

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

Healthy Moms Podcast

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

Episode 155: Thriving With Food Allergies or Intolerance and Crushing Life With the Paleo Chef

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

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Katie: Hello and welcome to The Healthy Moms Podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com. And today I'm here with a personal friend and someone who I really admire and love. Mary Shenouda is a highly sought-after private chef to A-list actors, professional athletes and high-octane entrepreneurs. She burst on the scene in 2013 and under the nom de cuisine The Paleo Chef after leaving a successful career in the startup world to pursue her passion for the transformative power of clean eating, a passion marked by her own transformational experience that we're gonna talk about. A long time suffer of undiagnosed food allergies, she took her health into her own hands like many of us have and discovered after much experimentation that a paleo-centric diet was her key to solving all of her issues.

Her focus on clean eating has found a worldwide audience in its few short years and has led to the creation of a fine dining menu consultancy, a performance food line called Phat Fudge that sells out as soon as she can make it. And her work has been featured all over the world and the internet, including in Food & Wine, Glamour, The Joe Rogan Experience and many more. Her motto is simple, "Eat clean, play often and crush life," and she lives it perfectly. So welcome, Mary, and thanks for being here.

Mary: Thanks for having me. I admire and love you too.

Katie: It's gonna be so fun. I feel like everybody just gets to listen when I chat with friends because we're real-life friends.

Mary: Yes.

Katie: I know I've heard your story and it's an amazing story, but I'd love if you could start there at the beginning, so to speak, because a lot of listeners are facing or have faced health challenges, and I think they'll really be able to relate to you and benefit from your story.

Mary: Yeah. So for me it started as a kid, so you don't really know what's going on in hindsight is 20/20, but I started to get really bad migraines when I was in second grade and they were almost weekly, and you'd go to school and you'd be in a lot of pain. And unfortunately, the nurse, if you don't have a fever, they'd think you're sort of making up the pain. So as a kid I always felt a little bit betrayed. Luckily, my mom always believed me with my headaches because she also had migraines. But they would get so bad that there would be like projectile vomits. So I just sort of dealt with having migraines as a kid. And when I would go to the doctor, they wouldn't really have an answer for my mom and essentially tell me that I must be making it up in some way or causing the headaches to some sort of stress. And I had a pretty chill childhood, so I never really bought into that.

And over time, the migraines then went over to also having skin issues really bad, something called dermatographia where you scratch onto your skin, it raises up, and then moving into having really awful hormone issues and having... always felt like heaviness behind my eyes. And then into my 20's, weight fluctuations and having doctors want to test you and try to diagnose you with lupus, with cancer, with mercury toxicity, with basically throwing darts and never really looking towards the gut. And it wasn't until I came upon the TED Talk by Dr. Terry Wahls about "Minding Your Mitochondria" that it all started to make sense. And at that same time, I was sending out my own lab work for auto-immune testing for gluten intolerance. And I'd already received a blood test for that when I was in one of my hundreds of doctor appointments, and those all came back negative. Then I had learned that blood tests for that at the time could be 60% or up to 60% inclusive.

So I was doing a stool test that unfortunately wasn't covered by insurance at the time. It was pretty expensive but worth it. And I was expecting a gluten intolerance because I had already started to remove that from my diet after I learned what I did in that TED Talk. I started to feel better, but it came back and said that I was actually full-blown Celiac, but then also intolerant to casein and soy. So for me, that was the greatest day of my life because I had answers and from then on never really looked back. And that's a short story.

Katie: It's amazing, and I know that you live the life. And I can only imagine though because I had food allergies as well but never to the degree that you have. You said that's the greatest day of your life, but was there also like a sense of loss at all that day, like finding out you would never eat those foods again, or were you able to just make that mental shift?

Mary: Yeah, I get asked that question a lot. I've definitely had some friends around the same time come back with their own diagnosis, and their response was the totally different than mine and I unfortunately just couldn't understand that. I was pumped. For me, anything is better than feeling like crap every day because I don't know to what extent they were uncomfortable. Like I dropped out of high school, I went to corporate America, I was 15 years younger than everyone else, and not only did I have to perform as great as my colleagues, but I had to perform better because I had to really prove myself. Like never mind being a person of color and being a woman and having those things, just numbers-wise, I had to out-perform them to earn my

seat at the table. And I was doing that in constant pain.

