

## **AUTOPHAGY: Set Your Cells in Motion: A Top 10 Episode with Naomi Whittel**

Announcer:

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Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's guest is Naomi Whittel. Naomi is a fascinating woman because she's a very successful entrepreneur in the supplements and natural product space. So successful that Twin Lab acquired her company a few years ago and then asked her to be CEO. So she's CEO of one of the largest and most respected supplement companies out there, and she's coming on today to talk about her story of how to be a woman entrepreneur and how to really blaze that trail like she has, and to get to the very highest levels of what is a really competitive and cutthroat business when you really learn about it. And to talk about some new work she's been doing and even a new book she wrote. So this'll be a fascinating interview, and Naomi, welcome to the show.

Naomi Whittel:

Thank you so much, Dave. I'm thrilled to be here.

Dave:

What got you started? I want to hear how you got to be in the supplements business.

Naomi:

I was 14, I had moved over from the UK. I grew up in Europe, moved over when I was 12 and I was 14 getting ready for the spring dance. And I had my eyes set on this one boy in my class, Clovis Chester Young, and I was totally excited to go with him. And the thing about me at that age is my body, I have a couple of autoimmune disorders.

Dave:

You and me both.

Naomi:

Right. And so, for me, it was exhibiting itself as eczema and really severe eczema. So eczema that would bleed and pus and I would cover myself, right? Because you're awkward about that. And I would cover myself up to my wrists and all the way down and I always dressed that way and I would skip a lot of the things that other people would be doing. Like I wouldn't go to the pool with my friends. And my mother said to me, she's like, "Look, honey, it's the spring. It's hot outside, you want to be able to just wear your T-shirt and shorts. It's no big deal. And you have enough friends you don't need to feel uncomfortable at this point in your life." And so, I did that and when I was out, Clovis saw me and he didn't invite me to the dance at all. And I'm like, "Okay, this sucks. I'm a reflection of what's going on in the outside of my body."

Dave:

Those mean boys.

Naomi:

I know. He was so mean. I went through every single process. I tried every natural ingredient, that's how I grew up. And when this thing happened with Clovis, I just said, "I'll take whatever. I'll take steroids. I'll do whatever." And I went to my first conventional doctor and it's somewhat suppressed the eczema, but ultimately in my 20s, I was able to reduce about 95% of the inflammation through acupuncture and through Chinese herbs.

And so, these little Chinese herb's really got me excited about this industry. And if you fast forward really quickly, I was getting ready to have my child and my husband and I went to my integrative medical doctor and he discovered that before I was ready to get pregnant, that I had very heavy metals, a large quantity of heavy metals in my body, and he traced it back to those Chinese herbs.

Dave:

Oh my goodness.

Naomi:

And so, that put me on the path to get into discovering where things come from. So when I built my nutritional supplement company Reserveage, I started with the farmers.

Dave:

Right.

Naomi:

I started with the soil and I got involved with supply chain, and that's what I've done all these years. And that's what really got me interested in the industry.

Dave:

It's really funny because my kids live on a biodynamic farm and so do I, when I'm not in a hotel room in Miami like we are now recording this. And I also look at soil because everything starts with soil and it's just offensive some of the things that companies will do, and it's hidden three layers underneath things, and just building clean products is really hard. Way harder than you ever imagined.

Naomi:

So hard. Yeah, because companies can have the best of intentions, but after being poisoned and having that heavy metal toxicity that took so long to move out of my body, after that, it was really about trusting, but verifying and trying to figure out what is really going on, and it's hard, there's no doubt.

Dave:

What was your first job in the supplements business?

Naomi:

So my first job in the supplements business was actually when I was in college. My grandmother had a little health food store, so my first job was in her health food store.

Dave:

It's not common for CEOs of companies to write a book, and you wrote a book called Glow 15, talking about what happens actually in your skin. And I can see why you got that because you had so many skin problems as a child. Walk me through how skin happens from inside versus outside. I think everyone listening will appreciate this.

