



Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Hello, and welcome to Unstress. I'm Dr. Ron Ehrlich.

Food is medicine. You must have heard that before. We actually did a show, [episode 19, with Dr. Terry Wahls, called Living Proof: Food As Medicine](#), where food transformed Terry's life from advanced, wheelchair-bound multiple sclerosis sufferer, to someone who now walks and rides pushbikes, and horses, and lectures around the world, including Australia.

Two and a half thousand years ago, Hippocrates said, "All disease starts in the gut." Importantly, he didn't distinguish between mental and physical disease. He said all disease. And then he also went on to say, "Let food be your medicine, and medicine be your food." You can see why he is considered to be the father of medicine. Those messages are even more relevant today than way back then.

My guests today are mother and son, Jo and Isaac Whitton. Jo is a mother of four. She's personally had a history of health issues growing up, and then some issues within her growing family. Isaac, at the age of 11, was suffering from, at times, debilitating anxiety and depression. Just to put this in a broader perspective, we touch on some statistics about [the issue of youth mental health](#), and as you'll hear, well, it's pretty alarming. It was at 13 years old that Isaac literally woke up one day and was suffering from a severe condition that threw up some serious challenges to him and his family. Well, I'll let them tell you about it. It's quite a story.

They explore a diet focused on a link between the gut and the brain. It's called the GAPS diet. I'll let them explain that, as well. You will have heard on this show before that [the gut is the second brain](#). There's a strong connection between mood and food. But when it's really not functioning properly, things can really start to go even more seriously wrong. Jo has written a fabulous cookbook, in fact, two. Her first is called "Quirky Cooking," but following on from her family's experience, her latest book is called "Life-Changing Food." The title actually says it all, and I thought it's such a powerful story, I'd let them tell you about their journey.

I hope you enjoy this conversation I had with Jo and Isaac Whitton.

[Download the PDF transcription](#)

Welcome to the show, Jo, and Isaac.

Jo Whitton: Thank you.

Isaac Whitton: Thank you very much.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Jo, in our family, I think we were just talking about this, your book, the "Life-Changing Food," holds pride of place in my household, and in both my daughters' households. But for you, this really was life-changing. Can you give us a little bit of a background as to what prompted this book, and this title?

Jo Whitton: Gosh, I think how far to go back? When I was growing up, I had issues with food. I didn't realize it was that at first. I didn't realize it was food reactions. I just thought it was just me. I was always getting sick. I always had colds. I always reacted to dairy, but I didn't know that that's what was going on back then. And as I got older, it got worse, and then I started having, late teens, I was having the hormonal issues, and the skin breakouts, and I was very underweight. I had a lot of trouble, once I started having kids, with exhaustion, and with really low blood sugar. It was up and down all the time. I'd get very dizzy, had low blood pressure.

I just got sick a lot, and the kids started having the same sorts of problems as I did, with constant colds and everything. Isaac was probably one of the worst. He always got constipated very easily, and he would be very lethargic. He was very sensitive and screamy. There were all sorts of things going on that I kept thinking, there must be something that I could do myself with food, but whenever I went to a doctor or even a nutritionist, I wasn't getting the answers. I was finding ...

At first, when I was younger, I was told to gain weight, you just sprinkle Sustagen on all your food, and you'll gain weight. And that was pretty gross. I was told, take these little pills whenever you have dairy, and then you'll be able to handle it. Drink lots of soymilk. I was told to ... I remember, I was living at a hostel while I was at uni, and the food wasn't perfect, and I remember talking to the nutritionist about it, that it wasn't really fresh fruit and vegetables like my mum had always. She's like, "No, no, that doesn't matter."

It was really, I was thinking, "This can't be right." And then I started having kids, and I'd go to the doctors and say, "These are the problems I'm having," and again, I was told, "To gain weight, just eat lots of chocolate and ice cream."

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Great advice, isn't it? You wouldn't even pay for advice like that, would you? Although we did. Go on.

Jo Whitton: And I remember, I'd get really itchy skin on my legs, and I'd scratch 'til I bled, and I'd have all these marks on my legs. I remember talking to a doctor about that, and he told me to get a life because that wasn't a real issue. I just, I really struggled, because I knew that there was something not right, but it wasn't like an anaphylactic allergy or anything like that, but it was bad enough that it was bothering me.

