's motivating them and that's what's usually wrong. If you look at motivation in two ways, you've got push motivation, so there's usually something painful or something that you're afraid of that's driving you forward; and then you've got pull motivation, which is a compelling vision, a compelling outcome or reward or something that's really exciting that's pulling you towards it. Now, when you're looking at goal-setting and motivation, you do need a little bit of both, but a problem for a lot of people particularly when it comes to weight loss is that they're so scared of their body, they're so scared of putting on weight, they're so scared of looking a specific way or accepting their body as it is, that the only thing driving them forward is pain and fear and guilt and shame. And if that's all that's motivating you, you're not going to get very far. If that's all that's driving you forward, you're going to lose the weight gain and still never feel like you're enough. We need to love ourselves a little bit more first. If you can't love yourself, you need to take steps towards that.

So I tend to look at why they're starting in the first place. I want to understand about their relationship with themselves, about why they think they need to lose weight. On Instagram, you see it everywhere on Instagram, people wanting to be a better version of themselves, people wanting to lose weight so they can feel happy, and they're going on holidays in two weeks' time so they need to cut. I'm going to look at someone and go, "Well, do you think your body is broken? What is it that

you don't like about your body and why don't you like that?" So the problem is that we constantly compare ourselves to others, which diminishes that love that we should experience for ourselves. So that's a really longwinded way to answer [chuckles] your question, but I'd look at what is motivating someone and, if they're motivated too much by pain, which is fear of their body never changing, fear that their body will never be enough, pain that they don't like it or self-loathing, that to me is the biggest sign that they're not going to achieve their goals, and even if they do achieve them it's never going to be enough.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, and I think one thing it reminded me of is that like everyone before has heard the kind of idea of not to compare yourself to others or, when we're looking on social media or Instagram, there are obviously pictures that are either photoshopped or people who are fitness models for a living and they're using perfect lighting and all this stuff. And people I think rationally know that they probably shouldn't compare themselves to these like set images, but at the same time what I'm really fascinated by is that despite hearing this kind of over and over and from different kind of sources and rationally understanding it, I think sometimes many people can still look at this stuff as something that they need to achieve and then anything less ends up being a failure or they're not in good shape, even though they kind of know that there are these warning signs about it.

Sarah Doyle: Exactly. We can intellectualize it very, very well. Most people who are in social media have enough smarts to go, "Oh, that might be photoshopped," or "Oh, this person makes a living from looking this way," so the expectation or the standard is a little different. The problem is that we don't emotionally connect with it. The problem is that no matter how many times your brain is telling you, "This isn't real," your behaviors is still telling you, "I'm not enough the way that I am," or "I'll be happier when..." We place conditions on our self-worth and on our value, and that's something that we need to...that needs to be driven a little bit more by our emotions and not so much by our...I guess our intelligence.

Danny Lennon: And it kind of reminds me of looking at either the process of something as opposed to just purely the end outcome just because purely from my own point of view this has been probably one of the biggest realizations or important decisions for me personally to focus on the process of things, whether that's with business or training particularly as opposed to looking at a set end outcome, which I think is kind of the easy thing that a lot of us fall into.

Sarah Doyle: In sports psychology or sports coaching, whenever there's someone working with a sports team, they usually work within three frameworks of goal-setting – process goals, performance goals and outcome goals. There's a lot of focus on process goals, so focusing on the process, focusing on taking small steps and celebrating most small wins, focusing on creating small changes. If you focus on that, you're far more likely to experience success. When you experience success, it's crucial that we celebrate that success. Our brain just loves when it gets positive feedback, and the more that we can reward ourselves and celebrate ourselves for doing something well the more likely it is that we're going to either keep on doing it with gusto or try something again, something new and different. So focusing on the process is crucial not just in terms of I guess acknowledging and recognizing daily changes, but also it's possibly sometimes a little bit better than focusing on the outcome, and that's just giving yourself one thing to evaluate your success on.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, I 100% agree because I've seen it even with coaching clients. One thing we've done at Sigma Nutrition is have people kind of track certain behaviors and aim for a certain degree of consistency in a behavior over, say, a month-long period as opposed to tracking a set outcome like body weight, for example, and by focusing on each day are you hitting these certain core behaviors instead of specifically just where body weight is. It tends to fix body composition in itself at the end of that.

