

## TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

### Episode 10: Happy Healthy Holidays

December 21, 2020

Summary: Seasons greetings from TSET! This month, James and Cate spread holiday cheer with guests Jae Morrison and Valarie Carter. Jae Morrison, an obesity prevention specialist for the Oklahoma State Department of Health, talks about ways to stay physically active during the winter season and best practices for sticking to your New Year's resolutions. Valarie Carter, chef and culinary medicine instructor for the OU-TU School of Community Medicine, shares what culinary medicine is, which ingredients are best to use for the season, and a couple of healthy and tasty holiday recipes. From TSET, have a happy and healthy holiday!

[Theme music]

**[0:15]**

James Tyree: Hello and happy holidays to you, Cate, and to everyone listening – which means you. This is your co-host James Tyree, a health communication consultant at TSET.

Cate Howell: And I am Cate Howell, producer and co-host of the TSET Better Health Podcast. It's not only a holiday season but finals season for me, and it has been a wild semester. I'm definitely ready to relax and kick it for the next few weeks.

J. Tyree: I bet. [both laugh]

C. Howell: Yeah, definitely.

The weeks around Christmas and New Year's Day often mean time off from school and work – but it can also be a time when healthy eating and physical activity take a little vacation.

J. Tyree: Yes, and those few days can turn into a few weeks or even months when frigid and sometimes harsh winter weather makes us want to cozy up and hunker down in warmth and not move around so much, especially outside. And that's why we are presenting this special holiday edition of the TSET Better Health Podcast just for you—to help us all keep the momentum of making healthy and easy choices going through the holidays and winter months.

C. Howell: Yeah, and I recently spoke with Valarie Carter, a classically trained chef and chef instructor at the [OU-TU School of Community Medicine](#). She offered some great tips for eating great-tasting healthy foods during the holidays, and she even shared a couple of easy recipes to get us all started.

J. Tyree: Good. And I had a nice conversation with Jae Morrison, an obesity prevention consultant at the Oklahoma State Department of Health's Center for Chronic Disease Prevention

and Health Promotion. He has as a worked physical fitness trainer and has academic expertise in obesity prevention, so it was great to ask Jae about ways to stay physically active during this time of year. But, I gotta say, I am really interested to hear more about your conversation with Val Carter.

C. Howell: Yeah, Chef Carter had some really interesting observations, particularly about what culinary medicine actually means, and a surprising tidbit about weight gain during the holiday season. Let's find out.

**[02:30]**

C. Howell: Hey there, listeners. We're here now with Chef Valarie Carter who works as a culinary medicine chef at the OU-TU School of Community Medicine. Valarie, welcome, and thank you so much for joining us.

Valarie Carter: Thank you for having me.

C. Howell: So, culinary medicine is an interesting term. Can you talk a little bit about what that means?

V. Carter: Sure. So, culinary medicine is blending nutrition and culinary information so that patients and community members and physicians-to-be, physician assistants-to-be can understand culinary and nutrition hand-in-hand and how those help not only prevent but reverse disease in some cases.

C. Howell: Wow. Okay. That's awesome.

So, obviously, this is a really trying time that we're in right now. It's a holiday season, but, you know, families may have to be separated, there's overworked parents trying to provide their children with best nutritional options. What is your general advice on nutrition during the holiday season, and do you have a healthy holiday recipe or two that you can share with this?

V. Carter: Yeah. I definitely have a couple of recipes that I can share with you. I can talk about those in just a second, but in terms of just general nutrition advice, I think it's really important for people to stick to a healthy diet that's very heavy in fruits and vegetables. I mean, we always want to aim for half of your plate being filled with fruits and vegetables. Beans are always wonderful whether they're canned or cooked from dry. Intact grains—that's going to be grains that are not milled into flour or meal so they actually retain the original shape that they were grown in. One of the reasons we want to eat these intact grains is because they don't spike your blood sugar the same way that a milled flour or meal might—a meal, kind of like a milled grain into flour. But just making sure that you're getting all of those basic foods is very important—helps keep your blood sugar under control, provides lots of fiber in your diet.

And so, one of the things that we've kind of talked a lot about in culinary medicine is that even though people do seem to have a weight gain over the holidays—it's about a

one and a half pound weight gain, and that can certainly add up over the years—it's really not the Thanksgiving Day, even the Halloween Day, the Christmas Day, New Year's Eve—those four days out of the year not causing the 1.5 pounds of weight gain. It's really more about that time in between where people are constantly snacking, people are bringing things to the office. We always have a tendency to do this special holiday baking, whether it's a family tradition or we're just trying out new things for the holidays. So we just want to kind of look at our fruit and vegetable intake, because you're eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, there's not really a room in our tummies basically to eat a lot of garbage. So, you know, take one bite of Grandma Maude's favorite fudge or whatever, but then, you know concentrate the rest of the time on getting all of those fruits, vegetables, beans, intact grains.

