Women In Wellness: Shannon Conklin of Organic Edge on the Five Lifestyle Tweaks That Will Help Support People's Journey Towards Better Wellbeing

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As a part of my series about the women in wellness, I had the pleasure of interviewing Shannon Conklin.

Inspired by personal events, Shannon Conklin founded the holistic wellness center, Organic Edge, in the popular Hamptons, NY in June of 2020. From *chronic illness as a child to losing her father to colon cancer at 49 years old, Shannon has committed to a mission of helping people heal and purify the body in the most natural ways. Shannon has over 13 years of experience in several holistic health and wellness services and techniques and holds many holistic modality certifications including being a National Board Certified Colon Hydrotherapist, an I-ACT Certified Colon Hydrotherapy Instructor and certified in Thermal Imagery.*

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Thank you so much for doing this with us! Our readers would love to "get to know you" better. Can you share your "backstory" with us?

My passion for health and wellness came out of necessity and survival. I was a competitive dancer and straight-A student when I became ill at the age of 12. I fell ill with Epstein Barr and micoplasmic pneumonia and was unable to fully recover. I was later diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome with Fibromyalgia. That diagnosis at the time meant you are sick, tired and in pain all the time without a known cause or solution. After 3 years and no answers, my mom read a book by a holistic doctor and decided we were traveling 4 hours away to a functional medicine doctor. She did all kinds of tests and found tangible answers. I had leaky gut syndrome where everything I ate became something my body deemed an allergen. I didn't digest or absorb nutrients from food, so all of my vitamins and minerals were completely depleted. I had an almost sterile microbiome from all of the antibiotics I had been on. This was the first step of many on my road to recovery. This was also the first time I saw the value in looking at the body "holistically," meaning looking at the whole body as one functioning machine and not breaking it down into separate systems, organs and symptoms. I later found out that I had chronic Lyme disease, probably since the microplasma episode. Over the last 20 years, I have taken many steps toward optimal health. One treatment, one test, one experiment at a time. My passion quickly turned into my profession as I found myself managing holistic practices before training to become a practitioner myself. Being your own health advocate is the most important piece of advice I can give someone. There are lots of different approaches to healing and most of them are valid but not all of them work for everyone. My healing journey was long and filled with a lot of throwing things against the wall to see what stuck. I'm grateful for the journey, what it's taught me and what I'm now able to provide others on their journeys.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you started your career? What were the main lessons or takeaways from that story?

Very early on I had a client come in with his mother for a colonic. He was about 25 years old, didn't really communicate much, with me not at all. His mom told me that he had neurological Lyme disease. He became suddenly sick in college and went from being a normal young adult to laying in a hospital bed. When I became a part of his healing journey, he had been sick for a few years. Joe had gone for colonics before, but his mom Donna told me that they were painful for him. He was chronically constipated due to the Lyme. Throughout the session, Joe seemed comfortable and released an INSANE amount of waste. The following week when I asked him how he was doing, he responded he was doing well. I looked at Donna and she said it had been an interesting week. Ridding his body of its waste made a huge difference in how he felt and not just in his stomach. He single handedly showed me how important colon hydrotherapy could be. I got to see Joe weekly for years and was witness to his transformation. I'm grateful to have been a part of his healing journey and a part of him and Donna's life.

Can you share a story about the biggest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

In school I was taught “nutrition” in regard to both general health and in relation to colon health. With that knowledge, I had an idea of what the perfect diet was for everyone. Now thankfully, I wasn’t counseling anyone nutritionally, but I soon learned that our bodies are all very different and need different diets. I learned that first by experimenting on myself. I have been vegan, keto, vegetarian, paleo, pescatarian and ovo-tarian over the last 10 years. I’ve also at this point seen thousands of clients with different medical backgrounds on different diets and protocols. What I know for certain is that it is not one size fits all. Not even close. I can say with certainty that the quality of food we intake matters, regardless of what food works best for the individual. In all the nutritional lifestyles I’ve tried, it was always organic, pasture-raised, wild caught, etc. I think the one size fits all approach to anything health and wellness related is a mistake. I truly believe my biggest strength as a wellness practitioner is that at the heart of it, I am a person that has been bio-hacking myself from a chronically ill person to where I am now. I’ve learned to always to listen to my body. Our bodies speak to us and give us so much information that we are used to ignoring or silencing. Explore, research, hear everyone, but listen to your body.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

There are many people I learned from throughout the years. Every person I worked for and worked with professionally and on my personal health journey, both added value to my practice as well as taught me what I did not want to incorporate into my own business. Life is fantastic in that way if you spend time absorbing all that you can. The biggest impact on my professional life was my late colon hydrotherapy mentor Barbara Chivvis. She truly LOVED colon hydrotherapy and was a pioneer in the field. When she first started, she was one of two colon hydrotherapists in the area. The field was widely undervalued and unknown. Her personality was quite the opposite of mine. She was soft spoken, reserved and timid. That made her passion for colon hydrotherapy so much more apparent because she spoke with conviction about health and wellness. She walked the walk and lived what she believed to be the healthiest lifestyle possible. She trained me throughout all 4 levels of colon hydrotherapy certifications with I-ACT and for the National Board Exam. I was then lucky enough to work beside her both as instructors for I-ACT and as a practitioner. Even with all she gave me, I still find myself wanting to ask her opinion. I love and miss her dearly. I wouldn’t be where I am without her.

