



Episode 317: Tackling Insomnia, Anxiety, Weight,
and Hormones Naturally With Esther Blum

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Katie: Hello and welcome to the "Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from WellnessMama.com and this episode is all about hormones and especially how hormones can affect our sleep and our mood. And we go deep on insomnia and anxiety and all kinds of important topics. I'm here with Esther Blum, who is an Integrative Dietician and a high performance coach. She's helped thousands of women permanently lose weight, eliminate the need for medication, lose stubborn belly fat and reverse chronic illness. She teaches her clients to cultivate a warrior mindset when it comes to healing, the relationship with food, and unconditionally

loving their bodies. She's a best selling author of several books and currently maintains a very busy practice where she provides 360 degrees of healing with physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual support. And find out in this episode why it's so important that we as women get enough protein, why lifting weights can be really beneficial to our hormones, some incredible sleep tips and so so much more. I know you're going to love this episode so let's jump in!

Esther, welcome. Thanks for being here.

Esther: Katie, I am stoked to be here with you, man.

Katie: I'm so excited to chat with you because we've had chats in person. And not only are you just a pleasure to talk to you, you are also so knowledgeable about so many of these topics that I get questions about all the time, and I cannot wait to jump in and tackle them today. So thank you for your time.

Esther: Yeah, let's do it. Thank you.

Katie: Awesome. Well, I wanna start with one that I get so many questions about, and I haven't personally experienced and so I feel like I'm not able to be very helpful about and that is anxiety. And I know there's a hormonal component here. I know, for instance, it gets worse for a lot of people during menopause or during...it can during pregnancy or certain times of the month, and all that comes along with that. But it seems like this is a growing problem. And I have personal friends who struggle with this. And I've seen just how difficult it can be. So I'd love to really like start by going deep on anxiety and why this is plaguing women so much.

Esther: Yeah. Well, anxiety is really, you know, as we know, there's all the external factors cooking along, right. There's just the multitasking and the stress of family, especially if you have young children and aging parents plus balancing the workload and financial stress. So, that alone is enough to give anyone anxiety. But in terms of hormones, especially if you are perimenopausal or postmenopausal, that's when I really see a spike in menopausal. It can also be, you know, premenstrual, pregnancy, postpartum, and puberty, all of the Ps, they can give you a lot of anxiety. And so I'll just speak to menopause in particular because I work with so many women going through menopause and there is definitely a link between perimenopause and hot flashes and anxiety. And high or low fluctuating estrogen coupled with low progesterone that can affect your serotonin and your GABA brain hormones for the worse and it probably worseness your sleep, too.

So we wanna think about really calming support for anxiety. I love lemon balm, like if I wake up in the middle of the night and my brain is just running at 100 miles an hour trying to solve the world's problems. I have a tincture of lemon balm and I'll put on some topical magnesium and both of those are very calming on the nervous system, they relax the nervous system. Magnesium lowers blood pressure as well, so it's a vasodilator, that's very calming. Putting some lavender on your pillow at night, that's also very calming to...or

like I even dab some on my eye mask so I can really breathe it in. Calming-type teas, if CBD is your thing that can be a solution, too.

But, also, you wanna start with the basics, you wanna start with blood sugar balance. Low blood sugar balance can really contribute to anxiety because when your blood sugar drops, it tells the body, "Uh-oh, I'm in a state of distress," and your cortisol can go up. And cortisol is a stress hormone that, you know, can trigger a fight-or-flight response. So you wanna make sure that you're getting adequate protein throughout the day and carbs together, a kind of like a nice one-to-one ratio of protein and carbs at all three meals, and maybe you need a snack or two.

Also, good mantras, calming mantras, reminding yourself like, "This is temporary. I'm in control. This is temporary. I'm in control." Reading, meditating. I love the sleep timer app and all it takes is 10 minutes to rewire your fight-or-flight response in the brain, the amygdala and lower your cortisol. So I really love just like simple lifestyle things. First, get your blood sugar under control because PMS is a time when your blood sugar's really poorly controlled. Same with menopause and perimenopause. So your blood sugar's control, that gets rid of anxiety ruling out any food allergies or sensitivities. I remember years ago, I was getting severe anxiety at like 9:00 a.m. and I was eating breakfast around 6:30/7:00. I'm like, "What is happening?" And I had been having dairy, I reintroduced yogurt into my diet. And I find...it took me about two weeks and then I stopped having the dairy and the anxiety completely went away.

So you wanna rule out food allergies as well. You wanna try meditation at night. If those things don't work, try calming herbs. You can drink lemon balm tea or Yogi Bedtime tea. You could steep like three bags of Yogi Bedtime tea, it's like a natural Xanax. Rubbing some topical magnesium. And if those don't work, you can certainly do calming brain nutrients like passionflower, L-theanine, GABA is a neurotransmitter that lowers your cortisol. So all those calming things can help. And they can also help you lose weight inadvertently because when your stress response is lowered, when your cortisol is lowered, you will lose weight. And that's really important as you age is managing your stress or weight loss.