Naomi:

Your skin, our skin is our largest organ, right? And we've got at least three layers of our skin. So the subcutaneous layer, the dermis and the epidermis and how they interplay in our health and how they surround our organs and what they do with the connective tissue. So it's so important in my mind what it is that I'm putting on my skin because we're absorbing about 60% of it. And that's going into our body. It's going into our organs, it's going into our cells. And so, Glow 15 was a book that I started to write about three and a half years ago, and what got me inspired to write this book was a trip that I took to Calabria, Italy.

And I'm sourcing the citrus bergamot fruit, and there was this one researcher there Dr. Elizabeth Janda. And she had me in her lab and we were sitting there working all day and I kept drinking. She gave me three or four cups of the spicy citrus, bergamot tea. We're drinking all day. And I asked her, "Why do you drink so much of this tea? I love it, but I'm curious." And what she said to me was, "It activates my autophagy." And that was the first time I heard that word and that was four years ago.

Dave:

Define that for our listeners because it's one of my favorite words.

Naomi:

So autophagy in Greek, auto means self and phagy means to eat. So it literally means self-eating. And it means it and what it does at a cellular level is within each of our cells, we have the ability to activate this process, so it eats up the unneeded organelles, it recycles parts of the cell, all of the factors like processed foods, environmental toxins. So many of these accelerating agers in our environment contribute to decreasing the autophagy that naturally wants to happen in our body.

So I found the skin autophagy expert, Dr. Richard Wang, out of the University of Texas Southwestern, and I was like, "Richard, help me find the things that will activate the autophagy in my skin." And then I found the exercise physiologists, and I said, "How much exercise do I need to do?" And the sleep experts on it and the nutritional experts, the food experts and I put it all together into a plan that I started doing on myself.

Dave:

You have fantastic skin, and you're just about my age. Do you avoid the sun?

Naomi:

I don't avoid that much. I mean, for example, I was on the beach this morning, early. Growing up in England, like you said, it rains every day, and I love that weather. But as an adult, I've lived in Florida my entire adult life, so I don't avoid it. I just go in the sun early in the morning or late in the evening. And I need that vitamin D like everybody else, so I supplement with it, but I get it from the sun too.

Dave:

What are some of the other things? I guess let's start from the outside in.

Naomi:

Sure, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dave:

All right. What do you do on the outside to activate autophagy in your skin?

Naomi:

So there are a couple of ingredients. So when I met with Dr. Richard Wang and we spent a lot of time together, my group, myself and my team looked at hundreds of different ingredients that would potentially activate autophagy in the skin. So one is caffeine. So we can take the Bulletproof grinds. Caffeine is huge for activating autophagy and skin. The next one that I think is very interesting is ceramides. So ceramides, and you can get them from a lot of different foods like wheat germ and different things like that, and you put them on your skin. They're powerful. You can find them in lots of products. Ceramides are really big.

Dave:

Okay.

Naomi:

So that's another one. Another interesting ingredient is trehalose, which is a sweetener. And there's different research out there right now around ingesting it. But when you put trehalose on your skin, it's really very powerful for activating the youth.

Dave:

Do you eat trehalose?

Naomi:

I do. I personally do. Not much. Not what you are saying. I will use it if I want to use a sweetener.

Dave:

Okay. It's a very mild sweetener. It's not really as sweet as some of the other ones like ribose or xylitol, or something.

Naomi:

Correct. Yeah.

Dave:

And aside from trehalose, EGCG, what else would you consider as an external autophagy activator for your skin?

Naomi:

Resveratrol, resveratrol. So I'm a huge fan of resveratrol. I have been for 8, 9 years when I first learned about the power of it as a polyphenol. So different polyphenols like EGCG is one, but resveratrol has been shown to do great things with the skin.

Dave:

Okay.

