



990: Grip Strength: Overlooked Longevity Metric & Tool  
(Solo Episode)

Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast!

Katie: This podcast is brought to you by LMNT, and this is a company you might've heard me talk about before, and I really love their products because proper hydration leads to better sleep. It sharpens focus, it improves energy, and so much more. But hydration is not about just drinking water because being optimally hydrated, a state called euhydration is about optimizing your body's fluid ratios. And this fluid balance depends on many factors, including the intake and excretion of electrolytes, which many people don't get the right amounts of. Electrolytes are charged minerals that conduct electricity to power your nervous system. I talk a lot about nervous system on this podcast.

They also regulate hydration status by balancing fluids inside and outside of our cells. LMNT was created with a science-backed electrolyte ratio of 100 milligrams of sodium, 200 milligrams of potassium, and 60 milligrams of magnesium with no sugar. Since electrolytes are a key component of hydration, here's what happens when we get our electrolytes dialed in.

We have more steady energy, improved cognitive function, suffer fewer headaches and muscle cramps, we can perform better for longer, and especially the support fasting or low carb diet because when we stop eating carbs like during a fast, the absence of insulin allows the kidneys to release sodium.

So replacing that lost sodium with electrolytes can help you feel good on a fast. Since LMNT is zero sugar, it also doesn't break up fast. Electrolytes are also important for maintaining blood pressure, regulating digestion and proper fluid balance. Keeping skin hydrated, which is a big one that I feel like often gets missed and so much more.

I feel like proper electrolytes is a missing piece for a lot of people and I love LMNT's new canned drinks, which are sparkling water with all the same ratios and minerals I just talked about, and they are delicious. You can check it out and learn more at [drinklmnt.com/wellnessmama](https://drinklmnt.com/wellnessmama). And at that link you will receive a free sample pack with any order.

This episode is brought to you by Native Path, and I'd love to talk about something that might surprise you. When you think creatine, you might think muscly gym bros, but here's what the research actually shows. Creatine is most incredible for your brain because your brain uses about 20% of your body's energy and creatine helps fuel those neural pathways.

Studies show that women who supplement with creatine experience better working memory, faster processing speeds, and reduced mental fatigue. So if you're juggling work, family, and everything in between, creatine might be what you're looking for. It also

supports the body in a whole lot of different ways, but I wanted to focus on the brain aspect for now.

When it comes to creatine, though, quality matters. Creatine monohydrate is the most researched form, and I use Native Path creatine. Most research says to start with three to five grams a day, that you don't need a loading phase, despite what some sources say. I personally have experimented with up to like 10 grams per day for the mental benefits. But as always, talk to your own doctor or healthcare provider before starting anything, especially if you have any health concerns. But for many women, creatine can be one of the safest, most researched supplements available and for too long we've thought of it as for just men.

So if you wanna try it, you can save up to 56% off as a listener of this podcast. Plus, get free shipping at [wellnessmama.com/go/nativecreatine](https://wellnessmama.com/go/nativecreatine) . So [wellnessmama.com/go/nativecreatine](https://wellnessmama.com/go/nativecreatine) or the link is in the show notes.

Katie: Hello and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from [wellnessmama.com](https://wellnessmama.com). And this episode is, I'll try to keep it short, as a solo episode, we'll tackle the topic of grip strength and how this is an overlooked longevity metric and tool. As well as how to increase it, how to test it, and everything else you need to know about it.

I find this personally fascinating and I love that I got several follow up questions when I mentioned this in passing. Because I do feel like this is a really cool non-scale related non-weight or size of clothes related metric that we can focus on, that is actually very strongly correlated to longevity.

In fact, grip strength is now considered one of the strongest predictors of overall longevity, which is pretty dramatic and understandable when we think about, for instance, Dr. Gabrielle Lyon explaining in multiple episodes of this podcast how lean muscle mass leads to longevity. And conceivably, the more lean muscle mass we have and maintain the stronger our grip strength.

There is also a nervous system component here as well, which we'll talk about. But it's more than just the muscles in our hand. Grip strength is a window into our overall musculature, into our nervous system health, our overall muscle tone, and potentially seemingly based on this correlative data, our aging rate.

Most of us don't think about this at all or at the very least until it's already declining. However, this is something very easy to test at home, with or without, kind of a grip strength tester. And it's also something we can increase at home without needing a gym membership because simple things, as I will explain, like hanging from a bar, doing something called farmer's carries with any kind of weight. I'll explain some at home options

or some other simple at home things can really make a difference when it comes to grip strength.