Katie: Yeah, I think a lot of people maybe don't understand just how important that connection is. And I'm happy...I actually wanna share a little bit from my own perspective of that in a minute because I've experienced that firsthand the last couple of years. But to stay on the anxiety thing for a minute. So you mentioned cortisol, which I think is really important because I think this is a maybe misunderstood hormone. And it's one that is so impactful to all these other hormones. And I think it often gets either not measured or discounted, or people discount just how much stress can be a problem. So talk to us a little bit more about, like, what cortisol is and what it's doing in the body. And then some ways we can address that, especially if we realize that's a problem in our lives.

Esther: So I work with a test. I test all my patients using what's called the Dutch test. The Dutch test, for those of you who don't know, is a dried urine test for comprehensive hormones. And so I look at how your hormone cycle from evening through overnight through the morning. And on that test, it shows me not only kind of what your daily cortisol curve is like, but it shows me if you're even breaking it down in your system, if you're

able to excrete it, if it's circulating around, and if it's kind of a chronic stress issue. So cortisol is, you know, I call it like a Goldilocks hormone, you gotta find the amount that's just right. Some can be very beneficial, and too much can be detrimental.

Cortisol is made by your adrenal glands, which sit right on top of your kidneys, and it kind of gives you a fight-or-flight response. So if you feel...a great analogy is like if you feel like your engine is spinning like crazy and smokes coming out, but there's no gas in the tank. When you're wired and tired, you probably have some chronically high cortisol amongst other things cooking. So, cortisol, you want your cortisol to be high, like when you're working out, because when you get a spike in your cortisol, your insulin stays low. So it actually helps you burn fat in those conditions. And but you don't want cortisol sustained. So it's much better, for example, to do high-intensity interval training or sprints versus training for a marathon. I'm curious, like, I know when I trained for the marathon, I thought, "Oh, I'm going to get so lean," and I totally gained weight because my cortisol was like, rocking out like crazy, and I had no idea.

So, ways to lower cortisol...well, I'll come back to ways to lower cortisol. But now if your cortisol is too high for too long, you're under chronic stress. You drink excess amounts of caffeine that your body cannot detoxify and typically, I don't like people to drink more than 8 to 16 ounces of coffee a day. If you're having too much alcohol, if you're smoking or if you just have poor emotional management of your time and the people you surround yourself with and work, or you're caring for a sick family member. All of those can really give you chronic stress and cortisol and that is detrimental because cortisol in high amounts will break down your muscle tissue and help you store excess body fat around your midsection. So you may start out with a muffin top and you wind up with a cake top. So that is not good because it really stores fat around your midsection that puts you at higher risk for all sorts of chronic illness and inflammation down the road, especially coronary artery disease and diabetes. So you don't want that.

So how to manage cortisol is a couple of things, okay. One, again, diet. I love intermittent fasting for some people, but for a lot of people, especially when you're starting out and your cortisol is really high. I have people eating every two to four hours to kind of support the adrenals and let the body know it's not under stress and that it can relax and let go of excess body weight. So I have people eat a lot of protein like to the tune of one gram per pound of body weight. So if you're about 140 pounds, that ends up being, you know, 4, maybe 6 ounces of protein at a meal like 3, 4 times a day. That helps support your adrenal glands beautifully. I like people to eat good quality grounding carbohydrates, things like sweet potatoes that are root vegetables or white potatoes or carrots or parsnips or turnips. Those are extremely grounding emotionally when you're under a lot of stress.

I love nourishing soups. Why do I like soups? Because when your cortisol is high like if you've ever had a really stressful conversation over dinner, and you feel like your stomach's in knots and you can't eat, that's because your digestion completely shuts down under chronic stress and your liver stops signaling your digestion to work. So, taking time to make some soups and I literally just simmer any vegetables in water with some sea salt for like 20 minutes and I put it in a blender or a Vitamix. Soups are very easy to digest. If you're chronically stressed and your digestion isn't working, it's not gonna...salads or raw veggies may be much harder to digest. So I recommend starting with soups or cooked vegetables, that really decreases bloating from chronic stress.

Meditation as I mentioned, 10 minutes a day. You can do it anytime of day. We all have 10 minutes. I mean, we spend an hour a day probably checking our phone. So we definitely have 10 minutes a day to meditate. Journaling your gratitude, there is a tremendous amount of clinical research on the benefits of just writing down three things you're grateful for either at the beginning or the end of the day. I'm a big believer in cleaning out really toxic relationships and saying no a lot. Just doing those things alone, like, is a game-changer having really clear boundaries. And it took me, Katie, until, you know, really my 40s to be very unapologetic about saying no to things and just, you know, reconfiguring the relationships in my life. And I'm very blessed to have really core people that I can call and say, "Hey, you know, I'm going through a stressful time. Let's get together and meet and just laugh and relax." Baths, I love baths with Epsom salts, those are really, really calming. Do you want me to talk about supplements to lower cortisol or what do you think?

Katie: Yeah. So to just highlight a couple of things you said, I think you brought up so many great points. But the midsection fat thing that's, I think, something people don't realize is there's such a strong correlation. There's a link between, like you said, midsection fat and all kinds of problems down the road. In fact, I've read that even just knowing like your waist-to-hip ratio, and having a certain waist-to-hip ratio is somewhat a predictor of like cardiovascular disease and like other things that you mentioned. Same thing with blood sugar, I think that's another easy thing. We all have the ability to test and many of us never think of it. But like I have a blood sugar meter at home, and I'll, every couple weeks, test my fasting blood sugar just to see because that's actually a really good predictor of health. And it tells you quite a bit about your body.

