

Speaker 1: Bulletproof Radio, a state of high performance.

Dave: You are listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Osprey. Today's cool fact of the day is that your eye muscles are the most active muscles in your body, moving more than 100,000 times a day. Bet you didn't think about that. June is Alzheimer's Awareness month, which is why you should listen to this show. You are going to hear from one of the world's foremost voices in explaining what Alzheimer's is, how it's affecting us, and what we can do about it.

Today's guest is Maria Shriver. Maria is the mother of four, a Peabody Award-winning and Emmy Award-winning journalist and producer, NBC News Special Anchor and author of seven New York Times bestselling books, including her latest release earlier this Spring called I've Been Thinking... Reflections, Prayers, and Meditations for a Meaningful Life. Her mission is moving humanity forward.

Today we're gonna talk about a topic, and cause, that Maria's been championing for years. She's been reporting on it, writing about it, fundraising for it, and bringing awareness to Alzheimer's Disease for 15 years, especially in women. This started because in 2003 her father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and since that time she hasn't stopped fighting for a cure and has become one of the Nation's premier Alzheimer's advocates. For her it's a spiritual, medical, and emotional issue. Maria, it's an honor to have you on Bulletproof Radio.

Maria: Thank you. Thank you so much for having me here.

Dave: Tell me what it was like when your father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease.

Maria: Well, it was in 2003, as you mentioned, and the world was a very different place in regards to this disease. There wasn't a lot of information about it. There was still a lot of fear about it. I think there's still a lot of fear today. There was really a hopelessness surrounding the disease, and there were a lot more questions than there were answers. When I found out that that's what he had, I immediately kind of started asking questions, I'm a journalist, I'm naturally curious. I found very few answers and that's what led me to kind of keep pushing. As you mentioned, I wrote a children's book on the subject and then I started just looking for other platforms in which to get the information out there, but they were platforms for me to ask questions and get answers and then cull that information and put it out.

Dave: When someone finds out that a member of their family has Alzheimer's Disease, I think we immediately go to like the Stage IV, people can't remember their name, and they're completely disabled, but it's not like that. It's the little things that happen first. What are the first things that happen, or first things that you experienced when it struck in your family?

Maria: Well, I think it actually ... To go back to what you said when people get diagnosed with Alzheimer's they kind of go into shock. I think that's still what happens. I think what happens is that there are small moments along the way that with all disregard. I think

the challenge to be present in our own lives is a challenge really for all of us, the challenge to take note of our health is a challenge for all of us.

What we now know is that Alzheimer's is present in the brain doing its work for about 20 years before diagnosis, so getting people to pay attention to the small changes is a challenge. Getting that information out there, encouraging people to see a neurologist is a scary thing. People say like, "I don't want to know if I have Alzheimer's. I don't want to know if there's something going on, because there's nothing I can do about it." I don't think that's true, so I think the small signs are what we all miss. If I talk to everybody who was in my position as a kid, the kind of universal thing is, "I wish I'd taken my parent to a neurologist sooner. I wish I'd paid attention to them when they said, 'Gosh I can't remember this,' or 'Gosh, I feel like this.'" Instead, most people are met with, "That's just stress. It's nothing. Relax. Don't pay attention."

I think trying to change that conversation to, "Yep, pay attention," and start paying attention really young. That's what we're trying to do with the Women's Alzheimer's Movement is reach people in their 30s, their 40s, their 50s and say, "Now, is the time to pay attention to your brain health," not start getting acquainted with brain when you're in your 60s and 70s.

Dave: Alzheimer's Disease is one of the big things that caused me to want to write *Headstrong*, which ended up hitting the *New York Times Science List*. I actually found in that book, I think it starts even earlier, probably in your teens. You get some of the autoimmune things that happen in the brain, so there's this life-long decline that we can go towards, or there's a lifelong let's sort of stay even, or maybe even get better with age.

Maria: Right.

Dave: If you look at this antiaging movement. My goal right now is to live to at least 180, no joke. I think it might be possible and I'm willing to die trying.

