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** * * Intro Music * * **

Welcome to Supplementing Health, a podcast presented by Advanced Orthomolecular Research. We are all about applying evidenced-based and effective dietary, lifestyle, and natural health product strategies for your optimal health. In each episode, we will feature very engaging clinicians and experts from the world of functional and naturopathic medicine to help achieve our mission to empower people to lead their best lives naturally.

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[1:10] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* Welcome back to Supplementing Health. I'm your host, Dr. Paul Hrkal. I'm really excited for our show today. We have Dr. Alex Mailis joining us. We're going to talk about something that is maybe a little bit outside of the nutritional and supplemental box. It's actually talking about the mindset of how do you stick to whatever change you're going to make?

[1:32] So, I'd like to welcome Dr. Alex. He's a colleague of mine. He's a chiropractic doctor. He is a strength and conditioning coach and a life coach, and an overall phenomenal guy. I think what sticks out to me about Alex is that his bedside manner and the way that his patients love working with him is really therapeutic. So, welcome, Alex. Thanks for joining us.

[1:55] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* Thank you so much for having me.

[1:57] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* You've been an athlete your whole life. You did kinesiology at York University, and then you graduated chiropractic in 2015. As we work together at the Pain and Wellness Centre in the same clinic, I've started to appreciate that you have this passion for motivating people and the mindset. So, tell about your approach because I think it's unique.

[2:24] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* Okay. Thank you for having me. When I first started here at the Pain and Wellness Centre, first of all, we work with a very hard group of patients – harder than your typical patients who pull their necks here and there or let's say they're sitting at their desk too long. We work with people with a lot of pain.

[2:41] Many times, when they have a lot of pain, that can sometimes affect the way they feel. It can affect their emotions; sometimes, they can become depressed; they can become anxious. When I was working with people, and when I generally work with people, I started noticing that the techniques and the exercises and things that we would use typically with patients were not enough.

[3:01] Because they were not enough, there was another component, and it was the component of mindset. The component of how do you motivate? How do you make people feel, or how do you make people come alive? How do you light them up? How do you find that thing that gets them feeling great?

[3:16] So, I started noticing in my practice when I was working with people it was a very important part in connecting with people in general, but finding those deep reasons why – why they're doing things, and then finding ways to motivate them and finding ways to empower them to take action. It was really important for me, and not only that, when you see the change in people, it's the best feeling in the world.

[3:43] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* It sure is, isn't it? We've had a lot of patients that we've treated mutually together. The thing that continues to be the common thread of what makes a successful person or successful outcomes in our patient care is the people that buy-in to the mindset of getting better.

[4:01] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* Totally.

[4:01] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* That's why I think that this show is so important is that we really get focused in on what's the particular technique that you use in chiropractic or in naturopathic medicine? We talk about what's the research behind the supplements? All those things are not really effective if the person actually doesn't do it. So, this show is all about compliance. How do you stick with it?

[4:27] Just yesterday, I was having a conversation with a patient, and she was saying, "I'm having trouble remembering to take my supplements. I'm having trouble sticking to the diet that we talked about." She has a lot of reasons to do that. She's a post-concussion syndrome patient, so there are a lot of obstacles.

[4:47] I want to explore: why is being compliant so hard? Why is that such a hard issue for people, whether it's weight loss, whether it's remembering to phone a friend that they said they were going to phone every week? What do you think?

[5:01] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* I think that there are two major things that play into why people aren't so compliant. The first is the reasons that we choose to believe and the rituals that we put behind it. The rituals will be anything from the schedule and how we organize ourselves, but let's go back to the reasons.

[5:20] When we talk about reasons, having powerful reasons as to why you're doing what you're doing is very important. Let's talk about someone who wants to start exercising, who wants to start losing weight. If your reasons are, "My wife thinks that she wants me to change the way I look." "I heard it's good to be healthy." "My doctor said I have to lose a few pounds." It may be a bit lighter on your approach, and maybe not that motivating.

[5:48] But let's say, for instance, you wanted to be able to lift up your son, or you wanted to have more energy; you wanted to be able to last throughout the day, and you find yourself being very fatigued. Or even another word – maybe your doctor said that you are pre-diabetic, and you're getting close to diabetes, and you've got to make some serious changes.

