

A sunburst graphic with numerous thin, light gray lines radiating from a central point behind the text.

# Healthy Moms Podcast

BY **Wellness Mama**<sup>®</sup>  
simple answers for healthier families

Episode 103: A Professional Organizer Shares How  
to Beat the Clutter

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

Katie: This podcast is brought to you by Four Sigmatic. If you follow me on Instagram, you've probably seen me mention them because I have been using and loving and Instagramming their products for years. They have an amazing instant mushroom coffee. Hear me out before you think it's weird. I know, mushroom coffee doesn't sound good. It's not only the best instant coffee I've ever tried, it's also pretty high up on the list of best coffee I've tried. It's cheaper than coffee shop coffee and it's so convenient because it's so portable and it tastes so much better. But it isn't just ordinary coffee. It has super food mushrooms like Lion's Mane, Cordyceps, and Chaga mushrooms. And these mushrooms have some big health benefits, and especially immune benefits. I personally, especially love them for the energy and the mental clarity without the jitters from traditional coffee. And did I mention how good it tastes? So I always take these instant coffee packets with me when I travel, and I also always drink it at home these days now that they have a big tin that lasts about a month so I don't have to open a little packet every day.

Some friends of ours recently traveled for three months carrying only the backpacks on their backs, and they brought an entire three months supply of this instant coffee in their bag that had limited space. In other words, this coffee beat out a pair of jeans for how important it was to make it in the bag. It's that good. And, of course, if you aren't a caffeine person, they also have a variety of mushroom tea and other products that don't have the coffee so you can get the benefits without the caffeine. And I love them so much that I reached out and they agreed to give a discount to my listeners. So go to [foursigmatic.com/wellnessmama](https://foursigmatic.com/wellnessmama) and use the code "WELLNESSMAMA" to get 10% off. That's Four Sigmatic, F-O-U-R-S-I-G-M-A-T-I-C.com/wellnessmama.

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to The Healthy Moms Podcast. I'm Katie from [wellnessmama.com](https://wellnessmama.com), and I'm here today with someone I'm really excited to talk to. It's gonna be a super fun interview. Andrea Dekker is the simple living enthusiast behind the Andrea Dekker Blog. And she is really passionate about how...helping people simplify every aspect of life, but in a way that resonates with real people and real lives and real budgets. I know a lot of people have pushed back against the whole KonMari method because they've said it's not realistic with children. And Andrea's method is, it's amazing and simple, and I've loved delving into her blog. So, I can't wait to get started on today's interview. Andrea, welcome and thanks for being here.

Andrea: Thanks for having me.

Katie: This is gonna be fun. So, you are a professional organizer and life simplifier, which I love that title. Every time I have to deep clean my kids' room, I wish I could hire someone like you to come help. And it really isn't even that they have that much stuff, they just manage to get it all into one big pile on the floor, especially with toddlers. So, I'm excited to jump in and hear your strategies for organizing, literally, every aspect of life. And I know that this is a very visual subject, so, of course, we're gonna do our best to communicate it via audio without being able to show someone. But to start, can you talk about the difference between organizing and simplifying and why you focus on simplifying?

Andrea: Well, I think that's kind of grown as I've gotten older and added more children to my family that I found that just because you're organized, things can still get kind of crazy. So, for me, organizing is more just making a home for all of your things. No matter how many things you have, if they all have a home and they're all put away, you're organized and you can find your stuff. But simplifying, for me, is really just having less stuff to organize, not necessarily minimalism. I personally would never consider myself a minimalist, but I really try hard to only keep things that we use, that we need and that we love.

And it's amazing how much stuff we have that we don't use, need, or love, and I'm just purging on a regular basis. And I think by getting to less stuff, you save yourself time, you save yourself money, you save yourself energy. And it makes it a lot easier to organize what you have less left, and it's less overwhelming because you think, "Oh, I have to just put these things away instead of everything."

Katie: Yeah, definitely. I think, I can't remember where I saw the quote, but something about that just strict organization is like premeditated hoarding. You know, if you still have all this stuff, you just have it like in a nice organized way. And I think minimalism has taken off, but I think you're right. Maybe the more attainable goal for moms should be simplifying which is, at least in my mind, a pretty constant process. Because with kids, I know, it feels like some days I'm fighting a losing battle. I have these little disorganizers in my home, and so, I feel like simplifying is a constant process. But how do you do that specifically with children and all that stuff that comes with children?

Andrea: Well, my kids are still pretty young yet, five, three, one, and one on the way in a couple months. So I, kind of, still have complete control over everything that they have. And so, I will say it is easier that way in some ways. Like in other ways, they are old enough to organize or really put that much stuff away themselves. But on the other hand, I can have the final say in almost everything. It gets a little harder once kids are older and have more of an opinion. But for me, the main thing I try to do is, every single night after they go to bed, is just get the house back to what I call ground zero. And everything that didn't get put away is put away, laundry is folded, dishes are washed, the kitchen is clean, the house is vacuumed and swept. I don't vacuum every day. Like bathrooms are cleaned if they need to. And then, it's just ready to go. My to-do list for the next day is ready to go. And when I wake up the next morning, it's just my house is ready, my brain is ready and, yes, it's gonna get all messy again during the day. But for me, just having that every night, getting back to normal for my house is key for me.

