

Episode 5

Give Peace a Chance

Hi. This is Rosie Bank and I will be your host for this episode of Health Matters Podcast. I am so happy to launch a discussion with you about something near and dear to my heart: Being at peace. Be sure to get your freebie download about the health benefits of meditation and yoga, which I'll tell you more about a little later on. In this episode, I'll be giving you three suggestions to make sure that you remain bigger than your stress. And that you can give peace a chance.

Let's dive in.

The peace movement was real in the 1970's. Anti-war protesters waived flags, had sit-ins, passed around a pipe, and marched in Washington. Here we are, almost fifty years later, and from my perspective, peace is just as relevant now as it was then. Although I'm wondering if peace has become less popular.

If you live a busy life, and stress is your constant or near-constant companion, I'm guessing that peace is not top of mind for you. I might be bringing something up that is not even in your consciousness. To be perfectly honest, I don't hear a lot of people talking about peace. If there was a peace movement in the 1960's and 1970's, then what do we have today? An accomplishment movement? A Get it Done Movement? A Work Our Butts Off movement? The only time I hear people talk about peace is in opposition to war. But how about inner peace, on an individual basis?

I'd love to show you how to make peace a part of your life. I'd love to help you have love and harmony flow to you and from you. I'll also show you how this impacts your health positively. In fact, your ability to be peaceful impacts your nervous system. A bit of science for you.

There are two branches of the autonomic nervous system, the parasympathetic and the sympathetic. They are called branches because if you can picture the anatomy of these structures, they literally branch off of the autonomic nervous system. And they have different functions.

The **parasympathetic division** dominates during relaxation and allows healing within the body, nutrient absorption and waste disposal, calming of the mind, and improved endocrine—also called hormonal—and immune system function. Think P, as in peace.

On the opposite end, the **sympathetic division** is in charge of action, increasing the heart rate, blood flow to muscles, and mental activity. Think S, as in stress.

So, in order to promote healing, calming, and immune support, it helps when we are in a peaceful state. Being stressed out stimulates the sympathetic branch, and is action-focused. Does this remind you at all of your life?

John Lennon wrote and sang, *"All I am saying, is give peace a chance."* The older and wiser I become, the more I appreciate how important it is to have more peaceful lives. The idea of growing old into a stressed-out, unhappy person is loathsome to me. Do you agree with me, that the older we get, the more we can benefit by having a sense of inner peace? And the greater difference doing this can make

with each passing decade? Personally, and from my own experience, older people don't necessarily mellow, contrary to popular belief. Maybe now is a good time to consider adding peace to that which we value.

"God grant me peace, thy most precious gift." is a Jewish prayer I remember from my childhood. I always resonated with this prayer.

As I write this in July of 2016, our country is embroiled in some vitriolic pre-election events. It seems that people love to hate the politician who they believe will lead their country to its last days. There is a lot of noise. People are losing sleep due to fear and anxiety. The uncertainty of the election pushes people into an at-risk state, especially for those who need to feel in control. My friend said to me over lunch today, "This election is killing me."

From my perspective as a Health Coach, this scenario is connected to several factors that impact our health. And if you are reading this (or listening to this) at some time in the future, you can extrapolate from whatever major news is in your current cycle that has people doubled over with stress.

Stress management is among the top three reasons why people seek the services and help of a Health Coach. The other two are weight loss and a desire for natural remedies for health issues. I am enthralled to discuss with my clients how to have more peace and less stress in their lives. I love peace. I followed Danielle LaPort's system to identify my core desired feelings. Feeling peaceful made the final cut. When I did the exercise in her book, [The Desire Map](#), I was asked to write down other words that were aligned with my primary core desire. Along with peace came calm, relaxed, compassion, acceptance, well-rested, self-aware, knowing, and present. These words, along with four other groups from my core desired feelings, are on my dream board, which is on the wall to my right and I can see it now.

When I think about some personal challenges I encountered over the past years, it always seems that finding peace was among the very best solutions. If there is such a thing as a universal strategy to resolve the kinds of trials that seem to be part of life, finding inner peace may be as good as any.

