



1069: Synthetic Fragrance Is the New
Secondhand Smoke: Here's the Science
With Mike Feldstein

Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast!

This episode is sponsored by Just Thrive Health, one of my favorite companies, and especially their new Digestive Bitters. So I've been talking about gut health for years before it was so trendy. I love that everybody's talking about it now, and the one brand that I have continuously used for my gut health is Just Thrive.

I started on their probiotic seven years ago, and my whole family uses it. I prefer their probiotic over any others as it's guaranteed to arrive 100% alive in your gut, and it has a thousand times better survivability than most probiotics. It's also one of the most versatile probiotics out there that we can take in capsule form and I can also add it to smoothies or even bake with it because it's heat stable up to 450 degrees. So it survives all the ways I use it. I also love their newest product, their Digestive Bitters, and I got to record a fascinating episode on this because for centuries, traditional cultures turned bitter herbs into an ultimate digestive activator.

But in today's world, these essential compounds have all but disappeared from our diets, and that's why I am really enjoying their di digestive bitters. Which features 12 clinically proven herbs. It activates your body's natural digestive processes and encourages healthy GLP one production naturally. So for you, that means smooth digestion, better nutrient absorption, and balanced cravings.

And best of all, the capsule design delivers the benefits of bitters without the unpleasant taste, which is a massive breakthrough. Just Thrive Digestive Bitters work with your body's natural process to optimize digestion, nutrient absorption, and gut health, all backed by science and centuries of proven efficacy.

They can replace several digestive aids like antacids making instead of masking symptoms. These actually help acid levels and regulate bile production. Some of the many benefits of Bitters, they can ease occasional bloating and indigestion, support GLP-1 production, naturally help you break down your food better for better nutrient absorption, support your healthy blood sugar balance and appetite control, encourage and support optimal bile flow and enzyme production, enhance digestion of fats and proteins and without the bitter taste.

It can promote balanced gut microbiome, support healthy gut barrier function, and can be taken alongside probiotics for peak gut support like all of their products. These are microbiologists formulated, evidence-based and safe, as well as non-GMO and free of gluten, soy, dairy, sugar, and artificial ingredients with a 100% satisfaction or your money back.

I have been experimenting with these and really, really loving them. If you would love to check them out too, go to justthrivehealth.com/wellnessmama and use the code WellnessMama15 for a discount.

This podcast is brought to you by BIOptimizers and in particular, their product that holds my heart, which is their Magnesium Breakthrough. My goal this year is to continue to focus on my wellness and to create more harmony and resonance, and we all know that the foundation of health is a good night's sleep.

I talk about that so much on this podcast. And magnesium is the one nutrient that helps my sleep so much as well as so many other aspects of my health because magnesium is vital for so many things within the body, and it is nearly impossible to get enough from food anymore. And Magnesium Breakthrough from BIOptimizers is in a category of its own.

They have seven different forms of magnesium in one supplement, and since magnesium is involved in over 600 different biochemical reactions in the body, no other supplement on the market offers all seven types of magnesium in one bottle. Pretty much every function of your body is upgraded when you take magnesium regularly from the quality of your sleep to your brain function, from metabolism to stress levels, and so much more.

This is one of the few supplements that lives on my nightstand and I'm a little odd, but I take every morning because I actually get energy from it though most people notice that it's better at night. Now studies point to a lot of benefits of magnesium, including that it may help improve sleep quality, especially by supporting healthy sleep onset and have more peaceful nights.

Magnesium is also involved in stress management support and it may help maintain energy levels and positive mood while also supporting mental clearness and relaxation.

Magnesium is also important for healthy and balanced muscle tone and providing the building blocks to strong bones, and it promotes a balanced stress response, supports relaxation.

And I feel much calmer when I'm regularly taking magnesium. So let's face it, even if your 2025 resolution is not all about focusing on your health like mine is, how are you going to be able to achieve your goals in any area without enough quality sleep and stress management? Check out Magnesium Breakthrough and make it part of your daily routine this year as well.

For better sleep, better stress response, and much more. They have a 365 day money back guarantee and you can find it at Bioptimizers.com/wellnessmama and use the code Wellnessmama for a discount.

