

A sunburst graphic with numerous thin, light gray lines radiating from a central point behind the text.

Healthy Moms Podcast

BY Wellness Mama[®]

Episode 81: Real Plans- How Meal Planning Can
Simplify Your Life & Reduce Stress

Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast.

Katie: This podcast is brought to you by the "Kids Cook Real Food" course. And you may have heard me talk about this before because I love it so much. It's made by one of my good friends, Katie, of Kitchen Stewardship, and it's one of my favorite bonding activities I've ever done with my kids. Basically, it's a course, Katie is a teacher by trade, so the course is incredible. It's all these videos that teach children of all ages how to cook, starting with the most basic skills, all the way up to advanced skills. So, my little ones love things like slicing soft fruits and vegetables, or spreading things, and my older ones love that they now have great knife skills and can make entire meals from scratch.

If you want to check it out, you can go to kidscookrealfood.com/wellness. There will be a special offer for Wellness Mama listeners, so keep an eye out for that. And I would highly encourage any of you if your kids are not already amazing chefs in the kitchen and you would like them to be a little bit more helpful but also to instill a love of learning and a love of real food in them, I highly recommend the course. I can't recommend it highly enough. And every friend that I have either given it to or encouraged to get it has absolutely loved it. So again, check it out, kidscookrealfood.com/wellness.

This episode is sponsored by Mama Natural. And my friend, Genevieve, also known as Mama Natural has just come out with a game changing pregnancy book called, "The Mama Natural Week-to-Week Guide to Pregnancy and Childbirth," so if you or anyone you know is pregnant, I strongly recommend picking up a copy or just grabbing one to donate to your local library. It is an incredible resource and definitely one of the best resources I've seen for new moms. Also, Genevieve has a week-to-week email series for pregnancy. So, you've seen these on other websites, but this one is a natural take on week-to-week emails that tells you how your baby is growing, what milestones he or she is having, all that cool stuff, and it's free. So you can check it out at mamanatural.com/wellness. [Mamanatural.com/wellness](http://mamanatural.com/wellness), to sign up for the free week-to-week pregnancy email series or also to check out her amazing new book.

Katie: Welcome to the Healthy Mom's Podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and I'm here today with two of my best friends in the world. And I'm so excited because we're going to talk about real food and meal planning and all of the tools that save me so much time in the kitchen.

Antony and Emily Bartlett are a husband and wife amazing team. They created Real Plans, it's an amazing online meal planning service that I use, pretty much, every single day, and it helps families to create amazing meals in minutes and also simplify shopping. So, if you don't have a lot of time but you're trying to eat real food, it is absolutely indispensable. You might remember Emily from Holistic Squid. I still read her blog, and it was one of the first blogs that I really read. And she brought in Antony, and they've now created this amazing system for families. So welcome, guys. You know how much I love it, but I'm excited to get to show you guys today.

Emily: Thank you.

Antony: Hi, Katie.

Katie: Awesome. So, if you guys are cool, let's just jump in and talk about kind of the story of real plans and how it started. Because, Emily, you've been in the blogging world for years and years, but together you created this amazing tool. So, tell us how that happened.

Emily: Well, I started blogging all...to back it up, I actually grew up in the middle of nowhere in Pennsylvania in

the ends, was raised on the typical 80s food of cocoa pebbles and pop tarts and, you know, mac and cheese and frozen pizza. And that was, I thought, amazing. And then as I grew up and explored what else was out there, I realized that that actually wasn't as amazing as I thought it was. I discovered vegetables in a way that I never knew, they weren't in cans.

And I realized that I really liked to cook. And over the years, I really fell in love with food and really learned a lot about how food can, you know, really be the basis of good health. And so my blog, Holistic Squid, was a tool for me to really, you know, dig into it and to help other people to understand how they could use food as medicine and also food to bring more joy into their lives.

So early on in blogging, I started a meal planner that was a PDF meal planner. And that was really great, except for that it was a ton of work. And a lot of people, I got a lot of compliments on it. A lot of people were really happy with it. But I also got a lot of requests and, "Oh, could we just have a meal planner that doesn't have, I don't know, mushrooms?" or, "I have a family of eight, not a family of four," and all these things. And so I was tearing my hair out. I was already accommodating a Paleo meal plan, a gluten-free, dairy-free and a traditional meal plan and I wasn't sure what to do.

And so my husband, who is a bit of a tech genius, looked at me and said, "Well, we could, you know, create this in code and it would do it all itself," and I just rolled my eyes at him and said, "Yeah, right. That's, I mean, you can't get in my brain and figure out what I do." And so he took that as a challenge and really brought to life, Real Plans, as it is today. And so that's my journey with Real Plans. And then Antony sort of got pulled into it, and really, his technical genius is what's made it the customizable tool that's become so invaluable to so many people.

Antony: Can I tell an embarrassing story...?

Katie: Of course.

Antony: About my wife? So, first time, you know, that we were dating, and Emily is like, "You should come to my house."

Emily: I didn't think he was going to tell the story.

