

This is the **DO IT SCARED PODCAST** with Ruth Soukup, **EPISODE 40**. On today's episode, we are going to talk with weight-loss expert Nagina Abdullah about weight loss, body confidence, and getting what you want without feeling deprived along the way.

Welcome to the Do It Scared podcast. I'm your host, **RUTH SOUKUP**, and each week on the show we will talk about how to face your fears, overcome obstacles, and, most importantly, how to take action and create a life you love.

Today's episode is brought to you by Elite Blog Academy 4.0. EBA is the comprehensive online course designed to help you create a successful, profitable, and, most importantly, sustainable online business. Since 2014, we have helped nearly 10,000 students create some pretty incredible results, and if this is the year that you're finally ready to start an online business of your own, then we would love to have you join us. Door is only open to the public once a year, but you can get more info and join our waiting list at eliteblogacademy.com.

Hey, there, and welcome back to the show. As always, my name is Ruth Soukup, and I am the founder of Living Well Spending Less and the Living Well Planner, as well as the founder of Elite Blog Academy, and the New York Times' bestselling author of five, soon-to-be six, books.

In today's episode, we are going to be talking to weight-loss expert Nagina Abdullah about daring to confront your body-image issues, losing weight the healthy way, and how to get to where you want to be without feeling completely deprived along the way.

Nagina is the founder of MasalaBody, where she coaches women to let go of their unhealthy habits and instead use healthy herbs and spices to create flavorful recipes that never leave you feeling deprived. As a busy mom with a demanding career that included a lot of travel, Nagina struggled with losing weight her whole life. But then, finally fed up with her lack of energy and a wardrobe full of clothes that didn't fit, she finally decided to do something about it. She began researching and experimenting, and ultimately lost 40 pounds. But that was just the beginning, because she also realized that she had a passion for health and wellness that she had never known about, and she eventually developed her own system for weight loss, which she now teaches at MasalaBody. She has so much insight to share, not just on losing weight, but finding the motivation to go after your goals and learning to love the skin that you're in.

And I really think that this is just the perfect topic for this time of year, when suddenly everybody is thinking about those resolutions and goals for the year, and it's also the

perfect followup to last week's episode, where I talked about my own personal weight-loss journey and how I lost more than 20 pounds following the keto diet. This will be a great different perspective, and hopefully, the combination of the two episodes will give you a lot of practical tips that you can start applying in your own life.

And ultimately, that is exactly what this podcast is all about. It's about taking the steps that will help us make the necessary changes so that we can create a life we love, because in the end, courage doesn't mean that we're never afraid; instead, courage is being scared but taking action anyway, despite our fear. It's putting one foot in front of the other, even when we're not quite sure where that path is going to lead.

Okay, so just a couple more quick things before we dive into today's episode. First, you can get all the show notes for this episode, including all the links for everything that we are going to talk about, by visiting doitscared.com/episode40. Once again, that's doitscared.com/episode40.

Also, if you have any questions for me, or if you want to share feedback on this episode, I would love to hear from you. You can send me a message on Instagram—find me at [@ruthsoukup](https://www.instagram.com/ruthsoukup)—or better yet, tag me in your story. And if I share your post, we will send you a “Do It Scared” T-shirt.

Okay, so with all of those details out of the way, I am honored to introduce you to the amazing and vibrant Nagina Abdullah.

RUTH: Hey, Nagina. So great to see you, so great to have you on the show. Thank you so much for being here.

NAGINA: I am so excited to be here, Ruth. Thank you.

RUTH: Okay, so I am so excited for this episode because right now it's the beginning of the year, and so many people are thinking about wanting to lose weight and wanting to get in shape and wanting to just feel better about themselves and feel better about their bodies, especially. And I know you have so much wisdom to share on this topic, but I just want to make sure that we start at the beginning. So can we start just by telling us a little bit about you, who you are, what you do, and kind of a quick overview of how you got to where you are today?

NAGINA: Absolutely. Basically, my whole life I'd been struggling with my weight. It was something I thought about all the time. I would wake up in the morning, I would never feel comfortable in my clothes, I would go to the closet, and it would take me at least 20 minutes to pick something out because nothing would make me look as—

RUTH: Oh, I can totally relate to that.

NAGINA: Yeah, yes. Nothing would fit on me the way that I wanted it to, so

I was always trying to hide things, even though politically correct, like, the politically correct way, you're not supposed to do that. But I really didn't want everything hanging out. I wanted to look professional, and I wanted to feel good about myself. So as I started progressing in my career, I got a very demanding, and actually my dream career, being a management consultant in New York City. I was traveling all over the country. I was jumping on planes, on trains. I was renting cars. I was staying in hotels for multiple days and going out to fabulous restaurants every night. And so, as you can imagine, this working-hard, playing-hard lifestyle did not do well for my waistline either.

RUTH: No, no.

NAGINA: Not at all. It's like you don't—when you go to a restaurant in a great city, say you're in Boston or something like that, and you go to a great restaurant, you want to order the special food. You want to try the dessert. You want to have a drink. I didn't want to deprive myself. And—

RUTH: Oh, I can relate to this so much. It's so hard traveling. I think traveling is the hardest for trying to—you try to be good, and then, especially if you've been trying to be good, then all of a sudden you've been depriving yourself, and so you're even more tempted when you go out to eat. You've like, "Oh well, I'm on a trip; it's okay." And you totally justify it.

NAGINA: Absolutely. Yes, oh my gosh—

RUTH: I can relate to this.

NAGINA: I'm glad you know what I mean, yes.

RUTH: Yes. I know exactly what you mean.

