Episode 503: Dr. Ana-Maria Temple on Fever, Cough and Snot, Oh My
This episode is sponsored by Four Sigmatic, superfood products that make my life easier, more focused, and improve my sleep. I have been talking about their ground and instant coffee for years, but I've recently added a new favorite to my list, their vanilla or peanut butter protein powder, although all their flavors are great. Like all of their elixirs and drinks, the protein powder is infused with superfood mushrooms for a brain and immune boost. I love to make a quick smoothie with their peanut butter protein powder and a coffee packet from them in the morning. And my kids love to do the same with their hot chocolate packets, which is also...those are a nighttime favorite in our house. Each group of protein powder has 18 grams of plant protein, 7 functional mushrooms and adaptogens, completely organic vanilla, and not a single grain, gum or gram of Stevia. You can try it and all of their products by going to foursigmatic.com/wellnessmama and use the code wellnessmama, all lowercase, one word, to save 10%.

This episode is brought to you by Joovv Red Light Therapy Devices. Fall is just around the corner, and the days are getting shorter, temperatures are going to be cooler, and we'll have less of a chance to get healthy natural sunlight but I have a trick to staying healthy and getting some of the same benefits during the winter. And that's my Joovv light. Joovv can't replace natural sunlight but it does deliver similar wavelengths of light, red and near-infrared to be specific, that have been clinically proven to be very beneficial to your health. I've had one for years and they offer a wide selection of configurations, from small handheld devices to large setups that can treat your entire body at once. It's also very important to note that the critical components used in their devices are medical-grade and have passed rigorous third-party testing to ensure they're safe and effective for home use. I've been using mine for healthy skin and to tighten up my skin after six babies and a lot of weight loss. Since we're all staring at the gloomy months ahead, I highly recommend investing in a Joovv device. Believe me, you'll feel a lot better with this light in your home this winter. And for a limited time, Joovv is offering all of my listeners an exclusive discount on their first order. To find out go to joovv.com/wellnessmama and use the code Wellness Mama to your order.

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. And this episode is all about fevers, coughs, snot, ear infections, some of the things that we might be encountering in our kids this time of year. I'm here with Dr. Ana-Maria Temple who is a board-certified pediatrician who's been treating kids for over 18 years, and she's been transitioning to a holistic approach and has changed thousands of children's lives.

She's really well-known for her extensive experience in the treatment of eczema and autoimmune diseases, but in this episode, she shared some really practical tips for dealing with minor illnesses at home, things from what to do about the flu, why not to worry about a fever in most cases, the difference between internal and external heat and effect on the body, how honey can be a superior remedy for cough, a couple of less well-known treatments for things like cough, congestion, and ear infection, including craniosacral therapy, the humidity factor in getting over illnesses quickly, and her wet sock method. If you have not heard of this, it's for
getting over illnesses quickly, and I am definitely going to try it with my kids if anyone gets sick this winter. You will learn all of that and a lot more in this episode. She is so fun to talk to. I learned a lot. I took notes. Those are all in the notes at wellnessmama.fm. Let's join Dr. Temple.

Katie: Dr. Ana-Maria, welcome back.

Dr. Ana-Maria: I'm so excited to be here.

Katie: I am excited to chat with you. And we're gonna go deep on some relevant topics for this time of year. But before we jump into that, I have a note in my show notes that your first pet was a rooster and something unusual happened to him on your birthday. So, I would love to hear that story a little bit.

Dr. Ana-Maria: When I was little, I grew up in Romania. And in Romania in 1975, you didn't really have, you know, pets, per se, but I got a rooster and his name was George. And I thought it was the greatest pet ever. Until my birthday, I'm sitting at my desk in my room and I'm looking outside my window, and I see my dad with an axe grabbing my rooster and he chopped his head off to which my mom responded like, "We're making soup for your birthday party." And that was my first experience with my pet who became soup on my birthday. Needless to say, I didn't eat any soup that day.

Katie: Wow. Yeah. That sounds like a lot of emotions all wrapped in one.

Dr. Ana-Maria: It's a little rough. A little rough in Romania.

Katie: Yeah. How was it growing up in Romania? And when did you come to the U.S.?

Dr. Ana-Maria: So, I was born in '73 and we came to the United States in 1984. So, we lived under full communism and we had the full immersion experience. We didn't know anything better or anything different, so we just lived our life. And when we came to the U.S. we realized all the things that we didn't have. For example, when you went grocery shopping, the grocery stores are...the shelves are empty. And you go to the store and maybe they bring bread that day and you have to go in the morning to get your number and you come back in the afternoon with your number and you line up for your number, and that's how you get a loaf of bread. And it was like one loaf of bread rationed to each household. And they did the same thing for meat, same thing for butter, for cherry. So, I remember sitting in lines for hours until we got our two sticks of butter. When we came to the U.S. and we went to the grocery store and there was, like, four sticks in one container and there were like hundreds of containers on a store shelf, my mom cried. She was, like, overcome by the amount of food that is in the United States.
Katie: Wow. That definitely puts it in perspective for those of us that grew up here. And I think in the U.S., we have the opposite problem. There's so much availability of so many hyper-palatable foods that we have to be more conscious of it. That's incredible, though. Thank you for sharing that.

Dr. Ana-Maria: Sure.

Katie: Well, I know now that you have so much expertise in so many different areas, but I thought it would be really relevant this time of year to go deep on some practical tools for families, especially parents with kids as we hit that time of year when there just tends to be more illnesses on the rise, especially in kiddos, which I know is part of the development of their immune system and it's going to happen, but there are things we can do on the natural side that helped make that process a little gentler on them. So, there's a lot of directions we can go. But I think I've got some notes on really cool ones and ideas that are maybe outside even the norm of holistic or integrative practice that parents can do at home. And I'm excited to delve deep on those. So, I guess to start broad, let's kind of delve into the idea of flu. I know it's a virus, so it's not something we can totally avoid. It's obviously not something antibiotics are going to fix. But that said, there are things we can do to help it be more comfortable or to run its course more comfortably. So, let's start there.

