



Episode 199: How Diet Directly Affects Mental Health With Autumn Smith of Paleovalley

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 I'm here today with Autumn Smith, who is a personal friend and also a fellow business owner. She's amazing to talk to. We're going to have so much fun today. But, she began her academic career, she has a Bachelor's in psychology and a minor in dance from the University of Montana.

She has pretty much done everything. She's danced professionally, become a certified yoga instructor. In fact, she was a celebrity fitness trainer with Tracy Anderson, and even completed a world tour with Jennifer Lopez. And while working as a fitness trainer, she could see first-hand that exercise alone, was not enough for many of her clients to achieve the health they wanted.

And personally, she was going through some health struggles as well, and I'll let her tell that story. But through her research, she and her husband healed her IBS with a Paleo diet and some lifestyle interventions. And then, she studied at the Institute for the Psychology of Eating, to become a certified eating psychology coach, and Hawthorn University, where she obtained her master's in holistic nutrition.

She and her husband also founded Paleovalley, in 2013, with her brother-in-law as well. And their mission is to disseminate incredible nutritional information and organic food products. It's one of my favorite food products and we're going to talk about all of that today. But, welcome Autumn. And thanks for being here.

Autumn: Katie, it's such an honor. I loved meeting you, and I love your family. And yeah, I'm just so happy to be here.

Katie: Likewise, and I know we could chat all day but I can't drop a bio like that that includes, "And completing a world tour with Jennifer Lopez," without asking you to tell your story. Because I've heard parts of it, but yeah, tell us how you got here.

Autumn: That's amazing. Okay, well, it didn't always...or it didn't start out so happy actually. I was a happy child but then when I hit my teens, I, kind of, flew off the rails, and I just really struggled emotionally, you know, depression, anxiety, and eating disorder. My parents did everything. They were so dedicated and wonderful. We did talk therapy. We did antidepressants, which made me feel like a zombie.

Nothing helped, we sought expert after expert. I mean, we drove hours and hours to get the best treatment. But, what ended up happening is, I just kinda resigned to the fact that I was just left to, kind of, manage this and there was something wrong with me. And so, I did just, kind of, manage my anxiety with substances, and alcohol, and I just...yeah. Anyone who hears that I'm in the health space today can't believe it if they knew me in high school. But this all, kind of, continued and I just learned to manage it, I think like a lot of people do. Until I met my husband, and when we moved in together, it wasn't even my emotional health that he noticed first, it was just the severe bloating.

I looked like I was pregnant after pretty much every meal. And I was working for Tracy Anderson at the time. This is even when I was super devoted to fitness. I thought I was really taking care of myself, and I would wake up in pain in the middle of the night. And so, he just said, "Wow, we're not going to live like this. You know, we're newlyweds. This is the beginning of something new, a better life. And I'm just not going to...that's not satisfying me for us." So we went to one last doctor and he basically told me the same thing. I didn't...really, I had IBS. I could take some Bean-o, or some Gas-X, and just, kind of, that's all they could do.

And so, Chas went home and researched like a maniac and he found that some people were having luck with what was called the Paleo diet. This was a really long time ago, like 10 years ago. And I was really reticent because nothing had helped me and I was just, kind of, doing it to humor him. But, after 30 days, not only was my bloating gone, but I stopped being that anxious girl.

I started feeling really energetic, and live, and enthusiastic. And just, I don't know, I hadn't felt that way since I was little. And I realized, I loved Tracy Anderson, I loved being on tour with Jennifer Lopez, but this was what I had to share with people because I was exercising, and doing all the right things, and my life changed basically in 30 days because of this dietary intervention. So I decided, regrettably, I had to leave that job, went back to school and wanted to just, kind of, scream this from the rooftops, and I've been just doing that ever since.

Katie: Yeah. I feel like I hear so much of my own story in that, like, it's, unfortunately, many of us in the health world we got here because we had something we were trying to fix. But then, you get so on fire with this mission that you realize how much better you can feel and how amazing your life can be, and you want to tell other people about that.

And I know for you, part of your research has also been with your background in psychology, and then your additional education in food is that really strong relationship between diet and mental health. So I'd love if you could go a little deeper on that because I feel like that's...I think a lot of moms get to that point, especially if they have children struggling with something where they realize, "I think what they're eating is causing a problem, I think something's going on." But they don't get a lot of support maybe from the conventional medical community. I know, I've had medical professionals tell me there's not really much of a link between, you know, nutrition and mental health, and so there's not a lot of support there. So talk to us about diet and mental health.

Autumn: Oh my goodness. Yes, my favorite topic. And, same thing, like I'm so grateful that I have this knowledge now that I've become a mother because I can see it in my little one. You know, when I nourish him, and we're eating the right foods, his mental health is so much better than when we're not. And the thing is like you said, there's very little support. Like, I grew up with the idea that there was something wrong with me.

That someone else had to fix even though no one could. And what scares me about that is, A, for, like, antidepressants that, like, depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide.

