



Episode 365: Why What We Put On Our Bodies  
Matters So Much and CBD Science  
With Jessica Assaf of Prima

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

This podcast is sponsored by Joovv Red Light Therapy. Like many of you, I am always trying to find different ways to keep my wellness routine in check. I've noticed some of the things that are most helpful to me are practicing daily gratitude, a no-phone rule one hour before and after bed, eating healthy and exercising, and if you've been listening to me for a while now, getting in my red light therapy sessions. I've told you before about why I personally love Joovv before: the skin and hair benefits are awesome and I find that I recover faster from soreness after working out. Joovv is my preferred red light therapy device because it has a patented, modular system that lets you build as you go so you can find a way to fit it into your budget. They have full-body devices (Joovv Elite & Duo) and you can keep connecting these pieces together to make it as big of a device as you like. They also have a smaller desktop model (Joovv Mini), which is great for travel or for spot treating. Remember, when it comes to natural light modalities, bigger is better for optimal benefits, which is why their modular system is so unique. I wanted my listeners to know they offer exclusive discounts on larger devices when you upgrade your system within the first year of your initial purchase. Their unique modular design lets you build a larger, full-body system over time, and their bundle pricing ensures you'll pay only what you would have paid if you bought the larger system from the start. Find out more at [joovv.com/wellnessmama](http://joovv.com/wellnessmama) and use the code `wellnessmama` for a free gift.

This podcast is sponsored by Wellnesse, my new personal care company that creates products that go beyond just safe and natural and contain beneficial ingredients that nourish your body from the outside in. Many "clean" products simply don't work. This is why I have spent the last decade researching and perfecting recipes for products that not only eliminate toxic chemicals but also have ingredients that work better than the conventional alternatives for your body from the outside in. I'm so excited to share these products with you and am especially proud of our whitening toothpaste which took years of formulating and dozens of rounds of tweaks to perfect. Our whitening toothpaste supports a healthy oral microbiome and strengthens tooth enamel naturally using ingredients such as hydroxyapatite, neem, and green tea to support tooth and gum health. Instead of fluoride, our formula contains green tea leaf extract, which is loaded with antioxidants. Plus, a phytochemical in green tea is shown to fight bacteria that leads to tooth decay. We combined this phytochemical with hydroxyapatite (a naturally-occurring mineral and main component of tooth enamel) to strengthen teeth and prevent cavities. Of course, fresh breath is paramount to good teeth brushing, and for that, we included peppermint leaf extract and neem. Neem prevents bacteria from sticking to teeth and turning into plaque. This protective measure means fewer bacteria, which leads to...fresher breath! Check out our whitening toothpaste and all of our products at [Wellnesse.com](http://Wellnesse.com). A tip – if you purchase a bundle or use auto-ship, you will receive a discount on both of those orders!

Katie: Hello, and welcome to "The Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from [wellnessmama.com](http://wellnessmama.com) and [wellnesse.com](http://wellnesse.com). That's "wellness" with an E on the end, our new line of non-toxic personal care products that work as well as any conventional alternative. Speaking of clean personal care products, I am here today with Jessica Assaf, who is the co-founder and the Chief Education Officer at Prima, which is a company doing many of the same things in a different industry. She's a graduate of Harvard Business School and an award-winning entrepreneur and activist on a mission to use business to improve health. She's been a leading advocate for safe beauty products and corporate accountability since she was 15. We get into that story today and we talk about the reasons that what we put on our body matter so much, what the endocannabinoid system is and

how to support it, and a lot of other topics related to health and wellness, as well as to entrepreneurship. So, without further ado, let's join Jessica. Jessica, welcome to the podcast.

Jessica: Thank you so much for having me, Katie. I'm so excited to talk.

Katie: Me too. And I'd love to start with I think what we have a very common interest in, which is leading to more transparency and understanding what's in products that we use in our lives, and especially that we put on our bodies. And I know your story here starts at a very young age and you did something pretty incredible. So, can we start with that part of your story and why this was so important to you?

Jessica: Absolutely. So, I grew up in the Bay area, in Northern California, where organic was a way of life. I grew up going to the farmer's market with my dad, every single Sunday, eating organic, feeling like I was living my healthiest self. But then, around the age of 15, I started using makeup, and it was so exciting for me to be able to use all of these beauty products that I could help my confidence with. And it was kind of a rite of passage for me when I was a teenager, to just start using products. But what I soon learned is that all of my favorite beauty products contained ingredients linked to cancer, neurotoxicity, and reproductive harm. And I took a step back for a second and asked the question, why are we choosing beauty over health? Because I was so excited to be wearing makeup, but yet I would never want it to compromise my health for the products that I was wearing.

