



Episode 495: Madiha Saeed on The Holistic Rx for Kids: Parenting Healthy Brains and Bodies in a Changing World

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to the "Wellness Mama" podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com. That's wellness with an E on the end. It's my new personal care line. And this episode is all about raising and parenting healthy kids with healthy brains and bodies in a very changing world. And I'm here with a dear friend, Madiha Saeed, who is also known as the HolisticMom, MD on social media. And she's a practicing, board-certified family physician as well as an international speaker and author. She's working with even the UN on creating better nutritional guidelines. And we're talking about her best-selling book, the original one, "The Holistic Rx: Your Guide to Healing Chronic Inflammation and Disease," and also, her new book, "The Holistic Rx for Kids: Parenting Healthy Brains and Bodies in a Changing World."

And we go through a lot of topics in this episode, but a lot of practical advice on parenting, integrating, giving your kids a healthy foundation, the reason that children are suffering more than they have in the past, how to speak to the various parts of your child's brain, why inflammation is the root cause of children's chronic

disease and how to address it, how to raise mindful children who understand their environment, the factors as a mom to be aware of to teach your children how to listen to their innate awareness of health, how things as simple as lack of protein can cause a cascade of changes on the brain level, how to build a healthy foundation in children, how to view their symptoms and understand them as them having a problem, not being a problem, and so much more. I always love, love, love talking to Madiha. I know that you will enjoy listening to this, so I cannot wait. Let's join her now.

Madiha, you are one of my favorite people to talk to. I just said before we started recording, you are literally a giant beacon of light and love. I'm so excited to chat with you on this very rainy Monday morning, where I live. So, welcome. Thanks for being here.

Madiha: Oh my gosh, my honor, my pleasure, Katie, I am so incredibly honored. Thank you so much for having me.

Katie: Well, I feel the same way. Anyone who isn't already familiar with you should be, because you are one of my favorite resources and favorite people. You're absolutely incredible. You are like a mom who seems to... I'm sure it's not effortless, but do it all effortlessly, and with grace. And I wanna talk about a lot of health stuff. But first, I have a note in my show notes that you are a professional henna artist. And I wanna hear about this, because I have this strange obsession with henna. And every time I have the chance to get it done, I'm like, my whole body. Could you just cover my whole body?

Madiha: Yes. Oh my gosh, I'm like that. So, no, I mean, I've always been artistic, right, using both sides of the brain. But I've always been artistic. And so, henna I've been doing for, probably since I remember. Whenever we went to Pakistan, as a child, in my grandmother's house in, like, the rural area, she actually had a henna tree. And we would actually take the leaves off and grind it ourselves, and then into a paste. So, I started from, like, you know, just taking it off the trees, grinding it, making it into a paste, and then applying it to our hands. And that was probably, like, seven years old, doing that. And since then, I mean, I've messed up my sister's hands multiple times as I was learning, you know, because you obviously need, like, practice. But, amazing. So much fun. And now, I do it on brides. It can take hours. I'm not 100... Like, I can't do it in a second, but it could take hours. But I do it on brides, all over my body. I did it... Actually, I did it on my wedding, over my hands and my feet, on both sides on my own... So, I'm telling you, I love it. So much fun.

Katie: That is some impressive dexterity. I recently had a friend get married. She's from an Indian background, and she had the most gorgeous henna all over her whole body. Just thought it was so, so, so beautiful. I love that you do that, and how cool that you got to get in touch with the actual roots of it, and, like, making it yourself.

Madiha: Yeah, that's what I grew up with. And now, obviously, there's a lot of chemicals that they've added to henna. So that's why I still try to go for, like, the most purest source if you're gonna do that. And that's another thing that, you know, even henna, you think something as simple as henna, we did it, actually, on my cousin's hands, when I did it on her for her bridal. She wanted the chemical one, and actually burned her skin. So you have to be really, really careful, for months. She had to immediately take it off because it burned. So, where it used to start off with just, you know, natural, completely organic, and now it's been, you know, tampered with, just like everything else in our planet. So, something to be cautious about.

Katie: Well, I feel like that's actually the perfect segue in, because there's a lot of, unfortunately, things that that is the case in today's world. I know you are super well-versed in this, and you educate thousands and thousands of families about this, both as a medical doctor and as a mom, which I think you balance so well and gives you such an incredible perspective into the life of a mother, and also understanding the medical side. And I know you have a new book that I got to preview, which I'm super excited about and I'm a huge fan of, which is "The Holistic Rx for Kids," and which is what I was so excited to have you on today, because unfortunately, it's no secret that there's a rise of all these problems in our kids, rates of things that truly should not have doubled, tripled, quadrupled in one generation, but they have.

Madiha: Seriously.

Katie: So, as moms, I feel like we're on the front lines, trying to reverse these trends. That was a big part of my story was realizing this is happening, and saying, "This is not okay for my kids. This is not okay for any kids." And I think moms are the ones who have the ability to create the change, and you have such a unique perspective. So, to start broad, can you walk us through, like, why are we seeing these changes? Why are our children suffering so much now compared to in the past?

