



1028: How to Build a Nervous-System-Friendly Home
(Solo Episode)

Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast!

Katie: This episode is sponsored by BON CHARGE, and I love so many of their products from their red light face mask to their sauna blankets and everything in between. They focus on high-end wellness tech, and if you're interested in how light can help you, which I talk a lot about, BON CHARGE has so much to offer.

Studies have found that specific red light frequencies can help reduce fine lines and wrinkles when used at the correct brightness and strengths. And some products don't get these correct. The frequencies of red and near infrared light stimulate cellular activity at a mitochondrial level, which I talk a lot about on this podcast.

This can create better energy efficiency in a given location of the body. For instance, red light on your face gives more cellular energy for biological processes. This can help to decelerate the signs of aging and lead to firmer, plumper skin. So the long-term results you can see when using an LED mask over time are things like, reduction in the appearance of fine lines, reduction in the appearance of wrinkles, reduction in under eye bags, firmer skin, tighter skin, reduction in signs of aging, scar fading, plumper looking skin, reduction in visibility of blemishes, and visibly clearer looking skin.

I'm always a fan of getting natural light from outdoors, but for people who are wanting to kind of tackle the aging process head on, this is in a way to kind of give your body some extra benefit from these specific wavelengths of light.

The safe, non-invasive beauty treatment is going to be around for a while, and for a good reason given the results people are seeing. If you wanna check out the BON CHARGE Red Light Face mask, and all of their products, you can go to <https://boncharge.com/wellnessmama> and use the code wellnessmama for 20% off.

This podcast is brought to you by LMNT, and this is a company you might've heard me talk about before, and I really love their products because proper hydration leads to better sleep. It sharpens focus, it improves energy, and so much more. But hydration is not about just drinking water because being optimally hydrated, a state called euhydration is about optimizing your body's fluid ratios. And this fluid balance depends on many factors, including the intake and excretion of electrolytes, which many people don't get the right amounts of. Electrolytes are charged minerals that conduct electricity to power your nervous system. I talk a lot about nervous system on this podcast.

They also regulate hydration status by balancing fluids inside and outside of our cells. LMNT was created with a science-backed electrolyte ratio of 100 milligrams of sodium, 200 milligrams of potassium, and 60 milligrams of magnesium with no sugar. Since electrolytes

are a key component of hydration, here's what happens when we get our electrolytes dialed in.

We have more steady energy, improved cognitive function, suffer fewer headaches and muscle cramps, we can perform better for longer, and especially the support fasting or low carb diet because when we stop eating carbs like during a fast, the absence of insulin allows the kidneys to release sodium.

So replacing that lost sodium with electrolytes can help you feel good on a fast. Since LMNT is zero sugar, it also doesn't break up fast. Electrolytes are also important for maintaining blood pressure, regulating digestion and proper fluid balance. Keeping skin hydrated, which is a big one that I feel like often gets missed and so much more.

I feel like proper electrolytes is a missing piece for a lot of people and I love LMNTs new canned drinks, which are sparkling water with all the same ratios and minerals I just talked about, and they are delicious. You can check it out and learn more at drinklmnt.com/wellnessmama. And at that link you will receive a free sample pack with any order.

Katie: Hello and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and this hopefully short solo episode is going to dive into some things I've learned over the year, over the years, about how to build a nervous system friendly home. And as you've probably heard me talk about before, a lot of this actually goes back to just mimicking nature as much as possible in our home, and being intentional about things like lighting and safety cues, and not having too many toxicants in our environment.

But these are things I've kind of dialed in over time and I wanted to share what has worked for me, and I'll put some links to the things I talk about in the show notes. Before we jump in, of course, I wanna reiterate, as always, nothing I ever share is medical advice or any kind of advice or even personal advice.

I am simply sharing my own experience, the things I've learned and what's helped me on my own journey with the goal of information and inspiration, never comparison, pressure or prescription. You are and always will be your own primary healthcare provider, and I encourage you to be curious. Always do your own research.

Listen to your own body with deep respect and question everything even, and especially me. So if something resonates, that's awesome. If it doesn't, please leave it behind. My deepest hope is these are just a springboard into your own experimentation. So to jump into this topic, I love trying to reframe and think of our home as a nervous system partner.

And I've talked before and can link to my previous episode on sending safety signals to the body and how we set up our homes is a major way that we can do this. And often in the health world, we talk a lot about diet and supplements and protocols, and those are great. And if our environment is sending stress signals to us.

And to our nervous system all day, it's still gonna be hard to thrive. So our home can either reinforce these safety signals or activate subtle danger signals that can help keep us dysregulated. So I wanna just talk about some of the major categories around this today in case these are applicable to your home.