And especially this time of year, because of COVID, we also want to eat very well because that, of course, protects your immunity. So if you're eating a lot of processed food, fast food or whatever, a lot of very high sugar foods—those things can bring your immune system down and make you less resistant to all kinds of illnesses including the dreaded coronavirus.

As far as the recipes that you were talking about, recently, we were asked to submit some recipes to the Ardmore Institute of Health (that's one of our grant funders for our program), but one of those recipes that we really love is a blended dip that's just avocado, walnuts, garlic, parsley, and you blend that up and serve it with vegetables for dipping, and it is so good. It's, you know, high in fiber, high in flavor, high in good omega-3 fats like walnuts.

And then another that we really like is a [Christmas kale salad](#). So, it's kale greens that have been washed, of course, and dried, and then you actually massage those greens with your hands to kind of start breaking those down. So you put a little bit of salt, a little bit of canola oil, a little bit of orange juice, and by actually physically agitating or manipulating those greens, you kind of break down those chemical compounds which can be kind of bitter. A lot of people think they don't like kale because it can be slightly bitter, but when you physically agitate it, as well as add that salt and acid to it, it does break it down a lot. So even, not just my kids, lots of kids have really enjoyed this recipe. And then we use a fresh apple vinaigrette that goes on top, and you can use dried cranberries or any kind of dried fruit; you can add pecans or walnuts. It's a really delicious salad that's really beautiful for the holidays, too.

C. Howell: Wow, yeah, both of those sound really, really delicious and nutritious. [laughs] Well, Chef Valarie, thank you so much for sharing your knowledge with us today, and hope you have a really wonderful holiday season.

V. Carter: Well, thank you. You, too. Thanks for having me on.

**[7:51]**

C. Howell: That avocado dip sounds amazing. Definitely adding that to my list for my little socially distant Christmas this year.

J. Tyree: [laughs] That's very responsible of you, Cate.

C. Howell: [laughs] Yeah, thought so.

What surprised me the most about that conversation was that while there is a history of weight gain during the holiday season, the culprit isn't holiday feasting—it's holiday snacking. So the simple act of managing that snacking habit will have large positive impact in the long run. And as a compulsive snacker, I know how difficult that can be, but it's a surprisingly beneficial piece of advice.

J. Tyree: Yeah, that's advice I need to keep in mind, too, let me tell ya. And you know what? I'm really glad you got to talk with her and share that information with us because I think we can all relate to what she had to say.

But after hearing that delicious food for thought, let's now get moving with physical activity. Jae Morrison at the Oklahoma State Department of Health not only shared tips and ideas on how to keep moving through the holiday season, but also practical ways keep those health- and wellness-related New Year's resolutions that many of us make go far beyond January.

**[9:08]**

J. Tyree: Hello, Jae. Thanks for joining us today. We really appreciate it.

Jae Morrison: Happy to be here. Thank you for having me.

J. Tyree: Alright. So to start off with, can you tell us what do you do at the State Health Department, and what is your background regarding physical activity?

J. Morrison: Certainly, certainly. I am the obesity prevention consultant here at the State Health Department. When it comes to physical activity, my background is a master's in public health that I got from Creighton University and I have five years of certified personal trainer experience.

J. Tyree: Wow, that's really good. So you got your master's at Creighton, so you're a blue jay, but you got your undergrad at Ball State, so you're also a cardinal. [laughs]

J. Morrison: Yes, it seems to me, you know, that I—it's just one of those things were I flock to the birds. We do the little chirp-chirp thing. That went right from undergrad to grad school staying with blue jays.

J. Tyree: [laughs] Very nice. So hey, what got you interested in the field, you know, your career field, your academic field, you know, what got you interested in this?

J. Morrison: Well, when it came to personal training, I just really wanted to help people, and I found a great way to do it with something I already enjoy doing myself: working out. So after about two to three years of personal training, I sort of hit this wall where I realized I was

fixing the same five problems in almost everyone, and I realized that that was then a macro issue, because it didn't matter if I was working with someone who was older, younger, what their socio-economic status was, black or white—it just didn't matter. I was fixing the same five issues. And so I wanted to find a way to become a macro solution to what was clearly a macro problem. And that's what led me to public health.