Dr. Ana-Maria: Well, you know, when viruses come and invade our body, they can cause a lot of havoc. And one of the things that we know as we've experienced recently with the different viruses is that our nose starts running. And the reason that happens is because the body is producing a lot of fluid to basically wash out the viral particles. The wetter the inside of the nose, the harder it is for the virus to catch, hold, and grab, and invade.

Then we have our coughing mechanism. The coughing is very protective. It helps us throw out the invading particles as well. We often go like, "Oh, my gosh, I have a cough and, therefore, I'm already sick." I'm like, "No, actually, that's in the beginning it helps our body get rid of it." And then, you know, when you get teary eyes and your eyes are watering, that is also extra fluid that the body is putting out, not to mention the fever that comes, which is probably the scariest part of parenthood. We know when I had little kids, I mean, the thought of my kids having a fever would send me into a heart attack. But I knew even when I was practicing traditional medicine that fever is the body's way of protecting us. And if we understand why fever protects us, we're less likely to jump on the medication train which, because we're panicked as parents because we think, you know, febrile seizures and we think brain damage. So, like, oh, my gosh, we got to protect the children. So, we reach for medicine.

But the way I usually tell parents I'm like, "Listen, when we become exposed to a virus, so it's sitting out there, somebody coughs in our face, the virus and his 50 friends try to invade our body. And they use our body as a photocopy machine because the virus cannot live on its own." It cannot just live on the table for days and months. It has to use a human body as a host and uses us as a photocopy machine.
When our body sees this happening, it turns up the thermostat and increases the fever. When we increase the temperature in the body, the immune system acts faster, more efficiently and produces more antibodies, which are the fighting cells to get rid of these copies of the virus. And as I said, it turns off the copying machine. So, let's say said virus and his 50 friends made 200 copies of themselves, you let your child have a fever. Now the body has mounted thousands of antibodies and is able to overcome these virus particles in about 24, 48 hours, and your child's cold, flu-like illness lasts for three to five days. Now, we're panicked, so we reach for our fever reducers or we do all these other things. What happens is we reduce the thermostat. When we reduce the thermostat, the immune system slows down, it is not as efficient, and it turns on the photocopy machine, so now the virus is having a field day and it's photocopying himself. It's like going across the office Christmas party when they're photocopying their tushies.

So, it's photocopying themselves. Now you have millions of particles. So, within 48 hours, the body has now been invaded by millions of viral particles, and the person's immune system is poking along barely trying to make a dent in it. Now your child's illness lasts one week, two weeks, six weeks because we haven't given the body the chance to fight. So, that's my number one tip, is when your child has a fever, really do nothing. Hydration, rest. But we're always like, "Okay. Well, we won't use traditional fever reducers. But let's use something else that reduced the fever." And I'm like just make the child comfortable and let it ride. The human body knows how to fight for itself. We just have to leave it alone because we are too hyperreactive to everything. Must do, must do, always, especially when it comes to our kids because there's nothing harder than watching our children suffer.

Katie: I definitely agree with that. And I can understand why parents would want to turn to the fever reducers because they can be a pain-relieving as well. And when you've got a kid who's got achiness or whatever, it's so uncomfortable for them. But it's amazing to me how it's, like, the more we learn in medicine, the more it tends to go back to what my grandmother always knew.

And it was, you know, eat some chicken soup and let the kids watch a movie even if they don't normally get screen time and wrap them in cozy blankets and just give them all the fluids and hydration. It can be so hard as a parent to watch your kid go through that. But I think that's such an important reminder, is the body knows what it's doing. And that was so helpful to hear you explain the duration that, like, even though short-term, they might be a little more uncomfortable without those pain relievers, long term, they're gonna get over it much more quickly. It seems like especially in kids, are there times and places when we do need to worry about a fever or is it... I know it's the vast majority of cases, it's better to let it run its course. Are there any times when we do need to be more alert or worried about a fever?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Well, sure. We have... This advice is for kids that don't have thermal regulation issues, which is major neurological conditions. Children that don't have significant seizure disorders, those kids, you need to speak with their doctor. When your child... The biggest concern is people will say, "Well, the fever has been at 105 for 3 hours, therefore, we're gonna have brain damage." Here's the thing, a normal brain will not allow...
the body to carry a fever that's going to damage itself. It just doesn't make sense. Why would the human body damage itself? It doesn't.

When you hear about people having brain damage from high temperatures is from being left in a car in the summer or for being outside on the beach without protection. It's external heat. Internally, the body will protect itself. And if your child has had febrile seizures or you're panicked about febrile seizures, you actually... All many, many medical studies have shown that no matter how much Tylenol Motrin you take or around the clock or you rotate, it's not gonna prevent it. I usually, am okay with fever reducers at night when the child cannot rest comfortably. Sleep is so important for the immune system. So, you've done everything you can, and now they're a screaming mess and they cannot settle down. I do allow for fever reducers at nighttime, and also in children that just refuse to drink anything and they're in danger of dehydration because we don't wanna have that either. So, in those two specific instances, I work with the parents to lower the temperature and make the child more comfortable so they could rest better and they don't get dehydrated.

Katie: And it seems like kids' bodies especially are so good at knowing and, like, spiking that fever early if we don't interfere with. It seems like if anything adults don't. We're not as good at getting fevers even though they're great for us, it seems like kids are just naturally great at that and especially I used to have Hashimotos and my body temperature was naturally lower. And so I knew if I illness coming on, like, my fever wasn't gonna spike as much as I would have liked it to. So, not that I would recommend this for children and I'm not medically recommending it at all. But I've often, if I feel an illness coming on, will go in the sauna to actually help my body facilitate that heat. Is that for adults only? I know I'm not gonna recommend that for kids. Is that actually beneficial for adults? If you raise your body temperature a little bit externally, can that have the same effect?

