

Fireside Chat with Emmanuel Lopez

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Megan Silvestri (MS): *Thank you all so much for joining us. This is our second fireside chat. We're really excited to hear from Emmanuel this morning. And these chats are really an opportunity for stability leaders to share their mental health insights based on their experiences. Today, Emmanuel will be sharing on food and mood. He'll talk for about five minutes, then we'll have time for questions and discussion.*

And before we start, we just want to note that we recognize everyone's individual journeys look different and we all have to find the paths and routines that work best for each of us. Emanuel's intention is not to give any medical recommendations or advice, but to share from his own lived experience, how food has positively impacted his mood throughout his journey. Without further ado, Emmanuel, I'm going to turn it over to you!

Emmanuel Lopez (EL): Thank you, Megan. Hi, everybody, I am actually really excited to speak to you today and share what I've learned during this quarantine, that's actually an extension of me being a big food lover. And so, what I'm going to do is just give you a bit of my background and what led me to my new discoveries. And I'm actually also known as Motivator Man on my social media. So that is just my superhero name. My first profession is running an illustration business and then that led to being a motivational speaker, and a movie blogger. Then surprisingly, that segued into business owners loving how I promoted and marketed my motivational speaking services. So, they hired me to do their social media marketing, and that became another fun profession. That led to me being a social media influencer, where I get to post the foods and the cooking that I was learning and, this is another form of therapy for me.

But today I'm going to talk about the foods that help my mood. And it started back in 2015, when I was diagnosed with clinical depression. I thought I was actually going in to be diagnosed for seasonal affective disorder, because I had doctors for over 10 years prior to that, that couldn't help me with these low depressed moods and even suicidal thoughts. So, I had to figure a lot of this out by myself. But once I got that diagnosis of clinical depression, I was able to try antidepressants and cognitive behavioral therapy, which was a huge, huge help.

At the same time, I knew an intuitive thing that diet was something I needed to look at. I started to do my own research. I was making sure I was getting some of the basics like vitamin D levels and increasing that, mostly through supplements, but then I started to realize that getting it from foods like fish, salmon, sardines, those sorts of foods was meant to be my journey.

And then the pandemic hit. It was kind of scary. To take y'all back to mid-March, I was concerned about my depression symptoms and what was going to happen, this was going to be isolation. I live alone so it was going to be tough and I understand how powerful social interactions are. Then on top of that, also

my mom—who lives alone—I was afraid for her. I somehow intuitively started to research about food and mood.

I came across this amazing study from the 1930s by this dentist, Dr. Weston Price, and he was like this Indiana Jones dentist that traveled to 14 different countries with his wife. The reason why is because he started to see a lot of tooth decay and cavities and in his patients, and he wanted to find out why that was happening. I was watching these seminars on YouTube, and followed the person who took over his studies, her name is Sally Fallon Morrell. I was hooked.

The first place he went to, for instance, was Switzerland. It was these isolated people—there were no railways that went through their town, high in the mountains—they didn't have access to processed foods from the West. Dr. Weston Price discovered, all these people, these isolated people, were healthy in their bodies and they almost had near perfect teeth—very few cavities. They were also near impervious to the diseases of the time, like tuberculosis. And I was hooked. I wanted to know what they were eating!

Everything was so diverse. The Swiss people's diet was what I was attracted to the most. They were eating a lot of raw cheese, grass fed butter—mainly because they had all these happy cows grazing on these pastures—and a nutrient-dense sourdough bread. This got me excited about changing my diet. I could go on with the different types of diets that they had.

But I want to stress that part of the way that these foods, say grass fed butter, or pasture raised eggs, or raw sauerkraut, or raw cheeses that I've incorporated, have helped my mood was not just the eating of the food, and then feeling a difference. It was the entire journey. It was the fun of finding these YouTube videos and reading articles and then posting on Facebook things like: "Hey, anybody in Toronto know where I can get raw sauerkraut?" And by the way, I absolutely hated sauerkraut before. Then when I started to taste raw sauerkraut, I couldn't believe how delicious it was. Again, it was just the entire process. It's what brought me joy. It's what kept me going through the past six, seven months, and continues to do so.

And I could keep going, but maybe we could do some questions. How does that sound?

MS: *Great. Thanks so much, Emmanuel. We have a couple questions for you already. So, our first question: Have you made any other non-food-related lifestyle changes during this pandemic that have helped your mental health?*

EL: Yeah, I'm glad that was asked because exercise goes hand in hand with this. Walking every day is something I've been doing for a couple of years. But I made a point of doing it. And I have to admit, at the beginning, it was eerie, because at the beginning of quarantine there was nobody out on the street. But it's the physicalness and being out in fresh air, and also walking off the meals that I've had. That's something that I've been lazy about in the past, but during the past couple of months, I'm doing my best. It's a good chance to get vitamin D, as well, from sunshine, and actually explore my city of Toronto. It's been great. It's huge, the physical time that I've dedicated.

MS: *Thanks for sharing that. Do you notice a difference in your mood, depending on what times of the day you eat?*

EL: That's interesting because I continually experiment. For instance, I've been told you should have a good breakfast, so one pastured egg in the morning and grass-fed butter on sourdough bread, is good for me. But then, recently, somebody has been suggesting intermittent fasting, so I tried that. And it's amazing. I actually prefer that sometimes. It's just an experiment. Everything that I'm sharing today is what worked for me, but I had to experiment. It's going to be very individual.