So we're dealing with an epidemic here. And the frontline treatment is these pharmaceuticals generally, you know, antidepressants. So many people take them, like, I think 1 out of 4 women in the prime of their lives they're being peddled to kids, what we know in the research is that 5 out of the 10 most violence-inducing drugs are antidepressants.

And there are dozens of accounts of, you know, children or people who are committing these homicides, and suicides, and having this aggression, may be as a result of this. And there was actually a pharmaceutical company who was fined about \$3 billion, I think it was GlaxoSmithKline, for peddling antidepressants to kids, despite the fact that they knew about this association between increased suicide attempts and these medications.

So yes, really, I'm so passionate about it. Luckily, around 2009, this started to become on the radar, this association of people doing the research. I think Dr. Felice Jacka, out of Australia, she's, kind of, spearheaded a lot of this. And what she found in her dissertation...it just blows my mind now that no one had been looking at this. But she just found that women who ate more processed foods had a higher rate of mental illness. And then, there's also research that shows the diet quality, like, when we eat a better diet, the hippocampus, which is an area in our brain involved in mood regulation, is actually bigger.

So not only is there association, but it seems, like, dietary quality can actually literally change the structure of our brain. And then for moms out there, I loved this, there's a Norwegian study with, like, a bunch of mom and child pairs. And they looked at the mom's diet during pregnancy and then the child's mental health later. What they found was more processed foods or lower dietary quality and worse mental health outcomes in the child that persisted across the lifespan. So the research is coming out, and I know a lot of those are kind of associative, but what happened last year was my favorite piece of research, it was called the SMILES trial.

And they said, "Okay, so we're accepting..." It appears that there's a relationship but what they did then is looked for a causative relationship. Can we take someone who's depressed, change their diet, and then improve their mental health? And they found out that, yeah, in fact, that is possible even for major depression. And what's really exciting to me about this being someone who's involved in this paleo movement is, this SMILES trial, it was in a brilliant starting place, but also included whole grains and low-fat dairy, two foods that I found in my research are actually associated with worse mental health, in a lot of cases.

So I think the potential for this to have huge implications, I think it's just...it's untapped. We don't even yet understand the profound relationship. So that's basically the research behind it. There's three things I usually want to tell people and that's...the first is that depression is not a disease, it's a symptom. So when we're dealing with these mental health issues, a lot of us have, kind of, been led to believe that, okay, so depression is a chemical imbalance, but the truth is that there's never been a human study that's ever shown that, like, depression is a result of a serotonin deficiency. And so, what we're finding now is that it's actually an inflammatory condition. And it's just so that it could be categorized just like heart disease, like cancer, all of these other diseases that are rooted in inflammation.

And so, that's the first thing I like to tell people. We need to calm the immune system down and we need to get, like, anti-inflammatory foods in our diet, but also remove the inflammatory ones. Katie, I'm sure a lot of your audience knows about the gluten, and dairy, and soy, and processed foods, and sugar, yeah?

Katie: Yeah, for sure.

Autumn: Okay. So we know about all of that, and zonulin. But there's some really fascinating stuff especially, I just want to, like, harp on gluten for a second. I've heard so many incredible case reports where even things like schizophrenia, it can go into remission when you just remove gluten. It's highly inflammatory, I'm sure your audience is aware of this, but I just think that is so impressive.

So getting those foods that activate your immune system, for most people, out, I think is step one, and then also looking for food sensitivities. Any foods that are activating your immune system, it's funny, because mine's garlic and there's a few other ones, but even these healthful foods that are okay for some people, for others, they're definitely not okay.

I also want to mention alcohol and caffeine, and we can touch on that later. And then looking for other sources of inflammation in your body. Maybe you've got parasites or bacterial imbalances, or maybe a fungal overgrowth, or there's any number of things SIBO. We know that Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth can activate zonulin, which can create leaky gut, and when you have a leaky gut, a huge source of inflammation.

And then, of course, you know, taking Wellness Mama's advice and restoring, like, or removing all of the problematic healthcare products that you might be using. There's a number of ways we can get rid of inflammation, and we can talk about those more if you want, but just understanding that depression is a disease often rooted in the immune system, I think is the first thing I love people to know.

The second thing I love people to know is that nutrient deficiency is often another cause. There's this incredible story about a lifelong vegetarian, and she basically came to a point in her life and she started suffering from major depression. And it just got worse and worse, and eventually, she started hallucinating. They tried electroconvulsive therapy, they tried antipsychotics. They brought out all the big guns. And she just, eventually, became catatonic, which just, kind of, means she's there, but not really there, she's kind of unresponsive. Fortunately, she was transferred to another hospital and they gave her some B-12 injections, and within, I think two months, she was totally fine.

And the thing about that is, according to the USDA, about 95% of us are deficient in at least one nutrient. And so, this is a widespread issue, and then also, our collective gut health is on the decline. So even if we're eating the nutrients, unless we have a gut that's probably absorbing them, this can still be an issue.