NAGINA: There's no routine, and also there's a lot of social pressure because everyone around you is ordering fried appetizers or cheesy things that look so good. They're very hard to resist, even if you order your own thing that's healthy, you kind of can't resist. So, it was just something I was facing daily. And then, I had my first child in that career, and then shortly after, had my second child. As many people do, I gained a considerable amount of weight while I was pregnant, nothing unhealthy, but after I had given birth to both my kids, I still had 20 pounds left on my body, and it was not budging. It was not going anywhere. That's where, after already not have been being happy before getting pregnant, not being completely happy with my weight and my body, now I had 20 pounds more. That's where everything really shifted. I remember the moment that it changed. I was actually sitting in my family room. My two kids were crying, and

they wanted to get some air outside. I realized that I was too tired to take them for a walk. I was feeling lethargic, and I was just too exhausted. The other thing that was really getting to me was that when I would go to my closet, all of my clothes, none of them fit me. And I was just sick of it. I wanted to feel good in my clothes. And at that moment, I decided I need to change. I started reading lots of nutritional information. I wanted to start with food because I was so busy I didn't have time to go to the gym for hours a week. What I learned is that weight loss is 80% of what you're eating, and so we have to eat anyway, and that is a great place and the place to start. So I started changing what I was eating. I can go over the details with you. But I actually lost 40 pounds in nine months.

RUTH: Wow, 40 pounds. That is a lot of weight in nine months.

NAGINA: Yes, in nine months. And it was 20 pounds of my pregnancy weight, so I got back to where I was, but then I lost 20 more, and I really got the dream body I had been aching for my entire life. Surprisingly, it happened after two kids, and it happened in my mid-30s, the time that I never expected it to happen.

RUTH: The time where for everybody else, you're like, "Oh, it's my mid-30s. And now I'm finally feeling like what everybody was talking about." That's how I felt when I hit my—like, 20s were easy. And then all of a sudden, I hit my 30s and had kids, and it was like, oh my gosh. Like, it wouldn't budge, the scale would not budge no matter what I did. So, that's amazing.

NAGINA: Yes.

RUTH: That's amazing. So that had to feel, like, the best.

NAGINA: Yeah. That felt amazing. I did have that feeling before I started, my metabolism slowing because I'm getting older, now I have kids. I actually had a vision that after I became a mom, I would never be able to wear sexy clothes or feel really confident, just because that is the visions, those are kind of the images I saw around me. But I defied that, which I'm super excited about, and then I went on to continue my career. As I was working, a lot of people were asking me, "What did you do? Why do you look better after kids than you looked before kids?" I was like, "Well, thanks kind of, for that compliment. But so many people started asking me, they were like, "What did you do?" And I told them that I had created these recipes that had a lot of the blends of the elements that I found were really important to include. And so people really, really wanted my recipes. So I started sharing them on a blog, and sharing also the psychology and the mindsets and the habits that I took on to lose weight while having this demanding career, with two kids. That

started my website, masalabody.com. Since I started it, I started coaching other ambitious women to lose weight. Then I started an online program to help many women lose weight. And I mean, just shared really—

RUTH: It's amazing.

NAGINA: — the systems that I found.

RUTH: And it works.

NAGINA: Yes.

RUTH: Okay, so, the question that everybody is dying to know is, how? How does it work? What are you teaching? What are you doing that's different? Lay it on us.

NAGINA: Yes. Okay, so, the thing is, I always felt like I would need to starve myself, deprive myself, eat very boring food, live like a recluse or as close to it as I could and not go out with my friends or my husband, to lose the weight. I actually found that all of that was not true. And I couldn't have done it if it was true, because I want to enjoy my life. I'm a foodie. I love comfort foods, and I also love wine. So how could this happen, okay?

RUTH: Yes, me too!

NAGINA: So, what I found is that when you—so, we all hear about sugar and how we want to take sugar down. It's kind of practical. Obviously, you don't want to eat too many sweets, you want to balance them. But the thing that I found is that sugar hides in a lot of places that we think are healthy. A lot of the place that it hides, that's just really easy to know right away, is processed foods. So if you're eating anything that's not natural, like, if you're eating anything in a wrapper, even if it sounds healthy, like a granola bar, there is sugar in there, and what sugar is going to do is it's going to literally get stored as fat unless you went to the gym and burned it off right away. If you can avoid sugar, but really getting the knowledge around where sugar hides, that is really key. So the main element of what I did is I started really focusing on eating foods that didn't break down into sugar really fast. And so, a lot of that means I definitely kept carbs in my diet because carbs break down to sugar. I kept carbs in my diet, but I started switching to healthier carbs, things like I would eat more beans, lentils, sweet potatoes, quinoa, things like that. That was really game changing for me because I didn't realize how many things I was eating that were just literally just breaking down to sugar. And what happens is, when you eat sugar, you start craving more sugar.

RUTH:

Yep.

NAGINA:

So if you can bring it down, your sugar cravings can actually disappear, which I never knew was possible for me, because I love, and still do love, chocolate and donuts and things like that. It was almost uncontrollable for me to have that in front of me and not eat it, and now I can just walk by and I'm fine.

RUTH:

Yeah. That's kind of how I feel being on keto too, where it just has gone completely away. So what kind of stuff were you eating before?

NAGINA:

Before, I thought I was healthy. I feel like I'm an educated person. I studied, I read all the magazines, I used to read all the literature, but I just did what I thought was healthy, but I would focus on some of the ingredients and eat too much of them for keeping my weight. I am a pescatarian, so I did eat a lot of fish. I didn't eat as much protein as I eat now. I would have more rice on my plate. That would be the main thing on my plate. On the side, I would have a little bit of veggies, and then I would have some protein. And now, I do something very similar, but I changed up the quantities. I would still have a healthy carb. I could have rice, but in a smaller portion, or I could have a bigger portion of one of the healthier carbs. Then I would have more protein, and I would have more vegetables. I would feel so full by doing that. Another thing that I did to help lose the weight is that I started flavoring my food. I started using really tasty, and what I later on found were very health and weight-loss beneficial, spices. And so I started using things like cinnamon, turmeric, cumin, spices like that. A little bit of cayenne, but overall it wasn't about being spicy, it was more that it was flavorful. I remember adding things like that to my vegetables and roasting them. I would roast cauliflower, and I would put turmeric, salt, pepper, and cumin. When I would get it out, it was so easy because I would just roast a whole tray at 400 degrees for 15 minutes, and when I got it out, it was like three days of cauliflower was prepared in 15 minutes.

RUTH:

Yeah.

