



952: How Food Reflects the Soul: Using Mindfulness
to Heal Wounds and Cultivate Deep Self-Love

With Gina Worful

Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast!

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Katie: Hello and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and this episode was so fascinating and insightful. It's all about how food reflects the soul and how food as a tool can help by using mindfulness to heal wounds and cultivate deep self-love. They're also a deep understanding of how things like cravings are actually a great teacher for us. What's actually going on when we crave a food, how we can have so many things wrapped into our relationship with food, like self-judgment, restriction control, and so much more. And I'm here today with Gina Worful, who is the founder of the Mastering Mindfulness Institute.

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She was originally trained as a traditional registered dietician and then got a master's in nutrition as well, and she takes an unconventional approach to health. She was frustrated by the poor success rates within the diet industry, and she developed methodologies that empower individuals to take control of their health by going into the subconscious reasons that were making decisions in the first place.

And her Mastering Mindfulness Institute teaches people how to leverage mindfulness to improve their health and provides training programs for health professionals, universities, and health institutions as well. She definitely goes deep and insightful in this one, and I really enjoyed her perspective on what I feels like a much deeper understanding of our relationship with food and how it goes so far beyond just the physical.

There are some really practical tips and takeaways in this episode as well. I know you'll enjoy it, so let's jump in. Gina, welcome. And thank you so much for being here.

Gina: Thanks, Katie.

Katie: I think this is going to be such a fascinating topic to dive into today and might give people an entirely new perspective on something that I know I struggled with for a long time and didn't understand my relationship with. And in researching for this episode, it's what the topic you call "how food reflects the soul".

And it seems like there's going to be a lot of beautiful directions we get to go within that topic. I feel like to start off, I would love for you to walk us into the topic in a way of understanding how our relationship with food is connected to our inner world in a way that I feel like a lot of people might not have considered.

Gina: Oh, yeah. You know, from the very beginning, from the moment that we're born, if you think about when you come out of the womb and you're crying and you're a baby, and as soon as you're in that frantic, overwhelming moment, and suddenly you're fed, and it's like, ah, everything is okay.

So from the very beginning, from the start of our lives, we develop this relationship with food, every single person on the planet. And unfortunately we lose the magic of like really looking at this relationship that each of us has. But if we're willing to get a little bit curious and explore what has this lifetime history of my relationship with food. How does food make me feel? What does it mean to me? If we can get curious enough, we can go on this wonderful self-exploration where our food can actually teach us about ourselves.

Katie: I love that. And it makes sense that that would start on day one, like that would be one of the first both like physiological circadian signaling cues that babies get, but more importantly, like their first safety cue. And I would guess there's actually probably a lot that connects to feelings of safety or feeling of need and how like hunger being such a strong biological drive.

Also, I would guess ties into like emotional needs and things we feel. And I would guess that maybe that connection is not as like topical and common sense as what we might wish it was, um, but I'd love to dive into, so it seems like this can start from literally the day we're born, if there's some kind of stress or fracture or trauma around those first moments. And I know I've talked before on podcasts about even birth experiences and how those can so drastically impact both the mother and the child in a very lifelong way, and it sounds like food is another one of these big things that can, from the very moment we're born, be a source of safety or potentially even a source of like stress from the very beginning.

And then building from that, I would guess beyond that, like many experiences in our life might actually be a source of reinforcing some good element or some more troublesome element of that. But can you speak to like, as this relationship develops, maybe throughout childhood, um, what kind of connections can be formed? What kind of fractures can happen? And like, what might that look like later in life?

Gina: Yeah, absolutely. So from the time that we're born, let's start like early on when you're like two to seven years old, you're figuring out how does the world work? Your brain is just like mushy baby brain when you first are born and you're using your senses and your touch and you're figuring out. How does the world work?

And one of those important things is, am I safe? Am I okay? Because as a baby, you cannot fend for yourself. So you're constantly asking, am I safe? Am I okay? And food, just like you said, is one of those things that can provide this feeling of safety and it immediately can regulate the nervous system. And so as we're learning in life, we might start to form associations.