I was an athlete in high school and like I would have migraines before basketball games and I would be sitting sideline with a thing wrapped around my head to get temporary relief sideline and then tell my coach, "I am ready to go in," go in for a few minutes and then look at her and she'd pull me out because she knows my migraines got bad. So for me to not deal with any of that anymore and then finally understand what it's like to physically feel good when you've spent your whole life having to convince yourself to show up and feel good, that to me, that was great.

Katie: Yeah, that makes sense. And I can only imagine. So how did you... Like on a practical level, how did you make this shift? Because that is a big... For most people, at least that's a huge change overnight. So did you research it? I know that that's become a passion of yours too and you share a lot of really helpful resources on your website, but how did you kind of make the transition like on a day-to-day practical basis?

Mary: Ironically, it was just going back to eating the way that my mom cooked for me. So if you look at why second grade was the time in which I started to get migraines, it's the time in which I would feel self-conscious about the Mediterranean food my mom would make me because I went to an American school and they didn't really understand falafels and fowl. And I would take a dollar and start eating school lunches, and that was pizzas, that was brownies, that was potato chips, and who knows what were in all those things. So I was just reverting back to eating a primarily Mediterranean-influenced diet, cooking it for myself, obviously, and then just finding substitutions which Google is really great for that, and then a lot of playing in the kitchen. So it wasn't... I don't know. Maybe I don't have the same relationship with food or maybe my eating wasn't so far off. I mean, trust me, I definitely love Jack in the Box. I definitely loved all of my junk food, but it wasn't that difficult. And it also could be that I know how to cook since I was a kid because it was just part of the family growing up that it was just more of taking control of each meal.

Katie: Yeah, that's awesome that you had that background because that seems to still be in research, the gold standard is the Mediterranean diet because of the right balance of fats and all the monounsaturated fats and all the diverse vegetables and spices. So that's so awesome.

Mary: Yeah. There's not a lot of bread. I mean, pita definitely is a big part. I mean, pita is such a big deal in that culture that the government controls the bread supply in Egypt. But it was just a matter of making pita in a different way and then everything else is just healthy proteins and vegetables with moderate grains, mostly seafood too. Seafood and organ meat is the primary stuff that we ate growing up.

Katie: That's pretty much how I've adapted to eating too. We might prefer anchovies for lunch and I love, love, love them. And I should have mentioned at the beginning that you are Greek and Egyptian, which if I could pick two food cultures and only eat those for the rest of my life, I think I would pick Mediterranean and Greek. So that's awesome that you grew up with that. So when you made this shift, how long did it take before your symptoms subsided and before you really started seeing the changes in your body and in your life?

Mary: Three months is what I would say is the total shift. So within, I wanna say two or three weeks, I woke up without a headache. So I always had a headache and then I would have migraines once or twice a week and then once a month, unfortunately, I'd be hospitalized from the migraines. But I woke up without a headache after the first few weeks and I almost felt like it was a trick. It was a bizarre sensation, and like I shook my head around almost expecting and waiting for the familiar pain to show up, then it didn't. And the hormone started

to balance out over the course of a month and a half. And the weight wasn't my primary goal for this. I wanted to feel better, but I lost around 30 to 40 pounds in the first three months, and that was just by changing what I was eating and actually increasing the caloric intake. And because my body felt better, I was able to do more in the gym. So I'm sure all those things play into the weight loss, but it was interesting to see your body change when you thought your body was a particular shape this entire time but it was actually hiding beneath layers and layers and layers of hormone disruption.