NAGINA:

And it tasted so delicious that it wasn't painful to eat my vegetables anymore. What I found is by eating more of these great foods, making them taste good, I didn't feel deprived, and I always felt full. So, really kind of the major elements of what I did is I never counted any calories; I just focused on—

RUTH:

Which is huge.

NAGINA:

Yes.

RUTH: Because it's so depressing to count calories.

NAGINA: It is. I mean, I feel like in the beginning, what could be helpful is for someone to do an audit of what they're eating, using a food tracker like MyFoodDiary or another app. And if you see what you're doing, it's kind of a surprise because you don't really realize how much you're eating and the types of foods you're eating. It can set the stage for where you are right now. But moving forward, I never counted calories because I focused on the types of food that I was eating, and once you focus on the types of food, it's a game changer because you're above the calories. Everything you're eating is so good for you. It's lower calorie anyway, so you don't really have to worry about it. So I never counted calories, I was always full because the foods I was eating were high in protein and high in fiber. And those two elements keep you satiated for longer, and it's due to the science of the actual ingredients. So protein, when you're eating it, it takes longer to digest, and it also takes more calories to digest it. So if you add more protein, you're feeling full, you're feeling satisfied, and fiber, actually, passes through your body, and it keeps you full for longer. And so that's why having those two elements is super key to staying full. And then, I always did things that were easy on the go. It's also about a lifestyle.

RUTH: Yeah.

NAGINA: If I was in my kitchen, cooking this food for hours, and then I had to cook again every single night, I wouldn't be able to comply to it.

RUTH: It's not sustainable.

NAGINA: Yeah, exactly.

RUTH: Right.

NAGINA: So, the elements of not counting calories, staying full, easy meals on the go, these were all really, really key for my life as an ambitious busy woman. And I was able to follow it. The other piece is it being tasty. I actually enjoyed what I was eating. I never felt deprived, and I definitely had my wine. I just wouldn't—

RUTH: Important.

NAGINA: I wouldn't drink every night, but I would drink about three times a week. That was very normal for me. But when I was eating like this, it was fine; it worked out. It very much worked out. So it sort of dropped.

RUTH: What about fat, then? Did you pay attention to fat, low fat, high fat, medium fat? Where were you at on that?

NAGINA:

I was more moderate fat, and I would also focus on the types of fats I was eating. I still do. Fats like avocados, fresh nuts, natural peanut butter, coconut oil. Those are the fats that I have in my diet to this day. I would keep it moderate. I didn't focus on it as much, because it would be in my diet, but I made sure to keep it moderate. If you're also eating all the other things that I was doing, if you have a lot of fat, then it does add up to a lot of calories. So you have to balance it out somewhere. If you're eating more fat, you want to make the framework and the equation of what's on your plate a little bit different.

RUTH:

Hm. So how is your plan different than keto and different than, say, a Whole30 or paleo or any of those ones? What are the similarities, and what are the differences?

NAGINA:

The way that I've eaten, when I lost 40 pounds, it was very similar to paleo, but I did have the healthy carbs in there. And the reason I had healthy carbs is that I just felt like I needed to do that to be sustainable. Also, it was much more realistic for me as a busy ambitious woman who was out at restaurants and who was eating out. I could at least get a side, or I could eat a smaller portion of a carb that I might not have eaten on paleo. In that way, that was different. For Whole30, I feel like it's much different. I do focus on a lot of really natural foods. Everything that I eat is natural, but Whole30, it takes everything out. And so for me, that was definitely something for 30 days I could do, but I was really looking at what can I do now that's going to last me for my lifetime and that maybe I can modify it up and down a little bit if I don't need to be doing it as much. For me, I needed to have some drinks. I needed to have a little bit of sugar. I needed to have some treats. The way that I eat, I have one cheat day a week where I eat anything I want, meaning really anything. I go to the bakery, or I order a croissant, I have a cupcake, I go out to eat pasta. And for me that was really, really important because I did like those foods, and for me to say that I couldn't eat it for like eight weeks or 10 weeks until I lost the weight, or longer, I just didn't think I could do that. I needed some balance.

RUTH:

Mm-hmm.

NAGINA:

I would eat all the kinds of foods that I've shared for six days a week, which it was easier to have a routine and a schedule during my workdays. Then on Saturday, I would go out with my family, go out with my husband or friends, and I would be okay with it because I would feel like, okay, I did everything this week, and I'm going to go out and eat whatever I want. I actually lost 40 pounds in nine months by doing that.

RUTH: Amazing.

NAGINA: Every Saturday I would go out and do whatever I wanted.

RUTH: So while you were losing the weight, you were still having that one cheat day every week.

NAGINA: Yes, every week.

RUTH: Oh, that's amazing.

NAGINA: And I was still having—yeah. Now, what I found is now I'm 40, 41, and I found that after turning 40, that cheat day does have to come down a little bit. So my metabolism did—I did see the effect of it, like, instantly when I turned 40, unfortunately.

RUTH: It's like a switch.

NAGINA: Yep, yep. Like, the thing is that I had spent time creating these habits, because it is quite a shift to start changing even the amounts of foods and the portions of foods on your plate. I'm not depriving myself of anything, but I'm just switching the way that I eat. And it's helping me with my cravings. I had to take my cheat day down to a cheat meal. Usually what I do is a cheat meal now on the weekends.

RUTH: Gotcha. And that's enough.

NAGINA: Yeah, and that's enough.

RUTH: I would think that would be enough, yeah.

NAGINA: Yeah.

RUTH: So, let's talk a little bit about travel because that one's, definitely, I can relate to so much because I'm on the road. For so long in my business, as I was growing my business and traveling so much, that was my excuse. Well, I just can't get into a good routine. This isn't a priority right now. I don't have time for this. I need to focus on my business. I can only do so many things at once, and it just doesn't work because I'm always traveling. I'm always eating out. And it just felt like it wasn't going to happen for me. But then I watched the scale creep up and up and up, which is really depressing. How did you make it work, this diet, while you were on the road? What are your best tips for eating healthy and finding things that you can eat while you're still traveling a lot?