And I will say I have a super helpful husband as well, who's very clean and very organized so that, obviously, helps. And then, I guess, the last thing for me is that I truly have learned to just accept that crumbs and stickiness and mess are going to be part of my days for the next few years. And I'm going to have to clean them every day. I'm gonna have to sweep my floors every day. I'm gonna step on crumbs every day, and that's just how it's gonna be. Because I'm not going to drive myself nuts trying to have a perfectly clean and organized home 24/7 when we have all these people living here all day.

Katie: Definitely. I think, actually, I love a lot of things about the life changing magical tidying up. But that was the one thing that really struck me was like, "And I know she's a mom now." But I'm like, "As a mom, there's no way I can take everything out of my purse every day and put it in a box under my bed and thank it for the job that it did for me." I mean, I understand the spirit she comes from in that. But I just thought like it wasn't realistic. And I think that's...what you do is a realistic solution with kids. And so, I'd love to go through it on a practical level. Different parts of the house in different parts of organization and, kind of, just get some strategies from you. So, obviously, moms are some of the busiest people around and our work day is commonly 12 to 14 hours or more. So, what tips would you offer from a basic level of just how to simplify your days to be able to have time for simplifying other aspects of your life?

Andrea: Okay. So this is, of course, everyone has different schedules, and different number of people, and different number of schedules that are in their home. So, it's really hard to say, "Everyone should do this and your life will be simplified." But what I found is working with... In the past before I had kids, I worked with people in their homes and in their lives like helping them develop plans to organize their home and working with them to get it organized. And what I found is the number one thing that helps me and that helps pretty much anyone with any type of schedule, is taking 10 minutes right before you go to bed or sometime before you go to sleep and just kind of looking over your schedule for the next day.

Do you need to have lunches packed? Do you need to have certain bags packed? Do you need to have the diaper bag? Do you need to have backpacks? Do you need to have certain things in the car ready to go or like, are you running errands? Are you going to someone's house and you needed to bring a book back to them? Do you need to return something to a library? And just getting all your ducks in the row before you wake up. So even if the mornings are crazy, you're ready to go. And I think that right there really simplifies my brain and my life and, kind of, frees up thought process and energy to work on other areas throughout the day. So, do you have like specific, you mentioned groceries, car, and laundry, do you want me to talk about those?

Katie: Definitely. I feel like as a mom, I spend a lot of time in the grocery store. And that's gotten drastically better since I've started meal planning. But I feel like between grocery and laundry and then driving kids to stuff, those are kind of the big chunks of my time. So I'd love if you could break those down with strategies.

Andrea: So, for groceries, that's one thing that I would do in my, like, 10, 15 minutes before I go to bed is make sure my grocery list is ready to go, that I would look through the pantry, look through the refrigerator and look through freezers, so I'm not forgetting anything or buying double of something. And then this sounds kind of crazy but it only takes me about two minutes. I rewrite my grocery list based on whatever store I'm going to and how the store is laid out. So, if there's two grocery stores, like I... it's Meijer, and I go to Meijer. That's where I get everything, and there's two of them close by. So, depending on which one I go to, the store is laid out differently.

So, the night before, I decide, "Oh, based on whatever other errands I need to run, which Meijer store I'm going to," and then I make my list according to that store's layout. It saves me so much time in the grocery store because I'm never backtracking. And, "Oh, that wasn't an aisle back there," track that all the way back there with the jumbo cart that fits all three kids, and it's super hard to maneuver. So it's like, I start in the back of the store, work my way up, get the frozen food last, head to the checkout and I'm done. And it really takes... I time myself, it takes me about two minutes to rewrite my list and saves me, probably, like 20 minutes every single grocery shopping trip. And also I bring snacks. So...

Katie: That's a great tip and you're brave. With six, I've realized I'm like, past the point of being able to take them all to the store. I like grocery shop at 10:00 at night these days. But, either way, I think that's a great tip of organizing your list based on the way, so you only have to do one trip.

Andrea: Yeah. It helps me. Even if I go by myself, because when I have a newborn then I always go really late at night too. But even when I go by myself, I'd always rewrite the list and I've had a couple times where I write it for one store and end up going to the other store. And it just takes me so long and I always end up forgetting something because the list is out of whack, and I'm going up and down the aisles 8 different times and getting frustrated. So, I know it makes a huge difference and it's so easy and so fast.

For the laundry, I never really felt the need to have, like a laundry system for a really long time because I always felt like our laundry was really manageable. And I could just do a load here or there whenever I had time. But then after the third kid, and my kids love changing their clothes all the time, and I never know what's clean or dirty and it's kind of crazy. I just felt like every single day, I was like, "Oh, well, maybe I should quick throw another load in and maybe I should just quick do this load." And I was doing like half loads because there wasn't enough. But I didn't wanna wait for the next day.

And I decided, "Enough, I need to come up with a system," And so, what works for me, right now at this point in my life, is I do laundry Tuesday morning and Friday night. Tuesday morning is the one morning that we are always home every week. We never have anything on Tuesdays, so I do like, I don't know how many loads I need to do Tuesday morning until it's done. And then, I never think about laundry again until Friday night after the kids are in bed. And then I do whatever laundries there and don't think about it again until Tuesday.

Obviously, that would not work for everyone. But, the key for me is that I'm doing it once in the morning and once at night. So, on the morning time is when I can wash sheets and stuff like that and pajamas that they would normally be wearing at night time. And it's pretty much halfway through the week, Tuesday and Friday. And that system has been working really well for me for about a year now. And I'm sure I'll have to change it up again once my kids get older and start having sports uniforms that need to be washed on certain days. But one thing that I also do is, I don't sort colors, I do whites. All our towels and sheets and blankets, everything like that is white. And so, I do those separate but then all other clothes just get thrown in together and I don't worry about lights or darks or pinks or greens or anything. It's just all together.

