



1042: Getting Out of Fight or Flight: The
Physiology of Safety (Solo Episode)

Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast!

Katie: This episode is brought to you by Hiya Health. Everyone's talking about their New Year's resolutions, and while everyone else is promising to hit the gym in 2026, I am focusing on something much easier that'll actually stick (gym's already pretty well a habit for me) which is better nutrition for my younger kids.

And that is exactly why Hiya exists, to give parents a real solution in a market flooded with products that prioritize candy-like appeal over actual nutrition. Some children's vitamins on the market have up to seven grams of sugar per serving and are stuffed with additives and petroleum based dyes.

Hiya took the opposite approach. Zero sugar, zero gummy junk, just clean nutrition. And the crazy thing is kids actually love them. The taste, the experience, all of it. It's thoughtfully designed. They looked at what modern kids are eating and not eating, and formulated around those specific nutritional gaps.

Working alongside pediatricians and nutrition scientists, Hiya created a superpowered chewable vitamin that packs 12 organic fruits and vegetables, plus 15 essential vitamins and minerals, including B12, C, zinc, folate, and more. The ingredient list is clean with no GMOs. It's dairy free, allergy free, gelatin free, nut free.

They've thought of everything. Plus, they've earned their clean label projects, highest purity award certification, and they put every batch of product through third party testing for heavy metals and contaminants. So it's the kind of transparency that actually means something. They are designed for kids 2 and up, shipped straight to your door in a reusable bottle with refills that come every month.

We have worked out a special deal with Hiya for their bestselling children's vitamin. Receive 50% off your first order. To claim this deal go to hiyahealth.com/wellnessmama This deal is not available on their regular website. So again, go to hiyahealth.com/wellnessmama and get your kids the full body nourishment they need.

This episode is brought to you by Just Thrive Daily Gut Detox. Here's a hot take. Most detoxes are just an expensive way to feel terrible for a week, and this is because they force toxins out with laxative and harsh ingredients, which can result in fatigue and days of discomfort. And I've talked about before, how it's not, detox is not a thing we do to our body.

It's a thing we work with our body because it already naturally knows how to do it. And that's why I love Just Thrive Daily Gut Detox. It's different. It works with your body, not against it. It's not doing something external to you. It's powered by clinically proven immunoglobulins that act like a toxin magnet.

They bind to the bad guys in your gut and safely carry them out so there's no extreme flushing or cramping. No shock to your system, and because daily gut detox is gentle enough for everyday use, it helps give you the support you need to stay healthy long term. So if you're dealing with signs of toxin buildup like embarrassing bloat, or brain fog or fatigue, there's finally a science backed detox that's easy to stick with long term.

And it's microbiologists formulated, gluten-free, dairy-free, and non-GMO. And as always, you can try it risk free with their hundred percent money back guarantee. Just visit justthrivehealth.com/wellnessmama. And use the code WELLNESSMAMA at checkout to save 20%. So again, that's justthrivehealth.com/wellnessmama Take control today with Just Thrive.

Katie: Hello and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and this episode is a hopefully short solo episode that will dive deep on my understanding of getting out of fight or flight, which is admittedly a place that I spend a lot of time for well over a decade. And all that that entails, diving into sympathetic versus parasympathetic nervous system, how to send safety signals to the body and much more underneath kind of that umbrella.

And this has been a relatively requested topic, and one I'm happy and excited to share my understanding, that, a lot of it I learned through trial and error, especially error, over the course of many years. And hopefully in a way that will be a helpful foundation for someone else and shorten that curve a little bit.

Before we jump in, I want to reiterate that as always, nothing I ever say is medical advice or frankly any type of advice for that matter. Even personal advice. I am just sharing my own experience, the things I've learned along the way and things that have been helpful to me on my own journey. My goal is to offer inspiration and information, never comparison, pressure or prescription. We are each unique with some things, of course, that unite us as humans, and you are and always will be your own primary healthcare provider. I encourage you to always be curious, do your own research and listen to your body and the deep wisdom that can only come from the relationship with your own body.

Question everything, including and especially me, and if something resonates, wonderful, if it doesn't, please discard. My deepest hope is that these conversations, if anything, simply inspire a deeper connection with your own body. With that said, well, let's jump in. So nervous system is a big topic. Fight or flight is a big topic.

