



Level Up: How to Approach Your Health Holistically

Fitness coach Yami Mufdi wants you to shift your mindset from on how your body looks to how it feels. She breaks down all the components—nutrition, intention, routine—to get to a healthier you.

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Alicia Menendez:

I know that for a lot of us, the idea of leveling up our well being and our fitness can instantly translate into changing how our bodies look. What if instead, we were focused on how our bodies feel? Trainer and coach Yami Mufdi is here to help us shift our perspective and teach us how nutrition, movement, intentionality, even morning routines can all work together to help us feel and be our best.

Yami, I first have to let everybody know how you and I know each other, which is that I saw you on Instagram and I was like, “Wait a second.” I’m like, “Yami Mufdi. There cannot be more than one girl in America named Yami Mufdi.” And I was like, so I DM’d you and I was like, “Are you from Union City?”

Yami Mufdi: And when I saw Union City, I was like, “Hold up. Who’s creepin? Who’s creepin?”

Menendez: Because our brothers were the same age. I mean, my younger brother, your older brother went to school together, but I remember you. It’s so weird to see someone you haven’t seen since they were a child as a full grown woman. I’d love to just start with a big question, which is when it comes to your health and well being, what does it mean to level up?

Mufdi: I think it is, in the simplest form, is doing what makes you feel good. When I started this whole journey, it was very physical. It was very like, “What do I need to do to have a six pack? What do I need to do to be the thinnest? What do I need to do to be the smallest person in the room?” I was that skinny girl competing and I was 129 pounds, and I actually shared a picture of that yesterday and when I saw that I was like, “No, ma’am.” And when I was in that space, I was like, “Oh, I’m great. This is perfect.” But looking back, I honestly look famished. It wasn’t until I stopped competing and I went through yoga teacher training, and I did some soul searching, and it really is about what makes your body feel good.

Of course, not only your body, but your soul as well, and it's all I think correlated, and I think it's when you get to that point that your body starts finding its happy place.

Menendez: How do you assess where you are and how do you figure out where it is that you want to go?

Mufdi: You have to be super honest with yourself. If you are completely rooted in the physical appearance, then you have a lot of work to do. I'm 34 years old. I did not have this same thinking when I was 22, 24. Even 30, if we're being honest. So, this is all very new for me in the sense of learning to accept my body, because it's very different to be in a body that's 125 pounds but your body's actually fighting it, than to be in a body that's where your body wants to be, and it's supporting you, and it's doing what it needs to be doing to keep you alive and keep you moving.

Menendez: You do one-on-one coaching, so when you coach a client, what do you use to assess where they are?

Mufdi: A tool that I use is macro counting, where you figure out how much protein, fats, carbs your body needs. What I like about that is that it kind of educates you into knowing what foods have what, and then it's not meant for you to do forever. It's just a tool to help you so that when you get a better grasp on what food does what, you are able to just live in that lifestyle. Obviously, we have the strength program and the workouts, but then I give them questions and I have them do meditation every day. And then what happens is in that time, in like the 12 weeks that we're together, something starts to shift in their mind and it's not so much about, "I want to be the skinniest. I want to be the smallest." It's more like, "I love where I'm at right now. I love the improvements that I've been making. I feel so much more connected to myself."

When you think about it, I'm not doing anything. It's the person that's doing the work. It's like a guide and just kind of a reminder of what we have forgotten, because throughout my entire life, I'm sure you can relate, the magazines are like, "1,200 calorie diet. Eat this to look skinny. Do this to be smaller. Do this." And we forget what we want, how we feel, and we're kind of just going with what society is kind of telling us to do.

Menendez: And none of that gets to the underlying cause of so many of these things. What is your relationship with food? What are your triggers? What are your social triggers? What are your environmental triggers? When is it that your mind says, "Let's go down to the refrigerator, open it, and see what's in there." Because for me, it's everything. It is happiness, it is sadness, it is stress, I mean like there is not an emotion that is not associated with food.

Mufdi: I agree with that completely. Back in the day, I would use any emotion to go for food, and be like, "This is my excuse. I could eat as much as I want to." But then what would happen is I would binge. So, there's nothing wrong with eating food to celebrate. There's nothing wrong with eating ice cream when you're sad. It's just understand that that food is not gonna bring you X, right? There are things that we grow from and our bodies and our minds just do thing on automatic, and then when you start to evolve and you start leveling up, you start doing different things and your original self that is programmed to do all these things wants to do that, but your healthier version of yourself is like, "But I don't want to." And there's that resistance there.