Naomi:

So I'm thinking about my skin all the time from the inside out. So it's things like the best things I can do for my skin. And we talk about it in Glow 15 is things like fasting. So intermittent fasting is done every, every other day. When I do intermittent fasting, coupled with protein cycling.

Dave:

Yay.

Naomi:

I know, we have so much in common. And when you do intermittent fasting and protein cycling every other day, you're really activating the autophagy, which is cleansing and detoxifying the cell, which is what I need to do and what most people need to do.

Dave:

Right. So I love that you're saying some days you don't eat protein. How low do people need to go in your research to hit autophagy levels?

Naomi:

So, I have high days and low days. So every other day, one day is a high day and you basically would eat as you normally do. There's 140 different foods that you can eat and timing matters. But on a low day where you intermittent fast until about noon, that's when you'll have about 25 grams of protein. And we both know that fat has to be the dominant macronutrient in our diets.

Dave:

You go to business meetings like I do with, I'm sure people from big food and do they just look at you like you're crazy pants when you eat this way?

Naomi:

They sure do. I brought what I would normally eat for you to see, and this is truly my average day. It's three avocados, tons of olive oil. We have some pili nuts here, and each of them have one and a half grams of fat. I'll eat a big handful, 20, 25 grams of fat there, and I eat a ton of macadamia nuts. So I've always used a lot of fat, growing up in Europe, fat is our friend, right? You get all of the good fat in the food. I never even heard of low fat or no fat, and I disagree with it so much. So eating good fats, the good oils, and then never eating low fat or no fat.

Over the past couple of years, so when I sold my company, I now I'm running a public company and there's a ton of chronic stress that comes with it, but I've dropped 10 pounds by activating my autophagy by eating more fat than I could ever imagine. Never counting a calorie, being satiated, having that mental focus and dealing with chronic, chronic stress. And I believe it's really through fat first, carbs last, intermittent fasting, protein cycling, these principles.

Dave:

Here's a high performing CEO who uses all of these to deal with the stress of being a high performing CEO. I do the same kinds of things. I don't think it's possible to live a CEO life if you're not taking control of these variables.

Naomi:

And that's exactly it. I've put more stress on myself than ever, I'm in the best health and the best shape I could be. I'm in my mid 40s, I have tons of energy, but it's really about. I almost call it cellular brilliance, right? When you can take the toxic fat, the toxic buildup that's in our bodies and you can push it out by activating the autophagy through exercise, through food, through nutrition, whatever it may be, through sleep, through sex. Sex is a great way to activate autophagy. When you can do these sorts of things then ...

Dave:

How many times a day do I have to do that?

Naomi:

Well, you have to have 200 orgasms a year in order to really get the prime benefits of sex. That's the number.

Dave:

Now, is that the same for men and women?

Naomi:

I don't know about men. I'm always thinking about women. Sorry. So there's something else that's really good for autophagy and that's spermidine. So spermidine can be found in pineapples. There's lots of good foods and of course, it can be found in a man. And so, that's something that's also fantastic for our health.

Dave:

And especially topically?

Naomi:

Specifically. And autophagy, it won the Nobel prize in medicine, a Japanese biologist won it in 2016 and since then, you see more and more research coming out and its effects on cancer and all of the different neurodegenerative diseases. So we all have this process in our body. It's within the cell, if you think of, for example, a kitchen, right? And this is an analogy that someone could see if you were making a meal and after the meal, you clean up the counter or you throw away the leftovers, you recycle some of it, and the next day you have a clean kitchen and you do the same thing, that's autophagy working well. If, for example, as we get older, we have all of these pollutants, environmental toxins impacting us, we make a meal, we leave some of the stuff on the counter.

Some of it gets into the garbage. Some of it gets into the recycling bin. It doesn't get outside to the corner and we start building this toxic waste up and it gets fermented and starts to smell, that's when autophagy isn't working in our bodies. So it's worthwhile really knowing about it. Think about the amount of research right now that's coming out on intermittent fasting really over the past couple of

years. You just can't believe how much good data is coming out, but it's been around for thousands of years, right? A lot of these things I was doing on my own.