Katie: That's a great tip. And like for my kids, to keep my sanity, I had to basically do capsule wardrobes with them. And I was like, "You know what? I'm not even gonna... There's no white. White is not allowed." So now I can just wash all their clothes together and it simplifies a lot because I felt, like you, I was drowning in the laundry.

Andrea: I think, like for me, we don't really have many white clothes either besides socks, I guess. But just having, I know it sounds crazy, but having all of our towels, wash cloths, we use cloth napkins and those are even white, yes, they get stained. But like sheets, blankets, pillow cases, everything is white. And I just bleach it and wash them in hot water and then I don't need to worry about anything fading or anything like that. And it's been 11 years that I've been married and the white's still going strong.

Katie: That's impressive.

Andrea: Okay, car. I have a very clean car and I do not spend very much time on the inside, on the outside, it's not always so clean. I do not spend very much time messing with it. And my system is, basically, every time we get home from something, I just take anything that doesn't need to be in the car, into the house, and it gets put away. I don't know, maybe that sounds overwhelming to people. But it really takes me minutes at the most to quickly put things away. Also, I keep a trash bag in the car. And when it gets full, every couple of weeks I empty it.

We don't put, like, food in there, really, like apple cores or something like that. We throw that away but like paper scraps or straws or little cups or wrappers or stuff, that all goes in there, Kleenexes. And then I do keep, like, some essentials in the car. Like we always have a couple of diapers, a packet of wipes, Kleenexes, hand sanitizer, lotion. I keep little Dixie Cups in there and give all the kids their snacks in those when we're driving. So, some pens and pencils and paper and coloring stuff for the kids, those all stay in the car and we have spots for them. But then anything that doesn't stay, we just remove it right when we get home.

Katie: Yeah. And how many aspects of life, probably, would that save us time? Like you, I have a husband who's very neat and tidy and in some ways much more so than I am. And that's his thing, like if you always...if you just put it away immediately, there's no mess later. And I think you also touched on another thing. Obviously, moms are in the car a lot because we're so busy. And we live in a society where people are...their calendars are full. And I know, so often, either people ask me or ask someone else how they're doing and usually, "Busy," is the answer. And it's almost like a badge of honor, although that could be a whole topic for another day of why it shouldn't be. But, do you have any tips on time management for people who desperately want to simplify their schedules and their commitments but, maybe, have a hard time saying, "No," and how do you prioritize your time?

Andrea: Yeah. I have an issue with the word "busy." Every time I get told all the time, "Oh, you must be such a busy mom. Oh, look at you, you're such a busy mom," and I always say, "No. I'm not busy. My life is full but I am not busy." Because I choose what I do and I choose to not do a lot of things. And I think for everything I have on my plate, with my business, and my blog, and my kids, and my family, and we live in a 125-year old farmhouse. And we always have home renovations going on. We have a huge yard that we landscape.

I have plenty of time for the things that are important to me. And I think that, for me, is what I'm striving for is...yes, there might be days when I'm just so tired at the end of the day and feel like I've never sat down, but if I was doing things that were important to me, and useful, and beneficial for my time, that day I feel like it was a good use of my time. And I'm not just running to try to, like, keep up with other people or do something just to say I did it. So that's kind of what's important for me.

I guess, where I start with this when others ask me is just tell them to sit down and make a list of their own priorities. And I'm not talking like 20 or 30. I'm talking four to six priorities, like, the main, main, main things that you want for your life, for your family. And then you need to start using your energy, and your time and your resources to focus on furthering those things and saying no to other things. And it is a lot, it's hard to say no. I realize this, but it's a lot easier once you have a clear set of priorities that you know, that you're working towards.

There are so many people who if you just ask them, "What are your priorities?" they would just say, "Oh, family and my job and, you know, whatever," and they wouldn't really have a good answer to that. So, I think if you just sit down and can, kind of list specifically. For me, obviously, my family. But specifically, kind of like,

quality family life, not necessarily just making sure they are healthy. But just having a quality life with my kids, and my husband, and our parents, and our extended family, and enjoying time together, not just crossing things off our to-do list.

And then, our home and yard is a big priority for us. We bought it, specifically, knowing that we wanted to renovate it, and it's our dream house, and we're hoping to live here forever. And we spent a lot of money and a lot of energy on renovating our home, but it's a priority for us. And we love to entertain, and we love to have people over and share our home and our yard with others. So that's a priority. I'm working on my blog and my business is a priority for me.

And then doing specific volunteer-type activities that fit with my season of life. And I'll, probably, talk a little bit more about that later. But if I get asked to do things that are not really related to those priorities, I just say, "You know, not right now. Ask me in a couple more years and, maybe, I'll say yes." So, I don't do community volunteer work anymore like I used to, and I used to do a ton. I was on all kinds of committees because they're in the afternoon or in the evening when my kids are taking a nap or when we're trying to get them to bed. And, instead, I help out in my daughter's preschool classroom, and I'm in charge of the nursery at church, and I have to go every month and, like, sanitize and clean. But I can take my kids with me for that and that fits my season of life.

So, picking your priorities and making sure they fit with your season of life. And then focusing your energy on saying, "Yes," to things that will kind of further those priorities and, no to things that will take your time and energy away from those priorities.

