



Wellness Mama Podcast Episode 26
Fasting for Women & Music Therapy
Interview with Abel James

Show Notes: <http://wellnessmama.com/podcast/fasting-for-women-music-therapy/>

Abel James, creator of the popular blog [FatBurningMan](#), joins me in this episode to talk about female specific fasting for weight loss and mental performance, how to lose weight while eating chocolate, and using music for therapy.

Abel is a modern day Renaissance man and bestselling author, award winning podcaster, world traveler and husband to Alyson. He has advised fortune 500 companies and is an acclaimed speaker. Abel graduated as a Senior Fellow with Honors at Dartmouth College with a concentration in Psychological and Brain Sciences and has traveled the world as a musician. His book [The Wild Diet](#) and his new musical album both release this spring.

In this episode, we talk about:

- Abel's own journey to health that involved following his doctors advice and gaining 30 pounds in the process before finding his own answers and losing 20 pounds effortlessly in 40 days (while still eating chocolate)
- What the "Wild Diet" is and how it is different from other diets
- Abel's take on fasting and the special rules that apply to women

- Emotional attachments to food and how our modern mindset about food often sets us up for failure
- How stress impacts living and the lessons Abel learned from going off grid and turning off technology
- The role of music in health and therapy and how to foster love of music in your children
- What moms can learn from bodybuilders about health
- Things that are hiding in health foods

Abel also shares his three tips for getting a jumpstart on creating healthier habits, his favorite online resource and the advice he wishes he'd gotten earlier in life.

Resources Mentioned:

- [The Wild Diet Book](#)
- [The Musical Brain Book](#)
- [Fat Burning Man Podcast](#)
- Article: [Intermittent Fasting](#)
- Article: [The Meal Frequency Fallacy](#)

Katie: Hi, and welcome to the Wellness Mama podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com. A random fact: did you know that fasting is an age old remedy that has been around since even before biblical times. In fact, Plato was famous for saying I fast for greater physical and mental efficiency.

Today's guest knows quite a bit about that and pretty much everything else. Abel James is a bestselling author, musician, speaker, and entrepreneur. He's a modern day Renaissance man. He's had one of the number one rated health podcasts in more than eight countries. He's a best-selling author. He has an award winning web series, The Fat Burning Man, and he's helped millions of people reclaim their health. He's here to talk to us today specifically about his new book, 'The Wild Diet,' and how it is specifically

helpful and can be helpful to women and about fasting and intermittent fasting and what the difference is for women.

Abel, welcome, and thank you so much for being here.

Abel: Thanks so much for having me, Katie.

Katie: Awesome. First, I would love if you could tell us a little bit about your story, because I know people to know you now may think you've always had perfect, vibrant health. We've talked about your story, so I know that's not the case. I'd love to hear you tell your journey, especially the part about losing 20 pounds while eating chocolate.

Abel: Yeah, that's the most important part, let's be honest. Growing up, I was always really active and into sports and had my physique under control. After getting into adult life, coming out of college I was working in consulting in Washington, D.C. If anyone's seen 'House of Cards' or any political shows, you know what D.C. people wind up looking like.

A lot of lifestyle factors collided with the fact that for the first time in my life I had good insurance, I went to go find the best doctor I could, because we have a history in my family of thyroid problems and high blood pressure and other things like that. I figured while I have this good job, while I have this good insurance, let's try to do everything that we can to preempt any problems that might come up.

My doctor basically immediately put me on a diet. He said with your family history, you should definitely be eating super low calorie, super low fat. That was the first time that I really started focusing on diet. I had been on and off vegetarian and interested in food for a long time, but this was the first time that someone slapped my wrist and said this is the way you need to eat if you want to be healthy.

I was eating a lot of whole grains and things that the doctor said were on the okay list that were low fat or low calorie and mostly tasted like cardboard that I could easily buy at the Safeway that was just a few blocks away. Over the course of time, I would go in every couple of weeks and my numbers . . . I'd pee in a cup. He'd take my blood. We'd go through everything. My numbers kept getting worse. I kept dieting harder and harder. Then, all of a sudden, a few years go by, and I'm 23, 24 years old, and I'm 20 to 30 pounds overweight and look like I'm 40. I'm feeling sluggish.

It happens to so many other people, too. I thought it was genetics or something that I was destined to be like as I grew older. At one point, it was after my boss actually ragged on me for putting on weight and being fat, I looked in the mirror and I'm like this clearly isn't working.