And it's when you absorb all of that is where you start to grow.

Menendez: For someone who's listening who says, "I don't get it. My goal is to lose 10 pounds, 15 pounds, 20 pounds." What are other ways of looking at a goal when it comes to health and fitness?

Mufdi: Things that you can think about are how you feel, how your body actually feels. One of my favorites is ability, so what can your body do? That means how heavy can you lift? I love to lift heavy and I feel super powerful when I'm lifting heavy. And if you don't want to work out, maybe it's playing with your children without feeling out of breath. When I said to take some time for yourself, that's really what I mean is like what do you want to do? What interests you? We have to take the focus out of the food and out of the scale, because I think that's where the problems begin.

I actually ask my clients to weigh themselves every day so that they can understand that your weight is gonna fluctuate forever, because if you step on the scale on a Monday and it's, I don't know, 150, and then Tuesday it's 149, and then Thursday it's 152, you're like, "Oh my God, I've ruined everything." But it's actually not the case. Our weight ebbs and flows depending on how much you sleep, you're stressed, what you're eating, your salt, like there's so much.

So, I think if you weigh yourself every single day, you stick it in your brain, like it's gonna ebb and flow all the time and the scale does not define you. So, I think it's time that we take that focus from the scale and apply it to how we feel, how we move, things like that.

Ad: *You all know I did not grow up speaking Spanish. My husband did. And it's really important to us that our girls have exposure to the language. When I interviewed Susie Jaramillo, the creator of Canticos, she gifted me a book for my girls, and they love it. Like, we read it all the time. And now the older one is using their bilingual learning app. They use the same nursery rhymes from our childhood, Burrito Sabanero, Elefantitos, and Arroz con Leche, to teach kids concepts like phonics, letters, math, and emotional intelligence through song and play.*

The games and the songs alternate between English and Spanish, so it's super easy to learn the languages, plus the characters are adorable. Pollitos, Elefantitos, we can't get enough. I want to squeeze their little cheeks. They've also got beautiful books, games, and toys that just bring the lessons and fun from the app full circle. If you want to learn more about bringing language and culture to life for your little one, visit CanticosWorld.com/Latina. That's CanticosWorld.com/Latina. Start their bilingual journey today and watch their Latino greatness shine.

Menendez: I have this residual muscle memory of this, which when we get to December, I feel that like, "All right, it's time to set a number for next year." And that I feel that rush of like, "We're just gonna really go for it at Christmas and New Year's, because we're just starting our life over on January 1st." And then I feel that sort of like gust of inspiration through the first few weeks of January, and I can almost see the crash that comes in February under that setup. I mean, at least for me, that is how it went year after year after year. And I think so much of that had to do one, with just having the wrong mindset about it, but also not understanding how accountability really works.

Mufdi: I was listening to something and somebody said that they heard a quote once about self-confidence, and the quote said, "Confidence is doing what you say you'll do." And for some reason, I don't know what happened, but it was like an epiphany. A lot of people,

when they come to me, it's just their confidence that's lacking. And I think what happens is that we all set these goals, but we never actually follow through.

And so, what happens is that every time we don't follow through, we drop in the confidence. And so, we tell ourselves these lies, that we're not good enough, we can't do it, we can't even commit. When you do what you say you'll do is when you feel better, you have confidence, and of course you're doing what you're saying, so you're gonna see progress, so you do that, you find that you're holding yourself accountable. And I'm not saying that you don't need anybody, because obviously a friend or a sister, brother, girlfriend, whatever it is obviously are gonna help you that much more, but at the end of the day accountability, yes, it's very important, but I think first and foremost we have to be accountable to ourselves.

Menendez: One of my goals is to simply be more mindful. I, the other day, ate a chicken nugget off the floor and as I put it in my mouth and was chewing it, was sort of so sad for myself that I had so little regard for myself that I had made it a priority to feed my children and I didn't give a damn about myself. And that doesn't make any sense, because they are still very little and they rely on me to take care of them, so if I'm not taking care of myself, I can't take care of them. But it also alarmed me that I just bent over, picked it up off the floor, didn't even check to see if the floor was clean, and popped it in my mouth, because to me it said something about my own sense of worth. That I didn't take care of myself as well as I took care of my children.

