



Episode 01: Thyroid Disease and Pregnancy

Katie: Hi and welcome to the Healthy Moms podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com.

You might have noticed there's a new format on the podcast today and a new name. After taking a little bit of a hiatus, we're switching to a new format for the podcast and following more of a series model. One question and complaint I got before was that it was hard to cover so much information with an expert in only one episode. In the new format, I'll be taking much deeper and more in depth dives into single topics but with experts for several episodes in a row to make a series. I'll also be focusing on making the episodes more conversational and more like I'm having coffee with a friend to make it easier to relate and easier to listen in the car if you're driving your kids to school or just cooking dinner.

To that note, I'm actually bringing on a friend and a co-host. My friend, Whitney, is going to be joining and she's going to be representing the listeners of the podcast and the readers of my blog to ask questions and offer experience and to make a more conversational tone for the podcast. I'm super excited. Could not be more thrilled to welcome Whitney to the podcast.

Whitney: Thank you, Katie. I'm so excited to be here and I've been a reader and a fan of your blog and your podcast. I just couldn't be more grateful for being here. I can't wait to delve into all this new research.

Katie: Awesome. Me too. The first topic for this series, it'll take about a month to cover in depth, that I know a lot of people struggle with, including me personally, and that's thyroid health. If you read my blog before, you know that this is a struggle that I've had personally for a really long time. In the next few episodes, we'll actually bring in thyroid expert and pharmacist, Dr. Isabelle Wentz, who specializes in helping people determine the root cause of their thyroid struggles and reverse it. She's just an amazing expert and a friend. I can't wait to really deep dive in to some topics with her.

Whitney: She's going to be awesome. In fact, she's offered a free resource to anyone listening. Especially anyone who struggles with thyroid disease or symptoms. If you would like her Overcoming Thyroid Fatigue Guide just email podcast@wellnessmama.com with the word thyroid in the subject line and we'll send it right over.

Katie: I've read it and it is an incredibly helpful resource that covers a lot of aspects of thyroid health and was helpful to me personally.

Whitney: Katie, you also have a lot of personal experience with thyroid disease. This is a very personal topic for you and one that you spent almost a decade trying to find answers for. Can you talk about your own journey with thyroid disease?

Katie: Yeah. Absolutely. As you mentioned, that was a really, really long road for me. In fact, it did take almost ten years before I got any actual answers as to what was wrong with me and a clear diagnosis that it was in fact Hashimoto's Thyroiditis which is an autoimmune form of thyroid disease where the body is essentially attacking the thyroid. This reaction happening in the thyroid can either cause it to become enlarged or to shrink but either way the body is attacking the tissue of the thyroid. It can be a really complex issue to try to solve and thankfully I finally started to work with experts and doctors who were making real progress.

The road for me started long before I even thought it did probably. Maybe even as early as childhood. To go really far back, this is probably a common experience for a lot of listeners. I had a lot of rounds of antibiotics when I was

very young. In fact, before I was even five years old, I can't even count the number of times I took that pink liquid of penicillin. I had strep throat constantly. I think I had it at least four or five times a year. Usually a lot more. By that age, I had had my tonsils and adenoids removed. I had had tubes in my ear. It was to the point that I also developed an allergy to penicillin and got hives and then started developing allergies to other medications as well.

Thankfully, removing my tonsils seemed to help with not getting strep throat as much and I did seem to be a lot healthier with the years following that. Then, starting in probably my early high school years, I'm very type A so I was spending a ton of time studying and in every activity imaginable and not sleeping very much because I was trying to do all these activities and still get my homework done and apply for colleges and everything else that comes with high school.

Lack of sleep was a big factor in high school. I started noticing just that I was fatigued, which is normal with lack of sleep, but also just some random smaller symptoms that I didn't think anything of at the time. At that point I was also just eating really just junk food that was available in high schools. In the cafeteria, I was eating what was served and it was probably all very high in soy which can aggravate the thyroid and just processed food that was low in nutrients. Of course also nutrient deficiency is a factor in thyroid disease so that's probably when I starting getting the triggers of the actual thyroid problem that I struggle with now.

That got worse in college. The same scenario. Lots of stress, bad diet, lack of sleep, and just basically the perfect storm if you wanted to create thyroid disease, that's how you would do it. If you want to have a thyroid disease, try that. At that point after college, I got married and got pregnant with our first child. That was, for me, I think the straw that broke the camel's back. You hear that a lot with women that any kind of hormonal change can really aggravate an underlying condition and cause it to flare even if it's kind of under control.