Katie: Hello, and welcome back to the Wellness Mama podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and this round two with Mike Feldstein, as always, I learned so much, and we talk about how synthetic fragrance is the new secondhand smoke. I didn't realize how big the industry was for air fresheners.

He talks about this and how it's roughly double the size of the air filtration industry, meaning that we're spending twice as much to pollute our air as to clean it. He talks about the worst offenders to avoid, some easy shifts that you can make that drastically improve your indoor air quality, and he gives his best offer he's ever given for the JASPR Air Scrubbers that I have in my home and many other people now do as well.

So let's learn from Mike. Mike, welcome back. We got to do an episode all about bringing some much needed balance to the conversation around mold.

I will link to that in the show notes for this episode. If you missed it, I think it's a must listen for sure. And in this episode, we're gonna tackle another topic that I think is not given as much importance as it should, and that is often overlooked, that I know you have a lot of really important insight into, which is the topic of synthetic fragrances, and more specifically, you compare them, synthetic fragrances, as the new secondhand smoke.

And that's a pretty bold claim, so I would love to walk us through what the actual chemistry is, what's going on in the body, and why you think that comparison is fair.

Mike: Sure. So I'll start by saying I think secondhand smoke was one of the greatest positive marketing campaigns of all time, because if you go back 60, 70 years, let's say 70, if you were sm- people would be smoking cigarettes everywhere, in planes, in restaurants, concerts, like everywhere.

There was no, like, this was before they even had smoking sections. Smoking was just everywhere, inside and outside. I could not imagine being on a plane with, like, smoking. And if you complained to somebody about their smoking, you were like the, the negative complainer who was being annoying, mind your own business kinda thing.

And then the research started to show, whoa, whoa, whoa. By me smelling that smoke, like you're killing me and my babies, and you're giving me cancer, and I don't even have a filter at the mouthpiece. It's arguably worse for me than for you. So the term and the idea of secondhand smoke gave people permission to be angry, because you went from being this complainer to being a health advocate for your children, essentially.

And once it was like, "Yo, you're killing me," it's like, then it's like, "No way. I'm not flying on that airplane. I'm not eating in that restaurant. I'm not going to that concert hall." And now

businesses started to feel the impact. So as the awareness grew and the consumers voted with their feet and with their dollars, businesses had to do what they had to do, and regulators then had to respond to that as well.

But it really started with businesses, even if there was no regulations. Like, try opening a restaurant now and not having, and allowing people to smoke inside. You're not gonna have a very successful business. Unless you're like a pool hall or something, and then it might work. But the term secondhand smoke allowed people to b- bind together and be angry, and it gave them permission to do something about it.

So when we learned that the smoke wasn't just impacting the smoker but everybody in the ambient air, that created the movement to make change. Now, if we think that synthetic fragrances, first of all, scents are being used. Get this. This is wild. The air freshener industry in America is about a \$7 billion a year industry.

The air filtration and purification industry is only about a three and a half billion dollar industry. So said another way, people are spending double the amount of money to chemically pollute their air than they are to filter it and clean it. Whoa. Talk about a lack of awareness. So, number one, like, no-no is the Christmas tree of death in the Ubers and in everybody's cars. I'm gonna create something later in the year to send to all the Jaspr customers. Like Ben Azadi had this seed oil allergy card that he would give to his community to take to restaurants in English and Spanish to give to your server to be like, "I'm allergic.

Don't give me seed oils." And then, like, it made you not feel like this, like, annoying complainer. Like, once you call it allergies, they're more willing to accommodate you, and they're more afraid of liability, instead of it being your preference. So I wanna create something very similar for Jaspr customers and have, like, a little free download on our website where we send them, like, a, a thing to give to your Uber driver in English and Spanish to be like, "I'm allergic to the 3,000 chemicals that are in your car right now.

And here's all the health things that it does," and maybe a little QR code to, like, a, a more detailed research article about it because it's an awareness thing. I ask Uber drivers all the time. They think it's improving the customer, customer experience, but, like, it's wild. Like, Febreze doesn't disinfect.

It just covers up the smell of the dirty gym bag in the garbage. Like, if you pour a bunch of cologne and perfume on the garbage, you haven't taken out the trash. You haven't removed the bacteria. You've just masked the smell. This is a big deal on a number of levels. So fragrances is, like, a catch-all term for thousands of chemicals.