NAGINA: Yes. Okay, so I actually have some tips that have worked for me, that it took me years to come up with, but I feel like they're no-fail strategies. I would love to share those.

RUTH: Hm. I love it! Yes, share them.

NAGINA: So one of the things is, when you are traveling and you're eating out, you are tempted by lots of amazing things. It is good to try things, but you want to have a strategy for how you're going to go about eating, because if you don't have a strategy, what's going to happen is you're going to try everything, you're going to leave, and you're going to feel really tired and lethargic right away. Then you'll also, over time, you will put on weight. I always focus on how I instantly feel. So how do I want to feel when I walk out of this meal? If I'm traveling, and I want to go sight seeing, or I want to go out, or I want to go to the beach, how do I want to feel when I leave? And so really thinking about how—am I going to feel better with a salad that has lots of protein on it, with maybe a little dressing, lots of fresh veggies. And maybe something really nice like beets, or whatever your thing is that you like, how am I going to feel, as long as it's filling, with maybe one slice of bread on the side versus having a really big plate of pasta. How am I going to feel? Maybe you go for the pasta, that's fine too, because it depends how you want to feel. But really focusing on that is key. I think a really—

RUTH: That's a really interesting strategy that I've never, ever heard anybody say before or really thought about before. Like, think about, before you go into a restaurant, before you go into a meal, how do I want to feel afterwards? I mean, that's kind of a game changer right there because you think about the moments, nobody thinks about that. I just think, I'm hungry right now, and I want that fettuccine Alfredo, or whatever unhealthy thing it is.

NAGINA: Yes.

RUTH: I want that bowl full of bread. But thinking about afterwards, how is this going to affect the rest of my day? I like that.

NAGINA: Oh, well, thank you.

RUTH: Ooh, okay, what else you got?

NAGINA: Yep. Well, and it's because food has a direct relationship to our energy, and so just accepting that direct relationship is a game changer because it's not as if you're going to eat this and, oh, I wonder why I'm so tired right after. No, there is a relation—everything you eat is going to either sustain you, fuel you, or it's going to tire you out. So just being conscious of that and thinking about it, it makes you feel so good when you're eating that salad, or whatever it may be, whether it's grilled chicken or grilled fish, whatever it may be, and it doesn't have to be boring. It can be interesting as well. Another thing that I always do when I go to a restaurant is that if I really am feeling the temptation to have

something, I order it as an appetizer. I'll order, like, fried calamari, for example, or if there is mozzarella sticks or something like that, and I just really want it because I feel like I'm on vacation, I will order it as an appetizer. I won't eat the whole thing. Hopefully, I'll be sharing it with someone. And then I'll order a healthy meal. The reason for that is because it's a smaller portion size. So if you can control your portion sizes for unhealthy foods, it's a lot better than just going all out. So instead of just saying, "Oh, forget it, I just want to enjoy myself. I want to let go. I don't want to deprive myself," well, you don't have to do any of those. You don't have to deprive yourself. But you're actually going to feel better when you leave if you have a little bit of that temptation and eat more of the things that really give your body that energy and that vibrance.

RUTH: Smart, smart. And you probably, by the time your entrée comes, you won't even be that hungry anyway if you've had a little bit of a nibble of an appetizer or something.

NAGINA: Yes, yes, absolutely.

RUTH: I like that one.

NAGINA: Absolutely.

RUTH: So appetizers are okay.

NAGINA: Appetizers are okay, yes. When you're feeling it, go—because then you're getting something. You're not feeling bad.

RUTH: Mm-hmm.

NAGINA: So I have a cocktail framework I would love to share.

RUTH: Yes.

NAGINA: Because a lot of times we're going out—I love it, yes, you're excited. I love it.

RUTH: I'm always excited about cocktails.

NAGINA: Same with me. I am, too. When you are a busy person, or when you're traveling, a lot of times cocktails or wine or alcohol are part of the trip. And so if you can learn to order smart drinks, you can go a lot further with keeping yourself in shape and fitting into your clothes that you want to wear, just feeling amazing about yourself while holding a martini or a drink. You don't have to feel guilty about it. So what I like to do, in my four-part cocktail framework, is I start off with a light-colored alcohol. Light-colored alcohols have less sugar. So that means vodka, gin, or tequila. Surprisingly, tequila

actually has more antioxidants and more agavins. It's one of the actually healthier alcohols. And so, you'll start—

RUTH: Really.

NAGINA: —to see, tequila is becoming actually really even more popular right now, but having a light-colored tequila as well. So, one of those. And then you add either club soda or seltzer, because those are both zero-calorie mixers. Then you can add a little splash of juice, whatever it is. It's like your main drink is already the club soda, that's really filling it up, or the seltzer. You have a little juice. I like to have pineapple juice because it's really sweet, and I get just a little bit of that. But you can have orange juice, cranberry, guava juice, mango juice, whatever they might have, totally fine. Then, if it's available, adding a flavoring, or kind of a flair, to your drink. This could be mint, or it could be a lime, or it could be, like, jalapenos, they have in places. This is really your drink. You have the flavor, the spice, or something that makes the drink interesting. You have the sweetness; then, you have the low-sugar mixer. Then you have your healthier option for an alcohol. This way, if you want to have two drinks, three drinks, you're just getting literally half, at least, the sugar as you would if you ordered one of the cocktails off the menu.

RUTH: Like a margarita on the rocks.

NAGINA: Oh, gosh. Which is, like, 500 calories.

RUTH: Right.

NAGINA: So you don't have to count calories when you're doing it like this. Sometimes what I like to do on vacation or on a trip is I will order one of their cocktails from the menu, because I like to try new things. Those are their specialties. And then I'll follow that up with my four-part cocktail framework drink.

RUTH: Mm. Smart.

NAGINA: Yeah.

RUTH: So, then, again, it's about not feeling deprived, and injecting tons of flavor so that you, again, don't feel deprived.

NAGINA: Exactly. And not saying—

RUTH: I like it.

