

Dave Asprey:

In today's 24/7 world, you might find yourself feeling a little bit less bulletproof than you like some days. It certainly happens to me. I have a really busy travel schedule including a lot of time on toxic airplanes full of bad air and questionable food although I frankly skip the questionable food. One of my top hacks for maintaining that mental performance and just to feel good and not be too swollen is to get rid of toxins through my sunlight and sauna. In the Bulletproof Bio-hacking Labs Alpha here on Vancouver Island where I live, I have a sunlight and three-in-one infrared sauna. Why? Because their patented three-in-one technology has near, mid-, and far infrared, which do different things, all in one place so I can get the detox effects, the energy and the weight loss, and the other things that infrared does for the water in your cells.

When I do that, I'm getting access to a bunch of different health programs. There's one for detox. There's for cardio and for antiaging. You can actually control the type of waves you're exposed to. The near infrared LEDs are important for cell health and antiaging results. It's controlled with a little Android panel that actually lets you watch Netflix while you're in the sauna which is kind of cool. It's eco-friendly, hypoallergenic basswood and premium craftsmanship. You don't want some of the toxic woods that release natural like Mother Nature's toxins. They don't use that kind of wood. You can actually access the sauna from the cloud so you can turn it on before you leave the office and it's ready when you get home which is super cool. It even includes something called acoustic resonance therapy where there's things that shake the seats according to the music you're listening to. It turns out that vibration is one of the signals mitochondria in your body listen to.

It's kind of a cool deal. If you want to check one of these things out, sunlight and infrared saunas are the most effective ones I know of for deep cellular sweating. You go sunlighten.com. That's S-U-N-L-I-G-H-T-E-N.com. You check out their [inaudible 00:01:38] full spectrum saunas. If you mention Bulletproof Radio, you get a free set of bamboo carbon towels. Trust me. You're going to need towels if you start using an infrared sauna. It's a limited time offer only while supplies last. Just go to sunlighten.com and mention Bulletproof Radio. You can also call 8772920020. Sunlighten.com.

Speaker 2:

Bulletproof Radio. A state of high performance.

Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's cool fact of the day is about your brain cells. When your body creates new brain cells, it's called neurogenesis. Until the late '90s when I was still working for that first co-location web hosting company that held Google's very first server, scientists still believed that neurogenesis ended in your late teens, maybe early 20s and basically once your brain was baked, it was baked and that was what you had. Now we know that your brain can produce new cells throughout your lifetime just like companies like Google can add more servers to their network whenever

formatting

the heck they want. That means that the formally inevitable brain degeneration just isn't inevitable. Your brain doesn't have to die as you age. It doesn't have to get weak as you age. You can make brand new healthy neurons at any age. It just takes a little bit more conscious playing to keep doing it as you age.

You can find more useful information like that in Head Strong, my new book. It's called The Bulletproof Plan to Activate Untapped Brain Energy to Work Smarter and Think Faster in Just Two Weeks. All right. That's the world's longest title. Here's the deal. It's called Head Strong. What Head Strong teaches you is that you have a battery in your body, and it's what powers your brain. When the battery works well, the brain doesn't fail. You don't get all the neurodegenerative, all the other diseases of aging. When the batteries get weak, you get weak. If you order before April 4th, you can get the first chapter for free by going to orderheadstrong.com. If you wait til after April 4th, you're going to love the book; you just won't get all the free bonuses. So please do consider preordering because it helps authors like me quite a lot.

Today's episode is one of the more fun ones because I'm here in person at Bulletproof Labs Alpha on Vancouver Island where I run my organic farm where I grow my own food. I'm here at least two-thirds of the time. This time I'm on the road doing things to bring content to you. I'm here with Dr. Mark Atkinson, the medical director for Bulletproof and head of the Bulletproof coaching program. We're here to do one of the Q&A podcasts which are fantastically fun. I always get great feedback on these because we answer your questions that you've submitted by social media, by email, and on the website, and all the other ways you can submit questions. Probably easiest is just to go to Facebook and do it.

So Dr. Mark, welcome to the show.

Dr M. Atkinson: Thank you very much. Excited to be here and looking forward to answering some questions.

Dave Asprey: Have you had a Fatwater yet today?

Dr M. Atkinson: I have had a Fatwater just half an hour ago.

Dave Asprey: Here's a pineapple Fatwater. You know you want it.

Dr M. Atkinson: Thank you so much.

Dave Asprey: Did you guys notice that? I snuck a product plug in there. You almost ... Sorry. I do make ... I do take a minute of your time on each show to talk about one of the cool Bulletproof products. Fatwater has brain octane in it. Brain octane is that oil that raises ketones that directly fuel neurons. Even if there's sugar present, neurons want ketones. So instead of putting sugar in your water, what if you put the right kind of fat that went straight to energy? Well, that's what we

did with Fatwater. It tastes amazing, and you can order it and have it sent to your place of work. We'll send cases of it. Even there's a free shipping possibility there. You can also buy it now in Southern California at a bunch of different natural product grocers which is particularly cool. If your favorite natural product grocer doesn't have it, go in there and stage a protest. What do they say?