I love that you brought up those points and things like soup, which has proline and glycine from the broth, like you said, are so nourishing to the body. So I think that's like such a comprehensive approach. But then certainly, there, I'm sure, are times when there is extra support needed and maybe that's where the specific nutrients come in. I know I've read about studies with certain B vitamins and vitamin D, but what do we need to know when it comes to anxiety and other nutrients?

Esther: Yeah, well, anxiety. So the other reason why and this is not a commercial for the Dutch test, but it's just to show you the importance of testing is I look at neurotransmitters in the brain. And this is the most fascinating thing I have learned, okay. I have, I would say 50% at least minimum, that's the low end of my patients are on anti-anxiety or antidepressant medications when we start working together. And the majority of the time those medications are not working. The neurotransmitters that people have or show me on their Dutch tests are still low even though they are taking these antidepressants. So we know that we have to address the gut because the gut is where 90% of your neurotransmitters are produced.

So getting your food allergies tested or sensitivities, and when I say allergies, I'm not talking and anaphylaxis reaction I'm talking a sensitivity. We can be sensitive to foods for up to four days after we eat them. The immune response, there's two types of antibodies, they're short and long-acting, and the long-acting antibodies can take up to four days to show an immune or an inflammatory response. So when you cut those foods out, that alone can enable your gut to heal from inflammation and you can start making your neurotransmitters. Also, getting in glycine from, you mentioned, bone broth, one of my all-time favorites. I

have, like, so many jars in my fridge and freezer right now. Making bone broth is really key. And chicken skin is actually really high in glycine, too. That is very beneficial for your nervous system.

You also wanna think about calming nutrients like L-theanine that's found in green tea, or you can supplement with it. You can take 5-HTP as well. You want to think about how you're going to make your serotonin and dopamine and protein actually raises and sustains serotonin and dopamine. So in the morning, right, if you're feeling depressed or lethargic or irritable, if you get a really high protein diet with a high protein meal with a low fat in there. That also raises your neurotransmitters and gives you amazing mental focus and gives you sustained energy and so you don't get that 4:00 p.m. crash. Most people are crashing at four. That's another sign like, all right, my adrenals are pretty shot I need some support.

And also, I do a lot of calming herbs. Holy Basil is very adaptogenic, ashwagandha. Sometimes I do licorice, some people with chronic stress, their cortisol is actually so low, it's so low. And when you're cortisol, it's one thing to have very high cortisol. But when you're under severe chronic stress for long periods of time, your cortisol will be rock bottom, that's another sign. So for those people, I have to get it up, and I'll use a little licorice or some core adrenal to kind of replenish that. But diet-wise, certainly protein all the way.

Katie: That's another great point. And I think one, just to reiterate, is, it seems like a lot of women are scared of too much protein, or it's just not something that we consciously think to get enough of. And the number you mentioned, for instance, like in certain phases, getting one gram per pound of body weight is probably I would guess, more than that most women just naturally eat, right. But there's so many benefits to this. And is that something that most women can do is just be conscious of our protein intake? Is that relatively beneficial to hormones in general?

Esther: Yes. So and I wanna address that because I want you to know I...this is all science and research-based. And I have no personal agenda. I have been vegan before and I have a lot of clients who need to be vegan for a while to kind of heal up a fatty liver. But eventually, I don't have any problem with a vegan diet short-term. Long-term, okay, women especially have a much harder time balancing hormones. It's very difficult to go through menopause for a lot of women on a vegan diet. And so protein really supports the adrenals so that you can keep producing estrogen and progesterone. A lot of the menopausal problems happen when the estrogen and progesterone and testosterone start to tank. And that's when we get hot flashes and anxiety and irritability.

So, yes, there's so much research I've done on protein. And what most doctors won't tell you is that you're gonna start losing muscle mass when your hormones drop, especially if you're not eating enough protein and you're not lifting weights. Or doing some kind of yoga or bodywork, some kind of strength work in there that stimulates your muscles. So getting enough protein is key because when you lose muscle mass, you subject yourself to, A) risk of falls and bone fractures as you age. But, also, you put yourself at risk for dementia. So there's so much research out there that shows dementia as type three diabetes and without enough protein, it's really hard to regulate your blood sugar.

So there's also I wrote the book "Cavewomen Don't Get Fat" which is a Paleo Diet book for women and because the question I always got was, "Well, isn't protein going to excrete...help your kidneys excrete more calcium, doesn't that contribute to bone loss?" That's absolutely false unless you are already in kidney failure and/or have severe gout and really have to watch your protein. For most people, your body adapts to the higher intake of protein and as long as you're getting enough water and eating vegetables, you can eat a very high protein diet and in fact, you will need more as you age. It's a myth that you don't. But I like protein because I feel like it supports your hair and your nails and your skin and to me, I wanna look a lot younger than I am biologically, so I like eating a lot of protein.