NAGINA: You don't have to say no. You can find an alternative to it. It's like finding a better way to do it. And then, one more quick thing I think is really key for traveling is—and this is when you're going on a

vacation, like you're on a vacation for pleasure—is really reframing your way of thinking about having fun on your trip. A lot of times we put food as the center of our fun. We say, “Let’s go to dinner here,” or “Let’s go to lunch here.” That’s just such a part of our social framework that it’s second nature. We don’t even realize we’re doing it. But instead of it being about our meeting place, or our fun, the centerpiece of our day being going out to lunch, it could be that your centerpiece of your day is going for a hike or going and seeing something you haven’t seen or talking to someone and walking while you’re talking. You just are going to go grab food to fuel yourself. Let’s stop here, grab something, and let’s go for a walk. Or let’s go for a walk, and then come back and grab some food, versus doing it while you’re eating.

RUTH: Don’t make everything centered around food—

NAGINA: Yep, exactly.

RUTH: —so it’s not such a temptation. I like that, too. Those are great tips.

NAGINA: Oh, thanks.

RUTH: Okay, so, obviously, you give great tips, and you’ve got great advice to share. What made you want to turn this passion for losing weight and for eating well and for not depriving yourself into an actual business, because you already had your dream job, a super successful career, so what made you decide to make the shift?

NAGINA: Yes, I absolutely was working in New York City, I moved to New York from California. I had always dreamed of living in New York and working in a corporate job. That’s just what I always wanted. I loved wearing business suits and all those things. But after I saw how many people were asking me about what I had done, I realized that there was a big need out there for me to help other people just like me. Through all the struggles I had been through in losing weight and in being healthy, I understood that it’s a lot of pain that’s involved, and it feels like it’s almost not possible to solve. But I felt like I’d found, like, seriously, I felt like I’d found the magic bullet to just transforming your body and transforming the way that you eat that I felt like I have to share this with people. I absolutely have to tell people what I’ve done and that it doesn’t have to be hard, because a lot of times, we have this stereotype that it has to be hard to get healthy and that we have to live really in a deprivational way. It’s absolutely not true. And I also saw that there was not any specific advice for ambitious women. When you are an ambitious woman, whether you’re a corporate woman or you’re an entrepreneur, you have a schedule that’s extremely demanding. Sometimes it starts really early, it goes late at night, or it’s just

unpredictable. And so there are strategies that you can actually use in that way of living which completely fit in and make you feel like, I can do this, you know? I can do it.

RUTH: So important.

NAGINA: Yeah. So that's where I realized I have something that I can personally offer, and it's so much more fulfilling for me to see people getting benefits out of what I'm doing, versus me not really seeing it right away. I did get benefits, and I did feel good, and I did feel fulfilled in my corporate career, but to actually see someone saying and telling you, "I just lost 15 pounds. Now I can hike with my kids. I just ran a 5K with my kids, and I wasn't able to," or "I walked into this shop, and I felt like everyone was looking at me and saying, 'Can I help you, ma'am,' versus before I would walk into a store and I would be hiding. I would feel like I would be hiding from everyone, or no one would want to help me."

RUTH: Oh, I love that.

NAGINA: Just hearing those benefits and hearing how I was helping people transform not only their body but also their lives, just feeling more confident around their spouse and just doing so many more activities with kids and also getting more confidence at work. Several women that I've helped, they felt like by losing weight they got the competitive edge that they needed. They already felt successful, they were successful, but they wanted their outside to match their resume, or their outside to match their skills. And so—

RUTH: I can understand that.

NAGINA: Yeah, oh, yes. So those are the things that I felt like, I just absolutely have to help other people, because there's so many people that I have to share that this doesn't have to be hard.

RUTH: So when you made the transition, then, was it sort of like you just sort of decided, like, oh my gosh, so many people are asking me about this, I should do this as a business, and gave your two weeks' notice and went for it? Or was it more like a slow burn and sort of starting out as a side hustle and dabbling in it a little bit? How did that all work? How did you do it scared?

NAGINA: Oh, yes. I love these questions. I am a huge fan of what you said second, which is to start a side hustle. What I did is that I could not take the risk of not getting an income. I wanted to make sure that I was lowering my risk, so what I did is that I built it, and it takes a long time sometimes. It looks like it can happen really fast, but when you're actually building a healthy and sustainable business, there's a

lot of things you want to test, and there's a lot of freedom that you want to have. And if you have something taking care of your daily needs and you're able to just be more creative and more free with trying different strategies, what I found is that I could actually grow my business for the right reasons. I wasn't growing it for money. I was growing it because I actually wanted to build a sustainable business that was going to last for years and for decades to come, and I needed to do that in the right way. I needed to set the right foundation. Because I did that, I was able to grow it on the side. All of the money that I made, and I did make income relatively fast in my coaching business, which started off as a coaching business. I was able to reinvest it into more coaching, into more training for myself, into more tools for my business, versus saying, I need this to pay my bills. And so because of that, I was able to actually build something that is solid. And so that's how I went about doing it. In terms of the timing, I did have a very demanding busy job, but it's surprising where you can find time. I could find time all over the place. Like I would be on a flight, and I might have slept on the flight otherwise. But I just made sure to get a good night's sleep the night before, and then I would work on my website, and I would work on my business. Sometimes when I would get to my hotel room at night from being a consultant, I would work on it there. I couldn't work on it in the office, but I'd work on it at home. Then, over time, I started waking up really early, because I found that was where I was the most productive and the most creative. I actually did some shifts to my entire way of sleeping and living, and I started going to sleep earlier so I could get up really early and get in two or three hours of really great time before I started my work day.

RUTH: Smart. I love that.

NAGINA: And it worked.

RUTH: I tell people that all the time. If you cannot find time in your day, start getting up super, super early before the rest of the world is up; nobody bothers you, nobody needs anything. And if you can shift your body into accepting that, that's when your brain is turned on and fired up the most. At least for me it is. I know there's this whole morning-person versus night-person thing. I cannot even relate to the night-person thing. I can't recommend that enough. So how long did it take, then, to get to a point where you felt like your business was more sustainable? How long were you working just in the margins and in the cracks before you were like, okay, I think this is actually a thing?