[6:10] When we have strong reasons, strong reasons can propel us forward. So, whenever we first start and we want to make changes in our life, we have to understand why. Not the why that other people give us; the *Why* that we really feel ourselves that can empower us, and that can be so much different than what we're actually told.

[6:29] When it comes to rituals, rituals are habits that we form over time. When it comes to taking supplements, and with that patient that you had, of course, has some problems to remember, and she's going through quite a bit. But, if she can't personally remember, we need to start creating structure in her life, so it's not something that she uses her brain to go "Okay. I've got to think about when to take this."

[6:56] Now, it is this supplement approach, or the nutritional approach is built into a system that she doesn't have to think as much. She just knows that at a certain point in her day, she has a schedule that she's going to be taking these things.

[7:12] The beauty is that we now have iPhones. We have technology, and we can totally set reminders; we can do certain things that allow us to take the guesswork because most of the time, we're juggling with so many ideas anyway, so when you actually have things written down, or you have things that are organized in such a good way, it allows you not to have to go to that place just to remember, which makes you more consistent.

[7:37] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* Yeah. I think that's bang-on. There are a lot of people with motivating reasons to one degree or another, but the ritual is the added thing. When I think of rituals, I think of even human nature is all about rituals, whether it's a coming of age, whether it's a religious ritual. People are looking at that saying, "Why do we have these rituals?"

[8:07] I think it's steeped in human psychology where you actually are putting importance on things with some extra hoops and things like that that maybe a person that doesn't understand that might say, "Why are you doing this extensive pre-bed routine?" Because that's what it needed initially for you to get to the proper sleep hygiene because you have trouble falling asleep.

[8:31] If you can share with the listeners, what's an example of an actual practical implication or implementation I should say of some of these rituals that you've done with some of your clients or some of your patients to get them to stick to what you're asking them to do?

[8:51] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* The first place where I start is, I like to start small. I think sometimes, and I see this a lot of the times where people start, and they try to implement way too many things too

quickly. They go from zero to hero really fast, and they may do well for the first couple of days and maybe a week, but then after something comes up – obviously, we have things that happen in our lives whether we have a stressful occurrence, something suddenly happens and throws us off-kilter, we miss a few days, or we miss a few things, and then we fall off the map.

[9:22] So, it's really about starting first on doing small things consistently, and once those things are done, and they're almost being put on autopilot, so to speak, then we can start progressing and adding more. With my patients, for instance, if we're talking about nutrition, or we're talking about exercise –

[9:43] When it comes to nutrition, I like to add things before I take away. I find it's easier. For instance, let's say someone likes their burger and their fries. For them to change their diet completely, that may be difficult. But if I want to say, "Can you add a fish oil?" Or "Can you have a little bit of greens?" Or "Can you have a salad with your meal, additionally?" That's something that I find is a lot easier to take in than to jump and completely change things.

[10:14] Don't get me wrong. We do have people who are Type A personalities. You tell them once, and they're going to do it, and they're going to do it better than anybody else. I wish all of us were like that, but we're not.

[10:26] Another thing, if we're looking at nutrition and if we're talking about supplementation, like you were saying before when it comes to your patients having difficulty remembering, the first thing that we start with is one simple something. What I do is, I choose – two times they'll have – their morning, they'll start their breakfast. They'll take things with their breakfast, and they'll take things at night with their dinner.

[10:51] I'm trying to use a certain aspect of their day or a place where they are normally going to do something. The term is called habit stacking. You're already doing something, and you can throw something else in there, so you don't necessarily have to think about it. It's almost ingrained in what you're already doing.

[11:10] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* Yeah. I've definitely heard of that term, and I say that with my patients all the time. I actually don't use that term, but now I will. Thank you for reminding me of that. Using the example of supplementation, you have to couple it with things that you've already planned in your day. Like, do you eat breakfast? Then you're going to take certain supplements with your breakfast.

[11:35] Obviously, the more points that you have to do something during the day, the harder it is. Is there a sweet spot that things fall off? In my practice, people are able to do fairly decently twice a day, like morning and evening. But as soon as you add that third one in at lunch, things start falling off. Do you find that after a certain point, there's this diminishing returns?