Katie: Definitely. I think that's so great. And we had a similar kind of decision at one point realizing like, especially, all these activities that kids can get involved in really take time away from family. And at the end of the day, I don't really care if my kids are the next Tiger Woods. I care if they have...you know, they're contributing to society. If they have kindness and things that are much more important to me than sports or activities at night. So, we made the conscious decision to minimize those because these are all also happen at dinner time, and to me, very few things are more important than family dinner.

So, we don't do a lot of those, unless, our caveat is if it's something we can all do as a family that's an activity, then that's totally different. But just minimizing things that take away from that, because there are so many in today's world. So many things that can take time away from family time or from the priorities, whatever they may be.

Andrea: Yeah. And I think one more thing is, I mean, we've read it, we've seen it, we've heard it all the time, but there is quite a bit of pressure on women specifically these days to kind of just be awesome at everything. And in some ways, I think, all the, I mean, the pressure is not a good thing. But for myself, I think women have more opportunities today than ever before and we have more skills, and more abilities, and more resources, and more knowledge, and information than ever before. So, that's awesome, but there is a lot of pressure specifically on women to do it all.

And if you are a type A personality or a perfectionist or just someone who is a people pleaser, it's hard to get sucked into just saying yes and doing more. Because you can and because you, maybe, know how to do it or you have a skill, but your time is just being depleted and, you know, you're not having time left to focus on the priorities that you have.

So, what I really try hard to do in my own life and what I tell others who ask, is just really try to evaluate how you're spending your time and try to stop overdoing it. So, this is a crazy example, I really like to bake and cook and I like making cute baked good things. And I always picture, "Oh, birthday treats for school. I'm gonna make them so cute and, like, the kids are just gonna love them." And then, it was my daughter's birthday and I thought I was showing her all these pictures of things like, "What should we make for your birthday?" And she's in preschool and she's like, "I just wanna bring Oreos and Craisins." And I was like, "Oreos and Craisins, we can't do that for a birthday treat. Let's make something cute and homemade."

"No. Oreos and Craisins." So, I spent like \$5 at the store, zero time and effort on my part making anything. Her whole class was thrilled. She was so happy with the Oreos and the Craisins and it was just so much easier. And I just think that's such a funny story to me because I would have spent so much time making a birthday treat for preschool students, and they thought a package of homemade Oreos was just the best thing ever. And for birthdays...another thing for birthdays, I just make a boxed cake from boxed cake mix and let my kids decorate it, and it looks ridiculous and it's not really what I would want but they love it and I saved so much time and energy. And they just think it's awesome because I let them use the knife to frost and then all the candy.

And so, just something like that, little things that, as moms, we in our brains overdo it and think, "Oh, this will be so cute if I did it this way," and really our kids and our family don't care and they would let it be way simpler.

Katie: Totally. I think it's that old, like, you get a kid a gift and they love the box type scenario. Like they're so... In some ways, like they can see the joy in such simple things and we try to make it so complicated. And I love the... You said that there's such a pressure on women to feel like they can do it all. I think that that is especially true in motherhood and in business. And, like me, when you are juggling all of those things, the pressure can seem really intense.

And from my own perspective, I had to learn over the last couple of years what I call like, "Learning the art of a graceful no but a firm no, and a truthful no." Because I felt like I didn't wanna disappoint people when I said no to things even if I truly didn't wanna do it. And so, I would always try to be really gentle or sidestep around it or like, "Oh, this week won't work for me, I'm sorry." And then, of course, it's like, "What about next week?" and that the question never goes away. And so, I think part of that is as women learning to be able to say no firmly but gently, and kindly, and gracefully. And have it mean no and not need an excuse, but just to be able to say no to the things that aren't a good fit.

Andrea: And learning to say no is a hard thing to learn, it takes lots of practice. So you just need to practice, "Sorry, that doesn't work for me this season of my life, contact me in a couple years, and maybe we'll see about it."

Katie: Exactly. I know another thing that is completely overwhelming to a lot of people. And even right now, I'll admit I'm guilty. I have bills piling up on my desk that I need to deal with. But paper clutter, I feel like it never ends, which is funny because everything's via email and digital these days, but somehow there's still paper everywhere. So, how do you handle the paper clutter with bills, stuff that comes in the mail, and kids artwork, that's like the hardest one to get rid of because it's so sentimental?

Andrea: Yes. I will say I am not a sentimental person. So, you can take my suggestions with a grain of salt

because they might be like appalling for some people listening. In terms of paper, I know this is kind of a cop-out but I really try to do everything electronically. All of our bills are electronically done and auto pay. So I don't even need to do anything. It took a little bit of time to set it all up but I basically get an email saying, "This is your bill." File it in my email under the appropriate file and then a couple of weeks later, I get another email that says, "Your bill was paid." And so, I never really need to do anything with that. And I've also contacted their resources and websites and phone numbers you can contact to get your name off of junk mailing lists. I've done that over the years and it is a noticeable difference.

And every time it starts to pick back up again, I'll go to the website or call the number and you can get unsubscribed from all these things, that helps.

And then, my other tip is, sounds lame but I just do it now. If something comes in the mail and I need to take action on it, I just take the action immediately. Or, for example, let's say it's a wedding invitation. Obviously, like, you might need to keep that information for a while. So first, I just send the RSVP card in right away, if I can come or if I can't. And then if I am coming, I write the information in, I still use a paper planner, kind of, old school but that's how I love to work. I write the information in my planner, say this is the wedding, at this time at this location, and then, like a month before that I put in my planner, "Get a gift for the wedding," and then write where they're registered. So I can get rid of all of that paperwork because it's just written down.

