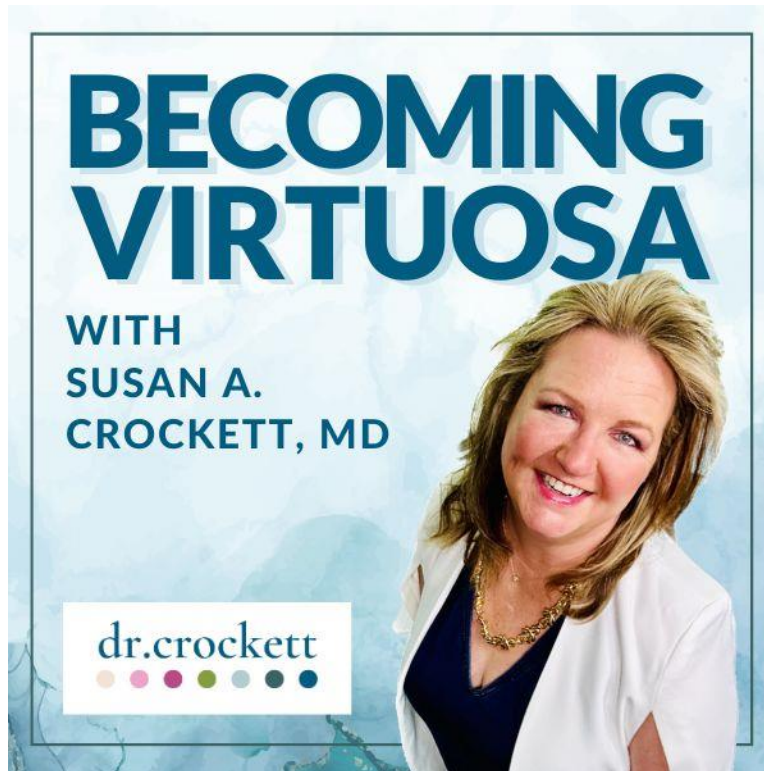


Ep #116: No-Bake Peppermint Bark: A Nutrient-Dense Treat for the Holidays with Sam Blumenthal, RDN



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dr. Susan Crockett

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Dark chocolate is one of the things that is really beneficial for helping with depression, it boosts our endorphins and our dopamine but you need the 70% or greater. So you can get the raw cacao or 100% but you don't have to eat completely bitter chocolate to get the benefits.

Welcome to *Becoming Virtuosa*, the podcast with Dr. Susan Crockett. You are listening to episode number 63 Healthy Holiday Peppermint Bark. Happy holidays, you all. Please join me in welcoming back our amazing guest chef and licensed intuitive eating dietitian, Sam Blumenthal, RDN. Today we are featuring a healthy and easy holiday dessert for you and your loved ones. Enjoy.

Welcome to *Becoming Virtuosa*, the podcast that encourages you to become your best virtuosa self. Each week, Dr. Susan Crockett goes where the scalpel can't reach, exploring conversations about how to be, heal, love, give, grow, pray, and attune. For the first time ever, she's bringing the personal one-on-one teaching that she shares with individual patients to you on this broader platform, a weekly source of inspiration and encouragement designed to empower you.

By evolving ourselves as individuals, we influence and transform the world around us. Please help me welcome board certified OB GYN specializing in minimally invasive GYN surgery, internationally in the top 1% of all GYN robotic surgeons, a certified life coach and US News top doctor, your host Susan A, Crockett MD.

Susan: Well, hey, you guys, welcome back. Happy holidays. Welcome to The Dr. Crockett Show.

Sam: Welcome to the kitchen with us.

Susan: I know, again, this wasn't supposed to be a kitchen show, cooking show. Somehow The Dr. Crockett show has turned into all kinds of fun,

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sweet things. And today I'm super excited to welcome back our very popular and amazing guest, Sam Blumenthal. Sam, welcome back.