This is where your beliefs start getting created of this plus this equals this. So let's say if your parents were, maybe they didn't know how to express love, but they did it through food. It's not a bad thing, but you're, but you're learning food is my source of love. And so as you're starting to grow up as an adult, there's still that association food is my source of love. So how does that become a way that we might find it valuable in life is we all as humans probably go through times of where you might be missing that feeling of love or going into a moment of loneliness. And it's, Oh, that association food can be my source of love. then as an adult, it can be a little bit challenging if you're now on a diet and you're, you hit that

moment of where you're like, Oh, I'm feeling that I need that source of love and it's being taken away. Then you might actually be missing that feeling of love.

So all different associations can be made. It might even be that growing up, you might not have had enough food at home. Food might have been scarce. Or you had a lot of siblings and they're all fighting for food. And as a child, you might learn this belief. There's not enough food. Food is scarce.

So the way that you interact with that food, the relationship with it, is I should overeat that food. Because there's not enough of it. My belief is that food is scarce. And as we hold that belief throughout life, a way to cope with life is to overeat, to provide enough food, to make sure that we're safe, that we have enough. But then as an adult, if you're told you shouldn't overeat, you need to be on a diet. You take away food, now you're losing that sense of safety that you learned from childhood. So food could be anything from childhood. It could be celebration, it could be love, it could be safety, it could be comfort. And none of them are wrong, but we use food as a strategy to help us as our ally in life, but we don't see it as that way. It gets turned into, like, overeating is a bad thing, so just don't do it without understanding all of these little checkpoints and different relationships that we built with it.

Katie: Oh, I love this and getting to dive into this because I feel like this is even a deeper extension of something I've talked about before, which is, um, I kind of call it my like micronutrient theory related to food where from a strictly biological level, even if we're eating enough calories, if we're not getting the micronutrients, our body actually needs.

In its wisdom, our body will keep craving food and keep telling us to eat food because it's not actually getting what it needs on a biological level. And so, like, learning that was a big shift for me and moving away from restriction and into sort of like maximal nourishment. Like, how do I maximally nourish myself with the meals I'm going to eat? And that still is on a biological level.

And I feel like what you're opening the door to is that it's like a yes/and there's an even deeper emotional level related to this. And like, understanding and diving into the emotional needs and how I would guess those can be met differently than only with food, even though that's a tool, um, lets us actually have like a much more holistic and deep relationship with ourselves and with food and with the way that we nourish ourselves, both literally and metaphorically.

And as you were speaking, I was thinking even how we position food in ways that like tie so often to like celebration or to attention, whether it's birthday parties or getting to go out to

eat with a family and getting more like family time together, because that was set aside and structured to really just be together and not to be in the busyness of life at home. And how those things are so subtle and probably can create like really strong associations that live in the undercurrent. So they're hard maybe to identify.

Gina: Yeah, I think that knowing what to eat and healthy eating is so important. Just like you said, if you're not really nourishing your body, you're probably going to crave foods to try to provide that nourishment. But what's so much deeper than that, what a lot of people don't realize is that knowing how to eat healthy is only about 5 percent of what influences our behaviors, but we're, we're saturated in a world that is do this plan, do this plan, eat this way. And I love science. I love nutrition, but there's so much more that actually influences our behaviors. And that is about what comes from the subconscious mind. It's about 95 percent of what influences our behaviors.

So if you're the kind of person and I say you, but I really mean like I was that person who like, you know how to eat healthy. You're like, I at least know the basics, right? Like most people know the basics of vegetables, proteins, you know, things like that. Like, that's good. Most people can navigate the basics. And so if you know how to eat healthy, but there's still this, like, you're white knuckling it, it feels hard, you're going through these cycles of where I'm like, I'm doing it, I'm motivated, and then I'm losing it. That's like a little clue of like, ah, there's something more that's deeper than just knowing how to eat healthy. And I think that that's really important. That's not talked about.

Katie: And if you're willing to share, I'm curious if you have like a personal story that you can use as an illustration of your, like, how you came into your experience with this and what shifted for you and how you learn, because also speaking to the subconscious, I know that. In therapy work, that can be difficult because it's subconscious. And so it's hard to access sometimes. So I would love to hear what your journey was like.