MS: *Thanks. I like this question that just came in. Did you try any food or eating patterns that did not benefit your mental health, and maybe worsened your mood and what did you do to handle that?*

EL: Oh, that's a really good question. This is really important, what I'm about to say: there's two types of food groups that I totally believe in. One is the nutrient-dense foods that I've been sharing. The other one is comfort foods. I don't want to be one of those hardcore people who eats what is supposed to be healthy. I wanted to enjoy butter tarts or greasy bacon and eggs. I mentioned butter tarts, because I was supposed to be at this huge butter tart festival in June, just north of Toronto, and I was so upset it was canceled. So, I learned to make my own and I ate a lot of them. I could feel it just ruin my brain. The whole moderation thing is such a key term in finding the perfect balance and diet for yourself and so that was a good learning experience.

There was a two-week period in the summer where I had stopped eating raw sauerkraut. It's something that you're meant to eat daily, just a fork full, because it's just filled with live, really good bacteria for your gut. What I learned was 90% of serotonin, which is a happy chemical for the brain, is actually manufactured in the gut. So that was another incentive for eating raw sauerkraut every day. But I remember there was a period that I stopped eating that and I stopped eating some of the other nutrient-dense foods. When I say it ruined my brain, my depression symptoms are that my brain goes foggy. I also have a symptom called psychomotor retardation. My body actually feels heavy. It feels like lead is injected into it and I can't really move.

I am so glad I was able to be cognizant and realize during that period that I wasn't eating well. One of the things I wanted to mention too, is that drinking water is so huge. It's almost like the go to elixir for me is to down two cups of water, and it's amazing. Part of it is also dehydration. In the summer, that two-week period where I slipped back into depression was a combination of being dehydrated, eating too many tarts, and being off the diet. Again, it's trial and error. I'm glad I went through it, but I've been fine since just because I'm watching my diet.

MS: *This is a great question that came in a little earlier. Someone mentioned that good food, healthy food costs more than processed food. Do you have tips on how you get healthy food on a budget?*

EL: I had to be careful on a budget. My work with social media dropped when the pandemic and quarantine happened. I had to really shop for the best deals. But something really deep inside me, said not to worry about the money. It's my health; it became the most important thing during the pandemic. I had to do the best I could, and it was an amazing mindset switch. Again, it had to do with a lot of these

videos and learning more about Dr. Weston Price's studies. I ended up finding the best deal for pasture raised eggs here in Toronto, and it's close to eight bucks Canadian, but I don't think about it because I've calculated the percentages. I can send this as infographics, the difference between the nutritional value of pasture-raised eggs versus normal eggs—the nutrition is in some areas like 10 times the amount of vitamins. It was an amazing feeling and that feeling also helps my mood, knowing that I'm doing something good for my body that I'm not skimping on these prices.

I see it as an investment in myself. It's one of the things that I really love sharing on Facebook. I'll share where I've got the best deals, or the raw sauerkraut. One of the big discoveries was finding raw sauerkraut that I really liked and had the best deals.

MS: *Thanks, Emmanuel. This next question asks: Do you use food to help manage any other mental health symptoms?*

EL: Yes, I do. Because anxiety is another challenge that I've had in my life. I found that magnesium is a new discovery because I was experimenting with what's called golden milk. It's hot almond milk with organic turmeric, Ceylon cinnamon which is apparently *real* cinnamon. So organic cinnamon and raw honey. I started experimenting with it because I have trouble sleeping. And it's supposed to help as a sleep aid. And it actually works sometimes. But it was also dosage and like, how close to sleep do I try it and so I researched it even more and magnesium was actually the key.

And then it became one of those minerals. I was told to increase magnesium supplements years ago, but I found that it's a muscle relaxant. You're supposed to take it with calcium and vitamin D and it's kind of like they all help the body absorb it. I have to admit it definitely helped my anxiety, but also the muscle relaxant. I could feel my body, my muscles really relaxed. And so that's my new discovery. If you join me on Instagram, I'm going to be posting the best product and economical deal that I found. I'm learning to have as much of these vitamin minerals from food, realistically for me, it's just not possible. So, vitamin supplements are important for me too. That's what I do.

MS: *Great. This next question is, do you use certain foods as more of a response to mental health symptoms or as a preventative to your mental health symptoms?*

EL: It's a bit of both. Here is a perfect example: For today and before any motivational talk where I'm speaking in front of an audience, I'm really conscious of whatever I eat the day before, this morning, and for lunch. For instance, yesterday, I walked by one of my favorite Jamaican food restaurants and I really wanted their curry goat on rice and I just knew it's spicy. I didn't want my stomach could gurgle, I wanted to be nice and light for today. So this morning, I made sure I just had a light breakfast. I had one pasture raised egg, mixed in with spinach, as a spinach omelet, and a glass of water and not even a lot of caffeine, like a quarter of a cup because I could get really hyper and I will be bouncing up and down. So that was just preventative eating.

MS: *Well, thank you so much, Emmanuel, we are at time and I know we didn't get to everyone's questions. If you have a specific question for Emmanuel, please go ahead and send it to him directly. If*

you need to be connected, just send an email to myself or Melanie. This has been a lot of fun. I really have appreciated your holistic outlook, Emmanuel, and emphasis on balance between the healthy foods and the “treat yourself” foods with exercise and everything in between on how you're managing. I really enjoyed hearing everything and that emphasis on balance. Thank you so much for joining us today.

EL: Well, thank you so much. It was such a pleasure.