And finally, a friend said to me, "why don't you go to a naturopath?" And I'd never been to a naturopath. I thought that was all a bit kooky. So, I was like, okay, I'll go to a naturopath, and that's when I started getting help with my actual diet. [He started to teach me about leaky gut, and about how dairy, and gluten, and sugar were affecting my gut, because it wasn't healthy, and he was trying to help me to heal that.](#)

And it took a lot of years because I didn't ... You just don't get this stuff all in one go. It just takes time to really sink in, to understand what to do and how to work things out. I slowly became gluten-free, dairy-free, sugar-free. Just some natural sweeteners. Mostly gluten-free. I think I used to have a little bit of spelt, and things like that.



Dr. Ron Ehrlich: And you mentioned, Jo, that at this stage, had you had all four kids?

Jo Whitton: Yes. I had four kids under seven.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Wow. And you were tired. Why would that be? I just cannot imagine. Yeah, go on. But how old are your kids now, just to put this into time perspective?

Jo Whitton: My oldest is 20, nearly 21 this year. So, 20, 18, 16, and 14. They all have birthdays around the middle of the year.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: And Isaac is the youngest, or?

Jo Whitton: No, he's 16.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: 16, right.

Jo Whitton: Yeah, there's one more after him.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Okay. So, at this point, when you consulted your naturopath, you already had the four kids.

Jo Whitton: Yeah. My youngest was one, and Isaac was at that stage where he was, like I said, getting constipated very easily, and just really lethargic. And when I was trying to breastfeed my youngest, I had trouble with it and the midwife ... sorry, the lactation consultant said, "I think it's something to do with what you're eating. It's something to do with your milk. You need to get that looked at." So, that sort of sent me off even more on this journey, to try and find how my food was affecting my health, and my kids' health.

I found that we started seeing improvements really quickly once I went to the naturopath, and we started working on all the different ... Pulling out the wheat and the dairy and stuff, and I started to see improvements, but I didn't really gain a lot of weight. I got ... At one stage, I also had struggled with anxiety, and I got down at one stage to 42 kilos when I was 35.

And so, it was just constantly working on things, and I was gradually getting better, and so I started to share what I was learning, and write because I was always making up my own recipes. I'd write them down and give them to friends because they'd ask, "What was that recipe?" And I'd write it down for them. And that's how the blog all started. That was nearly 10 years ago that I started the blog.

After a few years, that had really taken off, because I think there were just so many people out there struggling with the same sorts of issues, food intolerances, and sick kids, and all these different problems. They were told to go gluten-free, or dairy-free, or whatever, and they didn't know where to find the recipes. So, I started to have a lot of traffic on my blog and started a Facebook page, and then a cookbook came out of that, and that just really took off, then. But around then -



Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Which was the "Quirky ..."

Jo Whitton: That was the "Quirky Cooking" cookbook, yeah. But around that time was when everything went bad for Isaac. He, I thought we were going pretty well, but it was always a little bit of a rollercoaster, and especially as the kids got older, and they weren't always at home. They were out with friends, or they were out at their parties, or camps, or sleepovers, or whatever, and they started to ... Or their Grandma's. They were things that we weren't eating things at home.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: See, I know my daughter would literally kill me, so I wouldn't even risk it. But we're all in the same boat, here. But do go on. I can imagine grandparents ... Yeah. So, how old was Isaac at this point? I mean, 10 years ago, that's six years old.

Jo Whitton: No, when he was ... When I was doing the first cookbook, he was ...

Isaac Whitton: I was about 12.

Jo Whitton: Yeah, he was about 12. 11, 12. I remember having to have him pretty much sitting on my lap or under my arm the whole time I was writing it, and trying to do things around the house. Thankfully, I homeschooled, so I could have them nearby. But he was really anxious, and he'd cry a lot, and he just had all these fears and things, and it was really weird. And I remember thinking to myself, I wonder, if I pull back on grains and dairy and sugar, and just really go strict for a bit, meat and veggie kind of food if that will help? It's funny how you get the instincts.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Because you'd already, at some point, when you consulted the naturopath the first time, you'd had a bit of a go at going completely gluten and sugar-free, but as so often happens, you kind of slip back into a little bit?

Jo Whitton: Yeah. I had tried different things, but not properly. Like, for a week, I did gluten ... sorry, grain-free, dairy-free, sugar-free for Isaac, and he came out of his really bad stage that he'd gone into at about 11. And I thought, wow, look at that. And so, I started to try and be more careful. But, yeah, when things start going really well, you go, I'll be good again, and then you get a bit slack. So, things would slip a little bit.