Madiha: So, you know, what? And I think that's the key question, is the why, right? Because suicide is on a rise. You know, mental health issues are on the rise. Autism is on the rise. Basically, almost every chronic health condition, even in children, and adults, are on the rise. So I think it really comes down to, you know, asking that question why, right? Why is your child sick? Why are they difficult to parent? Why are children suffering? Why are we overall as humanity suffering? But, understanding that why, that's where the hope lies. And that's what's so powerful, right? Because that "why" is exactly what's going on, because our entire lives right now are totally imbalanced. We need to understand why. And because we are currently, right now, our children are making the wrong decisions because... And their brains are not working properly. Their bodies are not working properly. And when it comes to our decisions, our kids' decisions, what they wear, what they choose to eat, you know, it's all dictated by their brain.

So, if their child is constantly making the wrong decision, guess what? Their health and their brains are suffering. And so, if we can put our children's brains and bodies back into balance, that can really make a huge difference in their lives now, and for years to come. And then, specifically, when it comes to our brains, because I think even though we know, as parents, we've been hearing about this. We know that these foods

are not good. We know that we need to exercise. We know these things. But unfortunately, you know, our children's and ourselves brains and bodies have been hijacked. And there's two main pieces of decision-making. And that is, that is really critical in this entire science of decision-making, which is called neuroeconomics. And neuroeconomics, you know, two main pieces, prefrontal cortex and the amygdala. The prefrontal cortex is the more developed part of the brain, and it's, like, that responsible for your rational decision-making. It examines the pros and the cons, and it helps your child really think about their actions after taking a whole, you know, look at the whole picture.

And then we have is the amygdala, which is, like, the reactive part of the brain. And that one is fight and flight, you know, impulsive. But the thing is, in order to make a thought, a rational thought-out decision, we need to, you know, have both sides working appropriately together in unison. But that's where the parenting books and stuff got right. But what's going in today's world, is today's our children's lifestyles are completely out of balance. And despite warnings of a healthy diet, and obesity, and the rise in, you know, the diabetes, I mean, there's recent statistics CNN reported that diabetes have more than doubled in children in this last year. That's craziness.

But still, our children are eating more fast food now than ever, junk food, limited diet variety, you know, lack of sleep, lack of nature, lack of exercise and play, negative social environment, all increased exposure to toxins inside, outside of the homes, increased screentime, all contributing to this imbalanced child, leading to inflammation, one of the underlying reasons of chronic disease. Chronic inflammation is technically hijacking our brains, our bodies, and it's leading to children with, that are just constantly us versus them mentality, their brains are not working, lack of empathy, and their bodies are suffering.

Katie: I absolutely agree. And I know you and I, because we've talked about this before, share a heart for that, like, really true connection with children, and understanding how much they're capable of knowing. I know that's been a lesson for me.

Madiha: Absolutely.

Katie: The beauty is we don't have to force any of this. Children are so incredibly capable of understanding, and when we approach it from a perspective of curiosity, and education, and explaining to them, they're incredibly adept at grasping that at a young age, and integrating for themselves. We don't have to iron fist this at all. And I know...

Madiha: Absolutely.

Katie: ...you share that message. So, explain... You talk a lot about holistic parenting, which I think is a beautiful term. Explain what you mean by that, and how this, like, I'm sure in your life, too, is not a fight. It's a beautiful journey with your children.

Madiha: It's a journey, exactly. Absolutely. Because we are mind-body-soul, and our children are mind-body-soul. So, holistic parenting can really help nurture a child's mind-body-soul from the inside out, and giving them the skills that they actually need for emotional intelligence, you know, enduring, deep, real friendships, making correct decisions, managing stress, and being able to remain resilient, all through childhood, adulthood, no matter what life throws at them. And so, holistic parenting, I feel, is all about raising these mindful children, right? Because we know that mindfulness allows us to see the internal and the external environments really clearly, and showing us how best to respond and be fully aware on many different levels of perceptions all at once.

So, really, holistic parenting is also all about, you know, educating and empowering our children to be mindful of their bodies, their minds, their emotions, their social lives, their environment, you know, learning how to keep their bodies balanced, and giving them the autonomy that they need to make the correct decisions, but to know when their bodies are starting to go off balance, because when a child is mindful about what's going on in their bodies, you know, they can start to feel when they're going off balance, and then immediately, on their own, start to correct that imbalances. And so, that then increases their resilience in any situation, and environment. So, I mean, it's so powerful that, you know... I have four children. Mine are 13, 10, 8, and 6. And I've been sort of experimenting with them this whole time, right? And so, it's so much fun, because when we can really teach them to be mindful and incorporate all of these different levels of perception, all at once, and take into account how they feel, their bodies, their brains, their emotions...

My seven-year-old, who had walked in, I have literally walked in downstairs, and they'll be like, they're eating a bowl of sauerkraut. And I'm like, "What are you doing? Why are you eating a bowl of sauerkraut for breakfast?" They're like, "I woke up a little agitated this morning, so I wanted to feed my good bugs, and help my body get back into balance, so I ate the sauerkraut, mom. And that's all I want for breakfast. I'm good." I was like, "Okay." Or when you see your 10-year-old just meditating on their own, to bring their nervous system back into balance, right? It is so powerful, because before it even becomes a problem, they're able to then self-regulate themselves. And that is where the power lies.

Katie: Absolutely. Because truly, at the end of the day, we're not always gonna be there to be that voice for them. So it's about how do we help them learn that voice and learn those guideposts for themselves, which makes, ironically, the whole journey of motherhood so much easier, and to use your words, so much more fun.

Madiha: So much fun.

