



Essential Alchemy

The Ancient Art of Healing Naturally

Season 1, Episode 19: Power of Phytonutrients with Deanna Minich,
Phd, CNS, IFMCP

Jodi: Welcome to The Parasympathetic Summit. I'm your host, Jodi Cohen. And I'm so excited to be joined by my friend, Dr. Deanna Minich, a health educator, researcher, author with more than 20 years of experience in nutrition, mind-body health, medical science, and functional medicine.

Her passion is bringing forth a colorful whole-self approach to nourishment and bridging the gaps between science and art medicine. And so, I'm really excited to-- First of all, welcome.

Dr. Minich: Thanks, Jodi. Thanks for having me. What a delight. I'm excited for this conversation.

Jodi: Yeah. So, Deanna and I were talking about color and the vibration of color and how you can actually use color to help in a lot of areas of your life so, if you want to just dive into kind of color and how you use it for healing.

Dr. Minich: Yeah. Well, part of my personal journey involved-- I was about 28 years old. I was going through a number of emotional and physical issues, and something within me really unlocked. And I remember it was a Saturday. I went up to the art store, and I bought a bunch of paints, and this was back in the time when I was a student. So, I didn't have a lot of money.

I brought the paints in this big roll of paper back to my room within the student house. And I remember just painting and really feeling like I was losing myself in those colors. And it was almost like the more I was painting those colors, the more I started to realize the colors that were all around me, whether they were on my plate, in my room. I started to surround myself with all of these colors. I would put up my paintings.

And so, that I think was-- Maybe that wasn't the unlocking. I even think back to when I was 13, I had one of those — you probably did too, Jodi — I had one of those rainbow shirts.

Jodi: Of course, in the 70s and the 80s, my rainbow gauchos.

Dr. Minich: Right. In fact, I have been trying to find it back. But I would wear that when I was 13, and I would want my parents to call me star rainbow. They refused. So, there was something about rainbow with me, and then I kind of let it go. And then again, it came up when I was like 28, 29. I kind of had this painting episode. And then I met who was soon to be my husband. And he made an observation, which was really interesting, which was he noticed that the paintings that I would make that they reflected some things that I was going through within my body.

Dr. Minich: So, I had a lot of reproductive health issues. I had endometriosis. I had a condition called follicular hydrosalpinx, so my fallopian tube was blocked. So it was a hydrosalpinx on the left side, which is my feminine side. And so, he said, Deanna, don't you think you're painting your ovaries and your uterus?

And I kept painting with orange and pink and gold. These are the colors I would never wear. I couldn't stand pink, but yet every time I went to go paint, pink was the color I couldn't help myself from painting with. So, what happened with me in that whole trajectory?

Well, painting was one of the things that got me into the zone of I would say the parasympathetic. I found myself in the zone of non-perfection, really being one with myself. And once my husband had observed something about it, there's something about the witnessing of what you create and having other people find some element of your story in it.

So, I think from that point on, I was tuned in the color, and I was already a scientist studying yoga. And I knew about the chakra system. I knew that there were these color associations with the neuroendocrine system. So, then I started to piece it all together.

I'm like, wait a minute. Maybe I'm painting my sacral chakra, which is all about the reproductive aspect. So that's my intro into color. And so, now I use it as a vehicle for healing into all of the teachings that I do.

It doesn't matter if it's a medical presentation to doctors, or it's a consumer presentation. I'm always bringing in color because I feel like that's what's turning on our creative brain, and our creative brain is what helps us to be receptive, remember, and create a sense of story.

Jodi: It's funny. I struggle with meditation, and one of my good friends and I went to kind of a spa, and she was getting a treatment, and I was waiting for her for dinner.

And I was sitting kind of in the bar with some other people, and they were all coloring. So, I started coloring and by the time she came, like I was so in love with it. And she said that's a really good channel for people who have a hard time getting into the meditative state.

Dr. Minich: Those adult coloring books, like you were mentioning with just taking metallic markers, there is something really meditative about it. I remember somebody saying to me that they were painting or coloring while they were listening to one of my webinars.

