



Mental Health is Health | Dr. Gail Saltz

[00:00:00] Guest Intro - Dr. Gail Saltz

Darin: Hey, everybody, welcome to the show. This is Darin Olien. This is The Darin Olien Show. What's going on? How are you doing? What are you into? Creating your life, are you living extraordinary? I got it. Those are big words, but those are things that we can set for our goals, our intentions, what do we want, what do we want to do, and it all kind of exists within knowing ourselves, our hearts, and then eventually getting it up to our brain. Then our brain, our mind, helps us move forward in this world, either the ego gets too big and it gets slapped down, or we're full of anxiety and we need to calm that down, or we're feeling happy and joyful. The interpretation of this reality is happening within the ears. This is an incredible opportunity for us to understand ourselves at any given moment, and especially from what we've all gone through on a global scale, anxiety can certainly go off the Richter scale. My next guest, Dr. Gail Saltz, is an incredibly known relationship, family, mental health contributor, and many media outlets. She's a go-to expert for commentary on mental health aspects of current breaking issues and news. She is a best-selling author of way too many books. I don't know how she's done all of what she's done. She serves as a medical expert for physicians, for Human Rights, and as a host of an incredible podcast, How Can I Help from iHeart Radio. Dr. Saltz is an associate professor of psychiatry at the New York Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell School of Medicine, a psychoanalyst with the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, and also has a very grounded private practice in Manhattan. We dove into this episode. We talked a lot about mental health, I asked her questions about how much control do we have because there are some extraordinary people that are on the spectrum. There are extraordinary things where people seemingly are having the same experience, but having completely different experiences and interpretations. We talked a lot about that because that is the truth. One person can be witnessing something and have a completely different understanding of it and another person can be having good things coming out as a result of trauma or things happening in your life that are only supporting that which you perceive is going on in your world making things more and more difficult. So sit back, relax and enjoy this incredible mental health conversation with Dr. Gail Saltz.

[00:03:03] Podcast Intro

Darin: You are listening to The Darin Olien Show. I am Darin, and it is my life's mission to find and share healthy and sustainable ways of living. In this podcast, I talk to inspiring people and professionals from around the world to uncover ways that we as humans can improve our lifestyles, strengthen our mindsets, and take better care of this beautiful planet we call home. If you're looking for motivation to take the next steps towards a happier, healthier life, then you're in the right place, and I'm stoked that you're here. So let's do this. This is my show, The Darin Olien Show.

[00:03:48] First Part of the Interview



Darin: I'm so stoked to have this conversation with you and get to poke around and get to know and listen to your podcast. I'm just grateful that you're doing the work you're doing, especially in the wave we've all been experiencing and you starting your podcast as a result of obviously, the stress in this world. How Can I Help is a great name for your podcast. So thank you for that, and thank you for jumping on here. Why don't you just tell us a little bit because I'm very curious about your background as a psychiatrist as well as a psychoanalytic person as well? Describe a little bit about your background, and then I'd love to get into some things that could potentially really help some people right here right now.

Dr. Gail: Sure. Great. Well, thank you for having me today.

[00:04:38] Different types of mental health treatments

Dr. Gail: Psychiatry is the study of the mind, the brain, and treatment can be done with medications which psychiatrists can prescribe. That's something I do. It can also be done with psychotherapies. Almost in every case of serious psychiatric illness, it's preferable to have both but in milder forms of issues, perhaps psychotherapy is sufficient. I always say start with psychotherapy. Psychiatrists practice different kinds of psychotherapy. So some psychiatrists practice cognitive-behavioral types of therapy, which really have to do with the problem and the here and now and looking at the thoughts that you have that are moving you to perform certain behaviors that are obviously not working for you in your life and creating symptoms. There are many different offshoots from cognitive-behavioral therapies, acceptance-based meaning-centered, and many, many different kinds. But then there's also the kind of psychotherapy that looks at unconscious thought and how unconscious conflict may be driving behaviors or ways of feeling and that bringing those unconscious thoughts into the light. And examining them in your consciousness helps you to have the power to make different kinds of choices about behavior, and helps you to have different feelings about that. That is the premise, I guess I'll say, of psychoanalytic treatment. You can do that in the form of psychoanalysis proper, where you're lying on a couch, not looking at the therapist. You do it multiple times a week, but you can do it in psychodynamic psychotherapy, which could be once a week, or however often, but really, in principle, still looking at unconscious conflict. So, I went to medical school, and I did my training to be a psychiatrist. Then I also, after that went on to do training to be a psychoanalyst. Then I subsequently started doing a lot of what I would call public education work, which is not just seeing a patient one on one, but talking to people in groups and talking to people, larger audiences, at a time in the early '90s that we really we're not talking about mental health at all. So there was a steep, steep curve in those earlier days and now as you allude to, we do talk about mental health much more, and we've been forced to talk about it much more. I mean, I'm happy to say that we are talking about it much more in the face of this pandemic, but really all along, it's been needed because close to half of all Americans at some point will struggle with a mental health issue, and we don't talk about it. Stigma is the number one reason that people don't come to treatment. And without treatment, you continue to have suffering and sequelae from those mental health issues.