Dr. Ana-Maria: I actually subscribe to the same therapeutic management that you just said, not for the children, but for adults. If you can go into a hot tub that, obviously, is gonna be with low chlorine. If you go into your bathtub with Epsom salts, if you have an infrared sauna or sauna, I totally recommend that. I do the same thing. I go cook myself because I am externally raising my body temperature. It works like magic all the time. Always be careful in children because their body surface ratio is very different than us. They can dehydrate much quickly. Now, that's an external heat that could potentially harm them, so you don't wanna do that. But yes, in adults and older teens, that is a fabulous therapeutic option.

Katie: And the Epsom salt baths, not even a super hot one but just a normal Epsom salt bath, I feel like is a great comfort measure for kids if they're having the achiness. When mine start getting that, I'll stick them in the bathtub with Epsom salt and some herbal tea and just let them relax while that seems to help them at least be more comfortable while they're going through that fever process.

Dr. Ana-Maria: Totally. And that's the magnesium in the Epsom salts. The magnesium is a smooth muscle relaxant and it helps the internal. That's why it works for constipation, it works for migraine headaches, and, yes, for the achiness that comes with cold and flu with an herbal tea. I mean, that's just magic.
Katie: What about when it comes to coughs because that's another one that tends to make kids pretty uncomfortable. And I know as a mom, my heart goes out to my kids when they're coughing or just, like, so miserable and they're laying there like, and it's so sad. What are some things we can do naturally? I know that there are all these over-the-counter cough medicines and, like, you try to avoid those whenever possible. We haven't actually ever had to use them in our house. What are some of the remedies you recommend for helping calm the cough down or is that another thing we let run its course?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Cough can be so distressing. Oh, my gosh. The nighttime cough, and the middle of the night is usually when the coughing begins and no one's sleeping, so my parents come in, they're like, "Please help us immediately." So, some simple things for cough for children over the age of one, honey is a fabulous, fabulous remedy. In fact, I was part of a study that recruited all these kids to test honey versus common cough medications from over-the-counter and showed that honey was far superior than any other things over the counter, the bath that we talked about.

And one thing that, you know, comes out of the medical literature that a lot of people don't know about, and fun fact, a lot of studies come out of Romania is actually salt room therapy, which is called halotherapy. So, halo is Greek for salt. And it has been shown in people that have recurrent asthma, recurrent coughs, COPD, or other chronic lung infections that when you go sit in a salt room for about 40 to 45 minutes, you have a significant improvement in airway clearance and in loosening of the cough particles and better breathing. In fact, the study was done in children that were on low to medium dose inhaled steroids because of their asthma. And when they were given the salt room therapy in parallel with their inhaled steroids, they showed that they had less coughs, less sick days, and better exercise endurance and better airway flow than children that just had inhaled steroids and no salt room therapy. And that's because the salt particles that deposit on the airway lining and draw water out of the body and into the airway which thins the mucus, which makes you cough it out. Coughing out the junk is the best way to get rid of all the bacterial viral particles, dead cell tissues, and get them out of your system.

Katie: That's so fascinating. Is there any way to facilitate that at home if someone maybe isn't close to a place with the salt room? Can we use... I know there's salt inhalers now. I keep salt blocks in my sauna for that reason. But are there any other ways we can facilitate that at home?

Dr. Ana-Maria: I scoured the literature with salt inhalers and the data is not great. The data is much better for the salt rooms. The salt inhalers, use it with caution. Again, it's some cost to the whole thing. Can it hurt you? Depending if you're not using it correctly can make you cough more, but again, that's extruding more of the... So, I'm a little bit worried because I'm not getting... I don't have as much data as in a salt room where the human body can actually absorb as much salt as needed versus the salt that you're actually spraying in somebody's face.
Katie: Gotcha. What about... I know I've seen a lot of the, like, saline nasal rinses recommended for kids quite a bit. In fact, there's even, I think, one that has Xylitol that some parents use for biofilms with the tonsils. I know it's not the same thing, but can those be beneficial when you've got that kind of congestion stuff going on?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Oh, absolutely. A saltwater nose spray is fantastic because now you're getting the salt, you're getting it deeper. You're actually rinsing the sinuses because as we said, when the virus enters our nose, the drier it is, the more likely it is to penetrate and invade. When we can keep it nice and moist especially with a saline spray. In fact, that's one of my preventive measures. I'm like, wash your hands and spray your nose when you come home from school and before you go to school to keep everything moving. Also, we usually get sinus infection because everything gets stuck in the sinuses and a saltwater spray has a nice job of moving stuff through. And in fact, the nose spray you're mentioning has Xylitol and grapefruit seed extract. And they actually have shown in clinical studies in petri dishes to actually minimize COVID invasion into the body, which is pretty awesome. And they are trying to get FDA approval for emergency. That's not happened yet. But they're running studies to see how it actually can prevent viral invasion into our tissues.

Katie: That's awesome. I know I've always...that's always been one of my lines of defense when I travel just before going on airplanes or in airports, places I'm not normally, I'll just do that before and after. And I'm yet to, you know, knock on wood yet to get sick anytime I've done that. Same thing with, you mentioned honey. I'm also a big fan of propolis. There's like a throat spray with propolis for kids and it seems to soothe their throat, but there's also so many cool antibacterial properties in propolis. Are there any other, like, natural products like that that you turn to as home remedies?

Dr. Ana-Maria: I love propolis. I have it in my bag as well that's, like, next to my saline nose spray. The two of them, my kids think it's fantastic. And other things with cough, I mean, I go back to the immune system. I do recommend elderberry, vitamin D, zinc, vitamin C, and probiotics as immune system package to kind of boost up the immune system and get rid of the stuff. But generally, I keep it pretty simple.