Katie: I love that. And having eaten meals with you, I love that about you because you're not one of those women who eats like three bites and half a salad and is like, "I'm so full." You nourish your body. And I think that's maybe a mistake a lot of women make, is they think they have to eat less and less and less food and you're killing your metabolism by doing that. So I know that you don't have kids to deal with day to day, but a lot of my listeners, their biggest complaint is that it takes so much time and so much effort and it's so hard to get healthy food on the table all the time. And I think you're especially qualified to speak to this because you don't do it for kids, but you do it for like dozens of people who are like A-list people who have probably very high standards and you don't go crazy. So I'd love to hear, well, first of all, let's go to the story of how that happened. How did you go from corporate America to becoming a personalized chef to the stars?

Mary: It was sort of accidental. I was... So I've always worn many hats in corporate America, and my actual function was sales marketing and consulting, BC consulting in San Francisco. But I volunteered with a lot of different programs in high school and I kept that sort of coaching mentality through into corporate America. So I've done bereavement counseling, domestic violence counseling, body language counseling. And so when I was in corporate America, they had always asked me to do a little bit of extra with teams. And so I was just doing that normal stuff, and it was after a call or a meeting that I had related to our numbers for the month. Then I was asked by this person, "What have you been doing differently because you're obviously healthy or you're in less pain? What's this diet you're into?"

And I kinda sort of backdoored into the word paleo at the time. I was not eating gluten and casein and soy, and then at the same time paleo was becoming popular, and it was easier to say paleo than those things. So like, "Tell me about this paleo diet." So I explained what it was and how I ate. I was bringing my food to work, so people saw what I was eating. And this gentleman said, you know, "I don't really have time to cook for myself. Why don't you do it for me and I'll pay you?" And I kinda laughed it off. And the response was like, "No, I'm willing to pay X amount." And I lived in San Francisco, so to me, having a side hustle that I was already doing for myself anyways, so then it's really awesome have extra money.

And around that same time I was getting my wisdom teeth removed because they were impacted and coiled around the nerve. So I had to get put out for that. And when I came to, after that procedure, my oral surgeon was like, "I'm so excited for you to be my private chef." So apparently my subconscious in my ramblings was already believing that I was a private chef, and those were my first two clients, unofficially, but officially. And so I was cooking for those two people for about three months. And in my mind, it was just gonna be a side hustle, and I thought it was pretty cool. And then ultimately, my body broke down because I couldn't be handling my million-dollar quota in this and I had to choose. And I took a day off from work to really think about what it is that I wanted to do with this, and I was at the Ferry Building, and I was with my friend who was playing hooky with me.

And I went to go open the door because I saw a gentleman coming towards me, and I opened the door for him and he paused and said, "Oh, you know, chivalry is not dead." And he said, "Thank you." And I was sort of

thrown off that he thanked me while he was thrown off that I even noticed that or that he noticed that I opened the door for him, and he walked out. And my friend looked at me like I was a moron and I'm like, "What?" She's like, "Are you an idiot? You took the day off to decide whether or not you should be a chef and you literally opened the door for Tyler Florence, a famous chef." And then it came to me, "Oh, my God, that was Tyler Florence. That must be the sign. I'm looking for the sign. I found the sign." Later on, I tweeted him and reminded him of that interaction a few years later and he remembered me and was super pumped. So the next day I went in and resigned and went in all in on being Mary The Paleo Chef.

Katie: That's awesome. And I love that you come from the low inflammation food allergy angle too because sadly a lot of kids these days have food allergies, and that's a common question I get from readers and it's not when I have a ton of experience with. My son had a dairy allergy that we reversed, but many readers and listeners have kids with allergies. Obviously, it's still super important to get them to eat their vegetables, to get enough nutrients dense foods. So can you share some practical tips that you use in the kitchen to make it all taste good and to get people to want to enjoy it?

Mary: It's really experimenting with a lot of different spices. I think most people are pigeonholed in salt and pepper. And if you... The more spices you play with, the more you'll understand your own palate to be able to make meals that you're excited about. So when I go cook for clients, I know nothing about their palates, and usually it is pretty plain. So if they're willing, some of them will sit down and we'll go through and taste all these different spices and they'll tell me what they like or they don't like and we'll try combinations. And then afterwards, I'll tell them, "This spice actually could mean this, it's what your body is craving, and this spice could be...this is what your body needs." And then that connection in their mind of like this is not just flavor, but this is actually, "I'm looking at nutrients." They've become more excited to cook for themselves when I'm not available to them.