I've always been really into experimenting on myself and guinea pigging. At the same time, my older brother really got into pumping iron and bodybuilding stuff. We had all these underground bodybuilding textbooks from the '60s and '70s. I read up on high fat diets and eating a lot of really rich foods and clean foods. Some of those old bodybuilder guys in the '60s that won on their low body fat percentage were eating things like 36 eggs a day and chugging heavy cream and 2 gallons of milk a day. I mean absurd. I thought if there's one way to take away a lot of variables, it's changing one diet and doing almost the opposite thing, going from low fat to high fat.

About a month later after I did that, the fundamentals of my diet were pumping up the good fats, like grass fed butter, whipping cream, coconut oil, avocados, things like that, then ratcheting down the carbs, especially the refined grains and even the whole grains. After about a month, I dropped 20 pounds. Even more than that, my body showed all this definition almost like a bodybuilder. I was so shocked by how easy and straightforward it was to get away from something I'd been trying so hard to do. Dieting

is hard, and eating food that you don't like is terrible. This was basically the best thing I ever did, and I never really turned back after that.

Katie: Yeah, that brings up a really interesting point. Because I've been thinking about this a lot lately. I get a lot of questions on my site from people who are struggling with hormone imbalances or trying to lose weight. I've always thought people who are trying to lose weight, we're looking at different diets and different weight loss plans, but those are geared for people who are heavier and who are having hormonal problems. Whereas if you want to look at people who actually have gotten it right, look at bodybuilders.

Because certainly not everything they do is healthy, but they've at least been able to dial in on that. What else can we learn from the bodybuilding mentality, and are there any cautions there?

Abel: It wasn't just bodybuilding. That was just an extreme example that shocked me into trying something completely different.

To be honest, I've been an athlete for a long time, a runner, never an elite one, but always fairly good. It was a matter of performance, too. Looking at how you fuel your body has a totally different effect on how fast you are if you're looking at performance type stuff and also how healthy you are, how often you get sick, how good your immune system is.

You really need to be looking at your hormones. That's what your physique is all about, getting your hormones under control. If you're under eating for a period of time and you're sedentary, that's actually not all that much different from running a lot or doing a lot of endurance stuff and under eating also. You start to screw up the same hormones. Leptin and ghrelin go all out of whack, which are basically the hunger and then the satiating hormones.

What you want to do in order to lose weight is basically get your health under control first. Make sure your body is operating efficiently using the right fuels correctly.

Everyone runs on their own unique things. For me, I don't do well with olives, and my mom doesn't either, for whatever reason. As opposed to some other people who have trouble with milk and dairy, I've never really had a problem eating high quality, especially fermented, grass fed pastured dairy. I have quite a lot of it.

It's all about making sure your body is getting the right nutrients so that your hormones can do what they're supposed to do. When you're actually hungry and you need nutrients, you start to crave things like kale or green veggies or rich fats, as opposed to the junk chocolate that a lot of people eat. You crave the real stuff that has minerals in it. The single origin stuff is the best.

It's a shame, but there are so many especially Americans who have never tasted so many of these foods. People say that they're chocoholics, but most of the chocolate that they eat, the Hershey's and the Reese's and M&M'S and stuff like that, they're made mostly of corn and corn syrup. They don't really have chocolate in them at all. When you start to revisit how you look at food, it can really start affecting your body differently.

Katie: Absolutely. That's been a key thing that I've found. Shifting that focus, like you said, away from deprivation and dieting, because that's a different mindset and a very stressful mindset to always be thinking of food as the enemy and just looking at ratios of calories and macros. Because by that logic, you could eat a certain amount of just pure sugar and ice cream and whatever else you wanted every day as long as it fit within that.

Abel: Yeah, right.

Katie: If you look at the people who are those elite fitness professionals or people who are just naturally healthy and fit, they look at food as a fuel. It's not about how little can

I eat to lose weight. It's about how can I actually consume enough to get enough fuel for these activities that I'm doing. I actually have a relative who's now in her 50s. To keep her bones healthy, she started doing more heavy weight lifting and eating a very high protein diet.

Abel: Nice. Yeah.

Katie: She looks incredible. She looks younger. She's squatting 200 pounds. She's dead lifting 500 pounds.

Abel: Wow.

Katie: Just amazing.

Abel: Isn't that cool.