Antony: I'm trying to get to tell the story. And she said, "I'll cook you dinner." I'm like, "Oh, great," you know. I mean it's one of those things as a guy, you got various checks...you're just checking off various boxes, and one is, "Please let my girlfriend be a good cook, because if this goes further and we get married, I'm really hoping this is, you know, going to be part of my life, good food."

And she served up the driest, most awful meal. And Emily, who was quite a good cook, was super embarrassed. And she was like, "This is not representative of my work." And I was like, but there was something a little that died inside of me and I thought, okay, Emily is a beautiful woman and very talented and everything, but maybe cooking is just not going to be her thing. It's true story.

Katie: That's hilarious.

Antony: That's how we started. That's our very first food story. And then we bought that "Nourishing Traditions" book, you know, the Sally Pollen one, with the yellow cover on it. And, you know, we started playing around, and Emily was like, started cooking amazing meals, of course. And there was stuff in there like whey and we were going, "What is that?" other than the nursery rhymes, curds and whey. And so we're thinking, what is all this? And we started getting in to all the food in this cookbook "Nourishing Traditions." And we were, "This is amazing. This is...and we feel so good."

And at the same time, Emily, who is by profession an acupuncturist as well, and we built, you know, the blog

initially to just get a few patients and to have practice, started saying things to patients like, "So, what did you eat over the last week?" And like a good Chinese doctor, you know, this became a very large part of her practice. And so, we were, you know, practicing what Emily was preaching in the acupuncture world. And we started getting more and more into it and started finding likeminded people on the internet who are into eating like this.

And this was a paradigm shift from how, because I'm, you know, originally from England, how I was eating in England. And it was the fact that you could actually experiment with different types of food to make you feel a certain way. Who knew that you can't just, you know, eat rubbishy food three times a day and then expect to feel on top of things?

So that was actually, the real work. When I think about where we are today with Real Plans, it was really that decade of experimenting and researching, mostly on Emily's part, I was the one who just ate the food. And, you know, that lasted a good 10 years. And then Emily did this meal planner. Meanwhile, I was busy configuring accounting systems all around Los Angeles to make the machine do my bidding.

And Emily then said, "Look, this meal planner is awful. It's taking up so much of my time. People really love it. It's making a big difference out there, but I just can't keep up with all the requests." And so, I put two and two together that, "I think I could make a machine do what you're doing," and Emily looked to me and was like, "No, you can't." I mean, she literally like, "No, you can't do it." And so I got going, and that's how Real Plans started.

Katie: I love it. And it definitely does that. I feel like it does get in my brain sometimes. And I know you guys are even like continually adding new amazing things to make it even more so. So, you touched on the fact that you grew up in England, Antony, which I'm sure people could also gather from the amazing accent, but what was food like? What was your kind of food foundation? What did you guys eat there? I've never asked you that, I think.

Antony: Well, I mean, I don't want to be contentious when it comes to food, but my parents' generation were all low-fat, so we really didn't have pretty much any fat in the house. And so that was one of the big revelations, was to eat, you know, butter again or to have bacon and it being okay.

And in England it was more that you could get away with just eating, you know, a sandwich or a piece of toast or what have you. And it just didn't have that same... you didn't have that good energy through the day, you know what I mean? And you blamed it on other things. You blamed it on the outside world, when really, the machine that you're responsible for feeding every day just wasn't operating at the right level, because the, you know, you're just kind of dumping sugar on cereal and you're just eating chocolate the whole time, and just not really taking into account the fact that the food really does make a difference.

And if you exercise regularly and you work out what food works for your body, that's the key to having a good day. It's super simple. And you know like it's a cliché, almost, where you see people go, "Well, based on a good diet and plenty of exercise, this pill will work brilliantly." That really is because you need to go back to that. You need to figure out what exercise do you need to make you feel good. You know, you don't have to be crazy and do stupid amounts of exercise, but you do need to do some exercise. Our bodies are designed to move.

And then on the other side of it, you need to figure out what food works for you. And you can't just read one blog article or one thing, and then do that, because everybody's chemistry is different, right Ems? I mean, our children, one is much more of a meat eater and one really gravitates towards the vegetables. And they have different, it's probably, I don't know, Emily, you can tell it wax lyrical about the science bit all that. They're just different and they just need different things in order to function.

And so it's our responsibility to work out what it is that floats your boat and then stick to it. Because if you're feeling good, and Katie, this is a conversation we had when I first met you. Remember when we were at that

Westin Price conference?

Katie: Yeah, absolutely.

Antony: And we were sitting down, we had a chat, and hadn't met each other, and we had that all awesome conversation. And it was weird, because at the end of that conversation, from not knowing you, I knew that we were going to know each other for, you know, we were going to be friends. I just knew it. And it was because we so related to one another about this point.

It's that you need to figure out how to eat right, because if you do that, you feel good within yourself. You have good energy, you just kind of balance through the day. And when you do that, you look out for the world in a different way. You smile. You relate to people, and you're not imposing your stuff on other people. And it means that you're able to build community around you because it makes stronger ties to people because you're in a balanced place and so the people around you inevitably become more balanced.