Because for most moms, the home is where the majority of our nervous system triggers live. So addressing these can make a big difference over time. And the goal to me is a home that feels like a peaceful exhale. I dunno if you've ever walked into somewhere and had the experience of just feeling like your body relaxed, like you exhaled like a, Oh..., that's kind of what we wanna create in our homes and especially in our bedrooms.

To start, let's talk about the biology of our homes and why our bodies respond so specifically to our environment. In part this is because our nervous system is of course very aware and it's constantly scanning for light cues like low light at night or the right kind of lights during the day. For sound, which can be a dangerous signal or not. For clutter and visual load, which is actually a big stressor for a lot of women, especially.

For anything that can signal danger in smells, including toxicants in the environment, which we'll talk a little bit more about. For temperature, and I'm a big fan of intentional temperature variations, but as far as there is an optimal temperature for safety within the home for social cues and predictability, and all of these cues together happen hundreds or thousands of times per day.

And when the cues lean toward the unsafe direction, our baseline can be sympathetic, nervous system dominance or fight or flight. But when the cues lean more towards the safe side, the body can more easily relax, go into repair, digest, connect, and sleep through parasympathetic. You're likely not going to be surprised to hear me talk about light as the number one nervous system regulator in the home.

I know I talk a lot about light on this podcast. I do really believe that light is one of the biggest cues we can send to our body. It's a massive either safety or danger signal. In most cases, the right kinds of light are inexpensive or free, and I feel like this is as or more important than things like diet and supplements.

And at the very least, it's a both and. And within this category, morning light exposure matters a lot. So some things I do related to this in my own home are things like opening

blinds fully and when possible, if it's not raining, even if it's cold, opening windows, first thing in the morning going outside.

So I've talked a lot about mornings sunlight and how we don't want that to be through a window or even through glasses or contacts. So going outside in the natural light as soon as possible. After waking up and still opening the windows and letting natural light into the home as well.

If possible we want natural light to be the first light that we see. And I know some people even wear blue blocking glasses until they get outdoors to make sure that that like natural sunrise light is the first light that hits their eyes. We can also sit near windows, especially if they're cracked even a little bit.

We get some full spectrum light that way. And most importantly for me with this cue is to get natural light in my eyes for at least 10 or 15 minutes before screens or indoor light. And I love to stack this as I've talked about with morning hydration, if it's not too, too cold, getting my feet on the ground and grounding as well, and hydrating with mineral water.

Another component of this is the midday brightness environment. We actually want bright light during the day. Blue light in and of itself is not bad or harmful. It's the timing. And during the brightest parts of the day is when we would naturally encounter blue light outside. So this is the time when our body can receive the signal of blue light appropriately.

And this signals alertness and metabolism, which is why it's great during the day why you wanna avoid it before bedtime. I love to get little light snacks by going outside in bright light for 10 minutes at a time throughout the mid-afternoon when I can, and also have full spectrum non flicker daylight bulbs in my house, overhead to use in this time of the day as well.

Another big component of this is evening light hygiene in the home. And I've talked about this a lot as well, but just to highlight some key points here, in a perfect world, we are really aware of our light environment after sunset. I know in the winter that can be very early in some places. Of course there can be exceptions.

I don't live in a place that only gets, for instance, two hours of daylight a day during the winter. But assuming we don't live in one of these kind of extreme latitudes or longitudes, where we only get a little bit of light per day, it's ideal if possible to minimize some cues after sunset, including bright lights and too much food input.

So when possible, I will try to shift to low lighting and to eat after sunset and to eat as much as possible before sunset. And this is not always possible, but I'll still try to eat earlier. And

give myself at least three hours with no food and with lower light before getting ready for bed.

I also would like at this time to shift bulbs to darker, warmer tones. Kind of think of the spectrum of bright light sunshine during the day, then to sunset, then to more light campfire spectrums, which can be red light bulbs or just lower light, warmer tones. And having these at eye level or below to mimic what a campfire would be.

And I'll link to some of the ones I have in the show notes. After sunset, I love to use lamps and not overhead lighting, and of course avoiding bright LED lights or anything that signals daylight, including screens. I feel like screen management also comes into play here. We can, of course, put red filters on our screens, or I'm a big fan of using the daylight computer.

The daylight computer, which works kind of like a Kindle Paper White, so it doesn't have any blue light or backlighting in particular, and can be used for a lot of computer-based tasks after dark. So I'll use this for writing or for creative projects. But the key message here is to kind of shift our thinking to understand that the light structure of our environment is directly related to our nervous system structure.

So the more aware we can be, we can send a lot of safety signals to our bodies through our light cues. And one big one I do here, you could ask my kids, or if you were in my house, you would see my bedroom especially has basically campfire bulbs in lamps. And at sunset I close my U blackout curtains and have no artificial light from outdoors coming in. I turn on these red spectrum low light bulbs, and I do things like read or draw or try not to be on screens and really try to shift into a calming time.