Katie: She talks about how . . . She's like I can hardly eat enough. I have to eat all day to consume enough to be able to keep this up. She's not starving herself. She's eating a huge amount of healthy proteins and vegetables. I always think that's an important mindset shift that we sometimes miss. It's so hard in our culture, because everything's so about food being the enemy and about deprivation. Shifting that focus to nourishment and how can I consume enough nourishing foods . . .

Abel: Food is the best. The real reason I do this is we're foodies. We learn to love it as an art form, cooking as a gift that you can give to the people who you care about and your family. It's so much bigger than what most Americans and the western world sees food as, which is this thing that will make them fat if they don't pay attention to it. It's like no.

Man, we never took our food for granted in past generations. We don't have to go back that far to start to see a really healthy relationship with food. Just a generation or two ago, victory gardens were in almost every back yard, and people were growing their own greens. Sometimes, they'd cook them to death or whatever, but at least they were giving it a shot, as opposed to the freeze dried nonsense that most of us get a lot of times without knowing it when we go to restaurants or eat out. Certainly when we go to the grocery store, the things that they put in there shouldn't even be called food. Most other countries won't even import it and sell it as food because it's not even close to the standards.

What passes for food in America, unfortunately, is something to be afraid of. That's why it's so important to look at fresh, local sources of real food where the taste comes from the freshness and the quality of the food, as opposed to artificial flavorings and preservatives and all this other nonsense that's been blasting our palate for decades now.

Katie: Exactly. Yeah. I think that's a perfect segue. You have a book coming out, and I'd love for you to really delve into what the specifics of it are. It's called 'The Wild Diet.' You really advocate a lot of these things, going back to growing some of our own foods and incorporating a wide variety of local food into our diet. Can you talk about what is the wild diet specifically and what makes it different.

Abel: Yeah. If you look at most of the food that's available, if we're honest with ourselves, we know that it's not fresh. We know that it's freeze dried and full of industrial crap. There's this whole industrial side of food, factory farms straight out of a horror movie. These poor birds, turkeys and chickens that never get to use their legs. Same thing with cattle and pigs. They're treated in a way that's totally not humane. They're very sick, so they're pumped full of antibiotics and growth hormones. They're fattened too quickly.

When I worked as a consultant, I worked with a lot of Fortune 500s. In the book, I talk about their mentality on where the consumer sits. The concerns of health are so low compared to how important quarterly profits are. A lot of this industrial side of things, it can work really well if you're going to build a car. It's high efficiency. There's a high profit margin. They're very interested in that. But, when our health is concerned, it doesn't work too well because we wind up with really low quality food that is designed inherently to be as addictive as possible.

Then, there's the marketing that we're subjected to on top of that. Driving down the road, you see a hamburger, and then you see chicken nuggets, and then you see this sweet, highly addictive diet drink, then you see something else. Our willpower, it's tough for us to handle that.

It used to be we'd work for our food all day, then in the evening we'd have a big meal and it would be pretty much the highlight of the day. Now, we're dodging food all day and usually sitting in a car or sitting in a chair being sedentary. It's a complete flip of the way that humans are designed to live.

Contrast that industrialized view of food with these huge mono crops running on pesticides and petroleum based fertilizers and big tractors to a small local farm that grows a wide variety of foods and has animals on that farm. They use their own waste as fertilizer to grow nutrient rich vegetables and fruits. When you get your food fresh and local, it's better for you and it tastes so much better. Unfortunately, it's getting easier, but it's been really hard in the past few decades to get high quality food in America. Because the whole food supply chain has changed in favor of enormous companies that care more about shareholder profits and distribution metrics than they do about your health.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I love that notion that you have of feasting at night and maybe eating less during the day. This is something I've actually seen recurring in a lot of . . . Even my doctor talks a little bit about that. Can you delve into that more. What are the benefits of fasting and feasting? How does that work on a practical day to day level?

Abel: The whole three square meals a day is unprecedented when you look at it historically. When you look at things like breakfast, lunch, and dinner, even when talking to my grandmother about it, it was never like that. On my dad's side, they were dairy farmers. A lot of times you would need food to fuel your activity, but on days of rest like Sunday when they would go to church, they would under eat throughout the whole day. At night, their treat and their dinner would be a big bowl of popcorn that they put molasses and milk over.

I don't know. I've never heard of milk on popcorn. It's hard to imagine that world, because it doesn't exist like that anymore. We're eating all the time.