And you can do the same thing with a Google Calendar. You can put a reminder in there to get a present a few weeks before the wedding, and then the day of the wedding have the information in your Google Calendar. Or, if there's a field trip for school. I just write that information down and then throw in my planner, and then throw the paperwork away, recycle it. So, that is how...and I do it right away. I don't just let it sit there. When it comes in the mail, I do it and then get rid of the papers.

For kids' artwork, I take pictures of everything. So, I have the kid...not everything but a lot of things. I have the child hold the picture or the project or the piece of artwork, take a picture so I can, kind of, see how old they are in the picture. And then, I do digital photo albums. And so, each kid gets a small digital photo album every year, and then I put the pictures of their artwork in there. And I also have a Flickr photo album for each child for their artwork. So, if they ever want to say, "Oh what's that project that I did?" then I can just open their file, their album on Flickr and say, "Oh, you can scroll through all these pictures." And we really do not keep very much at all.

Katie: That's a great tip with the Flickr accounts. They can always go back and look at all of it. It's, kind of, like a timeline of their art. And we do the same thing with the photo books. That's like their main Christmas gift each year. It's like a book about their previous year. And I love that when they'll leave home, they'll have 18 little nice, like, books that they can take with them to teach their own kids about their life and growing up. But you mentioned you do most things digitally. So, I'd love to touch on email because, full disclosure, this is my nemesis. I have four email accounts because of business. And typically I get hundreds, often thousands, of emails a day. Right now, I have 2,751 showing up on my desktop. So, how do you deal with the email giant?

Andrea: I know, that is crazy to me because I have 10 different email accounts for all the different virtual systems work that I do, and for my own blog, and for my personal. And they all file into the same Gmail account. I had it all set up where they go to the same place. So, I only need to check one email. And I will tell you, I zero out my inbox every day. I do not get as many emails as you do. But it is, kind of, a little passion of mine to keep my email clutter free. I do not have tips to deal with 20,000 emails or however many you have.

But one thing that I do, I use Gmail for everything, everything comes through Gmail. But I create Gmail filters... I don't know what other email addresses have but some, sort of, filter the emails that come in. So, all the emails for certain clients that I work with, they go to a certain spot. So they're not just all showing up in my inbox.

And when I get blog comments or stuff like that, that goes to a certain spot. So then when I come to sit down to check my email, if my purpose is to work for one of my virtual system clients, I'll just click on that email inbox, read those emails, respond, and take the actions that I need to take. Or if my purpose when I'm sitting down to check email is to respond to blog comments then, or like Facebook comments or whatever, then I'll open those folders, that file, and read all the unread comments, and Facebook messages, and then respond accordingly.

So I can, kind of, compartmentalize my email, and then compartmentalize the time that I spend doing email. It's not, "Oh, quick response to this comment. Oh, I have to do this virtual system work. Oh, I forgot need to respond to this thing for an interview, and blah, blah, blah. Oh, this person's asking for my advertising information." and my brain is all frazzled. It's the same train of thought for 15 or 20 minutes until that chunk is done. And then I can, kind of, move on to the next thing.

So for me, doing all the different things that I do, that has really helped me. And, I mean, I have a folder for my daughter's school. So anything that comes school related will all be in there. And so then, she only goes to school two days a week. So, like the day before, I check to make sure there's no emails, like, from the teacher or reminders or something like that. And that's how I, kind of, keep my sanity and keep my inbox super clean now. Do you think that would work for you?

Katie: Yeah. Definitely, something I always aspire to. I know that's something I need to tackle. And I have someone helping with my main business account. And she's done a lot of that with the filters and stuff. It's the other three that I need to probably tackle.

Katie: This podcast is brought to you by Four Sigmatic. If you follow me on Instagram, you've probably seen me mention them because I have been using and loving and Instagramming their products for years. They have an amazing instant mushroom coffee. Hear me out before you think it's weird. I know, mushroom coffee doesn't sound good. It's not only the best instant coffee I've ever tried, it's also pretty high up on the list of best coffee I've tried. It's cheaper than coffee shop coffee and it's so convenient because it's so portable and it tastes so much better. But it isn't just ordinary coffee. It has super food mushrooms like Lion's Mane, Cordyceps, and Chaga mushrooms. And these mushrooms have some big health benefits, and especially immune benefits. I personally, especially love them for the energy and the mental clarity without the jitters from traditional coffee. And did I mention how good it tastes? So I always take these instant coffee packets with me when I travel, and I also always drink it at home these days now that they have a big tin that lasts about a month so I don't have to open a little packet every day.

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reached out and they agreed to give a discount to my listeners. So go to [foursigmatic.com/wellnessmama](https://foursigmatic.com/wellnessmama) and use the code "WELLNESSMAMA" to get 10% off. That's Four Sigmatic, F-O-U-R-S-I-G-M-A-T-I-C.com/wellnessmama.

This episode is sponsored by Kettle and Fire Bone Broth. If you love the benefits of bone broth but don't love the time it takes to make and how tough it can be to find quality bones to make broth, Kettle and Fire is for you. Their bone broth is a regular staple in my kitchen these days and it's what I use to create the recipes in my new bone broth ebook. So they only use bones from 100% grass-fed pasture raised cattle that are never given hormones or antibiotics. Their broth is also unique because they focus on bones that are especially high in collagen, which is one of the healthiest things you can put in your body. You can find them at many Whole Foods on the west coast and you can also order online and get a discount at [kettleandfire.com/mama](https://kettleandfire.com/mama). Again, that's [kettleandfire.com/mama](https://kettleandfire.com/mama).