Dr M. Atkinson: A sit-in?

Dave Asprey: A sit-in would work or resist. Resist the lack of Fatwater. There we go.

Since we just went into the realm of politics, without endorsing or denying any particular thing, Dr. Mark, if you couldn't tell by the accent, is from another country.

Dr M. Atkinson: Far, far away.

Dave Asprey: Far, far away. This county is called Brexit.

Dr M. Atkinson: That's its new name.

Dave Asprey: There we go. Now we've offended everyone but no one is quite sure how offended they are because no one knows exactly what we said except that we just mentioned inflammatory things. The reason we did that now that we're getting going on this is that you might have noticed that we pissed you off. Here's the deal. We didn't say anything other than mentioning things that were stressful. What we just did was trigger your fight or flight response most likely. So here's the deal. Take a deep breath because this is all for fun and this is all knowledge for you. We are going to share some things that will allow you to control that fight or flight response because, get this, every time your fight or flight response gets triggered it causes the mitochondria in your body to make more energy for you to kill your opponent. In this case, it might be whoever is on the other side of whatever it is you support given that we didn't actually say what we supported here.

What happened there if you actually are like "Screw these guys," that's all stuff that's driven from low level biology. In Head Strong, the whole point of this is that when you are triggering that survival instinct, it's a survival instinct that's driven from a subcellular level all the way up into your behavior. When you have more energy in your body because you manage this battery in your cells better, you actually can then choose to do something like continue listening to the show or to do whatever you're going to do. So we're giving you more control, but that's just a little small example of how just being triggered by something that's irritating can cause your body to burn calories differently. Instead of spending the calories for thinking, they went into like "What the hell are these guys saying?" That's kind of cool.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah, it is. When people realize if you are emotionally reactive and that's like your default state all the time, it's telling you a lot about what's going on inside of your biology. Rather than indulging the emotional reactivity, the question you want to ask yourself is "What do I need to attend to in my biology?"

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: Normally it's a brain power issue. As you start increasing your energy, taking care of your mitochondria, presto what happens is the emotional reactivity goes down, your level of presence goes up, and you can just listen to people and reflect upon what they're saying as opposed to be blindsided by the default emotional reactivity that kind of comes up. This is a big insight because a lot of people including a lot of the field of psychotherapy and psychology will tell you how to manage your emotional reactivity and that's important. We need to know how to calm our nervous system. Actually one of the most powerful and direct ways to deal with our emotional state and to improve the health of our mind is you start with the biology.

Dave Asprey: Yeah. There's a term that I'm a huge fan of. There's two of them. One is called hangry. Hungry and angry. The other is something that I was famous for at a certain time in my life. It's hypogly-bitchy.

Dr M. Atkinson: Hypogly-bitchy.

Dave Asprey: These are states that everyone can resonate with when we say those names. Those are biological states. They're not personal weakness states. They're not emotional states, but the emotions came about from a lack of energy.

Dr M. Atkinson: Exactly.

Dave Asprey: When emotions are triggered, they suck energy. So what if you have better control of that?

Dr M. Atkinson: There's a new emerging field within psychology called embodied cognition. What they're saying is the mind is not solely arose just from the brain, but listen to this. It arises from your bodily state-

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: And your environment.

Dave Asprey: That's exactly right.

Dr M. Atkinson: If you get that, that's a game changer. What that means is that if you want to feel different, if you want to think different, if you want to act different, you have to attend to your brain, your body, and your environment which is the essence of bio-hacking because you're taking control over your internal,

external environment. When I realized when people have psychological issues, start with the foundations of your biology, take care of your energy, and then see what's residual, and then that's when you then want to work with a psychology. This is just like a systematic grounded way of improving the way we perform, the way we feel, but we start with energy. We start with biology.

Dave Asprey: There you go. That's a core part of Bulletproof. Your body responds to the environment around you. That's the definition of bio-hacking.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: What I didn't know when I started the field of bio-hacking as one of the originators of the term, I didn't understand that a lot of that environmental sensitivity was actually driven by the mitochondria. These are the sensors of the environment that then drive the change in the body. It's fascinating. There's a quadrillion bacteria, a form of bacteria, that are now a part of your cells that live inside you that are the ones driving that bodily state.

Should we get into some of the Q&A?

Dr M. Atkinson: Yes, let's do that. Okay. So the first one is from John who's age 47 from America. This is about hacking habits. "Dear Dave and Dr. Mark, like many people I know I struggle to stick with new behaviors and practices. I start off enthusiastic and motivated, but within two weeks, usually sooner, I'm back to my old ways." That sounds familiar. "For example, I bought a gym membership last October and have only been once. It's now February. I've stopped all refined sugar on the first of January, and by the third of January, I was eating chocolate and cookies again. It's frustrating and demoralizing. I'd love to hear any tips or suggestions you have for hacking habits and what you consider to be the keys to making positive changes."