NAGINA: So, it took me about a year and a half before I realized, I saw this is really going somewhere. This business is growing. There is a lot

of demand. So what I did first is that I still was not quite ready to leave my job. It was a really good job as a management consultant, so to walk away from that income was a big thing to walk away from. I said, what I'm going to do is I know this business is going to grow, and I've seen the proof. What I did is I had over 1,000 email subscribers, and I also had made over \$30,000. It was actually more like \$50,000, or something like that. And so I knew that I just had to put more effort and more time into growing it. So what I did is I changed my role at my work. So instead of being a demanding management consultant, I started working internally, and what that meant is that I was giving up my future potential, like the potential of being a consultant is really big. But I said, let me keep where I'm at right now, because my future potential is coming from my business. And so I changed—

RUTH: Smart.

NAGINA: —my role, and I started having a flexible work arrangement where I could work at home. My hours were just more flexible, and it wasn't as demanding, so I could actually work from my home, I could fit in a lot more hours into my business. After that, I worked in that job for two years, and that's when I stopped.

RUTH: Really.

NAGINA: Yeah.

RUTH: So that was even another two years.

NAGINA: Yes.

RUTH: So three and a half years before you felt like, okay, I am ready to do this full time.

NAGINA: Yeah, exactly, because what I did is I coached, but then I also transitioned into online programs because coaching is really great, but it also takes up—there's a certain moment where your calendar is filled, and to really scale for me where I wanted to take my business was to online courses. And so then, that was a whole new business model, but that was something that would move into the future. But then I was learning about getting traffic to my website, and just really, really scaling, and also selling online courses. To make that transition, I had the flexibility to do that. Then my calendar freed up, so I had all this time on my calendar, and I was doing business in a new way. I was able to do that and make that change because I had the income coming in from my job.

RUTH: I love that. So, switching gears just a little bit, I'm really curious about the role that fear—this is the Do It Scared podcast, so we talk

about fear a lot—but the role that fear has played in your journey along the way, in your life, both in the weight loss and that whole journey, but then also building this business. What is something that has really scared you, and how have you moved past that fear?

NAGINA:

There's a lot that has scared me. I didn't even realize it was fear that was holding me back sometimes until you actually start really understanding what's happening. I think one really clear example of how fear was holding me back was when I was starting my website, and what I did is I put a picture of healthy food on the front of my website. It was a picture of like these spiced garbanzo beans. It was one of my secret things that I used to eat a lot. I loved it; it was so tasty, and I felt like that food like that was some of the things that helped me lose weight easily, and so I wanted to share that with people. But then what realized—and then I put a picture of me really small. I had lost 40 pounds, and I had gotten pretty toned. So I put a small picture of me with my name. What I learned after asking a lot of people for feedback on my website is that people want to eat healthy food so they can get a really fit body, even though that may be different for some people, but if you are looking to lose weight, your first step is not saying, "I want to eat salad and garbanzo beans just because." There's a reason you want to eat it, and the reason is to get really fit, to get in shape, and to lose weight. So I had to get over this fear of putting myself out there, and—

RUTH:

Oh.

NAGINA:

—this actually really, really stopped me for a while because I didn't want to put myself out there, and I didn't want to say, "Oh, this is who I am. This is the weight I lost. This is how I look," because I didn't actually want to make anyone think that I thought I was better than them, that I was bragging.

RUTH:

Look at me, look at me.

NAGINA:

Yeah.

RUTH:

Like, it felt—yeah. I get that.

NAGINA:

It felt really vulnerable.

RUTH:

No, I totally get that. In my business, it feels very vulnerable to put yourself out there in that way, and that's—

NAGINA:

Yeah.

RUTH:

—definitely something I've struggled with, too, yeah.

NAGINA: Yep, yep.

RUTH: So, how did you overcome that fear?

NAGINA: The way I overcame it is that I took a course on starting my website, and someone in the course told me, “You need to put a picture of you on there if you want to sell weight loss.” I like to take the emotion out of things, so I was like, “Okay, I’m not even going to be emotional about this. This is just a fact. If I want to grow this business, I have to inspire people. For me to inspire people, I actually have to put myself out there.” What I did after that is that I had to actually sell my coaching services, and that brought a lot of fear, because I felt like, what if nobody wants my help? What if no one replies to my emails? I had to be very, very open to rejection, of people not wanting my help. But guess what? I put myself out there, I said, “This is what I can offer you.” And I got my first client, and then I got my second, third, and then so many more after that. It was really that initial—and now it’s very, I’m not even, if something sells or if it doesn’t sell, it’s not about me. It’s more about what change do I have to make so that it works? So it’s not a fear anymore, but it was a huge fear in the beginning.

RUTH: At the beginning, yeah. Just that fear of putting yourself out there, the fear of rejection. I think that’s huge for anybody. I think that it also prevents so many people from actually taking a step, having an idea like you had, like, oh my gosh, I had success with this, I’m super passionate about this, I could help other people, other people are asking me about this. Here’s something I know I could do, but I don’t want to take that step to put myself out there. I don’t want to take the risk of being rejected. It’s amazing that you did it, because so many people won’t. But it’s also inspiring, because you can listen to your story and go, “Oh, it doesn’t have to be that hard. It doesn’t have to be this huge thing all at once.” You didn’t have this amazing job, and then lose 40 pounds and quit your job the next day, and go, “Okay, now I’m a coach.”

NAGINA: Mm-hmm.

RUTH: You really took your time and set it up in a smart way and tried a little bit here and tried a little bit there and tried a little bit there. I think that’s what it’s all about. It’s like exercising that courage muscle a little bit at a time until finally it doesn’t feel hard anymore.

NAGINA: Mm-hmm, absolutely.

RUTH: So, along those lines, what’s one of the hardest lessons that you have had to learn in your business or in life, either a mistake that you made or just something that happened, somebody else treated you

badly, something really tragic happening. What is your hard story, and what did it teach you?