Katie: But I'd love to, like, to step back and also talk about, from a general perspective, organizing and simplifying, and you've worked with a lot of people on this. So, what are some of the common habits you're seeing of organized people, and maybe habits that disorganized people could work on developing? And is minimizing the master organization strategy or if not, what is?

Andrea: As I mentioned before, I'm really not a minimalist at all. I definitely like the things I do have to serve a purpose. Whether it is a physical purpose of clothes that I wear or dishes that I use to eat off of. Or, like, just the purpose of this creates beauty in my home, and I love displaying it, and I love looking at it, and I love this picture collage, and I love these little antique set of books that my grandma gave me on the shelf. So, I don't think everything has to be super practical. But for me, that's kind of how I look at the stuff in my house, like is it serving a purpose in some way?

So, no. I don't think minimalism is, necessarily like the way to go. More of just, if your things aren't serving a purpose, if you're not getting enjoyment out of them, it's time to get rid of them. And so, when I think of things that organized people would do versus unorganized, the few that come to mind are, we put things away when we get them out. So, if you try something on and you decide not to wear it, you put it back in your closet. You don't just put it on the floor or on your bed. If you get food out to make a meal, you put the food away when you're done. If you do a craft project with your kids and get a bunch of stuff out, you put that stuff away before you move on to the next thing.

And, again, it sounds so basic but it's crazy how quickly things can get out of control when you're just getting things out, getting things out, getting things out, and never putting them away. And, obviously, with kids, they're really good at getting things out and not necessarily super good at putting them away. And I've noticed that with my own kids, if we do too many things without stopping to put things away, all of a sudden they'll be totally overwhelmed. And they'll kind of just shut down and refuse to help because there's just so much stuff out that they don't even know where to start. So I'll just specifically say, "Okay. You, pick up all the cars and trucks. You, pick up all of the blocks. You, pick up the stuffed animals or whatever." And then they can kind of process it, instead of just looking at a room full of stuff and wondering, "Where do I start?"

So, for me, I think just putting things away as you get them out, kind of keeps it from feeling so overwhelming.

Another thing would be purging extras and purging regularly. I do it without even thinking now. But if I try

something on and I don't like how it looks or my kids try something on and it's too small, I just take it off right away. And we have a box in our laundry room that anything that we don't want goes in there, and once the box is full then we take it to the donation place. If I decide I don't want a kitchen gadget, I just put it right in there. If, you know, something, a toy we're not playing with or a book that we decide we don't really like that much, we just stick it right in there all the time. I probably stick stuff in there every single day.

And so just getting in that habit of, instead of saying, "Oh, I'll take care of it later. Oh, the next time I purge, I'll remember to get rid of that." No, you won't. So just do it right now and have a spot for those things that you wanna get out of your house. Because if you just put it back in your closet or put it back in the toy bin, you're probably gonna forget about it.

I don't make excuses very often. Yes, sometimes I'm tired, sometimes I don't feel like it, sometimes I've had a super busy day or I'm just overwhelmed, but I almost always just force myself to pick it up, clean it up, do what I need to do to, kind of, get my house in order at the end of every day. Because I know how much better it feels in the morning and how much better the next day is if I kind of spend even just 10 or 15 minutes picking up and cleaning up the car right when we get home. Maybe I'm hungry and I just wanna get the kids' lunch but it takes four minutes to just clean out the car and then I'm done. I don't need to do it later.

And then, I also just try to leave every space better than when I arrived. So, if I'm in the living room and I'm gonna go upstairs but I see, like, there's blankets and pillows everywhere, I'll take 45 seconds and quick pick up the blankets and pillows off the floor and then go upstairs. Or if I'm upstairs and I see there's some laundry that needs to come downstairs, I'll just bring it down when I come downstairs the next time. All those little things take seconds to do and add it up over the course of days and weeks, it makes a lot less effort for me in the long run.

Katie: Yeah, that's a great tip. But I think we can learn from that in every aspect of life, like we said, just getting things done when they come in and when you have to deal with them instead of letting them pile up. It is easier. My husband would definitely agree with you. That was a battle of ours early on, I was like, "No, logically it takes less time, if you just batch and..." we've gone back and forth on that over the years.

And I would love to talk a little bit more about, you said you live in a farmhouse that's over 100 years old. I'm guessing you don't have a ton of closet space based on how they used to build. So, I'd love to hear your strategies for people who do live in a small space. For years, until we had, I think, our fifth kid, we lived in a 1200 square foot house. So we lived in a very small area and we made it work with kids. It was actually great. But how do you organize things when you have simplified and you have gotten rid of the unnecessary stuff but you still live in a small space? What are your strategies there?

Andrea: Yeah, that's a good question I get asked a lot of time, "I just have such a small space and I don't know, you know, how to organize it." And for me, part of it is if your space is really that small, then you might need to be more minimalistic with things and buy things that serve double purposes and do without some conveniences that might be nice but you don't have space for. Because if it's always sitting out and you're always tripping over it, and it's always in the way, that's not really helpful or, like, a happy way to live in your house all the time.

But, also, there are so many ways to just maximize your storage space, and they don't cost money, and they don't cost very much money, they don't take very much time. And it's amazing how much more you can store

in small spaces. Obviously, using vertical space is a huge one for me. We redid all of our closets so that they all have doors, like, the actual door with a handle that swings out, not the bifold doors or the sliding doors. So on the back of all the doors, we can have the over-the-door shoe organizers.