There's a lot of nuance that goes into this and not a blueprint that's going to work exactly the same for everybody listening. This episode will tie in many elements that I have found are impactful and connected to this conversation, including things like hormones, nervous

system work, how trauma and emotional patterns come into play, how light, minerals, nutrients and detox come into play in a very real way, mitochondrial health, which is something I've been diving deeper and deeper on lately, and even the cell danger response, and I'll explain more on that later on.

But the core theme, if you could only take away one sentence from this episode, for me, what I learned both hands on and in research over these last now decades is that the body heals when it feels safe. And we cannot force that. And there is not a hack, we cannot go around it. If the body doesn't feel safe, it does not wanna heal.

And if it doesn't feel safe, we're getting data one way or another from our body about why. So that's actually great news when we stop to listen. But that's kind of the core concept. Everything in this conversation will come back to this idea that the body heals naturally, wonderfully, perfectly on its own when it feels safe and has the resources to do so.

Many of us, I know this was me for many, many years, are trying to heal from a place of stress and depletion and overload. This was my pattern for years. I tried to force and override and like manipulate my body into healing through all of the physical levers I knew. And it wasn't until I addressed the things I'm gonna talk about today that I healed, and you guys have heard me tell parts of this story before.

But this was for me, the missing layer that made everything else work, including all the extensive things I was doing, the supplements, the diet, the labs, et cetera. So here's why, in my opinion, safety signals come first. It's my understanding that the nervous system sets the rules and the conditions for healing. And this is not a bad thing. This is actually brilliantly by design. It's our body keeping us safe. It is very, like, adaptive response that we want. So we don't, the body's never betraying us again. The body's always on our side. The nervous system sets the rules for healing. So when we are in fight or flight, normal, predictable things happen.

Like digestion slows down, detoxification slows down, hormone production changes. Mitochondria change and shift into defense mode. Reproduction is not prioritized and inflammation increases, and there's actually a very good reason for all of those things to happen when the body thinks it's in danger. And simply taking supplements to fix things that are out of range does not necessarily tell the body that we're safe and not in danger.

It's getting to the root of why is the body perceiving danger to begin with? Because the body is not broken. It is responding directly to what it perceives. As I've said before, symptoms are messenger and a gift. So if we're having symptoms, that's great. That is direct communication from the body and things like stress, trauma, chronic pressure, toxins,

nutrient deficiencies, circadian chaos, things in our environment and our diet all send danger signals.

So even if we don't feel mentally or emotionally stressed, the body can be perceiving danger and be in a state of fight or flight. And if we think about it, a lot of aspects of modern life kind of create these micro threats all day long. Things like screens and blue light at night, blood sugar spikes from processed food and from many of our meals, or skipping meals and sending the signal that the body is undernourished.

Emotional stress, of course. Environmental toxins and chemicals that the body perceives as a threat, even if our mind doesn't register that, as well as just too much stimulation, like too much noise, stimulation, urgency. I stopped watching the news entirely about 10 years ago. If the body doesn't feel safe, it makes sense to me healing is not a priority, and that's the key shift. It's learning to reframe the paradigm of how can I, to the best of my ability, help my body feel safe in this moment? That's the key shift. You don't heal your way into safety. We create safety first, and then healing happens naturally. The body already knows how to do that.

We don't have to force the body to heal. We just have to make it feel safe enough to heal. Okay, so let's talk about emotional and mental safety signals because these do come into play. They're just not the only factor. And often people think stress. They think mental and emotional stress, and that can be a component.

But also, as I just mentioned, it can be things in our environment that we're physically perceiving as stressful or circadian misalignment or undernourishment or any number of other things. But unresolved stress and emotional patterns do directly affect our physiology. And data is pointing toward this more and more.

I have certainly my own very profound direct experience with this. But basically a concise overview of this is that the limbic system determines whether we are safe. And it does this at a speed faster than conscious thought. So this is happening all the time in real time outside of our necessarily thinking and mental awareness.

Things like emotional neglect, chronic stress, unresolved childhood trauma, and even overwhelm can keep the nervous system stuck in on mode. And I had some aspect of all of those at one point, and I was doing, as you guys have probably heard me explain before, all the physical things, all the biohacks, taking all the supplements, eating a quote unquote perfect diet and nothing was getting better until I addressed these parts.

And these can show up as anxiety, sleep issues, often hormonal dysregulation, including from any thyroid, chronic pain, burnout, and weight gain that is resistant to dietary changes. So this is, again, only one piece of the puzzle, but it's a very powerful one. And for

me, some of the things that helped in addressing this, I tried actually many, many, many therapies,

I think this part is incredibly nuanced and personalized. Some of the ones I tried were IFS or Internal Family Systems, EMDR. I did try talk therapy that was largely unhelpful. I did both guided and self-hypnosis. But really it was the daily work of learning to re-pattern my nervous system responses that made the biggest difference over time.