And when I put this simple program together, I was able to transform my energy, my health, my wellbeing. And so, I decided, "You know what? I want to see if other people get these same benefits from these almost ancient practices." And the reason the book is called Glow 15 is we did an eight week clinical study with tons of women. And what happened was after two weeks, so 15 days, the researchers, the lead researcher called me up, she was like, "Naomi, you're never going to believe that every single woman in this study has achieved benefits in two weeks of the program," and that's why we called it Glow 15.

Dave:

How many French fries a day can you eat on Glow 15?

Naomi:

None, but you can eat carbs, but not those carbs. So it's fat first and carbs last. So if you're going to take some carbs, eat them at the end of the day, when you're recovering, when your body wants to go to sleep and recover.

Dave:

What are some of the other things that we can do. I know sleep we talked about earlier, but in the book you talk about one of my favorite guys, Dr. Michael Bruce, with chronotypes. Just walk me through what a chronotype is and then tell me what yours is.

Naomi:

So what happened in our clinical study, the Glow 15 clinical study was at the end of it. I met with all of the women and the researchers and we talked about what worked the best, what we would do differently for the program. And everyone was talking about, well, we got these incredible results, lost this weight, had more energy, got off medications, so many different things, but there were complaints around the sleep.

They didn't get the restorative sleep that they were hoping. So that's when I called up America's sleep doctor, Michael. And I said, "Michael, what am I doing wrong?" And what he said is they don't know their chronotypes. So what type of sleeper they are. And then, once you know that, you're activating your autophagy through your circadian rhythm.

Dave:

Pretty amazing the idea that there are four different types of people, genetically, where if we evolved to be in a tribe of 150 people, 15% of people wake up really, really early, and I call them the bad people, he calls them lions. And they just naturally pop out of bed at 5:00 AM. And if you tell them that they have to sleep until 8 or 9, they won't do it because they can't, and if you tell them to stay up until midnight, it's like death to them.

And then 15% of people are the night shift in case any night predators come. And you tell them to go to bed before one or two the morning, why would I do that? That's my best time. And then you have about 50% of people who just hang out in the middle, and some people just never sleep very well. They're the backup alarm system.

Naomi:

I loved learning about my chronotype and I love being able to share that because for me, for women in general, it's a matter of understanding, how we get out of that place of just surviving. We're working, we have families, we have children, we're juggling 15 avocados, right? We're so overwhelmed with so much different pressures. And I speak to my girlfriends that are female CEOs and executives, and it's a challenge. So my whole objective is to provide the simple and easy solutions to really activating the youth inside of our cell.

Because when we do that, if it's through getting aware of your chronotype, taking a quiz and just knowing what that is, I love that you do it with your team, to knowing what type of exercise you should be doing. There's two very simple exercise. You're either, and you can do this through weightlifting, you can do this through yoga. It's just resistance training and less is more. So 30 minutes every other day is the best way to activate autophagy.

Dave:

Not that much.

Naomi:

Not that much, less is more. And it's just getting that good stress.

Dave:

Can we talk about telomeres? If you're listening and you haven't heard of it before, this is a little part of your cell and every time a cell divides, it gets a little bit shorter. So the idea is that when you run out of these things, you die, or at least your cells die. And so, if you have longer telomeres, you'll have younger looking skin and you'll probably be resistant to cancer and a lot of the diseases of aging.

Naomi:

You need to meet this woman, Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn, she's the researcher. She's such a badass.

Dave:

I want too.

Naomi:

I think she's in her late 70s or early 80s. You would never imagine, imagine that this woman is that age, and to be able to discover, oh, there's something that's called a telomere, and this is going to do all of this for our health and wellbeing. It's just humbling to be around her.