And so that started basically a 10-year journey, really looking into every single product I was using every single day, to ask the question, is this safe? Is this safe enough? And what I learned through my research, actually the community I grew up in had really high breast cancer rates. The breast cancer rates at one point rose 60% in eight years, and no one knew why. And so I became a part of an early organization now called Search for the Cause, where we just wanted to ask Marin residents, what is going on in your lives contributing to potentially high cancer rates? And we went door to door and asked questions about occupancy, family history, all of the basics. But there was a question in the survey about personal care products and cosmetics.

And as a 15-year-old who had just started wearing makeup, you know, I loved getting my nails done with my mom and putting on makeup in the morning just to feel a little bit more confident, but I looked at that question and I said, what do, you know, what do these products have to do with cancer and health issues? And went back home, did my research. I had that first Mac computer with Google. And so I started doing my own Google research and learned that though countries and, you know, places like the European Union have done a lot in terms of just at least banning specific chemicals, the U.S. has not done that same work. It's kind of a loophole in federal law that enables cosmetic manufacturers to really just put whatever they want on the market without labeling requirements or proper testing.

And so, I spent a long time thinking, you know, are we just the human guinea pigs walking around, getting exposed to all of these industrial compounds, many of which belong nowhere near our bodies, let alone in the products we're putting on the skin, the body's biggest organ, every single day. And so it was a lot of learning

and unlearning and questioning. And I basically spent 10 years as an activist, trying to change companies from the inside. So, doing protests and direct action, sometimes even putting warning labels on products in stores just to get that media attention so that people could finally ask the same questions I was asking, because what it seems like, and still seems like today, is a lot of people assume what's on the shelf is safe and that there is a regulatory body, you know, ensuring that all of the products that enter our homes are tested and adequately validated, but unfortunately that's not really true.

And so it really, this whole industry and space relies on a lot of consumer education and, most people just don't have time for that level of information and education required to actually know if our products are safe. So that's why I felt this kind of innate responsibility to do that work as a young teen with, you know, very little fear and fear of consequence, but after many years of protesting and direct actions, and sure, we made progress, but at the end of the day, I realized maybe there's a better and more effective way to impact change at the corporate level beyond activism in the traditional sense, because at the end of the day, people just kept asking me, okay, you're telling me that the mainstream products are potentially harmful. So what should I use? What are the alternatives?

So I spent a long time basically talking about the problem only to realize that business is also the solution, because until we have better products, safer products, more natural products, we're still gonna just be talking about the issue. So, long way of saying, after over a decade on the streets, really doing the work to get consumers to question ingredients in their products, I shifted my focus to business, because I realized that until we have better solutions, we're all just gonna be talking about the problem, and it's not actually gonna be helping the consumer at the end of the day.

Katie: I am right there with you on that. In fact, our stories overlap a little bit. That was my motivation for starting Wellnesse as well. And a lot of listeners know we make things like toothpaste and hair care, realizing that even some of my most naturally-minded friends, the people like you, who eat organic and, they still held on to these certain products because they worked. And I get, as women, not wanting to sacrifice something that works or that makes you feel beautiful for the sake of choosing a natural option.

And I know we're on the same page in that you shouldn't have to. There should be amazing options that are safe and that work as well as the conventional alternatives. And I know that's what you're trying to do with Prima and that's what I'm trying to do with Wellnesse. I wanna talk a little bit more about the skin barrier, because you mentioned the skin being the body's biggest organ. And I've talked about this before as well. And we know that a lot of what we put on our skin does enter the body, but can you kind of walk us through this process and why it's so important?

Jessica: Yes. So, the skin is the body's biggest organ, and a lot of us think of the skin as a shield, but I think of it more as a sponge. And of course, there are layers of the skin that prevent ingredients from our skincare, you know, in entering our bloodstream. But at the same time, the skin is open, and what you put on your skin really matters. And for me, the big awakening moment was actually when I got my body burden tested through the Environmental Working Group. When I was a young teen, they invited me to be a part of their

teen body burden study. This is the Environmental Working Group, the EWG, and they tested my blood and urine for levels of 30 industrial compounds found specifically in cosmetics and personal care products. And basically 13 of the 30 industrial compounds were found in my blood and urine at various levels.

And I had above average levels of parabens found, compared to the other women tested. And what this says to me is, and these are specifically ingredients found in our cosmetics and personal care products. So for me, this was all the evidence that I needed to say what you put on your skin really matters, because it can end up in your body, accumulating in your fat tissue or in your blood and your urine. Luckily when things are found in your urine, you're obviously passing them through. But at the same time, these are chemical compounds that are accumulating in our bodies.