There are also things we know that universally kind of can sense safety to the human nervous system. And these are things like, like really solid human connections, feeling seen and understood, having healthy boundaries. This was a difficult one for me to learn. Having slower mornings and slower evenings, less rushing and having a solid routine, especially around our lighting at the morning and the evening.

Less multitasking. And then we know play, pleasure, and joy all send safety signals to the nervous system. So, some practical tools you can experiment with. Again, I think this is very nuanced, but some things that in general can be very helpful as starting points that tell our brain that we are safe are things like breath work.

A simple one here if you don't wanna do anything complicated is to exhale longer than you inhale. So you might breathe in for four. And then slowly breathe out for six, for instance, that's an easy one. That doesn't require any training or Andrew Huberman has really popularized the idea of the physiological sigh, which is another great tool for the nervous system.

And any moms listening, or parents, you might have noticed that babies do this naturally. But the basic method is that you inhale as much as you can, and then another little inhale before a full exhale. And if you've ever seen a baby or a child really worked up and crying, you might have heard them go, "Ah, uhhh", and so they naturally do this and it's something we can do that's actually very not nervous system calming also any vagal tone practices like gargling, humming.

I've talked before about how some of my improvements actually correlated with when I started taking voice lessons, which also stimulates the vocal cords. Journaling, gratitude journaling, somatic release. There are now a lot of trauma-informed somatic therapists that can help. Therapy modalities that regulate the body, not just the mind.

Including movement based therapies, nature exposure, gentle restorative movement and nervous system micro doses of calm throughout the day. And I do feel like when it comes to the nervous system, because it is a master driver of so much, this is very much a place of both ands. Like we can't only address one aspect, we kind of need to find anywhere that the nervous system is getting a safety signal or a non-safety signal and address that. And

there are some really powerful physical safety signals that can help the body feel safe, which is also gonna be an important thing in the nervous system, feeling safe, and for healing to happen and for the body to have resilience and capacity for that.

So these are gonna be things you've certainly heard me talk about before, but to reiterate them here, these would be things like nutrients, light and minerals. Personally I think light is actually one of the primary safety signals and it's one of the biggest needle movers and it's free. It can also be one of the biggest danger signals if we get this piece wrong.

So, at risk of beating a dead horse here, I'm gonna say morning sunlight is huge. It's free. It's one of the most underrated health tools. It anchors our circadian rhythm and our cortisol timing. Since cortisol is a stress hormone, this is really big in the recovery process and in nervous system safety.

Little mini doses of natural light throughout the day reinforce this pattern and support mitochondrial health and hormone production. This was something during my intensive healing phase I would just take mini like 5 to 10 minute light breaks throughout the day as much as I could and or spend as much time outside as possible.

I think if ever I were facing kind of a really intense diagnosis of some sort, if I had been given a word that was really scary or came with a pretty bleak prognosis, one of the things I would do is immediately spend essentially all of my time in nature, only in natural light. This also means avoiding bright blue light at night, which when we avoid blue light, our melatonin is able to rise naturally.

When we are exposed to blue light at night, it blunts our natural melatonin response. So we want to avoid blue light at night. I've talked about this before as well. But melatonin is not just a sleep hormone. It's actually a very powerful repair hormone that does a lot more than just sleep. So when we blunt this response, we're not just interfering with our sleep, which also has downstream effects on health, but we are blunting one of the most potent repair hormones we have access to that we make endogenously.

So light can tell the body it's morning, it's safe, run the full daytime programs, or it's nighttime, make melatonin and have deep recovery during deep sleep. Darkness tells the body, repair and detox. They're both important. It's about the timing. I also really firmly believe that minerals can be massive cellular safety signals, and I am also doing, I'm not sure which we'll release first, but a whole, a mineral mastery series.

But we'll go really deep on this. So I'm not gonna cover it super in depth in this one, but I wanted to just briefly touch on this because minerals are cellular safety signals, sodium and potassium balance determines our electrical potential. So we need both, but in the right balance, we need much more sodium than potassium.

And I will go actually into each of those in their own episode. Magnesium I've written about so much over the years, but it calms the nervous system. It's involved in hundreds of enzymatic reactions in the body. It helps with detoxification and deep sleep and so much more. And minerals are also co-factors in hormone production, in mitochondrial function and in stress resilience.

