



## **Expert Voice - Vanita Dahia CONTENT EDIT.mp3we**

**Victor** Hello, I'm Victor Tuballa and this is Expert Voice. Eagle Natural Health's podcast and your partner in natural health well-being.

**Victor** Joining us on the line today from Melbourne is Vanita Dahia, compounding pharmacist, naturopath, clinical nutritionist, mental health nutritionist, ayurvedic consultant and fellow in anti-ageing and regenerative medicine. Vanita has extensive experience as a pharmacist in both conventional and integrative medicine and has worked in community and hospital pharmacy, as well as in the pharmaceutical industry in both Australia and South Africa. Having owned and managed one of the oldest traditional compounding pharmacies in Australia for 16 years, Vanita is a wealth of information on bio-identical hormone replacement therapy, alternative cancer therapies, custom tailored nutritional medicine and cosmeceutical skin therapy. Vanita is also a published author with two books available for reading, titled *Alchemy of the Mind* and *Alchemy of Amino Acids*. And I'm pleased to welcome Vanita to today's podcast. Vanita, thank you very much for your time today and welcome to Expert Voice.

**Vanita** Thank you so much, Victor. Really pleased to be here and partake in this podcast.

**Victor** We're going to be talking about a very important topic that is relevant to all of us. And given that I'm now in my mid-40s, it's an area that interests me personally. That is healthy ageing, which also includes approaches to anti-ageing. When I personally think about healthy ageing or anti-ageing, I think about some of the people who I see, particularly in the gym where I see men and women in their 70s doing bench presses and doing squats, even RPM cycling classes or boxing classes. I think about the British Indian gentleman by the name of Fauja Singh, who apparently ran a marathon after turning 100 and even some elderly friends of mine who are, again, in a similar age group, reciting poems that are paragraphs long. Their cognitive function is still razor sharp. I think to myself that's where I want to be.

Let's start with this area of study of anti-ageing medicine. Could you take us through what anti-ageing medicine involves and what are the hallmarks of this practice?

**Vanita** People are in their hundreds and they're still performing amazingly well, and that purely indicates that their biological age is in line with their chronological age. Or they are even improving the biological age relative to their chronological age. You've got to start at a younger age, you can't start when you're a hundred years old pretending to do a marathon. Anti-ageing medicine to me is absolutely paramount. Some people actually get themselves Botox, they'll start to look younger but it all starts on the inside. It's actually a slowing and preventing and reversing the ageing process. Early detection is so important in identifying any of these age-related illnesses. We don't have to be ill in order to maintain anti-ageing and regenerative medicine. The idea is anti-ageing medicine is really a multidisciplinary area of optimising so many aspects of our life including diet, lifestyle, and exercise to optimize all of your physiology.

The practice of anti-ageing medicine is a holistic approach. Anti-ageing medicine identifies the metabolic blocks within mitochondrial function. It's the mitochondria – these are the little energy organelles within each cell – that make this wonderful stuff call ATP, and many of us don't have enough of the stuff.

We need our sun, our plants, our soil, our water; it makes beautiful pumpkins. It's what we call photosynthesis. The same thing happens in our body and it's called the Krebs cycle. We need the Krebs cycle to be optimized. We need to stimulate the anti-ageing process by understanding how the body is producing this energy. And integrative practitioners know this stuff. They know the biochemistry to support that. They also know their genetics. Because we know if you've come down with a whole bunch of bad genetics from Mum and Dad... and that buggers up things like methylation. It affects every biochemical pathway.

So integrative practitioners, anti-ageing medicines understands and correlates these polymorphisms with longevity in the whole ageing process. There's so many biomarkers and hallmarks of anti-ageing and we can go on with it but it is important to identify or rather optimize the physiology. And we can do that with great science now.