My favorite beauty and brain's protein is actually wild Alaskan salmon because...and I buy it from Vital Choice who I know you know, Randy, too. I love him. Wild Alaskan salmon has a neurotransmitter, has DMAE, it's dimethylaminoethanol and that stimulates neurotransmitter production in your brain and also underneath your skin. So it supports the contours of the muscle in your face. We don't look old because we have wrinkles, we look old because we sag. And so wild Alaskan salmon combat that. It has asked astaxanthin which is an incredibly potent antioxidant. It is what makes salmon pink. It's the red algae that salmon and pink flamingos eat and crabs. And it also has a tremendous amount of Omega-3, which again hydrate your skin, make it look very luminous and support brain function and it has vitamin D. So it's really, to me, like, beauty and brains. It's kind of a facelift in your fridge really.

Katie: I love that. And I think another important point to highlight here is that eating enough protein will also not cause you to gain weight. Because I think that's another fear that women have is like because, you know, bodybuilders eat a lot of protein or men need a lot of protein. If I eat a lot of protein, it's gonna make me gain weight. I know that hasn't been my experience, but I just would love for you to speak to that as well.

Esther: So women are so afraid of bulking up. I hear this all the time, like "I don't want to lift weights, I'm gonna bulk up." First of all, you have to eat a lot of calories to bulk up. You can't bulk up on a low-calorie diet, number one. Number two, I have looked at hundreds of Dutch tests and very rarely...women have testosterone in range, at best. Most women have very low testosterone and physically, it's impossible to build muscle and bulk up when your testosterone is low. You just can't. You physically cannot do it. Biologically, you need testosterone to build muscle.

And number three muscle takes up way less space than fat. So initially, when women feel they're bulky, they start to do strength training and they're eating more protein, they say, "Oh, my God, I'm bulking up." What happens is the muscle tissue builds and it pushes the external fat out. So you look bulkier, but you're really not. And as you build muscle, muscle burns more fat and calories at rest. And muscle is really an organ in and of itself. It secretes growth hormone, it secretes cytokines, it secretes anti-inflammatory chemicals as well. So muscles very metabolically and biologically active. So as you build more muscle, and you build your mitochondria, you will lose weight in the long run. So and you will be able to keep weight off much more easily. So it rights a lot of wrongs.

Now, the other thing I like about weightlifting is that it is equal to or more effective than metformin, and metformin is a medication that people take orally for type two diabetes. Let me tell you, metformin is gonna be pulled from the market soon because there are all sorts of problems with it and dangers associated with it. So weightlifting provokes the same insulin receptor response, so it opens up your insulin receptors so insulin can get into the cells. And when your insulin levels are high, your cortisol is low. So you're...it does manage your stress hormones, as well. So it's really beneficial. You kind of want the balance between insulin and cortisol, you don't want either to be too high too long, but they work in conjunction with each other. So when you're weight lifting, you will be in much better blood sugar balance, and you'll be able to burn fat more effectively.

Katie: Absolutely, that's been my experience. I've actually I've lost a pretty substantial amount of weight since I had my last baby. And I have the whole time eating pretty much every day more than 100 grams of protein. And I also know from experience, I've never felt better and leaner than when I was lifting really heavyweights. And I think women are kind of shy away from both of those things. And I've definitely seen in my own life, just how beneficial they can be. I think it'd be great if a lot more women leaned into that versus being afraid of it.

Esther: Yeah. I mean, my favorite client, I just put her pictures up on my social media handles. She just lost 25 pounds. She was a triathlete, and she kept gaining weight, gaining weight, gaining weight. And I said, "Your triathlons are making you really fat, dude. Like this is not serving you because your cortisol was up," and she was eating so many carbs to sustain her long work endurance workouts. So I finally...she was turning 40 and she was like, "I've had enough, I'm ready, like, tell me what to do." I have her doing far less exercise. I have her lifting weights with the trainer, like two to three times a week. She does a lot of walking, maybe some gentle swimming. And we flipped her ratios, making her protein higher than her carbs and she lost 25 pounds and she was like, "Wow, I'm never hungry anymore."

That's the other thing people don't realize is that protein is the only nutrient that shuts off hunger in the brain. It actually tells your hunger and satiety centers like "I'm satisfied now." Carbs will never shut that off. That's why you can eat a whole sleeve of Oreos or a whole bag of potato chips and not really feel satisfied, but, like, no one has ever come to me and said, "Whoa, I went on such a bender like I ate a whole steak last night, whoo," right. Or, you know, "I ate a 14-ounce steak last night." Like, even if they did, no one's overeating steak, but everyone's overeating carbs. So what does that tell you right there. That's number one.

And number two, like the most simple weight loss formula, so I have all my clients, like, track their food on MyFitnessPal, right? And as long as there...I don't even...they don't even always hit the protein targets. But as long as their protein is higher than their carbs, let's say they're getting, you know, 120 grams of protein and 97 grams of carbs, they always lose weight every time. So I'm like, "Look at the ratios. You don't even have to look at the total number just is your protein higher than your carbs?" "Yes." Okay, done. So that means when you have a plate of food, right, 50% should be vegetables and then you want like a good quarter of the plate to be protein and carbs are kind of your condiment, like half a cup, you know. And just measuring things also does wonders, getting in really high fiber carbs like legumes, or chickpeas, lentils, beans if you tolerate them. That alone also really makes a difference on your blood sugar and your ability to tolerate carbs because beans and lentils are very high in resistant starch, which means they take hours to break down in your bloodstream.