Sam: Thank you so much for having me. It feels like home here.

Susan: That's one of the nicest things you could say. This is kind of a fun place, isn't it?

Sam: It's incredible.

Susan: Well, you've helped make it that way. Thank you.

Sam: Thank you.

Susan: If you guys haven't checked out the first episode we did, it was the first kitchen show that we did actually with Sam, you should really check it out. It was the collagen episode. We aired it on Halloween. We made a bone broth, which was absolutely to die for and it's been our most popular segment of the show yet, so that's super cool, but today...

Sam: We're kind of taking a shift I would say because we're going towards something a little less savory, a lot more sweet.

Susan: Yes, a whole lot more sweet.

Sam: And these are, I'm really excited to make this together. We're going to be making a, what would be our official name for this?

Susan: How about healthy holiday peppermint bark.

Sam: Yes, I love it. A healthy holiday peppermint bark. That's super simple, nutrient dense and incredibly delicious.

Susan: It is, I've tried some already. We had to test it just to make sure it was okay before the show.

Sam: Yeah. And we're doing a little bit of maybe a food network swap or a cooking show swap. Because it does take some time to kind of set in the

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freezer. So what's also special about this recipe is it's no bake. And I'm sure during the holiday times if your family is anything like mine, you have things on the stove top, in the oven. This is something that you can really get kind of out of the way a little bit quicker without the use of so many other appliances.

Susan: And without so many ingredients. Even if you have kids or dogs in the way, you all can't see this but our co-stars are on set with us. I have Ollie right here next to me. Don't you all worry, you're always like, "Where is Ollie?" He's right here. And then Topher, who's Sam's special dog is with us today too. So even with kids and dogs and pets and everything going on, this is a super easy recipe to make.

We wanted to emphasize just the slowing down and giving yourself grace. And we thought it would be really fun to have something that was satisfying and made you feel good and still didn't require just a tremendous amount of effort. We want you to be able to slow down and enjoy your family too. And they're going to enjoy this as well.

Sam: You just make sure if you do have dogs around, we are using chocolate today, so just make sure you're clean with your process or maybe they're outside or in a different space.

Susan: Yeah. Well, cool. Sam, why don't you start by telling us the rest of the ingredients beside the chocolate.

Sam: Awesome. So our ingredients today, we're going to be using some dark chocolate, a kind of a combination of 70% and also, we'll do some semi-sweet. The cool part about this recipe is you can truly pick whatever kind of percentage of cocoa you're looking for or cacao that you're looking for. But we're doing a nice combination of 70% and semi-sweet today. And we'll get into a little bit more of the health benefits in a moment.

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We're also going to be using some Greek yogurt, vanilla, peppermint. What else do we have? These are semi-sweet chocolate chips, pomegranate seeds.

Susan: Pomegranate seeds.

Sam: And a little bit of orange zest we'll be using too. So perhaps these are all ingredients that you probably already have.

Susan: Did you mention almonds?

Sam: I did mention them but we'll mention them again [crosstalk], super important. We're going to be using so much peppermint, chocolate, fruits, proteins, healthy fats to create something that is so flavorful, nutrient dense and delicious.

Susan: I love it. Okay, so how do we start?

Sam: Awesome. So the first thing that you do want to get started before you begin all of your cooking processes is we're going to be working on melting our chocolate in a double boiler.

Susan: And I have a very fancy double boiler, please note. So we got to the cooking segment today. I realized I don't have a real double boiler. So I hacked it, which is what you can do too. So we have a big stock pot that has about this much water in it. The water is about up to here in the stock pot. We want it to heat up enough to create steam. And then you can either use a metal mixing bowl or what I used is a frying pan that fits over this. You just want something that fits over the top of it so that the steam comes up from below and is actually going to melt our chocolate.

Sam: So it's going to be an indirect heat, so we're not actually burning the chocolate.

Susan: Yeah, burnt chocolate, no good.

