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Healthy Moms Podcast

BY **Wellness Mama**[®]
simple answers for healthier families

Episode 131: Sourcing Sustainable Food and
Healthy “Fast” Food with The Good Kitchen

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

Katie: Hello, and welcome to "The Healthy Moms Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and today is gonna be a really useful episode for anyone who has to cook every day, and especially for moms, because I am here with Amber and Melissa who run a company called The Good Kitchen. Melissa has been a nutrition nerd since high school. She studied nutrition in college and in her postgraduate studies, but she became disillusioned with mainstream nutrition education and went on a quest to find her own answers that made sense. Since then, she's become an advocate for eating sustainably sourced whole foods, and she adopted a Paleo lifestyle in 2009. So she was an early adopter. She's also a busy mom who admits that cooking isn't her thing, but feeding her family nourishing foods is, which is why she's committed to The Good Kitchen and its mission. While she's working her operational magic behind the scenes, she breaks for The Good Kitchen's corned beef and cabbage, which is her fave. And she likes helping moms find calm and peace by taking away the guilt that comes from having lack of time to cook healthy meals. Totally I have felt that guilt.

Amber is the visionary behind The Good Kitchen. She founded its preceding concept, modPALEO, and grew it into a small business that supports small farms, sustainability, and a community of good people and healthy living. Her passion for food grew out of her own personal journey to wellness where she discovered the transformative power of eating real food. Like me, she's a sucker for a farm visit, and she loves to discover new dishes that complement her healthy and active lifestyle. If it has pulled pork in it, she's eating it. And as a busy professional, she's all about staying well-fed during the day, so no more skipping lunch and falling flat at 4:00 p.m. So welcome, Amber and Melissa. Thanks for being here.

Amber: Thanks for having us, Katie.

Melissa: Hey, Katie.

Katie: So I always love to start with people's stories, because I think we can connect and learn from people more when we understand where they came from. So, to start, can you guys just share the background from...I've mentioned a little bit in your bios, but basically, like, how you got here and why you're interested in this?

Amber: Sure. So, Melissa, actually, it's all her fault that we're into this lifestyle. My husband and I met Melissa in Atlanta, gosh, probably 12, 13 years ago. And we were essentially couch potatoes, and really the only thing that we paid attention to with our food was where it was sourced. So I was starting to get into the whole concept of pasture-raised meats and grass-fed but hadn't really, like, gotten into a healthy lifestyle per se. And Melissa kept trying to con me into going to the gym, and we finally talked my husband into starting the boot camp together. And so, from there, we were hooked. We started working out, we started doing Zone diet, and then Paleo and CrossFit started happening. And Melissa talked us into doing Paleo over a weekend when we were on vacation with them. And so, from then, you know, we were hooked on this, you know, new healthy lifestyle, and we became fast friends through all the Paleo challenges, and all the workouts, and all that fun stuff. So that's the connection between Melissa and I. And she owned several CrossFit gyms in the Atlanta area, and we moved away from Atlanta.

And when we moved to Charlotte, we had started CrossFit, and Paleo hadn't really found its way to Charlotte as much as it was known in Atlanta. And so Carter and I, my husband, started running Paleo challenges through our gym here. And I would call Melissa, and we would talk about it. And through the Paleo challenges,

we realized that people would see really good results for the 30 days during the challenges. And then when they were kind of off the challenge, they would literally just fall off the train, because they didn't have time, they weren't a good cook, they didn't know how to source. And so we saw a niche within the CrossFit gym to start doing prepared meals for people that didn't have time to do it themselves, so that's really the start of modPALEO. And then I talked to Melissa into moving to Charlotte, and I'll let her take the story from there.

Melissa: Yeah, I actually was Amber's first out-of-state client. Just like everybody else, you know, eating this way is very labor-intensive, and I was a busy, busy business owner and just needed some support in the food arena. And so I asked Amber to ship across state lines, which I'm not exactly sure it was legal at the time. And, yeah, it really changed my life, honestly, because it allowed me to eat the way that I wanted to eat and continue to talk about the way I wanted to eat to my clients and explain how the Paleo diet at the time that was the template that we were following worked. And, yeah, just kind of went from there.