Back in the mid-1970's, when I was young and naïve, I sat down with a pad of paper, trying to answer the question, "What is my number one professional goal?" I remember this like it was yesterday. I wrote, *to experience peace while I pursue the rest of my goals.*

Personally and professionally, I have had many challenges along the way. Sometimes I felt a million miles away from peaceful. I'll tell you more about those challenges in a moment. But for now, it makes sense that identifying peace early in my life enabled me to get back on track. Three ways I did this were through meditation, yoga, and finding my way to healthy eating.

My connection with peace began very early in my life. I learned how to meditate when I was in University. However, looking back, there were some enormous boulders that lay in the middle of my path at that time. The main thing that caused me tremendous conflict and anguish was an eating disorder. I continued to meditate and do yoga, which I knew helped put out some of the fire of that stress. I continued to make trying to find peace a priority even with seemingly unsurmountable obstacles in my way. The eating disorder practically destroyed me.

Inner peace has a way of helping to dissolve conflicts, both internal and external. Looking back, it's possible that meditation and yoga saved my life. If you imagine enormous amounts of stress, how can

you survive if there is not an outlet? Doing something to help you relax and feel more peaceful is essential to reduce the stress, along with the health challenges that go along with it.

In this current environment, it appears to me that people have relinquished peace as a value in pursuit of their political agenda. The reason I write this is because people seem so upset. Maybe they haven't relinquished stress. Maybe it's just not on their radar. In this political environment it is not fashionable to be calm and relaxed.

A quick trip to Google just revealed that 59% of the American people are sick and tired about the current pre-election state of affairs. People are losing sleep, which is a sign of stress and anxiety. It puts a strain on all of the systems in our bodies that are supposed to help us restore and repair during the night. Without this cleansing in the nighttime, our bodies are more at risk for inflammation, hormonal imbalance, weight issues, cognitive impairment, and toxic overload. Imagine your home or office if the trash was never taken out, and the floors were never swept. That's the effect stress has on our bodies if it is not mitigated.

On-going stress and anxiety during the day raises levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. This can do real damage, especially if the situation is on-going, and there is no respite. I'll discuss meditation more in just a bit, but for now, what meditation does is provide a break from the harmful effects of excess stress. It's the break that brings us relief. If we meditate and feel calm in the morning, this helps create a buffer between ourselves and exogenous stress that is in our environment. Endogenous stress is created inside of us when we allow ourselves to get worked up over, say, which candidate is going to win. Exogenous stress are events outside of us that can seem to be the cause of internal stress, even though we are always responsible for how we respond to our environment. Meditating and finding inner peace help tremendously with both types of stress.

I have my feelings, thoughts and opinions about the candidates. But my choice is to keep those contained and separate from my commitment to make my physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being a priority. I recommend that you do the same, whether it is pre-election season, or in response to any other massive assault on your capacity to handle stress. In fact, the more challenging your external environment is, the more essential it is that you nurture your internal environment. Imagine a protective shield between you and the intense, negative energy in your environment during an election season. This shield enables you to be somewhat detached from the impact of this energy, even while those around you are angry and upset. Your health, your sanity, and your well-being are worth protecting. *You* are worth protecting.

When I trained at the [Institute for Integrative Nutrition](#) one of the physician lecturers told us that he did not have a set of recommendations for a healthy diet that was unique for a variety of diseases. In other words, to maintain a healthy weight, to prevent cancer and heart disease, and to reduce the risk for Type II diabetes one would follow a course that *promoted ideal health*. Although he was generalizing, I received his message well. Let me make an analogy to maintain peace and harmony. I'll call this *spiritual health*.

This assault on your ability to manage stress, to which I referred above, comes in countless forms. In my own life, a few examples include a divorce; losing my rental houses during the recession of 2008; several sport-injury-related surgeries; my father's illness and eventual death in 2013; some business downturns;

and a very challenging work-related relationship. Stress is an equal-opportunity employer. It gives of itself impartially and no one is exempt.

When you think about the times when the stress has hit the fan in your own life, what do you see in terms of how you responded? How we behave when we encounter stress points to vital information about how we take care of ourselves. One way to visualize this is to sense whether you let stress get bigger than you are, or are you able to overcome the stress? I get a very clear image in my mind when I ask myself this same question. It's easy to imagine stress as a monster that is untamable and relentless. I don't recommend this perception, however. I believe that when we manage to put stress in its place, we can rise above. This simplistic formula has everything to do with your general health, your energy level, and your ability to ward off any major physical challenges.

