



Episode 182: Why You Need to Exercise Differently
If You Have Autoimmune Disease (& How) With
Autoimmune Strong

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

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Katie: Hello and welcome to "The Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com. And this episode is going to be super important, especially if you have any type of autoimmune disease, because I'm here with Andrea Wool who is a personal trainer, a nutritional therapy practitioner, and the founder and CEO of Autoimmune Strong, which is an online fitness program designed specifically for those of us living with autoimmune disease, fibromyalgia or chronic pain. She is a mom of two boys who struggled with her own health for years and she knew she had to make some changes herself to overcome her multiple autoimmune disorders. And she used fitness as part of this process for her. And it works so well that she felt compelled to share with all of the rest of us.

So, through Autoimmune Strong, her program, she's been helping women all over the globe learn how to exercise properly while living with an autoimmune disorder, which is a topic that's not often covered and I can't wait to dive in. So, welcome and thanks for being here.

Andrea: Thank you for having me, Katie. I'm so happy to be talking to you today.

Katie: Oh my gosh, likewise. I think that our time is going to fly by because you're so easy to talk to. And I know, I feel like there's so much resonance in our stories, but I'd love to hear a little bit more about yours first. Also having been through the autoimmune side myself, I'd love to hear your journey and how you ended up where you are.

Andrea: Well, what I think is really interesting is that when I tell my story, usually like 10 women are like, "Oh my God, I have the same story." There's so many similarities in what we all go through, and so, my story is not unique, which means that since I was able to get better, that other people can too, which is I think very helpful. So, I've always had health issues as I was growing up, but nothing really that different or spectacular. And after the birth of my second son, I was gaining weight rather than losing it as I was nursing, and I was...my

hair was falling out like all over the place, like more than is usual after you give birth. And I was so lethargic, like everything hurt. I was on fire all over my body. And just walking up and down the stairs, carrying the baby, playing with my three-year-old, all of that was like overwhelming too much. My body just couldn't...they just couldn't handle it.

And there would be times I was lucky at that time to be living right down the street from my mom. So, I would literally have to call her and be like, "I need you to come over right now because I literally need to go take a nap at this moment. Like I cannot take care of my children." And it was a really desperate place to be. And because what I was dealing with, what I know now, is that I was dealing with invisible illness. And everybody around me was kind of like, "Oh my God, she just can't take care of her kids. Like, what's wrong with her?" And I knew that this wasn't just postpartum. It wasn't just, "I have a new baby." It was something really different.

And I went to a bunch of doctors who all basically were like, "Well, you just had a baby." Of course, like, you don't feel good, you're tired, you're stressed and all of that. And I just knew in my heart of hearts that things...there was something really wrong. And after...I think I went to like eight different doctors, and one of them had suggested, "Maybe you could look at going gluten-free. I don't know if that'll help you or not, but it sort of helped other people." And so I was like, "Well, that's the only tangible information I've been able to get out of these eight doctors, so yeah, I'll try it. I'll try anything."

So, I started googling. I was like, I don't even know how to go gluten-free, what does that even mean? So, I started googling food. And I started playing with my diet. I started learning about elimination diets. I started learning about organic food, and I started learning about how the, you know, I was the person who was like spraying, I can't believe it's not butter on my whole-wheat toast, you know, for breakfast and eating jelly beans for lunch. Like, I'm not going to pretend I was at all healthy. Prior to this, and so I started learning like, "Okay, this is not...this is really bad, I need to make some changes." So, I started making some changes in my diet and I started to feel really different. And I've been an athlete my whole life. And during that time, I was completely unable...as I said, like I couldn't even climb the stairs, never mind, go for a run. I mean, that was just unheard of. And I have been a runner since I was 13.

So, as I started feeling better with food, I started realizing there needs to be a fitness component to this healing process for myself. And so, I wasn't working at the time, I was actually too sick to go back to my corporate job. So, I had quit my corporate job at this moment. And so, we didn't have a lot of money, but I convinced my husband that whatever we had needed to be spent on a personal trainer because I knew that fitness was going to be a major thing for me to get better. And this personal trainer, she was lovely, and she was wonderful. But she wanted to make every hour that we were together, really, in her mind worthwhile.

