

40. Feeling Our Feelings- What's the Worst That Can Happen? with Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma



FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

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Arpita: Hey everybody. Welcome to another episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. We are excited to have you here today. We're going to have a little episode again where we just kind of get to chit chat amongst ourselves. Welcome Dr. Michael Hersh. How are you doing?

Michael: I am great. How are you Arpita?

Arpita: I am good. Just kind of moving along, enjoying my time with my boy as he's playing football and having fun and on the field and just getting to feel all the feelings today. And that's what we're going to talk about today is feeling all the feelings.

Michael: Yeah, I would say before physician coaching feelings was not a topic I ever spoke about and it is something that I have had to get increasingly comfortable thinking about and speaking about. And so I think this is a great episode.

Arpita: Before it's even happened, we know it's going to be awesome, right?

Michael: 100%.

Arpita: Yeah. So I, I just wanted to kind of touch on and start with just recognizing that we always seem to think that it's our life around us that makes us feel a certain way, all the things that are happening to us in our life. You know, Oh, my son is playing football. He did awesome. That's why I feel great. Or, Hey, you know, so and so is moving out and I'm feeling sad. And so we just really don't actually get to realize that it's not really the circumstances in our life that are causing our feelings. It's how we're choosing to think about those circumstances that drive us to feel a certain way. And the reason this is important is because our feelings are what drive us to do or not do every single thing that we do in our life, right? Almost everything. And we, a lot of times don't recognize that. If you think about it, we think that we want to do X, Y, Z, or attain a certain goal in our life, because we're going to feel a certain way when we get there, right, what we don't recognize is a lot of times, all of those feelings, almost all of the time, all those feelings are caused by how we're choosing to think about things. And so what we're going to talk about today is a little bit more dive deep into why we have emotions, how we can start to become more aware of the emotions that we're having and how we can honestly just be a little bit more present with them and allow ourselves to experience them so that we can be ultimately the most productive and the most on point with everything we want to do in our lives. Tell me what you think. What are your experiences as a male having feelings?

Michael: Yeah. And so I guess that's a little bit to what I was speaking to before was, is that feelings just always seem like something that were just there, right? If I was, you know, standing in the grocery line and somebody was, you know, counting out change to pay and I'm getting frustrated, it was just the frustration and never really gave a ton of thought to where the frustration was coming from. And of course, in that particular situation, you know, I'm thinking who pays for groceries with change. Why is this taking so long? I've got a million other things to do. And of course, that is going to inform the frustration, right? That's where the frustration comes from. Now, if I am you know, thinking, Oh, this person is just scrounging together, you know, the, the change that they found in their couch cushion so that they can buy milk for their hungry children. That brings up a completely different emotion and feeling. And again, I think that this was not anything I gave any amount of thought or time to and something that coaching has really brought out in terms

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of being intentional about like, what am I thinking here that is bringing up these feelings for me, and it's really been transformative just in terms of how I'm able to think about things and then how I'm able to feel things also.

Arpita: Totally. I think that's an excellent example, right? We, we have the exact same situation, but it's how we're choosing to think about it that brings up the different emotions around that situation. And we don't really, oftentimes we don't have awareness. I know when I first started doing this work, I had no awareness around that. Like my thoughts create my feelings. What are you talking about? But oh my God, yeah, that's exactly what it is. Right. So I think to step back a little bit also, it's not only having, when we're building the awareness, we're building the awareness around the thoughts that we're having, but we also want to build awareness around the emotions as they show up for us versus the sensations that we have in our body, right? Because there's, there are two different things. And a lot of times we don't really recognize that. And so to give an example, when we have emotions pop up for us, sometimes we don't even realize that we're having those emotions, but we might have physical vibrations in our body that are the manifestation of that emotion. So for example, when I do a lot of talk on anger, so when I'm angry, sometimes I might just feel like my shoulders clench up really tight or my ears be really, really hot, my face get flushed. We have the physical sensations of it in our body. Another example is I remember once I was having a lot of anxiety about stuff in the office and rather than being able to label or recognize what it was, I remember just feeling like, Oh my God, my heart is like having palpitations. And I feel like this vague, like sense of doom. And I don't really understand what's going on, but there was a pressure on my chest. That was anxiety, right?

So it took me a minute to recognize that sometimes the emotions that we have we first become aware of them as sensations in our body. So there's different ways that we can build this awareness, not only around the thoughts, but it's also around how it's showing up for us. I think one of the easiest examples that are one of a good example that I really like to talk about is when we're eating. Right? For example, if we are eating from emotion versus a sensation, right? So the emotion of eating typically is like having the desire or the urge, like, oh hey, that donut looks so yummy. I really, really want to eat that. Right? Or, hey, I want that cup full of ice cream after dinner. Versus the sensation of hunger, right? Which is that grumbling in your tummy that, okay, I'm hypoglycemic. I feel it coming on. So there's definite differences between the sensations versus the emotions and learning to start differentiating. That all goes back to being, having more awareness in our bodies about what's going on for us.