NAGINA:

Okay. So, a hard story that has taught me something. I think that it would be, I would love to share the story of when I launched my first online course because it was actually really painful what happened to me at that time. So I was thinking I wanted to transition my business from coaching to online courses. And so I put all my energy, so much of my love and effort into creating this online course. It was an eight-week meal planning program called Foods to Get Fit. It would help women lose weight, who were really busy, all through eating. I put it out, I just worked so hard to do a webinar, send so many emails. What happened is not even one person bought my program, not even one person considered it. Not even one after all that work. At that moment, afterwards I was like, “What do I do now? This is my strategy for my business.”

RUTH:

That is the worst.

NAGINA:

Yeah. And it just happened the first time. For me, there’s so many things that could have happened. I did think, maybe this isn’t for me. That’s one of the things that I thought. Maybe this isn’t for me. Maybe I should just stick with a full calendar of coaching clients all day forever, and just try to do it that way. I realized, let me just ask some questions, and let me try to figure out what happened. I had a lot of people review my sales page. I had a lot of people review my emails. I hired a coach to help me. I changed my positioning of my program. All I did was change it. So what I did is I went from something called Foods to Get Fit to Spice Yourself Skinny. The naming of that, and the intrigue and the interest in spices, and in spices combined with healthy foods. It was still an eight-week meal-planning program. My next launch of that program, the first time I launched Spice Yourself Skinny, I made \$20,000 in my first launch.

RUTH:

Wow.

NAGINA:

Over 50-something people bought it.

RUTH:

Amazing.

NAGINA:

So, actually over 100 people bought everything I was selling during that time, whereas zero people bought it at all the time before. And so all it was—

RUTH:

Amazing.

NAGINA:

—was a matter of me going and really looking and asking questions. I only had one thing to fix. I just had to fix the positioning of this

program, but I thought it was so overwhelming and so huge. What I've learned is, whenever things don't work out right away, ask questions, and make little small changes. You'll be surprised that things can change. Sometimes, they might take longer than four months, but even if it takes four months, you're going to get something new. Now I've launched that program seven times since then. Over 400 women, or a lot of women, have gone through it and lost up to 70 pounds, using my techniques.

RUTH: Wow.

NAGINA: So, I'm helping people.

RUTH: That's amazing.

NAGINA: Yes.

RUTH: Right. It's amazing. I love that story, because I think right along with the fear of rejection and fear of putting yourself out there is the fear of failure. What if I do something and it bombs? What if I put something out there and it is a complete catastrophe, or crickets, nobody buys it? That is everybody's worst fear. That's the thing that prevents so many people from taking any step at all is just this idea that, oh my gosh, I could put it out there and it could be a complete failure. And it was. What I love about that is, first of all, it taught you how to figure out what went wrong and fix it. But also, that it was the thing that encouraged you to keep going, and the thing that probably in your business made you realize, it doesn't matter what I do, I just have to keep trying. Oh, I failed, and it didn't kill me, so now I know that I can do the next thing.

NAGINA: Yes.

RUTH: And I love that so much.

NAGINA: Thank you.

RUTH: They tell you in your coaching that, this is what I tell my students at Elite Blog Academy, you're never selling a product; you're always selling a transformation.

NAGINA: Yes, yes.

RUTH: So, you went from selling a meal-planning course—

NAGINA: Exactly.

RUTH: —where you were telling people that you were going to teach them how to meal plan, but what they really wanted was the

transformation of being skinny. And changing, just that little tweak, same product, all the difference in the world.

NAGINA: So true.

RUTH: I'm not surprised that you had those kind of results. It's amazing.

NAGINA: Yeah. That is so true because Foods to Get Fit is all about the process. It's like the foods. But why do you want the foods? Because I found in my target market research, it's to lose weight and it's to get skinny. Those are the words that I kept hearing. And so the spices were the process, but the end result for this was spices to get skinny, so Spice Yourself Skinny.

RUTH: Love it.

NAGINA: And it was totally a game changer, like, instantly from zero to 20,000.

RUTH: It's amazing.

NAGINA: Yeah.

RUTH: It's amazing. So, what are you working on right now that has you super-fired up?

NAGINA: Okay. So right now, I am working on—I'm actually getting ready to launch Spice Yourself Skinny again. It's coming out shortly in a couple weeks, and I'm just working on the next better version of it. What I've done is that I have integrated vegan and vegetarian menus into it.

RUTH: Oh, nice.

NAGINA: A complete vegan, complete vegetarian menu. I also have a traditional menu with meat and fish. I'm just so excited, because over 75 women, I have their pictures. They've shared their pictures with me and sent them to me of how much they've transformed. They have shown that it's become a lifestyle. They learn how to cook these really easy foods that their whole family enjoys eating. Then what they do is, it's so tasty that they keep eating like that, and it feels effortless to stay healthy. They learn what the other elements of eating healthy are. They learn how to get more protein in their diet, how to get more fiber, what to do when they go out places, what to order. All of that is included. But they also learn tons of amazing recipes. And so I'm super excited for this launch that's coming because I think it's just going to help so many more women and really expand to more vegans and more vegetarians and just

more ambitious women in general, and women that are busy that want a plan. It's like, if we have a plan, it's so much easier. If we just have exactly what to do, you take the emotion out of it. That has worked for me. You just follow it, and it works.

RUTH: I love that. That's exciting. And I love that you're hitting the vegetarians and vegans also. When you said you were a pescatarian, I'm also a pescatarian, which most people don't know what that is. It's a vegetarian that eats fish.

NAGINA: Mm-hmm.

RUTH: But then when I started doing keto, I randomly added bacon, so now I'm a pescatarian that eats bacon, which is not a thing. It's very odd. That was one of my frustrations, and also one of my excuses for so long when I was on this wanting to lose weight but not willing to go fully all in. "Well, none of these plans will work for me because none of them have vegetarian plans. None of them speak to pescatarians. I can never do any of the recipes. It's too hard, it's too hard, it's too hard." When you already are on a restricted diet, then to try to figure out the right things to eat on that is challenging. So I love that you're doing that. That's awesome.

NAGINA: Thank you.

RUTH: Okay, so, couple final questions. First of all, how do you practice self-care?

NAGINA: The way that I practice self-care, the number one thing for me is to get a quality, deep, restful sleep. That just makes me feel so good. It's almost a non-negotiable for me. I actually am a naturally late-night person, and—

RUTH: Are you.