And, again, as you said, while some of these we can't control, like, I can't control the exposures in the air I breathe, or the water I drink, or sometimes the food I eat, or, you know, the medications I may have to take. But at the same time, I have full control over the ingredients and the products that I put on my skin and I ingest, the supplements, every single day. And that's the control that I wanna reclaim and also empower others with, because this is an area where there are healthier products in the market. We have enough evidence to say through, you know, initiatives like the Body Burden Study, Environmental Working Group does a lot of research, but again, these, it's really hard to prove that a lipstick that you used for 10 years ultimately may be connected to a negative health outcome you experienced later on, because of this disconnect between, you know, the skin and the internal environment.

So a lot of the work we're doing with Prima is kind of just connecting the whole body. You know, what you put on your skin is just as important as the thoughts that enter your mind, is just as important as the food you eat and the water you drink. It's all connected. But just generally speaking, as an organ, the skin is very open. And for me, my body burden results really showcase the importance of what you put on your skin.

Katie: That's amazing. And I'm guessing most listeners haven't had the opportunity to do something like that, but that's really surprising to know, because you were trying to live really naturally, that you tested high for those chemicals, even at a young age. And I know a lot of the listeners have teenage children, and that's something I think about a lot. I know I've seen the studies that many babies are born with hundreds of chemicals already in their bodies. And those are just the ones that can cross through the placenta. And the placenta actually does a pretty good job of keeping most things out. So this is a really, really widespread problem.

And I know that it extends through all aspects of our lives at this point. It's something that our generation really does need to address. And like I said, I know that's something that's on both of our minds in a very big way, and that we share the idea that we can do through business. And I know for you, with Prima, which I wanna talk a little bit about, you guys are focusing on the CBD side, so I'd love to hear why that became a focus for you guys and why you feel that's such an important component.

Jessica: For a long time, I think a lot of us thought that the best we can do is just work with purity and prevention, meaning, you know, the best thing that we can do to address this problem is to create cleaner, greener alternatives with less synthetic industrial compounds, but with the same levels of efficacy. And I think that worked for a long time in that, you know, there are still synthetic ingredients that are safe, and there's ways to validate product safety now a little bit more than 10 years ago.

But at the same time, I always, as an entrepreneur with an activist heart, I always yearned for a little bit more in that I don't think that just combining a bunch of safe synthetics is good enough. And so that's what brought me back to nature. I myself, I use cannabis as a wellness tool to treat my own stress and anxiety I've had for the past 10 years, just through the highs and lows of entrepreneurship, because entrepreneurship is really hard. And if anything, the only thing that can stop you is just giving up.

And so for me, cannabis was always my calm and my stress relief as an individual. And it wasn't until I was actually, I got my MBA at Harvard. And I remember there was a case at Harvard about cannabis, because the Colorado market was just opening up, cannabis was just becoming legal in specific states. And so what happened was this, you know, opportunity for a real market around this plant. And I remember looking into the science behind cannabis and beginning to understand its connection with the human body. And there was this unlock moment when I learned that the human body produces its own version of CBD. Basically, for such a long time, since the beginning of time, no one understood how this one plant worked so well with the human system.

And when I say cannabis, I'm really talking about the cannabis family. The cannabis family includes both marijuana and hemp, and also includes other plants like hops, which is the active component in beer. But anyways, this cannabis plant family has been largely misunderstood since the beginning of time, because hemp has always been coupled with marijuana. And they've always kind of been thought of as one plant. Though they are a part of the same plant family, hemp and marijuana are two completely separate plants, with different levels of active compounds. And in the entire cannabis family, the active compounds in the plants are called cannabinoids. Cannabinoids are master regulators, and they work to promote homeostasis, which is balance.

The interesting thing, and the real moment of awakening for me was when I realized that the human body, and all mammals, produce their own version of cannabinoids, called endocannabinoids. And that is specifically why this plant works so well with the human system. Either we've evolved with it since the beginning of time, or perhaps the divine creator created this inherent connection to nature so we could always use this plant throughout our lifetimes to maintain health. And really, what this means is that basically, our bodies produce native cannabinoids as a part of our endocannabinoid system, which is an entire body system dedicated to cannabinoids, with the main function to promote balance, or homeostasis.

And so essentially, our bodies produce these compounds, the plant does as well, and we can supplement, or preserve the body's own supply, with support from the plant. And when I realized this, it kind of took me out of the chemical conversation. It was so much beyond, you know, purity and prevention and avoiding industrial

compounds. It was this moment in which I realized, wow, maybe nature knows better. Maybe nature has all of the beauty secrets and the active compounds that we need to help support the body's internal systems. Because again, the body is so resilient and miraculous and magical on its own, but at the same time, because of the levels of stress and anxiety that we're dealing with today as a society, we're just in overdrive. So we just need better tools, better information, and better support.