And here's why it matters. Studies show that low grip strength, especially as we age, is linked to increased risk of all cause mortality, so in other words, risk of dying from all causes, higher incidences of heart disease and stroke, (which are two of the big killers of a lot of people as we know), lower cognitive function, higher risk of falls and fractures.

So it's a correlative data, but it is very strong and it's a proxy for full body strength and nervous system function. It also seemingly has a very strong correlation with biological age markers. I've seen some data on this.

I've also seen a lot of anecdotal data on this, in that athletes that I've worked with who have very strong grip strength even some upwards of, or up to like 200 pounds of pressure, which is tremendously strong grip strength, had also very young biological age. Even in their teens. Some of them as 28 or 30-year-old athletes.

For me personally, the highest grip strength I've gotten, I believe, was 140lbs. I routinely can get, usually, in the 120s now. And I will see if I can find that picture and post it in the show notes. And my biological age, as I talked about in a recent episode, was 21.7. So I do think there's some correlation here. I don't think it's only correlative that it relates to aging and longevity. I think there actually probably is a pretty strong connection.

Now, the good news is. And grip strength is not something we need to go to a facility or a doctor or test in any kind of fancy way. There's multiple options. One option is a grip strength tester, also known as a dynamometer, which I will link to in the show notes. These are some inexpensive options.

I have bought quite a few from Amazon. I will say, warning, if you get one, especially the plastic ones that are inexpensive, as your grip strength gets better, they can break. We've broken quite a few actually. Especially if people are able to get up closer to 200. Or if you get above 200, which I have not personally done, but if you do you'll get an error message.

So it only goes up to about 200. However, for most people, that is going to be plenty and let us keep progressing for a long time. This is the most accurate. It measures your max grip force in pounds or kilograms. This is what's widely used in the research studies. If you read any of them, there are actually quite a few research studies in PubMed about grip strength and its correlation to longevity.

However, if you don't have a grip strength tester and you don't wanna get one there are other ones that you can do at home that don't require any equipment at all. Including

hanging from a bar, seeing how long you can hang. This is also separately of grip strength, a predictor of longevity.

And this is one you can do. You can hang, see how long you can hang and then see if you can have that number go up over time. As a separate, maybe I'll do an entire episode on this at some point, hanging in and of itself. It's a natural human movement and it's really good for us in a lot of ways, seemingly, it helps grip strengthen and therefore longevity.

However, it's also good for spinal posture. For shoulders. In fact, I've had a couple of guests who do either mobility or physical therapy work say that many shoulder issues can be greatly helped by simply hanging for three minutes a day. Even if we have to break that up into a bunch of small chunks to be able to get to three minutes.

From the perspective of grip strength, however, really this can be as simple as just, see how long you can hang and see if you can get that number to go up over time. Other simple tests, can you easily twist the lid off of a jar. Losing our ability to open jars over time can be a warning sign of declining grip strength. And as well as the farmer's carry test, which is simply how far or how long can you walk carrying relatively heavy weights.

So weights that between your two hands are somewhere between 50 and 75% of your body weight. How long can you walk while holding those? The great thing is these can also be done at home. Either with something like heavy kettlebells or dumbbells, or if you don't have weights at home, you can use a couple of five gallon buckets filled with rocks or water and see how long you can walk with that.

With any of these at-home options, if you track it over time, you're just simply wanting these metrics to improve. So hanging longer, walking further with more weight, etc. If your grip strength isn't where you would like it or if you simply wanna increase it, since this ties so strongly to longevity, this is something I play with quite often, are ways to increase grip strength. If you wanna increase it without going to a gym, here are some ideas.

I will say also, going to the gym and lifting weights, especially weights involving a bar or doing pull-ups. Very good for increasing grip strength as well. But I'm gonna focus today on things we can do at home, daily habits that are easy, that don't require fancy equipment. Some things like this that we can do are things like carrying our groceries instead of always using a cart.

So for big shopping trips I do have to use a cart because of the amount of groceries required for all my kids. However, if I can, I'll carry just a basket. You know, if I'm getting a lot of heavy things, it's just a chance to practice grip strength. Same thing with, like, twisting off lids, hand squeezing citrus, hanging, doing monkey bars, things like that.

Basically anything we can work into our daily lives that relies on our grip strength. Another one, I joke that the real reason I work out, is so that I can carry all of my groceries in one trip. And I'll often park quite far away at the store and then try not to take the cart out of the store.

So once everything's in bags, and I'll often use cloth bags so I can fit more weight in them, but with short handles, then I try to carry all of them to the car without the basket. So that's essentially a long farmer's carry and can be quite the workout.