It's like saying natural flavors. Fragrances is just a bunch of chemicals. The way that they work is they hijack your ability to smell. Your olfactory system is like your, your, you're smelling and you're breathing. It's like you're... You know, it's your smelling system. So what happens is if you're at a restaurant or something or at a business and they have fragrances, well, what happens is you lose the ability to smell, and what also happens is, like, when you smell a delicious meal or any food, even from a great distance, you start to salivate.

That's how it's supposed to work, and then the saliva tells your gut and all the digestive enzymes, "Hey, steak incoming." It tells your body what food's incoming, so you're getting prepared to break down whatever foods are coming and digest it and absorb it. When you can't smell, you don't salivate, and when you can't smell, your gut has no idea what's incoming.

Then all of a su- no wonder we all have digestive issues. Your body isn't able to break down the food properly. Your smelling system is a huge part of your digestion and your nutrient absorption. So it's not just, like, an annoying smell that's really impacting your immune system. It's also really impacting your gut 'cause if you can't smell, your gut's not ready.

You're not salivating. So that's just, like, another thing people aren't really thinking about, how fragrances can literally impact nutrient absorption and weight. Businesses had all these patented fragrances. Like originally it was just like Bath & Body Works and Lush and like casinos with these heavy fragrances.

Now they're using them everywhere, patented smells. And sadly, like a lot of people still think it works. I think it's gonna be like cigarette smoke and like alcohol. As the awareness increases and the consumers get more aware, businesses are gonna start doing something about it. Like you want your air to smell very neutral, very natural.

You know, maybe some cedar or some pine or a little bit of wood or high quality essential oils can be good, but a lot of them are really not good. So just to conclude, the reason I call it secondhand smoke is because it's an opportunity for people to realize your scents are my problem and my family's problem, and if you don't do something about it, I'm not coming back to your business.

I'm not riding in your Uber. I'm not going in your Airbnb. And when businesses start to feel the impact, then they start to make changes.

Katie: I love this, and I think we're seeing the beginnings of that shift, and I know there are so many things that fit in this categorically. I didn't realize the industry was \$7 billion big, but I knew it was big, and I know I personally don't love how I feel when I walk down the aisle at the grocery store that has all the, like, laundry detergents and stuff.

And that's what I've

Mike: Oh, my God

Katie: ... talked about so much over the years, is like you think your laundry detergent is just smelling good, but you're actually getting multi exposures through that because you're getting skin contact all day, every day, including on your sheets while you're sleeping.

You're getting... You're inhaling that. You're inhaling those VOCs and the fragrances while you're wearing it every day, and it's basically a low-level alarm for your nervous system all the time. So I would love to talk about what some of the worst offenders are. And as a side note, I'm curious your take on things like the ozone machines for laundry in place of these, like, chemical detergents that, like, use ozone hooked up to the water supply to clean clothes naturally or what you view as kind of the gold standard for replacing these things.

Mike: So I, I, I will say in the last couple years I've sort of come around on, on materials, especially from, like, breathability and even just, like, the frequency of clothes. I can really feel the material difference. Like, when you wear something that's, like, organic cotton and really a great breathable material and it feels light and it feels awesome on your skin, I think that stuff really does matter.

But I think what matters more is not washing your clothes in harmful chemicals a few times a week. Like, before we get to the materials, let's not chemical bathe our clothes all the time. And people li- And then they put it on the pillowcases too, and the pillows, and the sheets, and now we sleep in it.

Like, the fragrances and the chemicals are such a low-hanging fruit to deal with. So I think... And sadly, like, the, the, the intense chemicals definitely work the best. Like, they definitely clean great. Bleach works awesome. Also people don't think about it, but your dishwasher is also a really harmful polluter as well.

It's one of the only, like, big appliances that doesn't even vent outside, that's why you smell it. So that, it's, it's, like, taking those, like, plasticky chemical pucks, boiling them, and then, like, gassing your house. So if you can find a more natural alternative, hand wash.

Dishwashers are convenient, not gonna lie.

Open your windows, scrub your air. But just be mindful that your dishwasher is also really polluting your air. I don't know. I, I, I personally think, I, I haven't gone deep enough into the ozone and the other ways to clean clothes, but I, my instincts are that would actually be really effective. I don't love ozone for air.