One thing that kind of I was thinking of there is for those people, say, that are trying to create body composition change, how would you suggest that these people try and view themselves in a positive light as they're going through the process as opposed to getting sucked into that thinking of believing they can only be happy once they look the way they feel at the end because knowing that that's a good strategy versus being able to actually do it might be different things? So how would you go about trying to get someone to realize, “Okay, we have this lengthy process to go through, so I don't need to wait until it's over to kind of maybe be a bit more positive, be a bit more happy?” How do they start doing that on a daily basis?

Sarah Doyle: Absolutely. It's I guess a self-care or a self-love practice or ritual as well. So many of us invest a huge amount of time in nurturing positive habits with food and exercise but we don't actually do the same with I guess our self-esteem or our body image in some way. So it's an awesome question and I think it's something that so many more people need to consider, is that when you're putting in some work on a weight loss plan or a

composition plan, what can you do to actually support them develop self-love in some way?

One of the things that I think is the most powerful strategy that you can consider and then take on board is just imagine, and it sounds fluffy but by God this is half the problem with coaching strategies, is that people perceive them as fluffy and never actually try them, in life there's energy. The exact same way that you're going to get exhausted from working a really hard day, you're going to get exhausted from thinking too much, da, da, da, da, da. That's because you only have a finite amount of energy that you can invest into stuff. If I was to ask someone, "How much energy are you investing into actually hating on your body, trying to change it, trying to fix it, worrying about what you're going to eat, worrying about where your next macros are going to come from or your calories are going to come from?" If that's a disproportionate amount of energy, if that's somewhere about 70, 75% or above, I'm going to go, "You're focusing too much on all the shit that you don't like. No wonder you feel bad about yourself. You're actually going to even hinder your progress." You're going to need to look at that person and go, "Focus more time and energy on loving the parts of your body and of your life and of your relationships that you love than hating on the parts of your body, life or relationships that you hate."

You can do this by creating a positivity journal or a gratitude journal, for example, and it's basically just supporting people to direct their energy into something that will actually help them grow as opposed to constantly pulling them down. So in the exact same way that you might get someone to track their macros, track their food, track their calories, track their exercises, get them to track all the positive moments in their life as well. So, first thing in the morning a lot of people will write down three things that they're grateful for. Brilliant. Let's take—that's the next level. And actually write down 10 positive things that happened to you in that day. And I don't care how hard you think it is, if you have a personal trainer [00:18:34] over you, encouraging you, motivating you to do two more reps, you'll do those two more reps. So sometimes when we think it's not there, we just need to dig a little deeper. It's there. Ten things. It could be a smile the bus driver gave you. It could be the person in Starbucks giving you five cents off your coffee. It could be your manager saying that you did a good job. It could be your boyfriend gave you a hug extra tight, cooked you a dinner. It could be your dog. My dog Lizzie, every time I think about her, I count my lucky stars. It's finding something that's

positive that you can focus your energy on. You already acknowledged you have 75% of energy that you're investing into bad things. Think of how different your life would be if you took that 75% and actually invested it in developing a nurturing of the good things in your life because they are there. We just don't see them anymore because we're too busy focusing on all the stuff that we don't like.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, I completely agree and it's funny, I was only talking with someone the other day about a kind of similar issue—I think I've kind of talked about it before—that it reminded me of that.

Sarah Doyle: Okay.

Danny Lennon: I think it's...someone wrote a book, essentially, where he was for a year called “the year of living biblically,” and he basically tried to copy all the rules from the Bible and each day try and actually carry them out word-for-word. It's a hilarious story but one of the ones was obviously being thankful to God for everything that happened. So he had to literally go for 24 hours, every single good thing that happened, be thankful. So the elevator door when he pressed the button that would open, he'd have to be thankful for it. He'd get in; as he was going down the elevator, he'd be thankful that the cord didn't snap. He'd be thankful that the door opened when he—all this sort of stuff. And he said yeah, it was mentally exhausting that he had to think of all these things all day long, but the thing that it taught him was that over the course of that day, how many hundreds, maybe even thousands of things go right for us, but yet the thing we think about at home that night is the two to three things that go wrong, and it just reminded me when you said that.

