



Episode 12

From Broken Dreams to Sugar Free with Guest Thom King

Toni: Good morning. This is Toni Julian, and I am your host of Toni Talks Humanity Matters, and I am thrilled to have a special guest Thom King, who is the CEO of Icon Foods based in beautiful Portland, Oregon, and his company is one of the largest importers and manufacturers and distributors of natural sweeteners of which I am a huge fan.

[00:00:20] He is also a self-professed serial entrepreneur and other parts of his persona include personal development work, I want to hear more about that, and biohacker info geek, which I think we have that in common as well. He's made food science his passion to be able to help people eat healthier and avoid harmful sugars...so critical. Thom is also the author of *Guy Gone Keto: How to lose weight, feel great and achieve long time fitness*. And one thing that Thom may not mentioned is that he is also a really good person, which is I think is most important Thom, so, Thom, thank you. Welcome and thank you for joining me.

Thom: Thank you, Toni. I appreciate that. That was a, that was pretty amazing introduction. I hope I can live up to it.

Toni: I think you'll live beyond it. Thank you. I know our listeners will be really interested to hear your thoughts on the work that you've done, that, you know, for the bigger picture beyond products, beyond everything is the work that you're doing to impact people's health.

[00:01:26] And we, I was so excited Thom, to have you on this program because we share that same philosophy; we've dedicated our lives to it especially as it pertains to sugar, blood sugar regulation and keeping people healthy and away from disease. So, I'm hoping you don't mind if we kind of start at the beginning and we can kind of unfold some chapters, um, which is your personal journey and should I say the confession into how you got here?

Thom: Yeah, confession is probably the, the best way to sort of describe my book. Um, you know, I felt like I needed to own some things, so, you know, I mean, we go way back. So, I

mean, you're, you were, you know, familiar with my business when, you know, our retail was just starting up and that was to Steviva Brands.

[00:02:19] So, I mean, if this has been a pretty, pretty major journey for me and, um, You know, so I, I guess the real, I mean, the journey really, you know, before I started a Steviva Brands, it started, you know, in Phoenix, Arizona, when I ran into a gentleman whose name was Jim May, and I'll say he's the OG of Stevia.

[00:02:42] Like he would, he literally came from Paraguay and had a, uh, had a jar of this green paste. And he's like, Hey, you should try this. And I'm like, well, okay. Let's, let's see what happens. And I tried it and it was probably 25 times sweeter than sugar. Um, had a lot of like licoricey herbal, uh, you know, after notes or off notes and, you know, but the second I tried it, I thought, okay, You know, there's something here like this could be, this could be sort of a natural, you know, replacement for Aspartame.

[00:03:17] So like NutraSweet is just, you know, being, uh, pushed through the FDA at the time. And, you know, I thought this would be a great sort of natural placement for that. If it got passed by the FDA, which it did. And then while they did that, they also, so, uh, put a hold on, approving Stevia as a sweetener that took almost a decade and a half to reverse, but that's how I got into it. And you know what, I first ran into that Stevia plant when I was like, there has to be a way to be able to extract those sweet constituents out of the leaves in sort of a natural way, you know, like using like hot water and maybe, you know, vegetable alcohol. So, it took me about three or four years working with different chemists and different companies to be able to find a company that would, you know, that would be able to manufacture that for me.

[00:04:10] And so. I've seen 2000, now 1999 is when things really started to come together. And, um, that's when, you know, we took our first shipment of our water extracted Stevia extract and, you know, and start the brand. And that was the beginning of it, um, of the sweetener. The journey, just that's just the beginning, because at the time Atkins was a, was a big deal.

[00:04:43] So Atkins was like, I would say Atkins was the precursor for Keto. And so, I used to use that, but I would use Atkins in a way that as a diet. So, I would like, I'd gained some weight, I would do Atkins, I'd gained some weight. I would do that Atkins, but what happened is I kept getting fatter. Like I would lose some weight, but then the weight would come back.

[00:05:05] It's going to start getting better. Um, so it really wasn't until I wrote the book about three years ago or started the book three years ago. It wasn't until then that I, I guess you could say that I bottomed out, you know, that I hit the wall. Um, cause I was in Vegas and I had a dinner with, uh, with one of our vendors and they were buying and I had a steak and potato and I cake and I had wine and I got back up into my room, um, at the Luxor, which was, I don't know how to describe it, except like it smelled like, um, broken dreams, and shame.

[00:05:47] And it was perfect. It was perfect timing because I was like, you know what? I looked in the mirror and it's like, I was carrying about 35 pounds of extra weight. My blood pressure was through the roof. You know, I had terrible heartburn. You know, so I was taking Prilosec for it. And it's like, you know, this is BS because I'm working in the health food industry, working with companies that produce food for, you know, for keto and low carb. I'm not following it. Like I'm not I'm, I'm like living to eat, not eating to live. And, um, at that point, I think the pain of my lifestyle and, and who I was at the time, the pain of that exceeded the pleasure that I was deriving from pizza and beer and, you know, and a crappy lifestyle. And at that point, I, I really, I just said no more. And I started journaling, so I was just journaling everything, you know, that was in my head. Like, how am I going to shift my lifestyle? How am I going to make this not a diet, but commit to a lifestyle change? And that gave birth to the book and that', there you go. That was sort of a circuitous way to get to how I got here. But, and now I'm here. Yeah.

Toni: That's a wonderful story. And I think so many people can relate because that shame that you talk about. So many people feel that like, if we are like, you ignored all kinds of signals to your body, Right. You ignore not feeling great. You would ignore her lack of energy. You ignored the excess weight. And maybe, I don't know if your blood pressure was up or what your labs look like, but like we have all these signs that, that tell us. And then I think the part that is, is sad for people. And you talked about this in your, in your book *Guy, Gone Keto*, which is, um, and, and a lot of women are in this as well, is that, um, the amount of shame that we feel and the self-esteem that just spirals down because, because of this and we know, and I'm also very spiritual so like we know when we're not living to our full potential, we know that, and that is that to me, that's a sin. That to me is a shame and we all have different degrees of that.