And so, I just like people to be aware that nutrient deficiency, it can be as simple as really making a concerted effort to increase the nutrient density of your diet. I think a lot of times in the Paleo space, we think a lot about what we're not eating, no gluten, no soy, no dairy, you know, all of those things. But, what I find is not as many people are really focusing on, "What am I really eating?" And so, I think nutrient density, it just...if you are trying to get rid of a mental health issue, reducing inflammation, focusing on nutrient density is key.

And then my third thing is, oftentimes, blood sugar instability can masquerade as psychiatric symptoms. It's really incredible. There's a relationship between diabetes and depression, they're both becoming epidemics. And you know that feeling when your blood sugar, kind of, crashes, you become uncomfortable and maybe moody and irritable, and it feels a lot like, you know, depression. And so, stabilizing the blood sugar is my final...a thing that I wish people knew because it's really simple when you know how to do it. And it can move mountains in terms of your emotional health.

Katie: Okay. So, so many things I want to talk about more based on that. I'd love for you to, while we're on that topic, go deeper on the blood sugar thing, because I hear from a lot of women who that's their big thing. And they're like, "Well, I can't...I could never, you know, even intermittent fast, I could never fast because of

my blood sugar." So explain your methods for how you overcome that.

Autumn: Oh, such a good question. I just had an interview with Nora Gegadaus. And we were talking about this in relationship to, like, your adrenal health. But the thing is, your body needs to, kind of, build these enzyme systems to be able to become fat adapted. So we have two fuels, blood...or, like, you know, sugar and glucose. But if we can also become fat adapted, this is no longer so stressful for our body.

So it's not that you can't, it's just that maybe you haven't given yourself the time to do that yet. And what I love more than anything, I'm such a nerd. But I have found so many people who are willing to test their blood sugar at home. I do it all the time. And the reason this is important is because you get that feedback right away. And in Robb Wolf's book, "Wired to Eat," there's research that your blood sugar response is different than anybody else's. And so, when we focus on things like the glycemic index or the glycemic load, we're missing potentially what our body is actually doing. Some people are actually better or have a better blood sugar response to cookies than they do to bananas.

And in my research I found, I do better with bananas than I do with berries. And this is a really highly variable process and so simple to do at home. So, all I have people do is to get a glucometer, and you can just get one at Rite Aid, you can order it online. I've even gone to Walmart, I don't love it, but it does have the cheapest one called ReliOn Prime, and then just buy the glucose, the test strips as well, and like a little Lancet and a needle. And then, in the morning, after 12 hours of fasting, after you have a little water and nothing else, you just, kind of, test your blood sugar, we want to get a fasting reading, and I love to see it around 85.

If you're a super low-carber and it's higher than that, you could be experiencing something called dawn phenomenon. You shouldn't worry about if it's like 105, 95, 105, that's okay. And then, I also have people do it just two hours after every meal. And what we want to see is that it's, kind of, back to your baseline. It's, kind of, back to that fasting blood sugar. And when it's not, we know, oh-oh, there's something strange going on with my blood sugar. There's also the seven-day carb test, where you can actually start to see how every carbohydrate, kind of, affects you.

But, for general people, if you're just not into testing it, what I like to do is just eat protein with pretty much every meal and snack, and high-quality fats. And that includes breakfast. Breakfast is a really special time of the day because it literally sets the tone of the day. So if you can get rid of the oatmeal or, you know, the granola, or what...the fruit that you're eating and start with, you know, some pasteurized eggs and some bacon. Or, sometimes I just do, like, a little fat fuel drink with some cocoa and some grass-fed butter if you can tolerate it, add coconut oil and just drink it, something nice and blood sugar stabilizing, it's going to make healthy decisions really easy thereafter.

And, of course, we're getting rid of the fruit juice, and the sugar, and pretty much the grains. And I like to stick to around two pieces of whole fruit every day and just unlimited amounts of non-starchy carbohydrates. And basically, when you do that, you'll definitely begin to experience what it feels like to stabilize your blood sugar. And then, if you can test it at home, I take it to the next level. Do you test at home, Katie? Have you ever tried that?

Katie: I do. And then, when I'm water fasting, I also test blood ketones and breathe acetone. And I've noticed, especially as I've incorporated fasting, and I do that under medical supervision, but like, I have no blood sugar issues whatsoever. I can switch back and forth between fat burning and sugar burning, however I need to, if I eat carbs or if I don't. And my morning blood sugar's always between 79 and 83, always.

Autumn: Perfect.

Katie: Yeah, you can totally get to that point. And I used to be that one in high school that was, like, I have hypoglycemia and I have to have a snack in my purse or else I get lightheaded, and it is definitely fixable for sure.

Autumn: It definitely is. And it's remarkable when that change happens. And it takes a little bit of time. But yeah, you can definitely get there. I think my unstable blood sugar is one of the reasons I felt so crazy. I had highs and then I had lows and they were debilitating. But yeah, just getting off of that roller coaster, really possible. Of course, yeah, always talk to your doctor, but definitely in my experience is life-changing.