Gina: Oh, yeah. I have been in quite an evolution because about 13 years ago, I went to school to become a registered dietitian because I've always been super interested in health. Really wanted to feel confident with my health. And so I figured as long as I get a degree, I'll know everything. I'll have all the answers. I'll know the secrets, you know.

And so I became a registered dietitian. They taught me all the things that you're supposed to do, like count calories, come up with a meal plan that fits within those calories, um, you know, what's healthy, what's not healthy. And so I thought I was prepared when I graduated and I opened up a private practice and I started working with clients and I was so ready to like change the world. But I was giving my clients these goals and I was helping them with these plans and every single client started to follow the same pattern where they would be

like, okay, I'm doing it. I trust you. You're my coach. And they would start making some changes, but then they would have this moment of where they would like lose it.

And then they would like lose control. They'd go back to their own ways. They'd slip up and they would come back and it would be like confession. And they would be like, here's all the things that I did. And there would be a lot of self-criticism and I'll try harder next time. And I was in this place of confusion of. "Is it my clients? Do they not have enough willpower? Do I need to be more of their cheerleader?" Or am I just like a bad dietician? And I was really afraid of, like, I really wanted to help people. And so I thought, okay, maybe I need to learn more.

So I went back to school and I got a master's degree in nutrition and I just learned more at the same thing, right? More plans and programs and people still failed. So during that time, was also for myself trying to follow my perfect plans and I was like holding on and I was tracking my food and I was writing things down, I had to think about food all day long and it was so stressful I was able to like hold on to it for a while, but then I started noticing myself go into these almost like trance like states where it felt like something was taking control over my brain and like hijacking my brain and I would find myself like going like, almost like a magnet to my body, like pulling me into the kitchen and no matter how hard I tried....You're not supposed to do this. You know better. This isn't your goals.

It was like, there was this stronger force inside of me that was like pulling me into the kitchen and I would like lose it and then I would go into the same self-criticism that my clients were going through and I had it really intense and heavy. Cause I'm like, you're a dietitian. You know how to do this. Like what is wrong with you? Tomorrow you're going to do it. You're going to fast. You're going to work out harder. And I would. Propel myself back into the cycle.

And it was, and I remember getting to this place where harder I was trying to control and grasp for more of a sense of control, the more I felt like I was losing it, like I was going further and further away. So I got to the place where I was like, I probably had like five foods in my house because I didn't trust myself, didn't trust myself. I was writing things down, you know, at the time, if like, like Ozempic were a popular thing, I would have probably done it for myself because I was just so desperate to, I don't trust myself. I'm just craving food all the time.

And I got to kind of one of these, these moments of crisis of like, how am I going to get out of this? I can't do the same cycle every day. When you go through that cycle every single day of, I promise we're doing it this time. And then by the end of the day is like losing that. It's a really, really painful place to be in it. It was very heartbreaking to look at maybe

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everything that I've learned, I've been taught is not actually going to give me what I was looking for in this sense of freedom. And it propelled me to deeper questions.

Katie: I was thinking through of so many things and how resonant as you were speaking. I thought of the Carl Jung quote of until we make the subconscious conscious, it will rule our life and we will call it fate. And how, for me, my own personality came into play in a similar, but different way in that on many of those personality tests, I test as like the rebel of the tagline, you can't tell me what to do and I can't either.

So I recognized in myself the pattern that if I even in myself tried to create too much structure, I was simply giving myself something to rebel against. And that was kind of my first clue that, "Wait, there's something else going on that's not about food and also those things are still present". Even if I'm following the perfect like spreadsheet checklist plan, there's still the, so like what is going on?

And I feel like those are the things that you're helping us dive into today. And it seems like probably many people listening. I know I have, I've had that experience of like tomorrow, I'm going to do it perfectly. Tomorrow, I'm going to check every box Monday. I'm going to start. And then it like all those things creep in and it seems like this is like metaphorically and probably literally models how we relate to life in areas of like control and restriction and self-judgment. And when you mentioned Ozempic, I also thought like, that seems like a very relevant point for right now, because now we do have this tool that seemingly is like a biological override that can like remove hunger cues, but in the way you've explained how hunger is so much more than just it.