**Victor** And that's the beautiful thing about where we're at when it comes to both Complementary and Integrative medicine that we are approaching it from a holistic point of view because it's not just about how we absorb nutrients, it's also about, of course, targeting the areas of the body particularly when it comes to energy. Focusing on the mitochondria and like you said, it was such a

wonderful thing to mention because our poor old mitochondria, they're the ones that are generating the energy and if we're not supporting mitochondria then we've lost half the battle, isn't it? When it comes to dealing with fatigue and as we say fatigue is such a, such a major issue alongside stress. And of course, as we know, digestion, stress, immune function and so forth can all contribute to a decrease in optimal health, which as we know, and as you mentioned, can be an exacerbating factor in terms of the ageing process. And the idea is we want to try and target those so we can slow the progress of ageing. Fascinating stuff.

My next question to you Vanita is, in your work as a compounding pharmacist, you're known to value the principle of optimal integrative health to empower and heal your patients. When it comes to healthy ageing how does this approach play out in the clinical setting?

**Vanita** When clients present these days, it's just not a common cough and cold. I find lately, there is such a huge statistic of chronic, complex inflammatory conditions. Today we call it SIRS, we call it Lyme disease, we call it all sorts of endocrine dysfunction, adrenal dysfunction. As a client walks in the clinical door, we need to, as integrative practitioners, identify the drivers, the underlying positive factors that are causing all of their symptoms. As compounding pharmacist, I actually, as well as a naturopath, I tend to lean towards the natural medications.

There are people who have sleep issues. The first thing that we need to establish, we can't just give them a sleep pill. We need to find out: is there a problem with onset of sleep or is there a problem with maintenance of sleep? Onset is driven by serotonin and melatonin, which is a little hormone found in the pineal gland. But then maintenance of sleep is associated with GABA. And GABA is such an important neurotransmitter. Guess what? Most of it is made in the gut. So, if GABA is deficient, that patient's going to feel anxious, going to feel irritated and then to get this whole conversation going, ruminating about all their worries for the day. But if their gut is impaired, then you cannot produce enough of these inhibitory neurotransmitters like serotonin and GABA. And if you're not stimulating the vagus nerve, the communication highway between the gut and the brain, then that in itself is going to affect how much of these neurotransmitters actually get to the brain.

We therefore need to identify the drivers of all these inflammatory conditions or any disease. It doesn't even matter what it is.

As a compounding pharmacist, as a naturopath, as an integrated practitioner, what we need to do is find the underlying drivers. If stress is driving it, identify the cortisol DHEA, understand at which stage of adrenal dysfunction they're at - understand the actual drivers. What's their age? If they

are menopausal age, they might have hormonal dysregulation. If they are on prescription medications they might have, perhaps neurotransmitter imbalances and so forth.

When we can identify drivers rather than band aid, the end product symptom we're then truly talking about the integrative or the holistic model. The great thing with compounding as well, not only pharmacies but naturopaths can also do this very effectively. They can tailor a treatment regime individually for the patient based on the clinical setting.

**Victor** Yes, absolutely. And I just love before how you spoke about the whole issue of sleep because sleep as we know, it is a major issue where people are as you said, are either struggling to get to sleep and or maintaining sleep. But I love the fact that you were able to mention there, what are the hormones and neurotransmitters that are involved in that process? So again, just reiterating, so you spoke about the serotonin when it comes to getting to sleep and then you spoke about the GABA when it comes to maintaining sleep. And that's fantastic because again, we're looking at a situation where we spoke about the gut and again, not everyone would think about treating the gut when it comes to sleep.

**Victor** The other important part there is the adrenals, as you said before.

**Vanita** Absolutely. There's a plethora of information on the healthy microbiome.

**Vanita** We constantly talk about a healthy microbiome. And most people have got issues. They have constipation, diarrhoea, they have IBS and so many people on PPIs these days, Proton Pump Inhibitors. And it's well known in the literatures. As a matter of fact, in the recent study, the doctors have been informed that doctors should not be dosing their patients up with more than two weeks of Proton Pump Inhibitors because they suppress hydrochloric acid production. This is the good stuff, the good assets in your gut, your brain cells in the stomach, that actually release hydrochloric acid to break down and to set aside foods so that the good stuff can actually be digested and metabolized. If we are unable to do that, we've got a lot of problems. We're suppressing the capacity for the body to actually produce a healthy microbiota by taking drugs. We can talk endlessly about all that, but it's so important.