And I feel like it was like that bucket analogy, where things just kept filling up his bucket, and when he was 13, it just really overflowed. That was about the time ... Yeah, when he was 13 was when the cookbook had recently come out, the "Quirky Cooking" one. He just suddenly went into a really terrible time, with depression, anxiety, phobias, and it's probably good for him to talk about it if you like.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Yeah, no, this is a treat, and thank you, Isaac, for joining us. So, tell me how you were feeling at this particular point in time.

Isaac Whitton: Yeah, well, it was always really hard, because I had no information on anyone else ever having anything like this before, and it was ...



Jo Whitton: None of his friends.

Isaac Whitton: None of my friends, of course. None of my friends. And then I had ... We didn't even know where to look on the internet to find information about this stuff, because we didn't know it was an actual thing. I just thought it was me. I'm just always going to have these problems, where my mind just tells me to do certain things, which is obviously compulsions, and there's always these negative thoughts and these threatening thoughts which are always in my head, which I now know are obsessions. I didn't know what they were back then. I'm like, "Oh, this is just me, and I'm going to have to deal with this the rest of my life."

It was really hard because back then I was going through ... What was my grade in school?

Jo Whitton: Eight, maybe?

Isaac Whitton: Grade eight in school, falling really, really far behind in it, and things like that, you know? But we eventually got to a point where we did end up doing something about it, which was pulling back the diet a bit.

Jo Whitton: But we realized after he got so bad that he couldn't even feed himself. Like, he was constantly ...

Isaac Whitton: Oh, that was ...

Jo Whitton: That's what I'm talking about, that stage.

Isaac Whitton: That was that later stage.

Jo Whitton: When you were 13.

Isaac Whitton: Oh, whoops.

Jo Whitton: We'll talk about that, then.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Yes, no. Well, you became ... I mean, I have followed a bit of this story, and you became rather compulsive.

Jo Whitton: Yes.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Or obsessive. I think they call it OCD, obsessive ...

Isaac Whitton: Yeah, that's it. What I was talking about before was the first bit of anxiety that I had, that was nowhere near as bad. This was when I was 11 or 12 when mum was ... when the first book was about to come out. But after it came out, that was when it really started to hit, and I had about a year where I was completely, almost free of OCD. Well, not so much free, but it was not too bad, until 'round about June 2014, was when it really started to get bad.

And, yeah, like Mum said, it got to a point where I couldn't eat, because I felt like any action that I did, I would have to think thoughts in my head before I could do that action. Anyone who's ever suffered from OCD or knows about it will know what I'm talking about. Because, I mean, it's sort of hard to explain. It's like, you feel like you're trapped in your head, and you can't do anything about it unless you do certain actions, certain, obviously, compulsions, which is what they're called, to relieve your threatening thoughts or the thoughts that are in your head.

For example, you're going to die, you're going to get this disease, you're going to be buried alive, or something like that, if you don't do this certain action. Whether that's turning the light off two or three times, whether that's opening the drawer up five times, whether that's placing a knife in a certain position. It's crazy. Whew. Anyway ...

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: And this came on suddenly, this obsessive part of it?

Isaac Whitton: Absolutely. I still remember the day. I still remember, one day, just, the morning I was fine, afternoon I was in bed, not able to ... Well, I was able to ... I just felt not able to ...

Jo Whitton: Cope.

Isaac Whitton: Really get up. And I remember having a friend over that day, and I was walking around, and I was repeating actions, which is a huge thing with OCD. And he's just like, "What are you doing? Do you like to walk?" Because I was walking back and forth on this path, and he was curious about what I was actually doing. I just, I remember the day. It was off and on for a while, and then it just became every single day, unable to do anything at all.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Had you had an infection? Because there's a whole new thing, and I'm sure you guys know more about it than I do, PANDAS.

Jo Whitton: Yeah, I've heard of it. Yeah.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Well, following on from an infection, this is ... [I've just been talking, and I've learned so much on my podcast, honestly.](#) Talking to some pediatric physicians, who taught me about a follow-on from an infection, that results in this kind of ... But had there been anything like that?

Jo Whitton: No. He hadn't ...

Isaac Whitton: Yeah, I don't remember.

Jo Whitton: He hadn't had any ... It was so weird.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Just out of the blue.

Isaac Whitton: I never remember having an infection.