[11:59] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* Totally. I tend to stick to two points in a day just because I find that they're the easiest to stick to. Normally, when I find people start feeling better, and they start

noticing that there are changes that they're feeling, then I find it's easier to hook onto that third time if need be with what I'm giving them. But normally, they have to see something. I find that when people start feeling the change, then they're more likely to start adding and investing themselves into the action.

[12:32] *Dr. Paul Hrkal*: I think that's a brilliant point and something that I've subconsciously learned right off the bat in my practice is that start in a way that if you're going to start especially nutritionally, or you're going to start from a supplemental perspective, start with something that they're going to get some sort of appreciable benefit.

[12:50] One of my favourites is using a B Complex of mine that usually gets people feeling better energy without changing much in about two weeks. Then, from there, they're going to be like, "Oh! There's actually something to whatever this person is telling me." So, right away, that builds rapport; that builds a connection with the person. In this case, it would be their naturopathic doctor or their chiropractor, let's say. Then, you can add extra things in.

[13:17] I've always heard the long stories of, "Oh, I've seen many naturopathic doctors before. I've seen chiropractors, and they gave me a basket full of supplements, and I spent hundreds of dollars, and I didn't notice a difference. That, unfortunately, does happen. I think that it doesn't respect human psychology, even though they may benefit from all those things, the timing of it, they're not able to take it on, especially our patients. Right, Alex? We have chronic pain patients that are just not able to take on more than a couple of things at one time. Right?"

[13:52] *Dr. Alex Mailis*: Totally. Especially with those patients, what we do find is, less is more. At least for me, in the beginning of practice, when I would try to do too much too soon, I would not be very effective. You really have to understand who is in front of you. You have to understand what the person is willing to do.

[14:18] Over time, you start feeling that with your patients, or you start having that, but you can also have that discussion with them, as well. I find that when people do come in, especially with chronic pain patients, the tendency is that because they're doing something different, they get excited, they want to do something, but then we also have to respect how much do they actually do? For the first time they're coming for treatment, let's say they don't do much at home, or they do very little, and now you're asking them to do five things when maybe five things are what they do in their whole day.

[14:51] *Dr. Paul Hrkal*: That's right. They haven't done that in years, maybe.

[14:53] *Dr. Alex Mailis*: Yeah. So, it's very important to understand that part, understand where they're at, and even if you start with less, you can always add more. If you start with too much, if someone is not very happy with how things are going, it's going to be hard to backtrack.

[15:12] *Dr. Paul Hrkal*: I think just for the listeners, a good point to start with and a takeaway, start with what's achievable. Start with maybe one or two things. If you're going to start a new

exercise regime or you're going to start a new supplement plan, start with one or two things. I would say, with my patients, I usually follow that. On the first visit, they usually get something, definitely diet, whether it's another lifestyle intervention, but we try to keep it to two things, and then one or two supplements.

[15:44] Then, people can build that routine, and they're able to add more. Do you have any other particular tips on how to get people started in terms of creating these new habits? You and I talked about before the show about how there's a lot of misinformation thrown around about habits and building that.

[16:09] Ultimately, we want to build a habit of a person doing an exercise or taking supplements in general. Then once the habit is formed, you can continue to stack that habit. What are some of the misinformation out there that's out there on habits, and what are things that people can do to actually leverage the psychology of building a habit?

[16:29] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* There's actually a lot. You see it, especially now in the age of social media. There are a lot of people who talk about these three-week or 21-day resets or 21-day, or 30-day plan to change your health. These aren't necessarily bad, but if we look at habit research, one thing that we do know is that habits don't typically form in three weeks or 21 days.

[16:55] There's some research that has looked at as little as a week to up to 200 days or 250 days, and they find the sweet spot for habit formation is around 66 days, a little over two months. We have to keep with it for a while to get the benefits. One thing that I do find, in general, is where people have issues keeping with things is the fact that, like we were saying before, they take on too much too quickly. Then, after, when things start falling away, they fail, or they feel a certain level of failure, and they completely let it go.