Dr. Minich: And I thought, wow, what a great way to integrate the information that they were listening to, which was mostly heady and intellectual. And then here she was coloring in her coloring book. It's like that's the best of both worlds. So, that makes sense.

Jodi: Even in processing grief, that's been something that's been very helpful. And a lot of friends who've lost a parent said that's what they did as well. So, it's just accessing color. If we can't wear it, being able to just draw with it, it's amazing.

Dr. Minich: Yeah. It is amazing. And observing it in our environment too. One of the houses that I lived in when I was single, it was a small house, but I was very intentional about the colors I wanted in every room. I wanted a different element.

So, my kitchen I painted yellow. My dining room was orange. My living room was evergreen, kind of a pine green color. My bedroom was purple. My bathroom was this aquamarine color. So, every room had a feeling that I would have when I would be in there that would be emphasized by the color.

And so, color made me feel a certain way. When I was in the kitchen, it made me feel warmer, and there's the fire element with my stovetop. So, I've used it very deliberately. I mean, even when I go for speaking, different talks, I mean, even today I was like what's my feeling?

And my feeling today was like, oh, I want to be about nature. So, I'm wearing a blouse with actually lots of color, more natural tones, more than the vivid colors that I'm usually painting on canvases.

Jodi: Yeah. And this is amazing. We were kind of talking about empowering people and how you may not be able to control going to places you normally go or connecting with people you normally connect with, but you can always choose what color you wear.

And I would love it if you could share some of your art and kind of walk us through the colors and how that connects to the chakras.

Dr. Minich: Absolutely. Before we went on, I was telling you that I usually feel like painting in the summer. And so, this past weekend was like a painting extravaganza. And so, I went to go collect my paintings. So, let's start with red. And by the way, even though I'll say certain things about the colors, it's a personalized experience. Not everybody has the same feeling about the color.

Dr. Minich: Even though you go to color psychology, color theory, and they will say certain things, I defy all of that. I really do think that it's important to go with your own feeling about red because how you are seeing this red will be different than how I'm seeing it and feeling it.

And I really had this sense of repulsion with red. In fact, I even did a podcast on creating a date with the color red because I felt like red was too in my face. You think of a stop sign, red. You think of the stoplight, red. An ambulance, a fire truck, it necessitates some kind of alert.

It's the sympathetic. But then you have Valentine's Day, you have the heart, and you have blood. You have family and ancestry. So, I had this two-hour painting date with red, and not from this one, but from another episode. And what I came to was that red serves a purpose.

There's something really beautiful about family connection, blood, and we need to stop. Sometimes we need that reaction. We need the adrenals to help us to alert to our survival. And so, I came out of that experience very different. In fact, this is my favorite out of all of the paintings I did. I'm much more drawn to red now than I've ever been.

Jodi: Yeah. I remember I had the same adverse reaction. I think that as you heal and you kind of find the onion, different things like what you might've been averse to suddenly feels more appealing. Like you grow, and you evolve, and you change.

Dr. Minich: It's true. And each of these colors, we think of food as medicine. I say that color is medicine. So, red is a teacher. Just like you said, when we grow and change, what is red teaching us? How is it bringing medicine? Each of these colors they have even in color therapy where red sunglasses or not sunglasses, but like red-tinted glasses in order to see in red.

And I have a sauna where I can change the color inside. And so, it's like being bathed in that color. How do your cells receive it? And so, red connects to inflammation. Inflammation serves a purpose. So, how about for you? You mentioned that you kind of had a similar feeling with red.

Jodi: I connect it to the root chakra and to grounding. And I feel like part of the transition we're going through right now, the more we can stay centered and grounded and connected, the easier it is to navigate.

So, as opposed to avoiding, it's kind of like the things that you have to do. You get in the car, and you put your seat belt on. Like just I have chosen to see it as like kind of a daily ritual of just really focusing on red and connecting.

Dr. Minich: I love that. Yeah, it is grounding. And in fact, what I haven't mentioned is that there's a spectrum for every color. So, even though I'm showing this red, which is kind of pink, there's burgundy. There's kind of like the earthier red that you mentioned all the way to like a bright, just like a cherry red or even a candy red.