Yeah. a biological drive to eat calories. It seems like even in those cases when ozempic can be really helpful, it would be a both/and situation where a person would still want to address these subconscious parts, to make sure their actual emotional needs are getting met as well.

Gina: Yeah, well, there is that because I do have some, um, I've had clients and students who are on Ozempic and they not are feeling their appetite, but yet they still also are struggling to feel that sense of empowerment with their food and their food choices. And so I have worked with many people who are like, yeah, I don't have an appetite, but yet I still feel myself being pulled and, and being drawn to the kitchen.

There's also something really interesting about appetite and hunger too, if you don't mind me unpacking that a little bit. I personally, I don't really have like an issue with Ozempic. I think a lot of people, because I preach this trust with your body, a lot of people think that I'm against it.

And I really do believe that you have to feel like what is the right thing for you. But I think that there's something so fascinating to understand that could make ozempic irrelevant. And that's a misunderstanding of what actually influences our hunger and our appetite levels. I was stuck in a lot of criticism when I didn't understand this one thing, if you can understand this piece of science, you'll have so much self-compassion, so much understanding about your body.

This is the biggest thing I love to teach is that when your body is in a state of stress. Or your nervous system is activated. Naturally, your body shifts its physiology. So when you're under a stress, cortisol will start being released and that increases your hunger hormones.

The other aspect of that is there's an area of your brain. It's in your limbic system. Specifically, the insular cortex that is responsible for sensing when you are full. So you eat some food, maybe you eat your sandwich or something, that gets digested, that sends a signal up your vagus nerve, up inside the brain. gets processed inside of your brain in the insular cortex. And that has to happen in order for you to feel full.

Here's what happens, though. When you get stressed, that part of your insular cortex does not become active anymore. So you're no longer picking up the sensation of feeling full. Most people live in a stressed state where they're not picking up that sensation properly. So they have a combination of where one, they're not picking up the sensation that they're full from eating and two, their cortisol is increasing their hunger hormones.

So a lot of people feel this sense of, I can't trust my body. I'm hungry. I think about food. I don't feel full when I eat. I can't trust myself, but they're probably just in this stress response. When they focus on calming that stress response, cortisol comes back down, they start picking up those sensations of feeling full. The areas of the brain, the insular cortex is picking up those sensations and properly processing how much food you've had to eat. So you'll feel the sensation of being full.

So a lot of people believe that they cannot trust their hunger and their appetite, but it's really that they're in this stress response that their body physiologically cannot pick up the sensations of being full and they have heightened hunger. Does that make sense? I know I got a little sciencey there, but I think it's interesting.

Katie: That does make sense and it's fascinating and seems like yet another reason the stress piece is often a much bigger piece than we realize and that that's not even just when we mentally associate that we're feeling stress, but like if our body is in a stressed state, if

our nervous system is perceiving stress, which could be from any infinite number of factors, that same process is going to happen. That's so fascinating to understand.

Gina: Yeah, and it can be really freeing because it's not that it's not that there's anything wrong with things like Ozempic and the GLP-1s, but we can build a lot of self trust in our appetite and normalizing our appetite by instead of controlling our food or controlling our bodies, learning how these mechanisms work.

Our body is beautifully designed that when it's in a state of survival, when it's in a state of stress is going to increase your desire for food to protect you. And so we think of this as ,my body is flawed. My body is broken. Something is wrong with me. we can shift the lens and see that there's actually nothing broken with my body, my body is trying to get me to eat food to protect me.

Katie: I've said so many times before that was a big paradigm shift for me, even in like my healing journey with autoimmunity was shifting away from the idea that my body was fighting me to understanding that my body was always completely and beautifully on my side. And if I wasn't getting the results I wanted, it was my body's request for something it wasn't getting that it needed or a request for me to not give it too much of something it didn't need, but it was a communication and a request. And it sounds like this is true even on the deeper level of our emotional, even in somewhat spiritual relationship with ourselves and with our body and how that interplays.

