

Scott: Five steps to benefit our relationships and bodies. This is Stay Happily Married, Episode Number 293.

Announcer: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Scott: I'm Scott Blair, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Do you have a healthy relationship with your body and partner? As summer is approaching, we shed our winter layers for more skin-bearing attire, which for some also means a time to get our bodies in shape. While there is nothing wrong with wanting to lose the few pounds we put on over the winter, too much focus on obtaining the ideal body can lead to unhealthy extreme behavior to lose that weight as well as a distorted body image. With social media always commenting about celebrity bodies and talking about the best diets to get the perfect body, it's no wonder so many people have a negative body image. But we can learn to have a positive healthy relationship with our partners. What steps can we take to better our relationship with bodies and our partners?

Earning her Doctorial and Master's Degrees in Clinical Psychology, Dr. Nina Solanki has an expansive background in the healthcare profession ranging from private practice to crisis centers and everything in between. She has a passion for mindfulness, exercise, and nutrition. These days, Dr. Solanki is a therapist with Lepage Associates in Durham, North Carolina, incorporating her work and knowledge of Mindfulness and Healthy Lifestyle Behaviors into both individual and couple's therapy.

Welcome to the show, Nina. I'm so glad that you could join us today.

Nina: Well, thanks for having me back.

Scott: What problems do you see that couples are experiencing in their relationships when it comes to relationships with their bodies and their partners?

Nina: Well, a lot of times we don't think of body image as being the most common issue that couples deal with. Often we first think of communication problems or a lack of intimacy, but of those major issues we tend to think of first, all really relate to self-confidence and self-awareness, and body image and how we relate to our bodies definitely plays a big role in that. So while couples don't usually come to therapy with that as the major issue, it definitely needs to be addressed when we get to the topic of how individuals perceive themselves and how they relate to others.

Scott: What are some of the short and long-term negative effects that this behavior can actually have on the relationship?

Nina: Well, if one or both partners don't have a good relationship with themselves, that perception is really going to influence how they relate to others. For example, if one partner is really unsatisfied with his or her weight, common associated thoughts is going to be about feeling unattractive to their partner. Maybe they feel unworthy of their love, or they might feel guilty or shameful about their eating habits. Energy levels are also really a factor just by a lack of

exercise or poor diet. And as I am sure a lot of us can relate that when we are tired and lethargic, we are also likely to be more irritable and accompanied with stress becomes more difficult. So both short-term and long-term effects of this can ultimately affect how we handle conflict with our partners.

Scott: At what point in time do you see that couples are becoming aware that their relationship with their body is actually hurting their relationship with their partner?

Nina: I think it's going to vary depending on the couple and the severity. Some couples may not make that connection until a major health problem comes up and even then they may only think that the issues they're beginning to experience is due to the stress of dealing with it.

Scott: Have you observed any trends among couples that are having these issues that could be a result from having a better relationship with your body?

Nina: Again, the biggest effect is going to be increased self-confidence which again is an underlying issue for many aspects of a relationship. So if you have poor self-confidence, it's going to be harder for you to be able to relate to your partner and to be a little bit more understanding. But the more self-confidence you have, the more skills you are able to learn, and have, and to work towards the relationship.

Scott: What do you suggest that couples do to help resolve these negative issues and affects that low self-confidence or anything else that we already discussed?

Nina: Mark David, he's the founder of the Institute for the Psychology of Eating and he offers five steps that we can take that will benefit our relationship with our bodies and our partners.

Scott: Well, what specific items? Let's drill down on that a little bit are involved in Mark David's steps?

Nina: The first step which is the basis of every relationship is communication. And healthy relationships have plenty of open and loving dialogue. So negative comments towards each other eventually break down the relationship. And it's the same when it comes to ourselves. We can make negative remarks about ourselves, such as like God, that stomach is huge, and these comments eat away at our body image, And it makes it hard for us to be loving and accepting of ourselves when we constantly criticize and are unsupportive of our bodies. So just like in your relationship or marriage, if you're constantly being criticized or criticizing, you can't expect you or your partner to feel very appreciative, or accepted and loved.

So we really need to talk nicely to our bodies, replace negative comments with positive or neutral comments, find kind, compassionate, and supportive things to say to ourselves. And our partners respond well to encouragement and support, and so will our bodies.

Scott: I find that interesting. I was sure you were going to say today that we shouldn't talk about our partner's weight, but we shouldn't talk bad about ourselves and our own weight either. So once we learn that we need to be nice to our own bodies, then what should we do next?