Darin: So much of this is so fascinating to me. I have a master's in psychology, and I've always been interested in the worlds coming together between what's going on or unconscious and the automation and also, what choices do we have? You have a day and all of a sudden you wake up and you realize in that moment, what happened to the day. This



automation of our unconscious is kind of running most of our lives. Is it safe to say that 80%, 90% of our life is kind of coming from this automation and perhaps the unconsciousness? And if that is so what can we do to unlodge some of that automation so that we can have a little more perceived choice?

Dr. Gail: I can't give you a number because I am a very data-driven person, but I'm driven by scientific data, so there's no research study to tell us this amount of your-- we may get there at some point. I say that as if, well, duh, but no, really, actually we may get there at some point. This is the real age of neuroscience and our examination of the brain, and we have more and more tools to do that in a way that we are finding increasing information about what areas are active when and what does that mean, but we're not there yet. But what I would say is that it is very hard to examine your own thoughts and your own thinking, mostly because most of us have a lot of defense mechanisms to keep us from doing that because doing that is anxiety-producing in many circumstances or distressing in many circumstances. And so it can be hard work, and it can be so uncomfortable, and not even in our awareness that it's so uncomfortable that in our mind naturally and evolutionarily throws up roadblocks. Like I don't want to know that, I don't want to think about that, so I'll be in denial about it or I'll intellectualize it, or I'll keep it out of my awareness, I'll undo it in some way. I mean, there are all these different types of defense mechanisms that we all use every day that we're not even aware of, which is why sometimes it really is not just vital, but it is truly helpful to go to a good therapist because they are objective. In other words, they're not inside your mind and they can see the pattern that denotes a defense mechanism and help you to see that too. Then that might help point them to the direction of what you're trying to cover up from yourself and keep a secret from yourself and get to the bottom of it. But people can also do self-analysis. Freud himself did self-analysis. The point being that if you are aware that you have repeated patterns of behavior that are not working for you, that you keep blowing up relationships, or do something with your boss, or always pick a job where you're miserable, there are 1,000,001 patterns that someone could be in. And the better question than how do I get out of this is why. So asking as an individual, you can keep going down, and I would advise people to keep going down the rabbit hole, why? Why am I doing that? What does it make me think about? What from my past maybe informing my thoughts on that? Is that still reasonable and logical in the current day? Or am I living something out that maybe no longer applies, so I feel stuck? It's various forms of that that help you get to the bottom of things, which is how you change behavior.

Darin: That alone is starting to just look at any sort of analysis, like you said, it's stress-inducing. Regardless of how you want to put it in the box of understanding of it's the ego or whatever, it's hard work to look at ourselves. It reminds me, I've been in a men's group with a professional psychologist that kind of keeps the professionalism. But at this point, we can nail each other on almost everything because to your point, we have chosen to step into that, and everyone in that group is holding this space. They see all of our problems that we now displayed for three and a half years. It's such an interesting thing to us as humans, so we want to acutely run away from any conflict like that. But at the same time, when you do it, and you stick through it, and you have an awareness, or an epiphany or a different way, or an understanding of doing something different, and the liberation of that is so bloody freeing, and liberating to the whole being and body and stress. That's the irony.