And so, there are different shades of red we might be more comfortable with, but yeah, you're mentioning the earthy grounding root chakra aspects. So, what about orange?

Orange is the color that I did not want to paint or get anywhere close to. Again, sacral chakra, it's about sensuality, sexuality. It's about emotions. It's about the playfulness. It's kind of a messy childlike aspect to who we are.

It's very warm, and not a lot of us are very open about talking about our sexual selves, our creative selves. And so, the sacral chakra is all about the power of two, two ovaries, two testes, relationship, duo, stances. And do we feel comfortable with those partnerships?

What does our comfort level with those partnerships say about our ability to be in relationship with ourselves? So, orange for a long time, I did not wear orange. I now have my wardrobe aligned into the rainbow, and I can see where I'm deficient now.

Jodi: Interesting.

Dr. Minich: Like, I'm still a little bit deficient in orange, but I think because I have reddish hair, it's like too much orange. I can get it in other places. You don't always have to just wear it. You can be looking at it too.

Jodi: Consuming it as food.

Dr. Minich: Exactly. So orange-colored foods are rich in beta carotene, which also aligns to things like progesterone and hormones in the body. So, there is not just a psychological connection, but a physiological one as well. So, that's orange, playful, still working on that one.

Now, the one that most of us-- There was a study in Manchester, England some years ago and they asked people who were not anxious or depressed, but just kind of they called it a normal mood, but essentially it was a non-anxious and non-depressed person.

Dr. Minich: And they asked them what color do you like the most? And they gave them a color wheel. And most people like the color yellow. It was colored number 14. It was the sunny kind of yellow, like on a summer day. Even though we might associate it with a yield sign, it's the sun, and we're run by the sun. We're attracted to the light just naturally.

So, this is the solar plexus chakra, which is the energy of three. It goes upward. Like an arrow, it's directed, it's pointed, it's masculine. It gets us to do things in the world. It gets us to achieve, to aspire, and to focus.

And so, this is one that-- I have a questionnaire for people to fill out in my book and on my website. And when I look at the results of all the inputs, what I see is that most people have an imbalance in this chakra.

Jodi: And that's where most digestive dysfunction occurs too.

Dr. Minich: Exactly. And think of the yellow within us, with the location of this, the yellow bile, the yellow liver, the rotting, the ripening, the acid, the juices. But you know what? That's not really good because it catalyzes transformation. So, some of us are taking in too much where we don't have time to catalyze. So, this is the energy of fire. We can be inspired, or we can be burned out. Jodi, what do you think of yellow?

Jodi: I agree with you. Actually, during one of the darkest periods of my life, I decided to paint my entire house yellow, a really bright, happy yellow before I got married, when I was in grad school and everything felt hard. But yeah, it's amazing. But I also agree with you. I don't tend to wear yellow.

I think of it as really happy, but I'm feeling like we're all energetic beings and there's this idea that if we can-- My towels are yellow. Like just kind of bringing yellow into my life more, that can balance some of that energy in the digestive area.

Dr. Minich: Yeah, exactly. We can use it strategically. Like just the other day, I don't know what it was, but I felt like I couldn't get enough yellow. So, I made a meal with cauliflower rice, which I made yellow through turmeric and mustard powder and garbanzo beans.

I put in yellow onion. Everything was yellow. In fact, I put a picture of it on Facebook, and somebody said it looks like you need some green with that. And I said I was missing yellow. I need it. I need a little bit more fire. Being home with a pandemic, sometimes there's a stasis that occurs.

Dr. Minich: And so, we can use these colors to fire us up. And yellow is a really good fiery color. So, if you're feeling uninspired, bring in some soft yellow. Figure out which tone of yellow really resonates for you. And even on my desk, my workspace, I have a yellow candle that I light sometimes when I need inspiration. I also have sage. I have a number of different things, but I bring in the fire element when I'm feeling like I need a spark.

Jodi: No, that's great. And even like with all the wildflowers that are in bloom, I love the yellows. Yeah. It's funny. We're kind of known to recognize like our cravings for food, but we don't think about our cravings for color.