Katie: Yeah. Especially with kids, I feel like we can overcomplicate it so much. And their bodies are so incredible. I think that's been a recurring theme with pretty much any pediatrician I've ever interviewed is, like, you know, 90 plus, often 99% plus of things with kids will resolve on their own. As parents, we want to help them, but sometimes the things we do actually slow them down because their bodies are so amazing.

Dr. Ana-Maria: They're so amazing. I'll tell you one of the things that is, like, a recurrent thing in our clinic is, like, the gift of time. Somebody will call in on a Saturday morning in a state of panic and I give them a couple of things that we mentioned and I was like, "I'll see you on Monday and we will tackle this horrible thing." And by Monday, they're like, "We're amazing. We're great." And it's like the gift of time. Just a little bit. Don't do too much. I so agree. We try to do everything. We're grabbing things from over the counter. We're getting the latest remedy. We're googling everything and trying to throw it on to the kids. And I'm like the kids are just like, "Just let me have my fever. Give me a little salt spray. Maybe put me in salt room. Give me some chicken
noodle soup." By the way, that is actually studied in the medical literature. Chicken noodle soup has tremendous immune system properties to help decrease the duration of your common cold. And keeping it simple and giving it time.

Katie: Yeah. I think that's really the key to all of it is... But, you know, my kids don't really watch TV much. And when they're sick is the one time that I'm like, "You know what? Here's a list of movies. Let's get you all cozy and a blanket and a hoodie and some warm socks and some tea and you can sit here and watch TV as much as you want." And their bodies heal so fast that often that's a very short-lived process to begin with.

What about congestion-specific? Because I know this time of year, a lot of kids will just have that runny nose or be congested and that can interfere with sleep and certainly with play. Are there any tips specific to coughing or it's not in congestion if maybe even they don't have a fever, so maybe they're not acutely uncomfortable, but they've just got that congestion going on?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Yeah. So, in congestion, obviously, the things that we just mentioned for the cough, but one trick that a lot of people don't know about is a wet sock method. And it sounds so bizarre, but the way you do it, and actually my teenage kids are... My kids are old. And they're like, "Please, let's do this wet sock method because I have a congestion." So, the way it works, you actually need just a hot bath and you need a bucket or a bowl of water with ice cubes, a pair of cotton socks, and a pair of wool socks. And the child takes a bath or the adult, you take a nice warm bath, you get the body heated up, not too hot, but you get it heated up. And then you take as you dry them after the bath and you take the current pair of socks. You leave it in the water with ice cubes so it's super cold. You wring them out and you put the cold socks onto the feet of the child that just came out of the hot bath and you put those on and then you take wool socks that are dry and you put them on top of that. Then the child gets in jammies, you wrap them up in a blanket, and we're going night-night. Leave a blanket...another pair of jammies by the side of the bed in case they break out into a sweat in the middle of the night. But what happens is that I've been fascinated.

I've been using this trick in my clinic for now three years. And everybody is like, "But what is the method? How does this work?" Because it works 90% of the time. It is incredible. And the reason how it works is actually on the same premise as, like, people that do the cold plunge, which, by the way, I would die. But instead of doing the cold plunge, you just do it for your feet. When we go into a cold plungey ice tub, what happens is the body vasoconstricts, which means we are shutting down. And when the body goes...it feels like it's under attack, it starts making cytokines. And I know in COVID, we've heard about cytokine storm and we're all freaking out. Cytokines are our friends in a certain amount. So, when you get into this cold state, the body releases cytokines, which are potent inflammatory cells that we need, which stimulates the immune system, which gets the cold out of there. You can do this just with your feet because we have all these nerve endings in the bottom of our feet, which make our feet... In Chinese medicine, there's a whole study called reflexology and all they do is they actually use your feet in order to heal your organs. So, we use the feet as basically the door to the soul, if you will. And you can just put the feet in there to release the cytokines.
Another thing that happens is when you go from a very warm to a very cold environment, it creates like a pump because in a warm environment, the vessels dilate, which means open up, when you go cold environment, they close down, which means they, like, squeeze tight. So, the opening and closing thing actually causes our lymphatic system to move better because our lymph nodes, we're covering lymph nodes from our head to our toe, but there's no pump to the lymphatic system. It just drains in its own way. And when it gets clogged up, it takes us longer to get over an illness. When we have this hot cold situation creates a pump that gets the body moving better, it also speeds up your heart because it's trying to...it's under attack. And the more blood that's circulating, the more we eliminate the toxins out of our body and the more oxygen we bring everywhere. So, this little tip is great because you're not gonna submerge a young child into a cold bath, but you can put their feet in cold wet socks. And then by the morning time, all the socks are dry every time.

Katie: That is a new one. I have not heard of that, but it makes so much sense. And it lines up with a tip I tell people because I do cold therapy a lot. I love the cold plunge. But because of all those blood vessels in your feet and your hands, if you're not sick, I find that's the thing that gets people especially if they're new to the cold is your feet and hands feel so much sooner. And as far as if you're looking at, like, you're doing cold plunge for weight loss benefits, for instance, and not for getting over an illness, the hands and feet are just extra painful. There's not really much fat on your hands and feet. So, you're not getting the benefit there. So, I found that wearing neoprene scuba socks lets me stay in the cold plunge for so much longer because of this exact same thing. So, it's kind of the inverse of what you're saying. If you wanna stay in the cold plunge longer when you're not sick, wear neoprene socks, but use that to your advantage with kids. This is a brilliant tip. I've never heard this one. So, so excited that you just shared that and hope my kids don't get sick anytime soon, but if they do, I have a new thing in my toolkit to try. That's awesome.

Another thing that seems to be really common this time of year is ear infections. And I have a lot of my own theories about this, especially when, you know, cold and flu season, but it ironically always tends to start right after Halloween and excess sugar consumption and then this whole, like, cascade of eating sugar for three months straight.