Katie: Yeah. And for any of us with kids, and especially any kids approaching the teenage years. I look back and think, I wonder how much easier my teenage years could have been if my blood sugar was stabilized. And I wasn't actually living only on inflammatory foods. Like, you mentioned in passing the ones to avoid, I'm like, "Oh yeah, that was my high school diet, gluten, dairy, and soy."

Autumn: Oh my gosh, I know. In high school, I thought it was...I was a ballerina. I was like, "Oh yeah, if I just count my calories, we're golden." And so, I was eating Laffy Taffy, and Sour Patch Kids, and Suckers all day long. And yeah, I think that played a huge role. And when I send my little Maverick off to school, and maybe we've just didn't have time, he had something, like, banana chips or something, his behavior is just so different. He'll always crash. He'll have his tantrums in the afternoon. I can just expect that when I feed him that way. So yeah, pretty powerful.

Katie: For sure. And to go back to another thing you talked about, like you said, my audience is pretty well-versed in low inflammation foods, and why gluten and dairy can be problematic. But I want to touch on that again, just because I do get the pushback occasionally from people saying, you know, it's not good to remove any entire "food group." And you shouldn't get rid of gluten and dairy unless you have an actual allergy. And I know you have a perspective on this, too. And I just want to preface by saying, I've written a whole post about it but gluten is not a food group, carbohydrates are a food group.

And that's important to talk about. And those are in vegetables, and fruits, and lots of healthy sources besides just grains. Same with dairy, they're not a food group in and of themselves, you can get calcium, and protein, and fat, also from many other sources like sardines, if you want to get really healthy.

But I'd love to hear your take on that because I know that that's a pretty well-known thing, but, kind of, walk us through the low inflammation foods and the ones that are important to avoid, and understanding that you don't actually have to have extensive testing to do this. You can just experiment with an elimination diet and see what your body responds to.

Autumn: Totally. Yes, no. And that's what I urge people to do because I know the testing can be super expensive, and yes, there's a time and place for it, but you can absolutely do it at home. And when we talk about gluten, gluten is such a huge issue for me because I know that, you know, all these stories about the fact that this...there was one woman who was actually, like, psychotic and her family had a restraining order and she removed gluten and she was fine.

And we know that it opens those tight junctions and causes a leaky gut, but we also know, since the 1950s, there's been this association kind of explored between celiac disease and schizophrenia. And there's also been research to say if you're eating gluten, and you're pregnant, and you don't know it, and you're producing these anti-Leiden antibodies, then you increase your child's risk of schizophrenia by 70%, which is just, "Oh my gosh," to me.

So I think gluten, yes, it is definitely something you're going to want to take out if you have mental health issues or not, but especially if you have mental health issues. And if you don't have celiacs, we're finding that about 30% of the population is just sensitive to gluten but doesn't have celiacs and still creates a lot of issues. And a lot of times gluten sensitivity is strictly a neurological thing. So you don't have to have digestive symptoms. You don't have to have anything else. You can only be suffering emotionally. And so I think, yeah, gluten definitely worth experimenting with. It doesn't necessarily mean you have to let it go forever but I...what happens is people get rid of it, and they may never go back.

So I urge you...and even just explore that resistance. Like, what does gluten do for you? Like, I know they're delicious foods. But, in today's day and age, they have...we have so many suitable substitutes. And there's one brand of bread, even if you're just loving on your bread, and you don't want to get rid of it right now called Srsly. I think it's S-R-L-S-L-Y, and it's made in San Francisco, and it's absolutely delicious. So hopefully, that's something you can lean on.

And there's also dairy. Dairy is really interesting because I didn't want to get rid of it at first, but there's new research about kind of the A1 and A2 dairy, have you guys talked about this on your show?

Katie: Only briefly, so let's delve into that.

Autumn: Okay. Cool, so A1 cows, and that's what most dairy comes from in this country. And specifically, organic dairy comes from, like, Holstein cows. And what we're finding is that it breaks down to like this opioid morphine-like compound called B.C 7. And that has been shown to create inflammation in the small intestine, and brain fog, and all of these...and poor sleep, and all these other issues.

And so, what we're looking at is A2, there's another casein in milk that seems to be less problematic but not as available here. And so, I highly recommend that you take it out again. Do that in elimination diet and remove dairy completely. If you're loving your dairy products, when you want to reintroduce them, I definitely say stick to the A2, because there is research going on in regards to their association with mental health.

For sure, I think Dr. Felice Jacka, is doing it. And if you have to do it, goat and sheep's milk will have the A2, but it's kind of a big issue. And so, if you're going to do something, just making sure that you're inquiring about A1 or the A2. And then also, introducing things like yogurt is different than cheese, is different than milk, and grass-fed varieties are always a better idea. But even if it's a high-quality thing, they're also capable, wheat and dairy specifically, of creating exorphins. And there's like these addictive little molecules that make us feel really good. But also, that could mean we're sensitive to them.