Dr. Minich: And I often will post my paintings on Facebook or social media, and I'll ask people which color or which painting do you like the most? And based on their response, I can tell exactly what they need. So, I recently posted these, and many people like this one, which was interesting to me, green.

So, when you said that red is an earthy color for you, it grounds you, for some people, it's actually-- Actually, it's this way. For some people, it's green. And they associate it with nature, with being outside, with leaves, with plants. I mean, there's no deficit of green on this planet. We were supposed to get green as an infusion.

There's no shortage of green foods. The green is the heart chakra. It's all about expansion, just like a leaf on a tree expands to capture the light. And so, it's the energy of four. Oftentimes, it's seen as very Christ-like, the crucifix, kind of the two parts below, the two parts as above, so below. So, it's the divining rod between our body and our spirit.

And so, in traditional Chinese medicine, they consider this to be the seat of consciousness. It's not the brain. It's actually the pre-cognitive area of the heart. If you ask me what is my favorite color, ever since I was seven, I liked emerald green.

So not necessarily all these shades, but I like a very specific emerald. And I just eat it up. Like I don't know. I feel like when I want to be nourished like yesterday, I had to go to the dentist, and I wore green. I wore my emerald green because I was like, you need to come with me to the dentist.

Color is guardians, is guides, is healers, is medicine. And even the woman at the dentist's office said, oh, that green looks good on you. It's like we were resonating. I was resonating with that green.

Jodi: Yes. I do that with blue, although I love green as well.

Dr. Minich: Yeah. You are definitely that indigo goddess for sure. Every time I would see you, and I'm like, that's Jodi's color.

Jodi: And I just love it. And it's funny. Like I named my company that, and I really do feel like the oils that have a blue hue are really beneficial in the brain.

Dr. Minich: Yes. So, I'll show you the two blue that I did.

Jodi: Oh my gosh.

Dr. Minich: So, we have the throat chakra. The throat chakra is the energy of five. And so, it's like a star. And so, it's like what do we bring up and out? And so, it's our chemical. This is a huge portal of so many of our passions coming from the heart and from the brain. It's kind of this meeting ground.

And then the indigo, which is your color for sure, the third eye chakra. When my husband saw this one, he was like, oh, that's a little bit. And I'm like, no, but it's being all-knowing, all-seeing, being connected to your sense of awareness, your dream state.

It's seeing the things that are unseen is what you're tapped into, which is that level of intuition and the dream state. So, the throat chakra and the third eye, I mean, these two places are really-- Well, these are all powerful centers, but thyroid, pituitary gland, and how these things are like all signaling to each other, it's all one big web.

Jodi: It is. And also how we kind of communicate that with each other. Like there's all this uncertainty and fear and kind of division, and the more we can get into our heart and use our voice clearly and connect, then we can actually help each other and lift everyone up.

Dr. Minich: It's true. And especially now during-- You and I were talking a little bit about this before we got on, but people are expressing their truths during this pandemic.

It's like everybody kind of has a different truth, and there are personal truths, and there are universal truths, but all of us have a truth to express. So, one of the things I try to keep in mind is to always bring the heart up with the truth.

Jodi: I love that.

Dr. Minich: Yeah. Just as a way of allowing our truth to be heard in compassionate ways. The crown chakra is--

Jodi: That's beautiful.

Dr. Minich: It's lavender white. Sometimes it's referred to as gold or silver. I see it as like this lavender white. It's the all connecting rays of light. I liken it to the sun because it's connected to the pineal gland. So, it's kind of like white light. How do we bring in more of light?

We're hearing so much about the circadian rhythm and how important that is. It's not so much the what. It's now the when is what we're learning. And how do we integrate all of that?

How do we find connection and purpose and meaning? That's even more important now, the intangibles. The things that are not as visible and as physical are even more essential now because we don't have so much access to the physical.

So, that's where the crown chakra really comes in, but really all of these pieces of us, all of this. I did make one last one, which was an integration of them all.

Jodi: Oh, I love that. That's a pretty important step. That's amazing. Wow.