Dave Asprey: That's a big one. We'll get to spend the next 20 minutes sort of deconstructing that.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: First thing, instead of saying you're working to stick with new behaviors and practices, you're defining what you're doing as struggling. I would say that struggle always costs you in a way that's hard to imagine. If you think of someone taking a puppy for a walk if you've ever seen this happen, that's what a struggle looks like. The puppy plants its feet. It doesn't understand it's supposed to be pulled, and you tug and then it lays on its back. Then it pees on itself, and it's just a mess. In contrast ... That's what struggle looks like. In contrast when you have a trained dog, it just walks with you. It stops and it walks and it stays by your heel, and it's effortless. That said, you might not always go where you want to go. The point here is that identifying what you're doing as struggling, it feels like a struggle like that, but struggle always cost you

because struggle comes with anxiety versus "Hey, I'm working to stick to new behaviors and practices. Sometimes I'm successful. Sometimes I'm not." That's a lack of struggle, and that's a work.

First thing I'd do is reframe what you're doing here. Say "I'm working to stick with new behaviors." It's okay. You will never be perfect. No matter how good you think you are at that behavior, there's probably one molecule that could have been better. Give up on perfection. That will help you a lot. That also frees you from failure because if what you're doing is you're working to do, "Did I work towards doing it today? Yes. Did I succeed all the way? No. Did I fail all the way? No." A framing like that means that instead of "Man, I was going to with no sugar forever starting January 1st, and I had one cookie on January 3rd therefore I'm a failure therefore screw it. I'm going to eat all the cookies." That reframing is the first thing you do.

Then let's talk about some biological stuff you could do about this. Actually, I don't know. Should we switch to biology or do you want to do some more-

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: [crosstalk 00:13:41].

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah. I love this subject. In fact, I've just recorded a whole bunch of bad habits for coach students. This is a subject that everyone needs to know about.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: Now there's a couple of things. The first thing is to not make those changes is not a moral failing. Please never allow the inability to put a new change to reflect badly on who you are as a human being. Never indulge that story that says "I'm a failure. I can't do it." If that story pops up, see if what it is a story, breathe into your lower belly, come back to sanity again.

Dave Asprey: It's not a moral failing. You ate a freaking cookie. It wasn't a moral failing.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah, it's not a moral failing. But some people take it so seriously.

Dave Asprey: I used to, yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: Likewise. We have within a psychology the inner critic. The inner critic is constantly surveying the way we show up, the way we interact, and it's analyzing it against a tick box of who it thinks we should be. When it detects a gap between how we are and who we should be, it then sends in the judgements. The first thing is to watch out for the inner critic. The second thing is the reason most people struggle in implement habit changes, they don't have a systematic approach to habits. We're going to provide you one because I've

been taking a kind of close look at this. Before we do that, let's start on working with the biology first because-

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: Get your biology straight. This becomes so much easier. I do want to say one thing first. Please do not rely on motivation ever again to change habits. Why? Because motivation is a fickle creature. It comes and goes. What happens is around the time of New Year, we're highly motivated. We've put on a couple of pounds. We don't feel great. We say "Okay, January the 1st, I'm going to stop X, Y, Zed." And so but the motivation will come and go. If that's your primary way of motivating yourself, it is unreliable so you can't rely on motivation unless you're one of these rare human beings who is highly motivated all the time. A couple come to mind but for the rest of us, motivation is not a reliable way to change, but we're going to give you others. Willpower is one of them and the systematic approach to changing habits is another.

Dave Asprey: The assumption that if you just try hard enough you'll be motivated ... Can we try to feel motivated? It simply doesn't work. When you think about that, it's obvious it doesn't work. When you just feel about that like "Well obviously I'm going to feel harder" ... This is something I really used to work on a lot. When you're doing something like procrastinating, that's actually a fear-based thing. It doesn't even sound like it's procrastination on the gym. You went once and you tell yourself this story: "I should go to the gym." Here's the deal. You're probably not going to go to the gym if you're stressed because, shocking, exercise is a form of stress. If you have relationship stress, you have job stress, you have financial stress, you have a cold, you have toxins, you're eating bad food, you didn't get enough sleep or any of these other stressors ... Someone in your family died, you just moved, all the WHO list of top stressors. If those are going on, you know what your body needs? Recovery, not exercise.

I went through a period when I weighed 300 pounds where I went to the gym six days a week. I simply told myself "Look, the most important thing ..." This is serious motivation. "Most important thing I can think of. I don't want to have another knee surgery. I've had two knee surgeries. I'm 20-years-old. They told me I'll be lucky if I can walk normally after this one. The most important thing is recovery. I'm not going to have these sinus infections anymore. I'm not going to be fat." Six days a week, no matter if I sleep two hours a night or I slept 10 hours a night, no matter if I was sick, I was going to drag my ass to the gym and I did it. All I did was get strong, but I didn't recover. I actually got sicker even though I got stronger.