Jo Whitton: Well, when we looked back at things, we realized he'd always had a little bit of this obsessive-compulsive behavior, but we didn't realize that it was anything. I just thought it was his strange personality.

Isaac Whitton: Yeah, even when I was like 10 years old, I used to have this obsession with explaining myself completely.

Jo Whitton: Yeah, he'd explain himself over, and over, and over.

Isaac Whitton: Like, I would repeat what I'm saying. Well, not so much repeat as in the OCD way of repeating, but constantly saying what I'm saying over and over again, just so I can get the perfect meaning portrayed in language, you know? Which obviously is not possible. I was just constantly ... I would say something, and then I would be trying to ... I don't know, it's hard to explain.

Jo Whitton: Keep correcting himself.

Isaac Whitton: I would constantly try and correct myself.

Jo Whitton: And I was like, "Okay, Isaac. That's okay. We got it."

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Yes, it's interesting to know when a little quirky ... Sorry for using that word, but a little quirky behavior, it's just, oh, this is the way you are, and then at what point does it become a problem? And clearly, I mean, the point had very clearly been reached, hadn't it?

Jo Whitton: Yeah, once he couldn't cope with everyday life. Like, he couldn't do his schoolwork anymore. He couldn't go have a shower on his own. He couldn't just take off his clothes, even. He found that really frightening.

Isaac Whitton: Well, any action, any time you're moving, even when you're breathing, you're doing an action which you have to justify with a certain thought in your head. So, basically, with OCD, any action you're making, even blinking sometimes, you have to have the right thoughts before you do it.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: So, this is a really, I mean, obviously a huge shock to the family. There is, you've got to be consulting a medical practitioner at this point. What was the response?

Jo Whitton: Well, at first, we didn't know what it was. I think I took him to the doctor early on, and she was like, "He should see a psychiatrist and everything." And I was thinking, "But it doesn't make ..." I said I'm like, "But he does ..." And she was trying to bring it back to something that may have happened. I'm like, "But nothing's happened. Nothing's changed. I can't figure out why he's suddenly doing this, why he's suddenly screaming and crying all day in fear, because it's not like anything's happened."

And then I started researching, and I looked up OCD, and I saw that he had every single one of the symptoms. So, I took him back to the doctor, and said, "I think it's OCD," and she tested him. She said, "Oh, he has very severe OCD. You need to put him straight on medication and get him to the psychologist." And I was like, at that stage, we were so desperate. I said, "Put him on the medication, but I'm going to get him off as soon as I can." In my mind, I knew straightaway that ...

Isaac Whitton: We need to make some sort of changes.

Jo Whitton: Changes in diet. Because I'd heard a lot about the gut-brain connection, and I thought, okay if this is a mental health issue, I know that I can work on it with gut health. And I'd heard about GAPS, and I always thought, well, we don't need that.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Well, just share with our listener. That's G-A-P-S, literally GAPS in capital letters. What does it stand for?

Jo Whitton: Gut and psychology syndrome, or gut and physiology syndrome. So, it's an intervention diet that's used to heal the gut and rebalance the microbiome, and get everything working properly so that your gut and brain are connecting properly. It's been used for many years. It was developed over 20 years ago, based partly on the SPD diet, which was developed in the '30s, and also partly on, Dr. Natasha Campbell-McBride really had her own experiences as a young child with a terrible illness that she nearly died from, and her grandmother brought her back from that with traditional foods.

She was known as a bit of a healer with food and herbs, and things like that. She borrowed things from traditional wisdom, kind of a [Weston Price](#) kind of idea of food, and also from the SPD diet. As she was a neurologist, and a doctor, and a nutritionist, all these different things, she worked it all into a system that she used for her own family, for her son, and also for her clients, and she just saw so many people healed through it, and it became a book and a protocol.

We'd heard of it, and I thought, it seems so extreme. It seems really hard. And once you look into it, though, it's actually very simple. It's restrictive at first, but it's still just meat and veggies at first, so it's not that hard. It takes a bit of time to get used to eating so simply, I think, is more the trick for it than anything, because people want to eat their baking and their sweets, and you can't have that at first. But we worked through that for a few weeks, the intro diet.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Because there are several levels to it, aren't there?

Jo Whitton: Yeah. Most people ... What we found, the best way to do it was to start with full GAPS. It's more, what's the word? It has more foods in it than the Paleo diet. It has some legumes. It has dairy, fermented dairy, things like that. So, it is quite varied, the full GAPS diet, and it's based on whole foods and traditional foods. So, you've got the fermented foods, and the fermented dairy, things like that in there.