And that's really the mission that I'm on, and Emily on, and I think you're on, is to create that better society where people are able to understand their bodies and their mental state and put the odds in their favor so that they have a good day. Does that sum it up?

Katie: Yeah, definitely. And I remember that conversation really fondly as well. Definitely, we bonded. I know we both have a really strong passion, and Emily as well, for encouraging people to eat real food. But like you said, it has to be in that paradigm of what fits for their body. And that's the intangible that I feel like you guys are really trying to make tangible with Real Plans because it's so customizable, but I also think you made a really good point about people and their relationship to food because there are so many people struggling with that. And I feel like even food in our culture has become like a bad thing, and there's so much guilt attached to food and people diet or they eat too much, and it's like you're constantly fighting food. And I think that's something you guys both do very well, is have a good relationship with food and that it has a proper place in your life and it's there for energy and you also enjoy it. But food also is so much a part of our social connections and spending time with each other and I love that it's so much a passion for you, guys. And actually, we should talk about your proper British toast as well. That's another recipe I'm reading a couple of times. Is that in Real Plans, yet?

Emily: No.

Antony: It is not, no, no.

Emily: It should be, though.

Antony: It should be.

Katie: It should be. But you're so right, the relationship of food and our outlook is so interconnected. And that night, I know we talked about the fact that on the one hand, it is kind of scary the direction that society is heading with food and health and all these things, but that part of the remedy to that is to kind of heal that relationship with food and to heal so that people...because like you said, it changes your entire outlook when you're nourishing your body correctly. So, talk about how you've integrated that into Real Plans and how the system works to do that.

Emily: I think the thing is that I really love about Real Plans in its current iteration is that because it is so customizable, it really addresses that unique, you know, whatever is unique to you. So, some people really can't have dairy, they just can't digest it. They don't feel good when they have it. I, personally, can have, you know, milk in my coffee and eat cheese and eat butter, and I feel great. And so, you know, there's not one right way to do things, and it changes over time, you know. You might find that, you know, you're feeling awful because you're having a lot of inflammation in your body, so you decide to do an autoimmune protocol and you

cut out a whole lot of foods. But then after a while, you realize the only food that you can't eat is tomatoes or nightshades in general.

And so, Real Plans allows you to say what you can eat and what you can't eat, and also change it at any time, because, you know, your body changes as you move through your life. And your family might all have different needs and so we really try to meet people in the reality of Real Life, which is not static and there's not an absolute right or wrong. I mean, I have some ideas of what I think is absolute right or wrong. We have lines that we draw, but for the most part, you know, we really try and work with all the different ways in which people feel healthy by eating good food.

So yeah, it's sort of magical like that, you know. We get people really, really grateful not only for the ease that it brings to their lives, but then also the, and we may, there's, we get feedback from people that say, you know, "Your meal planner has really saved my marriage. We were constantly fighting about what was for dinner and who was going to make it, and it just solves problems like that." Or parents who are like, "I can't believe it. My kids like all these foods that they didn't like before because I've had a way to introduce them in delicious dishes." So yeah, I mean, I'm not sure I think that answers your question plus a bit more, but...

Antony: If I could provide some structure around that? So, I think that...no, I mean it's a beautiful answer. I mean, that's kind of what people feel. But it's really based on having years of people going, "Oh, I can't believe your meal planner doesn't do that." And then she would like go, "Oh, that's a good idea."

So in the end, what we've done is we've made it so that it'll fit any family size. So you could be single, couple, family, you know, a big family, you decide. So the meals will size up and down accordingly, that's the first thing.

The next thing is finding out how often you're going to cook. Because people think that, you know, a meal plan, "If I'm going to lose weight and so I'm going to have a meal plan and it's going to structure every single little thing I'm going to eat through the week. And that means that breakfast, lunch and dinner for seven days, I need to know what I'm going to..." That's not how we operate because the majority of people don't do that. They're not that structured. But they do cook maybe three or four times a week or maybe five. And maybe they don't want to have lunch planned on a Sunday because they're always, you know, at church or what have you.

So the planner enables you to decide on your schedule, so it's on your terms. And then the actual diet piece, how we approach, you know, what you like to eat and what you don't like to eat. You can set up, you know, basic things like traditional, Paleo, vegetarian, you know, what have you. You know, GAPS and autoimmune Paleo, etc.

But then you can say, "Yeah, I'm Paleo but I don't like mushrooms." And so it'll make you, it'll allow you to say, "I don't like mushrooms," say, you're Paleo and it'll come up with a convincing meal plan that tells a story through the week. You know, maybe it's gonna say, you're gonna cook a chicken on the Sunday and then on the Tuesday, you're going to use some of that chicken to go into a soup because you're going to make, you know, a broth from it or what have you. And that's where Emily's genius comes in with the content because she really understands how to meal plan and what is a successful way of combining various recipes together. So there's that kind of the ability to customize and to link it to reality, is the one side of what we're doing.