So you don't get a spike like you would if you're eating, you know, a doughnut or, you know, cookies or bread. That gives you a very high spike in insulin quickly and that ultimately is not beneficial for your body's ability to burn fat.

Katie: I love it. And I wanna switch gears and tackle a couple more topics. I just wanted to add, too, as a mom of now teenagers, which is kind of surreal to say out loud. The protein thing is a big deal with teenagers as well. Like if they don't get enough protein, they are more grumpy. They don't sleep as well. So like I found that that's really important as my kids are getting older is to make sure they have enough quality protein all the time as well. So just as a mom tip there.

Esther: Absolutely. And not only that, but to give them better focus and performance in school and help them manage their hormones because adolescence is, I mean, Mother Nature is one wacky scientist, right, so it all...everything goes crazy. And you wanna make sure they're getting enough protein especially red meat. Red meats got a lot of zinc, and that helps keep acne...teenage acne under control and it prevents them from overeating the junk too much. I mean, teenagers gotta eat what they wanna eat outside your house, but at least if you give them the foundation for steady blood sugar and appetite regulation it'll keep them lean and healthy.

Katie: Absolutely. Okay. So now to switch gears a little bit. Let's talk about insomnia because that's another thing I hear from a lot of readers about. And it seems to go along with hormone imbalance as well. And something I think we don't have a lot of experience with either, but that I think a lot of people do struggle with. So, what do we need to know about insomnia?

Esther: Yeah. So, insomnia, often, it's caused by a couple of things. Obviously, postpartum, your hormones are dropping like crazy. If you're nursing and you're up every couple hours, your body can get into a real insomnia cycle. And then in perimenopause or menopause, like there's also swinging hormones that affect your neurotransmitters like GABA or serotonin. And melatonin declines with age and it can be affected by high estrogen and cortisol, it could be a thyroid change, it can be low progesterone. And of course, there's all sorts of blood sugar imbalances. So let's start with the foundation, okay, and I am an expert in insomnia because I am just getting my sleep back down. My son is 12 and a half and I went through like horrible, horrible, like debilitating insomnia. And it causes all sorts of anxiety and depression and moodiness and no one is their best self under those guerrilla warfare conditions. Like there's a reason why terrorists use sleep deprivation as a form of torture, right? We really, really, really need it.

So number one lifestyle tip, okay, is to stop alcohol in the evening and this is a bitch for a lot of people because they really rely on alcohol to unwind. It's their mom juice, that happy juice, you know, but again, it's Goldilocks, right? Some is okay. Some people can tolerate like four ounces of wine, two to four ounces of wine. But for most people, A, they're not stopping at one glass and, B, wine or alcohol can cause a lot of blood sugar imbalances, and it can suppress thyroid function for up to four days after you ingest it. Not to mention bloating and waking and dehydration and all of those things. So no alcohol in the evenings, that alone has repaired sleep for my patients so effortlessly and quickly. Switch to I'm like if you really...if you wanna drink

like make yourself a mug of lemon balm tea or Sleepytime tea, you know, just help yourself unwind and relax that way.

Number two, certainly, a hot bath with Epsom salts is really great to unwind. But if you don't have time for that you can take magnesium in the evenings. I love magnesium. I love the trifecta of magnesium like Epsom salt, taking 400 to 600, of mag glycinate at bedtime because magnesium glycinate, by the way, there's many forms of magnesium. Glycinate is the form that specifically addresses anxiety so that's why I recommend that. And then topical magnesium for the middle of the night wake-ups, that will get you right back to bed. And magnesium glycinate is also great for fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue and it doesn't cause GI upset like diarrhea. Some people get diarrhea from magnesium citrate, it is a laxative. So that's what milk of magnesia is, it's a magnesium laxative or magnesium oxide, so you wanna make sure you're getting a readily absorbed form of magnesium.

Number three is carbs at night do wonders for insomnia and I can attest to this personally. If I do not have about three-quarters of a cup to a cup of carbs and I've clearly mastered this amount. It's different for everybody. But if I don't have carbs at dinner, I don't sleep. It's just that simple. Have carbs at dinner. And people say, "Well, that's gonna make me really fat. I can't have carbs at night." But think about it this way, right? If you're not sleeping, even for, you know, a week or two, your insulin receptors start to become problematic. And your insulin response and your blood sugar imbalance starts to get really problematic and you get sustained high cortisol and you start to get really inflamed.

So imagine you're not sleeping and you're totally in an inflamed imbalanced blood sugar state versus had...so you're gonna gain weight anyway versus having carbs where you have solid sleep. And sleep is the time you do your repairing. So imagine you have some carbs, you sleep, you're making your growth hormone, your blood sugar's normal, you're actually gonna lose weight. So you wanna make sure that, you know, you don't throw the baby out with the bathwater and you step back and look at the big picture and say, "What do I need to do to sleep?" If it takes little carbs at night, you're not gonna gain weight, you're actually gonna improve your body composition.