I, I love it for disinfecting, like, smoke and odor, like a spot treatment, but I don't want ozone running in my house all the time. But it's awesome for water filtration. So it really makes

sense to me that you could use ozone to clean clothes in a more natural way. Like, my Spidey senses say that's actually a really good idea.

Ozone, UV, less intense chemicals for clothes. That feels good. I'm gonna go down that rabbit hole a little bit .

Katie: That was my thought too. I'm gonna research it too. It actually came on my radar when my son broke his arm, and we were in the ER waiting to have it set, and I noticed they didn't... The bedding they have has no scent at all.

And so I asked them like, "What do you use to clean it?" And they're like, "Actually, we don't use any detergent. We use an ozone system hooked up to our water supply so it's only infused into the water, and it's like naturally kills the bacteria and all the things they have to deal with." So it made me think if it can work in a hospital, I wanna research it for my house, but that's good to know.

So maybe we can report back in a future episode with that. And I love that...

Mike: Yeah, I feel good about that.

Katie: Yeah. So that's interesting. So we'll circle back, and I'll put links too to some blog posts I've written on at least better swaps or homemade versions for the cleaners that are, like, huge offenders.

But like you said, even beyond normal cleaning, people are, like, plugging chemicals into their walls, and...

Mike: Oh, no...

Katie: And spraying all the time

Mike: Glade plugins and all those. No. Like, I have some posts I've done on Instagram before. I've, I've counted 12 air fresheners in an Airbnb. Also, red flag, this is so important.

If you're ever going to buy a home and they have all those little plugins, you need to make sure you get all of them out of the house for... Open the windows for a day, then close them. Make sure those things are out of the house before you do your home inspection, and because, because the way they work, they, they're not just masking smells, they mask your smell by masking your ability to smell.

So it's typically the most common thing that a seller does when they're selling a moldy home, is uses heavy fragrances to mask the smell of mold. And when we say mask the smell, we mean mask your ability to smell. So you won't even be able to detect the mold and feel the mold, because you're masking your ability to smell with chemical fragrances.

So don't buy a home unless you've allowed it to breathe without any fragrances and you walk through it again, 'cause you would have no idea what you're getting into. Painting over a white wall and throwing up plugins is, like, the number one way to trick someone to buying a moldy house, or renting a moldy apartment, or renting a moldy house.

So be super careful on that. Red flag. Now- The only reason you're needing to chemically do that to your home is if your home stinks. So be like, why does your home stink in the first place? This is like taking Advil every single day just preventively in the morning instead of, like, trying to, like, exercise and stretch and eat better.

Because if your home smells, it's for a reason. Is it, is it a garbage issue? Is it a mold issue? Are you not cleaning? Do you have musty carpets? Do you have humidity problems? Are you not scrubbing and filtering your air? Is your home not breathing properly? So, like, your, your smell system, it's not something you wanna throw out.

Your ability to taste and smell are deeply important senses. So use that as an o- if it's a cooking odor thing, scrub your air or open your windows when you cook. Use your range hood more. Like, use the symptom of the smell to figure out what's going on. Candles also typically very bad. Like, a really high quality beeswax candle, either with a wood wick or a hemp wicks or an organic cotton wick, those are actually great.

In fact, they actually clean the air. So there's some really good beeswax candles that are super natural ways to ozonate your air that are so effective. I was skeptical. I tested them. They worked really good. But yeah, you, the, the, the idea of masking everything and masking your car smell, like you might need to clean out the gym bag or wash the car, change the way you're cleaning, your cl- upgrade your cleaning protocols, upgrade your lifestyle and your hygiene.

Don't use bad behavior and lifestyle and then mask it with a bunch of chemicals. Not a good idea. Agreed. And it's just numbing, it's num- it's numbing your senses.

Katie: Absolutely. And on that note, obviously in today's world it would be impossible to entirely avoid synthetic fragrances, just as it's impossible to fully avoid Wi-Fi or even mold, as we talked about before. But I suspect in this area it's a thing where we can 80/20 to some degree, and that, like, some small efforts can actually have a tremendous payoff in our overall exposure, especially within our own homes. So if someone is newer to this, what is that 80/20?