Michael: Yeah, you had me at doughnut, by the way. You know, what's interesting about this work is that I remember the first time a coach asked me about where I felt a feeling in my body. I thought it was like she was speaking a completely different language to me. I had no idea what she was talking about and I had a really hard time connecting the dots between the things that I was feeling and what it felt like in my body. And I've noticed this a lot, you know, I, I spend a lot of time coaching male physicians and I don't know if, you know, I don't want to be, you know like gender bias, but it does seem like men, this is not something that comes naturally to us in terms of identifying where we feel things in our body. And so yeah. You know, I always offer just like you were just describing what anxiety felt like in your body. I will always offer some suggestions when I'm coaching physicians because I think a lot of times these sensations are happening inside of us. And just like you were saying, we don't notice them. You know, I might feel some clenching in my jaw or pressure in my chest or, or, you know, like a tightness in my hands. And these are all sensations that indicate to me that I am feeling something. And they were going on for years and I my entire life even and I never even noticed

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that they were there. And so when you're talking about raising awareness, it's not just raising awareness of kind of the thoughts that are going on, but really trying to go inward and imagine outside of the moment, like, where might you feel these things in your body? Because once you start to become aware of them, you start to notice them and they can be incredible signals that something is going on. And you and I have talked a little bit before about creating space and how that that will help you to choose your reaction and this is how you do it, right? It's starting to notice very early on, like what's happening for me getting curious about it so that you can then go on to choose your reaction. So it all comes down to feeling the feeling.

Arpita: And I guess if we think about it, part of the issue is, is that we don't want to feel the feeling sometimes, right? When they're negative emotions, we don't really want to feel them because they don't feel good. And so we have to give ourselves the opportunity and the ability to recognize that these emotions, in order to have positive emotions, we have to have negative emotions, right? You can't have just everything be hunky dory, rainbows and daisies, puppy dog tails, everything happy. In order for there to be happiness in the world, there has to be unhappiness. There is a comparison between the both of them. And so when we allow ourselves to experience that negative emotion is when we're able to actually move through it or push through it to get to the positive side. And a lot of times, we don't want to do that. Most of the time, we don't want to do that, because the negative emotions don't feel good, right? We're scared that we're going to get stuck in that negative emotion. We're scared that we're not going to be able to come out of it, or that it's going to feel so bad and doom and gloom. And we just don't want to be there. And that honestly is part of the problem. It's a big part of the problem because what we've adapted to create is different ways of handling negative emotions when they come up for us. And we aren't recognizing that it's actually creating more negativity for ourselves.

So I would love to dive into a little bit about which ways we can respond or react to emotions that serve us versus don't serve us. But I think the big point I want to first hammer home here is that you have to allow the negative to be there in order for there to be positive. Like, for example, somebody passes away in your life. You don't want to be happy about that. Right? We allow the grief and the negative emotions to be there so that we can work through it. Do you have any examples or things that you like to refer to when you're thinking about, like, the negative 50, 50, the positive and the negative with the 50, 50?

Michael: Yeah, so I love to think about the feelings that feel not that great, right? So when you think about, like, is fear a good feeling or a bad feeling?

Arpita: It can be

Michael: Most people would say that fear is something that doesn't feel very good. Courage, good or bad?

Arpita: Courage also feels negative, but... It's required, right? You're asking another coach.

Michael: Yes. No, I know. Right? So in order to be courageous, there has to be fear present. Right? Courage does not exist without fear, right? And so courage has a lot of positive connotations when somebody is courageous, right? But the fear has to be there in order to be courageous. So the two are intimately linked. And in order to get the positive of, of pushing through the fear of being courageous of doing the thing, you have to feel the negative emotion. And if you always succumb to the fear, you just don't want to feel the fear, then you never get to experience the courageous act, and you never get to get the thing that you want to get. And this is

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kind of a, this is polarities, this is the yin and the yang, this is in order to have the good stuff, the bad feelings have to be there also. And so that's how I like to think about it. You know, we in our training have seen kind of this circle, which is our whole emotional life, and then the circle gets split into positive and negative. And it just makes very clear that you have to allow for both in your life. Because if you don't allow the negative feelings, then you never get to feel all the positive feelings too.