Another thing you wanna look at and this is great. Another great reason to do a Dutch test is you allocate your progesterone. Okay. As your progesterone levels fall, you want to make sure that you are getting enough progesterone and this may mean supplementing orally or with a topical cream because progesterone does wonders for repairing sleep. So if you're in your 40s, you're hitting perimenopause or menopause, you can...you're absolutely a candidate for some progesterone replacement and progesterone therapy and that can reduce anxiety and really help your sleep.

Lifestyle-wise, also, you wanna make sure you sleep like a cavewoman. You wanna make sure there's no blue light or cell phone technology next to your head. There is clinical research that shows that sleeping with a cell phone next to your head, or within 10 feet can raise your cortisol levels while you sleep. So you do not want that. You want to make sure the room is dark. You know, a sleep mask if necessary, earplugs, a white noise machine. You wanna make sure there's no blue light technology, no TVs, no routers near your bed, nothing

technology related. And you wanna make sure you're in a cool room. It's very important, especially if you're prone to night sweats, you can sleep on a cooling mat just Google it, you'll find it. But you wanna make sure your body temperature is low. It's great to like sleep naked or in very low clothing with a warm blanket but keep the air temperature cool or use a fan if you need. All of those can promote really great sleep and help with anxiety.

Katie: I love all of that, and especially the carbs at night. That's another one that like the protein I feel like just because of all the dietary dogma out there, women have gotten afraid of pretty much every macro out there like there's reasons to be afraid of that, reasons to be afraid of protein, reason to certainly be afraid of carbs. That one has gotten some heat. But my doctor when I was first diagnosed with Hashimoto has told me that as well, that it's not about carbs in general, it's about timing them, the amount, and when you eat them, and how that supports your sleep when you eat them at night.

And another thing that's been really instrumental for me, I don't have insomnia, like I said, but I track my sleep really carefully. And one thing that's made a big difference in my sleep, and my cortisol levels is getting outside every morning, and getting sunlight as soon as possible after waking up. So my husband and I have this ritual of we'll get up and we'll drink either coffee or tea or just lemon water, whatever it may be on our porch in direct sunlight. And even if it's a cloudy day, there's so many...such a wider spectrum of light in sunlight than there is in our house. And so that signals light receptors in the eyes and on our skin to have a proper circadian rhythm. And I've noticed a huge difference in my sleep when I really commit to doing that regularly. But it makes sense. I think insomnia, like we're talking about before when it comes to anxiety, it's a broad-spectrum approach. And it's when you address all of those factors that you really can kind of get to the root cause versus just trying to like play whack-a-mole with symptoms.

Esther: Totally. And I love what you said about the light and getting outside. That's another piece of it is daily movement because you got to tire your body out. So, exercise first thing in the morning versus at night because for some people exercising too close to bedtime really triggers insomnia. And if nighttime is the only time you can exercise I recommend yoga because it is stimulating for your muscles, but also relaxing and calming and can put you in a real alpha wave state when you dream at night.

Katie: Awesome. That's a great tip as well. And lastly, I wanna make sure we also go deep on something that I know is also a specialty of yours, which is the perimenopause and menopause phase of life. And I know we talked about that kind of in passing through both of these things being big problems that a lot of women face when they hit that phase. But talk to us about how hormones change during that point of life and things we can do even like, for instance, I'm not there yet, but I know eventually I will be like things we can do to support our bodies going into it. And during that and anything beyond, obviously all these amazing tips about protein and movement and sunlight and carbs and all the things we've talked about, are there other things we need to know specifically for those phases?

Esther: Yeah, so let's just kind of go through the basics of what each phase is. So, pre-menopause, that's the time when your periods are cycling, your monthly hormones go up and down. It's, you know, from puberty to

around the 40s. It's different for everyone but basically in the 40s. And perimenopause, it's that time before menopause. It feels like reverse puberty. You're in your 40s and 50s. Your cycle starts to get more wonky. You get acne, you get waking out of nowhere, skin can be drier, you get brain fog. You get moodiness and irritability, your joints can ache. Whoever designed perimenopause can seriously suck it because I'm there now and I'm like, "What is that happening right now?"

And then menopause, it's defined as 12 consecutive months without a period. You can still be symptomatic, but your period isn't doing it. So, with perimenopause, right, all the follicles in your ovaries have been declining in time. And so, the cells that are making the hormones estradiol and progesterone and testosterone and DHEA are declining. And so progesterone declines more quickly when we stop ovulating, and it's a total roller coaster. And so some people have an easy transition to this and others don't. So you wanna make sure that you start with the basics. You're not crazy, this isn't your fault.

But, number one, you want to get more sleep. So our body does the most healing between 10:00 p.m. and 2 a.m. If you are a night shift worker it's between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. But that is when your body does the most healing it does the most resetting of your adrenals, releases the most growth hormone, releases anti-inflammatory compounds. So you want to prioritize sleep more than you ever have before. Sleep hygiene means you go to bed around the same time and wake up at the same time. You get in bed...you know, you're not on your phone till the minute you get in bed. Technology gets shut down by 8:00 or 9:00 you're in bed by 10:00. Let's say you're someone right now who goes to bed midnight start working towards 11:30 and then 11:00, you know, make it a progressive change. And getting in more sleep, look at your sleep habits. Look at if you're snoring. Most women also, this is not well known, they do develop sleep apnea in menopause because of falling estrogen levels. And so you wanna maybe get a sleep study if you find you're sleeping, but you're just waking up absolutely exhausted every morning.