And we don't really keep shoes in any of our shoe organizers. But we'll keep...like the kids can keep socks and underwear, and belts, and hair stuff, and little toys. My husband and I keep...like I keep scarves rolled up in my shoe organizers and he keeps belts and his wallet, and his watch, and like that kind of stuff in the shoe organizer.

In our mudroom, we put in...we added a mudroom on so that was awesome, and we put bifold French doors in there. And we have an over the door shoe organizer on each door. One has all the hats, and mittens, and scarves, and each child has a roll of packets that they keep their stuff in. And like their sunglasses, everything goes in there right when they get in the door. And then, the other door has umbrellas, and bug spray, and sunscreen, and swim diapers, and all that kind of stuff.

So it's just all right there, when we walk in the door, we can dump that. It's on the inside of the door, so it's taking up no space in the closet, and it would be completely unused space otherwise. So, if there's any way that... I know people who keep them, they hang them in their shower and keep bath toys. If you can get mesh kind, they keep bath toys and shampoo and that kind of stuff in there. Or in a craft room and keep sewing supplies, ribbon, scissors, colorful decorative items in there...for crafts, or wrapping paper, they're so useful and you can get them for \$5 to \$10. And you can even get kind of look really cute if you want. So, that's a huge tip for me. We literally have them in almost every single room of our house.

And then, storage furniture is key. So, if you want a bench, find a bench that's a storage bench, and store blankets and pillows or an extra set of sheets or a heating blanket for winter time or your kids' toys in there. If you want an ottoman in your living room, get a storage ottoman and you can store games and puzzles or blankets in there. If you want a shelving unit, get a shelving unit that also has doors covering the bottom. And then you can have closed storage on the bottom that you don't need to look at for kids' toys or whatever, and then the upper shelves can be more decorative items.

Or use an armoire, like a cool old armoire. We have these all over our house to chip in paint, antique looking and will store extra blankets and sleeping bags in one. Or I'll keep all my wrapping paper supplies, and craft supplies in another one, kid's toys in one. And you can just close the door. And they have shelves inside. So everything can be organized and it looks really nice, like a decorative piece of furniture that goes with our house and we can just, kind of, close it off and say, "Oh, all the kids' stuff is concealed." So, those are a few of my tips. The storage furniture, the over-the-door shoe organizer.

Katie: I love that. And another thing I'd love to touch on, I've seen you write about on your blog, is that just because you're simplifying or it's simple, doesn't necessarily mean that it's easy. And I do this on the health side, so like, my tagline is "simple answers for healthier families." But just because it's simple, you like, you still have to do it. And does it mean it's gonna always be fun or easy or enjoyable? And you talked about this on the organization's side. So, talk about that, that just because you simplify one time, obviously, you're not done. It's like everything you've mentioned, that it's a continual process. Every time you get out of the car, every night, there's a system to it. So, talk about that and how to get into that system.

Andrea: Yeah. One thing I tell people to try to wrap their brain around it. Because a lot of people say, "Oh, why

should I waste my time cleaning it up because they're just going to get it dirty again tomorrow? Or why should I do this big organizing project because in another week or so it's just gonna be disorganized again?" And I do understand how that can feel, like, defeating and not very motivating to wanna do, get organized and simplify your life. But the kind of example that I give is, are you gonna take a shower today even though you're gonna get dirty tomorrow? Probably. Are you gonna eat today even though you'll still be hungry tomorrow? Probably.

So those two things, like we eat three plus times a day, we usually take a shower at least once every day, even though we know we're gonna be hungry and we're gonna get dirty and have to do it all over again the next day. And we don't feel totally disheartened or unmotivated like, "Oh, I'm never taking a shower again because I just keeping getting dirty." It's just part of life.

If you want to have your home be a place that you feel comfortable, that you enjoy living in, that you can feel proud of, that you don't have to work for a whole weekend just to have company over on Sunday afternoon because you're so embarrassed by it, then it's going to take continual effort. It does not mean that your whole life has to be obsessed with keeping your home neat and clean. It just means it's gonna take some time upfront to kind of get it to the place that you want it. And then, a little bit of time on an ongoing basis to maintain it and keep it the way you want it.

And if you can develop the systems, I mean, almost every day, I'm talking about different systems and routines that I use in my own life or that I've helped others use to maintain their version of what they want their home to look like. So, it's not a one-size-fits-all approach to every single home and every family. But once you find the routines and the systems that work for you, it doesn't feel like that much work. It just feels like another part of your day... Like oh look, I'm making lunch because it's lunchtime. Oh, I'm picking up because it's time to pickup.

And I'm washing dishes because it's time to wash dishes. And I'm bringing this donation box away because it's full and when I get home, I'm probably gonna have more stuff to put in it tomorrow. And that's just how life is. It just becomes a habit and you do it without thinking, and it doesn't feel like a ton of work. But in the beginning, it's not always fun and it does feel like a lot of work.

Katie: For sure. And the book that I've loved and has become a daily part of my life, it's called "A Mother's Rule of Life" and it's definitely written from a religious perspective. It won't appeal to everybody. But for me, what I loved is that everything is scheduled. And the beauty of that is, when it's not the time for something, you don't have to worry about it. Like you said with the laundry, when it's not laundry time you don't think about it. Then they beauty of that as well is if you get the systems in place, you can schedule things, like, at 3 p.m. the kids are going to have quiet time, and I'm going to drink a cup of tea. And sit for five minutes and just, like, mentally regroup. And those things don't happen as a mom. I feel like unless you're really intentional about it, and unless you have a system because you are just putting out the fires all the time.