**Victor** And on that note with the PPIs, my concern now, of course microbiome is just one, that's just one factor. My concern with people on long term PPI is, when you're suppressing that acid

production from the parietal cells, you're then suppressing the ability for the body to digest protein properly. And what do we need for serotonin? Tryptophan. Tryptophan is one of the amino acids derived from protein. If we're not digesting our proteins properly then how on earth are we going to then extract the Tryptophan to help us produce healthy levels of serotonin? That's my concern and, again, it's I guess it's a good question to ask whenever you're treating someone with anxiety or maybe even depression. What's their digestion like? Are they taking PPIs or similar sorts of medication? It's a very valid point.

**Victor** In terms of ageing and disease, there are three key causes that have been identified. You mentioned one of them before, inflammation. But there's also oxidative stress and also immune dysfunction. Could you take us through these causes and what the exogenous or external influences are and what the endogenous or internal influences are?

**Vanita** As you mentioned, there are three. There are probably many more key causes, but inflammation is so, so common. Cardiovascular incident, diabetes, obesity. It's this whole process of ageing with inflammation. However, inflammation also supports and aids wound healing. Continuous inflammation is a big issue. It starts the immune system, mistakenly attacks its own healthy tissue and it leads to infections, injuries and so forth.

The endogenous, causative, underlying factors are what inflammation does on the inside, in that it upsets the t-helper cells called the cytokines. This is our own natural defence mechanism.

If you've got an imbalance of your t-helper cells, you're going to get all sorts of inflammatory conditions. They could be food allergies, food intolerances or it could be chronic pain. To reduce that level of inflammation we need a variety of herbs, of foods such as turmeric. There's a lot more work being done on curcumin, turmeric, ginger, devil's claw, cat's claw and Boswellia's. As a matter of fact, there was a study on Boswellia and compared that to non-sterile and inflammatories and it compared favourably. Another study by Kang in the *Natural Product Communications Journal* in 2014 showed that Neem, an Indian herb, together with liquorice is more effective than Ibuprofen in suppressing, your lipopolysaccharide or LPS-induced inflammation.

There are some really great studies to show that amazing herbs can be more powerful than the damage that a lot of these non-steroidal anti-inflammatories can do.

**Victor** I might add to that too, probably safer to take long term as well, right?

**Vanita** Absolutely, because they don't have the side effects, or the gastrointestinal side effects of your Ibuprofen and any non-steroidal anti-inflammatories.

Let's talk about the second driver that is the underlying cause and effect, and that's oxidative stress. We often talk about antioxidants. Antioxidants are found in our vegetables and our fruits.

But oxidative stress is really a presentation of free radicals. They are really highly unstable molecules that are naturally formed when we produce free radicals, when we exercise, for instance. And it's usually done when the body converts food to energy, lactic acid is formed.

Which is good, as it means that our bodies are exercising and detoxifying at the same time.

But when oxidative stress causes oxidative damage and it affects our DNA, the exogenous factors that can damage our DNA or oxidative damage, or everything that we consider as a stimulant like cigarette smoke, air pollution. We're breathing toxic air a lot of the time, eating processed foods which contain free radicals that cause oxidative stress. It's an excess of free radicals. These damage the structures inside the brain cells and cause damage in every cell.

They can cause damage in your brain cells and increases the risks of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. This oxidative stress alters these very essential proteins called amyloid beta proteins.

They form plaques inside the neurons which doesn't allow a person to think clearly, as the neurons don't function effectively. It damages every open system, not just the brain.

Antioxidants are so important because they help delay the whole damage that these oxidants cause. Oxidants are actually free radicals. They help fight ageing and inflammatory conditions, whether it's cardiovascular disease, chronic diseases or even cancer.