Sarah Doyle: And it's so incredibly true and that can be why it's hard to change, because we've developed such a cynical, pessimistic view on the world, on ourselves and our ability to even change. Our beliefs are so deeply embedded and so limiting that if I turned around and I said, “You can change,” some people will look at me and go, “I'm never going to change. This is how I was born,” and it's quite sad. So I think when you can support and help someone develop a more positive mindset, you are opening up their scope to change so many behaviors that will help them live such happy, awesome lives.

Danny Lennon: Oh, one thing that's kind of maybe related to that and it's something I've been thinking about lately because I'm trying to piece together, why is it that the people that I work with that get the absolute best results, what



kind of distinguishing factors are there? And one of the big ones that keeps coming back too is that they've simply been the ones that over a period of time have been able to keep up a high degree of momentum with the stuff they're doing and it's the people that, even though they saw initial positive results early on and then maybe after a while their momentum kind of faded away or life got in the way and interrupted what they were doing or for one reason or another it kind of put a dent in what they were doing, and they're the people maybe can do okay but not as well. And so what I'm kind of interested most in trying to work out is, how can people address, say, a point in time where they feel they've lost momentum? Perhaps the early motivation of the changes that they were making has now worn off as it inevitably does. Perhaps they've hit a slight plateau in their progress. Perhaps it's a case of a life situation has just thrown a spanner in the work and knocked them out of their schedule. Like regardless of the reason, they're just feeling stuck or stagnant or have lost that momentum. Is there anything you can advise to get them out of that rut of just feeling at a point where they've plateaued or stuck?

Sarah Doyle:

I was only talking to a friend this morning and I was...we were talking about weight class and I brought up the time when I first started training. I sort of inadvertently lost quite a chunk of weight and it was quite strange because I had spent 20 years trying to lose weight and the one time that I did lose weight was because I didn't notice it had happened. I didn't pay much attention to it or overanalyzed it or overthink it in any way at that time, but it's only been in the last few years that I've really started to understand why that weight loss happened when it did, why it happened when it did and why the weight hasn't come back on again.

And it happened for two to three main reasons. One, I was having so much fun with my life that I didn't overthink choices in any way. Two, I decided instead of trying to diet, instead of trying to stick rigidly to any sort of plan, that I would just eat food that made me feel good, and basically what I was doing there was creating really positive habits around my food choices because it's those habits that have been the platform from which I was successful with regard to weight loss. Our brain wants to do as much as it possibly can subconsciously, our brain needs to do as much as it can subconsciously so it can focus in on other tasks, and the difficulty is that a lot of people forget that. A lot of people are going, "Well, what's the secret ingredient to momentum and motivation?" And sometimes the secret ingredient is just taking a break, putting the feet up and stop thinking about it, and then another one is just understanding this bigger

picture that we're working towards – even if you don't focus specifically on an outcome goal, having something that's exciting to build you towards or to pull you towards it.

If people are stuck in a rut, I will get them to do two things straight away. One, change one small thing about their behavior. The problem is that a lot of us have habits and our brain, like I said, wants to work subconsciously, but as part of that process we've unfortunately developed some really, really bad habits that result in I guess negative or, in some cases, addictive behaviors. It's, how do we break those bad habits? And sometimes just changing one small thing about your routine will do that for you.

Two, I think we need to remember that we're not always going to have momentum, we're not always going to be super-duper-motivated, and that's 100% okay. You are not going to be able to give it socks in the gym every single day, so why do we think that we can mentally perform differently than we can physically? Our brain needs a break and sometimes when we need that break when we're feeling tired, we start to beat ourselves up. We start to go, “Oh my God, I'm a failure. I'm not doing it. I have to be 100% all of the time. It's all or freaking nothing.” And when we put that much pressure on ourselves, our motivation changes. We're no longer being pulled towards something; we're being pushed away from something. It's like being chased by fire for the rest of our lives. It's not fun. The novelty might be there for two or three seconds.

So momentum, I don't worry too much about momentum. Motivation, yeah, you'll have absolutely killer days, killer weeks, killer months, and then you need a break and that's 100% fine.

Three, you do need some sort of compelling vision to work towards. You need to understand your why. That's what...when you hear people say, “What is your why?” It's a compelling vision. It's an exciting thing that's moving you forward in some way. And for me, a lot of my training is built around the idea that I want to be able to do a double bodyweight squat. I have on numerous occasions visualized myself standing up with 150 kilos on my back and I swear to God I feel like the most badass person in the entire world. I almost visualize it to the extent that I actually feel it happening. My brain is going to, “Oh my God, she's squatting 150 kilos!” Like that's how powerful visualization is and I get so excited and I get so motivated.