So I'd love to dive into how we can understand these pieces and understanding that food is a beautiful tool, and that our body's responses are a beautiful communication. How do we transform our relationship with food into a way to create that beautiful radical self-love and gentleness and trust and, and like even unpack how do we understand what are the deeper reasons underneath our food choices?

Gina: I think one of the most important things is to shift first to begin shifting our mindset around it because in the health industry, we're so primed to look at this as cravings are bad, try to control your food. It's very like judgmental around our behaviors, and unfortunately, when you have judgment around your behaviors, it will keep you stuck. Whatever you avoid holds its power over you.

And so I love to encourage people to move towards the thing that you've been afraid of looking at. To not fear any part of you. Get, like, get comfortable with getting a little uncomfortable. And that was really a huge breakthrough for me because I was following that pattern again and again until I was willing to be like, Okay, let's, like, explore this a little deeper and really slow down. So it's not that you can't eat healthy. But instead of focusing

all of your attention on what am I eating? Am I controlling it? Instead of focusing so much out here, turning like the mirror inward and start noticing what is happening in here and my thoughts and my feelings and my nervous system.

As soon as you move your attention inward, you can start really noticing what's happening. And so I started to really pay attention to. What is happening when I'm eating or when I'm wanting to eat, like, how does food make me feel? And so one moment that I had that I noticed was I was like eating really fast and I started noticing my body was like feeling like it was in this contracted nervous system state. And when I really started to trust myself, I would take a breath and move my attention from like, Oh no, don't eat that. Don't eat that, control that you shouldn't do that. And I moved my attention inward and I was like, okay, what am I feeling here? And I felt this feels like fear inside of my body.

And my brain was like, well, it doesn't make sense. What are you afraid of? There's, there's nothing to fear here. But then I was like, no, it feels like there's fear in my body and my nervous system. And then when I sat with that fear. I thought, I felt this actually feels really young. It feels like me being like in middle school and feeling scared. And then when I felt that fear, it brought me back to this memory of being like maybe in sixth grade or something and coming home and my parents were at work and I was plenty old enough to be home alone.

But this like, feeling of like, Oh my gosh, I'm by myself. I'm all alone. And I remember grabbing and like eating all of these Oreos. And it was like kind of quick and kind of frantic. And I was like, Oh, that feels like this younger part of me. And I was able to like bring this love to this really scared part of me and like nurture my nervous system. And I continued to do that until I no longer felt this anxious need that was like this fearful driven need to eat.

And so I wasn't really learning about food anymore. I was letting my food learn about myself. What were the parts that even though I didn't have any reason to be scared, there were still parts in my subconscious or in my nervous system that still actually felt that feeling of fear and needed that food as my safety, as my regulation, as my comfort. And if I would have tried to keep taking away the food, it would have felt pain. It would have continued to feel painful because that fear would have still been in my body.

So to answer your question, how do we start using this as a tool? Get really curious and know that you can trust yourself. Maybe it doesn't make sense. Why am I feeling this? You don't need to feel this way. Everything's fine. Life is fine. But instead of using that judgment of your experience. Know that your relationship with food goes all the way back from the beginning of time and to trust what you're feeling in your body. And then that could reveal to

you what it is that you're really, truly actually needing. Now you can get more strategic with providing that for yourself.

Katie: I love this. I talked about that kind of inner exploration with people in the mindset capacity, and I love that in this conversation, we're integrating that with something that is a multiple times per day daily choice. So it seems like a wonderful opportunity to get to dive inside and to understand deeper because this is something we all do every day.

I'm also curious, what about cases where people feel like, they don't, they can't hear their body or they feel numb to their body. I know for me after, like, sexual trauma in high school, I felt largely detached from my body for a very long time. And it was a beautiful journey to reconnect with my body.

And I've shared the quote before I read that, um, I said to my body, I want to be your friend. And it took a deep breath and said, I've been waiting our whole life for this. But I know from that journey also. It was not an instant process. And I had to actually learn how to listen to my body after not for so long.

So, do you ever work with clients who feel like detached or dissociated from their bodies? And what advice do you have for them of learning to listen and then to trust themselves?