The other side is the actual pragmatic approach to really doing cooking. We are promoting people to do cooking. There are two types of kind of meal type planner services out there. One where you say, "I like this recipe, this recipe and this recipe." And they bring a box of food to your door and you take it out and the carrots are all sliced and you kind of put it all together. Pretty cool, right?

But we realized that we really wanted to give more flexibility and allow people to shop wherever they want to shop, within, you know, we have quite a lot of international customers too and so we didn't want to kind of be a company that gives you a box. It's more that it creates a shopping list from all of those recipes that you come up with. You can import your own too and mix them around and do whatever you want. But then you take that

shopping list on your cell phone and you check them off as you walk around the shop.

And then you come home and then guess what, those four bags of shopping that you got from the supermarket actually turn into meals, and they don't spoil in your fridge for two weeks because you never use that particular, you know, zucchini or whatever. It actually is something that you use and you have planned to put into a meal.

And once you combine that, that's the magic sauce. It's the combination of, "Yeah, this is kind of the food I want to eat. And I'm going to also make grandma's chocolate cake on Sunday night because it's, you know, Minnie's birthday and we need to do..." And people then have one shopping list and they go and they get everything they need in one go, and then they come back, and then they can cook it all.

And that is where, you know, we feel that we're really solving a problem, like helping many, many thousands of families and households in this kind of...they know they need to cook. They know they want to have healthy food for their family, but it allows them to, you know, meal plan efficiently. Anyhow, that's kind of where we've gone with this.

Katie: Yeah, and it really is awesome. I always say that if I could just kind of like give every family two tools for the kitchen as far as their skills in the kitchen, it would be Real Plans and also our mutual friend, Katie Kimball's, "Kids Cook Real Food" course because then you can get your kids involved with the Real Plans recipes.

But I love, Antony, how your story of evolved of, you got into it for the tech side and now I'd say you're at least as equally enthusiastic about encouraging Real Food and everything as Emily is, if not even more so. Like you and I, I know that night we're super excited about it, both of us, and I love that you've come full circle and are totally in with Real Plans and it's so much your mission. I love that aspect of you guys.

And in full disclosure, I should also say that I actually had a meal plan as well, like Emily and I have that in common with our blogging. And I had a meal plan that was on PDFs for a long time, and then I even had a website that did some very basic functionality of pulling recipes each week. And after we met and I saw what Real Plans could do, I realized, for anyone who's listening and wonders why, that you guys had a system that was so much better, and that's continually getting even more amazing.

And I realized I didn't want to compete with that because you guys had the tool that I wished mine was at the time. And so that's why we've put everybody from what was Wellness Mamas meals into Real Plans because I realized it was going to be the best system for all of my users. And I think that from the feedback I've gotten, it very much was. And I know, like you said, so many families are able to actually eat real food and to make these lifestyle changes because of it. The system is just easy.

Antony: Thank you.

Emily: The marriage of Wellness Mama meals and Real Plans has been fantastic because, you know, we have the tech and the system behind it and we have our own recipes, but your recipes bring this like really down to earth. Like, "Hey, I'm busy, I'm a mom. I got a lot going on and dinner needs to just happen. It needs to be delicious. The kids need to eat it and it needs to be on the table." And so you have built a reputation amongst Real Planners as being like the delicious but like no nonsense, not fussy recipe. So that's where, you know, with our customer service and with our subscribers, when anyone's asking for a simple but delicious recipes, it's always Wellness Mama. So, it's great.

Katie: Aww, I appreciate that. And I should say too that that's also based on like how I've learned to cook over the years because Antony sounds like he was lucky that you were already an amazing cook when you guys met and got married. My husband wasn't quite so lucky in that I had never cooked until we got married. So I had to learn as I went and thankfully, it worked out pretty well. But he totally took a gamble on me.

Antony: Well, talking about you and your husband, I think another connection that we made early on was the fact that both you and your husband and myself and Emily were kind of involved in the family business kind of pretty early on. And I just want to like mention just how lucky I feel to being able to get into a project like this, where you've got that kind of content and tech coming together. And it's really been super fun working with Emily to bring something about, has been great for our marriage, you know, because there's always like something fun to think about and to know that you're making a difference out there, it just feels great, you know?

Katie: And I think that's probably the secret sauce of Real Plans and why it's so much better than any other meal plan, is that you're not in it for the profit or the numbers. I mean, those are all great if they happen, but you're in it for changing lives. And I think, at least I'm a believer, and maybe it's naïve, but I'm very much a believer that if you truly are trying to help people and make a difference, it narrows your focus and makes your product so much better. And I think that's absolutely true for you guys because you can tell from even just the recipes, how much work goes into it and how awesome it is.

Antony: Yeah, absolutely. It's about trying to, you know, Steve Jobs said, "Go out and go and make your dent in the universe." Whatever it is, go and do something, solve something. And when you think about the kids when they're wandering around and a lot of their narrative is, "What can I get out of the situation?" It's like, "Can I get a...?" you know, if we're out and about, "Daddy, can I get a snack? Daddy, can I have a drink? Daddy, can I...? Daddy... Daddy...?"