Here's the deal. It's okay if you don't go to the gym. It's truly okay. In fact in Head Strong, if you go for a walk for 20 minutes a day and that's all you do, that's one form of mitochondrial stimulation. The other form is once a week work out for 15 minutes really, really hard. That's a lot easier than the demand that you go to the gym some mysterious number of days. Most people will say

"I'm going to go to the gym everyday." Bad idea. You must recover. It's easier to make a habit that's daily which why you want to do that, but it doesn't work very well. Then you set a schedule. You put it on your calendar. You're like "I'm going to go to the gym twice a week," but quite often that doesn't work. Your best bet, have a trainer there. Well you have an appointment that you paid for and you've booked so you have to show up or have an appointment with a friend who's going to show up and work out with you. Stuff like that. Here's the deal. If you just roll out of bed and you just don't feel like it, take a deep breath and say "You know what? Today I'm too sick or I'm too tired. I didn't sleep last night." Instead of whacking myself over the head with stress that clearly my body doesn't want, I'm just going to skip it and that's okay.

Dr M. Atkinson: I really, really think the stress bit is so important. Here's the deal. When we're stressed, we revert to our default habits. It is really hard to change any kind of habits when you're in the stress so you have to be attending to your stress.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: That's the first thing. It's like "How can you make important decision and get clear about what habits that you want to build if you're stressed?" You can't so you've got to manage your stress first. Period. The other thing is that when you start thinking about behavior change, you've got to get really clear about why do I want to do this and how does this fit into the bigger picture of my life. It's like you made this idea that you want to go to the gym five times a week, but that time will take away time from something else. Always keep the bigger picture in mind, but get really clear about the why behind the habit as well. What is it in service of? Be really clear about it. What's the outcome that you're after?

As a general rule of thumb, we want to start with our biology because what you find is that as you start to manage your stress, feel more relaxed, experience great levels of energy, your whole neurology just kind of calms down. As you become more mindful, more present, habits naturally start to change. Sometimes all you need to do is choose one keystone habit that you attend to, and then it's much easier to build other habits on top of that.

So for example, I wake up in the morning. The first thing I do is rove and go up to my head to have a good old think about stuff. I just center myself in my belly, and I'll meditate for 10 minutes or so. It's not that long. Then I'll have some water. Then I'll take care of the kids. Then I'll take them to school. I'll come back. I'll spend 10, 20 minutes just mapping out my day. Then I'll check my emails. The keystone habit is the first thing I do when I wake up. If that's in place, I've trained it so that other habits naturally follow it.

Dave Asprey: This is why I don't check my emails in the morning.

Dr M. Atkinson: That's right. Now you know.

Dave Asprey: [inaudible 00:21:00] tricks. No. I bet the morning for you is like a different like mind timezones away. It doesn't matter.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah, but it is. What is does is like ... So you want to build habits on top of habits. If I wake up, I didn't do the centering and then mediation. Guess what happens? Everything else falls away. You want to stack habits on top of each other. Taking control of habits ... I was writing about this the other day for us to use. I said if you do not take control of your habits, you are a humanoid. You're not a human being. You're a humanoid. Why? Because you're acting out of your habits. Most of those habits, you're doing what you're doing because you've always done what you've done.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: You're doing what you've done probably because someone else told you to do it or you think you should be doing it or society tells you to do it. The gift of being a human being is you can choose your habits.

Dave Asprey: You can choose and you can also operationalize them. I build time into my calendar for everything, and I'm fortunate that I have an executive admin who helps me on that. One of my habits is I do what my calendar tells me next. It's a really powerful habit because every time you make a decision during the day, it takes away from your decision bank account. It takes a little bit of willpower to do it. So if I sit down and go "What should I do now? Should I go workout?" The answer is probably no. Here's what my calendar says.

My morning routine, I have young kids as well. I wake up and based on the power of when by Dr. Michael Breus, I'm what he calls a wolf. My natural most productive time, the time when I wrote Head Strong, I literally sat there and I wrote between 11:00 p.m. and like 5:00 a.m. Those are like the precious hours to me. My normal night is 11:00 p.m. until 2:00 a.m. where like the most ideas, the most creativity happens. 15% of us are wired that way, and it's actually not bad for me to stay up late. It's bad for me to wake up early. 15% of us are early birds. We call you the bad people.

Dr M. Atkinson: That's me, by the way. It's okay.

Dave Asprey: Mark. Here's what I learned-

Dr M. Atkinson: You were meaning to say something ...

Dave Asprey: After years of bio-hacking is that the early bird works for the late bird.

Dr M. Atkinson: That's what it was. Oh my gosh.

Dave Asprey: In this case you have to do work for Bulletproof. Thank you for working for Bulletproof.

Dr M. Atkinson: That's my pleasure.