But in order to motivate me to get to that point, I need to create a few small habits, which is, “Sarah, all you need to do is walk up to the gym three to four times a week. When you walk up to the gym, you follow the program, the lads will take care of you. Turn up, do what they say, it'll be okay. Support that with two to four liters of water a day and eat to fuel your performance in the gym and let the rest take care of itself.” Those small habits that I'm able to take control of and implement into my life have ripple effects like nothing I've ever experienced before and it all starts with really simple shifts and how you're thinking about something.

So the idea of momentum and motivation, I think we place an awful lot of pressure on ourselves to understand how to self-motivate all of the time, and if we're not motivated 100% of the time or if our motivation doesn't match that time that we were really motivated, we just beat ourselves up.

Danny Lennon: Right. So essentially what we're looking at is then trying to focus on those times that we inevitably know we won't have like high degrees of willpower, high degrees of motivation, having some sort of habit or behavior that we regularly do that we're still going to be able to utilize even when motivation...

Sarah Doyle: Yeah, and the beauty of it is that we don't need to think of it in terms of utilizing the habit and awareness of it. If it's a habit, it's something that you're subconsciously doing and you don't need to worry about it. I subconsciously eat really good-quality foods. I don't think about it. I have to actively think about going to the shops to buy chocolate, going to the shops to buy crisps or sweets, and if I do I don't care. You move on. I don't eliminate or restrict, just to make that clear. But when a habit is ingrained, when a habit is a true habit in the sense of the words, your brain is doing it subconsciously and you don't need to invest time or energy into it.

But for a lot of people, we forget how far we come. For a lot of people who are working on any sort of goal, when we don't deliver on a day 100%, all of a sudden we're a failure, we've made a mistake, we're crushing ourselves, we're full of self-doubt, and we forget to reflect on how far that we've come, which was this day six years ago my lunch was a frozen pizza; my dinner was a massive bowl of pasta; my breakfast was, no kidding, probably a bowl of cereal with milk and about two slices of toast. That's what I ate naturally six years ago. Fast-forward six years, I eat food that fuels my performance in the gym. That's the reason why I can squat what I can squat when five years ago or even four years ago I was

trying to do one rep of 100 kilos and failed it three times. Now, 100 kilos is my warm-up. So whenever I'm having an off-day or not feeling very motivated or driven by momentum, I just need to reflect as others do on how far that they've come.

Danny Lennon: And with the whole area of habit formation, developing positive behaviors, this is a super-deep area that we could probably spend multiple podcasts delving into alone.

Sarah Doyle: [Laughs] Yeah.

Danny Lennon: So just for a starting point for people listening, what are maybe one or two important things just to bear in mind about that habit formation process of behavior modifica...like, where should they start in just terms of how to think about this stuff?

Sarah Doyle: Yeah, yeah. So there are many, many different ways that you can try to change behaviors. I recently, well, the last couple of years ago, read a book called *The Power of Habit* by, what was he? He was a New York Times journalist or reporter and he presented...

Danny Lennon: Oh, Charles Duhigg?

Sarah Doyle: Charles Duhigg, yeah, and he talked about habit loop that looks at an environmental cue which brings about a specific routine, which brings about a specific reward, and if you want to overcome a bad habit you need to find a new routine. That's one way of looking at it. It hasn't worked for me. I find this habit loop that he talks about probably a little bit too complicated and it's a little bit too much work, and I just want something that's a little bit more exciting.

So for me, if I'm looking to create a habit, I think about something really exciting and compelling. I think about my vision. If I need to go to the gym first thing in the morning, I think about what it is that I'm trying to honor in that moment. Is it my commitment to my goals or is it my feelings in that moment? And quite often for a lot of us the reason why bad habits are bad habits is because we honor our feelings instead of the commitment or instead of our vision or goals. What works for me is honoring my vision. And to support me to I guess trigger positive thoughts about that, I have vision boards in my house. I have inspirational and motivational posters that resonate with me specifically. Have you ever jumped into your car and driven to work or driven to the gym or wherever

and got to your destination and didn't even realize or remember your journey? Has that ever happened to you?

