



1092: The Light Diet: 10 Rules for Using Sunshine & Darkness to Optimize Health (Solo Episode)

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

This episode is sponsored by BON CHARGE, and specifically one of my favorite things that they have, which is their PEMF mini mat. If you are new to PEMF, this stands for pulsed electromagnetic field, which is magnetic energy that's being sent into the body via this mat. And these energy waves are fascinating.

They work with your body's natural magnetic field to elevate your wellbeing in a multitude of ways. Similar effect that we would have from being in direct contact with the earth, which I also think is an amazing thing to do daily. I love PEMF mats to improve sleep, to ground me, to increase calmness.

I often say that sitting on one of these mats, I feel like a cat in the sunshine and just, like, so calm and cozy. Some of the reasons I personally like this particular mini mat, it is small enough to fit in any room, and it's easy to move from room to room. I also have a larger one, but that one is more difficult to move around.

There are different settings, so you can find what works best for you, and it's low EMF. Some of these are not. I feel like this is an important thing to pay attention to. Some easy ways that you can use a mini mat like this: it's great on an office chair or on a sofa or on the floor, wherever you are sitting and reading, meditating, working, et cetera.

I love to use it before bedtime or after a workout or I'm actually doing yoga teacher training. I'll often use it during restorative classes or when you need kind of like a creative boost or a brain reset. And like I said, I love how portable this one is. You can find out more about it and get a discount by using the code wellnessmama at wellnessmama.com/go/boncharge

This podcast is brought to you by Just Thrive. And you guys know I don't share products that I don't personally believe in and take, and Just Thrive Probiotic is one of my absolute go-to. I've been taking it consistently for years, and I have noticed a huge difference in digestion, energy, and really how I feel day to day.

It wasn't an overnight dramatic change, but it's one I notice when I don't have. And I really respect this company and the products they make and their values, so when I had a chance to negotiate something special for you guys, I jumped at the chance. And here is the very special offer that I was able to lock in that's not available anywhere else, which is if you buy a ninety-day supply of Just Thrive Probiotic, you get three full months of their digestive bitters completely free, and these are awesome.

I use them occasionally with meals. They help digestion. I notice a difference in my digestion with them. And this is a ninety-dollar value added at no cost just for being a

Wellness Mama listener. It's a tremendously good deal. You save a lot, and here's why I love this pair. The probiotic works by surviving the journey to your gut.

Most probiotics don't. They die before they get there. But their spore based formula is clinically proven to arrive a hundred percent alive, so it can actually do something, and the digestive bitters are the perfect complement. I take them before meals to help my body break down food more efficiently, and I notice that I don't have that sluggish feeling post meals, and they help your body's enzyme production.

So together, they cover the full picture of gut health, and ninety days is the sweet spot where a lot of people really say they start to see the difference really tangibly. So that's why I am encouraging you to try this for the full ninety days and made this offer where you are able to get both for ninety days.

Give it the time it needs. They back every order with their money back guarantee. There's genuinely no risk. And you can use this link to get this personalized deal that's not available on their main website, which is get.justthrivehealth.com/pages/wellnessmama. I know that's long. This will be linked in the show notes as well.

Katie: Hello, and welcome to the Wellness Mama podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and this hopefully short solo episode is going to dive deeper on a topic that I've talked about before and think is really, really pivotal for a lot of people, which is the topic of light and how I think this can actually trump nutrition, supplements, almost anything including potentially even sleep because it impacts sleep so strongly and how we can optimize this.

The great news is it's essentially free because it involves getting more natural light. Before we jump in, I wanna reiterate something important, which is that nothing I ever share is medical advice, health advice, or honestly even personal advice. I'm only sharing my own experience, my own research, things I've learned and ideas that I find interesting, and my goal is to offer information and inspiration, never comparison, pressure, or prescription.

You are and always will be your own primary healthcare provider, and I encourage you to be curious, to do your own research, to question everything, including and especially me. If something resonates, wonderful. If it doesn't, please leave it behind. My deepest hope is that these conversations help you connect with your own wisdom

All right, so today's topic, the topic of light as a nutrient. And I've done several podcasts on this. I will link to several of them in the show notes. I don't know if this one will have aired first or if, my interview with Peter Forehand has, but that one really dove into this topic and I found it fascinating.