Thom: Right. Yeah. I mean, shame is the, I mean, I think for me, shame is probably one of the most painful emotions that a person can experience. Yeah. You know, I look at social media and online and in, you know, so look like, and also for men too, I mean, it's not as extreme for men, but for women, most definitely, you know, if you don't fit a certain type, you know, then you know, then you're, you know, you're not desirable. And so, what happens is people we'll get into a shame cycle and, you know, in breaking out of that shame cycle is, is a chore.

[00:08:41] It's a, it takes work. But it takes a commitment to yourself, like I'm going to break the cycle of change. Oh. And this is how I'm going to do it. And I mean, for me, I've carried chain for, for my entire life. And I still shame is still something that, you know, that I struggle with, but it, you know, but now I've learned to sort of harness it into, you know, correcting my path.

[00:09:08] Um, so I'm learning and I, I think that I will probably be learning until the day I die to harness shame to control shame. To take my right path.

Toni: You talked about journaling, which I think is such a great thing to do, right? Because, um, it's not just a self-reflection, but how wonderful to look back, you know, where you were Thom, maybe three, five years ago or 15 years ago and just say, wow, look at, look how far I've, I've come. And I was reading that people who journal their foods and their feelings and all of that, they are like 70% more likely to be successful, trying to make those you

know, those sustainable lifestyle changes that you're talking about, which is so great. It just makes people more aware, you know, more aware, more conscious.

[00:09:53] And, and I'm with you when it comes to the shame thing. If I, if I don't do things, just like, I'd be like, why did I have that wine last night? Why did I do that? Yeah. And I think that's just so common, but I think the feeling is that self-check. But falling short of the shame. Are there other ways to motivate ourselves, right?

Thom: Yeah, definitely. I mean, when shame turns to suffering, um, I believe that that when, you know, when you've lost sort of control over it, like, you know, when you put yourself in a suffering state, because you're immersed in your immersed in shame, but like the journaling for me, the journaling is. It's something I do every single day.

[00:10:32] Like I don't miss journaling. Like there's some things that, you know, that I try to do every day. You know, like I try to work out every single day. There might be a day that I get up late or I've got something going on. Um, but I, you know, I do try to get some sort of physical activity every single day, but um, there's bright lines, bright red lines around journaling. Like that is one thing that it doesn't matter where I am or what I'm doing. It's like the first thing that I get up in the morning; coffee, journal, and I've really found that it's helped me, you know, so much because I've incorporated other things within my journaling.

[00:11:09] Like one of my favorite books that I read every single day of by Ryan Holiday. It's called the Daily Stoic. And when I was younger, I used to practice Buddhism and I really feel like, like, um, like stoicism was that next step up. Um, so every day I read, you know, a passage from the Daily Stoic, and then I picked up a habit last year, which has really been so amazing for me, like I was listening to a podcast, um, on Joe Rogan's show and he was interviewing Tommy Chong and Tommy Chong from Cheech and Chong, like, Oh yeah. It's like, he's a big pot head, and I listened to him and he's like 82 or something. And he was super transparent about you know, where he was in his life, you know, and he had to go to jail. You know, some of the health issues that he was having, but you know, the one thing that I picked up the one little, the one grain that was a big treasure for me was he started talking about the I Ching and he's like, I do the I Ching every single day. And it's like the key to, you know, I would say that it's the key to Chinese mysticism and so I'm like, you know what the I Ching does sound super interesting. So, I started doing the, I Ching like about a year and a half ago after that podcast. And now I sort of incorporate it into my journaling process. It's like, so what are the questions? You know, for me, the journaling really starts with questions. And so, the I Ching it really brings that out. So, on Sunday I used to have this little ceremony of like busting out the I Ching, and then, you know, journaling about what, you know, what my lesson is like, there's my lesson too, you know, to, uh, to simplify. You know, simplify my life is my, you know, is my less than this or that.

[00:13:04] And I mean, there's always really, really beautiful lessons in it. And I would say for anybody looking to get into journaling, if they haven't journaled before, and I run into this all the time, people are like, I can't journal. I got a piece of paper in front of me and I can't think of anything to put down. I'm like, we'll ask yourself a question and were like, well, what do you mean? And it's like, well, ask yourself the question. What am I grateful for today? You

know, and that will take you down a path. And, you know, I mean, it's been said that, you know, that negativity and gratitude can't exist, you know, at the same time.

[00:13:37] So if you're feeling a little negative, you throw some gratitude on it, you know, sprinkle a little gratitude on it and just asking yourself, you know, what is it that I'm grateful for? You know, what is it that I want to manifest in my life? You know, Um, what is it that you know, where could I shown restraint?

[00:13:56] What can I do to be better? I mean, just if you ask yourself the questions. You will find that the ink flows from the pen magically upon that paper?

Toni: Yes, it does. And then also, if you are in tune, you will also receive answers. I, I do constantly and, and one time I just kind of asked what is wrong? Like, why am I just not...like what's going on and that I heard "it's your attitude." Yeah. I know the universe will respond. It was my attitude. I had to get a better attitude and you know, we all kind of fall into that every now and then, but, but don't you think that what you eat like yes, gratitude. Like I say, gratitude, I send energy. I do all these things right. And have similar rituals, but don't you find that like, when you, you eat crap, whether it's, you know, alcohol, sugar, things that aren't healthy for you doesn't that like, put you in that like negative, not feeling good state, like don't you feel like that I mean, it's a very leading question obviously, but don't you feel like that undermines that gratitude in some degree?

Thom: Yeah, I do. I think it poisons your body and if it poisons your body, it poisons your mind. So, you know, look, I don't eat well a hundred percent of the time. I mean, that is a fact, um, I try to eat well, 90% of the time, the other 10% of the time I drink beer. I'll have whiskey, um, I've even been known to have fast food.

Toni: Oh, so you enjoy your life?