Here are three suggestions to make sure that you remain bigger than your stress. And that you are doing what John Lennon says, which is to give peace a chance.

1. **Allow peace as part of your value system.**

Make love, not war, in your interactions with others. Using the upcoming election as an example, you can't control the fact that not everybody will vote for your candidate of choice. Let them be. If you allow this to become fodder for war, you have lost the battle.

I learned something wonderful from researcher Brené Brown in her book, *Rising Strong*. Considering that people might be doing the best that they can gives you the chance to see others' actions from a more compassionate perspective. I wrote about the importance of naming our feelings in my book, [Health Matters](#). After reading Brown's book, I decided to continue to name my feelings, because this is one way I stay true to myself. However, releasing others has become more appealing. If I get my feelings hurt, I will be honest about that to myself. But letting the other person off the hook because she was doing the best that she could, helps me feel more peaceful.

Forgiveness is related to this topic. We forgive others not because it helps them. But because we deserve to live freely. The point is not whether or not the other person deserves to be forgiven. The point is that you deserve to experience peace even if someone did something unkind to you. Forgiving and peacefulness are cut from the same fabric. Freedom, peacefulness, and forgiving are like our essential vitamins. We should have a dose every day.

As I experience more inner peace, it is astonishing how much pain and drama drop away. It feels like peace displaces unresolved feelings of hurt, resentment, and other wounding emotions I have lugged around in the past. I have gotten all tangled up in my feelings when it comes to trying to process with someone else who did or said something in response to which I got upset.

Notice that I did not say, that *made* me upset. Or that *caused* me to be upset. Another person does not have the power to make me feel a certain way. In fact, I have the power to choose peace and release in situations like these.

I wonder if you have ever had a similar experience. Someone says something or does something that is outrageous to you. You might feel horrified, as I have felt in the past. I continue to experience the value of releasing the other person rather than creating internal strife. This is

where peace lives inside of all of us. I love that peace and release rhyme. They sound alike, and they carry a similar meaning.

I love the quote from Gandhi. He said, *“There is no path to peace. Peace is the path.”*

2. **Prioritize activities that promote relaxation.**

Yoga and meditation came into my life very early, as I mentioned. I appreciate the word practice. Honestly, I am now in my 60's and I continue to discover ways to improve in both disciplines. Because I have practiced for so long, I understand the beauty of sticking with something and developing mastery. George Leonard, the author of the wonderful book, [Mastery](#) says, “Our preoccupation with goals, results, and the quick fix has separated us from our own experiences.” Frankly, I don't think in our society we pay nearly enough respect to the importance of practicing a discipline over time. When I recommend yoga and meditation to my clients, I always remind them that they can only begin where they are, and their own experience is as valid as anyone else's. I am reminding you that here as well.

Yoga stretches will help you release tension from your body, and meditation will help you release tension from your mind. There are other practices that do the same thing. Chi gong, getting a massage, long walks, taking a warm bath promote relaxation. People who stay on top of making their health a priority make relaxation a priority.

A few words about yoga and meditation. Although people often report feeling more spiritual, I don't believe that either practice needs to be connected to a religion or a dogma. The spiritual part comes when you hang out in your body by stretching and breathing, and when you hang out in your mind by quieting your thoughts. When you do this you will feel more connected to yourself.

That is a simple and non-religious way to describe spirituality. I don't believe that we are more spiritual because we wear special robes or adhere to a special set of rules and beliefs. On the contrary, those external practices can be more like spiritual materialism, which reminds me of a book I read called [Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism](#), written by a Buddhist monk who I studied with when I attended the University of Colorado in Boulder. His name was Chögyam Trungpa. I think of authentic spirituality as a state of being, more so than doing. We can do things that promote peace and spirituality, like being kind to others. And I endorse those kinds of actions completely. But our internal landscape is where true transformation lies.

Back to stretching. The more difficult it seems to stretch, the more value you will get. The goal of yoga is not to wrap your leg around your neck. It is simply to start from where you are and become a little looser, balanced, and stronger in your body. A beginner in yoga gets as much value moving an inch in a forward bend as a more advanced practitioner receives by putting her palms on the floor. If your breath was tiny and tight when you start to stretch, any give to your body's ability to expand while breathing is beautiful and noteworthy progress.