But that aside, there are lots of ear infections right now. They seem to increase this time of year. They're also, it seems to be one of the things where antibiotics are most prescribed, even though at least the literature I've read says that the vast majority of them are not ones that need antibiotics. So, they're also really uncomfortable for kids. So, when our kids come home with an ear infection, what are some of those first-line of defense things we can do?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Ear infections are about to hit an all-time high this time of the year. And you're right, it starts after Halloween, there's a total correlation with sugar. And fun fact, when we have about 100 grams of sugar in one sitting which is one bottle of Coke or a slice of cake, your immune system slows down, almost shuts down, if you will, for up to five hours. This is why kids get so sick after birthday parties. And like you said, here we go, it's Halloween and Thanksgiving and Christmas, so, it's a sugar extravaganza.
Other things that we know affect us, processed foods and dairy, dairy being an inflammatory food for a lot of people thickens the mucus. When your child comes home and has the ear... Usually, the ear pain happens at nighttime. And the reason that is, your child is congested, has a lot of boogers, they lay down at night, and all the fluid from the face actually ends up in their eustachian tubes, which is the ear tubes, and that pressure and that fluid causes a lot of pain in the middle of the night, so they wake up screaming.

Of course, fever happens at night. Fever happens at night because that's when the immune system is most awake. And when the immune system is most awake, that's when we're gonna generate our fever and our defense. Anyway. So, in the middle of the night when they wake up, then we're in a complete panic, so in the morning, we're rushing to the doctor. The doctor says, "Oh, my gosh, the ear is red. And they have some fluid or pus. And now we need antibiotics." And you're like, "Oh, my gosh, absolutely." Well, it turns out that the American Academy of Pediatrics in their policy statement says that children over six months of age have an 80% chance of getting over their ear infection without any antibiotics. That doesn't mean that we're gonna let the children be in pain, but what that means is, like, well, it doesn't mean that we gotta take antibiotics right away. This advice is not for kids that are super sick or laying around, they're high fever, they look awful. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the youngster who has 101 fever, is playing but occasionally complaining of an ear pain, or my favorite, the kids that have no symptoms, they're just really stuffy, but on exam, we find ear infections.

So, for pain, garlic oil drops, which actually I know that you've blogged about and talked about, the garlic oil drops are a really great remedy to help ease the pain. The next thing is a saltwater spray that we talked about in the nose to wash the nose and suction the boogers out. Other things, risk factors for ear infections are gonna be our pacifiers, smoking, bottle-feeding, the way you hold the bottle for the baby. Those things are known to be in the top category, of course, daycare because they're exposed to all these things.

But there's one thing that not many people talk about in the treatment for ear infection, and that is cranial sacral therapy, which has been around for a long time. This is nothing new. And it was developed, you know, in the 1800s by an osteopath and it didn't catch much on then because what he said was like, "Oh, the reason we're gonna do this therapy, because we can move the skull bones." And that was like that is crazy talk. Once you're mature, how was your skull bone moving? It's not. Well, then another 50, 75 years later, another doctor of osteopathic medicine was like, "No, no, no. There's a way that we can do gentle pressure on the skull and the bones in the face and the spine and it helps increase the movement of the cerebral spinal fluid." And the movement of the fluid actually helps move, shift stuff out because in our body, we're created of water, of energy, right, of different chemicals or different molecules, but everything is in motion. We're always... Our body is continuously in motion even when you sleep.

So, this fluid, and especially if we think of our face, where does the majority of the viruses and bacteria come into our body from, our face? Everything is our nose and our eyes and our mouth. Where does food come? In our face. So, everything that we... Not everything. But a lot of stuff that we accept into our body comes in our
face. And when we are... This is clogged up. Our sinuses are clogged up. Maybe your terminates, which is the things inside your nose, maybe you have nose palates, maybe your palate is a little off, maybe your tonsils are big, your adenoids are big. That causes an obstruction, which can lead to ear infections.

And cranial sacral therapy, which I actually saw it in action with my daughter who two years ago she was 18, horrible sinus infection, like, the kind, like, teeth hurt, you lean forward, and your face is falling off. And she was like two weeks in. She comes home crying from school, she's like, "Please give me antibiotics." And I'm like, "No antibiotics for you." So, we went to a cranial sacral therapist who did this specific manipulation and within an hour, she felt her sinuses open up, she felt bubbling in her face, her ears were less pressure, her headache got better. We had to go back a couple of more times. And she was able to overcome a really awful sinus infection without any antibiotics. And over time, I've seen so many patients in that direction. And because they're able to open these station tubes, manipulate the areas in your face, we're able to move the fluid, and now the bacteria can just get out of there.

Katie: Is this the thing that's available in most areas now? Like what should someone look for? Just Google craniosacral sacral therapy?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Yeah. A lot of times, you're like, "I had no idea that was around us." I'm like, "Yeah, because you never looked for it." Because if you put like, "What are some remedies for ear infections?" that never comes up. Not that I've ever seen. But if you put craniosacral therapist, there's a lot of folks that do it individually. And now, actually, we have several areas, several physical therapy companies in town who take insurance who offer cranial sacral therapy.

Katie: That's awesome. Are there any at-home versions of that? I know, obviously, you would need to be a trained craniosacral therapist to do that specifically, but can, like, even just gentle massage of the head and neck be helpful even as a comfort measure?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Yeah. Actually, there's YouTube videos that show you, if you have a lot of ear pressure, how to manipulate your eustachian tubes with a different pressure on your ear lobes in a specific way for a specific duration that actually will open up. And you can do that on your children, you can do that on yourself. A lot of folks that go to craniosacral therapy, they go once, and the therapist shows them what to do at home and gives them a lot of tools, so then you don't have to go like 1000 times. But yes, there's actually YouTube videos that show you how to decrease pressure within the eustachian tube.