But then, once you're sort of steady on that, then you pull back to the earlier stages and take out everything except the non-starchy vegetables and slow-cooked ... Everything is slow-cooked and very soft, in broths, and meat. So, everything is very easy to digest. And so, you start back there, and your body goes into kind of a fasting mode at first and switches onto ... It just starts to heal, because your body is like, "Oh, good. You've taken out all those things that are difficult to digest. I can focus on healing, now."

And it just is amazing how quickly we saw changes. Isaac was on medication at first, but a very small dose, and we started to see changes really quickly. Within a few months, he was up on stage, speaking with Pete Evans in front of 200 people about his mental health.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Fantastic, fantastic. I'm looking forward to hearing him down in Sydney, too. So, when you say "within a short period of time," you say, "Okay, we're going to go GAPS." And I presume this is something the whole family went on.

Jo Whitton: Yes. I basically said ... I did a lot of research, and Isaac was researching too, and he looked into things for himself. So, he was more up on all the stages that I was, and he'd tell me when I was doing it wrong. But I said to the family, "I'm not going to buy any of those foods, now. I'm just going to buy GAPS foods. That's all I'm going to cook, and that's what we're going to eat, and if anyone wants to eat any different, you have to go get a job, go to the grocery store, buy it yourself, and cook it yourself." So, since they weren't old enough to do that, they're like, "Mum!"

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: So, within a few weeks, or days ... Well, it takes time. When did you start to notice, in terms of time, that there was a significant difference?

Isaac Whitton: Well, I mean, it was only a couple of weeks until the medication kicked in, so I noticed a difference then. But I was starting, obviously, on the diet straight away, so I didn't see a huge difference apart from that, other than the doctor actually did. We were still going frequently to the doctor, and we started going to the psychologist as well, and she started saying, after probably six months, or maybe even three or four months -

Jo Whitton: Well, hang on. Move back a little bit.

Isaac Whitton: Okay.

Jo Whitton: I noticed a difference within two weeks.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Wow. Okay.

Jo Whitton: He had pulled out of that zombie state, and he was talking again.

Isaac Whitton: Partly due to the medication, as well.

Jo Whitton: Well, it was partly, but then when we started going to the doctor ... We were going to the doctor regularly for checkups, and I was worried that it was just the



medication. And so, I said the doctor and to the psychologist, "Is this just the medicine making this difference?"

Isaac Whitton: And then ...

Jo Whitton: Yeah. Do you want to say?

Isaac Whitton: And then they started to say, "Usually, by now, we've doubled the dosage of the antidepressants, and by now you're, most of the time ..."

Jo Whitton: On more.

Isaac Whitton: On a lot more than that.

Jo Whitton: Yeah, but he had improved, and within six months, the doctor said, "He really doesn't need to be on the medication now." Because I had said to her, that's my goal, to have him off by six months.

Isaac Whitton: I was still a little bit worried about it, so I kept it a year until I came off the medication because I really didn't want to ...

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: And the medication is not without its side effects, Isaac. What were some of those side effects? How did ... Because a lot of kids are on it. Is the medication antidepressant? Is that what they give you?

Jo Whitton: Yeah. It was like a tiny ...

Isaac Whitton: Side effects were ...

Jo Whitton: Half a tablet, but side effects were still there. It was still medication.

Isaac Whitton: Yeah. I kind of ... I didn't notice a difference at first, because my whole former anxiety was relieved. Well, obviously not all of it, but it was a huge relief. But I did notice once, I accident ... We ran out of, obviously, medication, and we couldn't get to the pharmacy for a couple days. So, I ended up going about three or four days without medication, and it was so funny, because I felt like all of the sudden, everything cleared up, and I could think quicker clearer.

Jo Whitton: He was working at the supermarket, at the cash register. I remember him saying, "Mum, I can actually add up quicker, and my brain is not as foggy." I said, "Well, there you go."

Isaac Whitton: Everything also felt more real. Everything just sort of felt like it came back into a sort of focus, real life, everything cleared up.

Jo Whitton: So, that was when he was ready to go off, and he was like, "Okay, I can see that I actually am better off without it." Because it had become a crutch for him. He was so frightened to go back to how he was at the start, and I was wanting to take him off, but he was really frightened, and the doctor recommended doing it slowly.

Isaac Whitton: So, I did break it down to half tablets. One year later, in September 2015, I took it down to half a tablet, and then half every other night, and then I just cut it off, and I honestly ...