Dr. Minich: Well, what I did was after I painted each of these, I took each of the colors and then just kind of-- In a meditative state, much like you with a coloring book, I just kind of went with the shape of it. And that's really what colors are about. I mean, they have so much to offer, and I'm not even going through black, brown, tan, beige, navy blue.

Usually, when I'm in an audience, and I ask people about what colors they're wearing, it's usually those colors. It's muted colors. It's blend. It's colorless, whether it's black or white.

Jodi: If you think the muted foods aren't as healthy as the colorful foods.

Dr. Minich: Yeah. Many times, although I get some people tongue in cheek saying, oh, the rainbow diet like Skittles and M&Ms. There's a spectrum. And I always think that we have to look to the spectrum, the spectrum of healthpromoting color.

I mean, because color is so powerful, food manufacturers have used it as a tool to attract people to products too, just like clothing, certain colors of clothing, certain colors of cars.

Dr. Minich: Like I had to be really deliberate. Like what color of car am I set for like the next four to five years? Because I usually keep my car about that time. And I was like it has to be a white car.

I'm in the crown chakra time. Like I was very intentional. It was white. I'm going with a white car for right now. This is just where I'm vibing. Before that, I had a black car. Before that, I had an aquamarine car.

Jodi: Pretty. I have a blue car.

Dr. Minich: Well, that doesn't surprise me.

Jodi: I know. I'm on brand, but I'm curious, like your advice to people, just how they can use color to activate the parasympathetic state and what strategies you might recommend.

Dr. Minich: Yeah. So, I would say first and foremost, ask yourself much like you would with food that you need, a nutritional requirement, kind of connecting to the colors that you feel every day. And that could just start by getting dressed in the morning. Like, what do I feel like I need today?

And I would also say the color that you feel least drawn to may actually be really good medicine as well, just like orange was with me. I was repulsed by wearing orange, but orange needed to show up in other areas of my life. So, I would ask yourself that question. What color am I attracted to?

That's probably your constitutional color. That's the one that you're already vibing to. And so, it feels comfortable. It's like a friend, and it's good. That can feel very comforting.

The growing color is the one that you feel more polarized to. So, it kind of depends on your state and what you feel comfortable with. Are you looking for comfort and support, kind of the yin aspects, or are you looking for yang, growth?

Kind of pushing the envelope a little bit. Are you looking for medicine? Are you looking for deeper healing? This is where I think looking at that other color. So, it can start with what you're wearing. It can start with what you're eating. It can start by--

I have a friend who just painted the color of her son's room this past weekend, the color that you're wearing. Maybe it's like surrounding yourself in that color and wearing that, looking at it. You can use cards oftentimes. I have a card deck that I created and so picking a card with a color.

Dr. Minich: There are all kinds of decks on the market, though. There's even one with just like Pantone. They are actually postcards, but it's all the different colors, and Pantone is the company that sets the color palette so like for mixing in paints. And so, you just pick one and then you reflect on that color and then maybe journaling on that color.

And what's interesting in this whole process talking about color is that even people who are blind, and I'm not so sure about people who are color blind because some men tend to be red, green color blind, but people who are blind, I read reports that they can feel color.

So, even though they may not have ever seen it, they can sense something about the color. So, you may want to experiment with that rather than just use your eyes, touching, feeling different colors of different foods. How does a red apple feel different than a Granny Smith green Apple? I think it's endless.

It's really endless. I mean, I would say just to use your creativity here with colors, maybe just eating the rainbow, bringing more color into your environment, just even doing a color inventory.

Like what colors are around me all day. I'm amazed at how many people surround themselves with like no color or like really dark colors. And I think each of those are okay. And I think what about something in between? Yeah. Just see how you feel with even a colored light bulb.

You can get the glasses that are tinted, or you can also just go to the hardware store and buy a red bulb, a yellow, an orange bulb. All of these bulbs exist, and then just surround yourself in that light and see how you feel.

Jodi: My teen daughter has these little things that you kind of tape up around the periphery of your room, and you can change the color, and it kind of feels like you're in a disco. It like makes it that color.