Maria: But you want to live there in a good way.

Dave: Yes.

Maria: You don't just want to live to be 180 for kicks. You don't want to sit there and be a drain on your family, you want to live a healthy life, not only physically but mentally, spiritually. You want to live that way. I think that's the challenge really for all of us. As a doctor said to me recently, "Look it, I have a lot of 70-some people sitting in my waiting room who have great abs and great triceps and they have no brain," meaning that Alzheimer's has taken over.

I think that trying to shift the conversation, even anti-aging isn't really for me about making sure that you don't wrinkles, or botox, anti-aging, or longevity, aging well, really I think is a conversation that we could all have. You know, to me it's like, "What does positive aging look like? What does powerful aging look like? What does purpose-driven aging look like? What does passionate aging look like?" That's what I want to do. I don't

want to live to 180. You can have that, but I want to live in my 60s, 70s, 80s in a way where I'm independent, where I feel purposeful, where I feel passionate, where I feel positive about my life, and that my kids don't feel responsible for me, where I'm kind of still a viable member of society. I think that's the goal certainly for me. What I do today I missed the boat on my 20s and my 30s and my 40s, because I wasn't thinking of that. That wasn't part of the conversation, so I'm late to it. My purpose is getting people younger to start thinking that way as soon as possible.

Dave: When you start thinking that way as a younger person there are other benefits that hit you right now. I can tell you when I was in my mid 20s I probably didn't think much about Alzheimer's. Most people don't. You're thinking about like, "What's my job going to be. Who am I gonna date." Those seem like much more pressing concerns, and that's normal and healthy. But, if you start paying attention to your brain function at that age, which leads you to not get Alzheimer's 50 years later, what other benefits might people experience?

Maria: Well, I find all my kids and their friends, and I don't know if it's because they're around me, they're all thinking about their brain health. They're all thinking about wellness in a way that people weren't thinking about 10 years ago. They're in the supermarkets, they're looking at what's in the drinks. They're educating themselves about wellness, about juicing, about stress, about health. They're thinking about their moods. You know, you hear a lot of young women talking about moods today. That never happened 10 years ago, or 15 years ago, so I think all of this is really positive.

When you think about your brain being connected to your body, when you think about wellness holistically, I think you're happier, you're more focused on right now. You're focused on, "I want to find a partner who's also thinking like that. I want to have somebody that matches my values. I want to raise children, when I get pregnant and when I have children, that are healthy. I want to look at my pregnancy in a different way. I want to look at my body in a different way." I think it shifts everything, and that conversation. I was just in an Erewhon Market the other day with my daughter and they're a big supporter of Move For Minds, and they're doing a big campaign with us.

I was in there and I was standing in the aisle and I turned to my daughters and I'm like, "This didn't exist when you were kids. I didn't know any of this. It wasn't in the conversation." There wasn't ghee. I'd never heard of ghee. I never heard of this stuff. I'm so excited for them that they're gonna be able to have this at such an early age, and maybe that'll be the key to Alzheimer's is getting people in at such an early age and making ... Part of my work with the Women's Alzheimer's Movement, and Move For Minds, and my partnership with Equinox has been to shift the marketing and the perception of who gets Alzheimer's and when they get it.

Dave: Let's talk about who gets Alzheimer's, because I don't think most people are aware that two-thirds of Alzheimer's patients are actually women, not men.

Maria: Right, yeah.

Dave: It sort of seems like a problem for old men, but it's a problem for old people in general, but it actually happens more to women. Do we know why?

Maria: No, and that's why I created the Women's Alzheimer's Movement. I'm really glad you brought that up, because myself I got into this because my father had Alzheimer's, but when I was First Lady of California I had a big Women's Conference and I started programming breakout sessions about caregiving and about this subject, and more and more women were coming up to me and saying, "Oh, my mother has it. My mother has it," and I went to researchers all over the country and they're like, "No, there's nothing about that other than the fact that women live longer. There's no [bear 00:09:58] there," and I was like, "I don't think you're right. I think there's a [bear 00:09:59] there."