There are different ways to . . . There's no doubt that restricting the amount of food that you eat can help you lose weight and that eating more, especially of the wrong things, can help you gain weight. In the book, I argue that we're not just eating too much, we're eating too often. For me, I found that I actually didn't get hungry until my first meal of the day. Every once in a while, I wouldn't eat breakfast, or I'd just have coffee with some heavy cream in it or something like that. I'd be like wow, I actually have a lot of energy. I started doing that more and playing around with under eating during the day.

Also, I'm very active and love going on hikes and stuff like that. That's usually how it works. You'll take some nuts or maybe some carrots or an apple or fresh fruit out in your pack. Then, when you come back home or you come back to base camp, you have this big meal, and it's the highlight of the day. You feast and you really enjoy dinner. You enjoy the ritual of eating and warm food at the end of the day. It's the best.

One of the ways that we keep our food down during the day and keep our energy up is by drinking lots of water, drinking tea and coffee, and sometimes nibbling on raw uncooked food. It might be a salad or a green smoothie or fruits and veggies, some nuts, something like that. We save our big meal and the big preparation of the day, this saves a lot of time too, for the evening hours.

That's actually one thing. If you look at the hormones, your cortisol spikes in the morning. That's what actually wakes you up and gets you out of bed. When you eat something like refined carbs in the morning or even whole grains, things like bagels, donuts, cereal, bread, pancakes, that sort of thing, as your breakfast, it drives your blood sugar up which releases a flood of insulin which makes you hungry in the next couple of hours usually. Because the insulin brings your blood sugar back down, you get that brain fog. We all know that morning crash. Then, you need another cup of coffee. You need some more carbs to keep your energy up all day.

If you contrast that to under eating during the day . . . This whole week, actually, I'm recording. It's Friday, the last day. It's been about seven interviews a day. My first meal every day has been between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. What I'm eating during the day is basically just teas with a little bit of fat. Sometimes, I'll have fish oil as a supplement. Occasionally, I'll nibble on a little bit of a salad or a green smoothie. That's pretty much it.

It's amazing the energy that you start to get when you're letting your system . . .

Basically, digestion is something that's a cost to your system. During the day, if you want a lot of energy in your brain then you don't want to eat a big heavy meal, because that's going to pull a lot of your energy down to digestion. That's where the cloudy headed after you overdo it at lunch syndrome kicks in.

Katie: Yeah, that makes perfect sense. I've noticed that in my own life as well that I seem to do better during the day with more just proteins and healthy fats in the morning and green vegetables, a light lunch, then eating a dinner with the family. That's obviously bigger because the kids are hungrier. Timing that where it's a few hours before bedtime so there's time for digestion to happen some. Like you said, when you eat a bigger meal, especially if you're going to have any carbs, having them be healthy sources of carbs and at night, that spikes your insulin, like you said, which does also let your body create more melatonin which you need for sleep and reduces your cortisol which helps you sleep through the night. I've noticed that's improved my sleep to really focus on moving healthy carbs to night and then just keeping my body fueled with protein and healthy fats during the day.

Abel: That's been one of the best things about this whole way of eating and living. I used to have a really hard time falling asleep before 10:00, 11:00, 12:00. I'd be staring at the ceiling tiles, counting sheep, whatever I could. My sleep quality was poor, and usually I'd have at least an hour or two where I was trying to sleep.

When I switched to eating this way, having a big meal at night, you look forward to it all day, it's so satisfying, and then you're totally right. The melatonin kicks in. We fall asleep at 8:30 or 9:00 and pass out all night, then wake up early the next day and have really productive mornings. It's been interesting. Also, we started drinking a lot less in terms of our own habits. Sometimes, we'd have a glass of wine to help us sleep, even though we know that it hurts in a lot of cases. Having that big meal seems to make that unnecessary. It seems to make that night time thing, where you're out of gas and you're tired but you can't sleep so you go surf the Internet or you watch TV or you do something else, we basically get tired before that happens. Nothing good happens after 9:00 anyway. It's good to just pass out instead.

Katie: Yeah, for sure. I'm curious. Are there any special considerations with fasting of any kind, especially this type of more intermittent fasting during the day, for women? I know your wife Allison obviously has tons of energy and is very much in shape, fit, and healthy as well. Are there any special considerations that she takes with fasting as a female?