And, in fact, when you often ask people, "What is the one food that you couldn't live without?" And they say something, like, I don't know, for me, it would have been chocolate chip cookies. It's usually something they're sensitive to because of this experience they get with the exorphins, and then making them feel good in the morning...or not in the morning, but in the moment, only to feel way worse later.

So yeah, definitely the gluten and the dairy, you can get carbs from other places. Gluten is by no means necessary. Alessio Fasano's research has shown that it can be problematic in literally everyone who consumes it. And in my work dairy, you know, some people can tolerate high-quality versions later. But I think it's always worth eliminating dairy for 30, if not 90 days, sometimes it takes that long for your body to stop reacting. Of course, we're also getting rid of the sugar and artificial sweeteners because they're feeding things. And GMOs, I don't know if you talk a lot about that on your show?

Katie: Yeah, I've talked about it some. But again, let's go deep on that.

Autumn: Yeah, the GMOs are a big thing too, because I think I love our paleo space. And we're moving this movement forward. But I think a lot of times people don't necessarily always get organic foods, and I know there's financial considerations within that. But definitely GMOs and the pesticide sprayed on them have a number of devastating effects to our microbiome. They can interfere...pesticides can interfere with the activation of vitamin D. Vitamin D is something I haven't talked about yet. But we know that that's highly implicated in mental health. There's a lot of research going on between that connection right now, it's kind of an epidemic. If you don't have vitamin D, your health's definitely going to suffer.

And so, also the populations of our gut microbiome, they're altered by GMOs and the pesticides that they contain. And we know the gut and the brain are in constant communication. I know Wellness Mama has probably definitely educated you very well on the topic, but we know that if you're, like, ruining or changing your gut microbes, you're also changing the way that your brain is functioning. So I think that's a really important one, too. And rancid fats, I haven't talked about that. I know Katie has talked about that. But, the quality of our cell membranes, which essentially, the fats are taking in turn into, it is really, really important.

And so, they're a huge source of inflammation, if you're eating any of these veggie oils, which I just wish it were different. But even in health food stores, it's so hard to find products that just use the right kinds of oils. I mean, Whole Foods is still using canola oil and all of this. But definitely, I know that you guys, your listeners are probably doing this already, but I just had to mention the quality of your fats is also paramount.

Katie: A hundred percent, I know I've read about that as well and how that's not even...if you're gonna talk about food groups or not, at least, like, dairy and gluten are things that were normal foods that we were eating at one point when they weren't so adulterated. But vegetable oils are actually like completely fake, they're man-made. They did not exist in nature in the form that we consume them and your body has no idea what to do with them. It's completely not natural.

Autumn: Right. And they're not even made from vegetables. So anyway, yeah. But is like corn seed, canola, soy, yeah. Anyway, yeah, just avoid them for sure.

Katie: Yeah, I love everything you just said. And I love...let's go a little bit deeper on kids specifically. So I know, like, we covered the broad picture of the links between diet and mental health. And I get a lot of moms who are also struggling with kids who have potential struggles, not usually depression and anxiety, although those are on the rise, but more the ADD and ADHD.

So I know that, like, your research background as well, so what would you say to these moms? And what are some practical steps we can start taking with children who are struggling through these things?

Autumn: Oh, I love that you brought this up, because again, you know, I think my little one is just super hyperactive. And we've learned how to manage and tone it down, you know, using this, but it's so important. First of all, I think a stat, I remember it was in 2014, I think 3 million kids are taking Ritalin, and there's something so simple that we can do. Because these guys, Ritalin and, you know, just pharmaceuticals in general, there's increased risk of, you know, brain damage and all these things. So, yes, there's a simple solution and I think that most people miss. First of all, I wanted to touch on some nutrient deficiencies that I found that are really, really common in kids with ADHD. And that's magnesium is the first one.

And we know that...I think, in two studies, there's between 70% and 90% of kids are deficient in magnesium, and it's tied to things like a reduced attention span, but also to these aggressive behaviors. And so, just making

sure that your child is getting a proper amount of magnesium is huge. Another one is...another two minerals, zinc, and iron, seem to be really, really important and to have an association with ADHD.

And also, vitamin C, it's really, really, kind of, fascinating. I read this article by a friend of both of ours, Alex Swanson, and he, kind of, went into this. The way that vitamin C can help us, kind of, maintain the normal levels of neurotransmitters in your brain. And so, it, kind of, has an action that's similar to Adderall in kids. And so we got to make sure that they're getting their proper vitamin C. And then also, DHA and the fish oils, you know, I love to go fish first or like food first, that's totally my approach. And so getting in those, the wild salmon, my little guy loves to eat his wild salmon, and also, you know, sardines, and all these other wonderful things.

Supplementation does work in some trials, it does improve cognitive effects, and it appears to improve learning. But, you know, food first is always a great idea. So there's that. And the two steps, like, other than just making sure that you're definitely feeding them a nutrient-dense diet, that I think could basically change everything is if you take away the sugar and get proper exercise for our kids, when kids have focus issues or attention problems, those are the two simple, simple steps you can take.