And when it comes to clients that do have families, I'm only there for a limited period of time when I might only be making meals for maybe that particular person, not always the whole family. So then we'll go through and I'll teach them how to make things in bulk using a pressure cooker where something that might take hours and hours now takes 45 minutes and something that can be made in bulk, and pre-prepping lots of proteins with the week, that way all you have to prep when it's go time is maybe some greens or some vegetables and then being able to reheat the meat. But it is all trial and error experimentation.

I do struggle with people who say, "I don't have time to cook." And then I'm like, "Okay. Well, then, why don't you hire a chef?" "I don't have money for a chef." I'm like, "Okay, then why don't you pay for this meal service?" "I don't wanna do that." I'm like, "So you don't want any solutions at all. I don't know that it's that you don't want any solutions or maybe you just want an excuse to not really give it a valiant go." So that's always a difficult conversation to have and try to figure out what will work for them because the solutions we have available to us now, were not available when I first went gluten free, there was no Siete, there was no meal services. It was all being done from scratch. So I try to get people to see that it can be more accessible.

Katie: Yeah, I'm with you on that. I can't even imagine how many tortilla recipes I threw away and failed at trying to make one. But it was like palatable, much less good, and now that you could find these things in stores is amazing.

Mary: Yeah. It makes me feel like that scene in Cast... Is that Castaway with Tom Hanks? And he, at the end is looking at all the crab legs already when had...when he's already rescued, all the crab legs are there in excess,

and he's playing with a lighter when he had to make fire before. That's how I feel when I see what's available to us now.

Katie: That's funny. Yeah, it's a great analogy. What about eating out? Because I know that you don't shy away from that and that can be a difficult thing to navigate with food allergy. So what questions do you ask or how do you know a food is safe or not?

Mary: Yeah, so first and foremost, if you have a preference, it's less scary. If you have an auto-immune disorder like myself, the risk will always be on your shoulders if you decide to dine out. That's something you have to understand. And when you go to restaurants, I'm not gonna choose to go to a hole-in-the-wall Italian restaurant where there's a language barrier and expecting to be able to serve me. That's really unfair. So I am always ahead of time picking restaurants that will more likely be able to serve me. And then when I do get there, if I don't call them ahead of time, questions are always the same, "Can I speak to the chef or this sous chef?" I tell them, "I'll be sitting at so and so table. I apologize. I am one of those people with allergies. I will eat anything you can prepare that doesn't have these ingredients."

And the reason why I do that is rather than trying to reinvent something that's on the menu, letting the decision fall on their shoulders so I don't disrupt their business and what's going on in the back kitchen, and I can still have a meal that's prepared for me by someone else and still have a social experience with people. And once I've established that and they send me whatever it is I can have, I'll also send a drink back to the chef as a form of gratitude.

Katie: That's a good tip. And I like the idea, even for those without allergies, I'd encourage people to try that once in a while especially if you go on like a date night in a nice restaurant. Like let the chef surprise you because almost always you will be blown away. It's a fun experience.

Mary: You get a better meal than what's on the menu too. They're like, "Yeah, sure." One, they're happy that you weren't the jerk at the table. And then when they get to play off menu, who knows what they were inspired by that day because you know chefs are artists and they might make you something super incredible.

Katie: Yeah, I've had that experience a couple of times. It's amazing.

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Katie: I feel like the biggest win in your personal story, though, in some ways, is the mindset that came from your challenges because I mentioned your motto in the beginning, and you really do embody that, the, "Eat clean, play often and crush life," and you really like embrace life to the fullest. So can you share some of the ways you've learned to think and live this way or were you born that way maybe, but even in the face of all the challenges you face in your life and your lifelong diagnosis?