[17:30] Another thing, as well, is if we don't have a plan, if we just go and take something – if you're coming to see a practitioner, typically they have a plan. But if, let's say, you're just going to the store, and you're picking up a supplement, you're just doing it just to do it. Maybe you read a few things – so, having an understanding.

[17:49] This goes back, again, to the reasons, as well. If you have reasons for doing things, it makes things a lot stronger. Lastly, I think a big part is, once you know your reasons and once you have everything set, now it's about how do you make it into a routine? How do you plan it into your schedule, and how do you plan it into your life so you can be successful?

[18:10] I think one thing that I do find a lot is that – one of the mantras and one of the things that I live by, especially with patients or even with my coaching clients, is the fact of how do I put people in successful positions? How do we put them there? It's about knowing your patient and taking your time and understanding what you can do with them?

[18:31] If we go slowly and we choose things appropriately, and they feel success, chances are the next time you bring something in, or in my case, the next time I add an exercise or add a

task for someone, they're more likely to do it. So, it's always about how do we position people to feel like they can do these things? And, when they do them over and over, they start building resilience.

[18:54] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* Yeah. Absolutely. There's a whole psychology of doing something successfully. I think as a life coach, and you've obviously translated that just based on your personality to your work as a chiropractor, which is absolutely invaluable. So, we started with the first takeaway as being: start simple and achievable.

[19:14] I think the second takeaway based on what you just said, which I totally agree with is, have a plan. That's where, I think, you can have a plan yourself, and people that are self-starters can do that. You can look up anything online nowadays. If you wanted, you could look up online back exercises if you had back pain or information about a supplement. But there's something that is another level that enhances compliances when you see a professional, and they actually share with you why you need to do this.

[19:48] That's actually point #3, as well in my book is, 1) have a plan. Let's use the supplement example. "I want you to do this particular probiotic. It has to be done three times a day because that's the evidence-based dose. It's not useful taking it once a day even though that's maybe what you heard from your friend, or it says on the label."

[20:09] So, having a plan when to take it, but then also having the insight of "This probiotic is necessary because you just took antibiotics." Okay. Now, I'm motivated to do that because now I know why I'm taking it.

[20:22] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* You give those reasons.

[20:22] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* Yeah, and there's also as part of the plan, there's a duration that should be added too. Because if somebody is like, "Take this vitamin C twice a day forever." People psychologically feel a little bit more compliant when they're like, "No, this is going to last a month or two months." Right?

[20:39] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* Totally.

[20:41] One thing I'd also add is the idea that – we do have plans, which are very important, but if we can go a little bit further, we need accountability as well, and I think something that sometimes gets lost is that "Listen. We can have reasons. We can be organized." But sometimes, if we find that we're not being successful, or there isn't enough–

[21:06] Of course, seeing the provider, whether it's a naturopath, a chiropractor, seeing a health professional, let's create some accountability checkpoints. Let's create aspects that hold you accountable for the actions that you want. Sometimes what people do is they get a workout partner. They get someone, so they can work out with, so they can say, "Hey, if I don't feel it,

I'm going to get help." Or people jump on, and they start doing a dive together so they can help each other.

[21:30] But the things that we may sometimes just need someone to be like, "You know what? I'm going to check up on you in a week or at the next appointment. We're going to be talking about this. I'd like to see you in a week." Just by the nature of let's say somebody would be like, "You know what? I don't know if I want to take this today," but they know that they're going to be asked about it. That changes the game.

[21:49] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* It does. Again, that's just psychology. Anybody that's done anything in a team sport will know that when you do things together, it's a lot easier to do it. I remember I played volleyball when I was younger, and I also did track and field. I did javelin and discus. I remember I used to loath going to those individual practices because they didn't have that connection with my teammates. There's motivation to that.

[22:13] So, if you are going to do a diet or change in the way that you're eating or an exercise plan, it would make a lot more sense if you did it in combination with people. I think that's why group classes and group sessions and now, even online like this closed support groups that are on Facebook that are kind of part of it, they're very successful because you have a group of people doing the same thing. You have that sense of belonging, and then you have that compliance built-in.