Katie: That's awesome. And I know just for, like, a comfort perspective, when my kids have had ear pain out, they like when I just, like, gently massage around the ear or even, like, the sides of the neck and down, which seems to help kind of that draining. Or making, like, kind of the idea of the salt again, putting some salt in a sock and heating it up, and then putting that warm salt on their neck or on top of their ear seems to help
maybe draw some of that fluid as well. But I think the craniosacral tip is huge, especially because it can kind of stop that cycle. Since a lot of kids tend to get kind of in a cycle of ear infections, it seems like once they start getting them, it can be more recurring. Do you see that as well, like, once kids get ear infections, they're more prone to ear infections?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Yeah. And here's a fun fact. It's actually in... They did a study where they put half the children on antibiotics right away, and then they put... They did the watchful waiting in the other half. And the half that did not get antibiotics, they had less recurrent ear infection, less tubes, less chronic issues. And the kids that got antibiotics right away, they had more ear infections, more tubes, the surgery to get rid of ear infections, and more chronic infections. And that's because once you become on the antibiotic train, it affects your gut microbiome, like you talked about all the time. And then the more we affect the gut microbiome, the more resistant bacteria we develop in our bodies, and then with every cold, boom, the resistant bacteria just jumps in. Also, because we didn't discuss why did they have an ear infection in the first place? Did we loosen up any clogged stuff? Did we deal with their anatomy? Did we deal with their immune system? So, we didn't... When you're not dealing with a root cause of their ear infection, the body just knows cold ear infection, cold ear infection. And the cycle just goes on and on and on.

Katie: And we talked a little bit about sugar consumption already, but are there any other things... I know that there is gonna be an element of sometimes things just go around more easily. In the winter, we have less sunshine, we're not outside as much. All those things. But understanding that there are things we can do to help kind of avoid this process before it begins. What are some helpful tips for parents that can help, like, either reduce the likelihood of getting these things or make them less severe that we can do preventatively before we get them?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Well, a lot of people talk about the viruses and handwashing. Obviously, it's very important. We're very happy that handwashing is now a trend. But one of the things we don't talk about that not only is it cold in the winter, but the humidity drops significantly in the winter. The air becomes very dry. And we see the rise in cold and flu is in the wintertime and everybody usually associate it, "Well, it's just cold and we're indoors." Which is true, but the one fact that has been uncovered by a fabulous scientist from Harvard and also from Yale is that humidity plays a tremendous role in both prevention and leading to the issue. So, what do I mean by that?

When we have low humidity, in our body, we have these little hairs inside of our nose, you know, the hairs that grow more when you get older. I don't understand. But anyway, when you're younger, we have hairs inside our nose and inside our ears and inside our lungs, they're called cilia, and they move up and down and then they get the mucus out. In dry air, the cilia become less active. They become more pokey. And they're less able to remove the particles in the mucus.

Also, when it's dry, the airway cells are not able to regenerate or heal themselves as easily as when you're in a humid environment. And another crazy thing, and this is all found in lab studies with rats to check on how
humidity affects the airway. In low humid environments, the cells cannot talk to each other. There's a cell signal called interferons that the cells use to communicate with one another. And in low humidity environments, the cells cannot transmit the interferons between the cells, thus reducing the communication which leads to more inflammation and infection.

So, a lovely lady called Stephanie Taylor from Harvard who was a practicing physician for two decades and then she was like, "Something is not right." Then she went and got a master's in architecture, as you do, because she was really interested in how buildings are created and built because she really felt that there was something to the air humidity. And based on all her research, she found that in hospitals, the number one reason for transmission of infections was not handwashing, was actually the humidity, the indoor humidity percentage in hospitals that led to more transmissions of viral and bacterial illnesses that you catch in the hospital. She took it one step further and worked with Mayo Clinic where they actually went to a preschool setting and they took half the classrooms in a preschool and put humidifiers. And then in the other half of the classrooms, no humidifiers.

In the classroom with humidifiers, there was a two-thirds reduction in absenteeism from flu, cold, and viral illnesses as compared to the classroom where there were no humidifiers. And so now they've done so much research and they've found that the sweet spot for humidity in the wintertime to prevent cold and flu and help you get over your cold and flu faster is between 40% and 60% because a lot of people are like, "Oh, my gosh, but if we have humidity, then we're gonna have mold." And I live in Charlotte, North Carolina, which is a moldy holy town. And so we're all paranoid about mold. But mold doesn't grow at 40%. Right about 58% is when we start seeing mold. So, there's now these fabulous humidity monitors you can have in your house and it tells you exactly what the humidity is and make sure that is between 40% and 58%. And then you get a humidifier that is not gonna grow mold. And that will help and you run it through the wintertime in your classrooms, in hospitals, in your home, and you will see a significant reduction in cold and flu transmission this time of the year, especially with the big holidays coming around.

Katie: I'm really glad you brought up the mold piece because that was gonna be a question I had for you. And I know a lot of people are rightly concerned about mold. So, just to make sure I heard that right. It's between like 40% and 50%, you're definitely fine for mold. It's over like 58% is when that threshold is?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Yes, correct.

Katie: Okay.

This episode is sponsored by Four Sigmatic, superfood products that make my life easier, more focused, and improve my sleep. I have been talking about their ground and instant coffee for years, but I've recently added a new favorite to my list, their vanilla or peanut butter protein powder, although all their flavors are great.
Like all of their elixirs and drinks, the protein powder is infused with superfood mushrooms for a brain and immune boost. I love to make a quick smoothie with their peanut butter protein powder and a coffee packet from them in the morning. And my kids love to do the same with their hot chocolate packets, which is also...those are a nighttime favorite in our house. Each group of protein powder has 18 grams of plant protein, 7 functional mushrooms and adaptogens, completely organic vanilla, and not a single grain, gum or gram of Stevia. You can try it and all of their products by going to foursigmatic.com/wellnessmama and use the code wellnessmama, all lowercase, one word, to save 10%.