Danny Lennon: Yeah.

Sarah Doyle: Okay.

Danny Lennon: All the time. [Chuckles]

Sarah Doyle: So our emotions are going to work in the exact same way. We're going to go from A to B emotionally quite a lot of the time. Our brain is going to think and follow the exact same path. When we're asked to do something new, we're going to jump back into our comfort zone, feel threatened, scared, full of self-doubt, and insecure. I, in order to support me create positive change in my life, and I get all of my clients to do it and it hasn't failed me yet, is to place triggers around their house that will remind them to think a way that's actually going to support them, create a life that they love, as opposed to keep them trapped in their comfort zone.

So I haven't gotten awfully sorted in the new office yet in the house, but I had a motivational or inspirational wall in the apartment and I think you might remember when you've seen it. I have little presents that my clients have given me. I have thank-you cards. For me, thank-you cards are probably some of the most meaningful things I've ever gotten from clients. And it's that trigger to remind me of my exciting reason for doing things that has helped me execute goals so much quicker, dig in when the going gets tough. It's not in me to quit because I've spent so long developing thoughts and behaviors to support me when things get hard. Some people will go, "Oh, this is when I quit because this is what I've always done. This is how my brain wants to behave." But our brains are neuroplastic. We can change the way that we think about certain things. We just need to have the right triggers.

So if you're talking to a client, if anyone is talking to a client and you want them to achieve their goal, you sit down with them and for a full session get them to tell you about what their life would be like when they've achieved success or accomplishment. So that's why you do need a bit of push and you do need a bit of pull motivation. But like I said, behavioral change or habit change or formation is so complex and it will differ for different people. For me, getting someone to visualize what they're working towards hasn't failed me yet, but it's getting them to visualize it with such great detail, getting them to—

There's another exercise called “your best possible future self.” You can use it to stay motivated. You can use it to get positive, to get cultivate optimism, but every, I guess, three to four times a week you'll get someone to sit down. You can use the same journal that you write your gratitude and your positivity in, and you're basically getting them to write about their best possible future self. So for 10 minutes, three to four times a week, they're writing about what their life would be like if they accomplished all of their goals and achieved all of the levels of success that they wanted to achieve, and you're getting them to connect with that, visualize that, fantasize about that, and it's been scientifically proven and supported to increase a person's positivity. And when you're in a positive state of mind, when you're feeling optimistic, life is just a whole other ballgame.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, I think one of the biggest things that, even all those different strategies you mentioned, is they still tie back to having some sort of underlying reason why I suppose the purely, the kind of initial surface goal may be, but there's something behind that and trying to get people to connect with it. And like just when you mentioned having like motivational quotes and a vision board, they're two things that probably relatively recently in my probably like the last few months has been two things that I've implemented a bit more. Just beside me here on my white board, the only thing on it is just five quotes that I've pulled from different places, and stuff that really does make a difference. Yeah, it's amazing. It's a lot more than I even would have expected. Like the reason I use it is not so much as maybe an inspiration. It's more of a mental cue, I think, once I see that stuff, yeah, and it kind of cues me into, okay, here's the stuff that I'm telling myself is important to me, so what things do I have to follow through with today in order to be, I suppose, in step with that or to actually be living up to what I'm trying to say?

One thing I did want to ask you about, Sarah, and this may seem like an abstract question and I hope it doesn't feel like one of those what-is-the-meaning-life-type questions where it's impossible to answer—it's more in line with this kind of concept of happiness, which is a huge thing of what you're trying to do with people, trying to cultivate a sense of happiness. But to try and drill down into the idea of what exactly happiness is...

Sarah Doyle: Oh, that's really easy.

Danny Lennon: Go for it.

Sarah Doyle:

[Laughs] This is something that people—people mystify happiness and they think that it's this elusive concept that has no real meaning, and I'm sitting there sniggering. It's actually really straightforward. Happiness is two things. It is when you experience positive emotions like joy, pride, fulfillment, success, and it's, two, I guess how satisfied we are by the progress we're making towards our life goals. So it's really, really straightforward. The only subjective part of happiness is that for me pride might mean more or make me happier than it does you or love might make you happier than it does me. In my opinion, that's the only subjective part about it, is that one positive emotion carries more weight for an individual than it does others, but it really does come down to something that's straightforward. Happiness is when we experience positive emotion and our satisfaction towards our life goals.