Katie: Children are this amazing gift, and when we don't feel like we have to fight them, it gets... like you said, is that autonomy. And often, I feel like we underestimate how incredibly intelligent and innately, much more than we are, maybe, aware of their body that they are. So it's all about teaching them that. It's about just helping them not lose the touch with their natural rhythms. I love that story about your son, I believe, who knew what his body wanted, and he was able to follow that. And I think, like you said, it all goes back to the education and the autonomy. I've had similar experiences, like, my five-year-old, I once looked back in the car, it was raining, all her siblings were being loud, and she's just sitting in the back meditating. And she was like, "I want some quiet." I'm like, that's perfect. You listened to your body and your brain. And I think, also, though, that does bring the impetus on the parents of how do we educate them? Because that's really what it goes down to. It's not the iron fist. I never tell my kids they cannot have these foods, or if they're at a friend's house, they must not eat the cupcake.

Madiha: Absolutely.

Katie: It's their decision. And I have been blown away over and over by how well, when they are just taught to trust themselves, they make that decision, with no outside impetus from me, no overarching fist of, like, "You must never eat sugar." It's not that at all. They know. So, as parents, like, what do we need to know? What are some of those core principles that we can pass on to them? Because like you said, it all goes back to inflammation. And unfortunately, inflammation can be that thing that makes it hard to listen to our bodies. And I think that's also part of the conversation with our kids. But what are some of those kind of maybe core ideas as moms that we can be aware of and pass on to them, so that they get to keep that innate awareness they already have?

Madiha: Absolutely. And I love what you just said there, that you just have them make their decisions, right? It's not like us really telling them what they need to do all the time, or what they can do and what they can eat, but it's all about building a better brain, right, to get those two pieces that we talked about, the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, working appropriately. I mean, Dr. Perlmutter actually had an amazing book called "Brain Wash," also, that talks about, and he actually quoted in there, that "The shift away from the prefrontal cortex represents the greatest existential threat to human survival." So heavy. And that's exactly what's going on with our children, and the children's brains are just not working the way that they should. So, where are we gonna start? And for me, I started off with digestive health and detoxification, social stress, sleep, social, and spiritual health.

And, so, because our children's brains and bodies are made of food. And, I mean, studies have shown over and over and over that children right now are, you know, at a critical phase of neuro development with lots of hormones, and structures, and behaviors, and molecule connections and, you know, specifically adolescents are then, you know, vulnerable to these stresses that can lead to behavioral changes. And so, their brains and bodies, if they're not getting the proper nutrients that they need from those real foods to function, then how can we expect their brains to even work properly? So, I mean, specifically, when it comes to adolescent brains, this junk food can impair their ability to think, and learn, and, you know, remember, and, you know, perform, even just memories, simple memories, tasks. And actually, their brains are still developing. And so, therefore,

they're unable to, you know, assess the risks and control actions, and they actually have more dopamine receptors in their brain, so, therefore, they're able to get more... Like, they feel more of, like, this reward from this junk food.

But the adolescents' brains can easily then be influenced by their environment. But specifically, again, now let's go to children. It's so powerful. There's, like, more and more research showing how, you know, these fruits and vegetables... And they just did actually a recent study in the UK where they, you know, did, research teams studied data from about 9,000 children in 50 schools, and they found that just eating more fruits and vegetables was better for mental health. I mean, we knew that, but now science is starting to show that.

But another big piece is your gut microbiome, right? Because studies have actually shown that, you know, the infant gut microbiome undergoes dynamic changes in the first 36 months of life. And during the first three years of life, the development of the microbiome is influenced by neonatal and maternal exposures, diet, lifestyle. And our children's environments really play a huge role in shifting the gut microbiota early in life. And that diversity is then really important in determining the health of our children's brains, bodies, and behavior. So, a recently, actually, in 2021, it was published in "Gut Microbiome," the research is actually at University of Alberta, they actually followed more than 400 infants, and found that those children with the gut bacterial composition, those boys with the gut bacterial composition high in a specific bacteria called Bacteroides, at one year of age, were found to have more advanced cognition and language skills one year later, you know.

So, Bacteroides, again, is one of those specific bacteria that produces metabolites called sphingolipids, which are instrumental in the formation and structure of the neurons in the brain. So then it makes sense that if we have more of this microbe, then they produce more of the sphingolipids, that can then, you know, have improved brain function. Which is then so important, because this is just the beginning. We're just starting to understand this, that... And then you say, how can you get more Bacteroides, is factors, again, same thing that influence the gut microbiota, breastfeeding, having a high-fiber diet, you know, living with a dog or animals, and then being exposed to nature and green spaces.

But it's so powerful that over the first one or two years, your brain is so malleable. And same with our gut microbiome. And so, if we can give our children, starting from diet-wise, the nutrition that they need to really optimize brain function, that can be really powerful. And then also, not even just as in the gut microbiome, studies have actually shown in, like, almost 2,500 children, that there were found that were overweight and obese, they actually suffer from, from ages from 8 to 16, they are actually suffering from more psychosocial and cognitive consequences in academic performance. So, it's not just what we eat, it's how much we eat.

And also then the lack of what we're eating, because unfortunately, right now, our diet has been, you know, shifting, where lack of diversity... Ninety percent of the Americans, including our children, are deficient in one or more nutrients, which is crazy because then it creates, like, these nutrient and vitamin deficiencies, and then obviously, we're not getting it in our bodies. Our bodies and brains are not able to function appropriately without them. Like, for example, lack of protein then results in a cascade of negative consequences at the

brain level, you know, decreasing the brain volume, altered hippocampal formation. I mean, it is craziness. Same with Omega 3s, and then vitamin D, selenium, vitamin K2, vitamin E, potassium, are all currently lost from the modern diet, and is affecting our children's brains and bodies.