Gina: Yeah, it's beautiful. I love what you said that it is a journey of reconnecting with the body. And that's exactly what it is. I consider this partnership in this journey with my body being this lifelong reconnection coming into partnership and that's truly what it is being able to listen to your body and it signals, being able to pick up that like, am I actually hungry? Is this a food craving? Am I full? Really being able to trust its guidance is by having your awareness down into your body. And there are little ways that we can start moving our awareness.

So if you, are you, are you up for trying something?

Katie: Absolutely.

Gina: Okay, so take a nice slow breath. And when you do that, you kind of already start to feel more sensation in your body, right? Like you, maybe do you feel a little bit more?

Katie: Yeah.

Gina: And so then if I told you, bring your attention down to your right toe, your big right toe. And then feel what's touching your big right toe. Maybe it's the ground or your sock or something like that. You can probably feel that sensation on your toe now. Is that right?

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Katie: Yeah.

Gina: Okay. So about two minutes ago, you probably felt maybe even numb to your feet. You probably forgot that your feet even existed, but then a little intentionality was like, Oh, yeah. Wait, I can actually feel the sensation in my toe. Oh, I take a breath and I start to almost feel a sensation inside of my body. So, it is about moving our awareness. So the challenge people have is that their awareness is pulled up into their mind. There's a few different reasons.

One of the reasons is that we're in a culture that pulls our awareness up into our mind. If we're sitting down to eat and thinking about calories is this, am I writing this down, am I eating the wrong foods? This brings out attention into right or wrong and numbers and counting. That pulls our attention up here. If we pull our attention to how are we feeling, are we full, we feel it down here. We live in a culture that brings us into our minds.

There's a psychologist and he talks about the mind-body split. When you are born, your mind and body are born into harmony together. Your mind, it's job, is to protect you. The mind is our safety tool. I touched a hot stove, so we learn to not do that. The body tells us trust and real time information. If I hit my arm, it's a true sensation. Or if the air feels cold, my skin will change into goosebumps. Body is truth. If we eat, we feel full.

The purpose of reconnecting with your body is a journey.

Katie: That's beautiful. And I would guess some people listening might have specific questions. I would love to tackle some of the specifics because I would guess many people are inspired to begin this journey based on this new understanding. Um, and I wonder if people might be wondering, like, are there people who can't trust their body as their guide to eating? Are there people who can't, and if so, why? And also, are there some people who just can't learn this? Or is this something accessible to everyone?

Gina: Yeah, this really important because a lot of people will say I can't listen to my body or they try and they feel like they're failing and so they're like there must be something wrong with me. I can't trust myself or my body and I was really in that way because I love the idea of intuitive eating.

I was like, Oh, I love that idea of listening to your body and not using food rules and but then I still couldn't trust myself. So I was kind of stuck in between. I don't want to track or obsess or count things, but then I also don't trust listening to my body and so I was kind of stuck until I learned that science of what I shared earlier about how when there's a stress that if your stress system is turned on, you can't listen to your body because your brain activity

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isn't properly picking up the signals. So you will still feel like, why can't I do it and think that you're failing and that's not the problem. It's just doing it in the right order, doing steps, doing it in the right order.

So the first most important part is to create regulation in the body and one of the most powerful tools to regulate your nervous system is to be able to use your breath.

A lot of people don't realize that your breath is like the switch. It's like the light switch for your nervous system. Of course, we want to do this deeper self exploration of like, well, how does my nervous system feel what's going on in there, but one really amazing tool that we have available to us is the breath.

So when you're breathing shallow and you're holding your breath, kind of like that hyperventilating. That signals to your body. We're in a stressed state when you're in that stress state, you can't properly pick up those signals. If you work on first regulating your nervous system, one of the tools being using a nice low breath, what happens is you'll start breathing in oxygen to your lower lungs, and that signals to the body, just like a baby breathing when it's sleeping, it has that nice, slow, big belly breath. It will signal to the body that you're in a safe state, that parasympathetic state. Now cortisol comes down, you'll start being able to sense your signals. So your breath is like that tool that you can start creating safety.