Thom: I do. I enjoy it. I do. I enjoy my life. But then after, you know, like when you put something crappy into your body, you know, it is you, do you feel like, you know, this isn't how I should be treating my temple. You know, you get one body to get you around, right? Your body is carrying your, yourself around your spirit, your, your, your, uh, your sentient being, if you will, um, that's your vehicle. It's like, do you want me to drive around in a broken-down Dodge pickup with a flat tire? No, it's like treat your, you know, treat your, your temple, like, you know, a really nice Mercedes or something, you know, just like treat it like it needs to be treated. You have this beautiful body, that's a miracle. Like there's a marathon that your heart is beating. Like people don't how is that happening? Why is my heart beating? And you know, why do I feel the way that I feel it's like you can become so immersed into the absolute beauty and, and miracle and, and splendor of what our human body is. So why would you put a bunch of garbage in the front seat of your car?

Toni: Exactly. And I always, I kind of make this joke that people spend more time figuring out how their printers should work, than learning about how, how they should work themselves.

Thom: Right. That's so true.

Toni: So you've come a long way, Thom, because one of the things that I was just like really laughing about is you, if you would share this, you, you used to think that, you know, sugar gives you energy and fat made you fat, and then you had this concoction when you were a teenager. You had me in stitches on that one.

Thom: I get that a lot. And it's, it's interesting because. Yeah. I, so when I grew up, right, so like I'm a child of the seventies and when I was in school.

[00:17:37] Cool. Right. I mean, when I was in this school, they had songs about that. Like, you know, and like, don't be fat, don't eat fat on chicken. And just like some of my classes, they would have these, you know, these things about not eating fat. And so, sugar was always one of those things. That's like, oh yeah, it has some sugar.

[00:17:56] It's going to give you energy. And it's, you know, and this was something that was perpetuated by scientists that were paid by the sugar industry back in the sixties and seventies. So. You know, my, my parents, teachers, everybody that, you know, that influenced me at the time was all about sugar. You know, put a little sugar on.

[00:18:15] If you got cereal, that's already loaded with sugar, put some milk on it. Here's some more sugar, here's some bananas, you know? And so, I mean, that's what I was, that's what my brain was fed with. It's like, this is what you, this is what gets you by. So, when I was in school, when I was in college, I had, well, I had an unusual job.

[00:18:38] It was serving legal papers on people and repo'ing cars at night. So, it's all about having a little bit of extra energy. And so, the thing that I would love to do is to take a can of Coke or Pepsi drink a little bit out and an empty pack of M and M's into it. And that would sort of buy, I don't know what you would call that, but I would call it like probably cocaine because it was so toxic. It would give me a buzz for probably a solid hour followed by not even knowing where I was or who I was. It's like, um, Yeah, but it was delicious at the time. Like now when I think about it and just makes me want to gag, but yeah, I would drink that Pepsi and down at the bottom would just be this sweet sort of syrupy sugary goo. And, um, yeah, that would, uh, that would, that would put me on a, on a pretty bad cycle.

Toni: Yeah. I can only, only imagine. And yeah, it's just, I kind of goes back to the things that we think were true. And then what I love about science. So, the things that you're into is that scientists get to learn more and then adjust their position base based on what's new. And I think as consumers, if I think about my client base and a lot of the people that, that I know, and the listeners here is that it's so confusing. So, like something that's good now, it wasn't good then, but sugar clearly, we know. I mean that there's, there's no confusion around that.

Thom: Yeah. I mean, sugar's an interesting thing, you know, like, cause I, I, I get interviewed a lot and people are like, Oh, well, do you think that food manufacturers put sugar in the food too? Um, you know, for mind control or, uh, because they know that it's going to make us addicted? But I mean, I work in the food industry and so I know so many people in the food industry and I can absolutely, without a shadow of a doubt, say no, food manufacturers don't put sugar in your food to make it more addicting.

Food manufacturers put sugar in your food because it's cheap. You know, because it's a subsidized is a subsidized industry. And so, they can take a product or a compound or an ingredient, um, sugar that's 15 cents a pound. Right? So, let's take, let's take Ketchup for example, like if you've got, you've got ketchup, ketchup has more sugar in it than ice cream.

Toni: Yeah, crazy.

Thom: That is super nuts. So, there's somebody who's like, well, I'm going to have a hamburger and you know, but I'm going to put ice cream all over the top of it. And that's no different than somebody putting ketchup on them on top of it. But when you look at ketchup like when I first started formulating ketchup, um, I was looking at ketchup and I'm like, what the hell?

Why are they doing this? And the number one ingredient was sugar followed by tomatoes. And I started thinking about it and it's like, wow, well, if you look at the old recipes, that they used to use for catchup, number one ingredient was like tomato paste or crushed tomatoes, but that's expensive. Like you could pay up to like a \$1.50 a pound. Right? But if you can take and cut that, cut that expense. Right? A \$1.50, but you're using now half as much, but instead you're just using sugar and salt to replace those tomatoes. Now a bottle of ketchup that used to cost you, maybe \$2 now costs you like 75 cents. So, yeah, that is the reason that that food companies use sugar in their products because it's cheap.

It's a super cheap filler. The solution would be to stop subsidizing them and that industry.

Toni: That's interesting. I was actually not aware of that.

Thom: Yeah. I mean, a lot of people, people aren't, I mean, there's, I mean, there's certain industries that are, are subsidized, like the corn industry it's subsidized. So, when people are like, well, why is there some, everything has corn in it? And it's like, well, because you know, corn is a subsidized is a subsidized crop. And there's like two or three corporations that control 90% of the entire, the world's entire crop of corn. And so, when you look at that, they've got a lot of influence with the government and, you know, and we all, I'm sure if you are aware of anything, you're probably aware of all the money that goes into politics. Right? So that's how our democracy is run, unfortunately. But when you look at like the power that the corn industry and the sugar industry and the cotton industry, all of these, these corporate run industries, when you look at the power that they have over our politicians, you know, with being able to make donations and, you know, and super PACs and you know, all of this, it's like there, there has to be an end to this cycle.