I've also recorded with Rudy Nassif about light, and that was a multi-hour masterclass. But I'm gonna try to simplify it today because we talk a lot about food, about supplements, about macros, about minerals, and all of those things can be really important. But I would argue that the body's first and primary input is actually light, and for this reason, I think it makes it the most important.

Now, Peter Forehand explained and used the wonderful analogy that we actually need the right types of light to charge our bodies, just like a phone needs a charger to charge its battery. And if a phone is low on battery, you don't need to add more apps or give it supplements or any of those things. You need to simply charge it, and the same is true for humans.

The right light environment actually charges our cells in ways I'll talk about today, and when we don't get enough, we're essentially operating in low power mode, which is reflected in much of our language when people say, "Oh, I'm low energy," things like that. And so this is kind of a-- my, my take on how to charge yourself naturally and for free.

If you have tried everything but you have not been consistent with really dialing in your light environment, this might make all the difference. Light controls so much. It tells your hormones what time it is. It literally determines your metabolism, your mood, your sleep, your digestion, and your cellular energy. And I've talked about it a little, but last year I got to a chance to test this to the extreme when I spent four days in complete darkness and felt what it was like to have the complete removal of light and then the reintroduction of sunlight. Which when I saw the sun after four days, there was so much joy that it brought me to tears.

Because what my premise with this podcast and what I hope the takeaway will be is that the real nutrient you might be missing, the real diet that we need to pay attention to, might not be related to food. It might be related to natural light and natural darkness. The best part? This is free, low effort, and it pays dividends to your whole body. So here's why light matters more than we think.

Humans evolved outdoors under full spectrum sunlight, yet now we live indoors. Estimates are we spend about ninety-three percent of our time indoors under artificial light. And I mentioned Peter's battery analogy. For many of us, this means very simply, we are not charging ourselves. We're always operating in low battery mode, and the body does not get the same input from artificial light that it gets from full spectrum natural light.

And there is nuance about how much, what time of day, and I'm gonna share my take on that in a few minutes. But artificial light as a category typically has too much blue light. It

often flickers, which is stressful to the nervous system. It doesn't contain infrared. I've heard guests say that we essentially have an infrared light deficiency as a society.

It doesn't contain UV, which I think has gotten a lot of heat that it doesn't deserve. I think UV is actually really, beneficial. On a side note, many of the studies showing the harm of UV were done on pure UV light, which does not exist in nature. Even when the sun is at its peak, there is still more infrared light than UV, which mitigates the intensity of the UV.

And indoor light is constant and unstopped and at the wrong time often. So it's not that all artificial light is bad, it's that we're getting confusing cues. Natural light is dynamic. It changes by time of day, by season, by cloud cover, and our body is used to and evolved to handle those cues. Our circadian clocks interpret the changes in light as biological instructions, but most of us are skipping those instructions entirely.

When our light timing is wrong, our hormones, metabolism, sleep, and mood can feel the effects. I wanna just go through a short list of some of the things that natural light, sunlight is linked to. It is known to affect our circadian clock, especially outdoor morning light, which I've talked about a lot. It tells the brain when day begins, and it helps the beginning of the timing of our sleep-wake cycle.

Light supports better nighttime melatonin production because bright daytime light strengthens the contrast between day and night, helping the body produce melatonin at the appropriate time. Light improves our sleep quality and timing because adequate daytime light exposure is associated with proper sleep onset, more consolidated sleep, and healthier circadian rhythm. It supports cortisol patterns.

We hear a lot about cortisol right now on social media. Morning light is one of the biggest cues that we can send our cortisol rhythms. And I say this as someone who mine used to be reversed. It was low in the morning and high at night versus we wanna see it spike in the morning and decline throughout the day.

Light can boost daytime alertness and energy because light has direct alerting effects on the brain independent of sleep. It influences our mood, because brain systems involving serotonin and other neurotransmitters are impacted by our light environment. Light therapy is an established medical treatment for seasonal affective disorder.