Katie: And I love that. I think a key of what you just said is focusing on the positive and the nourishment aspect, versus... And this ties into diet culture as well. It's not about the deprivation. It never was. It's not like the, "We must avoid processed foods because they are bad." That's an element of it. But more so, it's, we only have a limited amount of calories we can consume per day. How do we educate our children and ourselves about consuming the best possible options to nourish our brain and bodies? And it's not just, like to your point, it's not just what we eat. It's also what our gut bacteria eats. And I feel like that's what the research keeps pointing to is, it's not just, like, don't eat the bad stuff, it's that you're nourishing not just yourself, your own brain, your body, but also the bacteria in your gut that control your neurotransmitters, that control all of this. It's like the master control switch of hormones in the body. And as a side benefit, it's much easier to parent a child who has not got neurotransmitters all over the place, who's not having crazy mood swings.

Madiha: So much yes.

Katie: And to the earlier point, kids are innately able to understand this if we give them the opportunity, and don't assume that they can't. You know, like, we know, our gut microbiome, like you said, controls the brain. So it's like, how do we give our children the best starting point and foundation for having these optimal neurotransmitters? And I also feel like it's important to speak to moms who maybe didn't know or didn't have the opportunity to have the perfect birth experience, for instance, and transfer that bacteria, or to breastfeed as long as they wanted, or whatever the case may be. The beauty is, we're seeing in research, all is not lost. And I know, you see this in your patients, like, there's so much you can do, even if you didn't get the optimal start, it doesn't matter. There's so much available. So maybe walk us through some of those basic steps you take with your patients, and then I know that you implement with your family every day of building that solid foundation, even if maybe you didn't get the best start.

Madiha: Absolutely. All is not lost. And so, again, really focus... I try to keep it as simple as possible, focusing on your digestive health and detoxification, and the four S's, stress, sleep, social, and spiritual health. So, specifically, when it comes to nutrients that regulate, you know, every single chemical reaction in our child's body, right, just specifically starting with food, tons of fruits and vegetables, eating the rainbow, you know, packed with color, fiber, nutrients, minerals, good fats, clean protein. And, you know, that's shown, you know, that they can have healthier brains. They're less violent. They improve their behavior and bodies, you know, so, again, it lowers chronic inflammation. So, I have my patients and my families go down a list, trying to keep it simple, again, just what you said. Don't focus on the stuff you can't have. Crowd it out with all the stuff that you can have, right?

And so, tons of vegetables, clean protein, healthy fats, you know, and then fruit, you know, so, it's, like, some sort of carbohydrate source. But, again, vegetables are also carbohydrates. But tons of, like, eating the

rainbow with kids. And that's what I do in my own house in the morning, and snack, especially when the kids were home all day long as this last year, and even when they're home on the weekends or after school, I lay an entire plate of tons of fruits and vegetables, in different colors. And that's what they're stacking on all day long. I only stock my fridge up with things that they can have. My pantry is filled with things that they can have, right? And that's what you wanna crowd it out, so there's nothing they can't have in my house. And that decreases the stress for me, because now I know that they're being nourished with those, with... For me, every ingredient, every spice, everything has a purpose, right, in the pantry. So, if they can have that autonomy, right, there's less of that fighting that, "Oh, I want this. No, you can't have this. You can't have that. You can't have this." But now, they're able to make those good decisions, because I've packed, stocked it up, but now they feel like, "Yes, I can have everything." It's more of like a yes mentality instead of a no mentality.

Then the next piece of that puzzle, obviously, is those toxins, your detoxification. Studies have actually shown that, you know, these pesticide exposures, these heavy metal, the endocrine systems, all of these are affecting our children's brains and bodies, where they're not able to tolerate the 85,000 chemicals they're being exposed to on a daily basis. Like, I mean, just, for example, I mean, they've done, in 2016, they did a Canadian study that found that PFAS chemicals are more than 90% of the nearly 2,000 cord sample, blood samples collected in pregnant women. That's craziness. And that then disrupts our hormones and immune systems, and decreases energy. It leads to liver damage and, you know, mental problems. I mean, there's more and more science showing that all of these chemicals are really disrupting our children's brains, bodies, and behaviors. So, really trying to lower the overall toxic load, that can help optimize your child's brain and body, you know, all those toxins that are leading to this neurodevelopmental damage and disrupting the endocrine system. So, how are we gonna do that? Incorporating, again, foods that can help them detoxify their bodies, keeping their bodily fluids moving, and swapping out toxic things for clean things, you know, lowering the overall inflammation. I can optimize this.

And what's really simple is, again, teaching your kids that, you know, just like we're having them read labels for foods, having them read labels for shampoos, which is why I love your brand so much. But, you know, shampoos, and soaps and, you know, all of these things that they're also putting on their bodies, and just educating them, you know, and not just... And then if they don't know what something is, we just go look it up and, you know, really empowering them with that knowledge. And then my kids know that they need to make sure that they're pooping, and peeing, and sweating on a daily basis, because how else is...? Or Epsom salt baths. They love to do, and, like, hot showers and cold showers, and then dry brushing. These are just part of their daily routines, getting out in nature, earthing, you know.