Mary: I always think about whether that stuff is innate or if it's learned, and maybe it's a combination of both. I definitely got what people wanna call my edge in grade school because I was super bullied and the girls never wanted to play with me. So I'm like, "Okay. Well, I don't know how to convince these people to like me," and really, I think I'm a really sweet person. So instead I went and started to playing basketball with the boys because there it was pretty simple. If I put the ball in the net, I will be accepted, and that was pretty easy for me. And then by being able to do that and feeling really confident and empowered, I then would be able to stand up to my bullies a little better versus getting shoved into the tanbark, I can stand up for myself. And that sort of played out throughout my life going to corporate America being put down or bullied for whatever dumb reason the person wants to project on you, and you can get angry, you could make noise around it and be labeled drama, or you can make yourself so valuable that that person cannot bully you because they're gonna look like an idiot.

So that's the premise behind the crush life part. You know this, that I struggled with coming up with the crush life component of that motto. And it was because of the years and years and years of being told that I wasn't feminine enough and almost being scared to make that part of my motto because I'm like, "What does that mean? I'm not good enough?" And I had a friend sit me down and be like, "Mary, too masculine for whom, basically? And who cares what these other people say to you about that? This is who you are. You're more than feminine. The reality is you've been able to play in the spectrum of feminine versus masculine, and great for you. You know how to embody both. So don't you dare play small or play somebody else by not letting it be crush life." And I was still concerned about using that. And then one of my readers told me she had a surprise for me and had tweeted me a photo and where she had tattooed "Eat clean..." Or, she tattooed "Eat, Play, Crush" on her arm, and I was like, "All right, well, it's eat, play, crush. No going back from here." It's almost like that Tyler Florence experience like almost that God knows I'm so stubborn that I need a very clear sign.

So I think it's a combination of, maybe some of it is innate, maybe some of it was learned as a survival skill. Definitely, my parents, they raised me to... They didn't tell me that I was special and I could do no wrong. They

told me that, "You can be special and you can work hard to get what you want." And I was definitely unconditionally loved by them. My parents are very old school, very traditional. And the thing that I think I'm lucky is that they never asked me to be anything other than who I am, so I always had the opportunity to experiment. And then as far as living life to the fullest, mortality, for me is a big deal. A lot of people in my life passed away before age 25. Even this last summer, I lost somebody very near to me, and the only way I can feel to honor their legacy and honor their memory is to make sure that I can live out a life that brings me joy and pays that joy forward. Otherwise I've convinced myself that maybe they passed away in vain. So I think it's a combination of things.

Katie: Yeah. And one thing I really took from what you just said too, is that, like you had a great childhood at home, and I know statistically having parents who you know love you that does a whole lot for long-term outcomes, but also the fact that you were bullied in school. I'm sure it was not ever a pleasant experience, but when you look at the statistics, kids who have to overcome something young in life, they tend to be more successful and that's something my husband and I have struggled with because obviously you can't purposely make life harder on your kids, you would never want to. But you also know they do need resilience, they have to be able to face things. So for us, one of those answers has been that we travel because travel by nature has some challenges built in and language barriers and difficult situations. I know you traveled pretty a lot too in your life, right?

Mary: Yeah, mostly going back to Egypt for family. Yeah. However, you can create a little tension. Obviously, you don't want your kid bullied. I don't know. Maybe you do. I have no idea. I do have some friends and we've talked about this where they have almost the trauma of privilege where they haven't experienced any hardships and they either feel a little guilt around that and they don't know how to navigate especially with everything that's going on right now. Or when they are hit with something very challenging much later in life, they don't have the tool set to deal with it. And optimism is one of the things that I have in a lot of my products and I jokingly, but very seriously mean without my negativity I wouldn't be such an optimist.

So when something really heavy hits me, I feel it, it sucks, but I have the tools and I can talk to myself, talk basically to the cells in my body to be able to overcome it and thrive through it. And there are some people who haven't had hardships and when they're hit with something, it's almost like they have a complete meltdown because they haven't had that before. So, I mean, I think it's really cool that you're traveling with the kids to give them some sort of friction for them to navigate however they choose to navigate, especially with your clan, dude. I would love to see how each individual one reacts differently.