Like, what are the biggest offenders to start with? What are some positive swaps? Or maybe it's actually just more like removing the things and opening the windows and letting the air refresh itself. But where do you encourage people to start?

Mike: Well, I'm just gonna group fragrances into, like, chemicals overall. The amount of people in America, a million dollar home is not what it used to be. In a lot of cities it's kind of normal. The amount of people who have a million dollar home and a \$1,000 bed is staggering. Or a \$2 million home with a \$1,000 bed, or a \$20 million home with a \$2,000 bed. What is the purpose of your home?

It should be first like a sleep sanctuary, and it's, it's a great place to sleep and rest and recover, and it should be like your, your healing place, not the place that makes you the most sick, and it's totally backwards right now. So from a health perspective, I think if you want to start with your sleep, which is the way you spend a third of your life, you want to start by dialing in your sleep sanctuary, which is your bedroom.

So- Spend five grand on a bed. Get good pillows. Get organic sheets. I found moving to organic linens, and sheets, and pillowcases, and scrubbing the air in my bedroom to be the single biggest investment in my life for \$10,000 or less. Like, to me, the 80/20 of health is filter your sleeping air. So yes, scrubbing the air in your whole home is better, but, like, 80/20, if we can scrub our sleeping air, if we can filter our drinking water...

This could be a Berkey, this could be RO, this could be ordering spring water. But, like, our, before we move to the showers, and the baths, and everything, sleeping air, drinking water, and don't use artificial light before sunrise or after sunset. Like, so we're talking \$1,000 air scrubber, a few hundred dollar water filter, a couple hundred dollars on a, on a, a couple nice warm lights and lamps or a red light in your bedroom.

You know, for sub two grand you could have your breathing a- your sleeping air, drinking water, and lights really dialed in. And then if you wanna go above that, you know, don't get, like, a, a foam bed. Have an organic mattress. Have good, good high quality organic linens. I'm sure you've got lots of blogs on better beds and better.

Like, dial in your bedroom first is basically, like, number one, because now at least a third of your life is in this, like, sleep healing sanctuary. Then if you wanna expand that throughout the rest of your home, especially if you work at home and you're spending the whole day there, that's awesome. If you have young kids and babies, don't forget about them, too.

But, like, sleeping on a chemically bed with, with fragrant sheets, this is, like, the first thing you don't wanna do, 'cause you do all your healing and all your recovering at, when you sleep. So let's, like, start from there from an 80/20 perspective.

Katie: I love that. And to echo what you said on the lighting, I think people underestimate how drastically that can shift how you feel.

So if you've never done that part, I'll link to a blog post on how to improve the lighting situation in your home, but I think your tip is gold. If you just avoid artificial lighting or at least bright artificial lighting that has the negative spectrums and flicker after sunset or before sunrise, it will make a difference.

And bonus points if you actually see the sunrise and the sunset every night and guide your circadian rhythm by that. It makes a tremendous, tremendous difference, and I'll put some resources in the show notes for that. And in our last time, I'd love to just touch a little bit more on when people are chronically exposed to these fragrances, what is that impacting?

I know there's hormonal consequences that have been identified.

Mike: Oh, wow.

Katie: Cognitive consequences. And I also hear people say they feel fine around these products. And so if someone doesn't think they're impacted by it, what's actually going on there? Is it that they're not impacted, or is it more of a subtle, silent damage that's happening?

Mike: I believe it is numbness, and that's why they're not experiencing anything. I don't think it's... It's like, you know, everybody reacts to things differently. For example, some people can go to a coffee shop or be hanging out with six or seven friends and have no headphones and be productive and do work.

Not me. I need a quiet, focused area to be productive. So if you just think about noise or vibration, try to focus and then blast a bunch of music and maybe put on a, a static sound machine beside you and a bunch of vibration and see how well you focus. Or try sleeping at night with the lights on. I'm sure some people can do it, but, like, the more environmental stresses that you stack on top, the worse it's gonna be for you.

So when you have light pollution, noise pollution, chemical fragrances, mold, these things just stack, and they layer. So naturally, go on a hike into the forest and tell me you don't feel better. Come on. So the more you can just, like, lower your toxic burden or eat better or sleep more, you're gonna feel way better.