We went and got funding for the Shriver Report, partnered with the Alzheimer's Association, and reported that for the very first time to the nation, to leaders, to researchers and scientists, this is a woman's disease. This disease discriminates against women, and it's not just because they're living longer. There's something that's going on in women, and we can look at the X chromosome, we can look at hormones, we can look at inflammation, we can look at autoimmune, all of which affect women more, to try to find why that is. That's why we started the Women's Alzheimer's Movement. That's why I fund women-based research, and I still go around the country pushing researchers and doctors to look at women's health differently, not just when it comes to Alzheimer's. Women's health is way beyond the eight ball. Doctors aren't steeped in it. They don't know anything about hormones. They don't know about everything. It's like, "Well, you know, there's a lot we don't know." I mean, that should not be the fallback answer from doctors to women.

Dave: It's true. In the whole field of medical research over the last 50 years, when we've had so much data, you look at the heart disease trials it's all men, but women get heart disease at different rates and even for different reasons, and the same is true of Alzheimer's. The idea that maybe we're different, we have different hormones, different genes, and that at a minimum we should be doing trials on both genders on any sort of trial that we're doing unless you're looking at prostate cancer, in which case, all right, that's pretty much a guy's problem, right?

Even something like breast cancer, guys get breast cancer, too. There's very little research about breast cancer for men versus women. It seems like there's been just a bias in research and now it's catching up to us, because it's not just that women get Alzheimer's twice as much as men, which say two-thirds of the people are women, but that means one-third are men. Also, you look at who is providing the care for people with Alzheimer's-

Maria: Two-thirds of caregivers are women.

Dave: Exactly. It is exhausting to care for kids, and I think it's every person's fear as we age we don't want to be a kid again for our kids where we're just unable to care for ourselves. If you look at what's likely to end your quality of life, or actually end your life as you age, there's Alzheimer's Disease, there's cancer, and there's heart disease. Those are the big three. If you don't get in a car accident you can actually bet that one of those three

things is likely to end your life. Each of them has a different we'll just call it a debilitation curve.

Alzheimer's is probably the worst one, because it's not like you don't know when your brain starts to go. You feel like, "Oh, why didn't I remember that? What just happened?" You go through this period of feeling like you're losing control and you don't want to do it, and there's fear, and the fear is more than just fear of dying, it's fear of being a burden and being out of control and being unaware. If that's preventable by eating differently, or in the case of exercise just moving your body more, I think getting that message out is one of the most important things you can do just to reduce suffering, both for the people who get Alzheimer's, but their families and the people who care for them. I want to know more about movement. Why did you partner with Equinox?

Maria: Well, I partnered with Equinox because I said, you know, "What's the absolute opposite of Alzheimer's? Where is somewhere that nobody's thinking about Alzheimer's?" So, I walked into Equinox because they were known for their sexy marketing billboards, and messaging. Everybody in there was thinking about their body, and thinking about looking hot, and thinking of all these things, and I said, "I want to get that group of people, and I want them to think about their brains, and I want to go where you least expect to see me." We started in one club. We moved to four, we moved to five, we moved to six, we moved to eight, and this year we're moving to all 93 of their clubs.

Throughout the entire month of June, which is Brain Awareness Month, we're going to be doing classes there. They're going to be talking about food. Their website, furthermore, is engaged. We're doing a headstand challenge to turn Alzheimer's upside down. I'm doing Move For Minds events in four cities where we have brought the rock stars of science and research together to ... I'm going to interview them at the end of each class to bring people up-to-date on the latest information. We're gonna talk about the effects of exercise, meditation, sleep, nutrition, stress, all of the things we now know may contribute to the formation of Alzheimer's. So, people say like, "Well can you say 100% if I do what you tell me I'm not gonna get Alzheimer's?" I'm like, "No. There's no 100% on anything, but I'm telling you it's the best information that we have today." Even if we prevent Alzheimer's a year, two years, three years in a family, that's gonna save you financially, that's gonna save you emotionally, that's gonna save you cognitively.