And it's really profound. I mean, it's kind of like sometimes when I'm overwhelmed, just going outside and seeing the green makes me feel better, but it would be fascinating to see what people if they just change the color of their shirt or pick a different food that day.

Dr. Minich: Definitely. There was even a study. Just thinking about the parasympathetic nervous system, one of the things that your viewers would be probably already knowledgeable about is heart rate variability, which is a measure of your autonomic nervous system.

Dr. Minich: Like how does your parasympathetic and your sympathetic nervous systems, how are they balanced. It was one study, and I cited this in one of my books called detox in which green light, just like you were saying — this is what made me think of it — people that were in green light had better heart rate variability.

So, there's something about green. And then, when I look in the studies at nature, in fact, there was just a study I just posted on Facebook. Women, postmenopausal women being in a forest compared with being in a city, had increased levels of serotonin, and they were statistically significantly different.

And we know that serotonin is the neurotransmitter, the compound that is associated with happiness and contentment. And so, these women, just by being surrounded in green, had that connection with better serotonin levels.

Jodi: That's amazing. And that gives people a lot of tools. You're still allowed to go to Home Depot. You could buy a green light bulb. You can try wearing a green outfit. You can eat an all-green lunch and see how that makes you feel.

Dr. Minich: Yeah. And that's even why I like sometimes wearing makeup. I mean, I feel like, oh, this is artistry. Like what colors do I want to bring into my palette? We can dress ourselves up in a whole— Even the color of your socks. My husband, who is an acupuncturist, he has a clinic.

The way that he expresses himself because he has to wear like a lab jacket kind of a thing is he wears colorful socks, and he has a no-shoe office. And so, everybody sees the socks and so colorful, bright different images. So, there are all different kinds of ways that we can comfortably express ourselves through color.

Jodi: One, even like you, my closet is arranged by color. And I sleep in teeshirts, and they're arranged by color too. And every night, I kind of do a check and what color do I need tonight. Well, I sleep to balance me out.

Dr. Minich: I love that. And what you mentioned about sleep is really relevant because that's really where we need to be in parasympathetic. We need to be in a relaxed state. I still have Christmas lights like these beautiful, like pastely kind of holiday lights around my bathroom mirror. And it's like I haven't taken them down from December. And so, I just love them because I like the hue. And if I'm taking a bath, I just like to have that soft hue of these lights. I remember being a kid and just lying under the Christmas tree looking at the lights and like getting lost in each of those colors.

Dr. Minich: And I think in part, there's something soothing in that. Colors can bring in warmth. They can bring in memories. And so, yeah, I think finding our own way with color in that whole variety of different menu offerings, whatever that is for us.

Jodi: Yeah. And I mean, especially if people are stuck at home, this gives them a really nice option of things that they can do from dipping into their closet, dipping into a box of crayons, getting creative with their meal planning. This is fabulous. Thank you so much.

Dr. Minich: Thank you for having me. I mean, what a delight to be able to talk about color. I feel like as a scientist, many people look to me for things that are very credible and validated and scientific, and all of that is really important, but it's also important to go with our own personal experience and intuition.

And what I experienced with color being an important vehicle for healing for me, I don't discount that just because there aren't double-blind placebocontrolled studies on colors. I still think that they're very relevant. And so, it's bringing in the science and the spirituality, bringing a little bit more of the art into healing.

We used to have the healing arts, and then it became private practice. So, something shifted. And I do think we need to get more balanced. And that's what being in the parasympathetic is about. Many of us are sympathetically overdriven. So, it's like, how do we bring back a little bit of that art, a little bit of that creative expression?

And for some of us, I'm talking about color, things that are visual. For some people, that might be music. Some people see music and musical notes as colors.

Jodi: Yes. This was amazing. And how can people learn more about you or follow you on Facebook so they can see everything that you post?

Dr. Minich: Sure. My website is DeannaMinich.com, and everything is on there. The Facebook connection, Instagram, all of it. And again, you'll see a mix of science, different studies as well as creative expressions. So, just note that as you go into those spheres.

Jodi: Thank you. This was fabulous.

Dr. Minich: Thank you, Jodi.