And, in 2015, I believe was, I decided, yes, Amber, and there's a theme that Amber and I tend to have in our lives. We tend to make really major decisions over bottles of wine. I decided over a couple of bottles of wine to move to Charlotte and was trying to get a business going here, and it kind of wasn't working. And Amber and I, always, we've been talking shop as just female business owners for several years now and just kind of supporting each other better, because it's... Actually, you know, Katie, when you have your business, you're kind of on an island by yourself sometimes, and it helps to have support. And so just in talking shop, we kind of kept skirting around the issue of joining forces. And, again, the universe conspired to have us drink a couple more bottles of wine, and we decided to make the huge business decision to go into business together. So, with that decision, we decided that we wanted to change the name from modPALEO into The Good Kitchen so that it would allow a larger footprint of people to enjoy it. And it's been a great decision, and we've really been able to bring, you know, folks who might be a little bit afraid of the word Paleo kind of into the fold of, you know, "good, clean eating." And so, yeah, we're really excited we've been The Good kitchen for just a little over a year now, and, yeah, we're very excited.

Katie: I love it. It's so awesome to have clean options out there. And I wanna go a little bit deeper about that before we move on and kind of define terms, because I know, like, I've had my own personal experiences and successes as a result of changing diet and lifestyle, and I'm guessing you guys have, too. We're gonna get personal for a minute. But I'm curious, like, what were the factors, were there things in your life that, like, really, like, drove you into this? I know you mentioned a little bit in your story. And what do you call clean eating? Like, kind of define what that term means for everyone listening.

Melissa: You know, I owned the gyms, and I had gone to school for nutrition, undergrad and grad, and, you know, I went to school back in the old days, during the time where we were following the pyramid still, and just was having horrible results with that. And so I was able to out exercise my diet for a time. And, you know, CrossFit brought in some nutrition. I was resistant to a whole lot of it, just because I really felt passionately that it had to be a lifestyle change. You couldn't just go on a diet and then see some kind of dramatic change. But clients in the gym were really pushing me to learn about Paleo.

So I agreed, and I went to a Robb Wolf seminar, and, you know, it just made so much sense to me. And so I tried it starting the next day, and I just had such dramatic results that I just went crazy with it. And, you know, we started doing Paleo challenges, and it just ended up being a very, very powerful thing. And, in the gym we started...you know, in their 30s who were already on, you know, different types of diabetic medication and high blood pressure medication being able to come completely off of things like that. That was so powerful to

see that I'd never seen food act that powerfully before, and it was always so funny, because clients couldn't believe. They were like, "Well, it can't be that simple. It can't be, I just, you know, take a little bit of bread out of my diet and then therefore I have these crazy changes," and they just couldn't believe the changes that they saw. So that motivated me more in this field and continue to kind of bang the drum about healthy food.

And then, you know, as I said, Amber and I would always talk, and her passion was, you know, fully completing the meals. And then what she really got passionate about was the sourcing. And, you know, when we first start Paleo, the big thing is just making the change a thing. You know, we don't care where the meat comes from. We don't care where the produce comes from. Just get it in your body, and, you know, take out a few of the things that are problematic. But then as you start to refine, it's really important to start worrying about, you know, what you eat eats. You want to start worrying about that a little bit. And that's where Amber just kind of took the ball and really rolled with it.

And it's really interesting, because I was telling her the other day, like, she and Carter are really instrumental in changing the availability of grass-fed beef, I mean, honestly, in the state of North Carolina, because it just was absolutely not available. And Amber would drive around in her little mini, and go to all these different farms, and grab the grass-fed beef from the farmers who were awesome enough to make it for her at the time. And, yeah, it's awesome to see the change. But yes, that's kind of my personal story and just why I'm so passionate about it, because it did make such a tremendous change in my life and those around me.