Arpita: 100%. I think that's an excellent example. And that brings up a memory, like just for me, like going up on stage or speaking, right? I never would have thought I would be doing that before. And even when I am doing it now, I still have some negative emotion, a little bit of apprehension, a little bit of hesitation, but a little bit of determination too, right? So determination is one of those emotions that can be positive and negative, just like the courage and the fear, because that's what drives us to kind of push me to get to a place where I want to do that thing. Right? And I have the positive impact of the thoughts that follow and the feelings that I have afterwards of being successful in doing that.

And so if we're talking about emotions and having the positive emotions and the negative emotions, a lot of times we struggle with the negative emotions because we don't want to feel them and there are so many different ways that we, as I mentioned, can then show up when those negative emotions happen for us. The 1st things we can do is resist the emotion. Right? And so when we resist an emotion, we're kind of pushing it away, kind of like pushing a beach ball underwater. And as you can imagine, when we do that, it's actually building more force, more intensity, where it is going to return and come back later. What we resist, persists, right? And not only, I would say, with an emotion, not only does it persist, it actually gets stronger. And so that is not a beneficial way for us to handle emotions when they come up, specifically negative emotions, because we're going to cause it to come back worse for us.

Another way that we can respond to an emotion is to react to it. And this is a very much, so I find with anger, when we react to emotions, we have an outwardly outburst in a sense. So we show up in a way that we probably, it doesn't really serve us. So with the anger, for example, we might have an misdirected outburst at somebody. With anxiety, we might have an involution and kind of like turn inward and not interact and not kind of have the ability to, to face whatever we're feeling nervous about. So when we're reacting, that's also not necessarily serving us in a good way.

The third way we can respond to an emotion is to avoid it. And when we avoid emotions, we essentially what we call in the coach world, coach speak is buffer. And that means we're choosing to do something else that temporarily makes us feel better so we can avoid feeling the negative emotion. So when I overeat or over drink, over scroll, over work even, like this can be tricky. We can pick things to do that we think is actually a good thing. But in actuality, we're doing it to avoid feeling that negative emotion. And it's keeping us stuck in this kind of spiral of negativity because inevitably, after you've done that negative or done the task of over drinking, overeating, whatever it is, after you've buffered, we tend to then sit back and reflect later and regret what we did, or we beat ourselves up, or we show up in a way that we feel more upset because we haven't actually processed the original negative emotion.

So the most productive way to respond to a negative emotion is to simply just to allow it right, to be present with it. And I think the 1st step of doing that is by 1st naming it, right? Because when we name an emotion, we are actually acknowledging that it's there. And I heard recently somewhere, it might have been at one of the

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talks that we just had last week, that when we actually acknowledge and label the emotion, it eliminates the intensity of it, it automatically mitigates it a little bit. And so when we can first do that, and then just sit and be present with it, it actually is so much easier to become aware of how it's showing up for us in our body and allow ourselves to process it. It takes 90 seconds to five minutes on average to process most emotions. And so when you think about it, when we resist or react or avoid, we are prolonging the pain. We're essentially creating suffering for ourselves because we're not allowing ourselves to simply experience the negative emotion and let it kind of pass through us within a couple of minutes.

Michael: Yeah. So the naming, I think it does make a lot of sense. So as you were kind of going through the different ways that we can, you know, deal with emotions, you talked a little bit about avoiding the emotion, which is creating tension. It's holding that beach ball underwater. You have the ability to do that for certain amount of time, right? If you've ever held a beach ball underwater, you know exactly what it feels like. And the tension builds and builds. And when you just can't submerge that beach ball any longer is when you get to that second response, which is reacting. That's when you let the beach ball go and it just comes, you know, hurtling out of the water. And when you can acknowledge it, when you can name that it's there rather than avoid it, rather than reacting to it, it does. It, it takes away some of the power and the strength that you were giving it in the first place by just completely avoiding it. The tension that you were creating by trying not to feel it at all, immediately lessens. Because now you're just aware that it's there. And you've given yourself an opportunity to deal with it, to get curious about it, to try and figure out what's going on for you. And that is where all the power lies.

There's a lot of people out there that just don't want to feel emotions. I feel like if I feel an emotion, maybe I, you know, will lose control and it's the exact opposite. When you allow yourself to feel the emotion, you're a lot more in control of what happens next because you get to be aware and you get to choose, you get to create the space, you get to allow yourself to show up more of who you want to be by allowing your feelings to get there. We all have feelings. This comes up for all of us all day long. You are a physician listening to this podcast. You got to where you are today because you had a feeling. You felt determined. You felt motivated, right? So feelings inherently are not good or bad. They just are. And we all have them and learning how to process them and deal with them makes all the difference in the world.