And statistically, many of us are not getting enough minerals in the modern world. Without minerals the body interprets everything as stress. So we could be doing lots of things right and if we're under mineralized, we, our body is still in a state of stress. That's how important they are. I've also explained the body is electric, and I'm gonna do a whole voltage episode as well.

But when we don't get enough minerals, and especially electrolytes, sodium, potassium, magnesium, the body does not electrically communicate as well. Also, I wanna talk about, outside of minerals, nutrients as safety signals and availability signals. Because once we get past the very basic core blocks, which I think some of the things I've already talked about really are important and foundational, once we get past those and we're talking about capacity for the body to heal and supporting this process, this is where I feel like nutrients come in and nutrient loading as much as possible.

So enough protein can signal the body that it is safe to rebuild. Enough healthy fats can help signal the body it's safe to make hormones. Enough micronutrients can signal to the body, you are safe to detox without damaging tissues. Eating regularly and getting enough nutrients and not just calories tells the body food is safe, we're not in a famine, you don't need to store fat and you can run reproductive and repair pathways, we're getting enough nutrients. I think this is actually a big one for women.

I think a lot of women, myself included for a long time, massively are under-eating and under-nutrient consuming. And I've talked before about shifting my perspective away from macros and in true, how can I maximally nourish my body in any given meal? And this led to prioritizing really nutrient-dense animal proteins, healthy fats, brightly colored fruits and vegetables, especially local, and seasonal fermented foods, et cetera. And things like raw egg yolks, which I add to a lot of different meals.

And it's amazing when you really start loading up on those nutrients, how the body can respond. And then lastly, I think sleep is a massive biological safety signal. We know that so many repair processes happen only during sleep and especially deep sleep. Which is when we can reduce inflammation and reset our stress response, we also can flush cerebral spinal fluid and reduce things like beta amyloid plaques in the brain. And without sleep, even if we got all the other pieces right, the body is kind of in emergency mode, and

thankfully in times like when we have newborns, the body has beautifully designed protective measures. So even if we feel very sleep deprived, the body has protective measures so that we can get through those phases and recover later on. But outside of those phases, sleep is definitely something to prioritize because we will operate in emergency mode if we're not getting enough sleep.

All right. I wanna also briefly touch on environmental safety signals, things like toxins in our air, water, and home. Because phy, any kind of toxins are dangerous signals even if we don't feel in danger. So, chemicals, fragrances, plastics, mold, pesticides, these all send warning signals to the body. We don't need, the good news is we do not need a completely perfect environment here. We just need a relatively supportive one and one that is not sort of majority sending toxin signals. And so the good thing is here is that simple reductions can make a really big difference. Things like clean air, which can be as simple as opening the windows more often.

We know that indoor air is often more polluted than outdoor air, having plants, and I'm a big fan of air filters. I'll link to the one I have in my house called a Jaspr, but there's a lot of great options now if possible. But if not, just open the windows, try to reduce the things that are contributing to indoor air toxins in the first place.

Also clean water, and I will link to the whole house filter I use in the show notes as well. But the way I kind of actually think of these things in this order for a reason, because we breathe much more than we drink water or eat food. So I feel like air is important to address first. Water, we drink more water, hopefully, than we do eat food, so water is secondary. And then from there, also making sure our diet, of course, is clean. From a home perspective, reducing things like unnecessary plastics in the home, synthetic fragrances, that's an easy one. Just don't have those in the home and or harsh cleaners. And then prioritizing whole foods.

I feel like you can easily get lost in dietary dogma, but also at the end of the day, it often just comes back to, eat whole foods not processed foods. Get them locally and seasonally as much as possible and focus on the nutrient density. And if you start there, you're 80% of the way. And also I wanna reiterate here that detox is not something we do.

It's something our body does when it feels safe. So this is not something we have to do to our body. We just need to get out of its way and stop giving it more inputs than it can handle. If we try to push a detox on an already stressed body. That can lead to overwhelm on our detox pathways and actually make things worse downstream.

I'll link to a course in the show notes, but I went through a in depth course related, basically explained if your body's in a danger response, trying to push detox is actually, can be much

more harmful and you wanna address the danger response first and when the body feels safe and feels supported and has the resources it needs, it is an effortless clearing of things that are blocking it, it will naturally detox. Now to touch on some kind of behavioral safety signals, things that are within our power that we can do that throughout our day that send safety signals. Some easy ones here are things like slow mornings. So waking up gently, natural light first thing. I can link to podcasts I've done all about that if you're interested. Getting warm food and hydration first thing before caffeine. So for me, caffeine always comes after protein and hydration, I'm certainly not anti caffeine by any means, and then screens only after natural light, grounding and calm.