Katie: Yeah. It's crazy, we definitely get looks especially like in other countries. And another thing that, I'm guessing your parents probably did and mine did as well, and one thing we do with our kids is that we don't ever do anything for them they can do themselves because it's, again, about teaching the independence and not lending them everything and feel like the "special snowflake," but also because we look at it as they are contributing members to the family and they're responsible for doing things. I'm guessing your parents probably were like that as well. Like you probably learned to cook early and probably learned to do things around the house early because you were part of the family.

Mary: Yeah, I was the oldest so that that plays a role too. My sister and I are 10 years apart, my brother and I three years apart. My grandmother was around, taught my mom being that I was the first born. But as soon as you can walk around, your first job is like pulling cilantro, and then you graduate up to making pasta. You always had chores around the house. And my mom was a great... I don't know. My mom is a beast. She is a

biochemist, she had her full-time career, she had a side job, and I also saw her every day for breakfast and every night for dinner, and she had three kids. And my dad was an engineer, and when I first came to America he was an engineer during the day, would stock produce in the morning and do dishes at night. And again, I still saw him every day and every night, and I don't know how my parents did that.

So I constantly remind myself, there is nothing I could do that would be as difficult as what my parents did. Coming to a new country, having a family, having their degrees, their very high accolade degrees and their careers, and then doing all this extra stuff while still being present. So it was this incredible example of, you can do and achieve anything and you can look at it two ways. Like I can look at all the things I have going against me that make life more difficult for me, or I can respect that and use those things to my advantage and work really hard to overcome those things.

Katie: Yeah, exactly. Were there any other things in your childhood and specifically that you feel like your parents did that really like left a lasting impression with you? I know all of us as moms who are listening are trying to figure out, "How can we raise kind and contributing members to society who can hopefully fix some of these problems we've created in the world?" So I'm curious if anything else comes to mind?

Mary: I grew up in a pretty religious household, but also a really open-minded household. So it was a really wonderful balance. My mom encouraged curiosity. I know usually in churches, questioning is not generally allowed, but that was absolutely allowed. So she wanted to be as curious as possible and ask as many questions as possible. So curiosity. My dad always would hammer in generosity. He said, "I'm raising you to be a very kind, compassionate and generous person. I don't ever want that to change. I do want you to be mindful of who you're generous to, to also still learn how to protect yourself." They always raised me with the sense of like pay it forward and always heard how blood is thicker than water, so always make sure that you're taking care of your family, and once your family unit is safe and taken care of, then you'd have a strong foundation to be able to start taking care of people outside the family.

We were raised that no matter what paycheck you have coming in, you were always supposed to give a percentage of that back in some way. And it's more than just handing somebody money. It's constant volunteer work as a family. I don't know. My parents are overachievers as you can tell, and they definitely put that into us too. I think coming from a third-world country and coming from challenges I may not have really come to understand, they definitely did a good job of paying that forward. And mind you, my parents are not perfect. I don't believe in perfect parents. There are things that I've seen my American friends, their parents being able to do that I may not be able to do with my parents, but I also get to see the things that my parents provided me that they don't get to. So it's... I don't know. I think I have had a really good balance of the good, the bad, the ugly and the best.

Katie: That's awesome. And it seems like at least they checked a lot of those boxes in every article of the things you can do to raise kids who are gonna like contribute to the world. They checked a lot of the boxes whether they intended to or not. So that's awesome. And...

Mary: And they certainly weren't reading blog posts.

Katie: Right, exactly.

Mary: Naturally.

Katie: So I wanna switch gears a little bit because not only did you become private chef to the stars and you have a successful blog, you also now have a successful product which those are all hard things to do on their own and you've done all of them. So let's talk about Phat Fudge because I'm a fan and we have it in our house. But explain what it is and why you created it.