However, like I said, in most places, obviously if you live, in certain geographic areas, this would be an exception, but in most places, the light that we need is available for free in our area. There is some evidence that getting the right amount of light may be linked to a reduced chance of depression because of the circadian benefit there.

We obviously know about vitamin D through UVB exposure, which I would argue is different and more important than oral vitamin D supplementation. Also, indirectly having optimal vitamin D levels supports our bones as well because it helps regulate calcium and phosphorus metabolism. Our immune system benefits from natural light because light helps synchronize our immune rhythms.

Immune cells and inflammatory signaling follow circadian patterns, so when we're not getting enough light, our immune system also feels the effects. Like I said, it supports metabolic health. Circadian timing affects things like glucose handling, insulin sensitivity, appetite, and energy expenditure. It also really impacts our mitochondria, which I've talked about before.

There's data that light exposure can improve post-meal glucose regulation, especially when our circadian rhythms are well-aligned. Our metabolism handles food differently during what it thinks is biological day versus biological night, and this is why I often recommend not eating after sunset. Light helps regulate hunger and satiety signals, including its effects on leptin and ghrelin.

It supports healthy body weight regulation through its effects on sleep, activity, appetite, and metabolic timing. It influences the thyroid. This was a big one for me, and why I think light exposure was a big part of my recovery. Because many hormones operate on circadian schedules, and they're usually coordinated by the light-dark cycle.

So getting more light impacted my thyroid numbers. It supports our reproductive hormones. The reproductive system communicates via circadian clocks as well. So even if we're not trying to conceive, this is important for optimal hormone function. It helps regulate body temperature, which is also involved in sleep and metabolic function.

It supports cardiovascular rhythms. Sunlight can release nitric, nitric oxide from the skin. UVA exposure in particular can mobilize nitric oxide related compounds, so there can be vascular benefits here. There is some link to blood pressure via that nitric oxide pathway as well. And I mentioned sunlight is mostly, red and near-infrared wavelengths, and these penetrate more deeply than UV or visible blue light.

There's an active area of research into mitochondria and tissue effects here. And one note that Peter gave was you can actually get light through silk or a natural fiber cloth, and you'll get the infrared benefits even if you want to avoid the UV. Light supports our mitochondrial timing, specifically cellular energy and metabolism which follow this rhythm.

It supports cognitive performance, synchronizes our peripheral clocks throughout the body, So the brain's master clock regulated by light also coordinates clocks in the liver, pancreas, muscle, adipose tissue, gut, and other organs. It supports learning and memory indirectly

through sleep. There's some studies looking at natural light protecting our eyes, especially children's eyes, from developing myopia.

This provides-- Natural light provides dramatically more light intensity than outdoor environments. And if you haven't tested this, there's an app called My Circadian that lets you see the intensity of light you're under. And even on a cloudy day versus a brightly lit room, there's still much more light intensity outside.

Morning light advances our circadian clock, whereas evening light, especially artificial light, can delay it, meaning when you get the light matters, not just how much, and I'm gonna talk about that today. Sunset and evening light provides a natural transition signal. That change in intensity of natural light signals the body to start preparing for sleep.

When we get enough natural light, artificial light is less disruptive, so even if we're gonna be indoors, getting little breaks of sunlight can help. And it helps regulate seasonal biology because as humans, we retain biological responses to the changing light environment even though our modern environments often obscure those signals.

Also, by getting natural light, we're also getting outside, which adds secondary benefits of distance vision, nature exposure, temperature variation, sometimes movement and social interaction as well. So without getting too sciency, I want to talk about the roles of different light frequencies. I've talked a lot about the importance of watching the sunrise whenever possible or at least getting morning sunlight before we are on screens.

And sunrise is particularly rich in red and infrared spectrums of light. And like I said, these influence our circadian rhythm. This triggers the morning cortisol rise naturally. It programs our melatonin for the coming night through the impact of serotonin, and begins melanin production. So there's some interesting data around when we get morning light exposure, we're less likely to burn later in the day because our body has been primed to get that kind of light.