[22:44] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* Totally, and people feel that they're not alone. They feel that there's someone there. It's so important, obviously, but the only thing I can say is, make sure if you're choosing a group of your work people, you've got to choose the right people because sometimes if we have people who we're working with who are not dialled-in, they may be the weight on your ankle that may not be allowing you to progress.

[23:05] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* Good point. For sure. There are some cases, Alex that, let's say you give a prescription of exercises that are personalized to you or if I give a supplement suggestion and dose recommendations, you can't have anybody over your shoulder looking at you. You're going to have to put in the time – it might be the silly little retraction exercise that you think is kind of silly, but it's absolutely essential.

[23:29] Let's give the listeners some practical suggestions. We'll use the example of supplementation because I know you do a lot of supplementation. The first thing I'll ask you is, how do you stake a client with you, particularly your diet? I know that you're very focused on your diet with you and your wife. Tell me how you can be compliant.

[23:50] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* The first thing is, I truly believe in the things that I'm doing. I'm in a health space. I'm around a lot of health. I talk, and I preach about these things, so it's something that regularly pops up in my life. When we talk about things – another thing, as well, is, with my wife – my wife is also – she loves health too, and so we work together. She is kind of my support. But at the same time, we do things regularly together, which keeps me accountable as well.

[24:22] Another thing is that when it comes to staying compliant, again, I'm really about rituals. I am very organized. We do meal prep regularly. We do so with our supplements because I found that I kept falling off with supplements. I try to be better. My wife is great at it, but I try to be better. What we are doing is, we are using these pill containers that literally have everything set out. If I'm taking a bunch of supplements, I will put them – if I have morning and night supplements, I'll have them all together. What that does is, it takes away one of the steps, which is going into each bottle and taking one, which also detracts from taking them.

[25:00] Making less steps for doing a behaviour actually makes the probability of that behaviour happen so much easier. Probably, I'd say, yeah. If I could put it together, it would be having a great partner who I can work with, and I can be accountable to. And, obviously, just routine. Routine is so important, and start small.

[25:24] I didn't just start this way. This has been years and years of building things into autopilot. If you think about when you first started driving a car – do you remember the first day you were in a car? We didn't even know what we were doing. And then now, sometimes, you can drive. You know what? You don't even know how you got to your destination because you know things so well. It would be nice to gear health into that avenue.

[25:47] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* I think that's the ideal situation to get to the point that things are on autopilot. I know a lot of our patients struggle with getting there. That's the big thing. If we're considering everything we talked about – you talked about some great information that you need about two months to create a healthy habit.

[26:07] I think that your suggestion with a pill organizer is great. We often think – and I've heard this said by a lot of patients. "Awe, that's for my grandma." That is not something that we should be afraid of using. It's a tool, and we shouldn't be attaching the stigma on it. I think it's just the sign of you being hyper-organized and compliant, ultimately.

[26:31] So, there are a lot of practical organizational options. You usually pick a day, and you can find what works best for you, but organize your diet for the week and plan it out. People have had little blackboards or whiteboards, but they'll do the same for their supplements, and they'll take a couple of minutes, put everything in the right bottles, and now you're set for the week. Now, you know, "I'm going to be taking this in the morning; this in the evening, and there isn't fumbling around the cupboard trying to find that "Oh, I ran out of that." It pays to be organized when it comes to your supplementation.

[27:03] A couple of other things I wanted to mention in terms of practical consideration. We've asked patients to take things at different times. It's easy to habit stack. So, let's talk about some supplemental habit stacks. Most people know about taking it with food. Certain things like Omega-3 – I know you do a lot of Omega-3 supplementation. You'll do things like magnesium, vitamin D. All the three I just mentioned can be taken with food; no problem.

[27:29] But what about outside of food? What if we ask a patient to take something like an amino acid that is best absorbed away from food? Are there any other suggestions that you'd make for habit stacking outside of meals?

[27:47] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* It depends because typically we like to put things that are similar together, but sometimes we can't. Sometimes, let's say, we're going to work, and this is the time you've got to take it because you had your breakfast, and you took your other supplements. One thing that you can do, and probably my best thing that I would suggest is, create reminders.