And I think it's absolutely wonderful that we can have a definition of happiness, that we know what happiness means, because there's not one person that you could ask who won't say, "All I want to do is be happy." And let's cut the crap. It's a really easy concept to understand. The hard part is actually getting out of your way long enough to take action towards bringing happiness and allowing happiness into your life. That's the hard part.

Danny Lennon:

So maybe a better question might be then, if obviously for everyone I think it's a goal to be happy and now we have this kind of clear definition of it, how can we get clear on what will actually make us happy? Because so often we see people think, "Oh, if I do this thing, then I will be happy," and then they might end up actually going and doing that thing and then when it's done it's kind of like, "meh". It's kind of this feeling of, "Well, that didn't make me happy and I thought it would be." How do we get into doing things that will actually translate to happiness as opposed to thinking that we should...?

Sarah Doyle:

Oh my God, I love these questions!

This is amazing. There are a bunch of happiness myths out there. Myths around happiness include things like, "I'll be happy when I get a promotion," "I'll be happy when I get a mortgage," "I'll be happy when I get a new watch," that sort of stuff. And when we look at what makes a happy person happy, it's made up of three things. One, yes, genetics does play a role and approximately 50% of a person's happiness is going to be predisposed already when we're born. Around 10% is going to be around our circumstances, so could be something like relationship status, house,

job, but it's only 10%. Forty percent are activities that we can intentionally take up or engage to promote and increase our happiness. Now, if we look at that as a pie chart, 50% is I guess genetic predisposition, 40% is stuff that we can control, and only 10% is stuff around circumstances, material possessions or values. And isn't it gas that most of the people out there will spend 70, 80 or 90% of their time and energy on 10% of their happiness and wonder, "But I did this thing. Why aren't I happy?" It's because you're investing your energy into the wrong thing.

If you look at intentional activities that have been scientifically supported to increase a person's happiness, you've got things like spirituality, setting goals, health and fitness, random acts of kindness, fantasizing about your future. Would you believe, the more you can fantasize about your future, the happier you'll be. That's why your "best possible self" exercise is so awesome. But when someone is having a bad day, when someone needs a boost in happiness, usually the last thing that they try to do are the strategies scientifically supported to boost their happiness. They often buy themselves a takeout or get a bottle of wine. And that's nice, it's a momentary pleasure I guess, and we need to spend more time doing that stuff. We need to spend more time understanding what happiness is by exploring strategies that have been supported and proven to make us feel happy.

Danny Lennon: We're essentially looking at a place where rather than relying on end outcomes or certain circumstances that we can spend a ton of time trying to change, straight away we can just each day start doing a set of these practices or strategies or even simple things that will automatically increase happiness.

Sarah Doyle: I recommend to all of your listeners to read a book called Sonja Lyubomirsky, but her book is called *The How of Happiness* and she's basically taken all of the academic research, all of those fancy-dancy papers and packaged it into a book, and she even does a little survey there to help you understand what happiness-increasing strategies might work for you the most. But if someone out there is looking for something really simple that they can implement right now to make them happy, a gratitude journal is one of the most powerful things that you can do and it's when you can be specific about what it is that you're grateful for. Your life is going to change.

Danny Lennon: And just as you say that, I'm staring at my five-minute journal that's on my desk in front of me.



Sarah Doyle: [Laughs]

Danny Lennon: It's just kind of ironic that it's there today. Because a significant chunk I suppose of the listenership of this podcast work in some sort of coaching capacity with people trying to eat in a healthier fashion, whether that's nutritionists, we have personal trainers, there are doctors and dietitians, etc., etc. And a relatively common discussion I've had with many listeners over email and social media is around how to improve their client or patient relationship with food. Have you any thoughts on this or have you had any interactions with people who needed to kind of reframe their relationship with food and did you find anything useful that people can use?

