

(introductory music)

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**MARYN:** Welcome to Indie Birth's *Taking Back Birth* series of podcasts. We've been focusing on the pregnancy period here with our very first podcast from many months ago. And here we are midpregnancy. Here I am midpregnancy trying to follow sort of the outline of what pregnancy looks like, what kind of options we have at different points in pregnancy, what someone might be thinking or feeling at different points in pregnancy. So today is a less technical, shall we say, podcast. We've done some recently on more technical subjects such as gestational diabetes. Ultrasound was another one. We will, of course, be continuing with some more clinical subjects, group beta strep, the GBS, podcast will be in the near future. I know that's another long awaited one.

So we'll kind of hit the rest of those things people are talking about just in a normal pregnancy. But today less clinical for sure. More personal. This is my experience some weeks of what it's like to be pregnant at this point and what I'm thinking, how I'm feeling. So partly for me, maybe. It's kind of cool to sort of have this audio diary, if I ever would like to reflect on it someday about this pregnancy of mine. This seventh baby. My eighth pregnancy but seventh baby that will hopefully be earth side in roughly 15 weeks.

And yeah. For me, personally, and then also for all of you listening that experience pregnancy this way meaning you do your own care, whatever that is. It could mean clinical care. It could mean taking a walk in the woods every day and making sure you eat really well. It could be for those of you that are doing things pretty traditionally, so maybe you're seeing a doctor or midwife but you like hearing about what your other options are and what other people are thinking. So we live in the day and age now where we have access to things like this, right? You can just press play and hear some person talk about what it's like to be about 25 weeks pregnant. And isn't that kind of cool? Especially if you haven't walked this way before or maybe you're coming up on about the same point in pregnancy. Who knows?

Hopefully, today, though, you'll just enjoy me kind of chatting with myself. Nobody else here today. Just talking about pregnancy and how it feels to be in the middle of it. It feels good. I have to say. The timing of midpregnancy always comes at a good time. Early is just early. And lots more physical sensations, for me, earlier in the sense of nausea, being extremely tired, just really grounded in my body, my physical body. That's how I feel in the beginning of pregnancy. And then towards the end, we'll get

there. We're not there yet. It's a completely different feeling. I think I often feel almost detached from my physical body, in a sense, as you're getting ready for birth. And sort of yeah. Getting everything in line. Emotional, spiritual. Everything in line for this baby to come.

So I'm not either place right now. I'm just smack in the middle. And it's a nice place to be. I think most women, at this point, feel pretty good. At least, that's the hope. And that would be considered the best possible thing. That you're not feeling icky and nauseous anymore. That you have a relatively healthy appetite, and your baby is growing rapidly still at this point. So a normal appetite would probably be a pretty good one. So I'm feeling good. Relatively energetic. Still taking a nap every day, if I can squeeze one in. And if I can, the rest of my day is just so much nicer.

Physically, I think I've gained about—huh. I don't know. I haven't actually stepped on a scale, to be honest. But each and every pregnancy I do pretty much the same thing which is I gain about a pound a week. So that puts me at about 25 pounds already, if that matter. And, of course, it kind of doesn't. But it's cool how my body does it the same way each time. So I find some comfort in that. And have neglected to step on a scale more than once or twice. I'm sure I will before the end. I'll just be curious especially (inaudible 05:46). But it doesn't really matter to me other than knowing this is normal for me. And I need to eat a lot of food when I'm pregnant. And I eat a lot of good food. So I expect there to be a weight gain, and I'm glad that there is.

So any of us that are sort of in this midpregnancy time—really 24 weeks, 25, 26, 27, 28—anywhere in there, we're calling this midpregnancy. And there are some clinical things you could look for, if you were seeing somebody that was doing lab tests or you, yourself, were just interested. But if you remember, way back when, we talked about pregnancy nutrition, beginning of pregnancy, and expanding the blood volume, which is the key to a healthy pregnancy. Of course, there are other things too. But expanding your blood volume and the way to do that would be through protein and calories and eating lots of good food, lots of good fluid, salt. That's the key to a healthy pregnancy for most women.

And by expanding the blood volume by making this 50 percent extra plasma by about this time, by about 26, 28, 30 weeks, by the time she's gotten there, the blood volume has expanded, and there are signs of that. So clinically, again, if you were doing blood work, you would maybe get your hemoglobin drawn at about this point again. Or just do a finger prick. You can do a hemoglobin finger prick. So someone might have a hemoglobinometer, as they're called, or maybe someone you know has one to just borrow.