And it's a lot about what can I get out of the situation? And I feel that as you get older, there has to be that transformation where you're going, "All right, enough is enough. I need to figure out how I am going to be of service to other people and figure out how I can help out and do stuff. What can I do that is actually going to move, you know, move the needle?" Because we're all in this kind of human lineage, right, where our work is off the back of previous generations.

And so what we've done with the business would not have been possible had tech companies created databases that could be programmed, or that there was someone, Tim Berners Lee, had come up with the internet and said, "Oh, this would be a good idea. Let's connect everyone and do hyperlinks."

This whole thing is off the back of other people and it's our duty as, you know, mature, well-adjusted adults to figure out of all the things that have been invented thus far and discovered and everything else, what can we add on top to keep progress moving forward?

And ironically with food, it's about communicating to people that you need to ignore most of the last 60 years of food progress and education in terms of, you know, some of the things that people are being taught. There have been some amazing advances, of course, in food technology and everything else and the argument being that we need to feed more people on the planet, etc., etc. But a lot of people simply don't know that they really should soak their grains like their grandmother did the night before to get rid of the acid in there, what's called, Emily? That stuff in the grain.

Emily: Phytic acid.

Antony: Phytic acid, yeah. Because you've got to get rid of the phytic acid because that means that the grain will be a lot more nutritious when you eat it, you know, with your vegetable, with your meat and what have you, and it's much better for you. But people have forgotten that. And so part of what we're doing is advancing food and tech, and you know, you can walk around the store with your phone and you can have your shopping list just automatically generate and your mushroom list, paleo meals, are all coming up, hurray, hurray and pretty pictures.

But we're also, at the same time, suggesting that people look backwards to how we have been doing things and for millennia, this is how we have nourished ourselves. And it's really important to pay attention to that.

That mixture of those two things together, I think, makes for good progress.

Emily: I would just add to that that, you know, one of our main philosophies is, you know, "What you put in is what you get out of it." And so whether you're talking about money or food or just general happiness, it's all an exchange of energy. And so our business is based on affecting positive change and helping families to connect to food in a way that is going to be nourishing.

And all of this intention of creating positive movement, is it then feeds back to us, it feeds back to the mothers for putting this food, or fathers that are putting this food on the table. And then it feeds outward to the people that you're coming into contact with every single day. So, you know, I think that that is at the core of what we do, is always trying to be doing something of service, because that is how you grow and how you have a fulfilling life.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And I know that's also important to all of us, because we've had that conversation with you guys, and me and my husband as well, that that's so important for us to pass on to our children, both aspects of that. Like the real food and the quality of what you're putting your body and also the quality of what you're putting out and your desire to help people.

And I know that it's a passion for all of us to improve the world for the next generation because if you just watch the news, is everything seems pretty bleak of the statistics of what they're gonna face. And I know you guys, like me, are very dedicated to changing that.

Antony: Yeah, and on that, because it's such a contentious thing, I kind of fell into a news hole over the last few weeks with the election and everything else that was going on. And I don't particularly want to talk about party allegiance and all that kind of stuff, but more about the helplessness that I felt while watching the news and seeing these kinds of macro-economics taking place. And macro political change is happening and I'm sitting there going, "I can't affect any of this, you know. Unless I decide to become a politician or do something," which I would never anyway because I'm English. But there's nothing I can do to affect this situation.

But there is one little corner of society that we can affect, and it's about making people feel good within their own bodies and having good energy through the day. Now, if that's our contribution and that's what we're able to do, you know, effectively, that's what I'm pouring my love and focus into because it's something I can control. It's something I don't feel helpless in this department. You know, with the right words on the right email, you can change somebody's life, literally, from, "Urgh," to...

Emily: And the same goes with putting nourishing food on the table. You know, it may seem like just something that we do two or three times a day, but in reality, you're changing the way you and your family are going to feel as you move through the day, and your mood and your ability to interact with other people. So I think, you know, that when we focus on the home and we focus on nourishment, we're actually doing so much for society as a whole, really.

Katie: Yeah, especially the more we understand epigenetics and how they say now like what you eat, it's going to affect your grandchildren or your great grandchildren because it becomes part of your cellular makeup. So the more we understand that, the more we even realize that it is so important what we're putting on the table for our families.

And also, there's the community aspect that I feel like is actually getting studied now. You have all these experts saying it's so important, if possible, to eat dinner as a family, or to be in community and to spend those times together. And so I think, at least for me, Real Plans has helped do that so much because it cuts down the amount of time I have to spend shopping, it cuts down the amount of time I have to spend cooking, and it makes it easier to get the food on the table so that I can actually spend time with the kids altogether. And like I said, I've taught, through Katie Campbell's course, my kids help cook a lot as well. And I love that all the

recipes that you guys have as well, are really easy to cook and the kids love making them.

This podcast is brought to you by the "Kids Cook Real Food" course. And you may have heard me talk about this before because I love it so much. It's made by one of my good friends, Katie, of Kitchen Stewardship and it's one of my favorite bonding activities I've ever done with my kids. Basically, it's a course. Katie is a teacher by trade so the course is incredible. It's all these videos that teach children of all ages how to cook, starting with the most basic skills, all the way up to advanced skills. So my little ones love things like slicing soft fruits and vegetables, or spreading things, and my older ones love that they now have great knife skills and can make entire meals from scratch.