So I'm going to make it three because I think, you know, getting rid of the sugar is probably not going to be that hard for your listeners, getting them adequate exercise also probably a no-brainer. But then also making sure really looking at their magnesium status, at their zinc and iron status and intake, and then adding vitamin C. I think those would really, really help.

Katie: Yeah, definitely. I agree. I think if all of us just started there, we'd see such a big difference. And I know, I get it, like any moms listening, it is hard. And it's not...like, if you're not used to that, taking sugar, and gluten, and all that out of your kid's diet is going to be a process, but it's definitely a worthwhile one. And I know actually, this is one of the reasons I wanted to have you on was to talk about this because one of our favorite go-to high protein foods that meets all those criteria, is actually the one that you and your husband created, which is the Paleo Valley Beef Sticks.

So can you tell the story of that company, because just like for me Wellness Mama was...I didn't have answers and I was researching, so I, kind of, fulfilled a need. I know that was kind of the story for you guys as well. So tell us how that came to be and what's so different about it?

Autumn: Oh, awesome. Yeah, it was crazy because my background in mental health, like, I didn't even mention this and I definitely should have, but Dr. Felice Jacka found that the most anxiety and protective food of all is grass-fed red beef. And so, this has always been kind of my lens. I always looked, "Okay, how I improve mental health specifically?" So we were like, "We're gonna do a beef stick and we're gonna make it awesome, and we're going to do it better. We're never going to cut corners because we literally want to be able to feed this to our child," which we do all the time.

And so, we made our first iteration, our flagship product. And when we delved further into the manufacturing process and learned, where we realized, "Oh-oh, this is being preserved," which is this...the industry standard with an ingredient called encapsulated citric acid. And that just involves, you know, basically, GMO derived citric acid that they can just label as citric acid, and then it's coated in hydrogenated oil, and then it just literally melts into the product and then drops the pH and preserves it.

And so, when I found that out, I, kind of, got sick to my stomach. I could not provide a product like that, that I thought could have any amount of harm, could do any amount of harm. I didn't care how small the amounts were. I was not going to put that product out. And so, what we had to do was go back to say, "Well, what did

our ancestors do?" And they fermented food. And I thought, you know, people must be doing this somewhere.

And so I got on the phone...we made 200 phone calls. I found some people out in Wisconsin saying, "Hey, yeah, we'll ferment your sticks. It takes a lot longer, and no one's really willing to do it, we'll do it because it's going to create an awesome product. And we're going to avoid encapsulated citric acid, and as a side benefit, we're also going to get probiotics." And so, basically, that's how it came to be and people love them and they come in four flavors.

We've also moved into turkey, if your child ever gets sick of beef or, you know, for whatever reason, but yeah, and we plan on going, we're doing new breakfast sticks, so pastured pork. We always make sure the sourcing, you know, 100% grass-fed. Grass-fed and grass finished...pastured pork and poultry all the time, organic spices, and just nothing else, basically. So yeah, my little one loves them. We fry them up for breakfast, we put them in his little lunch pail and he's a happy boy.

Katie: Yeah, we keep them on hand too, but right now, especially being summer, we've got, you know, 20 to 30 neighborhood kids in our house at any given time running through during the day. And you mentioned, like, kids getting enough activity, that's definitely not the problem. Like, we've put a fitness tracker on our kids just to see and they were getting like 10 to 13 miles a day and of running. So the activity is not the problem. It's the getting actual food in them, getting them to be still long enough to eat food. So we have a stock of, like, chopped vegetables, and fruit, and beef sticks that I like, kind of, throw at them as they run through the house.

Autumn: I love that. And yeah, my little one is the same. He's always on the move and it's so funny because my sister's kid never stops eating. I have to try so hard to get my little one to eat. The other thing I often do that we're coming out with soon is that collagen. If you could sneak collagen in their shakes, in a little soup, you know, whatever, it's just, kind of, a miracle food for me when it comes to nourishing him and making sure that his blood sugar is staying stable.

Katie: Yeah, for sure. I think the blood sugar stability in kids is a huge key. And I will say, the one downside, the only downside of real food is because it's natural, your body can handle it more quickly, and it digests more quickly. So I feel my kids are, like, they also are running ten miles a day, but they are so hungry when they eat, which is great.

I'm like, "You're eating healthy foods from the earth, that's fine. Eat as much as you want." That's awesome, but they do get hungry. So it's like you have to be proactive with the meal planning, and all that, just to make sure you have food on hand. Because if kids are doing all the things we talked about, they will be voracious little eaters.

Autumn: They will, and yes, it is key, preparation is key. Always having those...because yeah, it just goes downhill really quickly when...I can't even keep bread in the house anymore, even the gluten-free. Because if there's just other options, I find that he just doesn't gravitate or just puts up a fight for the...when I want them to eat the healthy foods. So yeah, it's having them around and also sometimes taking out the other options for us. That's what works.