Sarah Doyle: Oh my God, that's such a powerful question. I think that the best thing that any coach can do to support their client is to help them understand that they are not broken and do not need to be fixed, and if they are treating nutrition or the gym as a solution to their broken body, that's the first thing that people need to support their client's change and see differently. And then, the second thing is to help them develop a positive relationship with food which, in my opinion, if you are trying to use a framework to kickstart a healthy food plan or weight loss plan, be very, very careful that you don't become a slave to that framework. So whether or not it's paleo, macros, IIFYM or whatever framework you are using to kickstart a food plan or weight loss plan, be so careful that your client doesn't become a slave to that plan. If she's starting to overthink her food choices in some way, if she is being guided and ruled by macros and calories, if she can't go out and enjoy a dinner with her friends without depriving herself, restricting herself or limiting her food intake on that day so she can get away with eating it or punishing herself in the gym, if she starts to do those things, you take that food plan away from her and you tell her that her body is not broken and it does not need to be fixed. Sometimes us coaches or trainers, we inadvertently support our clients to develop very negative relationships with food when we support them to stick too rigidly to it.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, I think it's really important, one of the things you mentioned around there's nothing wrong with any specific goal or even going beyond it. There's nothing wrong with any particular approach one wants to take that to goal. What I think creates the problems is how someone perceives it and how they end up using those tools. So, for example, your anecdote with paleo is a super-common one that I see with people where they go on a very restrictive diet by that nature and they have almost used that as a way

where they have to fit in with these guidelines and everything else is wrong, but either strategy, like if you look at paleo or if you look at If It Fits Your Macros, I mean I think I've written about this before that both of those strategies can be used well by different people if they, again, are approaching in the right way that helps them.

Sarah Doyle: People don't understand that one bad meal isn't going to make you fat. In the same way, one good meal won't make you lose weight. But there's just so much fear around food and I think trainers and coaches, when you see something like that, that's when red flags would go up for me and I would go, "Okay, well, let's soften the margins around this framework a little bit and let's try to listen to our body a little bit more and let's try to understand what it needs."

Danny Lennon: Yeah, and what you mentioned around just that simple thing of letting people know that they're not broken and reframing it in a better way, it's actually something only a few weeks ago I was talking with Dr. Cassandra Forsythe who does a bit of work with Girls Gone Strong and we were...yeah, and we were looking at the whole area of amenorrhea, which is so common now, women that are losing their menstrual cycle, and to show that this stuff isn't just some airy-fairy stuff, that it actually works, when I was asking her what was the kind of first step in helping these women, her thing was exactly what you said. It's like, sitting them down and explaining to them that they're not broken, that there's nothing wrong with their body, that it's not doing anything bad for them, that to realize they're not broken and everything will be okay, and so from there then all the other things associated with them ends up falling into place. And it was just really interesting to see that crossover to mimicking exactly what you said there, Sarah.

Before we get to my final question, let people know where they can track you down on social media, where they can find you online and all that sort of good stuff.

Sarah Doyle: Of course. The business is called The Better Life Project and you can find me on Facebook, The Better Life Project, Ireland; you can find me on Snapchat, Sarah or Doyle; you can find me on Instagram, Sarah\_thebetterlifeproject; and if you jump onto the website, there's a free confidence plan there that you guys can get and there's information—I have a program, a body positive program. Can I talk to people about that for a second?

Danny Lennon: For sure, yeah.

Sarah Doyle: Awesome. Just because I harped on so much about it. [Chuckles]

Danny Lennon: Please do.

Sarah Doyle: I have a body positive self-care program for women who want to feel more comfortable in their skin. It's a three-week online program called My Body Beautiful. It starts every month, so depending on when this podcast is going to be released it could be July 1st or August 1st that you'll be able to jump on board with one, and it is about supporting women to think about their body differently to connect with their inner strengths, their inner power, their inner beauty. Jump onto the website, take a look at some of the testimonials from some of the clients there. It's supported some really incredible moments for all of the women that have taken part so far. I'm extremely proud of it. I wish it existed when I was struggling with my weight, but it's there now and I'm happy that I could help a lot of people. Confidence, it could help a lot of people. So that's the body stuff that I do and you'll find it on [thebetterlifeproject.ie/mybodybeautiful](http://thebetterlifeproject.ie/mybodybeautiful).

Danny Lennon: Awesome, and I will link up to all of that stuff in the show notes for those of you listening, so please go through and click into that. And so that brings us to the final question that we end the show on and it's simply if you could advise people to do one thing each day that would improve their life in some aspect, what would that one thing be?

Sarah Doyle: Could it be to have two things?