Amber: And I would say, too, you know, speaking from the client perspective at a gym, I mean, we were, you know, two of the people that saw the significant health changes. I have had crazy digestive issues and never attributed it to food, oddly enough. I had been to a ton of different doctors, and everybody was like, "Oh, you have an ulcer," or "You have IBS," or "You just have heartburn, so take this." And I can't remember a time, you know, before age 30 where I didn't have heartburn, and it was the really bad kind that just would set my chest on fire. And my husband was on high blood pressure medication at 32 years old. And so when we started doing CrossFit, we started to see some improvement.

But it wasn't really until we started doing the Paleo diet that within, like, 14 days, I think, I didn't have heartburn for the first time in my life. And so, like Melissa was saying, making that lifestyle change versus the diet change when you're talking about, you know, clean food, I think, it's, you know, really important to do an elimination type diet for a certain amount of time to see what are the things that cause some of the ailments that you're having. You know, for me, it's gluten and soy, but for somebody else, it may be different. So when we talk about eating clean and the different approach with Paleo versus keto versus, you know, just cleaning up your diet, it really is talking about eliminating some things that you consume on a regular basis to see what your reaction is to that.

Katie: Yeah, that's a great point. Like, to back to your earlier point, I'm a big fan of also making big life decisions with a glass of wine. I'm also a fellow supporter of really good sourcing, and one thing I love about yours, we'll touch on it more in a few minutes, is the abundance of vegetables. Because there is very solid research on needing a wide variety and a lot of vegetable fiber, not just fiber, but vegetable fiber from non-starchy vegetables and starchy vegetables. So I love that you guys include that. But I wanna go deeper on sourcing, because I think that's an easy trap to fall into, is to think, like, you know, store-bought chicken is totally the same as pastured chicken, or beef and grass-fed beef are kind of the same thing. I've seen the data to know that it's not, but I'd love for you guys to talk about why sourcing is so important to you and the things that you're looking for when you're sourcing food.

Amber: Sure. For me, it was really an ethical thing. I like to refer to myself as a recovering vegetarian. I was a vegetarian for a very long time growing up, probably from eighth grade through college, but I would get to a point where my body would crave red meat, like, I would need that kind of protein. And the source that I got it from was not great, but I was actually listening to my body. You know, like, from a young age, I really would listen to my body about needing that kind of protein. But, in my adulthood, I realized that, for my health, I really did need to start consuming protein again in the meat form. And so I just really decided that if I was going to do that then I wanted to know where the meat was coming from, that I wanted to be responsible in consuming meat, and, you know, I don't live in an area where I can regularly hunt or anything like that. I didn't grow up in a family of hunters. So my version of knowing where my meat comes from is to go to farmers' markets, and know the farmers, and go and visit the farms, and understand the process that my food was going through before it gets to me.

And so, with starting the company, I wanted to really focus on that, because, like Melissa alluded to earlier, back in the day of early Paleo, which kind of sounds funny to say, but, like, when Paleo came back, but when people really started talking about this, you know, 10, 15 years ago, it was just about the protein, carbs, and fat. And I really think that the conversation needs to go a step further, you know. We're changing the way that people think about food, not just from what you're consuming, but also what is happening with your environment as you're consuming the food as well. And so it takes the whole sustainability conversation just that, like, one step further and really in my mind kind of completes that loop when you're talking about, you know, working with farms that are also regenerating their land, and their water, and the soil, and the air quality with the raising of hoofed animals. You know, and we can go down a whole rabbit hole with that. But what was important to me was the animal welfare piece of it, the sustainability piece of it, and that I was consuming protein in an ethical way.

Melissa: I think it's awesome, because we like to source some farmers who pasture their animals in a way that the land, the air, the water quality is actually better for having the animals on it as opposed to a lot of louder media is kind of touting that cows are the ruining the world or something with all their methane gas or whatnot. I mean, amber and I visit these farms. White Oak Pastures is one of our favorites, and Will Harris has led the charge with just land regeneration, and it's... We enjoyed ourselves thoroughly there. It was fascinating to see the way that they treat the cows. The chickens are out actually in open fields, the way that you expect a free-range chicken or a cage-free chicken to be out there pecking grubs, not eating grain. It's amazing. It's amazing to see.