The third drive or causative factor is the immune system. We all catch cold and flu and we all constantly vaccinating ourselves against everything. Our immune system gets compromised, and the body attacks and damages its own tissue.

The worst part is that never ever before in history have we seen such a exacerbation of autoimmune diseases. In Europe, chronic fatigue, Europe's SLE, MND, ALS, all of these chronic and thyroiditis, chronic autoimmune conditions are really the body attacking itself. The body cannot fight these invaders, and then we become vulnerable to infections.

There is now pure evidence to show that they're actually auto-immune triggers of bacteria, and that opportunistic bacteria that have been implicated in chronic conditions.

But we're so fortunate. We've got a huge armoury of antioxidants in our food, in fruits and vegetables. We've got really great supplements such as your mushrooms cordyceps, coriolus, reishi - they are amazing immune stimulants.

Coriolus exerts not only an immune regulatory effect but it also has pre-biotic effects and it modulates the gastrointestinal integrity within the gut. It puts back that lovely mucus in the gut so that it protects the good stuff from the bad stuff, so that you don't have the leaky gut.

There are things like reishi mushrooms. They protect against impaired gastric permeability. Those type junctions are not opened, so that you don't get all the toxic stuff that's happening in the gut being absorbed into the bloodstream and making the bloodstream more toxic. There are some beautiful herbs like Astragalus, which is very good to enhance macrophages. It has its B cell and T cell activities, at least on your lymphocytes, so it's a defence against your pathogens.

There was a double-blind placebo-controlled study of 300-odd children. This was published in *Pediatrics* in 2009 by Ley and his team. They studied probiotics such as Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium, which are found in our foods. They used that for six months in these children. They found that they had a reduced incidence of cold and flu and they decreased the antibiotic use by 84.2 percent.

**Victor** That's massive.

**Vanita** That is massive! This was done over the six-month period and it was compared to placebo. We're throwing so many antibiotics at children. We need to put back those nutrients. We need to put those fermented foods back in our system. We need to have half a cup of kefir yogurt each day. We need to go back to our ethnic diets as best we can.

**Victor** That's important to know. There is also concerns about antibiotic resistance. If the antibiotics aren't going to be doing their job, then what else have we got? It's important to try and lay those foundations first. One of those important foundations you spoke about being the probiotics, for example. To lay that foundation, to strengthen immune function, strengthen the gut. And it goes a long way to improving the health of your children, and adults as well.

I also loved how you spoke about antioxidants and how we can easily access them from fruits and vegetables, of course there are wonderful supplements too. Turmeric is a wonderful antioxidant source as well. Just by accessing and consuming those fruits and vegetables, a nice easy way of getting those antioxidants in is to reduce the damage that these free radicals cause.

What role does diet and nutrition play in the ageing process, and more importantly, how can we best optimize our diets to support healthy ageing?

**Vanita** It brings us to the question of what is the ideal diet?

**Victor** The eternal question.

**Vanita** Each day there is a new fad out there. I often talk to my patients about what an ideal diet is. They know what to eat, most of them know exactly what they should do, but a healthy eating pattern must be aimed at maintaining good health and wellbeing. They should incorporate everything that is fresh and wholesome, whatever is in season. Most people do not eat a huge pile of veggies each day. It's very important to have a palm sized piece of protein each day. And two litres of water each day. Also, at least three tablespoons of good oils. You can use coconut oil in your rice. You can use olive oil over pasta. You can use flaxseed oil or hemp seed oil in your smoothies.

Eating your vegetables and fruits are probably the most important things in a good diet. We've got to learn to limit the amount of red meat and particularly sugar. Sugar is a big one. Sugar is actually hidden in so many foods.

If we are looking at a diabetic patient, we make sure that they have an optimal diet, and also incorporate foods that stimulate the utilization and the uptake of glucose into the cells and prevent that glucose being recirculated. From a food and nutrition point of view, a great support for a diabetic is increased cinnamon. Just having a cup of cinnamon tea a couple of times a day is ideal.