Mary: So Phat Fudge is a replacement to the GU energy gel packs and a replacement to protein bars. Bars don't sit well in my stomach. They never have. GUs I love until I became paleo because it's just a bunch of crap for the most part. And it's more like a long drawn out checkpoint of a story. So I wanted to create a replacement to GU and protein bars and then I got asked to do some consulting with the Oracle sailing team and they needed something for on the water, and I was trying to find the perfect replacement. I couldn't. The best I could come up with at the time was grinding down chia seeds into a powder and then putting the different nutrients and foods in there. So I had that sitting in my mind.

And then I had Unicorn Fuel which was my replacement to butter coffee because there were a few clients of mine that just couldn't get into it because they really missed their fancy lattes. So I put together spices that I wanted to have in their diets in the morning, which is like maca, turmeric, cayenne, a little cinnamon. I wanted them to have the grass-fed butter, some sort of fat. And I had jokingly called that drink Unicorn Fuel, and that went viral and was voted one of the best coffee hacks in Paleo Magazine. So you have Unicorn Fuel going over here, and then you had this, I need to figure out a replacement to GU happening two separate ways. And then I had a client who was a professional golfer and another client that was a professional baseball player and I was making them these fat bombs, and the base was tahini which is life to me. I put tahini on almost everything. The base was tahini and butter and a little bit of vanilla.

So those three things were all happening independently. And one evening I was trying to make myself something called Halawa or Helava depending on what part of the Mediterranean or Eastern, which is just honey that you cook at a really high heat and then you mix in tahini and you put it in the refrigerator and you let it crystalize over the next few days, and it's an amazing dessert. So I was making that. It's very fickle. If you get the temperature wrong with the honey, you will knock at the crystallization, and essentially, I was multitasking, messed up the heat and I'm like, "I'll just make some fudge." So I dumped in all the spices from Unicorn Fuel into that, and the next morning I was eating this fudge and like all the light bulbs went off and I was like, "Holy crap, this is the replacement." So I spent some time tweaking the ingredients, like reducing the honey by a ton, increasing the turmeric and getting it to where it had a real functional purpose, and that was Phat Fudge. At the time, I called it Functional Fudge. I posted that recipe, and then that recipe went viral and the world asked me to turn it into a product because people were taking pictures of the recipes in sandwich baggies on runs, and then from there was this another moment where I was like, "All right, let me figure it out as I go."

Katie: That's awesome. And definitely I'll have a link in the show notes if anyone wants to buy it because my kids love it, my husband travels with it, I travel with it because it truly, like to me, it's like a meal on-the-go totally because it's got like calories and proteins and fats and covers all your bases, which is awesome. Which also this makes you a successful female entrepreneur, and I know on your Instagram which we'll also link in the show notes so people can find you, you post a lot of quotes about being an entrepreneur and about pushing through and facing challenges and overcoming them. A lot of women listening are trying to do things like start a homebased business or maybe try to be a private chef or develop their own product. So I'm curious if there's any lessons that you've distilled from tackling all of those yourself that you think especially like are

encouraging to women and who are trying to do that.

Mary: Sure. So I think Private Chef stuff, like in the beginning, understanding the price point and understand the kind of clients that I wanna have. So there's this idea that you just say yes to every opportunity. Not every opportunity is for you even if it's shiny. And I said yes to opportunities not based out of desperation or scarcity but out of like, "Who is it that I wanna become in the private chef world?" So I decided these are the things, the kind of clients that I wanna work with regardless, and this is the price point I wanna charge regardless. And it might leave a little room for being uncomfortable and maybe worrying how I'm gonna eat the next day. But by holding out, I was able to leave the seat open for the exact kind of client and the price point that I wanted. So it was kind of being bullheaded about that when it comes to the odds being stacked against you.

Like I was told by multiple manufacturers that they wouldn't package a butter product in a squeeze pack, and I'm like, "That literally does not make sense to me." So it's just about making more phone calls, because if I was able to hand-pack it, I would be able to find a manufacturer to do it. I guess there's that really cool cartoon that circulates the internet, and it's side by side, these two men that are digging underground, and the one guy is super pumped and he was digging, and he's really, really far away from the prize, which is all these diamonds hidden under the dirt. And then there's this other guy that's exhausted and he's turning around and walking away and he's just centimeters from the diamond and he gave up just way too soon.