After giving birth to him, I had a lot more of the more traditional thyroid symptoms like being cold more often, thinning hair especially in the eyebrows, some skin symptoms and digestive symptoms, and just trouble losing the baby weight which was surprising to me because I thought I still was pretty young and that it should've been pretty easy. Having several pregnancies pretty close together

kind of snowballed the effect and made the symptoms much more noticeable. The frustrating part during that time is that I was going to doctors and midwives and all of the OBs that I worked with and saying, "These are my symptoms. I think it is thyroid related from what I read." They would run blood tests and then they would tell me, "Well, your levels are a little bit low but they're still in the normal range. They're nothing to worry about. We'll just monitor them again next year. This is really normal after you have a baby."

This went on for a good six to seven years of not being able to get answers but knowing something was wrong and then pretty much feeling like I was crazy because I felt terrible but the doctors were telling me this is completely normal. I remember so many nights thinking, "This cannot be normal. This cannot be the way that someone's supposed to feel."

It was a very, very long road. It's only been in the last several years that I finally found a doctor who understood the autoimmune side of thyroid disease and was able to actually make a diagnosis because with autoimmune thyroid disease, you can have completely normal TSH and even T3 and T4 and it's thyroid antibodies that are more indicative of that type of problem. Even what he explained to me was that you can have all of your blood levels perfectly normal or just very slightly off but your body could still be attacking your thyroid and you could be having changes to your thyroid that are only noticeable by ultrasound or other types of tests.

Finally finding an expert was a huge, huge turning point for me for in finding and getting a diagnosis and being able to finally understand what I could do that would help to reverse my thyroid disease and not just to feel I was crazy all of the time.

Whitney: Wow, Katie. What a frustrating journey. I know that had to be tough. What are some of the things that you've found through trial and error that helped you and some of the things that didn't?

Katie: If you have ever suspected you had thyroid disease, and statistically the majority of women do at some point, either have thyroid disease or have symptoms that can correlate with thyroid disease, you might have gone on the internet and googled something related to it. Once you get past WebMD and get it out of your

head that no you probably don't have liver cancer and brain cancer and your leg is about to fall off, you find a lot of recommended remedies that are supposedly to supposed to help with thyroid disease. One that's pretty well saturated on the internet is that you should take a lot of iodine.

That was one of the first things I tried and it made me so much worse which makes perfect sense now understanding about autoimmune thyroid disease and the fact that iodine is something you don't need very much of and for some people it can actually be triggered by having too much iodine. Having an abundance of iodine can trigger autoimmune thyroid disease. I was taking all this iodine thinking it would help and it was actually making me worse. Some of the information on the internet says well you're just detoxing. You should take more which was, again, terrible advice. That was one of the big glaring ones that did not work.

Thankfully there is also a decent amount of good information on the internet. I found studies about the connection between certain dietaries triggers in thyroid disease, especially gluten. That's one that's pretty well documented on the internet is that those who struggle with thyroid disease may also have a gluten intolerance. I figured that was something that I could easily test at home without a blood test or without being diagnosed with thyroid disease. I could just eliminate gluten and see if it made a difference. Going gluten free and even grain free for a long time was a big part of kind of my self diagnosis and self experimentation to see what would work. For a while I was also dairy free. For a long time, actually. That did seem to help, especially when I was in the acute flares of thyroid disease. Thankfully now I do tolerate some kinds of dairy really well and I don't have to be completely dairy free. During that time, it was a great catalyst for helping improve.

Diet here was huge. In fact I even did, for a while, an autoimmune diet. There's a lot of documented information on this online and I even have a post about what I did. This is eliminating a huge amount of foods. Anything that could potentially be a trigger and then adding them back in slowly to see which things are affecting you personally. That was a way I could, even without a doctor, start to figure out some of my own triggers. I also found, through experimentation, that stress and sleep are my biggest triggers, even more so than food. That was really difficult for me to learn to correct because just my personality, I typically tend to be very high

strung and very driven so it's hard to reduce stress and to let things go. Also, it's hard to sleep because there are so many things I want to do all the time. The time when the kids go to bed, I just want to stay up and enjoy the time with my husband and not sleep. Those two, I'm still learning on but I'm finding those are really, really big factors in my own thyroid health.