Jo Whitton: Have never gone back.

Isaac Whitton: Have never gone back, and I never noticed a huge difference with my medication being gone, apart from the side effects of the medication being ...

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Yeah. Which, as I say, I'm just alarmed. We did a program a few weeks ago with a [psychologist in Sydney from the Anxiety Clinic, Dr. Jodie Lowinger](#). She gave me a statistic that I just found extraordinary. One in four people under the age of 18 is diagnosed with anxiety. And I also did another program with another pediatrician who said one in two children ... She's from America. One in two children suffer from depression. One in two teenage girls, sorry. One in two teenage girls.

Isaac Whitton: Yeah. I actually heard from one of my friends who was going through a hard time, he was in America, and he said ... I'm not sure if this stat is actually true, I mean, and I could have even heard it wrong. But he said roughly one in two teenagers in the US do cut their wrists, or cut themselves, which is really sad.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Well, yeah. I'd say it's also the side effect of these medications as well, which isn't ... But here we are, anyway. We're back on the GAPS, and things have gone really well for him. Let me ask you this, Isaac. If you had to give yourself a score, where you gave yourself a score of 10 for being in really good health, and 0 for being that day you were just in the worst state you'd ever been, where are you now?

Isaac Whitton: I'd say probably around seven. Because I mean, OCD is always going to be a part of my life, but it's so much of a small part of my life, I just can't describe how much of a change GAPS and the change in my diet has made in my life. And obviously, I still have those days where I'll feel a bit down, or obviously start getting obsessions into my head, and I'll have to push them out. Anyone with OCD probably understands that that's sort of ... It lasts. OCD isn't really something that goes away, particularly, but it's so much better than it's just indescribably better. I can't ...

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Well, if you can get it down to a more manageable level, I can recommend dentistry as an excellent use of your skills, there. I sometimes wonder whether I'm a little bit OCD, myself.

Jo Whitton: They put it to good use, don't they?

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: That's right.



Jo Whitton: Isaac puts it to good use with languages he's learning.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Really? I heard you were very good with the Rubik cube. Go on, share with our listener, your record with that. I was so impressed when I heard that. Go on.

Isaac Whitton: Well ...

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Because, just to preface that, Isaac, it's taken me about two or three weeks to sort one out, but go on.

Isaac Whitton: Oh, wow. Well done. That's amazing. That's awesome. Yeah, it takes a while. I generally don't usually say my record, because most of the time, people don't believe it. But I'd say my average is 'round about 16, 15 seconds, and my best time ever is 8.37 seconds. The world record is a lot lower. The world record is about 4 ... I haven't actually kept up with it, but I think it's about 4.69, or something like that. Somewhere around there.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Yeah, I wouldn't feel too bad about that, Isaac. I think you've done well. Listen, let's just take a step back from the GAPS. I think we can kind of ... And by the way, now, before we leave that, I wanted to ask, is this still the GAPS diet? Are we still on that?

Jo Whitton: Okay, so, it's been about ... I'm trying to think. I think it's been about four years, and we transitioned off about a year or so ago, we started transitioning off. So, we're mostly just whole foods now, but still really low in grains. So, we have a little bit of rice, and a little bit of buckwheat, and a little bit of ... Sometimes the kids have a bit of oats, but not a lot. We're still mostly GAPS, I find. And whenever, like with Isaac, he hasn't mentioned this yet, but when he does start to go downhill, if he starts to feel anxious, if he starts to feel like he's not so well again, we pull back, and we know how to do a quick reboot.

Isaac Whitton: Yeah, that's right.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Because the big challenge is building resilience, isn't it?

Jo Whitton: Yeah, yeah. And also, having the tools to work through anxiety is really important. We haven't really talked about that, but I know you're a big help for people with that, with your book. But it's something that was a big part of it, like getting out into nature, and all the things that we did to help Isaac to get well. But he knows what to do now when he starts to go backward, and diet is always the first thing we look at. Have you been eating sugar, have you been eating junk food when you're out? That kind of thing. Let's pull that back.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: How are you ... [How is sleeping through all of this?](#) Because this must be a big disruption, too. How do you sleep? Traditionally, have you been a good sleeper?