Ok perfect. Now let’s jump to our main focus. When it comes to health and wellness, how is the work you are doing helping to make a bigger impact in the world?

My impact on the world comes one client at a time. My clients have total access to me. I have clients that I haven’t seen in 10 years who text me every now and then to ask if I’ve ever tried a treatment or supplement. I’ve been where they are and sometimes, they just need someone who understands. I give every single client everything I’m able to. Being part of their healing journey, whatever that looks like, is my biggest gift and what fills me up at the end of the day. Everyone deserves to feel well and if I’ve contributed to that in any way, I’ve done my job.

Can you share your top five “lifestyle tweaks” that you believe will help support people’s journey towards better wellbeing? Please give an example or story for each.

These tweaks are effective and easy if you get into the habit of doing them.

1) Our bodies have two neurological settings; fight or flight and rest and digest. Fight or flight is meant for us way back when running from a tiger in

the jungle. It’s when your body prioritizes getting out of a crisis by flooding your body with adrenaline to give you “superpowers.” In our current society, we live in that state most of the time. As a business owner and a type A person I am absolutely guilty of this. Our body cannot properly digest food in this state. Taking 5–10 deep, cleansing breaths prior to eating gives your body a chance to switch back to rest and digest. Breathing is so important to our overall health, but it really helps us digest our food better, which in turn leads to better absorption.

2) I think sleep schedules are so important. One major turning point in my health journey was getting on a sleep schedule. I had terrible insomnia and was exhausted all the time. When I got married, I was worried about how I would stay up late because of how I was so used to going to sleep between 10–11 p.m. Our body loves routine, it is very smart and knows how to optimally help us if we give it what it needs.

3)I know you hear about hydration and water all the time. I have many clients who drink a ton of water and still feel dehydrated. One of the best things I ever did was start putting electrolytes in my water. My absolute favorite is Superieur Electrolytes. They have real Vitamin C from fruit, pink Himalayan salt that provides the electrolytes and no sugar. They also taste amazing. Electrolytes were an absolute game changer for me.

4) I eat a zero refined sugar diet. There is just so many other delicious sweet options that don’t do the damage to your body. Coconut sugar, honey and monk fruit are all yummy sweet indulgences that just make me feel good without crashing later.

5) If I want treats or junk food, I make it myself. I use real, quality ingredients and make whatever I want from scratch. At that point I’m having comfort food, not junk food. Sometimes the soul needs a little comfort food!

If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of wellness to the most amount of people, what would that be?

I can’t help but take the bait on this one. The wellness movement that I think would bring the most value to everyone is normalizing the BOWEL movement. I am here to meet people where they are at and assist them in getting closer to their health and wellness goals; bringing their body back to balance. It’s amazing to me how many people are still embarrassed to talk about poop! It tells us so much about what is going on inside the body. If everyone had daily bowel movements, they would feel so much better.

What are your “5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Started” and why?

If you love what you do and you’re providing value to other people, the universe will continue to open doors for you to fulfill that purpose. Letting go of control and being in the flow, while putting in the necessary work will get you to where you want to be.

Aside from that I have to be honest, “the school of life” is a very real thing for me. What I’ve learned through all my experiences is why I am where I am today. I don’t know if anything anyone could have said to me would have changed things and if they had, would I want really want that? I value every lesson and everything I’ve learned over the years and wouldn’t have wanted a spoiler.

Sustainability, veganism, mental health and environmental changes are big topics at the moment. Which one of these causes is dearest to you, and why?

I debated on how to answer this question. My last three cars were hybrids and speaking about mental health is not in my scope of practice so I can only speak from my experience. When someone is chronically ill, we concentrate a lot on the physical. We focus on the symptoms and the tangible information we receive from testing. After years of experience dealing with my own illness, and my chronically ill clients, I've come to realize that one of the most unrecognized aspects of it all is the mental health of the person. Advocating for your own health and searching for answers can become all encompassing. Your identity starts to become that of a sick person. Part of my healing journey was to look at every aspect that contributed to it. For me, recognizing that I had started to identify, first and foremost, as a chronically ill individual helped me break that habit and helped me heal.

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