But when I realized that essentially, this plant connects so deeply to the human system around this idea of balance, which is something that we all so desperately need, I kind of realized that CBD, it represents the next phase of the wellness industry, which is really about returning to nature, returning to the truths that we've known to be true since the beginning of time, and using modern science, technology, packaging, brand aesthetics, to elevate and uplift nature, to essentially create shelf space next to all of the products that we have problems with, so that consumers have better solutions.

So I think this is kind of the evolution of all of the work that I've done, and my cofounders as well. I started Prima with Christopher Gavigan, who started the Honest Company, and Laurel Angelica Myers, who worked with him for many, many years at Honest, launching hundreds of products. And same with them, you know, Honest was about purity and prevention. Let's provide safer products. Prima is about the next phase of health, which we hope is around plant healing, returning to nature, and using science to just create the best products possible.

Katie: I love that. And to circle back to something you said, so, you mentioned the body's natural endocannabinoid system and how these are something that we were, these compounds, we were designed to interact with them. And I think this is an important key, because certainly, CBD has had its moment in the sun and it's getting more popular. It's also had its controversy in the past, I think largely because people don't necessarily fully understand it. So explain kind of historically how this happened. Like, how do we used to interact with these compounds a lot more than we do now, and, in an optimal scenario, how do we bring that back?

Jessica: That's a great question. I think because hemp was coupled with marijuana for so long, it created this mass confusion, where both plants, and the entire cannabis plant family, was associated with the high. And the high is actually an aspect of the marijuana plant, not the hemp plant. So if you think about this cannabis plant family, and then multiple plants underneath it, there's hemp and there's marijuana. And we thought of them as the same thing, but really they're... You could think of them as cousins. We think of hemp as the sober botanical cousin of marijuana. But the confusing thing is, both plants, both hemp and marijuana, contain cannabinoids. They also contain other active compounds like terpenes and phenols.

But, again, the main active compounds in the cannabis plant family are called cannabinoids. And there are two primary cannabinoids, CBD and THC. THC is the single known cannabinoid responsible for the high. And CBD contains a lot of the same anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, but it's non-intoxicating. So CBD, as a cannabinoid, does not cause a high. Now, the confusing thing is that hemp and marijuana both have CBD and THC. But the difference between the two plants is that marijuana contains high levels of THC and low levels of

CBD, and hemp contains high levels of CBD and low levels of THC. In fact, industrial hemp is classified as a plant with below 0.3% THC.

So, the compounds are all called cannabinoids. We've only been focusing on two cannabinoids, THC and CBD. And while CBD is popular now, CBD was unknown until a few years ago, largely by all of us, because we didn't understand the benefits. If you think about society and, you know, specific times in our history, industrial revolution, other moments, if you think about what it was probably like to discover marijuana and discover the high, it makes sense why humanity was fixated by the high. It was all about the high.

And so, once THC as cannabinoid was unlocked, we began growing really high levels of THC plants and low levels of CBD plants, because people didn't understand what the benefit of CBD was if it didn't get you high. So basically, the entire cannabis industry was built upon kind of this desire to create high levels of THC. And the other cannabinoids, there are over 100 known cannabinoids, were kind of disregarded and thrown to the side. And so, the cannabis industry, the legal cannabis industry, was built upon high-THC plants. And what that did was create a lot of excitement, but also fear, around the high of this plant, but kind of a lack of interest around the other potential benefits, because it was all about the high.

Now, it was actually a few years ago when, I think the main tipping point was around when Dr. Sanjay Gupta and other medical professionals started reporting CBD as a potential treatment for even something like childhood epilepsy. Dr. Sanjay Gupta did a three-part CNN series around cannabis, and kind of the stigma, how we got to where we are, but also this opportunity to revisit and reinvent this plant to be a really powerful therapeutic tool.

It was all around a story about a girl named Charlotte Figi, who inspired a brand of cannabis, and a strain of cannabis, called Charlotte's Web, because this plant was grown with really high levels of CBD. And what it ended up doing is providing a potential treatment for children with epilepsy. So that's I think when the shift began to happen and more interest started to show up around CBD. But as you can imagine, for a long time, people just cared about the high. They didn't care about the plant's ability to heal without the high. And now we know that CBD contains really high levels of anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, no intoxicating properties. So it's not intoxicating. It does not cause a high, but yet it has all of these components that help us heal and maintain balance. So, it's been a fascinating evolution. We still have so much work to do, because, again, these years of stigma have coupled, and unfairly coupled, these two plants together, but now is our time to kind of separate the two and then see hemp and CBD for what they are.