J. Tyree: Well, I'm glad that you did it and that you're doing so here in Oklahoma with us. That's for sure.

J. Morrison: Yeah, after grad school, I looked at—we were moving around and I thought to myself, “Where can I go where this skill set is going to be utilized?” And, as I was looking at some of the statistics in Oklahoma, it popped up, and I thought, “Wow I should really try and find a job there,” and it—it actually all worked out.

J. Tyree: Well, welcome, welcome. Well, let me ask you this, Jeremy: you know, it can be so easy this time of year, you know, especially—right?—during the holidays and during the colder weather to eat a little more than usual or even a lot more—right?—while moving or exercising a bit less. Is that just the way it is, or have you learned—have you found some easy ways for individuals and families to stay physically active during this time of year?

J. Morrison: Staying active during the winter is certainly a challenge, but we found that having a plan is the first step when it comes to staying active. So, planning for that cold weather or even just planning your activities around the person or the group that you're working with. So, for example, if your schedule has you up early, maybe your activity should come later in the day, or if you end up at work late, maybe you should try and get up an extra 10 to 15 minutes early to stay active. Planning your space indoors or outdoors—if you have a backyard, a quick, you know, jog around the backyard or doing something there. Working out inside can be something you can do as well.

And, you know, taking that plan to the next level, doing things like bringing a change of clothes with you to work so that if you have access to facilities, or even just stairs at work, you know, take the stairs up and down once or twice during your lunch break is a great way to stay active.

Another way is to really kind of keep it simple. When it gets colder and it gets harder to work out, the more complicated your workouts and your activities are, the less likely you are to engage in them. So if you can do something that's simple, easy—laps around your house, take your dog out an extra once or twice a day, yoga or even just, like, standing up while you're watching TV and, you know, walking in place—something small and simple really seems to help.

J. Tyree: Those last few tips seem to be pretty helpful, Jae, especially now with many people being at home more or working at home or teaching their kids at home or something like that. There's stuff that you can do around the home as well as the workplace to kind of stay physically active.

- J. Morrison: Absolutely, absolutely. So one of the keys is that level of accessibility for a lot of people and, you know, it can be as simple as, like, making sure that you bundled up so that you can stay as comfortable as possible when if you're outside working out, or if you're at home, finding those workouts that don't require equipment or don't require you to be in a gym space. A lot of the fitness centers have been offering free classes online to make up for the fact that their, you know, participation is down in the gym, so you can go online, take their free classes, and that's another way while you're at home to have that accessibility to it.
- J. Tyree: Yeah, that's helpful. You know, I was going to ask you about resources that you would recommend to people. You know, here at TSET, we have our Shape Your Future website that helps to give tips for nutrition, physical activity and things like that that I'm sure that you've seen.
- J. Morrison: I really actually really like the Shape Your Future website. I'm kind of notorious for skipping breakfast. You guys have a lot of great recipes on there that allow me to, like, grab it and go while I'm in my morning rush of, like, getting the dog out and walked and getting ready to go to work.
- J. Tyree: [laughs]
- J. Morrison: That's something that I can just, you know, that's easily planned out, quick to grab and I can eat on the way.
- J. Tyree: That's fantastic.
- J. Morrison: But you also have a lot of great educational information. That was one of those five problems I found when I was a personal trainer that I was fixing was misinformation, people—
- J. Tyree: Mhm.
- J. Morrison: —having the wrong perception of what staying active meant, or maybe even how easy it can be, so that educational information aspect that you guys provide at Shape Your Future is really great.
- J. Tyree: Excellent. You just hit on something I was going to come back to you on. You talked about, in your training days, five recurring issues that you kept coming across—right?
- J. Morrison: Yeah.
- J. Tyree: —that got you into your master's program. What are those five things? I guess misinformation is one, right?
- J. Morrison: Yes, misinformation is one, you know, which is what choices can you make which will lead to successful outcomes? The others are mobility, flexibility, poor nutrition and chronic pain. Those were the five things that I just ended up really addressing with

everyone. Mobility speaks to your ability to ambulate or move freely without pain or restriction. Flexibility is having your full range of motion at your joints. Poor nutrition is a lot of what you guys at TSET do with the Shape Your Future website. And the chronic pain was usually a part of either a lifestyle or nutrition decisions. So, you know, focusing on those five aspects was just something that became pretty much an everyday part of my life as a personal trainer.

J. Tyree: Yeah, that certainly makes sense. And each of those five things is something to think about, again, now during this time of year with the holidays and the colder weather when it could be tougher to move around and be physically active, you know?