And we're really, really proud to be a part of that, and that's really where we put our flag in the ground. And we don't waver from that, because we feel like the quality of the protein is so important, because when you're eating a healthy animal and you're ingesting a healthy animal into your body versus a potentially sick animal. Just talking quickly about chicken, conventionally raised chickens, the way that they're raised, they can't even support themselves on their own legs once they're fully grown or even not even fully grown. But, just for example, the chickens, when we saw them out at White Oak Pastures, they were running around, and chasing each other, and running away from eagles that are trying to eat them. It's a really amazing system to see. They really do have their own little, like, city and system there at that farm. And we love getting to know our farmers and their families, and they've been wonderful and lovely to invite us into their homes. So that piece of it is probably important to us as well.

Katie: That's so awesome. And you touched on something that I do want to go deeper on, because I think it's

super important, which is there's the misconception, or you see a lot, it's pretty widespread online, that any kind of animal products are absolutely horrible for the environment, and vegetables are healthy, and that vegetarians are saving the planet. And I think there are many, like, positives that can be taken from vegetarians, and I'm not here to bash them at all, but I would love if you guys could go a little bit deeper into that. Because I know from my research on permaculture, for instance, that there is a system that does both. So I'd love for you to talk about that.

Amber: Yeah, and anytime that you have a monoculture system, I mean, you don't have the variety to maintain a healthy environment, whether you're talking about soil, water, air, the animal, the plants, I mean, you grow the same thing in a field over and over again, eventually it's going to rob the soil of the nutrients that it needs to be a healthy plant. And so just like we're talking about the healthy animals in a permaculture situation, where you've got the cows that, you know, stomp on the soil, and they poop on it, and then the chickens come behind them, and the chickens, like, peck around in the dirt, and they get the poop down in the soil, so then you've got good healthy soil again. And then you can introduce other types of hooved animals, you know, to help regenerate the quality of the soil, and you don't get that when you have a monoculture or vegetable farm, you know. And when you have these animals in the same environment that you're growing the vegetables, then you do have that loop of improving the nutrition, and, you know, the nutrients that are taken away from the soil, from the vegetables can be regenerated by the animals.

And so, you know, to go back to our visit with...you know, we've been down at White Oak several times, and it's always amazing to ride around with Will Harris, because he shows you the difference where animals have been grazed and then the land where the animals have not been grazed, and it's like night and day. I mean, you can see the health of the land on where the animals have been grazed and where they haven't, the color of the grass, the color of the soil, the water runoff, you know. We have so many issues with erosion that can actually be solved by grazing animals. And so, that was a big wake-up call to me even more than kind of what I had known or, you know, had gone to other farm visits, was really seeing a true permaculture farm and then seeing one that wasn't right beside it. And Will calls it the Southern Trifecta where they just grow corn, soy, and cotton. That's the Southern Trifecta. And to see the land where those crops are just grown over and over again, I mean, they've got to have herbicides, and they've got to have pesticides, and they have to have, like, chemical fertilizers.

And so then, I mean, that's a whole other issue. So, you know, just seeing how beneficial it is on the land was really a game changer, and it was pretty late in the game. I mean, we just started working primarily with White Oak about two years ago, and so it's been a really, really good education for us. It's like we knew we were doing the right thing, we were super excited about it, and we wanted grass-fed beef, but that was kind of, like, the end-all be-all. When we went down there, we were like, "Oh my God. This is amazing." And we're super excited to support him.

Katie: Yeah, I'll echo that. Because we used to live in an area with industrial farming as well. And where we were, it was corn, wheat, and soybeans, and they would either grow in a given year, I think wheat and soybeans would be grown in the same year, and then corn was on its own, but they grew every year. And they sprayed so much on it that when it wasn't growing season in the winter, like, nothing grew there, not weeds, nothing. It was a complete wasteland. Like, I wish I had actually tested the soil. There were no nutrients in that soil at all. And when you're looking at statistics, like, 40% of kids have some kind of food allergy, and a third of kids have autism, or eczema, or asthma. Like, we have to be looking at, like, where is it coming from. What do all kids have in common? They all eat. Maybe we should look there.