[00:12:23] Why it's so hard to admit you need mental health help



Dr. Gail: It is ironic, but think about it, running if you've never run is exhausting, and you're miserable, and you sweat, and you can't breathe, and you're like, why am I doing this to myself, and you want to stop. And if you keep doing that every day for over a period of time, during which many of those days may truly suck, at some point, you're gonna have built up endurance and you're going to be running and you'll go, hey, this feels pretty good. I could do a race with this. I enjoy some things about this, and I'm in better shape, and it feels good, and my breathing feels good. It's just harder with the mind because our mind is our organ of judgment, consequence, thought. So your ability to go, I know that if I do this thing and stick with it, I'm gonna get to a point-- It's harder. It's all in the brain. So it is hard. I don't like to flippantly tell people go to therapy. I acknowledge that it is challenging but yes, it's freeing. The goal of therapy is not to make you happy. The goal of therapy isn't certainly not to make you perfect or good in some way. The goal is to reduce suffering. And that's actually also something that Freud would fully acknowledge as the father of psychoanalysis. But even in those days, the father of talk therapy would say, the point is to reduce your suffering, and basically enhance your life. So pretty much anyone could benefit from therapy, but I acknowledge that it takes time and it takes effort and it takes money, and so not everyone's going to do it. But when you have mental health or mental illnesses, I guess I should say, then it does reduce suffering. And for certain types of illnesses where there's a biological basis, so maybe not a personality disorder, but depression, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, it's more important than that because every time you have an episode, you are strengthening the wiring in your brain that gives you the propensity to have another episode. So the longer it drags on and the more frequently it happens, the more likely it is to happen again in the future, it's something called the kinetic effect. So it's very important that people be aware of what constitutes a collection of symptoms that do need treatment, and then they go early, and then they stick with it to get it to go into remission.

Darin: That's very interesting the way you put that together because my brain immediately went to addiction. So maybe it's a physiological addiction that it's going into in that kinetic way and it's very much like that. I lost my father to alcoholism and he was sober for 30 freaking years. As soon as he fell back into that, it accelerated as if nothing happened, as we've heard that with alcoholism, it's very interesting. Treating it early before it kind of gets the snowball kinetic effect, as you said, is extremely important because it is weird. It is so strange that we then get addicted to the feeling that it's giving us even though we're miserable.

Dr. Gail: It's not really addicted to it in the physiologic sense that addiction drug is, but it is sort of the way neurons work. It's important for people to understand, all of our thoughts are basically chemicals passed from one neuron to the next. That's every thought, that's every emotion, that's the way the brain communicates with itself. But amazingly, neurons and the material of the brain is what's called plastic. It can change, it can grow, new cells form, new attachments formed between neurons over our lifespan, more so when we're young than as we age, but still really throughout life in a way that's kind of unique to that organ for us. So what perpetuates growth is use, is activity, in that neuron. And so an area that maybe didn't get much use would be like a country road. Then you keep driving on a country road with cars and tractor-trailers, and eventually, you got a superhighway. You just made a groove because you made it active, active, and use and use. So when it is a superhighway, it's got the propensity for so much activity and that's really the kinetic effect. That's the phenomenon



that really makes it important that you seek treatment early, and you finish it, which is another problem that some people come into treatment, they get a diagnosis, they start something, and then they just sort of dribble out, and then really have not recovered. The other thing is that, to be frank, we have medications. Some of them are really useful, but all medications have potential side effects. Sometimes the first medication or even the second medication doesn't work. So the frustration of like this isn't working, or this is giving me these effects I don't like really causes people to just stop which, of course, one completely understands. It's hard. It can be hard.

[00:17:37] Wren Ad

Darin: What is our future of this beautiful earth going to be like if we keep treating it so horribly? It's easy to feel helpless, even after making a conscious effort to reduce my own impact, your own impact on the environment and offset our carbon footprint, it still doesn't feel like it's enough, I get that. There's still the frustration of not knowing what's being done on a larger scale. Thankfully, there are some awesome projects and organizations that are making positive changes in the world, and subscribing to Wren is an easy way to support more and more companies doing good. Wren as a startup that is making it easy for everyone to make a meaningful difference in this world. As a monthly subscriber, your carbon footprint is calculated and then offset by supporting incredible climate projects like planting trees, protecting rain forests, investing in green, clean technology, and removing CO2 from the freaking sky. Wren is on a mission to unlock the collective action of millions of individuals to drive this systemic change needed to end this insanity. We keep doing the same thing expecting our planet to just be good. We take so much from our environment without giving anything back. What do you think is going to happen? We need to regenerate. Things can and should be done differently. We need to move forward in a regenerative way for our planet and for our own well-being. That's why Wren means so much to me. They're moving forward in a real pragmatic way of making change possible. They offer flexible monthly subscriptions that you are able to change at any time, and you're provided with monthly updates on your specific positive impact. It's going to take all of us to end this insanity, the climate, the world, the environment is screaming. Do your part today by signing up to Wren. Go to wren.co and sign up. If you let them know I sent you, they'll plant 10 extra trees in your name. W-R-E-N dot C-O, start making a difference. Let's do this and let's make a change. Thank you, Wren.