Dave Asprey: Most of us are like normal circadian rhythm. For me, I did wake up at 5:00 a.m. and I played a doctor on TV. I played Dr. Mark because I woke up early. Anyway, I woke up early for two years at 5:00 a.m. In order to do that, I said "Look, I'm going to do this. I don't care how little sleep I get. This is a hard limit for me, and I'm going to do it every day." I did eventually get so tired that I'd have to go to bed earlier even though it wasn't natural to go to bed earlier. I would wake up and I would drink some green tea and I would meditate for about an hour and half. I found an hour of good meditation would replace two hours of sleep.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: This is actually ... I don't want to say documented, but I've heard from other advanced meditators and other various people that they have the same experience. I consider that to be true if you know how to meditate.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: I did it for two years, and then I had kids. I'm like "This isn't functional for me." What I do is I wake up at exactly the right time to make Bulletproof coffee and to give it to the kids and to give myself some. Then I drive the kids to school. I drink my coffee. I haven't done any meditating, but I did have a progressive wake up of my sleep tracking alarm so I never get jolted out of sleep. I know the absolute latest time I might wake up which is just enough time to get out of the door. I get family time in. The entire time my phone is on airplane mode. You cannot reach me. These are all designs. I don't have to think about any of this stuff. I know where the coffee is. I know where the coffeemaker is. It's all planned out. I know exactly how many minutes it takes to get to school. All that kind of stuff. The only thing I can't plan is whether the kids at the last minute are going "I have to go to the bathroom," and then they're late for school. But hey, I know that they can run in and get a note. It doesn't bother me. That whole thing requires no decisions at all.

Dr M. Atkinson: That's key because one of the worst things you can do if efficiency and productivity is important to you is to not plan your day out ahead of time. If you just show up then what you do will be kind of determined by kind of how you're feeling and what shows up on your emails. Before you know it, you're completely distracted. You've got to find out when your primetime is.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: You want to ring fence that primetime. My most creative time is between nine o'clock in the morning and midday. That is just when I'm in the zone and just doing whatever I need to do. After that it's like whatever I do is whatever I do. So you want to find out what your primetime is, and you want to plan as much ahead as you can so when you wake up in the morning, you know exactly what

you're going to be doing because you don't want to be making decisions throughout the day. You may have little bit of energy in the morning to make good decisions, but after midday or mid-afternoon your decision making effectiveness will go down considerably. We get decision fatigue. Right?

Dave Asprey:

Yeah. It's interesting because, for me, my most productive time isn't going to happen until a bit later in the day. On my calendar, what's next? It says upgrade time. So I drive home. I know what time I'm going to get home, and then I have Bulletproof Labs here. I have all these equipment. Now I could sit down and I could go "I wonder what I'll do today?" If you were just playing down it, there's a lot of stuff down there. I could do the VASPER which takes 21 minutes to replace two and half hours of cardio. I could do the machine that does intermittent hypoxic training which raises brain-derived neurotropic factor. I could do some neurofeedback.

I work with my lab assistant who's here in order to either ask him for advice or better yet to just have it scheduled out on the calendar so I know "All right, this day I'm going to do this." I still maintain the right ... "Look, oh I didn't sleep well last night. I don't feel like doing a workout. I'm going to do something more relaxing this morning. I'll do some electromagnetic frequencies." But I have a half hour set aside for upgrades. I will turn on my phone to look for urgent messages before I do my upgrade. After that, I'm like "All right, now it's time I start my calls or I start my meetings," but I have no idea what's happening because they're all pre-scheduled.

In your case, you've got to have it on your calendar and you need accountability on your calendar because the calendar removes decision making for you. Allowing yourself to make a decision, it's pretty clear based on your track record that you suck at making these decisions. It's okay, John. You're not good at making those decisions. You might become good at making those decisions, but right now you're not. So get help. It's okay. Make the calendar make the decision for you. Have a friend make the decision for you. Have your significant other make the decision for you. It's an incredible hack.

Dr M. Atkinson:

You can borrow other people's brains.

Dave Asprey:

Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson:

You can borrow other people's brains until yours comes back online.

Dave Asprey:

Yeah. Check this out. You have an internal resistance that's going on there. "Well if it's up to me, I'm going to do this." Well here's the deal. Just decide it's not up to you today. Make it up to someone else. As soon as you do that, all of the effort and struggle and weight that you feel goes away because since it's no longer up to your nervous system and those little bastard mitochondria trying to sabotage you. Once they realize that it's not up to them, they'll be like "Aw." Then you can just go do it. It is shocking. Just call up a friend and say "You know

what? I'm going to work out one day this week or two days." Whatever your goal is. "I just want you to tell when. Will you tell me that morning I'm going to work out that day?" Seriously, all the procrastination, all the resistance, poof. It just goes away.

Dr M. Atkinson:

Yeah. I'll give you another way of working with habits. This works for some people, not for others, and ultimately you got to find something that works for you. This is called using micro habits. It's really, really clever. Say for example you wanted to get fit and say you had this idea in your head you want to do 20 pushups a day. What you do is you make a micro habit which is like a microcosm of that so the goal would do two pushups a day. Here's the deal. You choose a goal that is small enough so you have no reason not to do it. It's like anyone can do two pushups a day. So you just decide when you're going to do it, and here's the thing. You start doing the pushups and because you're down there, you do more. You start overachieving.