Isaac Whitton: No, I was never a good sleeper. Even when I was younger, I was always sort of ... I would lay in bed for two hours, trying to get to sleep at night, and I feel like that was always ... That sort of showed ... That was before my anxiety, you know? And I still do have trouble sleeping, but it's a lot easier now than it used to be to sleep, I think.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: And what about you, Jo? I mean, you've had a long history of health issues. Has sleep been an issue to you through your life?

Jo Whitton: I usually fall asleep straight away, and I've never usually had a problem with that unless the kids wake me up in that sleep window, and then I find it difficult to fall back to sleep. I usually wake up very early in the morning. Sometimes, I'll wake up at 4 or 5, but I'll go back to sleep, and then I'll wake up again usually around 6, and get up. If I get anxious or stressed about anything, like something to do with work or something, then I'll toss and turn a bit, but generally, I'm a really good sleeper.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Tell me another thing that I'm intrigued about, is technology, particularly for young people, because of kids today ... I mean, not kids. We're all kids in one way. We're all kids. All us kids are exposed to so much, and the social media aspect of life as well, and managing expectations. What are you thinking, Isaac, in terms of the role of technology amongst your friends, and mental health? You get up and talk about mental health. Do you think technology is playing a part in any of these problems?

Isaac Whitton: Yeah, I'd say for sure. A lot of times, people ... I don't know.

Jo Whitton: Get too addicted to games? Like, when you were first ... Do you remember when you were first having problems, the addiction to games was one of the first things that he ...

Isaac Whitton: Yeah, I mean, a lot of people who do have a, in quotations, "bad past" with gaming end up never wanting to play games again, and sort of hating games, which is definitely not me. I do enjoy myself a video game every now and then, but I do realize that I am really interested in other things, and I do feel like if you do only do that kind of thing and make it your life, it just sort of feels like a lot of depression can come out of that.

Jo Whitton: Isaac tries to use technology in a good way. He uses it a lot for his language learning.

Isaac Whitton: Oh, yeah, I do, actually.

Jo Whitton: He loves getting on the apps with other people, and talking in different languages, and he's learned so much through that. So, I guess there's always the pros and cons.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Yeah.

Isaac Whitton: And I mean, it's like, there's nothing ... It feels like there's nothing wrong with this one because everything new comes with pros and cons, and I feel like there's

always a balance in life with these kinds of things. So, that's my take on it. I feel like if it's a weakness to you, like if there are people out there who find it to be a weakness to them to play games, because they end up playing hundreds and hundreds of hours every month, it might end up being something that you should try keeping off of for a while to see. Because you might find that when you get off, you can get so much more done. You can get so much more accomplished. But that's just, yeah, it depends.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: And is it a factor amongst young people, having lots of friends, or being liked by lots of people on Facebook or the like? Because Facebook's a bit passe now, I guess. It's Instagram.

Isaac Whitton: I just ... I don't know what to think about it, to be honest, but I don't use it too often. I'm more of a fan of Instagram and things like that.

Jo Whitton: YouTube.

Isaac Whitton: But I still don't even use that. I don't use social media too much. I mean, when I'm traveling, I tend to upload videos to YouTube, and photos to Instagram and stuff, just for fun, because I love photography and things like that, but yeah, I generally don't use it too much. I often, I do watch a lot of YouTube, but ...

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Yeah. It's an easy one to get lost on, isn't it? But one last thing I wanted to ask you both, and I'd love to hear both your opinions on this. What do you think the biggest challenge is for people on their health journey today, in our modern world? Jo, what do you think?

Jo Whitton: I definitely think it's very -

Isaac Whitton: The modern diet.

Jo Whitton: It's so difficult.

Isaac Whitton: It's just about being misled.

Jo Whitton: Everyones... Most people are brainwashed to think, well, if it's being sold in the shops in Australia, I mean, the government wouldn't let us have anything bad, would they?

Isaac Whitton: Yeah, that's it.

Jo Whitton: And you hear people say that kind of thing. My auntie said something about, she brought this cake. This was in America. My parents are American, and my auntie bought this cake, and my mum looked at the ingredients, and she said, "This has sodium lauryl sulfate in the cake." And my auntie is like, "Oh, well, if you get all hung up on eating healthy, then you just end up spending more years in the nursing home." We're just like, "What? You're just going to live so long that you're going to be in the nursing home for years?" And it was the idea that ...



Isaac Whitton: You're going to be out of the nursing home for years longer.