[00:23:28] And one thing that I can say is that that cycle is not going to end through our government, that cycle is going to end through consumers, making decisions to start eating stuff that's whole foods, right? Eat stuff that doesn't have sugar in it, eat stuff that doesn't have corn syrup in it, you know, eat fresh food, make your own food. Shop the outside aisles at the store where the fresh produce are, um, and the fresh, you know, fresh meat and dairy. You shop those outside, stay out of the inside where the canned food and the packaged food is. Um, but the consumer it's like we have the power to be able to make a difference and that power is made through our pocketbook.

Toni: It is, we can vote at the cash register and that's one of my favorites, favorite thoughts is like, well then let's just not buy it. And you know, if you think about like, what I share with clients is, you know, go to farmer's markets, right. And even if, and some people can't afford that. And I recognize there is also a financial impact, as far as individuals making those choices and trying to feed their families while I can go to this say, fast food place for \$2 and feed each kid. Yeah. But like the damage that's being done, I know it's, it's, it's like education and making her make her own choices. And that goes for it. Everything that we need to take control back.

You know, we, you talk about, you know, in your book and some of the other things I've read diabetes--diabetes and obesity epidemic, and can you talk a little bit about, about that and like, what can people do we'll do to get the sugar out of their diet in a way that is sustainable to them. What would you recommend?

Thom: Well, so I would still recommend shopping the outside aisles of the grocery store. So here's the thing it's like, I totally understand people that, you know, particularly now the people that, um, you know, have had, you know, their means restricted, like they're, they're unable to work or, you know, because of the virus or for have a variety of other reasons.

[00:25:35] Right. But I mean, when, when you brought up the fact that, Hey, you could feed a kid for two bucks, by going to a fast food restaurant. I would challenge that. And I would say, yeah, you have four kids and you just spent \$4 for each kid. Okay. That's eight bucks. For eight bucks you can buy yourself ahead of broccoli and you can buy yourself a whole chicken.

[00:25:56] Right. So, absolutely find yourself a whole chicken. You know, you could buy yourself a whole chicken. If you can go to Safeway, you can go to any of these conventional markets, right. If you're in a situation where you can't afford to go to like a Whole Foods or something like that. But if you can go to even just go to like a Safeway or conventional store, you know, and buy yourself a chicken somewhere between the four to \$6 range for a chicken and you cook that chicken, that's going to feed a family of six.

I mean, you're going to be able to feed your entire family for that and with the broccoli. I mean, now you have a perfect right. And so, and then when you're done with the chicken, save the bones. Right. And for all those down into bone broth, and now you have soup and you can add more cut up vegetables to it, and you, and now you've extended that chicken out to be able to feed your family for a couple of days.

[00:26:52] And so that \$8 just turned into two, two days of meals and, you know, and it's healthy and you're not going to, you know, you're not going to go down the path, diabetes diabetes, which is obesity and diabetes. Right. And so, most of the people, like when you look at the biggest, the metabolic impact that we are dealing with now, it's Type 2 diabetes and Type 2 diabetes is self-inflicted.

Right. I mean, you give that to yourself by eating crap, you know, by eating high glycemic, carbohydrates, and sugar and you know, and a sedentary lifestyle. And it's like, don't let

yourself go down that path. Okay. Because that is not the path of strength. It's the path weakness. Right. And that's how you can be controlled too.

Like if you are suffering from health, you're under the guidance of city and pharmaceutical companies, because now you're taking pharmaceutical, you know, to combat your, you know, your blood sugar levels and it's like take control of your life. Go buy a chicken, don't buy the McNuggets.

Toni: Exactly. And you bring up to some wonderful tips for people. And even I was, I was thinking, boy, it's just so easy to make soup, even with the celery tops or, you know, parts that you might use in a salad, but may not like use the entire thing. Like, it just makes such a great. You know, and then you're also capturing all those nutrients from all of that in, in a stock.

And then a bone broth is so important because it helps your gut microbiome, like so many good things around that, aside from the financial savings. Yeah. I love that. I just do, do you think now with COVID people or have changed their buying habits a little bit and maybe they're cooking a little more at home? What have you noticed?

Thom: Yeah, I think so, because, you know, you're not really going out to restaurants and I mean, that's sort of a double-edged sword because those restaurants employ people. Um, you know, so I do feel bad about that, you know, but people are eating at home more. Um, the thing that was unfortunate though, is when COVID first hit, everybody was buying packaged foods were preparing. They're like, Oh my God, it's the apocalypse. So, they were buying spree on pancakes and SpaghettiOs and right.

Toni: It was like, let's eat the way we do Christmas. Let's buy all the bacon, buy the eggs. Let's buy the pancakes, the waffles, the shelves were empty of those things, right?

Thom: Yeah. And then the toilet paper that you're going to need afterwards. So, I think in the beginning, people are like, holy crap, we've got to, you know, we've got to stock up and, um, you know, but I think over time people are like, Hey, you know what? I think I'm just going to learn to cook some things. So, I do think that I do think that that that's sort of the upside of, you know, of the pandemic is, I mean, this is going to sound a little crazy, but I think that there's a lot of upsides to it.

I think it's galvanized people. I think that, you know, people are like, okay, we're going to, we have to take control over this because obviously, um, our government does not have a handle on this. If we don't have testing and we don't have a plan on opening schools, that's like, what. You know, like we don't, we don't have a plan.

[00:30:10] And so I do think that from that perspective, it's galvanized people because now we're like, Hey, you know what? This won't stand. We demand a plan. That's what we're paying you for. Maybe the roles have reversed a little bit from our, you know, some of our government officials thinking that. You know, the people work for them and bringing it back to where it's supposed to be, where our government works for us.

So, find a secure, get us a plan on how to open schools, teach us how to cook, you know, teach us how to take care of ourselves. This is what you guys are getting paid for. If you, you know, if you find that you can't do it, um, well we'll help you find a different career path.