Abel: Yeah. With females, hormones are even more important than males in a lot of ways. Because males are kind of like Jeeps. I think that's a quote from 'Seinfeld.' We're for the most part pretty predictable and pretty resilient in terms of our own bodies going out and doing a lot of activity without food. We seem to respond better to stress in a lot of ways. Torturing our own bodies, for some reason we can get away with it. If you look back at where we came from and genetics and what it was like in caveman days, hunter gatherer times, that kind of makes sense.

But, with women, there are so many more concerns with the hormones because carrying a child growing inside you, then lactating and all of the other things that women uniquely, their bodies need to keep up with, pre-menopause, post-menopause, if you're stressing the body too much in other ways, adding another stressor like fasting isn't often that good of an option. For example, if you're not sleeping enough or if you're exercising too much, adding something like fasting to the mix, they call it a hormetic stressor or hormesis. Basically, you subject the body to a little bit of stress, like under eating but still being active, and the body can heal itself similar to the way that if you do squats or if you do bicep curls. Your muscle will kind of break down, then when it comes back it'll come back stronger and more toned. A similar thing happens when you fast. If you fast too much or if you go too long without food, it can actually backfire for women, because it will spike cortisol. Then, you'll get hungrier than usual. You'll store more fat.

You really want to listen to your body and start small. When we first started this, we would skip a meal every once in a while. We eventually just followed our bodies, tried what worked, and kept doing that. Eventually, it got us to . . . I'll usually . . . Not all days. Some days, I will eat three meals, especially if I'm being really active or something like that. Usually, that means that I don't eat my first real meal until 3:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. Sometimes, noon will be my first one. If that's the case, it'll usually be a protein, veggies, and usually a bit of fat. For Allison, she's much more variable. It's like she'll tend to get hungry earlier than I do. If I don't feel like eating until 3:00 or 6:00, she'll feel like eating at 12:00 or maybe even 10:00.

It's important to honor that. If you're feeling stressed and you feel like you need some brain food, or that you're just running on overdrive, or that you didn't sleep that well, you can tell that you're stressed out, it's important to get some high quality food in there. You can never go wrong eating green leafy veggies or a big salad. That's something that whenever you're craving it, follow your hunger and eat. But, don't go for the pancakes. Don't go for the sandwiches and the subs and the carb heavy things. Because that just puts you on this roller coaster that makes you want to keep eating.

Katie: Yeah, definitely. I'm glad you brought up stress. Because I love that you guys are living off the grid right now travelling the world. I'm curious. What has that taught you guys about turning off and unplugging and stress? Have you noticed any physical changes just from doing that?

Abel: Absolutely. Everyone knows the phantom phone vibrations in their pockets or purses or whatever. What we did was neat. We lived in Austin for the past six years. We sold our house, our cars, pretty much all of our stuff. A lot of our technology, since we were flying international, wouldn't work anyway. We basically declared technological bankruptcy on social media and on email. We put up vacation messages and said we're

in Indonesia right now, we don't have Internet, we'd love to hear from you soon or connect with you later.

It's hard to notice how stressful this culture is, this technologized culture where everyone has several devices that are bleeping and blooping at them all day. It trains you to be reactive. It trains you to follow the day around whatever comes up and address that in these five to ten second little chunks, and never get a hold of what you want to do that day, what's important to you, spending quality time with your friends and family.

Unplugging has been one of the best things we've ever done. It was a few weeks of being off of email, then we came back and looked at it a little bit. I realized that 90% of those emails were just noise, and almost all those texts were unnecessary, and a lot of the voicemails were, too.

What we learned to value while we're living in the woods or visiting family or spending time in cultures that are totally foreign to us is that being in the present without technology is one of the best gifts you could ever give to anybody. When I'm hanging out with my dad, I'm not on my phone. We're going to dinner. No phones allowed. We grew up in the middle of nowhere in New Hampshire where phones didn't work anyway. That side of my family is kind of used to it.

At the beginning, it wasn't easy. I had an okay time doing it, but it's the other people in your life who are even more addicted to their technology than you are who are really bummed out when all of a sudden you're not responding to 17 texts a day and you're not responding to every email. I think we all need a hearty dose of truth, which is that there's no way we can ever keep up with all this. There's a new social network every week that we need to start, and nurture, and learn how to use to keep up with everybody. It's getting out of hand.