And so, she was having me do all this crazy stuff, and it was making it worse rather than better. When I say crazy stuff, I don't mean she was actually making me do crazy stuff, it's just that I was...do you know, she was like, "You can do burpees. Let's go, let's go." And I was like, "I can't even walk upstairs. How am I supposed to do a burpee? Never mind, like 50?" So, I quickly realized that fitness was what I needed to do, but that going sort of the traditional fitness route was harming me rather than helping me. And so, I realized that I couldn't find anybody who understood what I was dealing with. So, I decided to go back to school and become a personal trainer myself so that I could actually develop a program that would help me get stronger and get healthier at this time.

I really had no intentions of helping anybody else, but once I developed this program, and it was working for me, people around town...I was living in Providence, Rhode Island, which is a small city, especially when I grew up there. So, when you walk around town, you go to the supermarket and people you knew from five years ago would bump into me and they'd say, like, "Wow, you look amazing," which was code for like, "Oh my God, you actually look like you're not dying." And then they'd whisper to me like, "Well, how can I figure out what you're doing because I'm not feeling good either?"

And so, I started spreading this message about fitness in a much scaled back kind of way. And I realized that this was a message that nobody was talking about and that I had something here. So, that's how Autoimmune Strong was born. And now I'm six years into that healing process. I feel amazing. And I'm stronger than I was ever, like even before I got sick. And this journey actually led me to the diagnosis of...finally, I was... It took years for them to figure out what was wrong with me. But I now have been diagnosed with Hashimoto's and celiac and fibromyalgia. So, that's where we are today.

Katie: Wow, I can relate to so much of that, especially that struggle of trying to figure out what's wrong with you and that debilitating fatigue where you're just like, "I cannot even move." I remember when I first was going through the initial stages of Hashimoto's, I would just put my little kids, at the time I had two toddlers in the room, and I knew there was nothing that wasn't child safe in there. And I would lay in front of the door and just sleep because I knew they couldn't get out.

Andrea: Yeah, I've done things like that, too. Oh my gosh, I've totally...yeah, and TV, I mean, there were no screen time rules at that point. I was like, "You can watch TV whenever you want because I need to go rest."

Katie: Yeah, it's truly, it's a struggle. And I think to anyone listening who's there and hasn't been able to find answers, I just want to say I understand and we see you, we totally understand your struggle is real. Don't let people tell you that nothing's wrong because it is, and you just have to find those answers. But I feel like you touched on so many important things that I want to go deeper on. Why do those of us with autoimmune disease or fibromyalgia or chronic pain need to exercise differently? Kind of explain what's going on with the body.

Andrea: Yeah. So, well, the first thing that's really important to understand is that my hunch, my hunch back then was that, "I need to move in order to feel better." And there's actually science behind that, that I know now. And exercise has been proven to actually improve...or I guess not improve but slow down the progression of disease. So, exercise is actually, for people with autoimmune disease, beneficial from a healing perspective. So, as we talk about exercise, like that's really important to know, is that we can't just stay still, we have to move our bodies in order to be healthy.

That said, the traditional fitness model is very much a "no pain, no gain" kind of fitness model, right? And I get it, like they're trying to get people off the couch and moving their bodies. And the best way to get fast results is to push your body really hard. But I'm not about fast results, I'm about long-term health, that's different. A lot of what you see out there is, "Want six-pack abs in six weeks, this is what you've got to do." I don't actually care about six-pack abs, I just want to be able to not be lying on the ground when my kids need something. So, it first starts with having the right goal in mind of what do you want. And if what you want is long-term health and to feel good in your body every day, crushing yourself at the gym is not going to help. And the reason it doesn't help is because autoimmune disorders are inflammatory diseases. Our immune systems are fighting, they're fighting within ourselves all day long.