But that's another piece. That's the next piece, right? Stress. Oh my gosh, our kids are living in a world of chronic stress, lack of nature, lack of exercise, constant negativity, with our minds constantly going, the inability to sleep, all these negative relationships are really destroying our gut microbiome. And then studies have actually shown that this, you know, chronic stress is actually killing off the brain cells in the prefrontal cortex and making them grow in the amygdala. So, again, it's super important. You know, even a 2020 Stanford studies, in Stanford University School of Medicine show that these chronically stressed and anxious children, their brains' fear centers, from the right amygdala, send signals to the decision-making prefrontal cortex. That makes it harder to regulate negative emotions. So, our kids' stress and their lack, the negativity, is

disconnecting these pieces, which is then leading to this lack of empathy, impulsiveness, and poor decision-making.

So, how are we gonna fix that? Again, getting these kids that are chronically stressed to really focus on incorporating a stress management technique into their daily routine. You know, in the morning, for me, for us, you know, obviously the kids are getting their nature every morning, getting that early morning sunlight. They're like, "Mama, we gotta go and ground." Because we know that nature heals the body from the inside out. Nature has been shown to... You know, those people that are moving away from nature have increased risk of asthma, autoimmune diseases, you know, food allergies, lower activation of the prefrontal cortex. So getting them to spend time in nature. Right now, they're all sort of still, some unfortunately, stuck indoors, incorporating that nature for a better mood, the ability to focus, the improving sleep, mindfulness.

And then mindfulness, right? Just what we talked about. Mindfulness calms the amygdala, and helps our children reconnect to our calm. And so, again, educating them about belly breathing, and all those things that can help regulate their heart rate variability, right? Like mindfulness, and meditation, and laughter, and belly breathing, all of these things are super, super powerful to incorporate into their daily routines. And for us, just, my kids have a routine that they know when they wake up, they meditate, they pray. They go out and they have their nature. So if we can... Just like with everything else, just like we do with sleep, right, we get kids in a sleep routine. And we all love routines. Science has proven that that's really powerful. So that's what I've done, again, with the kids, again, to making sure that their sleep, their social health, making sure every morning they are singing gratitude. Morning and night, we start our day off with gratitude. And that is super powerful, right?

And because science has then proven that gratitude and optimism, that strengthens the connection between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex, so it's like you're getting out of on the right side of the bed every day. And then, making sure that they, you know, making sure, optimize their sleeping, because, again, we know sleep is super important for the brain. While a child sleeps, it cleans out the garbage. It, you know, strengthens connections in their brains. And then, the social. Really, love, and connection, that can be super, you know... Because kids need love to heal, period, right? And now, science has shown over and over and over that, you know, love, starting even from, at any age, can actually, you know, release oxytocin, that love hormone that can strengthen our children's immune system, develops empathy for yourself and others, and then promotes essential strength and self-regulation in children. So powerful. So much stuff that are simple, right?

They're easy, simple things that they can incorporate into your daily routine, that can then help them optimize their overall brains and bodies, and then your behavior. So, holistic parenting is all about that love, and the connection, and educating, and empowering your child and guiding them along the way, giving them the positive mindset, and that life skills to really navigate this crazy world. And so that's what I, truly with every conversation that you have, every hug that you have, every bite that the children take, to their stresses, their sleep, their social, spiritual health, all of that has the power to mold the children's brain for the better, no matter what age you start. That was a long answer. But wanted to give them... You know, these things are simple, but they're so powerful.

Katie: Yeah, I love, to just call out some of the key points of I think of what you just said is, like, when our child is struggling with some of those things, it's recognizing as a parent, they are having a problem, not being a problem, and how can we figure out and address what that problem is? And, to your point, like, there's something so powerful... I'm a big fan also of the morning sunlight and the getting outside. It's like, it's funny to me that we need studies to show us this. But, like, humans, throughout history, have known the importance of nature. Now we have science to back up just how important that is. It's also completely free to go outside and touch the earth and get sunlight. So, that's a great easy, no matter what your budget, no matter what anything, you can go outside as a family in the morning. And it's incredible to see the profound difference in that. And then, like, you said, addressing the core tenets of what's going on with them, and not assuming that they're just being problematic, but help them to better have a handle on their bodies, to better understand their emotions. And I view it as, for me, like, taking the responsibility of me as the parent, my job is to provide them with nutrient-dense food, just like you, keeping clean things in the house so there's never guilt around food. I think guilt's a very toxic emotion, especially around food.

Madiha: Never guilt around food. Yep.

Katie: Exactly. In fact, I had a great friend recently who, we were at a restaurant, and she was eating these cheesy bread things, but they were made from yucca. And somebody was like, "Well, you don't have to feel too bad because they're gluten-free." And I loved her response, because she goes, "Oh, I never feel bad about food. If it doesn't nourish my body, it nourishes my soul." And I was like, how beautiful that she's not attaching negative emotions to food, and how beautiful to model that in our children. Because at the end of the day, I view it as, like, my responsibility is to make sure they have constantly available, nutrient-dense options to help them understand and process physically what's going on with their bodies, emotionally what's going on, their stress.

And that's exactly like you said, just have the nutrient-dense things available, so they're always there. There's never negative emotions around food, and also, too, when they have any emotional struggles, because certainly, that happens with little kids, as they learn to regulate. It happens with teenagers because hormones are real. But instead of judging that, saying, like, "You know, well, what is this feeling? And where is it in your body, and how can you get in touch with it? And what do you need? And how can I support you and love you the best through this?" Instead of like, "No, you shouldn't be angry." It changes the whole conversation and puts them back to circle around in that place of autonomy and understanding, because truly, these are skills they're gonna need their whole life. We're not always gonna be there to be like, "Oh, you need protein." They have to learn that. So, how can we help them, early and often, learn that, so that they're not on that roller coaster?