Dave:

It's great to see women in science who've done it for a long time, but it's so rare, especially when you get to find women who are over 60 who have had a long career in science and then to win a Nobel prize and to have that experience. I just think that's so badass because I think it is a little tougher for women, and you alluded to that earlier. And as an entrepreneur and as a CEO and all of that, I've done a good amount of entrepreneurial coaching, I advise a lot of companies. What's your experience been like learning how to be a very successful CEO and an entrepreneur, and to allow yourself to be supported while you do that? What's your practice for that?

Naomi:

I love that you asked that question. So I think first and foremost, as women, we suffer more, our brains are more complex in the way that we process information. So we need to just understand that our biology obviously is very different than a man's, so that's number one. So once I respected and understood that, I gave myself opportunities for smart self-care. And this is something that I don't think I've told anyone, and now everyone's going to hear this, but I always give myself permission. And a perfect example of that is when I was first starting out in business, so I was in my early 20s, the first hire that I made, I got myself a nanny and she lived in my house with me.

Dave:

Yes, yes.

Naomi:

And I was living alone and she could do my hair, she could do my nails, she could cook my food, she could keep my house clean, and she could nurture and nourish me because as a woman we're nurturers. And that gave me such a killer competitive advantage, and it gave her one too, because she thrived in my environment, which helped me thrive.

Dave:

My, and I'll go into the Eastern medicine, spending time in caves in Tibet experiences in my life. My sensation is the act of creating a company is an act of nurturing. It's the same thing that a mother does for a child. And you put your own nurturing energy into the company culture, into the mission, the vision, and it's actually an act of creativity, but it's an act of nurturing and caring.

And if you're wired to do that, but you've got no one caring for you while you're putting all of your caring into something else, it's the same thing that happens to moms when they have a baby [crosstalk 00:22:31] support. For that first year or two, they're complete zombies because they're not getting enough sleep and they're nurturing another person. And unless they have the care of a community or a family and other things like that, it's incredibly stressful and exhausting and draining.

Naomi:

In order to have that creativity and that ability to transform people's health and their lives, like you and I wake up every single morning and that's what we're doing, and that's what we're focused on, and it takes so much energy to do that. So self-care or self-soothing, I mean simple things that I do. The first thing I do in the morning when I wake up, before I get out of bed is I meditate. That's when my cortisol levels are at the highest, and if I can work with them, first thing in the morning, my whole day is different. The next thing I do is I drink. I don't drink my Bulletproof yet, I drink an ice cold glass of water.

Dave:

Okay, so you meditate or you meditate, you drink a glass of cold water, do you put salt or lemon or anything ...

Naomi:

Sometimes I'll put lemon, sometimes I'll put some of the Himalayan salt.

Dave:

Okay. Got it. So those are things that I also do. All right, and what's next?

Naomi:

Well, it depends on which day it is. So today was a low day for me and I don't eat until 12, 12:30. And when I do eat, the next thing I do, so I'll have around 10:00 AM. I'll have some green tea. Of course, I want to have it organic. I'll have coffee, I love it. And then around lunchtime, I'm going to be starting with my fat first, so that's when I really get into the fat first. I love bone broth. There's so many great foods that I love to eat.

Dave:

I don't know how you'll answer this question, but I'm really interested. But what's your take on having a small dose of fat in the morning to make the rest of the fat effortless and to have more energy? Do you think we're getting autophagy or not?

Naomi:

The data shows that you are. So I think, especially for women, right? So I'm always looking through the female lens. So women, most guys are like, "Yeah, I'm all about fasting. I'm intermittent fasting." You're getting the benefits. And a lot of women, 90% of the time, their skepticism, they're worried, my body can't do it, and we're dealing with different hormones. So for a woman who wants to get into fasting, which I, of course, love and recommend I've been doing it for 25 years, there are steps that make it easier. And so, the first step is of course, getting sugar out of our diets, number one, then becoming fat adapted. So you can understand that fat first and fat most, what do you eat? 70, 80% of your diet?

Dave:

Depends on the day, something like that, yeah.