If you want to check it out, you can go to kidscookrealfood.com/wellness. There will be a special offer for Wellness Mama listeners, so keep an eye out for that. And I would highly encourage any of you, if your kids are not already amazing chefs in the kitchen and you would like them to be a little bit more helpful, but also to instill a love of learning and a love of real food in them, I highly recommend the course. I can't recommend it highly enough. And every friend that I have either given it to or encouraged to get it has absolutely loved it. So again, check it out, kidscookrealfood.com/wellness.

This episode is sponsored by Mama Natural. And my friend, Genevieve, also known as Mama Natural, has just come out with a game-changing pregnancy book called "The Mama Natural Week-to-Week Guide to Pregnancy and Childbirth." So if you or anyone you know is pregnant, I strongly recommend picking up a copy or just grabbing one to donate to your local library. It is an incredible resource and definitely one of the best resources I've seen for new moms. Also, Genevieve, has a week-to-week email series for pregnancy. So you've seen these on other websites, but this one is a natural take on week-to-week emails that tells you how your baby is growing, what milestones he or she is hitting, all that cool stuff, and it's free. So you can check it out at mamanatural.com/wellness. [Mamanatural.com/wellness](http://mamanatural.com/wellness), to sign up for the free week-to-week pregnancy email series, or also to check out her amazing book.

Katie: Let's talk a little bit in more detail about the functionality of "Real Plans," because I'm not kidding, I wish I could just kind of like shake everybody I know and be like, "You need this tool. It's so amazing." In fact, our mutual friend, Daniel, does that. He tells the checkout clerk at every grocery store, "You have to get this, it's amazing." He's like a Real Plans evangelist. But I think you guys probably get that a lot. Like when someone starts using it, they start kind of telling everyone they know because it's that good.

Antony: Yeah, we have a chat room between all of our customer service people. Because I think one of the pieces that we, you know, touched on is the chat, the 24/7 hour that I really wanted to implement chat at any hour of the day, right, because, you know, there's English people and Australians and stuff, using "Real Plans," and of course, in the US, we want to make sure that people feel supported.

Because when you join up to one of these things on the internet, it can feel so impersonal. You pay your subscription fee and then you get an email saying, "Here's how to log in," and you're done. Now you need to figure it out. I don't know how many services I've signed up for where that's been the case and you can't find any support articles and you don't know what you're doing and you just get frustrated. And then your original intention of what you wanted to do by joining kind of dissipates and you become disappointed and go back to square one.

So what we did is we had this amazing chat kind of thing, you know that new thing that when you're on a website, you can click on one thing and chat. So we have actual specialists who are all trained up in all of the different types and how to use a system and stuff, to support people and create that human connection in order that people can really feel supported in going through this. Because for some people who have never done any kind of planning, can feel a little intimidating. Only advice is just do two meals, go out and do that first and then come back. And then once you've got that down, you start building out.

But it's that intangible, that human connection, that's one of the features that really support people in getting

this done, you know. That helps a lot.

Katie: Yeah, it is great. And just to give everybody an overview, if they wanna see my recipes on Real Plans, it's wellnessmama.com/meals, will get you there. But I love the ease of use from start to finish with Real Plans. Like you literally, you can sign up and immediately set all your preferences. Like you said, if you don't like mushrooms, or my dad can't stand onions, whatever it is, you can specify all those things and then literally, you get an email every week with a meal plan. And if you don't like something, you can change it or you can add to it or you can be like, "We're gonna eat dessert every night." Whatever you wanna do, you can do.

And then you just take your phone with you to the store, or if you want to print out a list, you can do that too. And it's so simple. And the one thing also that you guys do that I wanna highlight that nobody else does, or that I know of at least, they don't do well is, let's you import your own recipes and then they integrate seamlessly kind of into it as well.

Antony: Yeah, it totally works. It's amazing. I remember the first time that we coded that and we started be going out, and it was just amazing. It was like magic. I remember I was gonna say, with all of the support people doing their thing, we have this chat room. And every time that someone pays us some kind of compliment, you know, in there, we throw into the chat room. And what happens is that everybody sees it in the company. And it's a constant stream of people going, "You're a lifesaver." "Oh, this is amazing." "Oh, this is awesome." All that kind of stuff. And it fuels us. It fuels us to wanna go and, you know, do more stuff and make it more functional and listen to our customers.

But yeah, you're right. The main driver of this is to be as simple as possible. So you get asked your questions at the beginning so we know who you are, and then we say, "When do you want to cook, and then what would you want to cook?" so, what food you want? And then it simply just creates a weekly plan for you, you know, four rolling weeks.

And from there, you can really start making, you know, teaching "Real Plans," what you want to do so you can start rating the food and when you rate the recipes, they come up more often. You can say, for example, in the shopping list, "Oh, I need salt for these recipes. But salt is something I always have. Don't tell me to keep buying salt." And you can make it a staple item so it just disappears.