What we found with micro habits is that you can set micro habits for anything. Say for example meditation. Now a lot of people intend to meditate. What they find is they put 10, 20 minutes aside and a week they're not meditating anymore. What you do is you do a micro habit meditation. You do one minute a day. It looks like this. You sit yourself down and you go "Okay, I'm going to meditate for one minute." Everyone can pretty much do one minute. You're there. It's one minute. And you know what? You kind of get into the hang of it, and if you stay a little bit longer. What you do is ... The key with habits is consistency and repetition. If you just set the habit of meditating one minute a day for every single day for seven days, by the time you get to seven days you've developed the habit of meditation and then gradually start to extend it. So micro habits works really well for a lot of people. What's cool about it is there's no resistance inside.

Dave Asprey:

Here's the gym version of the micro habit. Tell yourself "I don't have to workout, but I'm going to go to the gym." You get dressed. Maybe that's all you do. I just want to get dressed for the gym. That might be enough of micro habit, but if you just drive to the gym, say "I'm going to go to the parking lot, and then I don't have to workout." You might drive home. Better yet, "I'm going to go to the parking lot. I'm just going to walk in. I'm going to check in. At least I get credit for that. Then I'm just going to leave if I want to." It's shocking how the resistance is gone by the time you get there so you're tricking yourself, but it's a micro habit. It's like I don't have to do the whole thing. It's too much effort to do the whole thing. I'm just going to show up. Just showing up sometimes is all it takes.

Dr M. Atkinson:

Yeah. I'll give you another one. So this is for coaches who talk about building their business, and you're networking. Some people really struggle with this idea of networking and reaching out and sending emails out to people. So the micro habit is all you've got to do is just send one email a day introducing

yourself and reaching out to network with someone. What we found with coaches is everyone can do one email a day.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: What happens is it kind of builds momentum. That's the idea of a micro habit. It's repetitious. It's consistent. It builds momentum and then as you build confidence with it then maybe you do two a day or three a day. It's built organically without effort, strain. It doesn't require motivation, doesn't require willpower. It kind of bypasses all of that. It's just really cool.

Another cool thing is what's cool ... If-then scenarios. What you do is you mentally rehearse possible ways that life may get in the middle of or in the way of you doing your habits. Say for example you want to go for a run and it rains often wherever you go. What tends to happen is you wake up, you hear the rain, and you think "Not today." If running's important to you for whatever reason, what you do is ahead of time you do an if-then scenario. The if-then scenario is "Okay, if I wake up and it's raining, despite the rain I will put my trainers on and go for a run." You mentally rehearse yourself doing it ahead of time. Here's what happens then. In the morning when you wake up, you hear the rain. The brain engages with the mental rehearsal pattern, and that mental rehearsed pattern meets the rain. You just actually find your body getting changed and going for a run. You can use mental rehearsal if-then scenarios that kind of bypass. That works really well because you can think ...

Then when you decide there is certain habits that are really important to you then you want to ring fence them. These are the kind of nonnegotiable things. For example, if you want to develop quality time with your children, you want to ring fence the habit of when they come home from school give them an undivided 20 minutes of your time, 10 minutes of your time. It's got to be quality time. The reason I call it ring fence. It means it's nonnegotiable. It means that if something comes up, a call or something, the call has to wait.

Dave Asprey: Just put your phone on airplane mode.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah. There you go so no one can contact you because it's important enough you got to ring fence ... You got to protect it. Then you know that when they come back, you give your full time. If you have children, quality time is just the most precious thing you can give to them. Then you kind of come away and you develop this kind of sense "Wow, when I really care about why a habit is important, I see the benefit because habits are built on repetition but also reward as well." When you do a habit that's important, allow yourself to feel this sense of accomplishment as well because that also reinforces the habit pattern as well.

If you're listening to this, get really clear about what habits you want to stop, what habits you want to start. That clarity is really important. Get clear about

the why. Turn them into a micro habit. Ask for help. Get an accountability kind of person. There's one thing I just want to mention. There's a difference between a habit and a compulsion and addiction. This is really important. A habit you can have control and influence over and it's pretty easy to do that. A compulsion and addiction has a hold over you. Despite your best intentions, it keeps coming back and you really struggle to do anything about it.

Dave Asprey: Right.

Dr M. Atkinson: Now both myself and Dave, we recorded a whole Q&A on addiction. If you're struggling with a compulsion, you have to have a certain kind of food you have to eat. You have problems with alcohol. You have problems with spending money. Whatever it may be. Take a look at that Q&A on addiction.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: There's a lot of stuff for that. What we're talking about now is just habits. Habits are just something that's automatic. It's an automatic pattern. It can be ... You can have not just behavioral patterns, but you can have emotional habits. So you see someone and you always have the same emotional reaction. You can have somatic habits which are really interesting which is certain situations you immediately tense up. You could have relational habits which is your default may be to criticize your partner.