Nina: We have to move. Our bodies are designed to move, and we usually feel our best when we are active. So exercise can have a lot of negative connotations. People often think of it as a force not enjoyable and a miserable thing to do. And often this is because the main goal of exercise is to whip our bodies into shape which really just causes us more stress, but our bodies need more care and thought than that. No one likes to be forced to do anything. Just like you can't force your partner to have fun, feel free, and relax.

So when it comes to being active, we have to find ways our bodies like to move, and this requires really experimenting with forms of movement that make you smile and genuinely give you a feeling of joy. And, of course, this is going to be completely different for everyone, but some examples can be dancing, swimming, hiking, even just throwing a ball around. People just need to experiment with what feels good to them.

Scott: Sure, and so we know our bodies like to move, and we need to do that. What can we do next to help our relationship with our bodies, with our partners?

Nina: Then we need to fuel our bodies. So again, just like in relationships, our relationships need daily fuel in the form of a positive statements and affection to make us feel good and so do our bodies need food that makes us feel good. And there are actually two parts to this. We need to find foods that we enjoy as we eat them, but we also need to find foods that make us feel good. So you know that fast food meal you always eat in a hurry that ends up just sitting in your stomach, and then you're either hungry an hour later or it's just sitting in your stomach?

Scott: Yeah.

Nina: Well, that's not very loving to our bodies. Then at the same time if you don't enjoy eating the plate of veggies and brown rice, you're not going to be enjoying the moment. So finding foods that fit into both categories is really important. And while I'm not giving nutrition advice, those foods typically are minimally processed and high-quality natural foods.

Scott: Well, what else can we do to improve our relationship with our bodies and our significant other?

Nina: And another step is spending quality time by slowing down. So just like relationships, we need quality time between two people so they can relax and enjoy each other and so does our relationship with our body. We can't know what our body likes and needs if we don't give it time to relax. When we relax, we can be more attuned to our sensations, and then the more attuned we are, the better we can listen to our needs, and the more we respond to our needs, the better we feel. And the better we feel, we have a more positive and healthy body image. So quality time with our body can mean going for a slow, relaxing walk, taking a bath, getting massages, or meditating.

Scott: Okay, so we've discussed that we need to be more positive to our bodies, the way we talk to it, the way we treat it, to be active, to move, you said, to fuel our bodies in a healthy way, and

then learn to slow down, listen to the body, relax from time to time. What is the final thing that we should do?

Nina: All relationships benefit when we focus on what is working. When we recognize what works, and can be thankful, those things will continue to grow. Keeping a gratitude journal for our relationship can help us be aware of what is working and to reflect and possibly increase our self-awareness, and it's the same with our bodies. We can keep a gratitude journal for what we are thankful for, and that will also help us increase our self-awareness and be thankful for what is working for us.

Scott: Well, I love that you said that. I have kept a journal for years, and I don't think that a lot of people realize just how powerful keeping a journal is. For self-reflection, and then be able to look back and see the changes and the growth. With couples approaching the relationship this way, what are some of the changes that you're seeing in the quality interactions of the relationship when they start talking better to their bodies, treating their bodies better, fueling their bodies better, and moving, and relaxing?

Nina: Those steps can help us get away from the cultural ideal body image to a more positive and healthy relationship with our body. So in the same way that sometimes we have misconceptions about what an ideal relationship is going to be like, we have to find what ultimately works for us.

Scott: Well, I totally agree. I know somewhat about exercise and fitness in my background, and I can agree 100%. You need to find an exercise that you love to do. You need to find foods that you like. You just don't go on a hard core diet but something that you enjoy eating that will fuel you and make you healthy. You need time to recuperate and relax. All of this is great information, Nina. Do you think there is anything else that somebody who is struggling in this department in their life, in this area of their life needs to know?

Nina: Really that they're not alone. This is a common thing that a lot of people experience, and that there is a lot of resources out there, and they can definitely be on their journey to health and wellness, and having happier relationships.

Scott: Well, Nina, thanks so much for taking the time with us today and being on the show.

Nina: You're quite welcome. Thanks for having me back.

Scott: To find out more about Dr. Nina Solanki and her practice, Lepage Associates, you can visit their website at Lepageassociates.com or call 919-572-0000 for an appointment. Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and previous episodes, visit us at stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Scott Blair. Until next time, stay happily married.

Announcer: Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the web at stayhappilymarried.com. We would love to hear

feedback or comments. Please email us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com or call us at 919-256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.