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Sam: No, not good at all. We want to get that going before we begin our chopping process, so in here we have a combination of 70% dark chocolate and also our semi-sweet chocolate as well.

Susan: Cool. And so while you're chopping, I'm going to talk about the health benefits.

Sam: Awesome. I love that.

Susan: So in my practice, I'm a GYN surgeon for you all that don't know me. We deal a lot with different types of depression, postpartum depression, PMS, PMDD, which is premenstrual dysphoric disorder. It's basically the depression that goes along with our cycles. Sometimes a Seasonal Affective Disorder, which we're going to talk a little bit more about today.

So chocolate, in fact, dark chocolate is one of the things that is really beneficial for helping with depression, it boosts our endorphins and our dopamine but you need the 70% or greater. So you can get the raw cacao or 100% but you don't have to eat completely bitter chocolate to get the benefit. So today we're using mostly the 70% for the base bark.

Sam: Yes and I mean, it's really important because if we're not feeling satisfied by what it is that we're enjoying, it's very difficult to feel, if we're not feeling emotionally satisfied, it's very difficult to feel, also, physically satisfied. So we want the addition of all these health benefits from the 70% dark but kind of for some depending on your tastebuds, flavor profiles, food preferences, maybe just a straight up 70% dark chocolate's not really going to be your cup of tea, so to speak.

So that's why we want to get a combination of some of the sweeter flavors too. But if you're somebody who loves bitter chocolate, use 70% or greater for this one.

Susan: Yeah, 96, go for it.

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Sam: Do you want me to give the measurement of what we're using here today?

Susan: Yeah.

Sam: Great. We have three chocolate bars. So this was about 12 ounces.

Susan: They're two ounces each. Oh, no, I'm sorry, you're right.

Sam: We're using 12 ounces of chocolate, so each of those bars, if my math is correct and I'm mathing correctly, each of them are four ounces of chocolate. So do you want to take this right over here?

Susan: Sure.

Sam: This has already been heating up for about 10 minutes or so.

Susan: Look at it just melting right away. That's so cool. So we're going to post the recipe on our recipe blog. You can go to drcrockett.com. That's drcrockett.com/recipes. This is one that we are going to be linking there and we'll put a link of that in the show notes on the podcast and the YouTube video for you as well. Wow, that's melting pretty quickly. So you guys are going to want to make sure you have a little towel to wipe down the condensation on the bottom of this.

And then my counters are granite, so we're going to sit right on it. But if you have a counter that is not heatproof, you need to put a heat pad down. And we just wanted to mention that Sam is stirring this the whole time. We just want to keep it moving so that it all melts really evenly. That looks amazing.

Sam: You get this nice gloss to it. This really kind of silky smooth texture we're going to use to pour right into a little, either a lipped baking sheet, we're going to be using a baking dish today.

Kind of also depending on the size of your freezer, we have limited space today, so we're going to keep it a little bit smaller so we actually might have some leftovers to make for another time. But just kind of keep in mind and

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be mindful of how much freezer space you have because as I mentioned at the start, this is a no bake recipe but we do need enough time for everything to get nice and settled in the freezer. And so I'm going to hold it this way if you wouldn't mind.

Susan: Right. So now I'm just going to guide this into the pan and it is on parchment paper, not wax paper. You want to make sure you use parchment paper.

Sam: I'm going to turn it this way so you all can see.

Susan: There we go and we just want to smooth it and just cover the base of it, because that's going to be the base of your peppermint bark. I've never made this before. I can't believe I've never made this before.

Sam: It's so simple, it's one of my favorites.

Susan: Okay, beautiful.

Sam: Yeah, then we'll just have a nice thin and even layer.

Susan: Yeah, this pan seems about right. I think if you put it in a bigger pan it would be a thinner bark.