If you have a lot of bags, there are these cool carabiner type, like really strong carabiners that look like handles. So they are perfect for grip strength testing and let you keep more bags on those without having your circulation cut off in your wrist or hands.

As I mentioned, farmer's carries are another easy one we can do at home that is a part of our daily life. Both of these things simply hanging, like I mentioned before, or farmer's carry, are basic human movements. We were meant to push, to pull, to walk, to carry. And we simply don't do these things as much as we were meant to anymore.

So, like I said, this is as simple as get two heavy something that are equal in weight. Whether it's dumbbells, kettlebells, heavy buckets of something, whatever it is. And try to walk 30 to 60 seconds while carrying them with a strong upright core and without shoulders up here. Shoulders relaxed, arms at your side, ideally maybe lats engaged, but strong spinal posture and then try to extend that over time.

You could do several rounds of that. The reason it's called Farmer's Carry is that we often did these things all the time when we were more movement based in our daily lifestyles which was required in daily activities. I know I do a lot of this. On days that I am working in my yard, whether I am carrying, like, things around this is just a normal human activity that we've largely lost.

It's also one of the most effective full body and grip strength exercises. And you could start light and build up. Don't injure yourself, of course. But start light but challenging and build up from there. Another one I love that I feel like is almost universally beneficial for humans is a dead hang.

And I mentioned this one briefly as a possible test of your grip strength. It's also a tremendous way to improve your grip strength, which is simply hanging from a pull up bar, a tree branch, a doorway pull up bar, whatever you have available. This builds passive grip strength. It also is good, like I said, for shoulder stability and spinal posture, and some metrics here show that.

Hitting certain targets of this also correlates with longevity, so we kind of at any age want to be able to hang for at least 60 seconds, ideally 90 seconds, or even up to three minutes, depending on age. I will say I'm not up to three minutes yet. However, my average hang time daily is about 90 seconds.

I also notice a connection here with my recovery and my readiness score on my Oura ring. So on days when I have not slept well, where I don't feel recovered from a workout the day before, I will not be able to hang as long as I normally would. So this to me is actually an indicator of when I need a recovery day or to not push myself as hard, and it lines up with data from my Oura ring that indicates the same thing.

If you are new to hanging, it can be very normal to only be able to hang for 10 to 30 seconds and that's fine. That's great data and we can build from there. When I first started, I was only hanging for maybe 15 seconds at most, and I have built up from there.

You can also try active hangs where you engage your shoulders and you lift yourself by engaging your scapula. Or move your body. Also, if you wanna engage your core to make it more fun while you're hanging there for three minutes, you can raise just your knees or if you're capable, your legs to create kind of an L shape where your body's hanging and your legs are straight out in front of you.

If you wanna get fancy or just for fun, there are some grip tools and training aids, and I have some of these at my house as well. I'll link to a couple of them in the show notes. But there are grip trainers, which are usually spring loaded or resistance based that you squeeze.

If you don't have a grip strength tester these can also sometimes give you a good idea of what your grip strength is because you can sometimes either adjust the pressure, the poundage on them, or there'll be incremental stronger ones. And so whichever one you're able to squeeze all the way closed kind of gives you an idea of where your grip strength is.

You can also use wider grips on things like dumbbells or barbells to engage your forearm more, which also helps with grip strength or just use different methods of gripping and lifting. Grabbing things with fingers can be helpful, but that's a more advanced move.

Another one. This one is deceptively hard. Is using a rice bucket, or sand bucket. I personally like the rice bucket. It's a little bit less messy. It literally is just a two, three, or even five gallon bucket filled with rice. You wanna use inexpensive rice, you're not gonna be eating this rice, and this is literally moving your hand around in a bucket of rice, and it is incredible how fatiguing this can be to the hand and forearm.

What I like about this is most grip strength activities like hanging, are training in a closed hand position. This one, you're also opening your hands, spreading your fingers, and

moving all the way around in the rice, which engages a lot more of the tendons and muscles within the hands. So this can be really helpful, but again, you'll be surprised at how fatiguing it can be if you've never done this before.

Similarly, there are squeeze balls or grip squeezers that you can have just simply in your house while you're watching TV or relaxing. You can be doing these activities, especially kind of like, to me, this is a more beneficial version of a fidget spinner because it's improving your grip strength while you're at it.

Some brief other things that can help, like I said, all the ones we've talked about so far can be done at home, either for free or very inexpensive. Now I wanna briefly just touch on some of the more well known ones of course, that we can do at a gym that I would guess most people are pretty familiar with, but things like deadlifts, pullups, rows, kettlebell swings, anything that involves gripping is, as you would expect, good for our grip strength.