Toni: I've seen this in my family, family and my friends and just my, circle of people is, and one thing I thought from the beginning is like, people don't know what the hell they're doing. Like, what is happening with this pandemic? How long is this going to take? Why are we the last country, almost, to get our act together around it? And I was just telling my family, look, you guys all need to make, we need to like be collective in this and make our own choices to be healthy. And then like, you know, with people being sick, it's like boost your immunity, exercise, like do all these things, but I've been just telling everybody, like take control over this, quit waiting. And that's just a part about life anyway it's like just quit waiting for other people to make decisions for you. Right. Make the ones you feel are best are going to empower you to get through this and the safest way possible.

Thom: Yeah. A hundred percent. It's like take yourself out of the victim mentality. Like, you know what I mean? Yeah. Are the virus bad viruses bad, obviously, you know, but do the things that it requires to protect yourself? And protect others. And honestly, one of the, one of the most beautiful things that I've seen out of this is, you know, younger people. So, when you look at the, you know, gen Y and millennials wearing the masks, you know, they don't need to wear those masks.

They're doing that to protect older people. And I'm like, Hey, they're trying not to kill us. It's beautiful. When I see everybody doing their part, wearing a mask, washing their hands, social distancing, you know, particularly when you fall into a demographic where you really don't need to do it because your chances of actually, a mortality, you know of from COVID are so low, like less than one 10th of 1%, but they're doing it to protect us.

[00:32:45] And for that, I am.

Toni: We will, we will send our gratitude to all those.

Thom: Yeah. A hundred percent, hundred percent.

Toni: Yeah. And I, and I also love, you know, you're talking about the positives of it. People being able to kind of regroup, like, I feel like it's not a bad thing that we've had to reset. Like, yes, there are lots of negatives and I am I'm not talking about the people who are going through hardships or any of that. Right. But, but for, for people who have used this opportunity to ground themselves, to reset, to evaluate like what's, what's important to them, what are their priorities? It's forced us to kind of take a step back. And I, and it kind of goes back to your journaling too, a little bit, being a little more introspective and, um, not getting so caught up in all the external things that go on in our lives that pull us away from our health and doing things that are, that are good for us and good for people.

And, you know, that's part of it. And then I just also. Feel grateful that they're, there's a certain part of the population also where they start getting like intolerant and frustrated and, you see them coming out people too. And so, I'm just like, just like everybody take a breath, ground, yourself, stay heart-centered. You never know what's going on with other

people, right. Yeah. In their lives. And so, so that I just love, and I know that you are that kind of person, but it's just that kind of, uh, you know, mutual kind of look at people and just recognizing that a lot of people we're going through hard times and we need to be extra patient and extra caring right.

[00:34:24] To ourselves and others.

Thom: Yeah, a hundred percent. There is not enough grace and love in the world. And if this is a catalyst for us to be able to, to have more grace for one another and more love for one another, um, I'm all for it, you know, but I mean, another, another factor too, is like, when you, when you look at the mortality rates of COVID right.

[00:34:48] And almost across the board, like over 90% of the people that, um, that died from COVID have underlying conditions, right? So, the majority of those underlying conditions are from metabolic. So that is a huge thing because, you know, I do talk to a lot of PhDs and a lot of doctors. And, you know, across the, across the board, it's like, when I talked to them, they're like this isn't, this is really your chances of dying are greater if you are suffering some verses from some sort of a metabolic condition, because what happens is your body into what's called a cytokine storm and a cytokine storm is, cytokines are proteins that exist in your body. Right. And so. If you have something come up like a scratch or, you know, an infection, your body releases these cytokines into that area to create inflammation, to protect the area.

[00:35:44] So when you are already in a state of inflammation, right, because of, you know, of a metabolic condition, you are right for a, for a cytokine storm. And that is what kills you. The disease doesn't kill you. Your body kills you because you go into a cytokine storm, it gets into your lungs. You start developing a ton of mucus in your lungs, and then your lungs just brick up.

And that is if you want to stay healthy and you want to make it, through this, then, then. Eat foods develop the lifestyle that gives you metabolic flexibility and reduces your inflammation. And it's like, stay away from sugar. Just don't do it.

Toni: Right. Yeah. Good, good advice. And I mean, I think that what you're talking about is kind of the science behind people's understanding of inflammation. Like a lot of us have heard of that, but don't necessarily know how that impacts, you know, your, your health.

Thom: Yeah. I mean, inflammation is a huge thing. I mean, inflammation happens for me too much sugar. You can eat a bunch of sugar. You will start getting inflammation. I mean, inflammation also happens from, you know, not taking care of your microbiome, not eating enough fiber, not, you know, not taking care of that, you know, um, that population of, you know, of 7 trillion microbes that live in your living, your gut, and actually, you know, that is who you are, because when you, when you think of like, you know, you have this vagus nerve that goes from your gut to your brain, and that's like the information super highway keeps things going and like, and the thing is, is like, if you have anxiety that's, that could be a function of gut health. Because your gut is responsible for 90% of your serotonin. You know, your gut is responsible for 75% of your immunity take care of that. And so, a lot of people,

well, you know, I think what's interesting to me is like, people are like, I have a leaky gut. It's leaking and I'm like, well, like leaky gut. So, a lot of people don't understand what leaky gut is.

[00:37:57] Leaky gut is where the lining, you have this lining on the inside of your gut, it's called mucosa. And so, the mucosa is like this, this lining, right? This mucus, that lines, the inside of your intestines that protects your blood. Protects your body from having things leaking out of your, um, you know, out of your intestines, right?

[00:38:17] And so if you are not eating enough fiber, if you don't have enough food for your microbiome, they start eating the mucosa. Right. And so, then you post that once that becomes depleted and you don't have that protective layer anymore, that's when bacteria can start getting into your bloodstream, thus, the cytokines get released.

[00:38:38] They start attacking the area because I gotta protect this. This is where foreign object and that's what causes inflammation.

Toni: Yeah, right. So, um, to the heart of it, cut out sugar. Can you make some suggestions as far as how people cut out sugar and what some of the healthy options are? And I am all about all at, please talk about your products and if you would. What is in them, what makes them natural and, and why are they good alternatives?