Use fenugreek. Fenugreek is beautiful. You can get it in the same form as frozen spinach.

Bitter melon is bitter, but it's really useful.

We've heard of intermittent fasting; we've heard of the ketogenic diet. We've heard of specialized diets such as your Fodmaps or GAPS diet. There are so many various diets out there and patients are confused.

I often tend to ensure that for good ageing and for good health, make sure that the food is in season. Make sure that you're eating food in accordance with your ethnic background. If you find patients, people who migrate from another country, suddenly they blow up because they are not used to eating the foods that we have here. Stick to the diet that you're genetically attuned to.

Make sure that the vegetables are high in your diet, and we don't do enough of this, along with fruits, water, and oils. We need the good oils for myelogenesis to get the brain functioning again.

Keeping the principles as simple as possible is very important.

**Victor** Now, onto gut health. We know that it's an increasingly important area of focus when it comes to general health. And, of course, even in healthy ageing. Could you please outline the role of the gut and the microbiome in the ageing process. What is the role of pre and probiotics?

**Vanita** Our gut is our large and small colon. It's miles and miles of colon and it's lined with all these very good important microbes. The job of probiotics is to break down the fecal matter. The job of the prebiotics is to ensure that there's a really good mucous lining around the inner walls of the colon. It's just one cell structure that separates the inner and the outer world - the soldier in the gut is called Secretory IgA. It lives within the gastric mucosa. What it does it recognizes the food that you're taking in as nutrients and it opens the door and it says, 'Off you go! Go and feed the body, go and get absorbed into the bloodstream and go and produce some ATP in the mitochondria.'

If that nutrient is recognized as an allergen, Secretory IgA is so smart, it's scavenges and it is excreted. But if your brain says, 'Oh no! I'm still going to eat that particular food', whether it be bread or whatever it is, Secretory IgA dies down and then the mucus lining starts, the barrier wall starts to break down. And this is what is absorbed and that is what elicits and histaminic response. This is why some people get allergies. They get colds, gets flus, they get itchy eyes, and so forth and that's all because you've broken down the soldiers in the gut which is your Secretory IgA. You've disturbed the balance of the microbiota.

Therefore, we need to use the pre- and the probiotics to ensure that we are maintaining optimal immune regulation in the gut. You can also use microbiome enhancing foods. Amazing stuff like aloe vera, noni juice, your fermented foods - kimchi, kefir and supplement-wise, Arabinogalactans. There is also lactoferm, lactoperoxidase, slippery elm, and marshmallow, which are brilliant and support for the gut.

If you're feeling bloated, these are the armoury you would need. Your pre- and your probiotics. When we put them together, we call them symbiotic. They're both symbionts and they also need to rectify the pathobionts.

Anything that is pathogenic to the body, whether it be bacteria or fungi, parasites, viruses, when they are pathogenic, they do need to be addressed.

**Victor** In terms of specific nutrients, what in your opinion are the best nutrients that would best support healthy ageing and more importantly what are the best foods that contain such nutrients?

**Vanita** Most of us are tending towards eating foods that are more conducive to being wholesome and organic. But a lot of us don't tend to do so. We might do that for a short period of time, and then we'll go out and get a takeaway because life is just far too busy. This is why it's not only important to ensure that we're eating the right foods, but we're also preparing the foods correctly. In Ayurvedic medicine, or any medicine, it's considered a very nurturing thing to prepare your foods: freshly prepared, freshly cut, freshly cooked. Unfortunately, due to the way we live today, we're now having takeaways and pre-prepared meals.

This is one of the reasons why we might need to consider nutrient's exogenous supplementation, so that we are able to top up what is missing in the body.

Each person is different. Does this person have enough protein, which is important for muscle function; do they have nutrients for cognitive health.