So, as they're...you know, our bodies are working twice as hard as other people's bodies, even when we're sleeping because this immune attack is happening at all times. So, we're constantly on the high levels of being really inflamed. That inflammation is linked to cortisol and our bodies are stressed out because we're under attack, right? So, all of this is happening without us even really knowing about it. Exercise also increases cortisol and inflammation. That's actually...the point of exercise is to break down and tear your muscles in order for them to build back up and be stronger and more cohesive. So, those two don't seem to mix because if you're going to exercise and increase your cortisol, but you already have really high levels of inflammation, it's going to send that additional exercise cortisol loop is going to send your body over the top. And your body's way of handling when your inflammation gets too high is to shut down and say, "I am exhausted. I can't do anything, I can't move."

So, if you exercise too hard, you're going to put yourself into a place where you have an exercise-induced symptom flare up, which means that's when your body, some people get fevers. Some people get that incredible exhaustion that you and I are talking about. Some people get incredible muscle aches, like more than just your regular after I just worked out hard, work...muscle aches, but like muscle aches that kind of go to your bone and stay with you forever. For me, I would find that after one workout with that personal trainer, I'd be on the couch for two weeks and couldn't even think about moving my body, never mind going back.

So, this is why we have to worry about how we exercise. We need to make sure that we exercise in a way that increases our body's health without sending you overboard into that place of exercise-induced symptom flare up. So, there has to be that really happy medium. And that's what I have sort of found, is that really great space of you can do really short, quick exercises that you build up strength that are really targeted. They're just not going to get you that six-pack ab in six weeks, but I'm okay with that.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I feel like... I saw that a great example of this when we were in Europe recently, they don't, or at least the areas where we were, there's kind of this...there's no concept of them like working out or exercising, they just move throughout their day. Their body is constantly moving. It would seem bizarre to them to go run sprints or run a marathon or whatever because they're just constantly moving and they're staying active as part of their life. And I feel like we've seen that progression even in the studies in the last couple of years. Because I think about maybe five years ago, it was sitting is the new smoking and none of us should ever be sitting, and so that everybody was getting stand up desk, and then they were like, "Oh, it turns out standing in one spot all day is also not good for you." And the moral of the story is, we all just need gentle movement as part of our lives, not like an hour in the gym.

And I noticed that, I tried CrossFit for a while, which I love. So many things I love that they have the intensity, I love that for so many people, it's an amazing option, but for me, especially trying to do it early in the morning, it was just, I was fatigued again, it was exhausting to me. But through that, I realized I actually feel great lifting weights, but like you said, in smaller amounts, shorter amounts of time, not killing myself in the gym. So, from there, I'd love...can we kind of delve into what are the key elements that you found were so important for those with autoimmune disease? And how do you kind of put that together in your actual life and try it?

Andrea: Yeah, well, I mean, you just basically described it in a nutshell, which is the idea that, you know, putting pressure and putting some extra weight onto your body is actually what we need to be doing because that's what triggers our muscles to activate. So, in CrossFit, they do it at an extreme example. And for people struggling with...when you're in the thick of autoimmune disease, CrossFit is actually one of the things I tell

people to avoid, at least while they're healing because it's really intense. And it, I mean, when we're talking about this stress impact on your body, it's very severe. But the ideas behind CrossFit are really smart and can be applied to those of us who are going through a healing moment. I mean, really the tenets are you want to be putting pressure on your body in a way that activates muscles. So, the way that looks like in my life is I'm not lifting heavy weights, or I wasn't when I was in my healing process. I am now, actually. And that's kind of the beauty, is that I've been able to progress over the six years where I now can put some weight on my back. But when I was developing this program, that was like just to get myself off the floor and be able to climb the stairs.

The first thing that's really important is to target specific muscles. Traditional fitness kind of gets obsessed with glamour muscles. I worry more about deep, structural muscles. So, for example, the transverse abdominis, I think is the most important. Not that you can pick one muscle over the other muscles because they all work in tandem, but I think it is the most important muscle to start with because the transverse abdominis is our deepest core muscle, and it's huge. It wraps around the entire front of our belly and entire...wraps also around our entire back. It acts like a corset that's... So, you've got your spine and then right in front of your spine is this transverse abdominis. And its job is to suck you in so that your spine is held up straight, so that your organs are in there nice and tight, they don't sink. And that is what basically creates your stability as you walk through life.