Sam: Which kind of brings up a really great point. This recipe is really designed to focus on variety, variety in terms of the ingredients that you want to add to it. We're going to get a little creative today by adding in that pomegranate seed and also zest some clementines right over it, you can use oranges too. But if you want to add any pistachios or [crosstalk], delicious. Your favorite nuts or seeds. There's so much room for variety in customizing this not only in terms of the ingredients you add, but also the thickness of it as well.

So as you mentioned, if we have a larger pan this would be a little bit thinner, and if that's your cup of tea, awesome. But if you want something with a little bit more body and thickness, we'd recommend using a smaller,

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more compact dish. I just want to try to get a nice even layer. We're going to pop it in the freezer for 10 minutes while we start preparing all of our other ingredients that are going to go on top.

So now we're going to begin with our yogurt. We're going to be using a Greek yogurt today, super rich in protein. And protein's really going to help with that sensation of feeling satisfied. And because this is Greek yogurt too, we're going to get some great probiotics, they're going to be really great for gut health and digestion.

Susan: We talk about that a lot on the show about how half of our, probably more than that of our dopamine and our emotional wellbeing comes from gut health in the gut flora, so this is perfect, using a little natural probiotic here.

Sam: And in addition to that, we have 70-90% of our whole immune system in our gut. So by feeding it with some great gut bacteria, we can really take care of our gut health. So we're adding in just a little bit of vanilla just to help sweeten this a little bit more. So this is just a plain Greek yogurt and we'll give that a nice little mix.

Susan: So we add a little vanilla in just for a little bit of sweetness. So you guys know that most of the time on the show we talk about wholefood plant based diets. This may be an exception if you're choosing to add some dairy products. Yogurt is great not only for the protein that you mentioned, but also for vitamin D and for calcium. And there are plant substitutes you can do.

Sam: So if you wanted to go for a coconut based yogurt, that is a really delicious and fulfilling choice. We're also talking about an almond base.

Susan: I love the almond yogurts.

Sam: I've never had the almond yogurts before.

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Susan: They're so good, but I'm an almond freak. Have you ever had marzipan growing up?

Sam: No.

Susan: Oh, my gosh, so my grandparents, this is a really fun story because I love remembering my relatives during the holidays. So I had a Oma and Opa. And I have ornaments from my Opa's Christmas tree from when he was a little boy in Germany. He emigrated to the United States, and he's actually one of the inspirations for me and my major inspiration for becoming a doctor. So he emigrated to the United States when he was a teenager, learned English and went through engineering school in New York.

And I always thought that if he went through all of that to provide a better life for me, that I had an obligation to use my gifts to the best of my ability. So I just decided I was going to do as much as I could with what I had. And now that I do robotic surgery, I always joke that all my grandmothers were seamstresses and my grandfathers were engineers and that's how I became a robotic surgeon.

Sam: That's really beautiful. I love that, yeah.

Susan: But one of the stories he used to always tell us about was in their stockings, he lived in northern Germany almost, well, it was Denmark back and forth, oranges in the winter time were extremely rare. And so things that we take for granted...

Sam: Like pomegranate.

Susan: These were extraordinary treats, the figs, the dates. And so we still to this day put nuts and an orange and an apple in the bottom of our stockings for Christmas.

Sam: That's so beautiful.

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Susan: Isn't that fun?

Sam: And to just have that gentle reminder that food again, yes it's fuel and yes it's medicine, it's also nostalgia and love and joy.

Susan: And family, yeah.

Sam: Family and connection and that's such a beautiful story.

Susan: Isn't that fun? I had not even intended to bring that up today, but I think it's a great way to integrate what we're doing. Because we're maybe building some new family memories today for our generation and other future generations. So it's nice to incorporate those things. While I'm holding this, let's talk a little bit about the benefits of citrus.

Sam: Love it so much. So with citrus, there's actually some overlap between the pomegranate seeds that we're going to be using and citrus, a really rich source of vitamin C. And this is a huge callback to our previous episode together with collagen. Vitamin C is really excellent for our bodies because it helps with our own internal production of collagen.