I'm operating on every conceivable platform that I can find. I'm in gyms, I'm on television in my partnership with NBC, I'm on your podcast, I'm partnering with sponsors, I'm partnering with researchers, I'm funding research. What's amazing to me, Dave, is everywhere I go and I talk about this, it's as if I'm talking about it for the first time to people.

Dave: Right.

Maria: I mean, really smart people. I get, you know, in a room of 300, 400, 500, I spoke in Minneapolis two weeks ago 3000 people, and I say this stuff and people are like, "Ah, I didn't know that," so that tells me it's like a political campaign, it's an emotional campaign, a financial, spiritual. For me having worked in women's empowerment, and

having worked in politics, and having worked in the news business, those areas all my life, this is the ultimate challenge, and it brings all of those areas together, because I have to fight this issue politically, I have to fight this issue spiritually, I have to fight this issue in terms of sex differences, I have to fight this in terms of family, and it's a full-scale assault.

Dave: You're in a position in your life, you've been First Lady of California, and you could afford to retire right now if you wanted to but-

Maria: No, I can't, no I can't. No, I can't, because I know what's going on in the country. I know that the face of poverty in this country is that of a working woman with children. I know that what's going on this country is that people are being diagnosed with Alzheimer's every 65 seconds, and the vast majority of the public doesn't think they can do anything about it. I know that there's so much misinformation out there, and I know I can make a difference, so I can't retire. I wouldn't want to retire. I have information in here that I need to get out there.

Dave: You definitely, you have the ability to, but you're actually putting more energy than I've ever seen in your career, what I know of it, into this, and it takes ... It's probably hard for people listening to comprehend it, but it takes a huge amount of just personal spiritual energy to create a movement, sustain the amount of energy that you are sustaining right now. You're doing that at a time when many human beings would just choose to, "You know, I gonna go to the golf course." You could do something else. What is fueling the amount of energy that you bring to this right now?

Maria: Everybody asks me that. I've always had a lot of energy. I'm one of five kids. I have four brothers. You know, you have to have a lot of energy if you're an only girl, to fight back.

Dave: Right.

Maria: You know, I was raised by a woman who had more energy than any human being on the planet, and created the Special Olympics and changed the world for people with intellectual disabilities. My father had a lot of energy and changed the world in terms of the Peace Corps, and poverty, and service. I was surrounded in my extended family by people who changed the world in terms of what you could do for your country, what was expected of you, what you could do about healthcare. Was married for a really long time to someone who believed in the health message and really had a lot of energy to do that, and did that. So, I've always been surrounded by what I call architects of change. In my home growing up my parents had zero respect, or interest, in people who weren't out doing that.

I guess I was just raised with the understanding that I would also do that, and so I think to be successful, and I think early on in my journalism career I used that energy to climb to the top of that space. I used that energy when I became First Lady to make my time in that job worthwhile. I've used that energy to love, actually, as a mother, and learn about unconditional love and learn that is the job that takes the most energy, actually, and the most presence of mind, actually.

So, being a daughter, watching how both of my parents aged, and watching what felled them both, and trying to be a caregiver and reminding my brothers that this is not just a job for sisters, or daughters, which they did tremendously step in, which is becoming more common, I'm happy to say. I don't know what I'd do with myself if I didn't ... My daughter asked me this, actually, just a month ago, "Like, why do you do this? Why don't you stop?" I was like, "I don't know?"

Dave: Two of the things that we know help people avoid Alzheimer's is having a strong community and having a sense of mission. It seems like you've definitely checked those two boxes in your quest to keep your brain working really well, probably beyond what most people could possibly do.

Maria: I think I've learned a lot. Certainly, I think what we know about healthy aging, you're entrusted in longevity, it's important to have a spiritual life in that. It's important to be in community. It's important to move, to exercise, to do all those things which we talk a lot about in Move For Minds. We don't talk a lot about the spiritual component, but I think you can find spirituality wherever you are. For some people their spiritual place is the gym. For some people it's nature, right.