So, I hear so many people, and I struggled with this, too, talking about lower-back pain, upper-back pain, and most often, I believe that that comes from the fact that the transverse abdominis isn't strong enough to actually hold our spine straight up and down. So, that's a muscle you can target. You don't have to go to a CrossFit class to be able to target that muscle, you can do it. I mean, we could do it together right now. There are three steps. One is that you suck your belly button into your spine. The second is that you tip your pelvis forward a little bit so that your back is straight up and down. And then the third step is that you pull your pelvic floor, and guys can do this too, like you have to pee. You hold all of those three things together. And that's an exercise that targets that most important transverse abdominis.

So, you can do that while driving. You can do that while washing dishes. You can, and you should be doing it while you're doing those things because it not only strengthens the transverse abdominis, but it takes the pressure off our other muscles that are over-compensating for a weak transverse abdominis, like our shoulder muscles that are kind of small and don't need to take a lot of pressure. So, I don't know if I've answered your question, Katie, but that's...I guess that's how I think about exercise now, is how can you take, you know, how can you target this one thing that you want to strengthen but incorporate it into your daily life? So, I hope that example kind of got there.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And I'm curious because like I said, nothing against CrossFit, I think they have an amazing program. It wasn't the right thing for me at that point in my life. And I maybe might do okay with it now, but I'm curious, why don't we see more information about this kind of stuff in the mainstream fitness? I'm curious to hear your answer. I have some theories, but it just seems like that is across the board, the recommendation, it's like, "Oh, if it's not working, you need to like do P90X, you need to do it stronger. You need to do it harder." Why don't we see more about this?

Andrea: Yeah, it's a great question. And the answer is I'm not really sure. I have a theory as well, so here's mine, which is that first off, there's a lot of people with autoimmune disorders talk about that they're not being heard and/or acknowledged about their pain in the first place. And so, I love in the beginning when you

shared that like, "If you're going through this now, we see you," because for so long, I felt that I wasn't being seen and I wasn't being heard, and that my pain was being brushed off. And that kind of leads to this idea that exercise intolerance is an actual...like it's an actual thing, it's real. Exercise intolerance has been talked about in the medical community when it comes to heart conditions, but it hasn't really been linked to autoimmune disorders before now. But the reality is, is that when, you know, with our overtaxed system that we do struggle with exercise intolerance, our bodies are literally incapable of doing the same type of exercise that a person without autoimmune conditions, but has the same physical and like trying the same breakdown as we do.

If you look at this, the same two people, one has an autoimmune condition and one doesn't, that person with an autoimmune condition is going to be less capable of doing the same amount of exercise. And that's because of this exercise intolerance idea. Our bodies just can't handle that extra pressure. And I think that in the fitness industry, there's this idea that we need to be as effective as possible as quickly as possible. And so, if you're starting with exercise intolerance, the idea of going slow is not matching this idea of working as hard as you can to get quick results, right?

So, there's this disconnect. And even a lot of my members talk about the fact that they go to their doctors and their doctors are like, "Well, you're not doing enough, you need to be doing more." So, I'm trying to change the idea of that you have to do more and you have to do it more intense and you have to do it as often as possible, and that you need to really crush your body. I'm trying to put it out there that you can get the same results but just slower. And you'll actually feel better if you do it slower, more consistently, over time, over long periods of time. I can't make...I'm not going to make any promises, but like it's a get-fit-fast program. I don't actually think that get-fit-fast works for anybody, even if you don't have an autoimmune disorder.