And so anybody can do it, but I think of this as like a practice. It's not something that we want to say, Oh, am I good at it or bad at it? It's a practice of using my breath. to regulate my nervous system. So I actually, on a physiological level, start getting those sensations picked up again, but then also, like you said, also giving myself the patience and the practice that when I sit with my food. Feeling okay. I want to eat fast right now. What's that part of me that doesn't feel like it can be mindful? Is it overwhelmed? Is it stressed?

Letting it be like my mirror and practicing and seeing this as like, if I really want this relationship of where I trust myself with my food and my body. Can I think of this as like playing the piano? I'm not going to be inherently good at it. I need to practice. And I can start to see every meal as my opportunity to practice. Taking a few slow breaths first, so I can start to pick up those signals. Sitting with my food. Noticing how it's making me feel letting this be like this self discovery experience. And over time, you will start to notice that you can trust your body.

You'll start to notice, actually, that doesn't feel good in my body. Actually, my body doesn't even want that food, but I've been so hung up on, "Should I eat it? Should I not eat it?" I've been so in this mental, I didn't even ask my body, does my body, I didn't even think that I

could give me permission. Everyone can, but we want to do it in the right order of first regulating the nervous system and being patient and really seeing it as a practice.

Katie: I love that. And I think back to another podcast guest who made a great point about the nervous system. She said that, you know, we often associate nervous system regulation with always being calm. And that's not actually the case. Nervous system regulation is actually about being in tune with our nervous system and it being adaptable.

And so if you're actually having a stress response, and you don't take the steps in the time like you just said, and just try to move into calm, you're actually suppressing your nervous system. So you're actually like sort of trying to bypass. The messages that you're getting and so I love that you bring it back to like that starting point and the, the slowness and I've heard the breath called the master switch of the nervous system.

And I think it's an underestimated tool because it's so simple and accessible to all of us. Um, and it's definitely an area I can improve as well, but it's, I've seen firsthand already, like how drastically it can impact so many things. What about when it comes to cravings? Cause it seems like those might be also deeply insightful if they are, certainly if they're helping us understand deeper parts of ourselves.

And also I know many people struggle with cravings and would love to get rid of them. So what can cravings teach us and how do we shift to a healthier relationship with them?

Gina: And so I think cravings are one of the most misunderstood aspects of ourselves. And I say cravings, some people don't identify with the word cravings, but they're like, I don't get cravings, but, but then they'll notice that they have almost like, like I described earlier, that magnetic feeling towards the food that they don't really want to eat. And I think it's one of the most poorly misunderstood parts of our bodies. Why do I have this drive towards certain foods? And because they get judged, there's all these techniques and tricks. Like if you have a craving, chew gum, if you have a craving, drink water. If you have a craving, go for a walk. But these are really important.

I consider them like divine messages. These little teachers that are telling us, I need something right now. And when I tried suppressing my cravings. My cravings always came back. It was like pushing a balloon underwater and then it would come back up and I would like chew gum and then it would come back and then I'd go for a walk and the big, and then it would come back and it was like, this was just a big waste of time. So my cravings always came back and it felt like I was at war with my body when I didn't understand them. So kind of like how I explained earlier. That when you're in that stress response cravings, your natural drive for sugar, especially carbohydrates or food serves to protect you. So if we can

remember this, it gives me a clue. It gives me a clue that when I'm craving food, my body is seeking safety, or a sense of pleasure, or trying to avoid a pain. This craving is actually my ally to teach me something important about myself. That maybe I'm feeling sense of anxiety in my life that I haven't looked at. Or a sense of loneliness and I haven't figured out how to internally provide myself that sense of love a sense of worry or what it's a clue.

It's a clue or a teacher and when they get suppressed, we actually disconnect this really beautiful signal from our bodies that saying, Hey, I'm really needing something. And so if let go of the judgment of that, and as we're craving a food and we get curious and say, what is it that I'm really, truly needing right now. There's this, we can really see what it is that we're always really truly needing.