Because, like I just said, it's not that they're being a problem. They're having a problem. So, how do we, as their parents, address that problem? And also, to your point, I think sleep is a huge key. I know we as moms feel that. We know what it feels like when you're with a newborn who won't sleep, like, hormones are a real

thing, and sleep is the biggest factor that can mess with those. So, as a mom, a busy mom, and a doctor, what are some tips for sleep for our children, and also for ourselves? Because truly, it's like the whole, if mom is well-rested and calm, the whole family seems to be calm. What are some ways we can improve that sleep variable?

Madiha: Absolutely. Wow. I think that, you know, we are in, virtually in this digital world, right, sleeping is becoming more and more of a problem, especially when all of us moms... I mean, let's just be honest, that's when we're like, "Oh, we've put the kids to bed, and now, like, oh, let's just scroll through social media." And that turns to, like, hours and "Man, crap, I should have been sleeping during that time." But, you know, the sleep is so super important, right? We talked about its benefits, but, unfortunately, specifically with our children, 6 in 10 middle schoolers and 7 in 10 high schoolers are not getting enough sleep. So, studies have shown that almost half of these children in the United States don't get the recommended nine hours of sleep. Now, that's craziness, right? So, what are we gonna do with these children? Again, that can become a struggle for parents.

Because sleep training, and I feel like since the beginning, we've sort of been taught that we control the kids' schedules for sleep. Like, "This is what you need to do, this is the time you need to get it. We're gonna be..." Just, all starting from sleep training, like, right? We were supposed to let them cry for hours, they need to do it on our time. No, that's not the way. If you give your child the autonomy to make their schedule themselves, they know we know that they know that they need... Like, for example, my older children, like, my younger children, they know that they need 10 to 12 hours of sleep in order for their bodies to function appropriately, to making sure, you know, that they get those sleep and to find a schedule that will work for them, around that time, and then create that soothing routine for them, right? We all have a routine. We all know that the importance of routines for sleep, and making sure you cut out electronics a couple hours beforehand, making sure you decrease the blue light, all of those things, but have... One, role model it yourself. But then, heck, sit down with them and come up with that plan of action themselves.

And I find that is so powerful. And, again, when they start listening to their bodies, their bodies know exactly what they need, and they're able to start to put themselves to bed. Like, my kids now, they know that this is their routine. They take their Epsom salt baths. Like, one of them likes to take Epsom salt baths during their time with lavender oils. And then they do that... Now they're starting... My 10-year-old started doing that on his own, you know. But sort of role modeling it yourself, and then start to give them the autonomy that they need to then create those healing sleep schedules on their own. So powerful.

Katie: Yeah, it's such a profound shift. It took me, I think, until my third to really internalize that lesson. And he was the one that, at two, would be like, "I'm tired. I'm going to bed now." And even if it was, like, 6:00 at night. I'm like, "Perfect. You know your body." And he would sleep, and he felt great the next day.

This episode is sponsored by Wellnesse, that's wellness with an E on the end. It's my personal care brand of products that I created when I realized that some of my friends and family members were still using some

pretty toxic personal care products simply because they worked better. I set out to create truly natural products that outperformed conventional alternatives, and Wellnesse is the result. Our super popular whitening toothpaste has been helping families create healthier oral microbiomes for a couple of years now. And our hair food, hair care nourishes the scalp from the outside in, which is why we get so many testimonials about hair regrowth and thicker, healthier hair. But today, I'm excited to tell you about our brand new silk floss. Most floss is actually plastic and can be coated with some pretty unsavory ingredients that you're rubbing directly into your gums. Since what goes in the mouth goes into the rest of the body, we created a truly natural silk-based floss that is gentle, yet effective at keeping your teeth and gums clean and fresh. Check out our floss and all of our products at wellnesse.com.

This episode is sponsored by Olipop. At least six times a day I get the question, "Mom, can I have an Olipop?" Usually once from each of my kids. And I'm happy to say yes. While I sometimes drink regular soda as a kid and usually felt pretty awful after, I love that my kids get to sip on something that taste like the sodas I grew up with. But unlike other sodas that are full of sugar, corn syrup, and artificial ingredients like aspartame, Olipop is made with natural ingredients that are actually good for you. They use functional ingredients that combine the benefits of prebiotics, plant fiber, and botanicals to support your microbiome and to benefit digestive health. We've all heard that many people consume much more than the recommended amount of sugar. And Olipop is much, much lower in sugar than conventional sodas, with only 2 to 5 grams of sugar from natural sources and no added sugar. Their vintage cola, for instance, has just 2 grams of sugar as compared to a regular Coca-Cola that has 39 grams of sugar. I've worked out a special deal for my listeners to receive 15% off of your purchase. I recommend trying their variety pack if you're not familiar with them, so you get to sample all of their flavors. Go to drinkolipop.com/wellnessmama and use the code "wellnessmama" at checkout to claim this deal.

And I think often, like, you're right, we get attached to the schedule, or the rigidity, and we teach them to ignore their innate intelligence, when really, we can learn so much from them, and from their innate intelligence, and how amazing would it be if we, as moms, if we could, A, but if we did, B, actually go to sleep when we were tired.