Katie: I would agree with that. And I think even for those without autoimmune disease, I'm thinking of people I know personally, and the most fit people I know, they say, like both of us would probably agree, that the majority of it, 90% of it is in the kitchen as far as being fit, not working out to begin with. And they don't work out for hours and hours a day. Most of them, they lift weights, they do sprints, but it's all short amounts of time and lots of recovery, not just endless hours at the gym. So, I'm curious because we've kind of touched on it, but I'd love to hear more in depth. What about cardio? Because that's a pretty controversial topic right now. I feel like even in the non-autoimmune spaces, you know, how much do we need? Do we need high intensity? Do we need long distance? Is it the amount per day? A lot of conventional doctors had to give the whole an hour of cardio a day recommendation? So, I'm curious what you found, specifically for those of us with autoimmune disease, but even just across the board.

Andrea: Yep. So, I'm not the biggest fan of cardio. And this is coming from someone who is... I was a marathon runner, I was a long-distance runner, like I personally love the action of cardio. So, for me to say it's not the best for us is a big leap. But it's not. And the reason the doctors push it is because it's been proven, yes, to improve our blood flow and improve our oxygen intake. And there are lots of health effects that go with it. But if you think about primal humans, like way back, cavemen, right? Like, they were only running if they were running away from something, they weren't running just to run. What they were doing was they were building shelters, so lifting things up and putting them down. They were moving all day, they were gathering, they were hunting. So, what you were saying before, this idea that like we need to move throughout the day and we need to kind of pick heavy things up and put them back down, which also is not just weights but can be our bodies as well, I think is the more effective way to go.

Cardio really puts you into your sympathetic nervous system, which is your fight or flight zone. And when you're in that fight or flight zone, your body doesn't worry about proper digestion, your body isn't worrying about what it needs to do to keep you alive long-term, it only worries about what it needs to do to keep you alive short-term. And so, it worries about the immediacy, the here and now. And that means high levels of adrenaline pumping out so that you're alert because when you're in this fight or flight mode, you're looking for danger wherever you are. And that's not a safe place for us to be all the time or even for an hour. So, say you go for an hour run, that sympathetic place is not really that healthy for us. We want to stay in a parasympathetic place, which is a rest and digest place. And you can access that place while doing strength training work. So, you can get fit while not aggravating your system.

Katie: That makes total sense. Is there any kind of general recommendation that you would give across the board of things those with autoimmune disease should not do, or is it more case-by-case?

Andrea: Well, I think it is case-by-case in the idea that it sort of depends on where you are in your healing process. I know that, generally I say that high-intensity interval training is probably not your friend. Intense CrossFit is probably not your friend. You can lift, but like going to a CrossFit world where they don't really take rest breaks and they keep the intensity level up really high, that can be very dangerous. Spinning classes, even power yoga, like anything...the theme here is any high-intensity work is going to aggravate the symptoms and put you potentially at risk for a flare.

That said, if you have built up tolerance...because here's the thing is that you can actually build up, you can increase your exercise tolerance over time, it just takes a really long period of time. So, if you've increased your exercise tolerance over time and your autoimmune condition is being managed, then it might be possible that you will do okay at those things. But generally, I say those things are probably not the best forms of exercise. And I know that's disappointing to a lot of people like me because with autoimmune conditions, too, like a lot of times we have a lot of anxiety or at least I had a lot of anxiety, and those types of high-intensity workouts were really what I use to manage that anxiety piece. But ultimately, I found that I could manage my anxiety actually better by taking those components out and spending more time controlling what I ate, meditating, and doing more intensive deep tissue work like foam rolling, or the abdominal bracing exercise that I was talking about. Like you can still get those same neurotransmitters being, you know, those happy hormones being released by doing the less intensive kind of work. That took me a long time to understand.

Katie: Yeah, I think it's a hard concept until you experience it to really grasp it. I know...like for me, writing on Wellness Mama was born out of a need, like I needed to learn this stuff and it wasn't out there. So, I started researching and writing it. And I know that you've had sort of the same experience with your Autoimmune Strong program. So, can you walk us through basically kind of what the program is and how it's structured and basically how someone can work through it.