And there's the saying that overeating is an attempt to fulfill the soul's unmet needs and that food has, because of our relationship from childhood, food has become love. Food has become joy, food with safety. As an adult, we don't see this magic in this beautiful relationship that overeating can be this attempt to fulfill, this, this like calling that our soul is really trying to fulfill. And by suppressing that craving, we actually miss this deep calling from our soul of what we're really truly longing for. If we can appreciate it as our teacher, as our guide, that we're looking for something, maybe that's missing or something that's not working, we can, it can be truly our ally and we can provide something that we've really been deeply, deeply looking for.

Katie: And that reminded me also, you mentioned that, you know, when we were first born, we're much more in tune with all of these pieces and with our body and its request and what it needs and so I'm curious for all the parents listening. Do you have any suggestions on if especially understanding that babies are sort of born so in tune and with kids at various ages, I'm guessing they remain pretty in tune.

Like how do we help them strengthen and nurture this relationship? They hopefully already have and or avoid as much as possible. Kind of creating these relationships. Like associations, like all the ones we've talked about so that they have a healthy foundation. I would guess modeling is probably a big part of it.

And in every aspect of parenthood, it feels like the, when I do the work, it somehow ripples and affects my kids without them, like me having to work on them ever. But I'm curious specific to food. Are there ways we can nurture a healthy relationship for our kids and maintain that for them from a young age?

Gina: Yeah, that's such a good question. And I think what's important is that this association that food is our love or food is our safety. It's not necessarily a bad thing. So we might have these beautiful memories of like, Oh, food provided me this. And it's not necessarily a bad thing, but what we can do to encourage all of the aspects is, um, allowing them to feel that sense of love within themselves.

Like what is, what does it feel like for them to love themselves? And so that they can learn to cultivate that also from the inside out. So food might have that association, but they're also learning about, "How does it feel to care for myself to check in?" And so one of the ways that we actually practice loving ourselves is by really forming a partnership with ourselves. "Hey, how you doing today? I'm here for you. I got you. I love you." And we can continue to encourage them to know how to be that resource for that source of love, or maybe when they're feeling overwhelmed, being that support of letting them feel their feelings and learning how to regulate their own bodies and notice and tune into their feelings so that food can provide those things, but they're also empowered in knowing how to do it for themselves as well.

And that is really important. We don't have to use food to suppress our feelings. It's okay that sometimes we feel sad or we feel angry. Now they're building self-trust with their own body and with their emotions. And when they're eating, you can encourage them to tune in. How's your body feel and trusting them?

Like, do you feel full yet? You know, like just encouraging that. And I know I'm not a mom yet. So I'm sure that you would probably have a more advice too than I would. But we can really encourage them to like be their own resource. And I think it's also so fascinating that a lot of my students will end up learning a lot from their children that they're like, Oh my gosh, I thought I needed to really coach my kids, but actually like they're mastering it. I need to learn from them. They're my teachers, you know?

Katie: I feel like that rings true in every area of parenthood as well and like my kids are absolutely my greatest teachers in this lifetime for sure. And I feel like you've already given so many like directly helpful practical ways to begin this integration to begin listening to our bodies and to shift the meaning and relationship we might have with food and the reason for desires and cravings.

And I'm guessing a lot of people listening might want to keep learning. So where can people find you and keep learning from your work and or just kind of deep dive into this for themselves.

Gina: Yeah. If you want to go a little bit deeper, there's, I have a free training. It's called Reclaiming your Power with Food. And it's just on my website, mastering mindfulness Institute where we go a little bit deeper into the things that we talked about today. And I love sharing parts of my own story and my own journey and things that I've learned.

I share a lot on Instagram, Gina.Worful. Um, so I do all sorts of sharing my own life and things that I've learned and all there too.

Katie: Amazing. Well, I will make sure all of those links are in the show notes at wellnessmama.com for any of you listening on the go. Gina, this has been such a fascinating conversation. I love that you brought such depth to a topic that, um, many people I would guess have never considered in that way. I know I had never considered it this deeply and I have so much food for thought to use, no pun intended, after this interview, but I am deeply grateful for your time and your openness and all that you've shared today. Thank you.

Gina: Oh, thank you so much for having me, Katie.

Katie: And thank you as always for listening and sharing your most valuable resources, your time, your energy, and especially your 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.