As cognitive memory declines, nutrients will change. We will need to incorporate herbs, in addition to your foods, that will actually improve mental health. Not just high levels of antioxidants, but putting resveratrol into the body, such as a glass of wine - a glass of wine is really good. A little bit of cocoa is really good for the body, but not a whole box of chocolates and neither not a whole bottle of wine.

That's the reason why we need to consider some of the various herbs that are available. In cognition decline, you can use bilberry, bacopa, ginkgo, lion's mane, or lithuania. These are really powerful herbs. Vitamins are equally important too.

You're looking at a depressed patient. You've got to put the co-factors, the methylation co-factors into the system. Otherwise, the body is not going to be able to reduce those neurotransmitters.

We know that we need protein. Protein plus the co-factors are needed to manufacture neurotransmitters.

A really good balance of food is important, but your supplementation is equally important and it's available in so many forms. If you can get it in food, do it in food first. Where it's not available in foods, or it's not possible to take any foods, then get hold of your herbal interventions, vitamins, or minerals. Discuss this with your integrative health practitioner.

**Victor** What is the role of the practitioner in integrative medicine and how can we derive best value from the practitioner-patient relationship?

**Vanita** I think it's very important to ensure that the client actually seeks a practitioner who is well-versed. Most health practitioners are well educated and well-versed to unscramble all the garbage

that's on the internet. But more importantly, that they have studied up on many modalities within their medical paradigm.

A naturopath, for example, is well-versed in diet, lifestyle, exercise, herbal interventions, and biochemistry. It's really helpful for our health to get to a health practitioner who has actually studied. Don't go to Doctor Google because you're going to get one view. You're not going to get a balanced view.

The average GP and pharmacist in their schooling had very minimal exposure to basic nutritional lectures in our courses. You can't blame them but that's what they got taught.

Naturopaths are taught towards this, day in and day out, for full five years. Because they are well-versed in their biochemistry, they understand how to identify issues. Through pathology testing, they take the time go through their entire history in a clinical setting, understand what's happening to the patient in terms of genetic predispositions, the family history, their own history, their own diets, and get them disallowed diet diaries. And that's the role that the practitioner takes.

An ideal practitioner will look at your health from in its entirety and connect the dots. If you've got a headache: where is that headache coming from? Is it coming from a hormonal dysregulation? Is it only during periods that you have a headache, or is it causing stomach upset? Is the gut affected, or is that associated with a retrograded liver toxicity? An integrative practitioner, whether it's a naturopath, nutritionist, or a chiropractor, they are educated and these avenues with Integria, with Eagle, we have so many amazing, a plethora of information and a plethora of great health practitioners who are able to help clients in unscrambling and identifying the optimal health outcomes for them.

**Victor** I echo your statements there, Vanita, about the role of a naturopath. Being one myself, and there are so many nutritionists, medical herbalists, chiropractors, and even integrative doctors that are embracing all of this. By looking at not just the disease itself, but looking at the causes, not just the symptoms, doing pathology testing where necessary. This anti-ageing space is truly fascinating, and we're lucky to live in a time where scientific advances in this area can start benefiting everyone. Why start when you're 80 or 90 or 100? Start now. I always say, whether you're nine or 90 start anyway. You might as well get the ball rolling so you do have a greater chance of not only longevity but a very healthy and lively longevity. We can live to our maximum and still be enjoying life. Vanita, this has been a very educational and fascinating chat this

afternoon. I thank you so much for your time today and taking us through such a fascinating topic, which is of course, healthy ageing and anti-ageing. Thank you once again, Vanita.

**Vanita** Thank you so much, Victor.

**Victor** And we encourage you to consult with your health care practitioner for advice on whether supplements are suitable for you. And if you've enjoyed what you've heard today, we'd appreciate you jumping onto iTunes to provide us with a rating and a review. If you have a topic that you'd like us to cover in the future we want to hear from you. Get in touch with us via the Eagle Natural Health website which is [www.eaglenaturalhealth.com.au](http://www.eaglenaturalhealth.com.au), in the Contact Us section. I'm Victor Tuballa, thanks for listening.