And I think people think that starting a home business, being a private chef, whatever, is gonna be easy, and it's unfortunately, because what we see in social media and on TV is like just they'll vary the ending toward the success begins, and it takes a long time to get to just the beginning. So I think first be honest with yourself. Are you willing to deal with the work, with the rejection? Are you willing to understand that there is no such thing as failure if you're gonna be an entrepreneur, you have to master the pivot? And if you feel that you can do that, then the next step is just simply not giving up, being creative, like really being bullheaded about it if it's what you really want. You have to be kinda crazy and believe in yourself or your product beyond reasonable doubt.

Katie: Yeah, I think that's a key and something I noticed in our journey as well, is just you have to be so passionate about the topic and know that it's helping people too, and maybe I'm a little bit idealistic there, but I don't apologize for it that I think you have to be willing... Like whatever you're doing, whatever you're trying to accomplish, you also have to be helping people in some way because people aren't gonna buy your product if it's not gonna improve their lives, and so you obviously have done that in several different ways. And I think you're right that the end of the day that the answer is not very sexy. It's hard work and caring a whole lot and usually caring more than other people do...

Mary: Yeah.

Katie: Which doesn't sound very good when someone's just coming out. But...

Mary: Well, because that's contagious. I mean, who knows? I can't say. But would people care about Paleo Chef or Phat Fudge if I didn't share all those details the whole time? I think showing how much I cared and being relentless about it is a big part of the foundation that created the... I wouldn't call it success. It's on its way to success, like I'm still in the process of it and you do have to care. I get asked all the time about balance. I'm like, "What is this question?" If you wanna pursue something great or legendary, there is no such thing as balance. Your entire life becomes about these things, and you don't even think about needing balance

because you're so in love with it that you don't wanna break from it. If you ask a legendary baseball player and a legendary CEO, they're not gonna be like, "Oh, I did it by moderation and balance." That's not the story there. So, I mean, it's just really being honest with yourself about the work ethic and the desire to succeed.

Katie: That's a good point. And the older I get, the more I tend to notice too, balance is definitely not like an everyday type of activity. It seems to be like balance happens over months or years, and that comes as in diet, like, you don't necessarily eat every single thing you're supposed to eat every day, but over a week you might. And same is certainly with business or like sports, you mentioned. Baseball players play like a crazy schedule, 162 games, but they take the summer off. So balance for them is that.

Mary: Yeah.

Katie: So that's an excellent point. So to anyone who had really resonated with your story, first of all, before we go any further, I wanna make sure they can find you. So say where you are online in case people are listening, and of course that'll all be in the show notes, but I know I follow you for inspiration. So where can people find you?

Mary: Paleochef.com is the website, @paleochef on Twitter and Instagram.

Katie: Awesome. And do you have any parting words or encouragement to anyone listening, especially I'd say to any parents who are struggling to navigate that nutritional change with a kid maybe who has food allergies, who's going through kind of that phase that you went through and trying to find their own answers? Do you have any encouragement to them?

Mary: I think if you're trying to do it for your family or kids, make it a team effort, get them involved, make them feel excited and empowered about it, because I think... Again, I'm not a parent. I do have friends who I'm auntie and I'm always there, and I definitely... I get inspired once they're inspired. So when I'm working with kids and I teach them about ingredients or how to cook, and then they get really excited it's just this back and forth. So sometimes if you get the family involved and your kids super pumped, that might reignite your fire and your motivation to keep it going, and then when they're of a certain age, they can do the work for you.

Katie: Yeah, that's a great tip. Our kids are by nature super helpful now, so I'll echo that for sure. That's a huge tip. Awesome. Well, Mary, like I said, I know you're a super busy entrepreneur and I wanna respect your time, but I really appreciate you being here and I hope everybody tries Phat Fudge because we're addicted at our house. But thank you for your time and thanks for being here.

Mary: Thanks for having me.

Katie: And thanks to all of you for listening, and I will 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.