Not as important as light, but sound is also a massive trigger, and one people don't always think to audit within the home. Household noise can impact us more than we might realize, especially including things like cortisol and the startle response. And I feel like sound is often a trigger we don't notice as much or we can become kind of blind to sound over time.

This is one I have an interesting relationship with just growing up in a household with two parents who are hard of hearing. So I do find like in some ways I notice loud sounds more than the average person, but in others I've learned to tune out sounds. So it's an interesting thing. But some household noises that can impact cortisol would be things like loud TV always being on, or notifications constantly dinging, because we're kind of conditioned to pay attention to those and to respond. Even things like an HVAC hum if it's loud. Or appliances or echoey rooms. This, I feel like often there's some pretty easy shifts around. So adding just things like textures can help dampen sound. If it's, obviously if it's a TV we can either turn it off or lower the volume.

I personally can't remember the last time I actually turned on the TV myself. My kids do sometimes turn it on. We can use white noise machines. Or my favorite one actually is to use the Jaspr, which is an air filter, but it, double duty, has a beautiful white noise sound, so especially in my bedroom, I'll keep that on like a two or three level, and it works great as some white noise and calming sound.

We can also create quiet pockets or ear breaks during the day, or go outside if it's quieter. And I'm a big fan of reducing random notifications and only choosing intentional sounds. So at night my phone is either off or an airplane mode, but even during the day, I cannot remember the last time I've ever just left my phone on where people can, where I hear notifications.

I don't even like to have it vibrate, but certainly the sound is never on and I only check it when I want to check it.

Temperature is another forgotten stressor and not necessarily always in the way you would think. So extreme temperatures, of course, logically we can understand would be stressors, but also never having a change in temperature, even during seasonal changes, can also be confusing to the body and be a stressor.

Ironically, it's when our homes are too warm that our, actually, our nervous system tends to feel less safe. So our overheated homes, especially in the winter, are linked to increased irritability and stress hormones. And they're kind of, it turns out, especially during sleep, is an ideal temperature, and it might be lower than you think, it's actually in the sixties. Cooler temperatures, not freezing, but cooler temperatures support sleep and vagal tone, depending on what time of year it is. This can be great in the following winter when we can just let the windows be open and let natural temperature regulation happen. But in the daytime, in an indoor environment, for most of the time, we wanna be in the like 68 to 70 range.

But for sleep, it's more like 60 to 67, which is a lot cooler than a lot of people realize. And the thing I love to do here, instead of heating the whole house, is to add warm blankets and layers. And I actually find that some of my best sleep is with the windows open when it's in the 40's or 50's, and really cozy blankets.

All right. Now this one is a big one, especially for women, but I know for some men too, which is visual load and clutter and how this can really be a nervous system drain. There's data to show why clutter especially stresses our brain. And we even know things like the more stuff we have in general, the higher our stress level.

So I'm a big fan of reducing whenever possible. But in essence, every item we have is a micro decision of sorts. And I've heard the phrase, everything you own owns a little part of

you. And women seemingly are more affected by this than men. So visual noise is cognitive load for women. And clutter communicates often to women the idea of unfinished task. I know this feels true for me. And so this is something that can be a little bit harder to tackle. It's not quite as easy as changing out some light bulbs or spending time outside, but over time can make a big difference.

And so some ways to create calm related to visual clutter would be things like simplifying surfaces, clearing off counters, having one neutral space per room ideally at least, decluttering hotspots. I know for me it's easy for things to build up in the entryway, kitchen counters, chair in my room for clothes, et cetera, and then having storage solutions that hide visual noise. I feel like in this sense, calm is a design strategy, not an aesthetic.

And really this does go down to, over time, reducing and simplifying, not just organizing. So I've kind of been on a mission this past year to just simplify, subtract, get rid of as much as possible. And I do feel like that has actually made a noticeable difference in my mental stress load as well.

I've talked a lot about things under the realm of nature deficit disorder, and I think this is a huge nervous system component as well. There's even some really compelling data around people who spend a few days or a couple of weeks in nature without some of these cues that I'm talking about without the artificial light or the distractions and how their health and nervous system can change dramatically during that time.

And in the same way, anytime we can mimic and bring in elements of nature into the home, this tends to be an additional safety signal and cue for the body. So, some ways that I love to do this, there's less tangible data around this, but I can say anecdotally, I feel much more peaceful the more I'm able to bring the aesthetic of nature into my home. Because I think nature cues safety, we're wired for that.

That doesn't mean we need to live outside in, you know, in a tent or directly on the ground. However, bringing elements of nature like plants or natural fibers or natural materials like wood and stone and clay, or even just really importantly natural light into the home can cue safety. So some ways that I do this would be bringing in minerals from nature.