And these little things are transformative. It means that when you look at that shopping list, it's a real shopping list. And you can, you know, obviously add whatever else you're going to buy that week, like the cat food and the paper towels and whatever else. And you go and get the shopping and come back and then you pull it up again and then you can just cook with Real Plans sitting there in the kitchen. And so people don't have to go back to somewhere else to see what's going on and how to do it, it's all in one place. It's like having kind of an assistant in your pocket. And we have this amazing mobile app now, the sports opening, or you can do it, you know, on a PC or an Apple, Mac, whatever.

Emily: One of my goals, sorry to interrupt, babe, is that I want Real Plans to not be a 'nice to have' but a lifestyle essential that really you just can't live without in a good way. So, you know, the like period trackers, sorry to talk about periods, Antony, that most women use on their phone. And in my acupuncture practice, every time I ask a woman when her last menstrual cycle was, they whip out their phone and they can tell me all about their cycle. And I think a lot of women use that without even thinking about it.

And so part of my intention, our intention, is to have Real Plans be something that you just couldn't live without because it makes your life that much easier. So as we talk to our subscribers, you know, in the chat or in our Facebook group, we're constantly gleaning the information of how they're using the system and how they want to use the system, and what's been missing.

And over time, I really feel like we've created something that is a tool that our users are just, our subscribers are just, you know, so thrilled to have as like a life-changing experience, you know. And also, then the community that we have in the online group where they're sharing all their experiences as well, which is great.

You know, it takes it beyond the tool into a lifestyle, which is so amazing to see.

Antony: Yeah, people keep uploading pictures of the food they've made and like, "Check this out." My favorite posts are the ones where they show an empty plate and the caption is normally, "Well, this was the recipe from Real Plans, but I couldn't get my camera out quickly enough because we all ate it already." It's happened like a number of times, that same kind of post. It's cool.

Katie: I love it. And I would definitely, anybody listening, because I know it's easy to talk about these things in theory, but people who aren't meal planning already, I always would just encourage them to try it. Because people ask me all the time, "How do you balance everything with the blog and with six kids and all this?" and literally, meal planning is one of my top three time-saving things. Like you guys said, I cannot live without meal planning. It would be crazy.

And you also do save money by meal planning, as well, for anybody who's got budget concerns. Like I know I absolutely save more than I pay for Real Plans by far because no food's getting wasted in the fridge and we're only cooking what we're gonna eat. And it saves me so much time at the grocery store, also.

Antony: Let alone the gas it costs to go to the shops and back again. Now, if you have to do multiple trips, then that kind of messes things up. That alone is the saver.

Emily: I have that problem when I wander through the grocery store and I don't know what I'm getting, where I start looking at the shelf with the really expensive chocolate, I'm like, "Oh, I need that." And then I'm at the aisle that has the fancy, organic, instant food, you know. Like ooh, that's a really cool curry sauce. And like, oh, that was \$14, ends up in my cart, you know. And then before I know it, I forgot what I was there for. I have a whole bunch of things and I get home and none of it was actually gonna make any food when it's combined together. So this helps me get in and out of the grocery store with exactly what I need and nothing else.

Antony: And what I hear from people is that they'll cycle the same, you know, six recipes throughout the entire year, regardless of season or, you know, whatever. They'll just do the same recipes over and over again. And as you cross the threshold of the supermarket, my experience and what I hear a lot of people saying, is that they go to exactly the same spots in the supermarket and they walk past the counter that has the chickens and go, "Oh yeah, I eat chicken so I better have one of those." And then you go to the bulk section and you go, "Oh yeah, I eat rice. I better have some rice." And there's no planning going on. Then you get home and then you ask the question, "So, what should I make for dinner?" you know.

Katie: Yeah. I hate that. The 4:00 p.m. like, "Oh my Gosh, I have to feed all of these people in my house in like an hour and a half, what do I do?" And I don't have that feeling anymore. It's incredible.

Antony: No, it's that kind of black hole in your stomach going, "Oh no, I'm failing even as I'm doing it." That's why Emily's ability to organize and to...you know how this first started as well, is before Emily even did the meal plan, she goes...because she suggested it to her readers for Holistic Squid and said, "Hey, what should I do next? Should I do an e-book, should I do a meal plan or something?" and they all said meal plan.

The reason she said that is because she would meal plan. She meal planned for years. And she always, I was like, you know, to do my bit I went out and got the shopping. So she had my phone at the time and you know they're like the notes app on it, so she would put all the ingredients into the notes app of what we needed to supplement whatever was already in the kitchen to make the meals happen, right? And then she would email me that notes thing or text it to me or what have you. And then I would get a big fat text with a long list and I would go around the supermarket and try to put it all together.

Emily: Try being the most important word in that sentence.

Antony: Being the operative word, yeah.

Katie: How many phone calls, Emily, did you get, like, what does this mean? How many of these do we need?

Antony: No, I didn't. She... It was her phone call...

Emily: He'd just come home with...

Antony: Just came home with the wrong stuff. Not only...