And the other thing you wanna start doing and this is my favorite way to combat the symptoms and the weight gain is lifting weights. It's really, really...and it's coupled with eating protein. Okay, that's so important in building muscle because the fat gain is gonna come and you're gonna be more sensitive to sugar and carbs because of all these hormone changes. So find a trainer, lift weights, cut back on the cardio, join a class, do what you have to do, okay. And then cutting out alcohol I'm sorry, you know, but it causes insomnia and hot flashes and the alcohol will really bite you. It will bite you hard and it will bite you back.

The other thing you want to do is you wanna set your boundaries, you wanna say no to things, you wanna reduce your stress and take things off your plate. Because as your ovarian cells decline, your body really relies more on your adrenals, your fight-or-flight center. And if they're in overdrive, if your stress is not controlled, believe me, your symptoms are going to get much worse. This applies to PMS too, by the way, if your stress is really bad, and your caffeine, sugar, and alcohol are bad, your symptoms are gonna be worse.

Okay, so lastly, you wanna look at how you eat. Are you eating veggies at every meal? Are you getting enough protein? Are you getting in fiber? Are you getting too many carbs? You know, indulging in sugar and everyone says that they have cravings. But when you're getting enough protein, you don't have cravings, but I'll tell you

my favorite sugar buster is glutamine powder, a tablespoon of glutamine mixed into two tablespoons of water or even heavy cream and you do this, you know, one, two, three times a day and your cravings will be gone in a day or two. But I find as long as I'm getting enough protein the cravings are emotional maybe, the emotional me want a drink or a piece of chocolate but the physical me does not.

And be patient with yourself because, you know, you're going to be your truest self. I find the older I get, the less patients I have things become black and white. And this can be bad, but it can also be really good. It can be really healthy and help you get really, really good boundaries for yourself. It's really the ultimate expression of femininity, in my opinion, to say no and know your boundaries.

Katie: I absolutely agree on that and lift some weights and eat lots of protein.

This podcast is sponsored by The Ready State. If you're at all like me, you might have perpetual stiffness and pain in your neck and shoulders from years of working, carrying kids and all of the demands of parenting. Or sore hips from too much sitting or multiple pregnancies. I found a great way to relieve my aches and pains and improve my fitness and flexibility. It's from someone I highly respect - Dr. Kelly Starrett at The Ready State. If you don't know Kelly, you should. He's a Mobility and Movement coach for Olympic gold medalists, world champions, and pro athletes. He's the Author of two New York Times bestselling books, including "Becoming a Supple Leopard", which has sold over half a million copies. He has over 150,000 hours of hands-on experience training athletes at the highest levels and he's a Doctor of Physical Therapy who helps top companies, military organizations, and universities improve the wellness and resilience of their team members. So to say he's qualified would be the understatement of the century. He created a program called Virtual Mobility Coach. This program is easy to do from home each day, making it ideal for me, and for most moms. And I can do with my kids. Every day, Virtual Mobility Coach gives you fresh, guided video exercises. They show you proven techniques to take care of your body, relieve pain, and improve flexibility. And you can customize your videos in three ways. If you're in pain, you can pull up a picture of the human body and click on what hurts. And from there, the Virtual Mobility Coach will give you a customized pain prescription to help you find relief. Second, you can find a library of soothing recovery routines in the daily maintenance section. They're a great way to wind-down and practice self-care. And third, for athletes, Virtual Mobility Coach also has an entire section of pre- and post-exercise routines for more than four dozen sports and activities. They help you warm-up before your workout so you can perform your best with a lower risk of injury. Right now, you can try Virtual Mobility Coach totally risk-free for two weeks without paying a penny. And after that, you can get 50% off your first three months. Just go to thereadystate.com/wellnessmama and use code WELLNESSMAMA50 at checkout. That's half-off your first three months when you sign up for a monthly plan. And you'll get personalized techniques to relieve nagging pain and improve your fitness and flexibility.

This podcast is brought to you by Wellnesse... a new company I co-founded to tackle the toughest personal care products and create natural and safe products that work as well as conventional alternatives. I realized that even the most natural of my friends still used conventional toothpaste and shampoo because they weren't willing to sacrifice quality. There are natural options and ones that work, but finding products that do both was almost impossible. We tackled the toughest first, creating the first and only natural toothpaste that is fluoride and glycerin free, and that has calcium and hydroxyapatite to uniquely support the mineral balance

in the mouth. It also contains neem oil and green tea to support a healthy bacterial balance in the mouth and fight bad breath. Be the first to try it and our innovative natural hair care at wellnesse.com

Katie: What about night sweats? It seems like night sweats and hot flashes are another thing you at least hear associated with perimenopause and menopause quite often. Is there anything that can kind of make those easier?

Esther: Yes. You absolutely want to, again, how is your stress? Like your stress can trigger hot flashes. You absolutely want to have your stress and your blood sugar under control because your hormones fluctuate wildly. It's absolute hormonal chaos. So you wanna get back to the basics you wanna get enough sleep, maybe you wanna consider herbs like black cohosh, red clover, there's motherwort, there's maca, there's valerian and dong quai. You can choose any one of these and start there.