Susan: It's so pretty.

Sam: Exactly, yeah. And then we also have the ability to use it as a great way to pair with collagen that we maybe get from supplements or even from the bone broth that we made in order for our body to best absorb, digest and utilize collagen. Likes to be paired with vitamin C. And so today we're pairing some of the bitter chocolate with a little bit more of the sweet citrus. If you are looking for a source of vitamin C that's not coming from something sweet, we can also find vitamin C in dark leafy greens as well.

Susan: Spinach we had for lunch today. What else is a dark leafy green? Brussel sprouts qualify?

Sam: A little bit of vitamin C will have some kale in there too, arugula and I mean, my favorite, if you haven't noticed, this is my favorite beet tattoo, the

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tops of beets, the leaves, [crosstalk]. Those are going to be really rich in vitamin C as well.

Susan: Okay, beet tops. Well, we have just a couple of minutes I think for our chocolate that's in the refrigerator. I think we have time to talk about the benefits of peppermint.

Sam: Let's hear it.

Susan: Okay, this has so much, you all, I started thinking about the chocolate of course, and I can rattle those off. But the peppermint, I really hadn't put it all together until I looked it up. I've got to read it for you all, you all are going to [inaudible] especially since I'm a gynecologist. So the benefits of peppermint, it's used for the common cold, cough, inflammation of the mouth and throat, sinus infections and other respiratory infections. It's also used for digestive problems, including heartburn. Did you ever have somebody say they just need a peppermint?

Sam: Yeah, right.

Susan: I've never thought about that much. It's used for heartburn, nausea, vomiting, morning sickness. Hello all our pregnant patients. Irritable bowel syndrome, cramps of the upper gastrointestinal tract, which is stomach, bile ducts, which is your liver and your gallbladder. Bacterial overgrowth of the small intestine and gas. So they're talking about abnormal bacteria overgrowth in the small intestine. Our lactobacillus that's in our yogurt is replacing it with the good bacteria. So the peppermint's not counteracting this.

It's getting rid of the ones that the lactobacillus need to replace. There's more though. Some people also use peppermint for menstrual problems, preventing spasms during endoscopy procedures, fevers, headaches to reduce stomach bloating after surgery and as a stimulant. Peppermint oil is applied to the skin for headache, muscle pain, nerve pain, toothache,

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inflammation of the mouth, joint conditions, bad breath, menopausal symptoms, hot flashes during treatment for breast cancer.

This is hitting women's health so much. Itchiness of the skin during pregnancy, otherwise known as PUPPPs. Hives for repelling mosquitoes, for reducing plaque and for reducing nipple discomfort during breastfeeding. Babies really like it too. People use peppermint oil to relax the colon. Some people inhale it for treating symptoms of cough and colds and to reduce stress and improve mental sharpness.

Sam: What I love so much about the use of peppermint for our cooking today is, I love using peppermint cane because it's very symbolic of holiday time. And if this is a recipe that you want to make when it's not the holiday time, even just using peppermint leaves or peppermint oil drops too, just to get that flavor in there or maybe even a pop of grain in this recipe. Our attention for using the peppermint candy is to also invite in that sense of just joy and nostalgia too, while getting some of the peppermint in there as well.

But if this is a recipe that you're looking to make while it's not holiday time and maybe you don't have or we don't have access to our peppermint candy canes, just using mint leaf would be excellent.

Susan: It would be great. Awesome. Okay, now what do with this?

Sam: Okay, so while our chocolate is still setting, I think we just have a couple more minutes. That chocolate just needs to set for about 10. We're going to take a rolling pin and whatever aggression you've had from this holiday season you can really take out on the peppermint.

Susan: Are you letting me do this?

Sam: I'm letting you do this, yeah. So you can roll it out or sometimes what I like to do is pat that in.

Susan: Cool. That's very satisfying.