Emily: He missed like entire sections of the list or just, you know, get different things that, you know.

Antony: Oh man, the number of times I've got the wrong kind of peanut butter because it wasn't the organic one, you know. I was like, "That looks good." And also, I just forgot a major item. So I'd forget, I don't know, the salmon or something that should be the main thing in one of the meals that we were eating. And Emily would look at me with this face like, "I can't believe that you would mess this up again." It was like it became a marital thing that I was unable to pull off the shopping list.

And so to save face, that's why, you know, I've been involved in Real Plans as well because, one, you know, you have the shopping list as all kind of laid out, and Emily already checks off what's already in the kitchen and what's remaining is what you need to get from the shop. So that's kind of straightforward. But then what's cool is that as you put stuff in the basket, you check it off and it disappears, which means...

Emily: It's like a video game, for your husband at the grocery store.

Antony: Yeah, it's a video game. It's so kind of like hunter, gatherer. I love it. It's very male. You just go and you got the list and you get it and then you just feel that you've accomplished something because you emptied out the list. But it has, if you don't know what it is, you can click on it and you have a picture or you can upload your own picture, so you can go, "Yes, husband, this is the exact one. Here is the nearly empty part of peanut butter," boom and then that's the picture that shows up for you when you have peanut butter on your shopping list. You see?

Katie: Or like, this is what the heck?

Antony: Exactly. And now I have to sheepishly ask the shop assistant, what is the difference between parsley and, you know, whatever else. So you have all of that going for you. And then just to know that you, and ones you can undo, if you actually click something, you know, it comes and pops back in again. But to have that diminishing list going round the shop, you just get more and more excited. I'm getting to the end of something. And like, "Oh, I did it." And then you're done. And then it's all there and it's all accounted for. It's an audit trail. So if ever Emily goes, "Oh, but you didn't get the..." I'm like, "It's not on the list." Because it's all there. You got the grocery list.

Katie: Yeah. I literally, like because you mentioned the app, so if people want to get my recipes, they can go to wellnessmama.com/meals. And then once you have an account, you can get this app. And I literally meal plan one-handed while nursing the baby because you can just swipe back and forth to put things on your shelf and then add them. It's amazing.

Antony: That's it. That's why we built the mobile app because we did the website and it was like, well it's cool and stuff. And we had this lady who said it was 3:00 in the morning or whatever, she was nursing the baby and that's when she had the time to plan it, to do her Real Plan. And she was bouncing a laptop on her knee, with two hands, trying to do it. You know, it was like using the touch pad and trying to do the whole thing.

And she gave this kind of plea on Facebook that she really, really wanted to have a working mobile app that could do everything that the website could do, but just wanted to do with one finger. And I pledged to her that I

would do it. And so it took, I don't know, Ems, how long? Was it a year or something? I mean it was...

Emily: It felt like forever, but probably it wasn't.

Antony: The amount of work it takes...yeah, I know. The amount of work it takes to make it work and then to really get it down and to make it, you know, intuitive and stuff, Holy Moly. Anyway, we got that done. And the feeling I got when I got to find that old Facebook post, she was still a subscriber. I totally commented and said, "You know that whole thing, the eloquent quote. I meant what I said and I said what I meant. There we go." And it was so great because I got to say, "Yes, you can now meal plan with your thumb at 3:00 in the morning while nursing your baby. And you will get your, you know, your plan together." So satisfying.

Katie: Yeah. And you guys also just implemented instant pot options. I should say that because I have a lot of instant pot fans listening. Literally, between the Real Plans app and my instant pot, I think I actually spend less time cooking real food than I used to spend cooking processed food without the plan.

Emily: Yeah, everybody loves the instant pot. I mean when we started to see that trends and people kept asking for more instant pot recipes, so we had a whole effort to instant pot all recipes that were instant potable. And we figured out cooking times and cooking methods and got them all up and going.

And I mean with our, we have a new filtering system where you can say, "I want an instant pot recipe on Monday, Wednesday, Friday," and your plan will automatically have them now. Or you can just look at the whole collection of them and pick them out. I mean, it's such a time saver and it's so, you know, as somebody who grew up on convenience foods and then really got into slow food and traditional foods, I really love sort of bringing it together and marrying the two, where you can have convenience and real healthy food. And the instant pot is a really great way to make that happen.

Katie: Absolutely. Definitely, I'll echo again, anybody listening should definitely try both of those, but especially Real Plans. And if they want my recipes included, it's [wellnessmama.com/meals](https://www.wellnessmama.com/meals) will take you there. And there's all the information and the walkthrough of everything.

But you guys, thanks so much for being here and for talking about it. I know a lot of my listeners already use Real Plans, but hopefully, some new ones will give it a try. I know it saves me so much time and so much stress and I know that you guys do that for thousands of people as well.

Emily: Thanks, Katie. We're always happy to talk to you.

Antony: Absolutely. All right.

Katie: So much fun. I can talk all day, but great to talk to you guys. Thanks so much for being here.

And thanks to all of you, for listening. I'll see you next time on the Healthy Mom's Podcast.

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