If you're really sweating a lot, you can take sage and Rhodiola, these are adaptogenic because those dry you out, which you want. You wanna be dry if you're sweating all the time. My favorite is Vitamin E, you can take 400 to 800 IUs per day. That is wonderful for hot flashes. Rhubarb is also wonderful for hot flashes and B6 and B12. And lots of adrenal support, breathing, yoga, meditation. Acupuncture is amazing and yoga there are...there was a great study I read it was like the "New York Times" published it was at least 10 years ago and it was saying how yoga combated menopausal symptoms like as well as any herbs or nutrients.

And the bottom line is this, right, supplements and herbs and nutrients are helpful. If we all manage our stress better, we would not need half of the supplements that we need. So and it's more time consuming, right? It's harder. It's hard. It's so much easier to just take a pill, Katie. I would much rather take 20 supplements than have to meditate, you know, because I'm like, "Ugh, one more thing to do." But you know what, I'm such a better human for it. And it's like when I feel better, it's worth it to keep putting that in. It's not whoo, we're just trying to calm your ass down, lower your adrenaline. You know, get a fan, watch hot spicy foods, maybe a sauna is not for you at this point in your life.

And lastly, is I love fiber like chia seeds because fiber binds if your excess...if you're very high in estrogen fiber, will bind that and pull it out. And it's just very gut-friendly. And last but not least, like maybe need some hormone replacement therapy that can really be helpful for hot flashes too. And I'm not averse to that at all.

Katie: Awesome, so many practical tips. I love it. And we're getting near the end of our time, but a couple of questions I love to ask. Are there any other things that are kind of like misunderstood about the work that you do and everything that you teach?

Esther: Yes, people think you have to be perfect to get results and you don't at all. You never have to be perfect to get results. So people are so worried like, they're never, you know, when we start working together, they're like, "Oh, my God, I could never have a drink and I can never have chocolate and I..." false. I actually

reverse engineer that. So as much as I don't like people to have alcohol too much, I understand it's very much a reality in life and I occasionally I have alcohol too. So I'm like, reverse engineer it, look at your carb intake, right, if you're gonna have, you know, a glass of wine at dinner, you know, watch out for your other carbs. Or build it in or get in a workout or make sure you're hydrating. Or make sure the next day your carbs are lower. So I teach people to really build in balance.

I think, also, people think that I really bring a lot of practical common sense. I don't like to do anything extreme. I rarely, I mean, I really never had...one client who was on a keto diet because she asked me if she could. And I said, "You're welcome to try it. I don't think it's a fit for you." And within a week, she was like, "I can't stand it. I don't feel good." I really don't want people on unsustainable things. It's like I really...I compare it to a one-night stand versus a marriage right? Or, you know, one-night stands are very sexy and fun and, you know, they can be great for a lot of reasons, but long-term, you kind of want the marriage or the stability in your life. So I really try and build people's diets around their life versus trying to get them to follow a diet with. Instead of them revolving their entire life around the diet, I revolve the diet around their life meaning I don't...I try to make it as simple and effortless and lifestyle-based as I can and meet people really where they're at.

Katie: Awesome. And lastly, any books that have been really impactful for you that you would recommend to others?

Esther: Well, A. I love my books. I would start with "Eat, Drink, and Be Gorgeous" and work your way up to "Cavewomen Don't Get Fat." I really love, oh, my, god, there's so many I love Jolene Brighten's book "Beyond the Pill." Jade Teta, "The Metabolic Effect" books. I really love, oh, my, god there's so many, "The Whole Soy Story" written by Kaayla Daniel that has like all the published studies on the negative effects of soy and how it's just big money-making industry. I love "Seeds of Deception" by Jeffrey Smith, talking about the impact that GMOs have had and how they're impacting our health. I feel like those are real game-changing books and Charles Poliquin also, all his German body composition books. He really taught me some incredible foundations of strength training and eating. And they're very funny. So those are all really good books.

Katie: Amazing. I'll make sure all of them are listed and linked in the show notes at wellnessmama.fm. Along with, of course, your website and ways people can get in contact with you. But for anyone who's just listening right now, where can they find you online and learn more?

Ether: Okay. I wanna give your listeners a special offer. You can find me on social media, you know, under Esther Blum. You'll find me on Instagram, Facebook. My website is estherblum.com. And if you go for your listeners, Katie, if you go to estherblum.com/call, C-A-L-L, for the first 12 people who read out to me, I'm going to give them a \$500 value offer. And that is a strategy session with me, this is a 30-minute call on 3 specific tools that they can learn to lose 10 pounds this month. So it's a wonderful gift. It's estherblum.com/call.

Katie: That's incredible. Thank you so much. And I'll make sure that's linked in the show notes as well. So if you are exercising or driving, you can always go to wellnessmama.fm and find any links that we talked about. But Esther, thank you so much. I knew this would be a super practical and amazing conversation that would help a lot of people and I think you just hit it out of the park. So thank you for your time.

Esther: Thank you so much, Katie.

Katie: And thanks as always to all of you for listening and for sharing your time with us. We're both so grateful that you did and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

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