Katie: Yeah, I absolutely agree. I think the idea of fasting could be applied to technology just as much as food, and we'd probably all benefit from that. One of my big things I am always recommending is especially turn it off at night and let that be family time. After sunset, don't use the computer, don't look at your phone, don't watch TV. If you do, wear orange glasses or use only orange light bulbs. Give your body that time to be away from technology.

Abel: It's important. You sleep so much better. It's really neat. I'll share a story of hanging out with my brother, Mark, who works on an organic farm. He's been living that lifestyle for a while. He's never gotten that into technology. There's such a fascinating thing that happens when you hang out at this old farm house with him and his girlfriend and you don't have TV and you don't have phones. Because you wind up playing card games with each other, and talking, and listening to Tom Waite's records and stuff.

You feel like you're back 50 years ago. Were they happier then? Were they as stressed as us? I would venture a guess that they weren't as stressed as us, certainly not in the ways that we're stressed now, which are the unnecessary ones. We used to be stressed by things like survival or dying from disease. That's such a secondary concern now. We're stressing about not getting back to someone who texted us two minutes ago.

Yeah, fasting from technology, especially with your family at night . . . Bring back family game night. One of my best memories from being a kid was we got two and a half channels in New Hampshire. Any time we wanted to change the channel, my dad would have to climb up on the roof and move the antenna around. We'd be like oh, no, right there.

One of the channels that we got half way was channel 13. Every Saturday night, we'd watch 'Star Trek: The Next Generation' as a family and make pizza together as a family. Even though pizza is one of the worst foods you can eat from a health perspective, the

culture of it, all of us getting together, putting our fingers in the dough, laughing, spending quality time, and then . . . Making our own pizzas was a big part of it, too.

Being a kid and being allowed to put cheese in the crust or make a double decker pizza and just experiment with food is something that makes you fall in love with it, even if it's a stepping stone to eventually eating a big salad.

Katie: Absolutely. I'd love to transition a little bit. I know there are probably a lot of moms listening who have kids. I'm curious about this myself as well. You were involved with a book called 'The Musical Brain' which was also a best seller. People may not know this as much about you, but you're a musician as well, and you've actually just recorded an album from what I've heard. I'd love for you to talk about that, your research that you've done with music and the brain. Especially for those of us who are moms, how can we implement this with our children at a young age to help them?

Abel: Music is a language, and it's one that comes . . . We don't know why we have music. It's very bizarre how much it's everywhere but there's no real evolutionary adaptive reason for it that's obvious. Music is something that deeply affects the brain and helps grow certain parts of the brain in a way that almost no other art or no other thing does. It's essential for communication.

There was a neat study that I mentioned in my book about when mothers talk to their babies, they try to emote a bunch of different feelings - happy, sad, and basically a bunch in between. With their voices they try to communicate that with words. They did this for a bunch of different babies at different ages. Then, they sang those emotions. By several multiples, the babies could understand the emotions from maternal singing, from the singing of mothers, but they couldn't from the words.

I think that's something that applies a lot to all of us. When you listen to someone speak, it has nothing to do with the words. It's more about the feeling behind the words. When you learn music as an art and you start to play it, you learn how to communicate better.

This is something that's important to me, and this is how I start the book. When I was a kid and a teenager, I had to go through some rough things. One of my best friends, my cousin, died in a freak car accident. I couldn't get myself to cry, even though he was my best friend. I knew that I needed to have some sort of outlet. The only thing that I could do to open that up and cope was turn on my amplifier and play guitar as fast and as hard as I could trying to keep up with crazy people like Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughn.

I would play until I collapsed, literally, in tears. Then, it would open up all of these emotions and you could deal with them. Then, I would write songs about it. I am very honest about the fact that at many points in my life, music has saved my life.

One of my great passions is getting kids to love it, because it's not hard. Most people teach music wrong, which is like slapping your wrist and saying you need to practice, you need to practice. It's more about having . . . We didn't have cable TV growing up or all these distractions of technology. What we had was this dinky little \$5 Yamaha keyboard that we got at a yard sale that we'd plunk around on and this little tape recorder that we made radio shows on. Look at me now, I'm a musician and a radio show host. It's so cool to look back at that. I'm so thankful, because we never had much money but we always had cool little musical toys around.

I think, if anything, you don't need to stress out about making sure your kids play. Just keep those things around and offer it to them. Say hey, that little guitar looks like fun, let's learn a few chords.