Another safety signal we can send is to small movement breaks and light breaks throughout the day. We don't need extremes here. This can be a 10 minute outdoor walk. This can be very short batches of movement. It does not have to be even exercise. It just needs to be movement and ideally natural light. And walking is one of the biggest safety signals for the body from a movement perspective, it supports the lymphatic system. It supports the circulatory system. It supports sleep. I think if people added a 10 minute walk after every meal it would make a tremendous difference. And that's also free and available to most people. Also, predictable routines can be helpful, especially if we're in a phase of healing because the body thrives on rhythm and predictability.

So just building in little routines around these things can help a lot. Chaos is a stress signal. So if we're feeling overwhelmed and we feel like we have this to-do list of things to do to support our health, it might be counterproductive because we're still sending a stress signal to the body.

Consistency is another safety signal. And then this one isn't talked about as much, but pleasure is actually a survival signal. It immediately shifts the nervous system into repair mode because when we're feeling pleasure or in a state of play, that is not a time of fight or flight. So that's actually a way to help the body shift into parasympathetic.

I also wanna briefly touch on the hormone connection here and how safety signals come into play with hormones, perimenopause, and the hormonal aspects of health, especially around hormonal shifts. Hormones also follow safety, so estrogen, progesterone, thyroid hormones, cholesterol, and DHEA are all downstream effects of how safe the body feels.

Of course, there's more that comes into play here, but if we feel stressed, those things are all getting impacted. When women are chronically stressed, our hormones show it. Our cycles show it. Early perimenopause can show that when safety increases, hormones often rebalance naturally. Because again, the body's not prioritizing optimal hormones, fertility, reproduction or any of that when it feels like it's in a life or death situation.

So this is, I have done a whole nother episode on hormones specifically, but I think even in times where we're talking about bioidentical hormone replacement, it's worth addressing the nervous system first and or both and. Because we're still needing to make supportive hormones within that, even if we are replacing some, and we don't wanna just replace the hormones without addressing the underlying kind of cause and the reason for the stress to begin with.

I also wanna say, because I've had a lot of guests on this topic, and I get a lot of questions on this topic, and I'm not there yet to have any direct experience. However, I think it's also important for mentally to remember that perimenopause and menopause are times of transition. They're not a failure.

Hormones shifting is normal. Symptoms can intensify when the nervous system is depleted, our mitochondria are stressed, our detox PO pathways are overwhelmed or the body feels unsafe. And those are things within our ability to shift even without hormone replacement. I think also the mindset around this is really helpful because if we feel like it's a failure, that's not a very empowering place to start to create change.

When you add safety signals a lot of symptoms may shift, especially hormone related ones. So when people address the nervous system side, they often see things like fewer hot flashes, better mood, better sleep, more stable energy, improved hormone levels and cycle patterns, and reduced anxiety. So safety stabilizes the transition.

So basically, to go back to what I started with in this episode, the body heals naturally when it feels safe and we cannot force it to heal when it doesn't. Healing is often not about adding more protocols, supplements, or to-do lists. It's about removing danger signals and sending as many safety signals as possible.

Safety takes into account emotional, physical, biochemical, and environmental. So a lot comes under this umbrella. And the more safety the body senses, the more it naturally heals and opens pathways for hormone balance for detox, for proper digestion, mitochondrial repair.

For deep rest, for resilience. I would sum up this entire episode by saying this, when the body feels safe, healing becomes effortless. When it feels unsafe, healing becomes impossible. Safety is the foundation that everything else built on, and I would love to hear your experience with this if nervous system safety and fight or flight, if this is something that is top of mind for you and that you've addressed.

And or if any of these things have worked. If you have a different perspective, I would love to hear it. Either way, thank you so much for joining today and for sharing your time, your attention, your presence today. It means the world that you're here, that we get to learn

together. And if you found this episode helpful, the easiest way you can support this is to leave an honest review wherever you listen to podcasts, which helps other moms and families find us and be part of the community. Also, if you want to stay in the loop with episodes, resources I release, behind the scenes updates and some of my favorite wellness tips, be sure to subscribe and join my VIP email list at wellnessmama.com. For today, thank you so much for listening. I'm so grateful that you did, and I hope you'll join me again on the next episode of the Wellness Mama Podcast.