And if you aren't working out in the gym, again, you can get a lot of the grip benefit by hanging, but as you build it up, you can further increase it by adding in some of these more compound lifts. Even, interestingly, body weight exercises are really beneficial here, so it seems logical that pull-ups would be helpful because you're gripping the bar, but seemingly even pushups are helpful for grip strength and potentially this is because the hand is being extended and engaged in gripping the ground.

But I think this is just another checkbox in favor of body weight exercises and how beneficial they can be. And for people who are already lifters and lift heavy weights in the gym. One encouragement I've read when it comes to grip strength is to not always use lifting straps. Allow your grip to be the limiter occasionally so that you can challenge the upper ranges of your grip. Even if that means you're not maxing out your weight in that particular workout.

On a side note about nutrition and recovery. You are not gonna be surprised to hear me talk about this. However, just like any kind of exercise or activity, recovery is equally important as stimulus. And something that comes into play here is adequate protein intake to support muscle repair and strength.

I won't go deep on this in this episode because I've talked about it before. As have a lot of guests, including Dr. Gabrielle Lyon is my go-to when it comes to muscle mass and longevity and all of the reasons this is important. So I'll link to her episodes in the show notes where you can Google them by searching for her name and Wellness Mama.

But adequate protein intake supports many aspects of muscle building, including grip strength muscle building. Creatine, there's some evidence, may support muscle



performance, including grip strength. And this is another one I've talked about. I'll link to my episode entirely on creatine in the show notes.

Interesting side note, Dr. Rhonda Patrick, who I really respect, recently had a recording about how she increased her creatine dosage from 5 grams a day to 10 grams a day. Five grams is kind of recommended in the muscle range. And she believes there are additional brain benefits in the more 10 gram range.

I've personally seen benefits from taking creatine and feel like in most cases this is a beneficial supplement. Of course, ask your professionals if you have any condition whatsoever. However, I've felt I've had good effects from creatine, and I feel like for most people it's very beneficial. In that same vein, collagen and vitamin C are synergistic to this in a tendon and ligament support way.

It's not just about our muscles. We're only as strong as our tendons and our ligaments, and that's where a lot of injuries happen. So I personally take a lot of collagen and vitamin C along with minerals, which I feel like are not talked about enough in the context of joint support, especially silica to help avoid injury.

And thankfully, in my last several years of weightlifting, heavier and heavier weights, have had no major injuries. And as you would also expect, sleep and recovery matter just as much as training and stimulus when it comes to building any kind of muscle, including grip strength. In almost a thousand episodes of this podcast, I am yet to have one single guest not say that sleep was important, or say that sleep was not important.

And many, many, many talk about this being one of the biggest factors in health. It ties into the nervous system aspect as well. I think that's why when I have poor sleep or I'm not recovered, my grip strength is lower. My recovery is lower, so sleep is important. In the interest of keeping this short, I'm gonna now briefly go through summary and key takeaways as well as some very quick action steps.

Grip strength is a reliable, inexpensive, and actionable biomarker of health that does not require a doctor to test. It is never too late to improve it. I have seen some incredibly inspiring videos of women in their sixties, seventies, and beyond, learning to do pull-ups for the first time, and then eventually being able to do monkey bars and all kinds of incredible feats.

Results come from baby steps with consistency, not from massive one day efforts. Train. We can all train our grip like our life depends on it because it actually, based on the data, might. We can also combine strength training with real life activities and targeted grip work if we want to. So action steps.

Test your grip this week with either a dead hang or a grip strength trainer, linked in the show notes if you want one. They are really fun and it's fun to see my kids compete on that as well. Add in a couple of grip focused exercises a couple times a week. Whether it's farmer's carry, hanging, maybe it's a bucket of rice. Just experiment and have fun with it. Be intentional about using your hands more or doing more body weight type exercises. And try to lift, carry, hang, or squeeze something every single day.

As always, I am so grateful for you for sharing your time, for your questions, for the topics you guys suggest. I love to get feedback from you, so please feel free to leave a comment, to respond in the show notes or to leave an honest rating of review wherever you listen to podcasts. Or you can DM me on Instagram.

I read all of those and I would love to hear what you would love me to talk about, who you would love for me to talk to next, any questions that you have or topics that you would find interesting. But for today, thank you so much for sharing your time and your energy and your attention with me. I don't take that lightly. I'm honored that you were here, and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of The Wellness Mama Podcast.