Katie: That's fascinating. I was definitely taught more of the slap on the wrist you need to practice type of way with piano. Part of me loves the piano and loves music, but a part of me doesn't like to play because that brings back those memories. Are there different types of music that are better, if a child's showing an interest, to encourage, or different instruments that are better, or is it really specific to a child?

Abel: Everyone is so unique. I think everyone has a thing. For me, I always loved the saxophone. In a lot of points in my life, that's been my main instrument. Now, I play guitar and sing and do a lot of other things. Those were the things that really appealed to me. My other brother, Mark, he was always the drummer. He's like a typical drummer, flighty, spastic, tons of energy and really good at that. He was always banging on pans, and I was always plunking on something with a melody.

I think that you need to find whatever resonates with your kid. We tried to do piano lessons. I went twice, I think, and I hated it, because the teacher, you could tell, she never played piano. She didn't like it. That's no way to learn.

It's more about trying to create music and create sound. Even having a piano there that your kid can put their fingers on and hear a sound come out does something in terms of good training for them and training the brain. Especially when kids are really young, they're looking for all sorts of different stimuli. I wouldn't get your kids started on death metal or anything like that. There are a few types of music that are dark, and they're obvious. Basically, everything else that has a melody, getting your kids to sing is so easy. You don't even need to buy an instrument. Making an excuse to be a little bit more musical and get involved with music is one of the best gifts you could ever give to yourself and your family.

Katie: Yeah. I'm really curious to see how this will play out with our kids. We have five, as you know, and my youngest, when I was pregnant with her, I was on this Italian

opera and old fashioned opera kick and classical music. To this day, she's almost two, she can be in the middle of a full out temper tantrum, and I can put on Andrea Bocelli and she completely mellows out.

Abel: Isn't that amazing?

Katie: We had a piano. My husband's grandfather was a maestro, and he taught piano and violin for years. His piano was recently passed on to us. She's always had it to play on. I find it fascinating that she's from the beginning had this intense interest in music. She also was our earliest talker and our earliest walker. Even now, she's talking full sentences, but she can sing more than she can talk. She'll sit at the piano and belt it out. I'm really curious to see how that evolves as she grows.

Abel: I've seen the other end of that, too, people with Alzheimer's. I've been with a few of them who have lost the faculty of speech. They can't communicate that way anymore. But, if you sing a song that they knew, for example, from childhood, they can sing. They can sing every word, and they remember all the melodies. There are a lot of neat YouTube videos. If you Google something like that, it'll come right up. Some of the most beautiful things to see . . . It's almost like it's coming straight from their heart, like it bypasses the brain in all ways. It's a very emotionally rich experience.

Yeah, it's amazing for kids, but it also keeps you alive a lot longer, too. This is like a running joke among musicians that if you don't die of a drug overdose when you're 27 then you pretty much live forever. They'll cart those old guys, especially the old blues guys . . . Down in Austin they still have a bunch of them. They'll cart them out on stage. They've been 400 pounds for 40 years or whatever, but they're still rocking it on guitar in their 80s and 90s. It's such a cool thing. It keeps you alive. There are a lot of physiological reasons for that, too. I'm a big fan of chi gong and tai chi, movements that calibrate your visual part of the brain with the physical. If you're looking at your hands

move, or you're putting your fingers down on keys and sounds are coming out, that's really good for keeping yourself sharp and keeping your nervous system in order, especially if you want to age well.

Katie: That makes so much sense. Out of curiosity, what is the album you just finished? Is that something we're going to be able to get in stores?

Abel: Yeah. It's so nuts, because my show, my podcast, without me knowing, a lot of celebrities started listening to it. Some of them were the guys from the Tim McGraw band. We got together and started jamming. It was so much fun. We accidentally recorded an album in Nashville. We didn't really know what we were going to be recording but came out with a dozen songs and wrote a few on the spot. It's so much fun. I think we're going to call it 'Swamp Thing' and it should be coming out this spring. We're going to release it completely independently of record companies and stuff like that. Because these days, it's much more fun to be independent and let your music speak for itself, I think.

Katie: Oh, for sure. To wrap it up, I want to respect your time, but there are three questions I always ask at the end. The first is if someone's just starting out and they feel overwhelmed, what would be the three baby steps you would give them to get started.