Madiha: Yes! See, that's what we need to do. So, role modeling those behaviors is really important, right? So, you have to start to create that routine for yourself. Obviously, if your routine is, you know, sitting in front of a, you know, your television, or sitting in front of your phone, then we can't expect it from them. So, really trying to create that routine then, yourself, about all those things that really benefit you, and then making sure you prioritize your sleep, so then your children will do the same after role modeling that.

Katie: Absolutely. And I think also if you shift your perspective, I think you would agree with this, our children become our greatest teachers. My kids have taught me so much about the importance of play, and laughter, and not taking things too seriously, and about listening to our bodies. And obviously, I strive every day to make sure I'm teaching them as well. But I feel like, if you view that as a very, like, equal, symbiotic relationship, so many beautiful things happen. I think that also shifts how you relate to your children. And you talked about this some in your own work, I'd love to hear about it here, is how to, like, guide and, even maybe

use the word discipline, although I think, like, I love the word "guide" better, but for good behavior, because I feel like when you shift that perspective, it becomes so much less of a fight, and so much more of a fun, educational journey together.

Madiha: Absolutely. Wow. The word discipline, I think, we have to understand that discipline does not mean punishment, right? It doesn't mean punishment. So, discipline, on the other hand, comes from, like, a Latin root word, called, means "to teach." So, and discipline is, like, a range of ways that you can parent, and interact, and teach your kids, so they understand what is really expected of them. And so, the child then will make good, thought-out decisions on their own. So, discipline is like a set of rules, and tools, and guidelines that really help a child set up, you know, basically getting a way for them, it helps to set up the child, for allowing their prefrontal cortex and their amygdala to work in unison. So, by explaining to a child what you expect from them, what happens is that, then, these two pieces start to work appropriately, because that way, they know what to expect, they understand real-life consequences, and if they don't do what they're doing.

So it's like really, a thought-out plan that is not intended to hurt a child, but to really shape a child's future. And real discipline doesn't...you know, focuses on the misbehavior and not the child. And so, that's when we have to start separating those things, right? And so, when it comes to, like, it's really... You know, when it comes to disciplining our children, we have to understand that we need to first role model that good behavior for them. Because that connection, and the empathy that are key, that is super key to getting a good behavior that you're looking for from your child. And if there's misbehavior, then try to figure...and it's important to find out why the child is sort of out of balance is what I'd like to say, right? But when the child gets that empathy and the comfort from a trusted adult, they're able to use, like, self-calm and self-regulate their bodies and their brains. And that relationship is then really super critical for good behavior. So that's super, again, important for disciplining your child, is making sure that you're role modeling that for them.

And for me, and I know I've listened to lots of podcasts of yours, and you do the same thing, you treat them like adults. They have real-life consequences. I treat my children... I don't do anything for them that they can't do themselves. You know, but we need to give them enough credit. Talk to them, set these rules, sit down with them, and come up with, like, family rules. And, you know, setting... We love to do that, maybe every year, as the children grow, come up with different rules for your family that they're sitting them and making them, you know, making them together, and then setting those consequences together. You know, and then, use choices and set real-life expectations. In my house, if the chores aren't done, you know...in my house, it's like work first before play. "I would like you to do the..." But they know that. They actually wake up in the morning, I know this is craziness, because of it, they chose this themselves, they made those rules themselves. Before I'll even come down, I'll be meditating upstairs, they're downstairs already early in the morning. The dishes are done, Katie. The laundry is folded.

Like, I'm telling you, well, my seven-year-old... They all know their responsibilities. So, before they go to school in the morning, all of that is done. And then they're able to, one is making their lunches. They know what they're doing because they came up with those chores themselves. They came up with those rules themselves. And then, they're like, "Oh, this is awesome." So, really educating every child that every person is responsible

for their own choices, and when faced with real life, you know, choices and consequences that they can deal with, you know, real-life consequences. Like, if they're deciding to play and they're not doing their homework, okay, you can deal with that life's consequences.

I don't even wake up my kids in the morning to go to school, because I want them to start to, again, learn those...treat them like adults. And it's craziness. I've almost never had to wake up my 13-year-old. He's up early in the morning, 6:00. He gets his chores done. He does his priorities. And then, if they have a podcast... They've also started a podcast, "The Holistic Kid Show" podcast, he'll do their prep in the morning, too, with his brothers, if they wake up. And if they don't, then they suffer the consequences. And that, I think, is super important. And then, appreciating good behavior, right? Sticker charts, point systems, even just words of not just, like, "Oh, you're a good boy," but instead of using words like that, you wanna be using words like, "Wow, that's amazing. You're such a big...you're like...only big boys do that. That's awesome."

You know, but not, like, saying, "Your behavior is, like, bad or good." And not constantly, but lots of attention to this good behavior actually leads to more good behavior. So, using words really carefully, like, because the harsher the words that you use, that activates the amygdala and leads to further disobedience. And then, when there's a problem, you look for where your child could be out of balance. You know, not to look at it as this is bad, just like what you said at the beginning. And I think that's what we do, is like, "Oh, you're such a bad child." No. They're not a bad child. They're just maybe an out-of-balance child. We just have to figure out, okay, are they lonely? You know, is there attention issues, nutrition issues? Maybe are they stressed? Is there a sleep issue? Gratitude? Do they feel isolated? Do they need more attention? Do we need to spend more time together? So, really remember to validate your child's feelings, and then work together to find out, you know, where are they out of balance? What can I do? What can we do to help your body feel better, together, as a family?