Arpita: Totally. One of my favorite quotes is when emotion is high, intelligence is low. Right. And this, this really resonated with me because it helped me recognize that I am not showing up as my best self when I let the emotions get the better of me and I don't really allow myself to be present with them with the underlying emotion when I'm having anger outbursts, et cetera, et cetera. I didn't like the way I was showing up. Right? So we are ultimately in control, but we have start by first recognizing where is the emotion for us? What is the underlying emotion and why am I afraid of it? I think that's a big piece of it too. It's like, why are people so afraid of feeling their negative emotions? Right? When we go to the movies, we are subjecting ourselves to fear, to like horror movies and you know, all the emotions, the sad movies, whatever it is, we are subjecting ourselves to it. And we do it optionally because we know that it's not going to be permanent. It's something that we're going to work through. It's the exact same thing in real life, right? These emotions are not permanent. They will be a feeling that you have that you can work through, but unless we allow ourselves to be there for it, it's going to persist and that's where the suffering is with that.

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So I would love to talk a little bit also about how do we actually process emotions? And I know we're packing a lot into this episode, but this might just give everybody some tools on how to work through some of these things. So when we become aware of having an emotion and we become aware of patterns. But I think the first thing I would do is ask yourself, what are the top three feelings I tend to feel during the day? Right? And a lot of times what we recognize is we have similar feelings, right? For me, there was always anxiety around what's going to happen with the office. I would always have a feeling of love, honestly, from my spouse that I felt like I always had support. And then I had this fear of what's going to happen next, like the fear of the uncertainty of the future. Right? And so when we start to first label, what are the most common emotions we have, then we can have also awareness of situations that come up during the day that tend to bring those emotions up for us. Right? And so when you have the emotions come on, that's when you have to give yourself a moment to pause, especially in the beginning. I know it's hard because we're all running through the rat race of life. So try to do it in the, in the moment if you can, but if not reflect later, but I want you to just sit and be present for a moment with the emotion. Maybe think about the situation of the circumstance that happened and what were you thinking when that situation or circumstance happened? Try to recreate that emotion for yourself and your body. And when you drop into your body, then notice the temperature, notice the texture, notice if there's any vibrations like palpitations in your heart, maybe a humming in your throat. Intensity, sensation, color, any of the descriptors that you can use to know this and really tune into where it is in your body. That in and of itself is processing the emotion. And a lot of times we don't think that because all we're doing is just sitting and being present with it. That allows ourselves to, to really feel and work through these feelings that come up for us that sometimes don't feel good. And you can even do this when you're feeling great. Like when you're having a positive emotion, you're happy just to test it out. If you're really kind of nervous about doing it with a negative emotion, do it with a positive emotion, right? All we're doing here is having an exercise to build the awareness for how it's showing up for us in our body so that we start to see that's how we process it. And we come out of it feeling much better.

Michael: Another really fun exercise that actually kind of piggybacks on what you were just talking about. And for the listeners, this may be something you want to do right now in real time while you're listening to this. So you were just talking about what are the three things that you feel most commonly on a daily basis. And so the follow up question to this, I don't know if you've done this exercise Arpita, is what are the three feelings you want to feel on a daily basis? So just for the listeners, just give a couple of seconds here to think about what are the three things you want to feel every single day. You got them? Okay. Were any of those negative emotions? And I want to ask you, how do you get to a life where you only experience those positive emotions? And can you get what you want in life from only experiencing those positive emotions? So if you have big goals in your life, if you have things that you want to do and achieve and see, can you get them by feeling just calm and loved and supported all day every day? Or do you need to feel some fear, some courage, some sadness, some, you know, motivation in order to get those things? So there really is so much to be gained by allowing yourself to feel those negative emotions. And again, by kind of tuning into your body, like Arpita was just talking about, recognizing what those different feelings feel like, being able to identify them, be aware of them, and then use them to get the things that you want in life. There's so much there.

Arpita: Totally. Awesome. Well, I think I am emotionally drained.

Michael: I think you should probably look into that and figure out what that feels like for you.

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Arpita: No, I've enjoyed talking about this because I feel like it's an area that I completely was clueless about, quite frankly, when we started doing this work, as I mentioned, when they said, thoughts create your feelings. I'm like, holy shit. Why didn't anybody teach us this in med school? Right? Because we are ultimately in control of how we want to feel and what we create our thoughts, create our feelings, our feelings drive our actions, our actions create our results. So if we know we want to reach a goal, like you just said, What emotion do we need to create for ourselves to give us the drive to do the things we need to do to create that result?

Michael: Fantastic. Well, loved chatting with you again, as always, thanks to all of our listeners for tuning in and looking forward to seeing everybody on the next episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. Take care, everybody.

Arpita: See you later. Bye.