Katie: That makes sense. Okay. So, walk us through then some of the basic benefits. You mentioned that the endocannabinoid system kind of impacts the entire body. So, what are some ways that these compounds interact once they are in or on our body?

Jessica: The interesting thing about the endocannabinoid system, and again, this is so new, we've just discovered this system, and still to this date, most doctors actually aren't taught about the endocannabinoid

system in medical school, even though it's a master body system. And I think the reason is because the endocannabinoid system is actually activated on demand. So it's not another major system like the cardiovascular system or any system that's, you know, surrounded by specific organs and for a specific purpose ongoing. The ECS is activated when it's needed, and it's a receptor network. So it's a little bit more nuanced and hard to visualize, but essentially, our bodies are built to tolerate stress.

Since the beginning of time, our bodies have always been built to be able to handle stress, whether that meant a lion chasing us, or now, you know, emotional stress. And that's because the endocannabinoid system, essentially, when a stressor hits our body, and this can be an internal stressor, this can be a stressor on the skin. Essentially, a stressor is something that causes stress, and theoretically, inflammation. So, when a stressor hits our body, the endocannabinoid system is activated, and this receptor network is activated to promote balance and maintain homeostasis, so that when something hits the system, it essentially doesn't kill us. And that's because of the ECS.

The issue is, before this time, modern society, we actually had moments for our bodies to naturally reset in between stress. So, we'd get chased by an animal. We'd then rest, our bodies could maintain homeostasis, and we could go on with our lives. We are living in a time with chronic stress and, you know, science says 75% to 90% of all doctor's visits are stress-related. So stress is an epidemic right now, and our bodies don't have time, most of the time, to reset and maintain homeostasis on its own, which is why so many of us rely on these plants to help supplement our own supply of endocannabinoids.

And so, essentially, because of chronic stress, the body doesn't have time to reset. So we need more tools to support us in homeostasis. And what's so interesting about CBD is, unlike other cannabinoids that increase the body's supply of endocannabinoids, CBD is known to help the body preserve its own supply of endocannabinoids. And again, endocannabinoids are the natively-produced cannabinoids by the body that help us regulate balance. So essentially, you could kind of think of CBD as almost like a preservation system. It helps our own bodies do their job better, and it also helps us save and preserve our own endocannabinoids, which is really interesting, I think, because it's not like we're introducing something new to the system. We're just giving the body a little bit more of what it needs, again, to do its job better.

And these endocannabinoids and this receptor network, this is both all throughout the body. It's in the brain, in the reproductive system, in the gut. These endocannabinoids are everywhere, but there's also a receptor network on the skin. So the skin has its own essentially endocannabinoid system, its own receptor network, that works almost as like a lock and key metaphor with phytocannabinoids from the plant. So when you put cannabinoids in a skincare product and put that on the skin, it almost unlocks the efficacy of the endocannabinoids, and allows us to promote balance on the skin as well. And when you think about most skin issues, the root cause is an imbalance. So it makes sense why CBD products are so effective on the skin in just promoting just balance and health.

Katie: That's so fascinating. I love when there are compounds like this, that kind of support the whole body approach like that. I think that's an important shift that we are hopefully seeing in the wellness industry. I

think largely because people are bringing this up, is that when it comes to health, for so long, we found all these really cool components and we thought of these super foods and we wanted to focus on what looked like silver bullets. And more and more, I've found, in my own journey as well, that at the end of the day, it is so personalized, but it's also so holistic. And, just like in conventional medicine, you can't just focus on one part of the body at the expense of the rest of the body. The same is true when it comes to taking ownership of our own health. We have to address the body as a whole and support it as a whole, from the ground up, and not just try to target the one thing we're having a problem with, and long term, that is so much more effective than just trying to kind of spot treat whatever the one thing is that seems to be really bothering us. And I love your approach in this as well.

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The other thing I love about your story, and I'd love to talk a little bit about, is this idea of entrepreneurship, because listeners have heard me talk about this before, from my perspective, and also from the perspective of wanting to raise entrepreneurs and to encourage my children to become entrepreneurs, with the idea, I think that we share, that thoughtful businesses can change the world. And in fact, that it's one of the most efficient ways to change the world, much quicker, even than government regulations or many of these other things that we can try to enact. And I know that you're working on doing that on the front lines as well. To start, I would love to hear, were there any things that your parents did growing up that you think really helped you on that trajectory?