And these symptoms and signs, they're not bad. They're not, like, trying to fight against these symptoms, just like with symptoms for, we do with, you know, if somebody has eczema, or allergies, these are not bad symptoms. This is your body talking to you. So, behavior is the same way. Behavior is your body talking to you. Your child's behavior is their body talking to them, saying what it could be off-balance. And remember to just start slow, build over time, decide what battle is worth taking into consideration, the whole child, and then really focusing back on the foundations of the holistic parenting, you know, the digestive health, detoxification, stress, sleep, social, spiritual health, because that will then help them build healthy brains, bodies, and then better behavior. But again, working together as a family is key in discipline, and really validating, and treating them like adults.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I love that. And creating a culture that helps them succeed, I love your point about praising and affirming the behavior, something that it's within their control, versus them, because I know I got told I was smart as a kid, and then I got this fear of, like, don't do anything that makes you appear..... Whereas if you say, like, "Oh, you worked so hard. I really admire how much you worked on this. That was such a creative solution. How did you think of that?" Like, it affirms those things that are within their control. I tell my kids, often the reversal of the Spider-Man quote, which instead of, "With great power comes great

responsibility," I tell them, "With great responsibility comes great power." And my job as a mom is to give you all the freedom and autonomy and power that you're gonna need as an adult, and as soon as you show me that you're ready for it, I'm so ecstatic to give it to you.

And it's like helping create that relationship through your family culture, like you said, being the role model, and showing them, is so much more powerful than telling them, and remembering, like, exactly like you said, if something's going wrong, it's they're out of balance. They're not being a problem. They're having a problem. How can we help them solve it? And that puts you as a mom in a lower state of stress, and a much higher place of empathy, and they feel that, and it's, like I often say to my kids, "Oh, well, what are you feeling right now? What is your emotion? And where do you feel that in your body? Like, what is it telling you? What can we learn from this?" And to put them in that place of curiosity over, like, "Oh, this is a bad emotion. This is a bad symptom."

Madiha: No. Yeah, there's no such thing as a bad emotion, bad symptom, right? And I feel like that's so powerful, right, Katie, because as they get older, then, they're not ... Any symptom they have, because right now, it's like cancer, oh my gosh, is terrible, terrible, terrible. You know, fight against this. We gotta fight against it. No. What is my body teaching me? Nothing is really bad or good. It's just what can we learn from it? So, it's super powerful, and I think that these lessons can be really then... You take a child out of that state of fear, and put them in a state of empowerment, and that is super important and powerful.

Katie: Absolutely. And just like expected, I knew our time would fly by here. So, this is why you're on the medical review board, and I'm so grateful to have your ear. We'll definitely have to have you on for more rounds three, four, five, six, seven. But quickly, let us know about your book and where people can find it. I think it's an amazing tool for families.

Madiha: Thank you so much. Wow. So, I have... It's called "The Holistic Rx for Kids: Parenting Healthy Brains and Bodies in a Changing World," with your name right here. And so, Amazon, any bookstores, it's available there. I also have a children's book series that's coming out simultaneously. It's called "Adam's Healing Adventures: The Power of Rainbow Foods." And this is actually the second one in its series, where it's basically a functional, integrative, holistic medicine book for children. And it's really talking about the importance of all these different color foods. And so, both of them are coming out simultaneously, and can be found on Amazon, on my website, bookstores, so... So honored. So, thank you so much for having me. It's been an incredibly... And by the way, I love being on your medical advisory board, so give me more work.

Katie: Oh, and I love...I feel like trend and the theme of this whole conversation has been, you know, empower and educate your kids. And so, side by side with empowering and educating moms, you made these kids' books to help make the process of educating our kids easier. And speaking of books, a question I love to ask is if there's a book or a number of books that have had a profound impact on you personally, and if so, what they are and why?

Madiha: You know what? It changed my... I've been studying parenting for years. And studying even... So this, there was one book that is called "The Science of Parenting," by Margot Sunderland. I loved it. It really dove into the science, and exactly where the brain... Like, what you do as a parent, and what happens in the brain as a child's doing, when you're doing it. And then also, my other favorite thing is "Brain Wash," by Dr. Perlmutter, because it really opens your eyes to what's going on in the world today, that we have been, you know, just like what we're doing with kids, where, you know, slapping bad behavior, and not recognizing that it's our environments, our lifestyle that are really disconnecting our prefrontal cortex and our amygdala. So, therefore, we personally should not be taking response... We shouldn't saying "bad person, bad this," but it's our environment that's really impacting our decisions. And when we start shifting that blame from the person to our lifestyles, that now it shows, oh my god, there's so much hope, that there's so much in our lifestyle that we can actually change and heal and improve, and we can get our brain and body to work for us, not against us. And so, those are the two books that really have impacted me quite a bit.

Katie: I love those. Those will be in the show notes for you guys listening, wellnessmama.fm, along with Madiha's book, her website. She has so many resources. Also, follow her on Instagram. She's always posting all the rainbow foods that her family's eating. Like I said, we're gonna do more rounds of this for sure, and people see you on the website, on the medical review board. You are so amazing with that. Thank you for your work, for being such a light in the world, and for being here today.

Madiha: Thank you so much, Katie. I love all the work you're doing. Love you.

Katie: Love you too. And thanks to all of you for listening, for sharing your most valuable assets, your time, energy, and attention with us today. I know that 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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