So I've seen a lot of people. I mean, the fragrant industry couldn't be \$7 billion if everybody was aware of it and felt the difference. So a lot of people are just so numb. I mean, how many people just, like, eat fast food and candy and drink soda still? Do they think that doesn't impact them either? Try swapping your soda and your Coke for spring water, and try moving to organic food, and try scrubbing the air when you sleep and drinking filtered water, and come back to me in 30 days, and don't tell me that you're not feeling better. If

you track your sleep, the proof is gonna be right there. But like the proof's gonna be in how you feel.

Katie: Yes, and listening to your body. I love that point from the first episode. And we talked about it a lot in the mold episode, but I do feel like air quality is such an important piece here, and the way I've described it kinda before is like from the triage perspective, you can go much longer without food than you can without water.

So in my mind, water quality is actually more important even than food quality with some nuance, and you can go way less time without air than you can without water. So air quality in my mind is actually the most important because we're getting the most volume of input from that of anything. And so I love that you give such practical resources for improving air quality and that like in the, even in the mold episode, even if there's an identified problem, it doesn't necessarily always have to be hard or drastic or dramatic.

And in this one it seems like even simpler because it's a simple subtraction of not putting those things in your environment to begin with, and then the layers of improving air quality even more by things like the Jasprs. And I know you said in our first episode you had a special offer just for people listening to this podcast. So I wanna make sure we highlight that, and I'll link to it as well for anybody listening on the go.

Mike: I do. So this is early access to our Black Friday offer. The only time of the year that you'll ever see this offer is just during Black Friday. But for the Wellness Mama community, so today, early July, starting today, the day the episode comes out, for only two weeks, code wellnessmama is gonna be a \$300 discount.

So instead of 1199, Jasper will be 899. And then after that, the discount will still be live forever, but it'll only be \$200 off instead of \$300 off. So if you're looking to invest in clean air, now is a great time. And if it... You'll know in the first few days, but we give you a month to try Jaspr or Jasprs.

If you put it in your home, and you're not... Use it, if you're putting the first one in your bedroom, fan speed three with dark mode is where the undeniable life-changing sleep happens. So the bedroom unit would be fan speed three. If you're putting one, like, in your living area, put it on smart mode. That way it's silent, but it will automatically adapt to cooking and cleaning and pollution and things like that.

If your life is not obviously better, like the reason I love Jaspr is because it's kind of undeniable how good it works and how much better you will feel. So if you're not though, let us know. We will buy the Jaspr back from you, give you a full refund. We'll cover the shipping back as well. So yeah, for two weeks from the day the episode launches code wellnessmama is \$300 off.

Our website is jasper.co, J-A-S-P-R dot C-O. And the reason I love clean air is because it's the laziest and most passive way to be healthy. You don't have to go to the gym or journal or red light or sauna or all the other biohacking things or cold plunge. The, it's the laziest way to be healthy is by breathing cleaner air, especially when you sleep.

And, like, start with the passive stuff that doesn't require willpower. It is an investment, but once you buy your first Jaspr, you have a lifetime warranty as long as you're changing your filter twice a year. So you buy it once, it's 899, and then for the rest of your life, for a little over a dollar a day, we got you.

Consider yourself under Jaspr's air quality management. We got you covered, and we're always innovating our filters and upgrading, but any time that we are innovating our filter, the machine will stay the same. So our filters are constantly improving, so every time you get a new filter, you're constantly gonna be getting an X filter.

You'll see your next filter, we're actually moving to coconut carbon, which I'm super excited about. So yeah, to conclude, [wellnessmama](https://wellnessmama.com), jasper.co, J-A-S-P-R dot C-O, \$300 off for two weeks only. For whoever that resonates with, awesome. If not, I hope you learned something today.

Katie: Amazing. Mike, it's always such a pleasure.

I hope we get to do more follow-ups in the future because every time we talk, we find more things to talk about, and I know that there will be more and more things to cover in the future. But for today, thank you so much for your time, for the offer you're making for the audience, and for all the wisdom that you share with us and with so many others.

Mike: My pleasure.

Katie: And thank you for listening, and I hope you will join me again on the next episode of the Wellness Mama Podcast.