Jessica: That's such a good question. I do think... My dad is Israeli. And so, I'm first generation here, and I'm also the oldest of four children. And I think that my birth order and the fact that my dad sacrificed so much in his own family to be able to raise a family here, I always felt this innate kind of responsibility to make a name for myself and my family, just because I could. And this sounds maybe a little bit too spiritual, but I feel almost like generations of the women that came before me and my family almost on my shoulders, guiding me, because I knew that for so many generations, women didn't have this opportunity to be an entrepreneur.

And so, for so many generations, I know this is true in my family, women were mothers and housewives, and that was their destiny. And that was not their choice, but it was just kind of the reality of the situation. And so I think that for whatever reason, from a very early age, I had this hyper consciousness that I am finally the woman in my family that can do something big, and the one that can use business to transform health, and really just even pursue business.

So that knowing and that feeling of just gratitude, but also excitement that finally, you know, all of these sacrifices came to fruition, it's been this internal fire that I've had since honestly I was 13 years old. And I always had this gravitation towards health. I remember when I was 13, I learned about the high cancer rates in my community, and the first thing I did was call UCSF hospital and start talking to oncologists, asking if there's anything I could do. And I learned very early that, you know, the medical system was not something that I could easily change. And even being on the street as an activist, it just took so long to get things done.

And then I spent many years in NGOs, and because I was taught that nonprofits are the ones that actually impact change. But then I found myself just writing grants the entire time, because most nonprofits don't have the funding to actually achieve what they wanna do. And so it was kind of my own personal evolution, but also I do feel like just this knowing of how much generations before me have sacrificed, and how I am actually the first woman in my family that can be a business woman, it was more generational than anything that my parents specifically did.

Katie: That makes sense. Okay. And like you said, you were the youngest woman at Harvard from what I understand. Is that right?

Jessica: Yes. I was the youngest woman in Harvard Business School's class of 2016. And that, I will actually thank my parents for it, because I think choosing a passion, choosing a single passion at the age of 15 was so helpful in just creating a path forward that was very linear and very, it just flowed. So I think that when I chose that I wanted to change the cosmetic industry at the age of 15, and it was so intimately tied to my own experience, you know, breaking up with my beauty products and finding cleaner alternatives. And then that led me to both, you know, legislative change, but also learning what couldn't be done on the ground, and then leading me to business.

I think that that choice to just choose one thing that you're passionate about and make that almost like your identity, become obsessed with it, you know. Even if people laugh at you for it, because I got a lot of people laughing at me in high school, saying there are way bigger problems than the ingredients that are in our makeup. Why don't you just stop wearing makeup? Like, why don't you care about bigger issues? And I kind of just let that pass. It was really hard to hear. And of course, you know, I wished I had the confidence that would enable me to not wanna wear makeup, but I still wear makeup, and I still feel like we have a right to these products.

But I think because I chose one thing that I cared about, and made that my identity, and made that my passion and my focus, it created a really, really clear pathway that led me to, you know, Harvard Business School. I was accepted to Harvard when I was in college, as a part of a very special program where they were trying to attract entrepreneurs who didn't study finance, who were more creative. And because I had this just clear story, it was very easy for them to understand how I would do well in the program.

So I think that for parents, just find that one thing that lights your kid up. For me, it was, you know, industrial compounds and cosmetics, but everyone has that thing. Don't be the parent that says you have to do everything, because if you try and do everything, you won't do anything well. And being specific is really effective in opening up someone's world and showing them what they're possible, what they're capable of, what's possible.

Katie: That's such a good point. And I had noticed that with my kids as well. Our encouragement to them is to try to master a small number of things, versus do everything. And that kind of, we look at the kind of the trajectory of high achievers or people who have created lasting change in society, that's a commonality I've always noticed, was, even polymaths who have mastery in several areas, none of them tried to master dozens of areas. And so I think, especially young, honing in on a focus like that. And you were exceptionally young at finding yours. I feel like a lot of people don't maybe hit that stride until their 20s. But you definitely have had this passion since the teenage years.

And it's also, I think, a great encouragement to teenagers and to young people that you don't have to wait until you're 18 or until you're out of college to start creating change. And, in fact, I think that in some ways, teenagers can be even more effective at times, because it's still unusual, and lawmakers and people pay attention when teenagers are passionate and so young. It's been fun to watch. My oldest is almost 14, and he's gonna be launching a podcast called "Greatology," and he's focusing on a lot of environmental initiatives

and doing experiments with super worms and fungus and breaking down plastic in the environment. And it's so fun to see him have that passion at such a young age. And seeing stories like yours, I always remind him, you know, like, you don't have to wait. You can start changing these things right now. I think our children, this upcoming generation and your generation, are gonna be incredible forces for good in the world. And that's so exciting and so needed right now.