So mineralized water stations. And I'll link to one that I use in the show notes. I have like a vortex, water vortex machine that I add minerals to. I keep sea salt by the stove. I've talked a lot about the importance of salt. I've even done a whole mineral series I can link to as well. Having relaxing bath setups in the bathrooms with Epsom salt, sea salt, essential oils, et cetera.

We try to really focus on mineral content in our foods. And then a hydration corner where there's all kinds of liquid minerals that my kids can add to smoothies or to beverages. I also

love incorporating grounding elements. I'm a huge fan also of just going outside barefoot and actually grounding.

But within the home, having places where bare feet can be on natural surfaces, having things like natural fiber rugs and blankets, I'm a huge fan of blankets all over the house. Spending time sitting on the ground or the floor, not always in chairs. And having outdoor transitions with like covered patio spaces and hanging chairs where the kids can spend a lot more time indoor, outdoor.

Now there's the component of emotional safety in the home, which I also think is obviously a huge foundation of calm and so understanding this, we can just build little kind of cozy, calm corners within the home that are nervous system regulating. And these can be different based on the needs of the people in the house. For instance, when my kids were little, especially having things like yoga swings, hanging chairs, even actual just swings in the house, that was very calming of their nervous system.

Turns out it is for adults too, but now those things are more outside. So some ways you can incorporate this would be things like creating little calm, cozy nooks throughout the house, having weighted blankets in those areas or on beds. I'm a big fan of those. Using breath tools or little mini breath breaks.

And also just building rituals around things like morning routine and bedtime, which are signals of calm to kids. For adults, it could be things like having one quiet chair or space reserved for our own quiet kind of cocoon area. Or a morning or evening ritual that grounds our system. I love something called Cacao Calm at night in my little reading nook in my room, or music as a cue for calm.

So I love miracle tones or sound bowls or things like that, especially at night. I also encourage you to think of your bedroom as your nervous system repair station and really set it up this way because anything we can do that helps during sleep or during the evening hours is compounding and especially if it's something we don't have to continually put effort in but is beneficial while we sleep, we get kind of exponential benefit from.

So some of my personal sleep sanctuary essentials are things like complete darkness. So I have U blackout curtains, complete darkness in my room, no LEDs. I've gone to extreme lengths to even finally cover the blinking green light in the smoke detector. I keep it as a cooler temperature, so I use a Chilipad Dock Pro.

Turn the temperature down, keep the ambient temperature around 60. I use the Jasper and have minimal noise, so I have just white noise only. I also minimize clutter in my room. So my room itself is very minimal with no screens. I don't have a TV in there. Try not to even have my phone in there. I don't bring my computer in my room.

And then I love linen bedding. That's something I've invested in and I absolutely love and I can link to the one I have. And then I have mineralized water on my nightstand. And then I mentioned I have the lower light bulbs in lamps. And so when I walk into my room, especially after sunset, I feel my whole nervous system relax.

Part of this for me was a, like a slow shift, but the things I removed were, like I said, devices, blue lights, cables, clutter, anything in my room, there's no, the surfaces are clear. I have lots of plants, which are calming to me. I don't put any laundry in my room. I don't even have a dresser in my room.

Everything lives in my closet. And I don't let work come into my room. So no computers, no reminders, no to-do list, none of that. I think the kitchen can also be, secondarily be, like a nervous system regulation area if we set it up well with things like hydration zones and mineral access. Let me know if you would like videos or pictures of what these little stations look like in my house.

Organizing for ease, again, keeping surfaces uncluttered when possible and keeping minerals and healthy foods visible for kids to eat. Simplifying cooking tools, appliances, and reducing overwhelm by simplifying meal workflow. The key concept for me here is make the kitchen a place of nourishment, not stress.

And what I love about this whole concept is some small changes can make a massive difference and a nervous system friendly home does not have to be expensive. In fact, most of these things can be entirely free. It can be as simple as opening blinds and windows, turning off overhead lights, especially after sunset, decluttering, getting rid of stuff.

So don't add anything. Get rid of stuff. Adding more nature, whether it's plants, whether it's just open windows and seeing the outside or natural fibers. Reducing noise, cooling things down, and creating routines and rituals. And this is about the signals, not the aesthetics. This is not about having a fancy home or having high-end furniture or any of those things.

It's more from a key takeaway perspective of turning your home into a nervous system ally. Because healing happens when our environment helps support safety. And the goal is not perfect design, it's regulation, and small shifts create compounding calm so your home can become a partner in your health, your healing, and your kids' emotional resilience.

As always, thank you so much for listening and sharing your time and your presence with me today. I would love to hear if this topic was helpful. Again, the links to things I've talked about are in the show notes at wellnessmama.com. It means the world that you spent time with me in this podcast. And if you found this episode helpful, it would be so, so helpful to me if you could take just 30 seconds and leave an honest review wherever you listen to

podcast, which helps other moms and families find and listen and become part of this community as well.

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