As you commit to being more mindful, living with more awareness, you want to start noticing patterns and habits. Do those habits serve your vision for yourself and for your life? Or are they anti your vision? What you tend to find is there's a whole bunch of conflicting habits there. You may do certain things that bring out the best in you and a whole bunch of things that don't. So you want to systematically go around your life and look at relationships. You want to look at your health, your energy, your performance, your work, and just say "What habits are working for me already? What do I need to work on?" You just break them down and you do one or two ... When you do micro habits, you can do two or three at a time. You just systematically do them. If you don't have a system like that, it's not going to change.

Dave Asprey: The system is the most important thing for me. There's no thought therefore there's no decision therefore there's no resistance.

Dr M. Atkinson: There you go.

Dave Asprey: I just know whatever is in the phone I do that next. I know that I have a team of people of follow my rules, my cognitive rational well-planned strategic rules about how I want to spend my time. They're going to allocate the time really well because if I allocate the time really well, I might just look at Facebook all day. For me, it wouldn't happen because of all the 40 years of zen brain hacking. I wouldn't get stuck in a "I'm a bad person" loop, but for a lot of my life, I'd have

been like "Wow, I could have done so much more today. I just wasted all this time. It's probably because I'm weak. It's probably because I'm not good enough. It's because I'm a failure."

All that inner critic stuff that can be erased or just turned off, for most people it's not turned off so all that stuff gets triggered. The truth of the matter is that you probably put yourself in a set of failure for going to the gym or doing anything else that wasn't what gives you the most energy. It's because you put yourself in charge of deciding to do it right then instead of putting yourself in charge of doing it another time or better yet having help. It's one of the reasons that even having a virtual assistant for a small amount of time can be an absolute rocket ship especially for like ADD entrepreneurs because you have help deciding what you're going to do right now. It's not that you don't know what you're supposed to do. You don't know the most effective thing to do which includes going to the gym on a regular basis for your physical hardware. It's just that in the heat of the moment you probably won't do that. It's okay. It's like get someone else to do that.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah. Kind of setting up that process, having a system that kind of works for you, reviewing whether it works for you, and also just kind of managing conflicting habits as well. Focus on the keystone habits. Remember the keystone habit is the one habit that has a massive influence on other habits as well. For example when people start exercising, they tend to find that they hydrate themselves better, they eat kind of better food.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: So you want to put your energy and focus on that. I just noticed you mentioned about refined sugar and it lasted 48 hours. If you have sugar sensitivity or the more extreme sugar addiction, that's a challenging one. That's why the biology is so important with habits. You want to start getting yourself a nutritional ketosis, taking the brain octane increasing your healthy fat, the fiber reducing your sugars, and you just feel so much better.

Dave Asprey: I feel like we have a whole other episode. We've focused this one on habits on John's question, and we've got another question about energy. Let's cover the sugar addiction part and the energy question in our next Q&A episode. On this one, there's one more: the flip side of habits which will take up the rest of the time we've got for this episode.

That is my buddy, Maneesh Sethi from Pavlok. This is [inaudible 00:39:04] Sethi's brother. You guys may have heard of both of them. Maneesh was, I think, the only guy to turn down funding on Shark Tank. He did this basically because he didn't want to work with a certain investor there in a way that was - Maneesh, you're probably listening - shocking and definitely got you some press. What Pavlok is is a little device that shocks you. You wear a little wristband, and anytime you do something that you wish you hadn't have done,

basically a bad habit or you give into a craving, you push the little button and it gives you a mild electrical shock. Cognitively, it's not that big of a shock, but your nervous system hates the shock. Pretty soon it stops having an attraction to the behavior that doesn't work well.

In Maneesh's case, I think he's a bit of a masochist. I don't know. He also was first famous because he hired someone off of Craigslist to come to his house and sit there and slap him when he would go on Facebook when he was supposed to be working. Like literally his entire habit breaking protocol was based on negative reinforcement. That's not a good move. But a lot of us ... You're grandmother might have told you "If you do something you don't like, snap a rubber band on your wrist."

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah, they used rubber bands.

Dave Asprey: The idea here is that your nervous system was doing something that you didn't want it to do, and it was probably an unconscious behavior. That kind of thing can bring it into consciousness. Knowing Maneesh well, I know that he's had people stop smoking in a week. He's had people break really destructive habits because when you pair the destructive habit with a super mild electrical shock - it's not that uncomfortable - it does something at a very low level so the part of you that would have gotten in the way doesn't get in the way.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: He even has it set up so that there's a URL you can go to to shock him. If he says he's going to meet you at the gym and he doesn't show up, he'll get shocked. His buddy knows he'll get shocked. I don't believe that it's in your best interests to set yourself up with an aversion response to create positive habits, but pairing negative habit with an aversive response can be a powerful way-

Dr M. Atkinson: It can be.