I also wanna touch a little bit more on kind of the idea of consumerism as activism, because this is something else I know that we're on the same page about. It's not just, we can't just talk about the bad stuff. We have to provide alternatives that are actually better. We have to be better than the competition and get people to choose it because it's actually just more effective. And that's when we're gonna see the pendulum swing and society really start to change. And so I know that you guys are doing that with Prima, but just talk a little bit more in detail about how, like, the products we choose really can be a form of activism.

Jessica: I think the main issue is that, again, most people assume what's on the shelf is safe, right? So, before we can really introduce this idea of consumerism as activism, I believe the first step is transparency and consumer education. Because until I know the truth about a product, how am I supposed to know how to make a better choice? So the biggest issue, I think, in really introducing and blasting this idea is just making sure that companies are held accountable, and there's a way to find out the truth about a company and a product. But, given that's possible, I firmly believe that consumerism is activism. Whether you know it or not, what you buy is translating to either your values or your destiny, or it's funding something that you may not know about.

And so, I really think that we have to believe and buy into this idea, because at the end of the day, we are in a very strange time, where the whole concept of, you know, government and healthcare and religion is kind of breaking down, and brands are actually best positioned to provide philosophy and values and vision and purpose for humanity.

So I think that there's such a big opportunity on the brand side. But on the consumer side, people don't realize this, but when you buy a product, you're supporting something with your dollar, and you are voting with your dollar. And if you have access to information, I believe we all should adopt this mentality, and really think about what we buy as an extension of what we believe. I think part of this is also kind of opening up the veil and incentivizing businesses to come forward and share who they are and what they care about, because what used to be, you know, everyone could create a blog, now, everyone could create a brand, especially with Instagram.

So, in this conversation, I always say, when you're buying something, especially if you're buying something expensive or something that you're gonna use all the time, peek behind the curtain and see who are the founders. Like, who are their faces? What do they believe? Where are they from? What are their intentions and motivations? Because you're buying into that too, and you're funding them with your dollar. So I really, really believe that more people should think about what they buy as an extension of their value set, just in understanding what they're supporting with their dollar, but also in understanding that there are brands with

really big visions and purpose and fire. And these are the brands that we should be funding and supporting, because, as a consumer, you're an investor. With every dollar you spend, you're investing in something. So I just think more people should be aware of both the implications, but also the opportunities to really vote with your dollar in a meaningful way and support only the things that you believe in and the products that are actually good for you.

Katie: And, with you guys at Prima, walk us a little bit through kind of your values there, and how, I know you guys are really working to change the industry from the inside out, especially when it comes to CBD. So walk us through how you're doing that, and some of the products you guys are focusing on.

Jessica: We started Prima to really uplift science and nature, to advance health and cultivate collective wellbeing. So that's our mission statement. So, you know, every brand should have a mission statement, or every brand should have a value statement. We built that statement into our DNA because we really believe that wellbeing, as we've been talking about, wellbeing is holistic. So, yes, it's about the products that we make, but it's also about the values we share and this feeling of belonging that we can cultivate for people.

So I think, when we started Prima, we made very intentional business decisions to support our purpose-driven brand. This started with incorporating as a public benefit corporation, which is a type of incorporation you can do as a business, similar, you know, it's a choice compared to a...there's LLC, there's C-Corp, but PBC is an incorporation that sets you up to ultimately get B-Corp certification. B-Corp certification is a third-party validation that kind of validates businesses as a force for good.

So, we're a certified benefit corporation, we're a public benefit corporation. But really, I think what says a lot about our brand is how we launched. We launched Prima with about 100 pieces of content on our magazine, on our website, prima.co, breaking down all aspects of health, and really democratizing health and wellness education, because the reality is we're all selling products, but a lot of people are disconnected from their bodies and their minds and their souls. And you won't be able to feel better until you get that body awareness and alignment to really even know what your body needs. So we thought let's democratize health. Let's put out 100 articles talking about, you know, both CBD and the science behind it and doctors' interviews, but also just kind of breaking down taboos that come along with the human experience and make people feel ashamed and alone.

You know, we had essays about what it's like to have a child, or, you know, go through childbirth or an abortion or a miscarriage, or deal with racism in your community. Just all of these issues that kind of indirectly relate to health, but don't relate to our products, but certainly relate to how people feel. And I think in bringing in all of these stories and all of this education first, and then launching products, it really created this level of trust and transparency and truth, because people could see what we're really here for, which is to help people and make us all feel less alone so we could live our best lives.