[28:07] I have this on my iPhone. I would set reminders, and I would set timeframes. Now that we have Siri and we can speak into things, I would set a reminder at a specific time every day that I would take something, so I don't have to think about it. Now, don't get me wrong. You're still going to have to pack that away, and you're still going to have to bring it.

[28:25] Let's say you're having to take this supplement at work. Take the supplement and leave it at work. Know that this is what you do at work. I think it comes down to organization, and sometimes what we have to realize is that. I wish there was an easier way, but sometimes, we've just got to do what we've got to do.

[28:43] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* You're absolutely right. I think of something that's very helpful for me is putting it in places that are going to remind you to take it. For example, if you're taking something away from food, and when is it you're usually away from food? It might be on your commute home. So, I have a bottle of magnesium in my car that I know, "Oh! You know what?" At 3:00 or 4:00, if I was coming home at that time, I'm able to take it.

[29:12] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* That's a smart idea. I've never even thought about it. That's really good.

[29:15] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* Magnesium, unlike something like probiotics, which has to be refrigerated, magnesium is pretty temperature stable. Another one that people use all the time is doing it by their bedside table if they take it before bed, or in their bathroom. That will give you the cue that, "Oh, I'm brushing my teeth. I can have a little bit of water. Also take my –" something I want to take before my meal to get better absorption, let's say. A lot of herbs, minerals, and amino acids are better taken away from food. So, that's the way you can remind yourself there.

[29:49] Then, finally, I think is – and you touched on this – make it easy for yourself. So many people have their supplements in the highest corner of their shelf because that's the overflow, and it's hard to find those things; it's hard to access it. Not everybody wants to have it on their counter, but I have to say in my family, when we're learning a new supplement routine, like my wife or I, we'll have it for a week or two on the counter in a basket, just to remind us because that's where it's top of mind.

[30:22] Then, we just recently reorganized things that it's the first drawer that you pull out. It's right there by your hands, obviously, making sure everything is child-safe. But there are certain

practical things you can do to make sure that you are removing the obstacles. Assuming you started simple, it's achievable, you have a plan, you know how to take it, and you have good reasons, these are just the practical things. I think that's the fourth takeaway point. Do you want to add to anything that I mentioned?

[30:50] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* I love that if anything, the fact of putting things in places – you know it's interesting; now that you bring that up. We also do that at home. I didn't think about that at the time, but we actually do the same. Things that are in front of us or things that we're trying to do, we try to see them more regularly. If you have them locked up in a cabinet or you have it somewhere, of course.

[31:12] Let's say you're busy. There are so many things on your mind. Of course, there's a higher probability that it will be missed. So, making things easy, removing obstacles from why you're going to do something is so important, especially when you're trying to do something, especially when you're trying to take on a new habit, whether it's a supplement, whether it's exercise, whatever the case. Try and make it as easy as possible so you can start and be successful.

[31:33] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* Absolutely. It's half the battle is actually following through. You can get the best advice in the world; you can get the best therapy in the world, but ultimately, you're responsible for your own health. We have technology; please, use that. That's such a great way of getting this. I think that point of setting reminders is such a great one, Alex. We can set it every single day at 3:00. You can set it at 6:00 am, and right after your morning alarm, you can say, "Take thyroid medication because I have to take it on an empty stomach." So, we can use that technology for our benefit, and then using some of the things we talked about.

[32:12] Thank you so much for sharing today. This was awesome. If people want to get to know you a little bit better and connect with you, what's the best way to do it?

[32:18] *Dr. Alex Mailis:* You can find me on Instagram. My Instagram name is @dralexmailis. You can find me on my website, dralexmailis.com. I work at the Pain and Wellness Center in Vaughan, so if you go to the thepwc.ca, you can find me there. You can learn more about me. If you want to work, I'd love to work with you.

[32:42] *Dr. Paul Hrkal:* Awesome. Thank you so much for joining us. This is such an appropriate topic and one that is often overlooked, but how do we stay compliant, build positive habits into getting ourselves into optimal health. Thank you so much for listening, and make sure that you stay tuned to our show next week. Thanks, Dr. Alex, for joining us.

** * * Outro Music * * **

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