Danny Lennon: Go for it.

Sarah Doyle: [Laughs] For me, what's worked for me, what works for my clients, what I think everyone should do more of, is to be compassionate to themselves. We all have this inner mean girl or inner mean boy voice that beats us up when things don't go well, that criticizes us, that makes us feel bad because of something that we did or didn't do, and beating ourselves up doesn't help us live happy, healthier confident lives. It just takes us down a notch or two. But when we can be kind and compassionate and loving to that inner mean girl voice, when we can show her that she is safe and that it's going to be okay, we are going to notice massive, massive changes in our life. And a way to practice compassion is to remember how would you treat your 10-year-old daughter if she made the same mistake or your 10-year-old cousin or your 10-year-old son and treat yourself in that exact way.

And then the second one is to make every attempt and effort to laugh or smile or play every single day. I am 30 years of age and I don't think I've ever played or laughed as much as I do with someone, James or in general, that I have in my entire life. I'm so open to new and silly ways to do things. I have embraced my strange quirky nature more now than I ever have, and if you can't make yourself laugh then there's no hope for you. [Laughs]

Danny Lennon: [Chuckles]

Sarah Doyle: So just to laugh and to play and to be open to it at all times, never be ashamed or feel guilty for what makes you laugh or smile and just to fight for that happiness in some way, and when it doesn't go the way that you want to be compassionate with yourself. For me, that's been...it's been fairly life-changing, Danny. [Laughs]

Danny Lennon: Awesome.

Sarah Doyle: Yeah. [Laughs]

Danny Lennon: Love it. Sarah, thank you so much for your time today.

Sarah Doyle: Thank you, buddy.

Danny Lennon: I really, really appreciate it and for all the great information.

Sarah Doyle: No, I was tickled pink when you asked me back again, so thank you so much.

Danny Lennon: It's an absolute pleasure and I will talk to you soon.

Sarah Doyle: Talk to you later, Danny. Buh-bye.

Danny Lennon: And that is a wrap for this week. You can get the show notes and the transcript to this show over at [SigmaNutrition.com/episode127](http://SigmaNutrition.com/episode127), and over the next few weeks we've got some absolutely massive shows coming up including Dan Pardi's going to be on the show, Chris Masterjohn, and Menno Henselmans will be back on as well. Plus, there will be the listener Q&A episode too, which has been a number of weeks in the working which I mentioned a few weeks back, but that will be coming soon as well. So make sure you've hit Subscribe on your podcast app so you do not miss them.

Any of you that do regularly enjoy this show, then I would be absolutely honored if you considered supporting the podcast either on our official

Patreon page at [Patreon.com/sigmanutrition](https://patreon.com/sigmanutrition), that's P-A-T-R-E-O-N, and that will be for a \$1 per episode or however long you feel you would like to keep up your support, and that just means so much and it does make a big, big difference. So for everyone who's doing that, thank you so much. If that is something you maybe can't do or can't commit to, then maybe go over to iTunes and leave a review for the show. I get to read all those, which is really positive into itself. But even beyond that, it massively helps to continue to spread the show and for more people to find it and for us to keep pushing out this evidence-based message that we try and get out.

If you want to connect with me on social media, then right now you can get me on Instagram, that's [dannylennon\\_sigmanutrition](https://www.instagram.com/dannylennon_sigmanutrition/); usually over on Twitter as well with the handle [nutritiondanny](https://twitter.com/nutritiondanny); or if you just search for me on Facebook you can find me there as well.

And finally, don't forget to subscribe for free to the weekly Sigma Synopsis, which you can get over at the website as well. It's a short email sent out once per week with a collection of my favorite content and resources from around the web as well as a kind of key lesson or quote to leave you with each week. And so if you just go to [SigmaNutrition.com](https://www.sigmanutrition.com), you will be able to find a link to subscribe to it somewhere at the bottom of the page.

And that's our show for this week. Hopefully, you took something from this, and we'll be back next week. So thank you for listening.

## **Are you getting value from these transcripts?**

**If so, please consider supporting the podcast in whatever way you can.**

**It makes such a difference. Thank you in advance. Here's how you can help:**

1. Go to: [patreon.com/sigmanutrition](https://patreon.com/sigmanutrition) to officially support the show.
2. Leave a review on iTunes
3. Spread the word on social media.