So, back to your question, I really think that brands can dream big now. This is a time for brands to kind of take the role of government and healthcare and religion, and provide values and philosophy and purpose, and just hope for people, beyond bottom line. But it certainly has to do with just the way that you set up the company, how you run the company, and also just bringing in third-party validations and standards that ensure that you're doing what you say you're doing. Because, again, it shouldn't be a brand telling you that, you know, they're doing great and the products are safe. It should just be an unbiased third party source. So there's a lot of things you can kind of weave into your company's DNA, but I really believe that this is the time for purpose-driven brands.

Katie: I'm right there with you on that point. And that's something that we've done with Wellnesse as well. It's fun. I feel like we're on a little bit on parallel journeys. We're still in the process of our B-Corp certification, but we were formed as a public benefit corporation as well, and have been dedicated, just like you guys, to transparency at every level, from the very beginning, because, I agree, I think consumers have a right to be able to make informed choices about what they're putting on their bodies, and you can't do that unless you know what's in the things that you're putting on your body. And so, it's exciting to me to hear from people like you and other companies that are purpose-driven.

And I really do think that over the next 10 years, we're gonna see dramatic changes in these industries because of brands like that. Because like I said before, I don't think this is something you can just legislate. I think it also has to come from the inside out. And I think we're seeing that start to happen, which is super, super exciting.

To shift gears a little bit, toward the end of interviews, I love to ask a somewhat selfish question, which is, if there are any books, a book or a number of books, that have really drastically impacted your life, if so, what are they and why?

Jessica: The first book that impacted my life and my journey was "Silent Spring," by Rachel Carson. And this was the book that was before its time. Rachel Carson was an incredible environmentalist, and wrote about, you know, potentially harmful chemicals. But she was going through her own breast cancer journey, or cancer journey, the entire time, and I just still get chills thinking about this environmentalist and leader, trying to educate the world while dealing with her own health journey. And she's such an inspiration and force for me. There's so many books, though. Right now, I'm actually reading "Grow a New Body." Have you heard of that book?

Katie: I haven't.

Jessica: It's basically a book around how spirit and power plants, nutrition, can transform your health. It's by Dr. Alberto Villoldo, and it's really around how to get your body to a place of wholeness, so you can experience oneness. Essentially, until you detoxify both your body and your mind, you won't be able to feel this, essentially the magic of the world, which is the feeling of oneness with nature and spirit and your soul. But so

many of us are so, again, blocked by consumerism and all of these compounds, that we kind of, we need to get back to our roots and back to who we are. And part of that is just kind of doing everything that we talk about, detoxing, positive thinking, and just getting yourself to a place of wholeness. So, I'm really inspired by that book right now. And I'm kind of doing a little bit of both education, but also some spirituality, because I really believe in the role of spirituality in all of what we're saying, in health and happiness and wellbeing.

Katie: Awesome. And lastly, any parting advice you wanna leave with our listeners today, whether it be business-related or health and personal care-related? Any advice you want to leave with the listeners?

Jessica: The advice I'd like to leave with the listeners is...health journeys can be so complicated and stressful and expensive and time-consuming. But at the end of the day, I think the best thing you can do is fall in love with yourself, because if you truly love yourself, then you will always be striving for better, and always be striving for health, and for even things beyond yourself. So I think through all of this, and also through entrepreneurship, I've learned that the best thing you can do for your health is to genuinely fall in love with yourself, accept the things that you don't like about yourself, love the things you do, and see yourself as this beautiful, flawless being that's reflected in nature, and just realize that you're worthy. You're worthy of all the things you want. You're worthy of health. And just never stop trying, because when you get there, it's just magical.

Katie: Awesome. And lastly, of course, I'll have links in the show notes at [wellnessmama.fm](http://wellnessmama.fm), but where can people find out more about you and more about Prima?

Jessica: You can learn more about prima on our website. It's [www.prima.co](http://www.prima.co). And there's a lot of information about me there as well. I've written a lot of the magazine articles, so that's the best way to learn more about everything that I care about. And we're also Prima on Instagram, and I'm Jessica Assaf on Instagram. It's my first name, Jessica, J-E-S-S-I-C-A S-S-A-F on Instagram.

Katie: Wonderful. Those links will be in the show notes, so that anyone listening, if you guys are exercising or driving, you can find those at [wellnessmama.fm](http://wellnessmama.fm). Jessica, I really appreciate your time today. And it's so refreshing to talk to other entrepreneurs and brands that are working to change things from the ground up, and just really grateful for you and what you do.

Jessica: Thank you so much for having me. I am just as grateful for you and everything that you do to help us in this journey.

Katie: And thank you as always for listening and for sharing your most valuable asset, your time, with us today. We're both very grateful that you did, and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the "Wellness Mama" podcast.

If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.