Melissa: Could it possibly be food? No one ever believed it.

Amber: No, that would be too easy..

Katie: Right. I feel like that's the gap. I hope that conventional medicine is going to catch up. But, like you said, with digestive problems, like, to me, that would be the one where you start thinking about, like, "Oh, maybe it's food." So there's some catching up to do there, for sure. And I wanna talk a little bit more in depth about Good Kitchen and the types of meals you guys make and how they're balanced, because I've always heard it kind of jokingly said that there's not healthy fast food, and also that, if you want, you can have fast, easy, or healthy, and you can pick at most two. And you guys kind of, like, throw that on its head. So I'd love to hear you just delve into more about, like, how you determine the meals and the kind of meals you have. Because, for our family, it's been a healthy fast food. I can get farm-to-table on the table in, like, under 10 minutes, which is awesome.

Amber: Well, and so that was the whole reason behind starting the business, is we started seeing that people would not stick with this lifestyle change unless they had something, like you said, that was healthy and quick. And, there's not a lot of options out there for healthy and quick. And when you're not prepared, then you tend to...you know, I always tell people, you go to Five Guys, and you get burgers and fries. And so really seeing that niche, that there was a service missing there. And so when we started, you know, we were primarily on the Paleo template, and I have been eating that way for a long time. And so our meals were protein and carb, and we would say, you know, just add fat. And, as we've evolved into The Good Kitchen, we've wanted to open it up to...you know, we have a lot of customers that they would take our meals and they would put them over rice. And it's like, okay, well, you know, that's fine if that's what you do. And I eat rice, but let's talk about the source of the rice. And so we started using Anson Mills products, and it's a heirloom grain company out of South Carolina. They offer four different types of gluten-free grain, and one of them is Carolina Gold rice. And so for those people that are incorporating rice into their diet, we're like, "Hey, let's give them a well-sourced rice."

And so we're always evolving in this lifestyle of, you know, not just looking so strictly at the different types of templates and diets that are out there, but giving people the options. So, you know, you can go on there, and you can look at the Paleo options, and you can look at the keto options, and we have vegetarian options, too. Let's not leave the vegetables out of the equation. They're super important and the variety of them, you know, really eating on the rainbow when you're talking about your vegetables. And because that's so important, you're gonna get so many different nutrients from the different array of vegetables to incorporate into a meal. And so we really try to have, like, a super diverse set of menu options. We change our menu every week, because, you know, people can also get bored eating this way and, really, eating any way. You know, if you ate the same thing over and over again, eventually you're like, "Oh my gosh. I just can't eat that anymore." And so we try to keep, you know, the variety up so that people really stick with it and they don't get burnt out on the template, so to speak, of a clean diet.

Melissa: When we plan our meals, we do kind of a seasonal template. So, you know, you're not gonna get watermelon in the dead of winter. I'm trying to think of other things. We try to source what is actually available and not having to be, you know, crazily produced or things like that.

Amber: Yeah, sent from God knows where. But, you know, one of the things, too, and we'll get this a lot, and

it's actually coming up on that time of year when we start getting customers talking about, like, "Oh my gosh, can you please, like, give us a piece of broccoli?" or something like that.

Yeah. And it's like, yes, yes, yes, but, you know, we really do try to stay within that template of eating seasonally, you know. And sometimes eating seasonally means that in the winter you're eating a lot of greens and you're eating a lot of root vegetables. And then once we explain it, they're like, "All right. Fine. I'll wait until the spring to have my broccoli."

Melissa: But we have been able to add some more variety with our...we've been able to add fish in the last few months. So that has been wonderful to give folks a little bit of a lighter feel to what we do.