Bright midday sun has the UV spectrums. These are needed, of course, as well known for vitamin D synthesis. I mentioned these also help with nitric oxide release, serotonin production, and very importantly, mitochondrial charge. We only essentially have as much energy as our mitochondria do, and sunlight is one of the easiest free ways to charge this.

I would say before you consider spending a lot of money on red light panels, experiment with natural sun exposure first. The sun is also an incredible source of infrared light, which provides all-day mitochondrial support, redox balance, which I've talked about in my mitochondrial episode, ATP efficiency, which is kind of the energy current of our body, skin and tissue repair.

I've heard anecdotally from quite a few of you who saw changes in things like eczema from optimizing light environment. And just a note here on infrared. Like I mentioned, Peter explained that infrared can penetrate through clothing or through an umbrella made of a natural fiber. So this is a great way if you don't want to get too much UV and you're trying to work up slowly, simply being under, some kind of natural fiber or wearing linen clothing, lightly colored clothing, you can still get the infrared, which is, in my mind, direct food for your cells.

Now, another key part of light exposure is actually the darkness. The hormonal pharmacy goes offline without true darkness. This true darkness signals melatonin production. It allows us to have our maximal cellular cleanup and repair during sleep. It allows things like autophagy and detoxification to happen.

So to oversimplify, this means getting natural light during the day, avoiding artificial light at night. So my bedroom is a complete cave. I have blackout curtains from UBlockout that cover the windows so no outside light gets in. I don't have any little blinking lights or you know, clocks or anything in my room that has light on it, and I make sure I'm sleeping in complete darkness.

So quickly I wanted to share the 10 kind of tenets of the Light Diet. If you wanted to optimize this, this is my opinion on kind of the 10 pillars that help you to do that. Number one, see the sunrise every day. I firmly believe this is one of our most powerful circadian habits. This tells your brain that it's morning, please make hormones accordingly.

It anchors our cortisol patterns, and it sets the clock for improved sleep 12 to 16 hours later. And even a couple of minutes, even two minutes makes a difference. Ideally, 10 to 15. bonus points if you're hydrating while you're getting morning light and you haven't looked at screens yet. Number two, eat your first meal after natural light hit your eyeballs.

You do not need to stare directly at the sun, but light first, food second. This prevents a cortisol blood sugar mismatch. It improves digestion and metabolic flexibility, and if you haven't done this regularly, you might be surprised how big of a difference it makes. My personal preference is to wake up, drink some mineral-rich water outside barefoot, getting light exposure in my eyes and on my skin if it's warm enough, and then wait a few minutes, and then eat a nutrient-rich, protein-dense, natural fat breakfast, within an hour or so of waking up.

And like I said, this is drastic what it can do for energy. This is probably the change that I've noticed the most effect in my usable energy from, and I think if you do nothing else, this one is huge. This was something I, really did when I was recovering from Hashimoto's, and it made a huge difference in my energy levels.

Like, noticeably different day to day if I did this versus if I didn't. Number three, get natural light exposure every two to three hours, even if it's just for a couple of minutes. This reminds your clocks that it's daytime. This can reduce stress and stabilize mood, and it can help maintain energy and alertness.

And if possible, have your kids do this with you. Even just, like, two to five minutes every hour or so will make such a difference in your energy levels and the intensity of light that you're getting in. Over the course of a day, this helps your cells really to kind of charge their battery like I talked about.

Number four, build a solar callus slowly. Now, I know melanin is a controversial topic. I personally am a huge fan. I hope that you'll listen to my episode with Peter where he explains how melanin does much more than create pigment on the skin. In fact, our highest density is in our brain, in an area that gets no sunlight. And why this is so important, important as a energy storage and light signaling molecule.

In a perfect world, we're getting early spring UV and infrared exposure through natural light and working up slowly. We're also getting midday UVB for the vitamin D and nitric oxide, and these will increase gradually if we start sun exposure in the spring. I hope it goes without saying we obviously don't wanna burn.