[00:20:35] Second Part of the Interview

Darin: I look at the world today, whether pandemic is here or not, for me, I have the same message of health, like take care of your foundation, hydrate, sleep, eat a bunch of healthy plants, whole foods, stay away from inflammatory substances, etc, etc, etc. And you build that foundation, it helps everything else. It does help your brain. It does help your body. It does help with some of those systems that when you actually start doing the work-- Where do you sit with some of that stuff as you're kind of sitting there going, okay, you know this person may be using substances and they're maybe just completely eating like crap and that's definitely not supporting the situation? How do you bring in that part of the conversation for yourself? I'm just curious.

[00:21:24] How to address lifestyle choices' impact on mental illness



Dr. Gail: Quite directly. Well, first of all, if somebody is abusing substances, alcohol, or any drugs, it's very hard to treat another mental health issue as long as substance use and abuse is going on. So we're really upfront about that. That has to be treated first because it's driving some of the other issues. That's a definite given and I have often referred people for substance abuse treatment. Then as we remove the substance and you move along, now we're going to be treating this other issue that you've come in for as well. In terms of food and sleep and exercise, well, there is some data. Exercise goes head to head with medication for mild to moderate major depression. It is helpful for anxiety disorders. It definitely reduces stress. By exercise, I mean, like 30 minutes of aerobic exercise with a heart rate up for three or four times a week for weeks. So we know that that is effective. Absolutely. I tell patients that. It doesn't always make them do it, but I recommend that. We know that sleep is extremely important, particularly in mental health. If you're not sleeping, and you have an underlying diagnosis of bipolar disorder, that's a sign you have an episode coming, or it will make an episode worse, or it will bring on an episode. There's just a huge connection between mood, anxiety, stress, inflammation, as you brought up, and sleep, very important. In terms of food, well, there's a lot we don't know yet. But I certainly am a proponent of having a generally healthy diet. I am not a proponent of eat these berries, they will cure your x. I'm like where's the data? So I've not been a fan of like, guess what omega-three fatty acids will treat your schizophrenia with. Once in a while, these studies come up and I'm like show me the data. I don't think it's a good idea to tell people that you can treat specific illnesses with specific either foods or for that matter over the counter vitamins or non-FDA regulated substances because the difference is that we know less about whether they are a problem in high doses and so on because they're not FDA regulated. Everybody was really hot for some years on Kava. Kava Kava reduces stress, great. Oh, turns out like a boatload of Kava can really harm your liver, but we didn't have that data going in because Kava is not FDA regulated. So we have to be cautious about what we're recommending and we have to be driven by science. That being said, if you were eating, like not nourishing food, or food that propels inflammation, what is coming on the horizon? Really cool, fascinating stuff about the gut, and brain connection, and inflammation and bacterial flora in the gut and its relationship to inflammation in the brain, that there's going to be a lot of money there, but I don't know what the money is yet. I don't think anybody knows what the money is yet. So I hope research dollars go in that direction because it does look very interesting. That's one of the biggest problems in mental health is the lack of funding for research. That's going to be very interesting and we just don't know.

Darin: It is interesting back to the berries thing, and maybe this is a connection. There's a research that came out where now they really realized that the anthocyanins that are in blueberries are actually a prebiotic, so it's directly feeding that microflora and no one knew that.

Dr. Gail: But for example, sometimes someone will ask me, should I take probiotics, blah blah blah. Here's the thing, we know that the bacteria in your gut can affect these things, but we don't know which bacteria you want in there and we don't know that just swallowing something that has that bacteria in it does anything to change the ongoing colonization of your gut. So what can I say, there's a lot of money in pharma.