Thom: Well, thanks. Thank you for the softball. So, Stevia, I mean that Stevia, I got. I went to like a long time ago and Stevia is super interesting to me cause, um, the sweet constituents that are the plant in that plant are called the Stevia glycosides and there's a variety of different Stevia glycosides that you can use for different, you know, different things like, um, you know, like the highest concentrated one is going to be called Rebaudioside A, and so I would say if you could replace, you can replace sugar with, um, with Stevia or even with Monk fruit, um, But it's super concentrated. So, you're only going to be able to use a tiny bit. So, for cooking and baking, you might run into some challenges, right? Because you're losing a lot of volume.

[00:39:56] So where you're going to be using a, uh, like an eighth of a teaspoon equals a cup of sugar. So, if you are, you know, if you're replacing a whole entire cup with the eighth of a teaspoon, you're going to be losing a ton of volume. So, you can replace that volume. You can use Stevia and you can use Monk fruit. You can replace that volume with like unsweetened apple, apple sauce and that works great for baking, but you are a person that's like, nah, I don't want apple sauce. I don't like apples then. I mean, there's other options. Like you can, you can get blends of Stevia, Monk fruit and erythritol. And erythritol is an alcohol sugar that's made from an enzymatically treated, um, glucose, substrate.

So basically, fermented and voila! You've got, you know, you've got erythritol, but there's one sweeter that for the past five years, I have really, really been investing a lot, a lot of time, money and effort into, and that's allulose. And so allulose is actually a rare sugar, right. And it exists in nature, in very small amounts, but you can take actual like corn syrup or a starch or anything that has a carbohydrate in it. And you can inoculate it with a particular

bacterium and the ferment, the fermentation process, the, the metabolite that comes out of that, it's basically the poop from the bacteria is allulose.

And so, and, allulose and erythritol, they're both about 70% as sweet as sugar. So, we add a tiniest bit, um, of erythritol and, and/or Monk fruit to allulose and to erythritol so it's on par with sugar. So, you can use it as an actual sugar substitute in baking and cooking, you know, anywhere you would just use sugar.

My preference is, is using allulose. And for me is so interesting because it's considered a saccharide and saccharides are sugars. Right. So, it does things that sugars do. Like it caramelizes, it acts as a humectant, which means it holds things together. So, for me, yeah, the most exciting, sugar replacements that I've worked with, it's all natural. It doesn't have any side effects. And coupling it with some Stevia and some Monk fruit.

Toni: Yes. And, you know, I'll just share with you. Um, I created my own special lemonade.

Thom: That's a nice plug!

Toni: Isn't that so nice. I thought you'd enjoy that. It is so good because I. I mean, like most people and everybody listening, like we like the taste of sweet. Right. So, and sometimes I'll just put like lemon in water, but a little bit, a little squirt of that just makes it just so yummy. I think drinking water can be really boring, like so much water.

Thom: Right. Yeah, it came in and that's the thing it's like, keeping yourself hydrated is totally critical. Like particularly if you're in, you know, low carb, high protein, or like Keto you have to hydrate and I mean, hydration is super important because we're 70% water. And so, it makes sense that everything that we consume should be 70% water as well. If you want to stay hydrated, do you want to, you don't want to dry up like a raisin.

Toni: Yeah. We need to keep our youthful appearance, right?

Thom: Yeah. I do my best, but age never stops.

Toni: Well, you have the benefit of being able to grow a beard. You can cover any imperfections in the jawline. Here I am getting all like aesthetic, but, but you know, the really like a lot of people care about aging and sugar ages people not just ages them as far as how they look, but. But like on a, like a genetic level. I mean, it's, it's really important to cut out those sugars.

So, you have some, um, projects you're talking about allulose and what are some of the other natural sweeteners you talked about Stevia and monk fruit, other, are there any others?

Thom: Yeah. Stevia and Monk fruit, allulose, erythritol. You know, we, we have xylitol, I don't really recommend Xylitol because it's, uh, and alcohol sugars in general you have to become adapted to them. So, like the first time that you have an erythritol, you could get some stomach upset. And the reason that is, is because, um, because it has a pretty heavy molecular weight. So, when it gets into the lower intestine, it has, uh, has a tendency to

draw moisture in. Right. Which, um, well, you can put two and two, together, a lot of water activity.

Toni: The big D word is in their set floating around somewhere, right?

Thom: Nasty-pants. Um, yeah, so, I mean, that's the, um, xylitol is even a little more pronounced and it's, uh, ability to do that. Um, but they all have different functions. Like xylitol is, is great for chewing gum. It's great for toothpaste because it has sort of antimicrobial properties that are great, um, for that type of a, of a purpose. Um, also, I mean, with Erythritol, there's great places for that. Like, using it as, you know, coatings on the outside of bars or cookies or cakes or anything like even frostings and stuff, because it is not hygroscopic, it means it doesn't draw moisture into it.

[00:45:37] So it will actually hold up better and extend shelf life. So, I think it's every, like I worked on probably half a dozen applications every single week. So, from bars to cookies, to beverages, to frozen desserts, to, you know, increasing our line of inclusions, like chocolate chips, white chocolate chips and sprinkles.

And, um, you know, I use the, I use a different sweetener for, for different things. You know, I'm just looking for the right sweetener for each application. Yeah. And it really does become very scientific effect, you know, and we're using, as you know, you were monkfruit+ in our products we've been using it for, I know it's so good.

[00:46:20] We've been using it. I reformulate our products about, I don't know, at least three years ago. Okay. And started incorporating it and then we're coming out with some, yeah. So, I'll definitely get to talk with you offline about this, but we're starting to create some granola clusters and also meal bars. Our meal bars are zero carbs. So those are keto friendly. No, not all of our products are little, little, something different, but definitely with the, the idea of keeping sugars out. So, you, your products, what I love is that they taste really good. You know, it's, I just got samples of your, uh, your chocolate Sweet bits. I think he's what you call them.