Andrea: It was born out of a need, just like you're saying. I was desperate to find someone who could help me get strong without putting me into these exercise-induced symptom flare-ups and I couldn't...I looked everywhere, and I couldn't find it. So, that's...finally, when I was like, "Fine, if it doesn't exist, I'll do it myself." And basically, the program that is up there is basically what I used to heal myself. So, if you go to the website, which is www.getautoimmunestrong.com, you have access to what's designed as a three-month strength-building program. And it's designed both for someone whose autoimmune condition is so flared up that they can't move. It's also perfect for people who are over-exercising and need to have some guidance into how to scale back.

And basically, there are short instructional videos, like at the maximum, they're 15 minutes long, and they teach you about these different exercises that are very targeted. I work on core strength. I work on balance-training. I work on flexibility. And I work on...really focusing on deep stabilizing muscles. And then as you get through those sort of instructional videos, they're also then workout videos. So, once you know how to do the moves, then you can just go into like the basic workout videos and get your workout in. The program is designed to progress upon itself. So, you start with Level 1 and then when you feel like you're ready, you go on to Level 2. And it's the same as Level 1, but just a little bit harder. And then there's Level 3, which is just a little bit harder after that. Because over time, your body does adapt. And so, in order for you to continue getting these really great changes happening in your body, you have to keep putting a teeny tiny little bit more of intensity on over a long period of time.

Yeah, so that's kind of how it works. It's all online, and you can watch the videos any time of day, anywhere. You can get them on your phone. So, some of my members do it...like if they're traveling, they do it in their hotel rooms. Some people like to do it at home. Other people like to go do it at the gym. It's kind of designed to fit your schedule. There's no, "This is exactly how you must do it." It's self-guided.

Katie: Yeah, I find myself loving those kind of programs so much more now, just being home with kids, because it's so much easier just to turn it on in the living room versus going to the gym and having to figure out if you're taking the kids with me or finding a place for them to go. So, I love that. I'm curious what kind of results you've seen. Because, like you said, it's not the traditional, you're not trying to get like shredded in six weeks or any of that. So, I'm curious what the results look like.

Andrea: The results are so fun and amazing, but they look very different than any kind of traditional fitness program will advertise. So, for example, one woman just...we had, there's a private Facebook group for all of the people who are Autoimmune Strong members, and she just posted on there that she was finally able to sit and meditate without having pain in her legs. She didn't need to use anything to lift her body up to get herself back up off the floor, that she was able to just come out of her meditation and stand up. So, that doesn't sound like a big deal, but it is such a big deal.

Another woman was sharing a story that she has a lot of grandchildren and she was able to play Wiffle ball with them. She hasn't been able to do that ever. So, these are like real-life achievements. Another woman wrote that she was washing dishes without back pain. So, these are like tangible real-life improvements rather than, "Wow, my bicep is bulging." Although, I do get those results, too. One woman in one of my small group coaching classes was just saying that because of all the abdominal bracing, she's feeling like her jeans are fitting in a looser way and she can tell that a lot of, you know, that her belly is slimmer, which is a happy side effect. But mostly, what I hear is, "I have more energy. I'm able to go out and do what I need to do during the day without feeling exhausted. And I don't have as much pain in my body." Another typical thing that I hear is, "I wake up in the morning and I don't feel sore before I get out of bed." So, people are just generally feeling better in their bodies. And that's my goal. That's, you know, that's the stuff that brings me enormous amounts of pleasure.

Katie: For sure. I think that we'd probably all have a healthier outlook if that was the mindset we all had. And it's hard because I know it's easy to want to like focus on the exterior and that being toned and all that first, but like you said, when you start on the inside and focus on those core muscles, which those are also linked to better health as you age, like so many benefits that you will see the cascade kind of throughout your life. And

also, it teaches that thing which is the most elusive, I think, in health, which is the consistency and the actual implementing. And so, like it builds that slowly over time in a way that's sustainable because I think all these super-fast to get-fit-quick programs are not sustainable. And then they basically create this cycle where you're learning to just give up when it gets hard because it's not, you can't keep doing that.