Darin: So much and that's where it's like, I want to have these bigger discussions of the simple, stupid things that we can do. Simple, brilliant, really, because we know that



diversification of fibers, diversification of food definitely shows the proliferation of bacteria, beneficial bacteria in the gut, things like that.

Dr. Gail: I'm all for obviously, not substance abuse, but I am all for aerobic exercise for mental health. I'm all for sleep hygiene to help you to have the best night's sleep that you can. We know that also sleeping too much isn't a good thing, like a certain regular hour, certain regular schedule seven to nine hours, those sorts of things. I'm all for educating people on things that don't help them. They think, oh, have a glass of wine before bed that will help me and they don't know that alcohol interrupts sleep architecture. So you're having many more awakenings and it's actually not helping you have a good night's sleep. The education, I'm all for a healthy diet. I'm not on any end of like, you must never have X or you should always eat boatloads of Y, but I am for definitely following the data again, not as a psychiatrist, but just as a medical doctor in general. The Mediterranean diet is a healthy diet for many, many things. And we do know that having a comorbid condition like diabetes, we know that affects the brain. We know that obesity can affect the brain. So mental health is health. So yes, take care of your health, because they are one in the same.

Darin: Yes, mental health is health. Isn't that so powerful? So let's unpack a little bit, the current things that I think is taking on us but especially now with anxiety and stress and burnout and depression. It's like our reserve is taxed right now. Our resiliency seems to be waning in the wake of all of these things. It's just a crazy time. What are some things that people listening today can at least start to be aware of or move forward on? Then I want to definitely get into your book about genius and people may be on the spectrum, it's up to you. But I want to unpack this a little bit. It's funny because I'm in California, and I just went to Arizona and did a talk, and just being in Arizona. People just use massive if they wanted. There were no mandates and it was like, wow, I didn't even realize how the grade of stress, just leaving my property is just automatic because people are running around. I'm empathic, so I feel it too, and I think we all are on some level, so you're feeling the fear and then also this just other mandated part of it all. But just being in another place, I was like, wow, it feels great and just to have that experience. I tried to be aware of what was going on for me and then you realize I was carrying stress and I wasn't even aware of it.

[00:28:34] Coping tools for stress and anxiety

Dr. Gail: So some people might have the experience that you had, oh, this is a change of scene, it feels like a vacation, I remember what this feels like, and people I'm not seeing lots of things that trigger me around reminding me that there's an ongoing pandemic, so I feel more relaxed, and these people aren't afraid. So they seem more relaxed and that's all great. Other people might have a totally different experience in doing exactly the same thing. They might feel I have made all of these changes because there was something to be afraid of for good reason. And that reinforced my behavior because I felt more relaxed that we're all in masks, and we're not standing on top of each other, so I'm not worried about getting infected and being sick. And that going someplace where it seems like people are in denial because they have just as much COVID there as you have in California. But if they're not doing those things might have made you more stressed and more anxious and like I want to go home where people do that. So people are having all different kinds of reactions. I am seeing plenty of people who and being forced to and when I say forced, I don't mean by the government, like being forced by the pandemic to make a lot of changes in their life that