J. Morrison: Absolutely, and again, I sort of think that part kind of comes back to the simplicity of it all. When it comes to flexibility, it can be as simple as adding five minutes in the morning to actually take time to stretch before you get going with your day. That little bit of activity really can be very helpful in maintaining your flexibility, decreasing some chronic pain, simple things like that.

J. Tyree: During your physical training days, did you ever come across kind of an influx of people during this time of year, you know, New Year's resolutions and people wanting to get in better shape and that sort of thing?

J. Morrison: Absolutely, absolutely.

J. Tyree: [laughs]

J. Morrison: This was our busiest time of year, everyone knew. From, like, Christmas to about January 30th, we didn't take days off because this was our busy time of year. And so, we would see that huge pop in January, and then by about Valentine's Day, it kind of fell off. We would usually lose about 30% of that influx, that big rush that we had right after the holidays.

J. Tyree: Yeah.

J. Morrison: But there are ways to sort of stay on track and avoid that.

J. Tyree: Oh, please, tell us. [laughs]

J. Morrison: Yeah, absolutely! Enrolling people around you—family members, friends, co-workers—in what your goals are. Having that person where you can go to and say, “Okay, this is what I'm going to try and do. I'd love your support in this. Don't forget to remind me, text me, call me.” Having that person helps with accountability, and that accountability helps consistency.

Setting realistic goals, setting incremental goals based around activity and health—not weight loss. Everyone comes in going, “I want to drop 20 pounds,” which is the wrong way of looking at staying active and staying fit. I would always tell my clients when it

comes to, like, what the scale said, you know, if I put you on the moon, you'd weigh less, but you wouldn't be any healthier. So—

J. Tyree: Ah, yeah.

J. Morrison: —the goal should be about health and activity, not just what the scale says and weight loss.

And then the last one is always give yourself a little bit of grace. Life is going to get in the way. Don't be discouraged by your setbacks. Just find a way to keep going, even if it means sort of starting from scratch and working from that one thing that you like to do into multiple things that you like to do to get back on track.

J. Tyree: Wow, that's really good advice it seems like not only for physical activity but also for eating better, right? The person's overall health.

J. Morrison: Very much so. Nutrition is a very key aspect. I am frequent to saying that you can't outrun the kitchen.

J. Tyree: [laughs]

J. Morrison: Where weight maintenance and weight loss occurs is in the kitchen. Running miles and miles and miles a day isn't really the way to do it. It's making sure that you are consistent in your physical activity as well as consistent in your nutrition, which is very important. Making sure you're making the most amount of good choices you can make, and sometimes that's as simple as, for me, not going for extra sweet potatoes during the holidays and instead doing—

J. Tyree: [laughs]

J. Morrison: Would I prefer the sweet potatoes? Well, certainly, but the salad's the one good choice that I can make, and I still get the rest of my Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner. I just switch out that one thing.

J. Tyree: Indeed. And the salad can be kind of tasty too, right?

J. Morrison: Absolutely, absolutely.

J. Tyree: Indeed. Well, man, you have been really helpful. Thank you for your time. Welcome to Oklahoma, and do you have just any other final words of encouragement or advice?

J. Morrison: Stay consistent. 2020 has been a grind and, you know, 2021 might be a bit of the same, so let's really just stay consistent and stay optimistic. Give yourself a little bit of grace, set your goals, and let's go for it.

J. Tyree: All right. Jae Morrison, thank you for your time. I really appreciate you, and take care, and have a really, really happy New Year, okay?



J. Morrison: You as well. Have a great day.

**[20:30]**

J. Tyree: That was a fun conversation and great information, and I am so glad Jae is now here in Oklahoma at the State Health Department. As mentioned in our discussion, you are invited and encouraged to check out the website [shapeyourfutureok.com](http://shapeyourfutureok.com), where there truly is a wealth of information for parents, kids, teachers, and really anyone on easy and practical ways to eat healthier, move more and live tobacco free.

C. Howell: The site has tasty recipes for home or on the go, easy exercises that anyone can do at home, outside or in the workplace, and links to some great resources that are worth tapping into.

J. Tyree: Well Cate, the holidays are a busy time, so we are going to end now so people can keep moving with their plans.

C. Howell: [laughs] Good plan. Thank you for joining us and listening in. You can always find us with new episodes – or listen to a previous one – at [tset.ok.gov](http://tset.ok.gov) or wherever you listen to podcasts. Happy holidays to you and your loved ones and until next time, this is Cate Howell

J. Tyree: And James Tyree, wishing you peace –

C. Howell: – and Better Health.

[Theme music]

**[22:03]**