Amber: Yeah. And, you know, one of the other things to mention, too, is the way the meals are packaged. We use a process called Cryovac or vacuum seal, and so we actually are able to get a longer shelf life on fresh food without using any kind of preservative. And so when you look at the ingredient list, you know, that's really important to point out. Because when you're talking about packaged food, a lot of people are like, "Ugh, it's packaged food, you know. We can't have that." But it really matters, like, what is in that ingredient list, you know. I'm a crazy train label reader, and when I'm picking up a product that I get super excited about, I'm like, "All right, let's look at it." And so I'm reading the label, and I'm like, "Ugh, there's a lot of stuff in here that I don't want." And so on the front of the package, it looks amazing, but then when you turn it over and you actually read the label, it's like, "Oh, man, there's so many preservatives in here, because it's, you know, to make it shelf-stable." And so our packaging method actually enables us to get a 14-day shelf life on fresh food without having to put any kind of preservative or anything in the food.

Katie: That's awesome. And one trick I've been doing to stretch them, because at first I was like, "Man, this would be like pretty pricey if I was trying to, like, get one meal for every member of our family of eight." But I find really it only takes like two to three of the actual meals, and then I just spread them out and add a few fresh veggies, and we're good to go, or we've been making a lot of soups, because it's winter, and we're all craving soups. So I just put it as is in a soup, and it's amazing. Like, I have yet to have one that doesn't taste good in the soup. So...

Melissa: Oh, nice. That's a really good idea. I might have heard that one before. We will take some of the things and add eggs to them and make, like, a breakfast scramble, and that stretches that, you know, one meal will go to five, I think, that way. But I love that idea for soup. I had not thought of that. Thank you, Katie.

Katie: You're welcome. Just stretching the food at our house all the time. But, yeah, like I said, I loved that it's a fast option. I also love that you can customize it, because I know there's people listening with food allergies, or who don't eat a certain type of protein, or can't have mammal meat, that kind of thing. That's another point I wanted to make, is you can go in and customize each week what you wanna get or not get.

Amber: Yeah, and, you know, our menu, we have anywhere from 18 to 26 options every week, anywhere from you can do Paleo, you can do keto, you can do vegetarian. We have wings that are available every week. So if you just wanted to do, like, wings, and then you wanted to make a salad at home, you know, there's a really good way to mix it up. And then also, like you said, if you've got some kind of food allergy or something that you're trying to stay away from, then that makes it really easy. All the ingredients are in the menu selection area.

Melissa: And I would really like to plug our wings. They are delicious.

Amber: Melissa is obsessed with the wings.

Melissa: I am obsessed with the wings, because I love wings. And when you start eating, you know, in a certain way, you're not really allowed to have them, but you try not to have them, because they're fried and deep fried in peanut oil or whatever there is out there. And, I mean, this way, I know exactly they're coming from White Oak Pastures. They're beautiful chicken wings. They're doused in amazing sauce, and I get to eat them. On Super Bowl Sunday. I'm very excited.

Katie: I have fed our whole neighborhood, like, all the kids in the neighborhood, some wings a couple times.

Melissa: That's awesome.

Katie: I wanna switch gears a little bit, though, because I'm gonna put a question that I get asked all the time. I'm gonna, like, take the easy way out and put it on you guys. I know you're both female entrepreneurs as well. And I get asked all the time, like, "How do you balance it all? How do you, deal with the business? How do you provide for your family? How do you put food on the table, all these things every day? Like, how do you find balance?" So I'm gonna cheat and put that question on you guys.

Amber: That's really funny. And I'm gonna cheat and make Melissa answer it.

Melissa: That's fine. So, from the food standpoint, you know, it's funny. I own this company, and I forget that I own this company every once in a while. I'll come home, and I'm all frazzled. I've been working, you know, too many hours, and the kids are home, and everyone's starting to ask me what's for dinner, which is literally the most annoying question on the planet to me, ever. And it's funny, also. And I'll think, "Oh my gosh, I have the meals in the refrigerator that I can pull out, or in the freezer," and I pull them out, and I knock that out. And we'll do, like, a little smorgasbord or, like you were saying, Katie, kind of make it stretch over by adding some other things to it. So that's one way that I balance it. The rest of it is magic.