Katie: For sure. And related to that, a question I'd love to ask, when I have people on who have a background in nutrition and health and research, and also, or who are high achievers is, what are some of the things that you do day to day that seem to make the biggest noticeable difference in both your health and your productivity? Because I get asked that a lot, like, "How do you get it all done? And what's your normal

routine?" So now, I love to pass that question on whenever I interview, so tag, you're it.

Autumn: I think that's a great question. Okay, what do I do? Well, I think I'm a type A person. And so, I definitely schedule minute to minute. I'm not really wasting time at all. I'm prioritizing. First of all, I'm taking stock, like, what's important to me, you know, and sometimes that's work stuff. And a lot of times, I'm actually scheduling, "Hey, here's what I'm going to do, I'm going to be totally present with Maverick, from 3:00 to 4:00, that's what we're going to do."

And I also have to schedule little self-care periods, I'm not good at self-care. You said that it was so annoying, but when I don't do it, I'm a mess. And when I do, I'm just...I'm more creative, everything just goes better. So I think for me, it's scheduling. It's prioritizing self-care, and literally putting it on my schedule. Putting on my schedule, "Here's where I'm going to be super present with my son," you know, obviously, eating well is a huge part of it. But for me, I think most of its back to the priority and the scheduling.

Katie: Yeah, I agree, for sure. I think that's the key in every aspect of life, but especially in health, and especially if you have a lot going on.

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Katie: I know for me like being...having a lot going on, I won't say busy. I'm trying not to use that word, but just having a lot going on actually makes me more productive because you have no choice, but to be...like, to have that scheduling and to have the planning. It's like when people are like, "Oh my gosh, how do you survive with six kids?" I'm like, "No, it's actually easier. Like it forgives a lot of my parenting struggles because I can't spoil them. I can't do everything for them. I have to, by default, teach them to be independent and teach them how to be contributing members of the household, and how to get along, because my life would be in complete chaos if I didn't."

Same with like when you have a lot going on, you just have to be organized and a little bit more regimented, but then you're able to just keep getting more done.

Autumn: Yes, and that's what I loved about you is, like, that thing that you...just your boundaries, your ability to set boundaries and teaching them to take care of themselves. You have to do that. I think that's something that a lot of moms don't necessarily do. I was included and I was inspired by the fact that, no, he's going to learn this and he's going to take care of it. And then like you said, you free up time for yourself to get all of those things done, and beautiful. Yeah, I love that.

Katie: A hundred percent. Okay, so another question I'd love to ask is, what's your either favorite book or a book that's had a big impact on your life?

Autumn: Oh, my favorite book. There's so many, I love to read. Have you read, "The Four Agreements?"

Katie: I have not.

Autumn: Katie, you have to read that book. I read it earlier this year, and then I read it again, and I'm just going to tell you guys about it. Number two and three are constantly echoing through my head because they were so impactful. But I'll just start at the beginning, and that's just about being impeccable with your word, not only like having integrity, but also not using your own energy and language to ever speak poorly of others or of yourself. That was a big one for me, just really making the effort to not degrade yourself, even just in your head.

And the second one was to never take anything personally. For me, this was huge. And I realized nothing anyone else is doing is because of you. It's a reflection of their own reality. And so just anytime you're like something happens and, "Oh, that must have been because I was this or that," you're just remembering, "Nope, that's something about them."

And the third one is to never make assumptions. And I was an expert in assumption making. And I'm always trying to counterbalance that. Well, what they're saying is you need to have the courage to ask questions. A, because, you know, when you get close to people you realize what you think was happening or why wasn't true at all. And it's really hard to not understand someone when you take that time to be curious and get to know it.

But then, the second part is all about learning to communicate what you actually need, huge hurdle for me. A lot of times, I didn't want to acknowledge that I needed anything because I was that superwoman caretaker, and I could just do this all day long. But if you're not communicating effectively, then you're doing yourself a giant disservice, so not making an assumption.

And the last one was just to always do your best, just about, you know, when...a lot of times we are our own worst critic. And when we're not doing our best, we're judging ourselves about it from thereafter. So always taking the time to...whatever you're doing, just, kind of, doing your best at it, but also realizing that your best is going to change from time to time, from moment to moment. You can't always be 100% creating the best there is out there. There's sometimes you're going to be tired, and sometimes you're going to be sick, and sometimes you're just going to be off, and just being okay, but still doing your best within that. So those four agreements, for me, have been so impactful.

Katie: Okay, so I just added it to my Kindle list, and I will read it. And I love, especially two things you just said, the first one about the assumptions, because especially in a world that's so digital, I think it's easy, especially when it's in text or just on social media, to read into things that are not there because you don't know the tone. And you can't just pick up from words on a page what you could pick up in someone's eyes if you could

see them, or in their voice if you are hearing them. And I think, I mean, it's sad. I see this on social media, especially so much these just rants and disagreements that just, like, snowball out of control.