Mufdi: A thousand percent. We're always on autopilot. And so, I think what I tell my clients is that I want you to be intentional with your life. And it's very hard when you have kids and you're taking care of not only your kids, but yourself, your husband, the house, like it's a lot. The other day I was getting ready for my launch and the house was a disaster, and I was like, "How do women do all of it? Like how?"

And so, I think first and foremost, women especially need to learn to give themselves some grace, because it's hard. We're doing a lot. And especially in a pandemic, and just so much going on, and I think what it is, what it comes down to is just that intentionality. And it all starts back with having a morning routine, and I know it sounds so cliché, but find some days. Find some time in the morning to set yourself up for success.

Menendez: Give me a sense of what a morning routine can look like.

Mufdi: So, for me, I work from home. I get up around 6:30, 7:00, and then I go straight to my coffee maker, grab myself a coffee, come back to bed and this is where I'll read my Bible, I'll do a devotional, which is just a scripture, and then they kind of elaborate on that scripture, and then I journal for a little bit and talk about things I'm grateful for, maybe I'm just writing out my prayer, the things that I'm looking forward to, things that happened the day before, literally anything. And then I close it and then I stay in bed and I have my coffee. And then when I feel like I'm ready, I get up.

And obviously, this morning routine is not the same every single day. Sometimes, I don't have enough time to journal, or sometimes I don't have enough time to read, and sometimes I don't have enough time to do my morning routine, but the point is is that when you get so busy, and your life starts to kind of feel frazzled, you have that to fall back on. You have that routine to bring you back to your foundation.

For those people that have jobs and are gonna say, “I don’t have enough time throughout the day,” I think a great routine is just like first 15 minutes, or first 20, whatever it is that you can do, I just want you to get up, not look at your phone first thing in the morning, and just say three things you’re grateful for.

Menendez: So, Yami, draw a line for me from that morning routine and how it impacts your overall approach to your health and your fitness throughout the day.

Mufdi: I think that’s very important, because it wasn’t until I realized that it was all connected that I started seeing progress. So, if you get up and you take some time for yourself, you’re starting the day with intention already. You’re saying, “I’m not gonna do what the world tells me to do. I’m not gonna check my phone. I’m not gonna see what’s on Instagram. I’m not gonna see what my likes are like.” It’s just take some time for yourself, what it is you need to do today, what you want accomplished, how you want to feel. You’re just less frazzled.

Let’s say you get up 30 minutes before your day starts or you have to leave the house, that is not enough time to get in the right headspace. It’s just not a way to live. And that truly was how I used to live. I would get up at the very last minute, and I would run around my apartment frazzled, forgetting things, forgetting that, and then what happened is I made bad choices throughout the day because I’m still not composed from the morning. You know what I mean? We need to focus on what we want and what we want to do before the world tells us what we should be doing or how we should be feeling.

Ad: *Hey, Latina to Latina listeners. It’s Juleyka, executive producer of this show. I want to invite you to listen to How to Talk to [Mamá and Papi] About Anything. It’s my show that I host, and every week I talk to adult children of immigrant parents, like me. And you, probably. We talk about things that are difficult, especially conversations that we’ve been avoiding with our loved ones. Things like mental illness, being the first to go to college, politics, we get into all of it. Subscribe to How to Talk to [Mamá and Papi] About Anything wherever you listen to your favorite, Latina to Latina. Thanks!*

Menendez: Are you also a believer in a nighttime routine?

Mufdi: Yes. So, this is funny, because you’re talking to me the day after I launched my clothing line, and so I... This past week and a half, there was nothing. There was literally no routine. But before, yes. Like I said, I work from home, so I will be on my computer till the late hours of the night, but I have made it more intentional with closing my laptop around 7:00, 7:30, and just not working for the rest of the day. Spending some time with my fiancé, cooking, tidying up, and then I have my nighttime tea, and then I’ll jump into bed, and then I’ll read. I really wanted to make a priority of reading again, because it just makes me feel good and I just didn’t because I didn’t have time, in quotes, because again, we never have time for anything until we make the time.

So, that’s like my nighttime routine. There’s nothing super crazy, but it’s just kind of winding down, turning off the screens, maybe not having your phone for the 30 minutes before you go to bed, and just doing things that are gonna calm you down, just to get a good night’s sleep.