Whitney: That's great advice, Katie. I'm so glad to have that information to share. You're currently pregnant. Has that changed your thyroid protocol at all or have you made any changes?

Katie: Yes. That was ... I'm so glad I now have the doctor that I'm working with because this is my first pregnancy where I've had a diagnosed thyroid condition that I knew what I was dealing with. Realistically, the last two pregnancies, I did but I just didn't know what I was dealing with and I didn't know how to, if I should be doing anything differently or what I should be doing in general. Thankfully with my doctor, he's doing a lot more testing than he would normally do. Just testing thyroid levels relatively often throughout the pregnancy because you can tend to need more thyroid hormone when you're pregnant. The increased need of your body in growing a new human. I'm taking right now a replacement thyroid hormone called WP Thyroid which is a natural T3 T4 combination that's often used for Hashimoto's and other types of thyroid disease.

Part of the logic there is that you are taking the autoimmune burden off of your body because it no longer has to produce thyroid hormones so by just providing it, you can hopefully reduce that attack on the thyroid by not having as much need for TSH. He's monitoring those levels really carefully. Then, I've also just been really focused on consuming as many nutrient dense foods as possible and really watching my nutrition and my water intake because with any kind of autoimmune disease, and especially thyroid, you typically have an increased demand for nutrients or an decreased ability to break them down. You can also struggle with gut issues. They can go hand-in-hand with thyroid disease. I've just been watching all of those factors really carefully and trying to focus on really high nutrient foods like proteins and healthy fats and bone broth and lots of vegetables and choosing as nourishing foods as I can and getting enough protein since all of those are supposed to be really helpful for both pregnancy and thyroid disease.

Whitney: That's great to know, Katie. You also mentioned stress and sleep. How did you notice that these things impacted your thyroid?

Katie: Those are ones that for years I kind of just ignored figuring those don't really matter because they're not super tangible and it's not like if you don't eat, you get hungry. Of course, if you don't sleep, you get tired but you don't really drastically notice how that's effecting your body right away. I always had the assumption that I did great without sleep and that I could just get by, push through. I didn't need sleep but it turns out that even though mentally I do fine without sleep, my thyroid doesn't.

Like I said, it's still a work in progress but I've tried to get better about kind of scheduling sleep just as I would schedule getting up. A lot of us set an alarm for when we get up or if you're like me, your alarm has a name and she wakes you up at a certain time but I started doing that with sleep. Just setting a time on my phone when it would start beeping at me that you need to go to bed. It's your actual bedtime Not just when you need to wake up and making that a priority.

There's actually an app called F.lux which is F dot L-U-X and it has a neat feature that not only reduces blue light on your computer, which is great for melatonin production and sleep which is a great topic for another podcast, but it starts reminding you every fifteen minutes when you're getting close to your bedtime. I think you can adjust the settings. If I try to stay up too late working, I keep getting these things popping up on your computer saying, "Hey, you have to wake up in eight hours," "Hey, you have to wake up in seven and a half hours." It kind of really keeps you focused on the fact that you need sleep and it kind of alerts you to that.

Stress is one like I said I'm still struggling with as well because it is a part of life, especially life with kids or life with family. I've just been trying to focus on time to actively reduce stress or to do things that I know are not stressful and to balance that out because as a mom, we all know there are things we have to do that aren't avoidable. Whether it stresses you out or not, you're going to have to cook and clean and do laundry and dishes and all that and give kids a bath but working in time to take a bath yourself or read a book or if you enjoy drawing or painting or whatever it is that you enjoy, working in time to do that and not feeling selfish for doing it which is, again, something I still have trouble doing but I've

definitely made some strides with and I'm trying to get better at is just doing those little stress relieving things throughout the day to keep my stress levels lower.

Whitney: Katie, I'm so excited about this new format for the podcast and to be able to learn from the podcast guest. In the next few episodes, we'll be taking a deeper dive into thyroid health with Dr. Wentz but in the meantime, just a reminder, that you can get her Overcoming Thyroid Fatigue Guide free. Just email podcast@wellnessmama.com with the word thyroid in the subject line and we'll send it right over.

Katie: Awesome. Thanks so much for listening to the new format. I hope you'll enjoy it as much as I'm going to enjoy interviewing all the experts and being on here with Whitney. Thank you, Whitney, for being here as a co-host.