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Sam: Yeah, let's see if you guys can see this.

Susan: Here we go. It's harder than you think. It's just a lot of pieces all over the place, a lot of powder.

Sam: And with this I like to create a little bit of variety in terms of the size of pieces too. So we can get some of the dusting that's happening, but also I like when some of the peppermint is whole because it gives a nice little mouthfeel and texture.

Susan: All your holiday blues going.

Sam: Not just the health benefits of what we're making too, it's the therapeutic benefit of just the whole cooking process. And if you're doing this with kids, it might be just a fun thing to do, but make sure they're supervised.

Susan: Yeah, so there's our chilled bark. Boy, that was fast.

Sam: So fast.

Sam: It still might be a little silky to the touch, but that's totally fine, because all we're doing is adding in our Greek yogurt, some of our toppings, and it's actually going to go back in the freezer for about two hours.

Susan: To kind of magically speed through.

Sam: Exactly. But this is what it should look like. And so when you line your parchment, I want you to put a little bit more parchment along the sides, so it's easier to pick up.

Susan: Cool. So let me wash my hands real quick. Okay, so now we're spreading the yogurt out on the chocolate.

Sam: And this is an opportunity for you to also get as creative as you want. If you want a really thin layer, you just get to control the thickness or the thinness. So I like to have a thicker layer of chocolate. That's my choice.

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Susan: More chocolate, please.

Sam: And so just cover a little bit here.

Susan: So this is going to freeze and that's what's going to make the yogurt hard. But this isn't something that you want to put in somebody's Christmas stocking.

Sam: Yeah, you're going to have a lot to clean up. It'll melt.

Susan: Yeah. So that's the kind of the caveat of this is you need to serve it straight from the freezer so that it stays hard because it'll melt when it stays out. And it will store up to two weeks between parchment paper in the freezer. Although mine is not expected to last more than about two hours, I think two minutes. There's no way it's lasting two weeks, let's be honest. Let's be real.

Sam: So I'll let you do the honors.

Susan: It smells so good.

Sam: Yeah, we'll go ahead and just sprinkle that on top.

Susan: Here goes our peppermint. Oh, my goodness, it's so beautiful. This smells so good, pretty cleared up my sinuses.

Sam: Okay. And get a little bit of our chocolate chips.

Susan: Lovely. So these are the semi-sweet, the little mini morsels, they're so cute.

Sam: Yeah, you can also do Cacao Nibs too, if you want more magnesium.

Susan: I forgot about magnesium in the chocolate.

Sam: Really great for heart health and blood flow and muscle cramping as well.

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Susan: That's why we like it around the PMS time, right?

Sam: 100%. And if you want to help me, if I'm going to get my hands red, you're going to get your hands red.

Susan: Oh, gosh.

Sam: So I'm going to sprinkle some of these pomegranate seeds too.

Susan: The red is so festive. I haven't used pomegranates in my holiday cooking before very much.

Sam: Well, we can also add to this beautiful dish, for a little bit more of a pop of color to get kind of the red and green vibe going with some mint leaves but I don't know if we have mint leaves today.

Susan: I have some.

Sam: You do?

Susan: Yes, I just happen to have some and I really hadn't planned it.

Sam: Oh, my goodness.

Susan: Yeah, look.

Sam: Wow.

Susan: It's just set up from our lunch.

Sam: Incredible.

Susan: Yeah. Isn't that pretty? I was going to use it for our tea and then we ended up having pomegranate juice instead.

Sam: Look at this. We have a pop of green, so much mint freshness.

Susan: It smells so good. This is going to go in the refrigerator for two hours. You're so much better than I am at this.

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Sam: Well, what I love so much about kind of this teamwork process today is that we have an opportunity to infuse our energy into what we're making. And if we are coming into the kitchen and if you all are watching this and want to create this or any kind of recipe that you're making at home, whatever energy you're bringing forth to this space will go directly into what you are creating.