The same goes for meditation. You succeed at meditation when you find one miniscule slice of silence between your thoughts. That experience is sublime and can transform your day. The

relief that comes from *hanging out with nothing* even for a brief glimpse, is lovely. I came up with this phrase, *finding nothing*, not from a text book. Rather, it describes how I feel when I sit and breathe. In that space of nothing, no decisions have to be made. Even the consideration of who becomes the next president—or whatever is pressing upon you—vanishes. Imagine for a moment releasing the burden of thoughts and concerns.

When I sit to meditate, all kinds of random thoughts enter my mind. “Why didn’t the gardener call me back?” “My mother really should see a wound specialist.” “My daughter is paying too much in rent.” “I should have given our dog a bath today.” Pardon my French, but these little crappy thoughts are the kinds of things that filter through our minds during the day. And when we make them important, they can fester and add to our stress. I want to inspire you to consider that lightening your load of this mental chatter promotes peace. Letting go of the things that make you feel upset is transformational itself. And as I mentioned, it’s good for your health, including your immune system, which is an essential part of your body’s defense mechanism against getting sick. This is why Dr. Dean Ornish, founder of Ornish Lifestyle Medicine suggests that meditation can turn back the clock on heart disease.

All of those thoughts I just mentioned don’t even get finished when I meditate. The relief is something I have grown to appreciate on a daily basis. And I think you will too. In the beginning, that silent crack between the thoughts will seem like a flash. But with practice, the quiet can be dominant and the thoughts can be the exception. For the sake of your mental, physical, psychological, and spiritual health, I believe this is worth practicing.

Be sure to go to www.rosiebank.com/podcasts and look for this podcast episode’s free download, The Seven Health Benefits of Yoga and Meditation. I actually just wrote it and I found an extra one for you.

3. **Take really good care of yourself.**

Practice the things that you already know put you in what Tony Robbins calls a balanced state. Don’t let your health slip by the wayside. Pay attention to the little things. Taking the stairs instead of the escalator makes a difference. Drinking water instead of sugary or artificially sweetened tea is better for you. Going for a walk with your dog or your spouse after work will help you relax and unwind. Even when you are very busy, remind yourself that it is the little things that count, and that add up. Catch yourself before it has been days since you ate a green salad or got some hearty exercise. Connect with your loved ones and reach out to your friends. I pick up the phone to speak with friends and family even though I know that many relationships have been relegated to texting. Recently I phoned a friend to tell him we hadn’t connected in a while and I wanted to catch up. He said, “Don’t you see my posts on Facebook?” Even though we all love to get likes on Facebook, there is no way that these virtual conversations are a replacement for the love, warmth and connection that are vital for our well-being.

If you don’t feel so great, consider this. Have a look around your life and become aware of some of your habits that might be contributing to your having low energy, food cravings, brain fog, exhaustion, excess weight, or inability to sleep. Without spending a dime, hiring a coach, or

overhauling your life, it is astonishing how much of a difference you can make by tweaking what you do and don't do throughout the day. In the grand scheme of your health and well-being, since everything adds up, you can make some pretty simple adjustments and get some pretty amazing results. Here are two real-life examples from my clients. One committed to seven to eight nights sleep, instead of her normal five. She felt better within a few days and realized that this was a habit she wanted to keep. Another client switched from diet soda to water, something I have written about numerous times in the past. He experienced a dramatic shift in his energy, his weight, and his sugar cravings.

Your capacity to experience peace and well-being is enormous. Think of both as a wellspring, and you can dip into it on a daily basis. A little bit here and a little bit there. If you use the time when you sit at a red light for deep breaths instead of road rage, your body will thank you for the rest of that day.

I hope you are inspired to move in the direction of greater health and more inner peace. Even if you inch toward that, or make only minor changes, you will have started something that can bless you and those with whom you live, work, and play for many seasons to come.

As your host on Health Matters Podcast, I want to tell you again that I cherish our time together. I want to be in the world where you and as many people as possible make pro-health choices. Join me in choosing peace over conflict and healthy habits over self-destructive ones. Health matters. And so do you.