NAGINA: I am. And I always stayed up late my entire life. I woke up really late, and that was just how I thought I was. That's how I labeled myself. It's pretty amazing what you can do when you just try new things, and you just have no choice. You say, this is the way that I need my day to be, and I want to maximize my productivity. So what you can change about yourself. But when I get a restful sleep, what that means to me is getting to sleep on time. That's really key. And then having a really good seven hours. I like to have eight if I can, seven to eight hours. Having that literally changes my day. It changes everything about it. It's so much easier. I wake up without an alarm. It's pretty amazing.

RUTH: I love that.

NAGINA: And sometimes if I need my alarm, if it does go off, I feel ready to get up. I don't feel like, oh my god, I can't imagine getting out of bed, and my eyes are so tired. I'm just ready to go. Then I just have more control over my cravings all day when I have the right amount of sleep. I have more energy. I can do things all throughout the afternoon. So getting that sleep is really, really an important way that I give myself self-care.

RUTH: Oh, I love it. I feel like sleep is so restorative, and we never give it enough importance in life. It's the difference between feeling like you have your life together and feeling like everything is about to fall apart, if you get a good night's sleep.

NAGINA: So true.

RUTH: It's amazing. So, what is the best piece of advice that you've ever received?

NAGINA: Okay, so, the best piece of advice that I've received—so, this is something I love. I love this. I live by this all the time—is took at everything as an experiment, or look at everything as a test. That's another way to put it. A lot of times I would say, "Okay, if I'm doing this, it's all or nothing. This is it. If it doesn't work, oh my gosh, it's over." It could even mean like going out to have a conversation with someone. Oh my gosh, if we didn't click or I didn't say the right thing, it's just not going to go anywhere. It's doomed, this relationship, even if it's a friendship that I was trying to form. Now I look at things as a test. And so what I do is, if I put a product out, I'll say, "Okay, well, let me just see how this does." Or maybe I'll even bring it back a few steps and say, "Before creating this product, let me test it in multiple ways. Let me put something smaller out, and see how that performs." If I'm going to meet someone, or if I'm going to a party, maybe I don't say something in the way that I later thought, first of all, I try not to think about that, because I don't think it's effective. But I always look at things as examples of what I can now do better in the future, and know that life is still going. It hasn't ended.

RUTH: Yeah. I love that because it feels like it's not quite as risky if you're just doing a test.

NAGINA: Yes, yes.

RUTH: Then you don't have to worry if it doesn't work out because it's just a test. Doesn't really matter anyway. I love that.

NAGINA: Yes.

RUTH: Such a good piece of advice, especially for people who have perfectionist tendencies, which a lot of people do. I love that. So—

NAGINA: Well, and—oh—

RUTH: Go ahead.

NAGINA: One more little piece I wanted to add to that is that it also helps, like, when you are working on getting healthier, you want to eat healthier, and you're trying different things. Maybe you tried paleo, maybe you tried Whole30, and you just couldn't do it. Or you could do some of it, but not all of it. Then you try keto and it works. Or you try something else. Just having the vision that it can work, and just finding something that works for you is a really, really great strategy versus saying, "Well, I'm just meant to have this," you know, "I'm not meant to feel good in my body." Because that's not true. You absolutely are, and it's finding the thing that will get you there, and keeping on looking at things as a test until you find what works for you.

RUTH: And then it helps you give yourself a lot more grace, too, along the way.

NAGINA: Yeah, mm-hmm. Yes.

RUTH: I love that. So smart. Okay, last question. What else do we need to know, and where can we find you online?

NAGINA: Oh, okay. Well, I am so excited to share that I have a free give for Do It Scared listeners.

RUTH: Yay.

NAGINA: And I'm going to tell you where it's at. I created something really special. This is my Sweet Spice Cheat Sheet. It has this spice that's most likely already in your kitchen cabinet. It helps to lower blood sugar and to curb sugar cravings. Now, the Sweet Spice Cheat Sheet includes three health benefits of using this spice, five ways to use it in your day, and an easy recipe using this spice, which is actually a late-night fat-burning tea that's really, really cozy and warm. I have this at masalabody.com/doitscared.

RUTH: Awesome. Thank you. And we will make sure that we also link to that in the show notes for this episode, if you forget that one. So you can find it both places.

NAGINA: Yes, perfect. And that's the best place for listeners to find me. After you grab your free Sweet Spice Cheat Sheet, then I'll send

you one of my free recipe books, and then I'll send you my regular newsletter, which includes recipes and tips and ways to use spices, and travel hacks, and things like that. I'm also on Instagram at @masalabody.

RUTH:

Awesome. Thank you so much. Nagina, it was awesome talking to you today. I'm so fired up and so inspired by everything you shared. Thank you so much for being here.

NAGINA:

Thanks for having me, Ruth. This has been so much fun.

Okay, so, don't forget that if you would like to get all the show notes for this episode, along with the links to everything that we just talked about, you can find it all at doitscared.com/episode40. Once again, get all the show notes and links on our website at doitscared.com/episode40.

And then, once again, before we go, I just want to say that I love, love, love hearing from you, so the best place to connect with me on a regular basis is probably on Instagram, where I share daily tips and inspiration, and where you can message me directly. So, if you have any questions about what we talked about today, or any other topics that you would like to see addressed on the Do It Scared podcast, or any guests that you would like to see interviewed, just find me at [@RUTHSOUKUP](https://www.instagram.com/RUTHSOUKUP).

And that about does it for this episode of the Do It Scared podcast. Thank you so much for joining me today. If you liked what you heard, share it to your Insta stories, and tag me in your comments. If I repost your story, we will send you a "Do It Scared" mug or T-shirt as a "thank you."

And speaking of upcoming episodes, be sure to join me next week as we continue our "new year, new you" theme and talk about how to maximize your productivity by eliminating distractions. I will share a few super-practical tips on how to get and stay focused on the task at hand, even when there are all sorts of squirrels and shiny objects being thrown your way. It is going to be a good one for sure, and I will catch you then.