were radical, really most of us, these changes have been radical, are having difficulty coming out of that. They might think to themselves, I want to go on vacation or like I want to go back to work, or I want to go to a party. Then when the opportunity arises, they feel like, maybe I don't know, I'm very busy, like they're reticent and they're not aware that there's a lot of anxiety going on that makes it hard to go. They get back on a plane and they're like, is this person vaccinated next to me, their mask is down here, I feel so close to you. We were used to being close to people all the time and now we've spent two and a half years not being close to people. There's just a panoply of depending on what it is that made you anxious and uncomfortable that a lot of people are still struggling. We know that over the last year and a half rates of depression and anxiety went up 41%. Although interestingly, for 2020, and the first half of 2021, we also know that suicide rates did not go up across all age groups. It's really important that we go with the numbers and really look statistically at what's going on. I can't tell you why that is. I can tell you that rates of anxiety disorders and mood disorders have definitely gone up in kids and teenagers, in young adults, and in every age group. So it remains a very difficult time. There aren't enough people who are getting care for that. There aren't enough treaters to treat all those people. What can you do for yourself? I think a couple of things, everybody needs to have some coping tools that they can use on a day-to-day basis, depending on what the symptoms are you're struggling with. Anxiety which tends to be most people's difficulty or a lot of people's difficulty right now, maybe that's learning how to do paced deep breathing. Maybe that's learning how to do progressive muscle relaxation. These are practices you can do 5 or 10 minutes twice a day. Maybe it's going to be journaling about your mood, talking with friends, connecting with people that you can trust and talk about how you're feeling. We know that's helpful. We know exercise, as we've talked about is helpful. So having things that you do regularly. It could be like you get in a warm bathtub at night with bubbles and play relaxing music for half an hour. As we talked about, mental health is health, our mind is part of our body. When you physiologically relax your body, you relax your mind. When your mind is anxious, it sends out neuro chemicals that tell your body to tighten up its muscle and has the whole fight-flight response. So it is important to relax your body and have systems for doing that. Some people have taken up meditation, taking up yoga, or whatever works for you. So have some things. Teach some of those things to your kids. Kids need them too. They need some coping tools right now, and they need to be able to talk about how they're feeling to their parents or to their friends. Those are the things that you can do for yourself. But also, we found over this pandemic that teletherapy has turned out to be really effective. It's not where we were going before this pandemic, I assure you, I would not see anybody just by teletherapy, but this just accelerated the whole field like a decade. Now in all of us being forced to do it, we're finding out it works pretty much as well as in person. So you don't have to have somebody nearby, you don't have to have somebody you can commute to, and there are many ways to find someone that you can talk to and obviously, I advise people to do that when they're struggling.

Darin: Well, that's a silver lining, for sure because the therapist can go back to back with things without having to move around and that's great and maybe potentially makes more people available and more people can do it in the comfort of your own home, maybe you can keep that stigma a little more secret.



Dr. Gail: That's unfortunate if it's about having to keep it secret. But I do feel that if you're really depressed, sometimes it's just hard to get out of your house. So being in the comfort of your living room is okay.

Darin: Well, that's the thing I think of too because I've looked at habits of health for a very long time. That's why I got into the mental side of things, the emotional side of things. I was always like looking at people going, hey, they're getting results and seemingly the same things they're doing. But yet, there are so many other things going on, and a person's intention and the reason they're doing things matter so much. So when I think of people when they're stuck, especially if they're depressed, mildly depressed, or a little bit or a lot, whatever the spectrum or anxiety, the issue that I find in people is that it's so easy to find our routines. It's part of the blessing of us as such an adaptive species. We adapt to bloody anything, and then it normalizes, and even in this anxiety kind of world we're in, that's just at another level, we kind of still normalize it and then find a routine and that routine doesn't necessarily mean that it's in our best interest. Because again, reaching out to people, just talking to a friend to listen, and all of these things, it's that jaggering people out of those routines just so they can at least do something to turn on that bath that night, to do something nurturing for them. You find that challenging and frustrating as a therapist. You say, listen, start doing these things and yet they don't and there's so much to do.

Dr. Gail: There is a comfort, I mean, trying something new can be anxiety-producing, especially if you're already anxious. And there is a comfort and just doing the same thing over and over again. Change is hard, and transitions can be scary. Sometimes they don't do things because they tell themselves "no, I'm really okay." It's not even a wish to admit that there's a problem that you're addressing. And sometimes it's feeling frozen. There's so much anxiety that you just kind of feel locked in place. If that's where you are obviously coming to see somebody is important because sometimes, for example, somebody will come in for psychotherapy for anxiety, but they're so anxious that they can't learn something new. You need your frontal lobe to be able to acquire knowledge to be able to implement it. Part of medication is if someone is so severely whatever it is, anxious or depressed, that they can't make use of what I'm telling them. And that's when I'm going to say hey, we need to reduce your anxiety level enough that you can take in this information and learn it because it's a skill and so that might be where people are at, at certain points.