Andrea: Yeah. And I don't think necessarily, like, and I'm sure you don't either, that every minute of every day needs to be perfectly scheduled. But, like you said, I mean, even if the kids get a bunch of clothes super muddy and dirty, I'm not worrying about it until it's the next day to do laundry. I'm not just gonna frantically run inside and, "Oh, I better start a load of laundry because they've got all this dirty stuff now." No. I'm doing laundry on Monday or on Tuesdays and Fridays. I'm not gonna worry about other than that. And I'm not gonna

worry about constantly picking up every single thing all day long because we pick up right before lunch, we kind of do a rough pick up of the house, then we eat lunch, and then the younger kids go down for a nap. And then, we pick up like right before bedtime or after they go to bed.

So, during the other times, they can play, they can make messes, they can get out every single toy. I don't care because it's not the time to pick up. We have the times to pick up. So at the end of the day, the house is neat and orderly but during the day we can live in it and do whatever we want and not to worry about making the mess. So, just having those, kind of, schedules and routines in place does really help to simplify and, like, enjoy life because I'm not always worried about, "Oh, when am I gonna have time for this? When am I gonna have time for this?" Because I kind of have my schedules and routines in place already.

Katie: Exactly. And a funny story on that note. My husband worked in the corporate world for years and then started his own company and now works from home a lot of the time. But when he first started working from home, some of the time, it was like we had a culture shock because with little kids, I would clean every day at about 4:30 before he came home. And like I'd usually, like, brush my hair for the first time that day or whatever. And so, from his perspective, the house was always clean because every time he came home it was clean. And then he's home during the day, and he's like, "What the heck. Why is the house a disaster?" And I'm like, "Well, honey, this is real life, you just always got the clean part at the end."

But it, really, is helpful, like, that was our cleaning time and during the day kids could play. And I think that something else that you speak to so well, which is everything in moderation when it comes to simplifying. I won't agree with you on all things related to food because for me, personally, I can't eat any sugars or flours if I want to feel good. But when it comes to other aspects of life, I agree that moderation does seem to be key. So, why do you feel that all things in moderation simplify simple living?

Andrea: I know that there are different personality types. And I read books about it. And there are people who are just...they have to stick with all or nothing way of life because if they just even do it once, it's, you know, almost like an addictive behavior. Like if they have one cookie, then they just can't stop, or if they, you know, do something one time, they just fall off the bandwagon and...

So, I know that moderation literally cannot work for every personality type but I do think for the majority of people, it's just so freeing. Because there's not all these legalistic rules and ways that you have to do things all the time. For me, we do not have strict rules about food in our house because I just have so many people in my life that I have known that they were never allowed to have snacks, they were never allowed to have candy, they were never allowed to have juice.

And then, when they got out on their own, it was just like hoarding all that and they all gained all kinds of weight, and... I just saw really negative aspects of that. And we don't have allergies, we don't have, like, food sensitivities in our house that we know of. So for us, like, moderation works well. My kids can have a snack, they can have a dessert if they finished their meal.

They can have ice cream but they also have vegetables and fruit and from-scratch food. And, yes, sometimes we go to Abby's. And sometimes I make, like, a full huge roast and potatoes and like four different vegetables and they eat it all. Because it's just food to them. There's not like, "Oh, junk food and bad food, and good food." It's just...we eat when we're hungry and we don't eat when we're not hungry. And I feel like for simple living it can be the same thing.

So, yeah, my house is almost always relatively clean. But there are times when it's just crazy like after I have a baby and there's tasks like I didn't clean the bathroom for three whole weeks and didn't really realize it. And is that gross? Yes. Was I, kind of like, mortified when I realized how long it had been? Yes. But are we going to die because we had a dirty bathroom for three weeks? No. I'm not going to go crazy over that or let myself get super upset. And I just, kind of, try to think if something is morally or ethically wrong, then we shouldn't be doing it. And I should focus energy on, like, fixing that.

But if no one is doing something morally or ethically wrong or harming someone else I kind of just try to let things go and work themselves out. And practice moderation in pretty much every aspect of my life. And I just feel like it frees my brain up to worry about other more important things than when the last time I cleaned the bathroom was or what every morsel of food my kids stuck into their mouth that day. Or if they watched 10 minutes of TV or an hour of TV, I'm not gonna stress out about that kind of stuff because in the big picture of life, it just doesn't matter to me.

Katie: Yeah, that's great, I think, to have that balance. And I'll agree, like, for those people listening... I know, for me, and it's a health reason I can't eat flour and sugar, I have like severe gluten issues and I feel like crap. But if you don't have those, I agree your approach is very healthy. And you don't wanna create problem foods unless there is a medical reason to, obviously, you wanna teach children healthy habits but in a way that's balanced and appropriate. And I think that's a great point, as well.

Also, I wanna make sure people can find you because you have a ton of great resources on your blog. And I'm gonna link to quite a few of them in the show notes so people can find them. But where do people find you online?

Andrea: Very cleverly at [andreadekker.com](http://andreadekker.com)., and the "Dekker" is with two Ks. So [dekker.com](http://dekker.com).

Katie: Awesome. And again, that link will be in the show notes. But thank you so much for your time. This has been such a fun chat and you have so many great resources. I'll make sure people can find them easily in the show notes.

Andrea: Great. Thanks for having me, it was fun.

Katie: And thanks to all of you for listening and I'll see you next time on The Healthy Moms Podcast.

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