Andrea: Well, and I think that's actually...that's really important. And I think what a lot of people are finding is that this program challenges them to learn how to pace themselves, and then they're finding that trickling down into their regular life. And I find this too, we have this, you know, especially as a mom, a working mom, like this idea that we're always busy. When someone says, "Andrea, how are you?" I'm like, "Oh, my God, I'm so busy." And that's the story that we're telling in this modern life, right? But doing everything fast and quick is not always the best thing. And so, by having this program kind of challenge you to pace yourself, I've learned to pace myself in other parts of my life, too, and I know that my members are feeling the same. Is, "Okay, maybe that is too much for me to say yes to today. So, maybe I'm going to say no to that today. And maybe I'll put that off until tomorrow." And that's really hard work, like slowing down.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And I think like, if nothing else, maybe that's one shift all of us listening can start to make because I think I've said that to you over the years so much, like, "How are you?" "I'm so busy." And busy is a choice. And I've heard people I really respect to say like, "If you're busy, it's all about your priorities, and you're choosing to let yourself be busy." Certainly, there's many more demands on us now than there ever had been, but maybe how much could we shift our mental health and adjust our mindset if we would just respond to that with a different answer or find a way to respond to that with a different answer, finding ways to become less busy. And you've mentioned your daily life a couple of times, people who are high-achievers, who are doing amazing things and staying healthy. I'm always so curious to ask, can you share, if you're comfortable, a little bit of what your daily life looks like in any kind of routines or tips that seems to really help you to thrive?

Andrea: Yeah. So, yes, my life is very much well balanced now. It's taken a lot of work. One of the things that helps me out a lot is doing an enormous amount of food prep on Sunday nights. And I found the foods that make me feel really satisfied and are also quick and easy. So, I don't get that creative in the kitchen anymore because I know what works. So, on weekends, I always make sure we have time to get my food and on Sunday nights, I always carve out time to food prep so that during the week I don't have to worry about dinners and I don't have to worry about feeding myself. I just, you know, everything's kind of there and ready to go. So, it's a little bit of work upfront, but I do that by, you know, I put...like right now, I'm watching "So You Think You Can Dance?" And I watch "So You Think You Can Dance?" while I'm doing my food prep. So it at least gets my TV time in with my cooking. And so, it makes it more fun. So, that's one tip.

I mean, really, I just try to make sure that when I'm working, I'm working and I'm focused, and when I'm with my kids, I'm with my kids. And that I've learned over time that there's nothing that's so urgent that it can't wait. So, there's a difference between urgent and important, right? So like, I feel like I've always lived in this place of urgent, like, "Oh my God, if I don't do this right now, it's going to disappear." But that's not really true. If I don't answer this email and I spend like half an hour sitting on the floor and playing Legos, I'm going to be okay, everything's going to be okay. So, that's still a process for me that I'm learning.

You asked specifically about my daily life, though, and it looks like this. I get up in the morning. I usually get up before everybody else in my family just because that's when I wake up. And so, I lie in bed and I answer emails and I do my...and I kind of like take my social media time and I get kind of mentally ready for my day. And then

I get up and I get my children ready for school or camp. And my husband travels a lot for work, so often, I'm on my own. So, my kids, I put a lot on my kids of saying like, "Okay," I have a 10-year-old and a 6-year-old, and like the 10-year-old loves making his own breakfast and making his own lunch. It makes him feel really empowered and it allows me the space to do whatever it is that I need to do, like get dressed in the morning. So, I get dressed and I help them out wherever they need it and then I take them wherever they go. And then I get my workout in. So, right now, I am experimenting with CrossFit, but not in those CrossFit wads, I'm just going and lifting kind of heavier weights than I've ever lifted in my whole life. And I feel amazing.

And it's been such a great moment to feel powerful, to feel like I can put 150 pounds on my back and lift it up. That carries me throughout the day. It's like, "What else can I do? What else did I think I never would be able to do that now I can do?" So, I make sure I take my time for that. And then I come home and I do my work. But the key to my work is that I usually try and accomplish...I set aside three important things that I want to get done in the day. And if I happen to get through those three things, then I can move on and come up with the next three things. But I don't usually worry about the next three things until I've accomplished the first three things. So, that just allows me to stay focused because I used to be in a place where I would end the day being like, "Oh my gosh, I didn't get anything done." Now, I go to bed at night feeling I've accomplished three things. So, I feel positive rather than negative. And it's all helping with that self-talk, right? Like how we frame our days matters. So, I try and keep it positive.