I think I came late to the nutrition component of all of this, just because I wasn't raised that way, and so that's an area of my life that I still need a lot of work on, because I think like many people, once you're a sugar addict it's a tough thing to break, even though you intellectually know it, so changing behavior, I think, is something we all have struggles with. Maybe some people are just like, "Got it, cool, I love the way I feel, so I'm not tempted at all." I'm not that girl.

I try to check the boxes of I have a strong spiritual life, I try to stay in community, but I think it's a big issue, also, for how do people age and stay in community? How do people age and stay involved? How do people age and feel needed, feel useful, find meaning? These things we know. The opposite of that loneliness, isolation, we know that that's not good for the brain, or the body, and that that increases your chances of getting Alzheimer's, or increases the likelihood.

I think I'm really interested in the larger conversation of how we treat people as they age. Do we discard them? How do families care for parents as they age? Whose job is that? How do we take it from duty to joy? How do we build our cities to incorporate that? How does corporate America respond to people as caregivers? So, that's a huge other conversation, but I think it's a really interesting one, and needed one.

Dave: Maria, if someone came to you tomorrow and said, "Based on your incredible life's experience, what are your three most important pieces of advice for someone who just wants to perform better as a human being, just at everything they do in their life?" What would you tell them matters most?

Maria: Well, I think your health matters most. I just had that conversation with my kids at the table. I asked them that, "What is the most important thing for you?" And I was thrilled ... My son said, he goes, "Health." I said, "Well, do you think you act like that?" He goes,

"Yeah, I do, because everything I want to do depends on me having the health to do it." I wouldn't have answered that when I was his age. I would have said, "Oh, the most important thing to me is becoming an anchor of a morning news show." That's what I would have said at that time.

I think having your health, paying attention to that, and I don't mean just your physical health. When I talk about health I talk about your emotional health, valuing your emotions, your mental health, your cognitive health, your spiritual health, your physical health, your financial health. Paying attention to your health holistically I think is the most important thing you can do.

Dave: What are the number two and number three pieces of advice you'd have?

Maria: Well, I think going in there is, knowing yourself is probably the most important thing you can do, knowing your values, knowing what's important to you, knowing your worth. Respect for yourself, I think that's a huge, to me, probably that's like you'd start from that place, because then that would help you with your health and everything else. Respect for yourself, self-love for yourself, and I think those things then dictate how the person you chose, the job you do, the life you lead, the people you surround yourself with.

Dave: Maria, it's really an honor to have you on Bulletproof Radio, and I'm just so impressed and grateful for the work you're doing around Alzheimer's and around Move For Minds, and I just think it's so noteworthy and amazing ...

Maria: Thank you.

Dave: ... that you're just putting so much of yourself into that movement, and you can see the awareness change directly as a result of what you're doing, so thank you so much.

Maria: Thank you, Dave, and I hope people will sign up whether they're in New York, Boston, LA, San Francisco, any of those cities, I'll be there, and then we also for the first time this year have people in other cities starting their own like Games for Minds, Hikes for Minds, Dining for Minds, Dancing for Minds, in their own way, and maybe they raise \$100, \$200, whatever, it just gets people moving and thinking about that, and I know that's been your mission, as well. So, I thank you for your work. I was really happy to do this, not just because I drink your stuff, and eat your stuff, and put it in my coffee, ...

Dave: Thank you.

Maria: ... but because I think we're on the same mission, and as I said in a speech I gave about a week ago, "I want to spend my time with people who also believe they have a mission and are working to try to make the world a little bit better," because I think we all can do that. I think we're all capable of that, and I think that's what the world needs.

Dave: It does, indeed. I'm not going to promise this will work out, but I am going to do a calendar tetris game to see if I can arrange to be in a city at one of your events.

Maria: Oh, well that would be great. I know we've been wanting to work with you, so if you could do it this year, or any year, I'd love to have you.

Dave: I'm really inspired and just happy to support your work and what you're doing.

Maria: Okay, I'm gonna go get a Bulletproof. Bye.

Dave: Thank you for being with us.