But, you know, it's funny. Amber and I have been talking lately about, you know, just as entrepreneurs, what has been, you know, a couple of the most helpful things for us over the years. And what we've both been realizing lately is just, like I was saying before, when you're an entrepreneur, you're sort of on an island, and nobody really gets, you know, some of the things that you go through except for other entrepreneurs. And we've been really, really lucky here in Charlotte. We have an amazing group of entrepreneurs, male and female, and we're part of some of some networking groups that are incredibly helpful. You know, business is business, and we all go through similar things, whether it's employee issues, or, you know, sourcing issues, operational issues, and things like that. So that has been one of our biggest helps here from a business standpoint. And the rest of the balancing, I don't know. How do I do it, Amber? How do you do it?

Amber: I would say...

Melissa: Sticks, and glue, and tape.

Amber: Yeah, sticks, and glue, and tape. No, having a sense of humor.

Melissa: There you go.

Amber: I mean, we were actually talking about this yesterday, being able to make fun of ourselves and not take ourselves too seriously, and really not playing into the whole guilt and shame of being wonder woman and doing everything perfectly, and giving yourself a little bit of space and grace. And that, I think, is really, really important, and that's been something, I think, for both of us, has been really tough. Because we like for things to be perfect, and we have a certain thought process about how that perfection should happen. And so the universe has kindly shown us that sometimes it's not the way that you think things are going to work out, but there's a reason behind that. So I think, you know, the humor piece of it is huge, and not having to take yourself so seriously, and knowing when you have to walk away for a second, you know. You know, having that that self-care awareness, that you can't be on burning the candle at both ends, and you do have to take care of yourself first. And, you know, to use an airplane analogy, it's like you've got to put on your oxygen mask before you can put it on anybody else. And so, again, that's been a lesson that I think we've had to learn over the past year or two, is if we're not taking care of ourselves and we're not healthy, then we can't really help anybody else.

Melissa: Yeah, I learned a lesson at an early age or in my 30s that it is... My body basically, you know, just said, "Screw you," you know, "I'm not going to do any more." Because I'm one of those people. I think we all are. We'll just keep loading stuff on to look at, you know, "I can do it. I can do it. I can do it." And one day my body was like, "Your brain may say you can do it, but I'm not doing it anymore." And, you know, as much as I was mad about that, now I'm incredibly grateful, because I realize how important it is to, like Amber was saying, put the oxygen on yourself so that you can take care of yourself first and then others. And I think, as moms, as wives, as women, that's just such an important lesson to learn. And, unfortunately, so many of us don't learn it until it's, you know, way later in life or too late. You can eat healthfully. Is that a word? You can eat very healthy. But if you're living in a state of constant stress, you're never gonna be happy, I guess, is one of the words. Your health is not gonna be where it wants to be. You're not gonna have the relationships that you wanna have with other people, because you're living in constant, you know, stress.

Amber: That's right, yeah.

Melissa: Exactly.

Amber: And when we live there, it's just, you know, there's no amount of healthy food and exercise that can counteract living in fight-or-flight 24/7. You know, our society has put those parameters, I think, around us that it's, you know, 100% all the time, and so we don't have any of that downtime. But I think more and more people are becoming aware of that, and so you're starting to hear people talk about mindfulness, and meditation, and taking that time out, not being in fight-or-flight all the time.

Melissa: It's so funny. Just coming from the gym business, people think exercise will fix everything, and it's funny. My analogy has always been, like, you have a bruise, and you're literally hitting the bruise again when you are in such a state of stress, and then you add exercise to it. It's just not a good idea. You know, especially as Americans, we think, you know, more is better, and that's just not the case. Again, that was a lesson learned, you know, in time, I think, for both of us, so...

Katie: Yeah, such an important point. And I think you're right, that for women, especially, that self-care is sometimes the hardest aspect of health to tackle especially without feeling guilty. So I love that you guys

talked about that. And another thing you mentioned in passing, I think, is also super important to highlight, which is the importance of community. Because it sounds like you guys really have that where you are, and we've now found this where we are as well. And if you look at the literature in the statistics, it really is amazing having, like, solid relationships that support you and friendships. That is actually one of the biggest ranking factors in longevity and health span, which is not just how long you live, but how long you live functionally, and happily, and cognitively. So talk about that. Like, just, if you don't mind, share a little bit about the community aspect of your life and how you've seen benefit from that.