Susan: I love that. You taught me that.

Sam: Yeah. And if it's that cheery kind of positive, exciting energy, that's going straight into the dish. Though in my personal experience, sometimes the holiday time can be a little stressful and sometimes that inner light feels a touch dim.

Susan: A little dim, so holiday blues or if you're like me, I suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. That's something that is due to the shorter days during the winter months, and I've had it since a kid. I always kind of get the funk. I am very dependent on the sunlight. So we talk about, in our medical practice, about things that we can naturally do to help prevent depression or blues. And of course, if you're really suffering from depression, please go see your doctor and there are medications that are available that are wonderful.

But we're going to talk a little bit about just some natural things, so chocolate for sure, the orange we talked about, so citrus is helpful. Sunlight, so if you live in a place where you don't get much sunlight, try to get out first thing in the morning and get at least 10 minutes of sunlight when the sun is coming up. If you can't, there are sunlight lamps that you can buy. And I find those helpful because it helps extend the exposure of the sunlight into your eyes.

Exercise is great. Sex if you're able to have some, great. So those things all increase your dopamine and help with depression. So in lieu of not having a sexual partner right now because I'm single, I'm going to have some peppermint bark.

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Sam: I'm going to have a lot of peppermint bark. So with that too, as you're creating your recipe, if you notice that what might feel like a negative energy. Rather than using this as a way to absorb that negative energy, how can we reframe that? How can we transform or recreate something that might feel negative when the sun's not out, etc., into something fulfilling and enriching and energizing?

And so whatever energy you bring into this space, into the kitchen, know that is welcome. It requires that moment to create a pause and say, "Okay, what's showing up for me? Is this something I want to transfer? Or maybe this is something I want to transform."

Susan: I love that idea. So we're transforming the dark days of winter and the holiday blues that come after everybody's gone, and all the packages are opened into something joyful and beautiful that we're full of gratitude for.

Sam: I love it. We added a little bit of salt too to kind of offset some of the bitterness and bring out a little bit more of the sweetness and we're going to pop this in the freezer for two full hours.

Susan: Two hours. Stay with us, we'll be right back. Two hours later.

Sam: Two hours later, oh my goodness.

Susan: It's magic.

Sam: And a different sheet.

Susan: It looks so pretty and it doesn't have green on it.

Sam: So we're going to add a little bit of our mint.

Susan: Does this one have salt on it?

Sam: Yes. We're also going to get a little bit of orange zest too or clementine zest just to give it a little more pop of color.

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Susan: Get all the colors. That's so good. The flavor meld so nicely. I think the point that you were making earlier about how the vitamin C and the magnesium, all of the things that we eat work together to help increase our collagen and our health, is super important. Because especially in the way we think in western culture, we think one thing that we take does one thing, you take an antibiotic and it makes the bacteria go away.

But when it comes to our food and our body's chemistry, it's a whole lot more complicated than that, and things are additive. So that's the other thing I really like about this recipe. There's all sorts of goodness in here while it's pretty.

Sam: Are you ready to break a piece?

Susan: Can I have a little bit?

Sam: Yeah, sure. We'll have to try some.

Susan: Incredible. You are amazing. Thank you so much for being a guest on the show and let's try a piece.

Sam: So when you're ready to break it, honestly, it's helpful when you have the parchment paper that's sticking up on the edge.

Susan: Do you need a knife?

Sam: I have one right here actually. Just like this. So this is kind of the consistency we're looking for and then I love seeing that layer too. Lovely.

Susan: Thank you so much.

Sam: Thank you so much. Cheers.

Susan: Cheers. Happy holidays, you guys. I hope you have a safe and happy holidays and may all your wishes come through and we will see you next episode, which is actually mocktails. We're doing alcohol free really amazing drinks next week.

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Sam: Delicious.

Susan: Just in time for New Year, so join us for the next episode. Thank you for being here.

Sam: Bye, you all.

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