[00:36:35] Bite Toothpaste Ad

Darin: Okay, let's talk about toothpaste. Most of us are still using toothpaste in tubes, and they're sitting in landfills for years. Not to mention, there is a ton of harmful chemicals, artificial flavors, and preservatives that are found in these tubes that you're putting in your mouth. Ingredients like sulfates, palm oil, glycerin, and you're swallowing little bits of this all the time. Do you know a toothpaste doesn't contain these ingredients, Bite toothpaste. Their toothpaste, Bites, are made from completely clean ingredients, and they come in refillable containers that make it really easy for you to take care of your teeth, while also taking care of the planet. Your refills are delivered in compostable pouches. And trust me, once you start on the Bite toothpaste, you'll be ordering the refills. I guarantee it. I know I won't be going back to the conventional toothpaste tubes. No way. Using bites toothpaste tablets is so easy and honestly, it's kind of fun because you crunch down on them as thinking that they're a little mints. I just bite down and the tablets turn into the unnecessary foam that we need and



then you just go at it and it leaves your mouth feeling incredibly fresh. Bite also offers plastic-free alternatives for everything in your bathroom sink. That's right, from toothpaste, to mouthwash, to toothbrushes and deodorant. You can now cut out the harmful and harsh chemicals and plastic waste all from this one company. To try Bite today, they're offering my listeners 20% off your first order. Go to trybite.com/darin or use code DARIN at the checkout to claim this great deal. That's trybite.com/darin.

[00:38:49] Third Part of the Interview

Darin: I'm so intrigued. The power of difference. The link between disorder and genius. I'd love to just give me your synopsis of that book and pick that apart a little bit. I think we're all on some sort of spectrum all the time because I recognize it with me sometimes. I'm like, oh, yeah, here we go, I can see my brain doing certain things. I also celebrate that. I also celebrate that through the unique fabric that we all also are.

[00:39:17] Finding strengths in mental differences

Dr. Gail: Well, so when I use the word spectrum, I don't know if this is what you are meaning, but usually people in my field at least are talking about the autism spectrum specifically. What I would agree with your statement is that we all have slightly different brains. There are billions of neurons and trillions of connections in each brain and there's tremendous variation. There are some people who have enough variation that correlates to areas and a type of wiring that can create collections of symptoms for them, and we call those mental illnesses. But those same people who have that difference in wiring, the wiring also confers the potential for extraordinary strengths. It doesn't mean they will use them, but they are there and this is data-driven. There are many studies. I have looked at these various connections and that was the point of this book was for me to pull together this data, the research, talked to many people who have struggled mightily. Don't get me wrong, I do not jelly-coat mental illness. It can cause terrible suffering. But I'm also very aware that if you look back in history at the huge names of people who really changed their field or created their field, many of them, I would argue most of them had a mental health diagnosis or learning disability, and that really struck me. So I wrote this to try to help people understand that, first of all, we're all a little different. But that when you have enough difference that you have a mental illness, you should get treatment because it will alleviate not only suffering in the short term, but suffering in the long term, as we talked about the kinetic effect, but you should also be spending time looking for what the potential strength is, and they can vary with illness to illness, and I try to elucidate that. So for example, if you're talking about the autism spectrum, on the one hand, some people with autism, you would say, well, they suffer a lot because social engagement is very difficult, they don't get it and they persevere a lot, and that can make it even more difficult to socialize and function in the world, and that's just hard. But the same wiring that confers this for separation, for example, also confers an ability to analyze and construct patterns in an extraordinary way better than somebody who does not have autism, let's just say. And comfort in repetition, such that they can do detailed work, particularly work that looks at patterns over and over and over again in a way that somebody who doesn't exist on the spectrum cannot, they would get bored. They would make mistakes. There are certain kinds of tech work that is incredibly well suited if you are on the autism spectrum. I've talked to a young man who's like an incredible composer. He's played with the Boston Symphony. He has had albums of jazz compositions that are extraordinary



that he started under the age of 10, who is on the autism spectrum and teaches music and certain elements of life are difficult, but he is also extraordinarily gifted. The data basically shows that if you have a mental illness, but you are not severe, you are mild to moderate, your ability to be creative and think innovatively creatively outside the box is superior on average to somebody who has no mental illness. But of course, if you have a severe mental illness, then it's diminished because severe mental illness doesn't mean that the potential strength is there. It just means that your ability to utilize it and manifest it, organized enough to be able to display that ability is impaired. So overall, I talk about mood disorders and anxiety disorders, schizotypal disorders, ADHD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and autism and Dyslexia as learning disabilities because these are the main symptom clusters that people have that is difficult, it does disrupt their life. But as I said, close to half of all Americans at some point or another will have something.

Darin: That's amazing. I think that the education around it because there is such a population. Is it safe to say that this is as far back as we know? Is this always been a part of our evolution as humans? Have we always had this certain percentage of people in this area on this spectrum? I look at it as like, obviously, the functional side of it is kind of beautiful when they get a lot of reward from their abilities to be able to exercise that though is that true as far back as you can tell?