Naomi:

But for someone who's just getting into fasting, intermittent fasting, if you can get fat adapted where your body is using it as your fuel, and then you stop eating at 8:00 PM at night and you go until 10 in the morning. And when you first start eating or you're having your coffee, you do a Bulletproof coffee, you're able to sustain and satiate yourself in a way where you're still getting the fasting, benefiting effects.

Dave:

That is all the science I could find when I wrote the Bulletproof Diet, and this was 2014 or something. And you can tell if you've fasted and you're getting autophagy when you're used to these feelings. And so, to this day, there's still controversy. Is a Bulletproof intermittent fast, really a fast? I'm like, "If there's no protein and no sugar, yep." And so, [inaudible 00:25:57]. You could have easily said, "No, absolutely not," and I would have listened.

Naomi:

No, I look at this all the time. I look at it all the time. And I just think with activating the autophagy, I mean, you can activate it in lots of different ways. I just did a five day water fast a couple of weeks ago. And I love that at day three, you're activating, Valter Longo talks about how you're activating your stem cells. And I just interviewed him and I know you have, and you're getting that stem cell generation and

you're activating autophagy at different levels. So an intermittent fast is a great way to do it. A 24 hour fast, water fasts. I mean, there's so many ways to go.

Dave:

We all get cravings. I mean, as a former 300 pound guy, I didn't know that there was something besides a craving. I thought it was the same as hunger. They're very different sensations, but I think women are subject to cravings more than men.

Naomi:

I totally agree with you, Dave and I love that you say that.

Dave:

That's my perception.

Naomi:

No, you're 100%, in my opinion, 100% right. I mean, I think the relationship that we as women have with food and with cravings, and it's so hard for women because calorie counting, low fat, no fat has been the mantra. But to be able to turn that on its head and say, "I'm obsessed with good fat." Embrace it, use it every single day, fat first and fat most. It will satiate. You'll lose weight. You'll feel better. You'll totally change your relationship to food.

Dave:

That is awesome. If someone came to you tomorrow and they said, "Naomi, I want to perform better at everything I do as a human being, not just my job, but everything. What are the three most important pieces of advice you'd have for me?" What would you tell them?

Naomi:

I would tell them first and foremost, to understand their relationship with their macronutrients, right? So, fat. Number two, I would talk about meditation and mental health, and self-care because that's so undervalued, and I think we have to have that. If it's the community that loves us, the people that support us, that is such a critical part of performing at our very best. The third thing I would say is move around.

Twit twitch let your legs go up and down when you're sitting here, wherever you're sitting. Yeah, this switching that you're doing. You're burning, your building ground fat just by doing that. So engage in twitching, engage in when you exercise, scratching your body to get activation moving in your cells.

Dave:

So move a lot.

Naomi:

Yeah, move a lot and in lots of different ways.

Dave:

Beautiful. Great pieces of advice. Naomi, where can people find in Glow 15? I'm guessing everywhere books are sold?

Naomi:

Yeah. Glow 15 is found everywhere that books are sold, Amazon, Barnes & Noble. It's going to be found at GNC. It's all over the place.

Dave:

Beautiful. And is there a URL people can go to read about your stuff?

Naomi:

Sure. You can go to Glow 15. There's Facebook, Naomi Whittel, all over the place. And just so grateful and blessed to have had this time with you.

Dave:

And now that we're officially done with the show, I just have to tell everyone listening. Naomi is one of those CEOs who's just super kind and helpful to everyone in the industry, and supplements can be really a cutthroat place. And there's been a couple of times where she's just reached out and been like, "How can I help?" And, "I have the right resource for you." And so, there are a huge number of people out there when you look for them who are looking at how do we make the world better and how do we help everyone do it even if they're doing something similar and Naomi is totally one of those people. So, she's good people and you should read her book.

Naomi:

Thank you so much. Collaboration is the new competition and that's how we move forward.

Dave:

It is. Thanks Naomi.

Naomi:

Thanks Dave.