Abel: There is so much misinformation out there, so it's hard to know what to do. If there's one thing that every health expert agrees about it's that we should all be eating more green leafy vegetables. Do that every day. It's something that we do almost every meal, actually. That's the real secret. It's not protein, fat, carbs, or anything like that. It's getting your veggies in.

And, stay away from in any large quantity the starchier veggies. I'll make this number two. Stay away from things like refined grains. Definitely stay away from sugar, even in

the form of fruit and fruit juice, which oftentimes has 50 to 100 grams of sugar if you buy it off the shelf. Even if you're making smoothies at home or whatever, use something like berries, which is a tart low sugar fruit. Pretty much all berries are like that, compared to a pineapple. Tropical fruits are too sugary to be good for you in any quantity. They're more like toppings.

Number three, be active. You don't have to do a huge workout every day. In fact, one of the things that I do . . . I broke my foot this past summer, so I couldn't do pretty much any of my exercises. I had to get into staying in shape by being balanced and doing the more low impact type stuff like chi gong and like tai chi or yoga or Pilates and that sort of thing. What I do is six days a week I exercise for about two to five minutes. That's all. If you can do a two minute exercise that gets your blood pumping or even just a little short jaunt outside, that's something.

Don't think that you always have to go to the gym if you want to work out. Just do a few pushups. Do a few air squats. Whatever it is, get your blood pumping every day. The morning is the best time to do that. Take two minutes tomorrow morning and get started.

Katie: Awesome. And, a favorite book or resource besides your own?

Abel: Oh boy, that's good. I would have to say all of the recipes on the Internet. Here's why. Basically, anything with real food in it that's gluten free, or grain free, or totally paleo, or grass fed or whatever, you can open up your phone and Google it, and it'll spit back ten recipes. Most of them are probably pretty good. Whatever you like, know that that dish can probably be made healthy out of real food. Use that. There are so many people that go I don't know what to make today. We have the entire world in our pocket, so take advantage of that.

Katie: Yeah, great point. Finally, what do you wish someone had told you earlier in life?

Abel: Every kick in the butt is a step forward. Learning from failure is one of the best things you can do. Planning on it is pretty cool. It helps you see failure as something that you can use to your own advantage later is pretty cool. It takes some time and some getting used to see it that way. You need to constantly remind yourself every day that there will be road blocks, there will be things that go wrong, but you're probably eventually going to be better off for them.

Katie: Awesome. Abel, where can people find you online?

Abel: The best place to find me right now is wilddietbook.com. We're doing a bunch of giveaways for putting this book out there. Basically, the book, we made it to be a cookbook with awesome recipes that are surrounded by a bunch of stories and tidbits from all these different food cultures around the world. If you're interested in the book, it's wilddietbook.com. If you like podcasts and shows and stuff like that then mine's called Fat Burning Man. I'm not too hard to find.

Katie: Awesome. When does your book officially release?

Abel: April 7.

Katie: Awesome.

Abel: Coming right up. It's crazy.

Katie: Those bonuses are available, I'm guessing, until it releases. So, people can get those now?

Abel: Yes. We're giving away a drone for HD filming, and GoPros, and a bunch of cooking gear, my favorite skillet, and other fun stuff like that. Yeah, it's going to be cool.

Katie: Awesome. I need to go enter that, too. Awesome.

Abel: Totally.

Katie: Abel, thank you so much. Please tell Allison hi.

Abel: I will.

Katie: Thank you so much for taking the time.

Abel: Thank you, Katie, and thanks for listening.

Katie: Thank you so much for listening to this episode of the Wellness Mama podcast, where I provide simple answers for healthier families. If you would like to get my Seven Simple Steps for Healthier Families guide for free, head on over to wellnessmama.com and enter your email. I'll send it over to you right away.

You can also stay in touch on social media, facebook.com/endlesswellness or on Twitter and Instagram @WellnessMama.

I would also really appreciate it if you would take a second and subscribe to this podcast so that you'll be notified of future episodes. If you've ever benefited from something I talked about on this podcast, I would be really appreciative if you would leave a rating or review, since that's how others are able to find this podcast and so we can help spread the message.

Thanks, as always, for listening and for reading and for being on board with creating a future for our children that's healthier and happier. Until next time, have a healthy week.

Thanks as always for listening to the Wellness Mama Podcast. If you're enjoying these interviews, please subscribe via [iTunes](#) or [Stitcher](#) and leave a (5 Star!) rating and review if you haven't already!