[00:47:00] A little chocolate chips. Those are all good. Yeah, those are solid. And we should have, I think we'll have the white chips. I'm hoping not next week, but the week after, and then marshmallow, we've got the toasted marshmallow chips that are going to be coming in in a couple of weeks. I'm working on a cinnamon chip.

[00:47:18] We've got a funfetti, which is a word now. So, we have funfetti, um, colored sprinkles and chocolate sprinkles. So, I, a couple of years ago, I'm like, you know what I mean? I, we can keep doing sweeteners. We're always going to be a sweetener company, but inclusions are kind of a carrier for our sweetener. And there's really not a lot of competition out there.

[00:47:40] So for, you know, people that are making cookies and, and, you know, frozen desserts and baked mixes and stuff like that, it's a lot of them were using conventional, you know, inclusions that have sugar. And it was one of the biggest risks I ever took. So, like when my first round of chocolate chips, I had to commit to 200,000 pounds of chocolate chips, that was almost a million dollars.

[00:48:03] And I was like, yeah, I was like, I really feel like this is a good place for us to be, um, you know, and I had a year to use that 200,000 pounds up and we were sold out in 20 days and I'm like, Ooh.

Toni: Yeah, you did great on that. And I would just say, like, I have been like coping, you know, praying for a company like yours, because really, I mean, the reason is like everybody loves sweets.

[00:48:33] Like people love chocolate and you know, if there was a healthy way to do it, a lot of people would change that. And so, I'm kind of on that front lines with you. I have products that I use them in too. Because if you think about it, Thom, these things are tools for people. Like you can have tools for all kinds of things, but if, if you can start like cycling out the sugar and stuff, it's a little bit of a taste bud adjustment.

[00:48:57] Right. It's kind of like, like, yeah, I don't eat sour cream, but I use non-fat Greek yogurt. Tastes the same to me, but maybe to some people, it doesn't at first, but you know, sometimes there is a little bit of a flavor profile adjustment, but, but it is so, so important. We are not going to get out of this until we either cut sugars out and like you said, just go whole or the sugars that we do have making sure that they are these, they are, are these plant based, you know, natural sweeteners that do not, you know, I don't know if you mentioned this. I don't think so, but does not impact your blood sugar. Right. Does not impact calories. So those things to me are, are godsend because America, we're not going to change the fact that we love sugar, that we're addicted to sugar, that we eat tons and tons and truckloads of it every year.

[00:49:44] So. So, I'm, I'm really, I'm just super appreciative of the work that you do. And I know because I have a food business as well as science that goes behind it and the investment and the risks that you take and to use that and that huge investment, like its people don't realize that people. Like you, the owner of Icon Foods, you're, you're a normal, good guy and you've got, you've got family, you've got things going on, just like everybody else.

[00:50:10] And I think sometimes people think that gee, these food companies are these big ambiguous, but they don't realize the risks. The risk that you take and the heart and the, the level of like the amount of time and everything that goes into it to make that happen is just, I appreciate you greatly. Thank you very much. Love your product. So, and this kind of brings me around to. A question, something that you said that I just, which is you aren't doing well, unless you're doing some good. So, can you tell me about some of the, obviously you're doing great good with the products that you're making. How are you, and I've read a little bit about the, the chickens you have for employees and some of the things that you're doing, uh, back at your homestead there, but can you tell me how, like what, what are you doing for the community lately?

Thom: Um, well, there's, I'm big about education. So, we do, um, actually, you know, support some specialty schools that are in the area. Um, we also, I don't, I don't know, but I mean, I think that there's one thing that, you know, that I really like about the company too,

is we've got, uh, an educational policy at our company where we actually do pay the full tuition for, um, any of our employees that want to go back to school.

So, yeah, I mean, I think education for me is one of, is I would say the most important thing, because I think that an educated population, there's a free population, you know, where you, you are able to learn, um, you know, when you're being BS'd, and where you have confidence in the things that you know, to be true.

[00:51:51] So, I mean, that's one way that I think that we give back, um, you know, we also give away a lot of products. So if there's people that, you know, reach out to us, like through the Charlie foundation or through other foundations that, you know, that are all about, you know, helping educate kids on eating better, um, donate a ton of product just to, you know, so people can, can learn about cooking better, you know, sugar-free meals.

Um, but I think that, I mean, that goes back to just understanding a person's why, you know, like, why did I do this? Like, and why do I get up every morning and go to work? And you know, why do I continue on? Right. And, and I think that my why, and I mean, this is something that I, that I, I meditate and meditate on a daily basis is like why?

[00:52:45] And it is to, it is to come from a space of contribution, right? It's coming from a space of what, what is, what legacy do I want to leave behind? What is it that I want? You know, what is it that I want to be remembered for? You know, do I want to be remembered for, Oh, he's got a fancy car or a big house, or, you know, whatever rich people have.

[00:53:07] Like, do you, do you want to be known for that or do you want to be known for, Hey, you know, I got a call from a women who said that her, her son, you know, had a brain tumor and used the ketogenic diet and use some of our products and that brain tumor actually shrunk and it went away. I mean, or somebody who calls and says, you know, my, my father was 200 pounds, overweight, diabetes, lost his foot, and now he's 165.

So, and doesn't have diabetes anymore. I mean, hear stories like that. Or when I go to a trade show, and somebody comes up to me and wraps her arms around me and gives me a big hug and says, Oh my God, your book totally changed my life. Those are the things. That's my why. And that's why I get up in the morning.

[00:53:55] When I see that I've had a positive impact on the world. And so what I would say to people that are going to start a business or thinking about doing anything, anytime a cause is, you know what, make sure that you're doing good, because if you're doing good doing well, it's gonna, it's going to happen. You know, if you're doing the right thing, you know, abundance is going to come your way.

[00:54:20] So just do the right thing. Do good, you know, be kind to people. Show grace love. Express yourself, you know, self-acceptance, accept other people, you know, just do those things to be a good person.