Dave Asprey: I would be careful about that because what you end up doing is inducing mild trauma in the body every time you do something you don't like. That's sort of like training a dog by beating it all the time.

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: That's not okay for your nervous system, but if you're doing something and you feel like it's a really strong addictive thing, I would not be opposed to trying out a Pavlok. I have one. The problem is I don't have bad habits anymore that I want to break. I'm like "What do I do with this thing?"

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah. Kind of just thinking about that, there is another way of doing this which is that you can take time to reflect through and think through the consequence, the longterm consequence of the specific habit.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: That's kind of quite powerful. So say if your habit was you eat sugar all the time, what you do is you actually just take time to reflect on "If I continue to eat sugar all the time, what's the consequence in my life right now? I feel shitty. My energy is low. I feel grumpy. It's on my mind all the time." Then the longterm consequence is "I put weight on, and when I have sugar my energy is low and that affects my performance at work. I become a bit of a grumpy partner." So you actually spend time getting in touch with the pain around the habit. That's a way of deconditioning yourself as well.

Dave Asprey: Just to feel into the pain?

Dr M. Atkinson: To feel into the pain of it. Say if you have a habit of criticizing your partner, in the moment it just kind of comes up. You think nothing of it, but actually if you lean into the consequence to the relationship and the impact it has on them, another human being, and you connect with the pain of it, sometimes that can just help to loosen that habit a little bit.

Dave Asprey: But what if your partner really deserves it? Now we're both in trouble.

Dr M. Atkinson: There you go. Real big trouble.

Dave Asprey: Don't listen to this episode, okay, Dr. [inaudible 00:43:16].

Dr M. Atkinson: Then what you do is you loosen that habit and then we know appreciations are the antidote to that. Then so you set yourself the habit of ... You just start with a micro habit. I'm just going to do one appreciation to my partner each day, but when I do it I'm going to be really present to it. I'm going to be sincere about it, and I'm going to look them in the eyes. What it does so in the kind of moment you've got in touch with the pain around existing habit, and you've set yourself with a micro habit to start doing the antidote.

Dave Asprey: In the case of going to the gym for John who asked the original question ... Okay, when you don't exercise, what is the pain you experience? You have lower energy. You are probably crankier. You have muffin top, whatever it is you don't like. Instead of thinking about it or visualizing it, actually you go into the body. This is something that in the 40 years of zen, its a core part of the neurofeedback training. There's a visceral sensation. Imagine what your skin feels like when you're weak or imagine what your knees feel like when they get creaky if that's something that happens if you don't exercise. Whatever the symptom of no exercise is, imagine waking up and just feeling crappy. It's the sensation that you want to trigger because your nervous system doesn't care about your thoughts. It only cares about sensations, and you can trick it by turning on a sensation that isn't really there. Then it's like "I don't want that." That creates the own aversive signal, but you have to be willing and able to do that.

Dr M. Atkinson: And a little hack to that is can exaggerate it in your mind. You can exaggerate putting yourself a lot of weight on. Just imagining just going kind of crazy and then feeling the consequence of that in your body.

Dave Asprey: Yeah. Like you can't see your feet?

Dr M. Atkinson: Yeah, exactly. It's affecting everything.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: Actually just go deep into it, and just breath slow as you do it and you get in touch with the pain around it. Basically what we're saying is if you don't have a system for dealing with habits, habits will be in charge of you.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Dr M. Atkinson: Create a system. Experiment with what works. You can get in touch with the pain. You can create micro habits. You can do if-then scenarios. You got to get clear about what habits are most important and why. Do a couple of habits at a time. Work with a keystone habit. Share on Facebook how you get on with that because all of us need to work with our habits. It's one of the foundational skills for high performance, but eventually when you get to the place you just start cleaning up your habits. It's just most of the time you're kind of showing up as a healthy high performance human being. You're in your best self, and you don't have to work so hard. This is the thing. You don't have to work hard to change habits. Do not rely on motivation. You don't have to rely on willpower. You just have to hack it. You have to be kind of skillful with it, and then you can just organically change habits that matter to you.

Dave Asprey: All right, John. I hope that answered your question for you. You don't need to deal with the frustration and demoralizing things here. This is a behavior that your body is actually doing to protect you. It's driven from a very low level, and we give you a bunch of techniques there. If it doesn't work someday, you don't need to feel frustrated and demoralized by it. It's like the technique didn't work. You'll do something different tomorrow, but you're going to hack this.

Now if you enjoyed today's episode, check out Head Strong at orderheadstrong.com. We talk about some of those mitochondrial beginnings in that. In the next Q&A episode, we're going to answer the second half of John's question around sugar cravings, and we're going to talk about another question that has to do with energy and mood and relationships and libido. Things like that. So it's going to be a fascinating next episode. I look forward to seeing you there. Head on over to iTunes and leave a five-star rating if you'd be so kind to do that. Or maybe six or seven stars. Just kidding. I think five stars is all they've go. But when you do that, it actually helps other people find the show. If this is valuable to you, thanks for listening and thanks for sharing with others.