Menendez: Again, this is a reminder that I do all of these things or my children. There is a bath, they get rubbed down with lotion, they have a book, and a song, and I fall asleep on the couch watching The Crown.

- Mufdi: Okay, so I know I'm loving The Crown right now.
- Menendez: Very good. Very good. My husband's like... Although, apparently not so good, as my husband's like, "You fall asleep in the middle of every episode," which I think speaks to how tired I am, which leads me to my next question, which is what do you see as the role of sleep in this picture that we're painting of a well-balanced life?
- Mufdi: Sleep is so important. So, if you don't have sleep, your body doesn't have the chance to recover. Figure out what you feel the most rested with. Is it six hours, seven hours, eight hours, and then do that. Make that a priority. Back to your point about how your kids get the spa treatment before bed but you don't, I had a moment the other day because my friend just had a baby, and I just watched her give her baby a bath, and it was just so relaxing, and so peaceful, and I'm like, "When did that stop for us?"
- I think we have to be more intentional with everything that we do. And it sounds so woo-woo, wa-wa, whatever it is, but it's the truth.
- Menendez: You're coming off of a very busy period. You just launched your clothing line and that means that a lot of your routine went out the window. For a lot of us, that's where we lose our way. That we build a routine, we stray from the routine, and then we never come back. So, when you have a period where you are off of your game, how do you then recenter yourself?
- Mufdi: Life is not gonna be the same every single day. It's gonna have ebbs and flows. Just like the scale. And what I've learned is that that's okay. If you don't work out for a week, that's totally okay. Just get back into that routine. Stop with the excuses. Just start. And if you have to start slow, start slow. My workout today was not the same as it was seven days ago. I mean, I was totally out of breath. You don't work out for a couple days and it feels like you've stopped. So, again, give yourself the grace that you need because life is tough. When you fall off that routine, just get right back on.
- Menendez: When it comes to moving your body specifically, what is the key to finding something that works and sticks for you?
- Mufdi: I think it's what you enjoy. It's that simple. But you have to find what works for you. And is it Zumba, is it dance classes, is it playing with your kids in the park? Movement is movement. Just honestly find something that works for you. But how do you do that? It's trying new things. I never knew that I was gonna like weight training until I started doing it, and it's just try new things and find what lifts your spirits up. Not only you had a good time doing it, but you can't wait to go back.
- Menendez: This is one of those journeys where there kind of is no end point. I mean, with some of the other conversations that I'm having, like money, you could get to a point where it's like you have achieved financial independence, or you have achieved financial security, or you have built wealth.
- Mufdi: I think it's those intimate moments with yourself, where you kind of say, "I don't know that I love running anymore." Or, "I don't know. I'm bored with my routine." Or it's just those intentional moments that you have with yourself to check back in, because I think it's when we get into the habit of just running on autopilot that we kind of forget to check in on ourselves. We check in on everybody else, but you don't check in with yourself, and I think it's becoming more mainstream to do that. I think a lot of people are speaking up about it

now, and meditation, and intentionality, all those things which I think is great, but at the end of the day it's just checking in with yourself.

Menendez: I feel fatigue around this conversation, and I know that we have listeners who are like, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no. January, best life, best self, best body, I can't do it again, Alicia" For someone who's at that part of the journey, what is your 30-second pep talk?

Mufdi: Honestly, if you're at that point, maybe sit down and ask yourself are you happy. If you really feel that you are happy, you feel good, you move well, maybe it's just you're on autopilot and maybe you just see everyone else talking about it. Check in with yourself. Have some silence with yourself, like pray, meditate. Whatever it is that you want to do, just do it so that the focus becomes yourself and not the people around you, and not what they're doing, because that is when things get a little shaky, when we're looking at other people. Whether it be on Instagram, your coworkers, your peers, your sister, whatever it is, what they're doing has nothing to do with what you're doing. And I think that is what we really need to focus on.

Menendez: Yami, thank you so much for this.

Mufdi: You're so welcome! This was so fun.

Menendez: Thank you for joining us. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our senior producer. Virginia Lora is our managing producer. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor and ad ops lead. We love hearing from you when you email us at hola@latinatolatina.com, when you slide into our DMs on Instagram, when you tweet at us @LatinaToLatina. Remember to subscribe, follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, wherever you're listening, and please, I know I ask this all the time, but do leave a review. It is one of the fastest, easiest ways to help us grow.

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