Jo Whitton: Yes. The idea amongst a lot of people I've talked to is, there's no use trying to eat really, really healthy, because, what, you're going to live a few years longer? Big deal. And they think that it's not important. And I've found so many people think that way until they get to the stage where they're so desperate with chronic illness, then they go, "Oh, I actually do need to do something about this." It's so hard, because we're bombarded with all these advertising, and foods, and young people especially find it really difficult to be different than their friends.

And that was something that we had to work through with our kids. It's okay to take a thermos of soup to the soccer game, practice, and the other kids are all eating pizza. I think that's really difficult for young people, and for adults. I've seen so many mums that get ... And I know myself, I've been teased and laughed at by family and friends in the past, because of the way I eat. So, I think that pressure to conform to the Western diet is one of the most difficult things with health.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Yeah. Well, that's great. Did you want to add anything to that, Isaac?

Isaac Whitton: Yeah, definitely. I agree. It's just, the perception of people. People think that certain foods, if they say they're healthy, if they say 50 percent less fat or something like that, then it's got to be healthy. It's got to be something that you can benefit from eating. I had a friend that told me once ... Actually, no, I'm not going to say it, because he could hear this podcast.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: No one else is listening! No one else is listening. Go on, Isaac.

Isaac Whitton: Well, basically, he was talking about a certain snack that he'd gone off, and he started eating a different snack and that that was more healthy, and it really wasn't.

Jo Whitton: Still lots of packet food.

Isaac Whitton: It wasn't very much healthier, and I was like, "Oh." At the time, I didn't say anything. I probably should have. But anyway, yeah. I just think that our diet, it's just gotten so unhealthy. Well, obviously. But it's just, it's sort of, people see it as ... People don't look at it as a problem when they have health problems, things like this. They don't look at the diet as a problem. They look at that last. It's like the most important thing that everyone isn't really looking into, looking at.

But it just feels like more people need to know that diet plays such a huge role in someone's health, and it's more about, as I quote from Fouad, it's what you eat more than how much you eat, when it comes to weight and, of course, health benefits, as well. But, yeah, I think definitely, more people need to know that diet is something that really can affect you, for good or bad.



Dr. Ron Ehrlich: Okay. Well, guys, thank you so much for joining us. I'm so looking forward to catching up with you in Sydney. It's been terrific. Thank you so much.

Jo Whitton: Thank you.

Isaac Whitton: Thank you so much. Thank you very much. Good to meet you.

Dr. Ron Ehrlich: The key is building and maintaining resilience. I think it's actually the aim of our health journey throughout our lives, and I actually think focusing on the five pillars is a great way of thinking about your health, and a great way to build and maintain resilience. Now, we've done shows on mental health. We've done shows on the impact of poor sleep, the impact of breathing, the power of movement on thought. And as you heard, food and its impact on your gut, your immune system, and your brain are profound. But if it's about building and maintaining resilience, then as I said, I think that's just a lifetime journey.

Now, I also mentioned a condition called PANDAS. It's not a cuddly bear; it's an acronym. Well, it is a cuddly bear, but in this case, it's an acronym. And there are all these acronyms, I know, but it stands for P: pediatric, A: autoimmune, N: neuropsychiatric, D: disorders, associated, A, with streptococcal infections. The I didn't quite make it in there, but it's autoimmune neuropsychiatric conditions associated with streptococcal infections. Now, [we've done a show earlier this week with an integrative pediatrician, Dr. Leila Masson](#), and she discusses it, and OCD is actually part of that complex. Which is actually, it's only in recent years, it's slowly becoming recognized. Anyway, you've heard it first on this show.

Jo has a great website and podcast and blog called Quirky Cooking. Her book, "Life-Changing Food," which she co-authored, and co-hosts the blog and podcast, with her friend Fouad Kassab. The book is not only full of literally life-changing recipes, but it's an absolutely beautiful cookbook and a favorite in our family. We'll have links to their website on the show notes.

Both Jo and Isaac are talking at the upcoming Mind Conference, which I've referenced before. It's in Sydney, from the 11th through the 13th of May, 2018, and we'll have links to that. And if you're listening to this after that, and you've missed the fabulous three-day program, you can download the recording from the Mind website.

So, until next week, this is Dr. Ron Ehrlich. Be well.

*This podcast provides general information and discussion about medicine, health, and related subject. The content is not intended and should not be construed as medical advice or as a substitute for care by a qualified medical practitioner. If you or any other person has a medical concern, he or she should consult with an appropriately qualified medical practitioner. Guests who speak in this podcast express their own opinions, experiences, and conclusions.*