This episode is brought to you by Joovv Red Light Therapy Devices. Fall is just around the corner, and the days are getting shorter, temperatures are going to be cooler, and we'll have less of a chance to get healthy natural sunlight but I have a trick to staying healthy and getting some of the same benefits during the winter. And that's my Joovv light. Joovv can't replace natural sunlight but it does deliver similar wavelengths of light, red and near-infrared to be specific, that have been clinically proven to be very beneficial to your health. I've had one for years and they offer a wide selection of configurations, from small handheld devices to large setups that can treat your entire body at once. It's also very important to note that the critical components used in their devices are medical-grade and have passed rigorous third-party testing to ensure they're safe and effective for home use. I've been using mine for healthy skin and to tighten up my skin after six babies and a lot of weight loss. Since we're all staring at the gloomy months ahead, I highly recommend investing in a Joovv device. Believe me, you'll feel a lot better with this light in your home this winter. And for a limited time, Joovv is offering all of my listeners an exclusive discount on their first order. To find out go to joovv.com/wellnessmama and use the code Wellness Mama to your order.

What about essential oils being kind of diffused in the air? I know some of those release humidity as well. Does that accomplish any of the same thing or do you want a specific humidifier for this?

Dr. Ana-Maria: Well, here's the thing. If you have your humidity monitor, you can actually check and see if your diffuser is actually putting out enough humidity for your world because that also depends on where you live. If you're gonna live in the northern climates, you're gonna probably be drier than if you live in the South. In the south, we probably have more humidity than the north.

So, starting out with what your humidity is in the house and seeing if the current device you have in your house is actually providing you with adequate humidity before you go out and buy something else. Other than that, I can't comment because, you know, essential oil diffusers depends on the size of them, depends on the size of the room, depends on the ventilation in the room. So, that's why I'm like, you know what? You get this Accu... Accuride is the thing. I have no affiliation with it. The Accuride monitor is 10 bucks on Amazon. You have it and then it gives you, like, in real-time what the humidity in your house is.

Katie: That's awesome. I'll make sure that's linked in the show notes because I know... I remember as a kid, I got strep a lot when I was little. And I remember my parents had a humidifier that they would put on in my room, but we lived in a very dry area. And it's not something I've ever really thought about now because I live
in a more humid area. But I've noticed as the air has gotten cooler these last two weeks, that I notice how much drier it is and my kids are like, "My lips are chapped." And so that makes so much sense especially in the winter why we would be noticing that difference.

Dr. Ana-Maria: Yeah. And then by the fact that it's actually one of the reasons why we're seeing such a spike in viruses. And what I really love about this information is that it puts the power back in our hands instead of like, "Oh, nothing we can do. It's winter. We're just gonna get sick." I'm like, "No. You can actually improve your indoor air quality to help you fight the cold and flu and you're not another statistic."

Katie: That's awesome. Separate of the humidity, are you a fan of diffusing any essential oils just for the comfort measure or to help? I know that people say, like, eucalyptus can help with the breathing. Do you use any of those?

Dr. Ana-Maria: I do love essential oils. I think they do play a big role in all different kinds of things for your headaches, for your sleep, for relaxation. But I do use eucalyptus and I do use peppermint in certain ages. You gotta talk to your provider and make sure you use the right dosage for you and your family and make sure that you're not sensitive. But yes, they can do a huge benefit in improving your immune system and also helping clear your airway.

Katie: Awesome. And then what about any... Are you fans of any of the remedies or supplements for kids as kind of preventative whether it'd be vitamin C or is it better to... Do you, like, focus more on the food side of this? Like one thing I do with my kids is we drink lemon water every morning just because it helps with hydration after sleeping and also because it's got that little bit of vitamin C which I know is still a small amount. But anything like that that you recommend either from food or from supplements that can be helpful?

Dr. Ana-Maria: I am a big food is thy medicine kind of doctor because, you know, in supplements... Listen, I love my supplements. They're awesome. They're the new fabulous trend. However, Mother Nature has already provided us with amazing vitamins and minerals in our food. And eating the rainbow is one of the ways that it's your daily multivitamin, if you will. And one of the things that I always do on my social media, we talk about plant points and do contests on how many plants you can get into your diet. I'm not saying you have to be vegan, but the more plants that you can get, the more minerals and vitamins. And vitamin D is a hard one to get because it's winter now, we can't be outside, we live in a polluted world and blah, blah. But here's one food that is really high in vitamin D. I know everyone's been waiting for it. It's sardines. And it's a tough one because in the United States, sardines are not our number one food, but I'll tell you in Romania, in European countries, sardines are amazing. It is the highest vitamin D food and lowest mercury fish that you can have. It also gives you vitamin E and Omega III. So, boom, powerhouse for your immune system. But if not, you can certainly do a vitamin D liquid or supplement, make sure it doesn't have any food coloring in it. And if it's in oil, it's gonna be more effective than it's in a capsule.
I love zinc. Zinc is awesome. Zinc, of course, we find it in fancy foods like liver and oysters. We're very bougie in my clinic. All the kids have to eat oysters and sardines. But that's very high zinc foods that are very helpful for the immune system. Obviously, they're supplements. Vitamin C is awesome. The number one food for vitamin C is actually guava, followed by red peppers. I have one child of mine that just eats red peppers, like, they're going out of style. I'm like, "Well, he's good with vitamin C." But you can get your Vitamin C. And here's the other thing. When we get our vitamins from food, we have to get it in much less quantities than when we get it from a pill because Mother Nature is in symbiotic relationship with our body. And our body knows how to get the vitamin C from red peppers. It's having a little harder time getting the vitamin C from a supplement especially... We don't know. Not all supplements are created equal. When you're looking for vitamin C, I suggest that you make sure it's liposomal. Again, it's surrounded by fat, which will help the absorption of vitamin C. Otherwise, extra vitamin C, you just pee it out.