And then I try and incorporate some playtime with my kids or at least like reading to them when they get home a little bit. But most of the time, I'm shuttling them around to their after-school activities, getting dinner on the table, getting showers and baths done and getting them into bed. And then I do typically go back and do more work at night. I don't know, I don't know if that was illuminating. But that's kind of...And oh, and I make sure I'm in bed no later than 10:30 because I find that the difference between 10:30 and 11:00 is very different in my brain. If I go to bed by 10:30, I'll have a good night's sleep. If I go to bed by 11:00, I'll be anxious and worried about all the things that I didn't get done and that's not a good place for sleep. So, I try and be in bed by 10:30. It's not a lot like there's not a lot of like, "Woohoo, I'm going out." There's not a lot of that. It's very regimented.

Katie: I'm the same way. And especially with sleep for years, I've always been a night owl naturally, and it's taken me years to reform my brain to actually want to sleep early. And lately, we've been actually going to bed at like 9:30 or 10:00 some nights, and it's the best sleep ever. I think, especially with autoimmune disease, we have to realize sometimes our bodies just need more rest. And I'll sleep like nine hours some nights and still be up early because I went to bed so early and it's awesome.

Andrea: Yes. And isn't it nice when you wake up and nobody else is up and like the kids are still sleeping and it's just quiet and you can like gather your thoughts? I love that time.

Katie: Exactly. That was the mental shift for me because I used to stay up at night because it was finally quiet, the kids were asleep, and I would try to get everything done. And now, I've shifted that so I try to get up in the morning before the kids and get everything done. And so then by the time they wake up, I feel like I've already like conquered the day and I've done my morning routine and I've gotten a couple things knocked off my to-do list and breakfast is ready, and especially in summer right now. Like they're running so much that they're so tired, they hit their pillow at 9:00 p.m. when it's finally dark outside and they are out. And so, they're not waking up at 6:00 a.m. anymore, so I'm able to get so much more done. But I think that alone, like if all of us

would just focus on getting a little more sleep potentially a little earlier, it's absolutely life-changing, and I resisted it for years.

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Katie: Okay. So, another question I love to ask, and I can't wait to hear your answer is, is there a favorite book that's been really instrumental or life-changing for you?

Andrea: Absolutely. Yeah. So, the book that I love is called "The Gifts of Imperfection" by Brené Brown. For me, it is a self-help book. It's a parenting guide, and it's like a business book all wrapped in one. It kind of kicked off for me this idea of how I want to structure my day and how I need to put myself first and how I want to frame everything in terms of positivity rather than negativity. So, I use it as a reference. I read it like once a month, and I take something new out of it every time. It's genius.

Katie: I love her. She's such a great writer, and such important topics that she tackles. So, I agree that, for sure, I'll link to that in the show notes. It's one of my favorites as well. And lastly, as we start to wrap up, if there's a piece of advice that you could kind of spread far and wide and pass on to a lot of people, what would it be?

Andrea: We've talked about it a lot here, but I'm going to say it simply which is think about the long game. Short-term fixes don't work and nothing good happens fast. So, that's kind of my thought, my life philosophy is like, think about making sure that you're just doing little things every day that work towards health improvement, self-improvement, whatever it is. You're not going to get there by thinking about, "What should I do in the next two weeks?"

Katie: Absolutely. Yeah, I think that's such an important message. And I love that you are spreading that. I love your work. I've gotten to try out your program and I think it's awesome and there will be a link in the show notes. If anyone wants to find it and you're driving, you can find everything we talked about at wellnessmama.fm. But thank you so much for being here. This has been such a fun conversation.

Andrea: Katie, I love talking to you. This is amazing. Thank you so much.

Katie: Of course. And thanks to all of you for listening, and I hope to see you again next time on "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

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