Dr. Gail: Mental illness has always been present. It's just that in much earlier times, people didn't understand that's what it was. They thought it was you were possessed or witchcraft, or we didn't understand the biology or humors were run amok. In the 1800s, there was a long period of women who had any mental illness, your uterus was wandering around their body, and all kinds of things. So we have a history, unfortunately, as well as doing just terrible, terrible things to people with mental illness because it was scary, and we didn't understand it. The field didn't really exist, we just locked people up or did terrible things to them. But variations on brands have always been there and therefore mental illness, amongst other variations has always been there. When it wasn't understood, and there wasn't treatment, sometimes the person who did something extraordinary was recognized in their lifetime. Sometimes they were, sometimes they weren't. Sometimes they lived an absolutely horrible, miserable life. Vincent van Gogh suffered horribly his whole life. It wasn't until after his death that there was a recognition of his extraordinary contribution to the world of art. He probably had temporal lobe epilepsy, even though people today think he was just, they use "nuts," they don't know. But his temporal lobe epilepsy, which comes along with the symptom of having visual hallucinations, and things that would contribute to the potential to produce something on a canvas that is in your mind, and that is not in other people's minds. There was some understanding, even at that time, they actually treated him for epilepsy in the hospital. I mean, they did understand that at some level, that temporal lobe epilepsy is not like other forms of epilepsy. You don't have proper seizures, but you have emotional seizures as it were and you have these constellations of symptoms because it's in the temporal lobe of the brain. So some people were not recognized, and some people were, and they were seen as the mad genius, which wasn't really so helpful to them. I'm sort of really advocating for, you know if you have a child who is struggling with something, that you spend time getting them treatment so they can suffer less, and that you spend time looking and introducing them too many things to find their potential strengths because everybody needs that source of self-esteem and it's there.



Darin: It's beautiful. I think of a very good friend of mine, John McGinley, who's been an actor, Platoon and everything else. His son, 23 years ago, was born autistic with Down syndrome. I marvel at John's ability to support him. Every once in a while, just two weeks ago, he just sends this video. His son who largely can't speak, he has a very small verbal acuity. So he'll send these videos where he's learned the guitar. He's on a stage in front of people. Then the last video, he said he was singing, things are coming out of his mouth, and I instantly cry because I've known Max now since he was 11 years old and it's just extraordinary because he has found something that you don't need him to say anything to know that he's enjoying it, he's learning, he's engaged.

Dr. Gail: You know, music is a collection of patterns. So music is often a good direction for someone on the autism spectrum. And social communication when it's purely from person to person can be a little baffling if the area that has to do with reading faces is impaired. But one's ability to have an audience where you're not having to read every individual face might be just great, it might be just fine. Well, that's a cool story.

Darin: I've learned so much and just observing that relationship and getting to know and it's extraordinary. I'm so grateful for the work you've done and you continue to do. I want everyone to check out How Can I Help podcast because there's a lot of great information. I know you're constantly putting out some cool stuff, that poll that you put out about 90% of the people really care about the mental health of children and the Olympic stuff, and they're talking about the mental health in the Olympics now.

Dr. Gail: Which is great. The more people that come forward and are honest about what's going on, the more comfortable people will be able to talk about it for themselves, celebrities, and athletes. It affects everyone. It definitely affects everyone. Yeah, the podcast, people send me questions and it's a great way to be able to-- because many people have similar questions about mental health issues or parenting relationships, and it's nice to be able to put out information that people can really utilize.

Darin: Well, you've created a great forum there, and the guests that you bring on and everything else is fantastic. So, again, thank you for your time.

Dr. Gail: Thanks so much for having me today. I really appreciate it.

[00:49:26] Podcast Outro

Darin: Thanks for tuning in to this episode of The Darin Olien Show. I hope you took something valuable away from this conversation that will help improve your life in some way. If you'd like to learn more about my incredible guests, you can find all of their information in the show notes on my website. If you enjoyed this episode, or even you didn't like it, please rate this podcast. The team and I value your feedback so we can continue to give you the most value possible. We want you to get the most out of every podcast. So please rate, subscribe, share anything you feel called to do. I truly appreciate it, and I love and value your support. So, thank you, and I'll meet you in the next episode.