And of course, when we have a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, that helps us with probiotics and that means that the fruits and vegetables feed the microbiome, which are the bacteria that live in our gut because, fun fact, in the adult body, three to four pounds of our weight is actually bacteria weight in our guts. So, we gotta feed those bad boys because they are...60% to 80% of our immune system lies in our gut and the bacteria in our gut are responsible for how strong our immune system is. And they really like to be fed fruits and vegetables, even though your taste buds might not, but they do. And I will use elderberry this time of the year or the other one that I use elderberry. I prefer a local elderberry. If you can make it at home, that's awesome, if not, find a person that makes it because local especially with local raw honey is superior than any other gummies that you can get from, you know, a supplement company.

Katie: We are big fans of elderberry in our house. And I love that you mentioned sardines as well. I've written about this. And people push back, I think, because of the taste. But I'm like, truly, if you can learn to love them, which is a thing as parents we tell our kids, you know, "Keep trying. Your body will learn to love it." Hey, it works for grownups too. But it's inexpensive compared to all other kinds of seafood. It's actually an overall inexpensive protein source. And I've noticed, like, just making that my default lunch, sardines with, like, either I'll chop up pickles or cucumbers or salad or whatever or make, like, tuna salad but with sardines, such an easy switch. You get all that protein, like you said, all those vitamins, and you will learn to love it over time.

Dr. Ana-Maria: You know what I tell people because they're, like, open... If you never eat sardines, you open the can of sardines and you see the dead fish and if we're gonna be honest, they're just dead carcasses in there. Okay. Well, don't eat the whole can. Just get a bite out of it. So, I love the tuna fish idea because if you're making tuna fish salad, you can just get, you know, an inch of sardine and mush it in with your tuna fish salad. You won't even know it's there. It's just visually you're like, "Oh, my God, it's a dead carcass." And I'm like, "Okay. Well, your salmon was a dead carcass too, so is the chicken, you know, but you don't visualize them in a can, so then it's a little different." But yeah, start off small. Tiny little bites. Just like I tell my small people, tiny little bites and over time, your taste buds adjust.
Katie: Yeah. And great for parents to start with because I feel like, you know, kids do some of what we say, but they notice more of what we do. So, if we do it, then our kids are more likely to try it as well or at least in my house. Anytime I put food on my plate, my kids are more likely to eat that food than whatever they were eating.

Dr. Ana-Maria: Well, in my house, because my husband was my biggest challenge as we went through our wellness journey, whenever I would put something new on the plate, the kids would look down and they would look at him immediately and I was like, "Make a face. Go ahead and just make one face because I'm gonna lunge over this table." Because they knew. They would know if dad makes a weird face and this is weird and we're not eating it. So, my first order of business was working on the hubs in order to get the kids to eat a more varied diet.

Katie: Did that get better over time? I know I hear from a lot of women who are like, "My husband is my toughest one when it comes to eating healthy."

Dr. Ana-Maria: No. He's so awesome now. He is now writing my eczema book because he's like, "Oh, my gosh, I have seen such changes in our family and in patients and stuff. I'm a complete believer." So, yeah, my man now eats like 30 plant points a day, full rainbow diet. I mean, his fast-food days have been long gone, even though he still complains about it sometimes if we're gonna be honest. But, yeah. No. He's a total convert.

Katie: That's awesome. And that's a whole another conversation about eczema, but definitely curious to continue that at some point because that's another one I hear from a lot of parents about. But in the interest of respecting your time today, I know you're also busy and in practice today. The couple of questions I love to ask toward the end of interviews, the first being, if there is a book or a number of books that have profoundly impacted your life, and if so, what they are and why.

Dr. Ana-Maria: So, two books that everyone has to get is "Fiber Fueled," which is a book that speaks about the power of plants. It is written by a gastroenterologist, Dr. Will... Okay. I have to read his name because I cannot remember. Dr. Bulsiewicz. I kill that name. No. It's Dr. Will. It doesn't matter. Just Google "Fiber Fueled." It's an amazing book that tells you about the power of plants and all the science behind the power of plants. And then the second book is "Sugarproof." "Sugarproof" is by Dr. Michael Goran. And he goes way deep into sugar and how sugar affects children's bodies and how it affects the brain. I've learned so much excellent science from both of these doctors. And it goes into just a different way of looking at how food heals us and how food can hurt us.

Katie: Fascinating. And any parting advice you wanna leave with the listeners today that we haven't touched on?
Dr. Ana-Maria: The one thing that we talked about several times during our podcast today is really just having the...give the children the tincture of time and let the body do its thing. Have the faith and confidence that everything that you do every day is that when they do get a sickness or an illness, their body will be able to overcome it with the tools it already has. Don't try to do too much. Less is best when it comes to acute issues in a cold and flu season.

Katie: Perfect. And I know I have links that people can find specifically your courses that touch on some of the things we've talked about today. But where can people find you online if they wanna keep learning from you?

Dr. Ana-Maria: So, I made... On Instagram, I do tons of free advice. And on YouTube, I go grocery shopping because, oh, my gosh, food has become such a confusing, difficult to navigate journey. So, I go to Costco, and Target, and Walmart on my YouTube channel and show you how to shop for different things. We're doing Thanksgiving this month. And to make your life a little easier, I put together a holistic pediatric manual where I do topics from A to Z from cough to acne, constipation, diarrhea, vomiting, you name it. I give you all the holistic tips so you can have it in a handy dandy format that we're continuously updating with the latest information and the latest data that I'm finding.

Katie: Awesome. I will put that link in the show notes as well. I know how busy you are as a practicing physician. Thank you so much for your time today. I definitely took notes and I learned a few really practical things I've never tried. And hopefully none of us will have to, but the odds are some of us will. So, thank you so much for sharing.

Dr. Ana-Maria: Thank you so much. This was great.

Katie: And thanks, as always, to all of you guys for listening and sharing your most valuable resources, your time, energy, and attention with us today. 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."

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.