Amber: Well, I think, you know, the community aspect kind of started within the CrossFit community, you know. We, my husband and I, Carter, lived in Atlanta, and then we moved to Birmingham, and then we moved to Charlotte. And then, you know, in all three of those cities, we were involved in the CrossFit community, and it really was helpful in, you know, people that were like-minded. They like to be active. They like to eat a certain way. And that's really where a lot of our lifelong friends are now. And now, you know, I would say, we're not really in the CrossFit community any longer, but we're in, you know, more of the talking about eating healthfully, to use Melissa's new word. And, you know, so we're in a different community that's talking about regenerative agriculture, and sustainability, and eating pasture-raised meats, and so then we find community there.

And then, in a business community, we have a great startup and entrepreneurial community here in Charlotte. So we've been able to... I'm part of a business group that meets once a month, and we go, and we spend a day together, and it's really my day to be around other CEOs that, you know, have a ton more experience than I do. But it's funny, because there's people that are running, you know, \$40-million chemical companies, and here I am with my little sustainable company, you know, coveted, and we have the same issues and, you know, are really fighting the same fights when you're talking about business. And so that's been really important, too, to have those relationships so that you can discuss, you know, just different issues that you may have.

And then also, just with Melissa and I, I mean, before she joined the company, you know, it was literally Carter and I just kind of, like, doing everything that we could to, you know, start this business and keep it going. And then it was, you know, a breath of fresh air to have somebody that hadn't been in the business, they had new eyes on it, and there's a personal connection there, too. So it's like I know that she has my back and I have her back, and at the same time, we can also have really honest conversations about, you know, business and life and that sort of thing and really have somebody else there to hold accountable as you're kind of walking. So the community thing has been super huge for us. And, you know, just having the ability to have people to call when you're, like, I literally... And we've been so fortunate to have amazing people surrounding us that we can call for different situations that we've gotten ourselves into and that sort of thing.

Katie: Yeah, 100% agree with what you just said. And I think the key, too, is in this world, because for so long, for most of history, community was built in. You were born into it. You had people around you. You had family around you. And now we have to really make an effort for it. And so, like, currently, my four best friends live in four different states, actually one lives in a different country, but we make an effort to get together at least twice a year with our families and have that community, and then we keep in touch in between. And I have a local community now, too, but, like in today's world, we can't just assume it's gonna happen. We have to be proactive and build the community. And I also think that alone will really go toward healing the culture and helping people make sustainable life changes because of that factor of having the support, like you guys just mentioned.

Amber: Definitely.

Melissa: Absolutely. Couldn't agree more.

Katie: Awesome. Well, actually, where I live, it's getting really close to dinnertime, and I'm about to go make some of your food. And I don't want to take your time too long either. But before we wrap up, I would love for you guys to tell people there will be links in the show notes, but just give them, like, a rundown one more time of what you guys have available and the options. We didn't really mention the kids' food for lunches. I'd love if you would highlight that. And all the links will be in the show notes at wellnessmama.fm. If you guys are on the road or not by computer, you can find those later there.

Amber: Awesome. Yeah, so, to order, you just go to thegoodkitchen.com. And you can also find us on social media. Our handle is @eatTGK. And, yes, our line of kids' meals. So think healthy, lunchable, and we're using grass-fed, pasture-raised proteins, well-sourced dairy, and yummy little vegetables and cookies, and stuff like that, but all made from scratch and done without any yucky ingredients. And we've made them fun for the kiddos so that they, you know, don't get grumpy about what's in the little trays.

Melissa: Low sugar, and then Amber added some dad jokes on the inside of the band so that the kids can read them.

Amber: Because everybody loves a dad joke.

Melissa: Everybody, not me. It's just Amber.

Katie: I love it. Well, thank you, guys, so much for the work you're doing in advancing sustainable food and getting healthy food in the hands of so many. And thank you for your time and being here today. I really appreciate it.

Amber: Awesome.

Melissa: Thank you, Katie. Thanks for all of you do as well.

Amber: Thanks, Katie.

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

If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.