And I can't help but think...I don't think, and either of these people originally meant anything mean toward the other in this. And now, it's become this huge dispute, and I think that alone it...definitely, I'll read the book just for that, because I think we do make too many assumptions.

And then, what you said about women and taking care of yourself but also, like, we do have that wired in us to just give and give and give and make sure everyone else is okay, and always be looking out for others. And now there's that research showing that that also makes us more likely to have, whether it'd be like depression anxiety, but also even physical problems. That when we suppress our own emotions and needs for so long, it actually can manifest in physical ways. And they're seeing, like, even a rise in cancer among people who...others would describe as, like, "They're always giving and they're so kind." And that's important, certainly, but we also have to take care of ourselves. And I think for women, that is such a hard thing to do.

Autumn: Oh, my gosh, yes. Did you read Dr. Nasha Winters' book?

Katie: Yes, yes.

Autumn: Okay. Yeah, that type C personality that always giving, always caring, super conscientious, definitely, higher rates of cancer. She said, she sees that all the time, so this is so important. And I'm talking to myself because I'm definitely just that way. But yes, like you're saying, it's so important. And one thing I wanted to add about the making assumptions thing, my sister, and her husband, she's a professor of communications. And I think like you're saying, communication is so different in person versus like in text and she's found that sometimes they have little squabbles or, like, little fights over text messages.

So what she has them do is, okay, now you take the text message. Now read it to me while I'm sitting here in the tone that you sent it. And then she does that. And she sees, like, these completely different conversations unfolding. So I think, yeah, like, when you're making assumptions, first, get curious, and then do this, like, read it out loud to each other in the way that you actually meant it when you sent it. And I think, it can change everything and definitely make your communication a lot more effective.

Katie: That is a great tip. Another question I love to ask is if there's a piece of advice that you could spread far and wide or give to everyone listening? What would it be and why?

Autumn: Oh, yes. I love this question, too. I think, staying curious. I think a lot of times when people come to this health space, we're looking for someone else who has all the answers, and well, this is the expert in this topic, so they must know what I need to be doing. But what I found as the most important thing is learning to assess your intuition. And that just means literally slowing down and little by little listening for your body's feedback, after you're eating, when you wake up in the morning and just really getting in touch with that. Like, a inner pilot life that you have that can actually take you where you need to go, because you're the only person who will ever know that.

And just also, I think that staying curious every single day, and it's always a struggle. But what you need today won't necessarily be what you need to have tomorrow. No expert can give that to you. So if I could give one piece of advice, it'd just be to always stay curious.

Katie: That's awesome advice. And so, you mentioned Paleovalley, anybody listening there is a special discount just for Wellness Mama listeners in the show notes at wellnessmama.fm. So make sure you grab that

because, like I said, they are our go-to, like, middle of the day lunch snack everything protein, but what's next for Paleovalley? What's next for you guys? I know you're constantly pushing the envelope as far as really high-quality products and new solutions, so what's next?

Autumn: What's next? We have a really, really exciting project. We haven't named it. Well, actually, we named it and then we're having some trademark issues. So we're going to try and deliver 100% grass-fed and grass-finished beef to everyone at a super affordable cost. Because I think it's really, really important for our physical health because it's more nutrient-dense, and it contains all these vitamins, and this B-12, and the iron. And all these even vitamins that are just important for mental health, but also, because when we use rotational grazing, and all of these awesome practices that are implemented on well-managed grass-fed and grass-finished operations, we can actually improve the soil health.

And I think when we're looking at nutrient deficiency, which is a big interest of mine, the nutrient content in our soil is declining, that's a big deal. And so, when we hack and support all of these farmers doing the right things in this highly regimented and well-thought-out way, where they're moving the animals, and rotating them, and stimulating the grass growth, and taking the carbon out of the atmosphere and putting it back in the soil, and just building that biodiversity. That to me is just the biggest mission for us right now, that we're really focused on that.

So hopefully it's going to be more affordable than anything that you can find out there, and definitely, the highest quality. We're not only in this for health. We're in this for the environmental restoration. We're in this for the welfare of the animals. We're in it for all of these reasons. And we want to just leave a thriving planet for our kids. So that's what we're doing now.

Katie: I love that. And for anyone listening, I will make sure to be in touch as I find out details from you guys about when that will be available. And I know you have a lot of current products that already meet all those criteria, the links to those are in the show notes for all of you listening. But Autumn, I could literally talk to you all day. In fact, whenever we're at conferences, we kind of do that. So I think we'll have to do a round two.

But this has been so much fun and I so much appreciate your research, and your passion for this, and all the work that you guys do. Because I know that there's...it's so much more difficult to run a company the way you are with that intense focus on quality. And I really appreciate that you guys do that.

Autumn: Yeah. Thank you, Katie. It's been an absolute honor and I can't wait to see you next time, so come visit us in Boulder.

Katie: Absolutely. Thank you so much. And thanks to all of you guys for listening. And as always, I hope to be with you again next time on the next episode of "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

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