Toni: Absolutely. And, and I think, um, one thing that took me a long time to realize is that the good that you do create such a ripple, people don't recognize the ripple, like it's you help these families, but it also put them in a position like the gentleman that lost all that weight

and the little child with the brain tumor is that, that goodness that you did for them gets, gets amplified into other people's lives. And it's, I wish we knew, I wish there was like some way to measure. I'd be like, yes, yes, we did that good. And then it rippled and we got 180% ripple on that goodness. It just went into the universe. So, so, so great.

Thom: Somebody needs to come up with an equation for the butterfly effect. Because that's literally, I mean, what it is butterfly effect, like a butterfly flaps, its wings in Indonesia, and then there's the hurricane in Florida. So, I mean, the butterfly effect is a real thing and you know, and it's, I'm always shocked.

[00:55:41] Like really shocked when I'm at a trade show and somebody comes up to me in this like, Oh my God. And like freaks out. Cause I'm like, what I did that? Oh, you know, it's hard for me to really wrap my head around, but it is, if you do good, it's really, yeah. There's that butterfly effect or that ripple. That just, it just rips through, you know, the universal energy.

Toni: Yeah. It really does. And I, it is a thing and thoughts are things. And, you know, at that, that's kind of a, some, some people aren't quite familiar with all of that, but I think it's definitely been part of my path and I knew yours as well, because we tend to know these things about each other. Right.

Thom: Secret handshake.

Toni: Exactly. Exactly. So, what is, um, if we could just. Uh, I would love to hear just kind of a final question, and then I want to hear about how people can contact you as well. Um, but what would you, what kind of advice, just last piece of advice you might give to a person, um, that you wish that you had known earlier in your life, but that has really resonated with you now?

Thom: Well, um, in that you are the sum of the five people closest to you. So, choose wisely, surround yourself with people that are supportive, uh, surround yourself with people that are like-minded yet force you to grow, and don't get stuck in comfortable situations, right? Get comfortable with always being a little uncomfortable because that means that you're growing.

Toni: That's exactly right, but not, not painful or shameful. Just comfortable. A little uncomfortable.

Thom: Absolutely.

Toni: Exactly. Oh, well, how can people reach you if they want to try some of your products? Can you share that?

Thom: Sure. Um, if you want to see like the mad science behind everything, you guys, you can just go to Iconfoods.com, or follow us on, um, you know, follow us on LinkedIn.

[00:57:49] Um, that's like that's to see the inner workings of what we're up to as far as the company goes, if you want to see my side hustle. So, and that's where, you know, things get

a little silly, but I, if you want to see my side hustle, go to GuyGoneKeto.com. You find me on any of the socials social to guide on keto.com.

[00:58:11] Okay. And drop me a direct message. I'm really good at getting back to people. And you know, if you are interested in our products at all, You know, and you're an influencer, you know, we, we love to, you know, we love to get our products in the hands of influencers so we can get their opinions on them. Um, yeah. So GuyGoneKeto.com, [#guygoneketo](https://www.instagram.com/guygoneketo).

Toni: Yes. So, um, yes, and people, I know you have a couple specials on your website. That people can check out some of your Keto sauces and things like that. So that's really good. And, and they are delicious. So, I will, I am one of your influencers, so I will, so put me to work, Thom.

Thom: We are, I have like, I have two, we have two, we have a lot of new products in the queue, but there's two of them that I think that are spectacular. Like we created a spicy garlic ketchup. That is, it's phenomenal. Like it's spoiled me. I can't have anything else. Um, and then we also have a spicy, uh, spicy barbecue sauce that is really spicy.

[00:59:14] So if you like spicy, and these should be able to try that, but I've got so many other products in the queue, like I've got, um, cocktail mixes, margarita mix, uh, pina colada mix that's in the that's in the queue. We're releasing the white chips and the, the, uh, um, toasted marshmallow chips. So just if you sign up for our newsletter or you follow us on, uh, on any of the socials, your, any of your people will know exactly what we got and when it's coming out and we're always looking for, for testers.

Toni: That's great. And I will say, just in case any of my clients or followers have questions, is it all, all of your products do fit within, um, the, the coaching that I do, the nutrition coaching and everything, they are all very consistent and safe and healthy, uh, for, for people, if they don't have, you know, like medical issues.

[01:00:09] Like, I think there's one with a little bit more sodium, just, just, I mean, but everything, as far as sugar content is completely just fine. Thom. I was referring to, there was a teriyaki sauce that was, had a little more sodium than, I mean that most people can eat, but if you have a sodium issue, that's the only thing I wanted to bring up is just to look at, look at that one.

Thom: I reformulated that. Yeah. So, the new formulation that's coming out, we moved from using a Tamari sauce to using coconut aminos. And I think we cut the sodium like more than half and it just really increased the quality of the product. So, it's things like this that really helped me, you know, where it was like, Hey, can you cut that sodium? Can you do this? That helps me so much when somebody makes a comment on the product on how we can improve it. When people are like, Oh yeah, it's delicious and amazing. That's super nice. And I appreciate hearing that, but the thing that helps me be better is when somebody says, you know, Hey, have you thought and doing this or cutting back the sodium or increasing the fat or, you know, whatever those are, the things, is it really helping, so thank you for that.

Toni: That was like my only, my only thought. So, I'm so glad you did that. And I was thinking coconut, the aminos great, I think like the Bragg's liquid aminos also very high in sodium. So, you, it sounds like you made an awesome choice. So, thank you for being ahead of the curve on that.

So, anything else you want to leave us with Thom before we part ways? Sadly?

Thom: Yeah, just do good. Do well. Show grace. Love one another. Yeah. I love that. And I adore you and thank you for being here. Uh, you have made my day. I know that, uh, your, your ripple will, will reach, reach many.

Thom: Thank you so much for that, Tony.

Toni: Thank you, Thom. You have a wonderful, wonderful day and I'm sure our paths will cross again soon.

Thom: A hundred percent. Thank you. Thank you. Bye bye.

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