We wanna increase tolerance gradually. And the My Circadian app is a great tool for working up slowly. Number five, avoid artificial light, especially after sunset. Overhead LED creates an artificial noon and night which triggers cortisol, suppresses melatonin, increases hunger, and can really interfere with sleep.

So bottom-up lighting is more circadian-friendly. I've mentioned before my method for this is that overhead lights go off at sunset and lamps with just amber and red light bulbs go on, and I notice a difference in my sleep when, when this happens regularly.

So along with this number six, after sunset, mimic firelight. Think warm tones, low lighting at eye level or below, candles or lamps with no blue light bulbs, minimize screens and blue light, put a red light filter on your phone, use red or amber bulbs and screens, like I said, only with filters or blue blockers.

Number seven, sleep in complete darkness. Even teeny bits of light exposure suppress melatonin. So blackout curtains and no LEDs. I put black electrical tape over any lights or little alert lights. Aim for cave-like darkness because melatonin is related to mitochondrial repair. Number eight, get as much midday sun as possible in conjunction with your skin tolerance.

You don't wanna burn obviously. I work up slowly, but now I can get several hours without burning and without skin damage. This is the best time for vitamin D, for mitochondrial charge, for dopamine and serotonin boost if you've ever felt great after spending a little time in the sun, and also for nitric oxide, for blood pressure and vascular health.

Number nine, in conjunction with nighttime darkness, try to limit screens at night. Blue light affects our hunger signals, our insulin, and our mood. It can reduce melatonin for hours after exposure, and even dim blue light suppresses melatonin by 90% or more. So screens after sunset, think of them as metabolic jet lag.

And number 10, use darkness as a healing tool. Darkness isn't just the absence of light, it's a biological input. It lets us move into deep healing, deep detox, and deep repair. These only happen in darkness. So embrace this, especially in winter when we have more natural darkness. Circadian rhythm is a 24-hour cycle with varied amounts of light and darkness, and so often in the modern world, we live in constant daytime instead of getting those darkness signals.

And here's why these rules work. Light synchronizes the suprachiasmatic nucleus, which is our master clock. Food synchronizes our peripheral clocks. Misalignment between the two, like screens and snacks after dark, create inflammation, weight problems, fatigue, and anxiety. Light is kind of a master switch for our hormones, and our hormones determine our metabolism, our mood, and so much more.

So you can't out-supplement or out-diet a broken circadian rhythm, which is why I really think this free tool is worth trying and it might be the missing piece for a lot of people. So here's an example of what my light diet looks like in real life. When I wake up, I go outside in natural light, hydrate barefoot on the grass.

Breakfast happens after sunlight. I try to get breaks throughout the day for midday sun and movement, especially afternoon exposure. Try to dim the lights at sunset or at least one to two hours before bed. Don't use overhead LEDs or flickering bulbs in my house, and I don't sleep with electronics near my head or in my room.

I also like to sleep in a cold and dark room, which I've talked about before and I'll link to in the show notes. And then I do occasional circadian resets by trying to spend full days outdoors. Some tips to start. If you're a beginner, only like, make it a goal to see the sunrise. That's all. If you wanna add into that, dim your house lights after sunset and open windows just a crack during the day if possible.

Intermediate level, add in some midday sun breaks, even for just a couple of minutes. Try to reduce the artificial lighting and get more outside time instead. Maybe take a call or a meeting on your computer outside instead of inside, and use screen filters at night. And

then advanced, when you're ready to go all in, would be getting consistent solar callus building by getting that bright midday sun, adjusting your seasonal light exposure, sleep in full darkness, and try to reduce EMFs in the bedroom. So final thoughts.

Light is free, it's available, and I think it's absolutely foundational and one of the biggest levers we have. I really believe if we fix our light environment, the body can start working the way it was designed to. This is kind of the original diet that came even before food, and I think can be much more powerful, and it's in most cases available to everyone.

So I would love to hear your take and how much of this you are doing, and I am so grateful that you joined me today. I'm so grateful for your time and your energy and your attention, and that you shared it with me. It means the world that you spent time with me today. And if you found this episode helpful, the very best way that you can support this show is to leave an honest review wherever you listen to podcast, which helps other moms and families find and listen as well.

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