So if you were going to do that, if you really wanted to see sort of on paper that you did expand your blood volume, then you would see your hemoglobin value be less than it was early pregnancy. So say it was 13 at about 10 weeks. Now you're expecting it to be about 11. 12 maybe? Just depending on you and where you live altitude wise. And then 11 would be sort of even better, in a sense. They say two points is ideal to reflect the blood volume expansion. So I always think that's pretty cool. I haven't done that this time. I haven't done that—well, probably, for the last couple pregnancies just because I feel like, for me, I really do know what I need. I really do know how much food I need and what types of foods feel good. And I just don't need that clinical sign for myself. But it is kind cool. So if you're into experimenting, you can do that. Or, again, if you're just going to get a lab draw, then that would be part of the CBC, which is really easy and cheap. And even if you didn't have anyone to order you a CBC, you could go order one yourself. They're cheap. Probably less than 30 bucks.

So that's one way that we can see on paper that we've done a really great job, that our blood volume is expanded, and that in the next 15 weeks—although we keep that up meaning the eating—we feel like we can go into birth pretty confident about having enough in our bodies to continue to feed the baby, the placenta, to hopefully have a pretty straightforward birth, and then to be healthy after birth and keep our blood and not be unable to breastfeed successfully. So those are some benefits of making sure your blood volume is expanded. If it's now, for some reason, if you're—if you do do lab work and you see that it's not, the number has actually gone up. Well, yes. Then I would pay close attention to that, myself, and probably really look closely at my diet and write it down even. Day to day. And just look at it. How many calories is this? No one loves to count calories. But it could be that you're just busy or whatever and way off base with what your body needs.

At this point in pregnancy, I eat probably every two hours. Sometimes every hour during the day. Just depends on what it is. And every two hours, for me, means pretty good amount of protein. Not tons. Maybe a hardboiled egg and an apple. That would be something I would eat kind of on the hour with more meal like things happening three times or four times a day just depending on what I need. So yeah. For me, at this point, I am eating all the time. It's definitely different than that early pregnancy with the nausea where you are able to eat just sort of more like a normal person. Now I really feel it. I can't go more than two hours mostly without eating. So I usually carry stuff with me if I'm out. Bag of nuts or—I don't know. Fruit. Cheese. Something like that. make sure I always have water with me. And then I can be out at least. Outside the house for a little bit without having to buy stuff or be starving.

I'm also getting up quite a bit at night, so I wonder, for me, if that means I need even more during the day because, as anybody with a bunch of little kids knows, sometimes you don't even know what you're eating during the day. You're just feeding them all

day. You're running around. You're doing this. You're doing that. And then I think, for me sometimes, by the middle of the night, my body wants to remind me, "Hey, wasn't such a great day today eating wise. We missed a few of those snacks." And believe me, I've been waking up starving. Not every night. But nearly every night, I get up at least once. And then a couple times this week, I got up twice which seemed ridiculous to me because, obviously, between that and getting up to pee every couple hours that's not a whole lot of sleep. Ugh. I must do better as well during the day. I would like to avoid the twice a nice wake up. I think I can do once.

So for me, the way that looks is obvious. I'm either hungry. I literally wake up in my sleep hungry. Or when I get up to pee, I notice I'm really hungry. Or I just don't sleep well. So I think that's kind of one of those things that is cool to tuck in the back of your brain. Just because we do all need, I think, different amounts of food and calories and nutrition. So there are plenty of women that I have worked with too that don't wake up at all to eat and are perfectly fine and happy and healthy. But some of us, it sort of manifests as this insomnia. And it can mean you can't get back to sleep. It can mean you wake up several times or just not sleeping well. And, again, for me, right now, that means that I need food.

And, of course, there could be other reasons I'm sure why people during pregnancy wouldn't sleep well. But I'd say if it's happening all the time just try it. One of those times you're up have a really good snack. Have some water and see if it helps you get back to sleep. It certainly does for me. After that snack, and it's just a small something— maybe a couple of pieces of cheese and that's it—then I really do fall back asleep. And it's the best sleep I get all night after I eat. So that's me. That's where I'm at. That will continue until the end. And then I will be perfectly ready to wake up with a baby every hour or two. I'm probably already on that track of getting ready. Not sleeping for more than a couple hours at a time.

So that's probably why that nap is super helpful to me during the day even though I am feeling pretty good. So let's see. Exercise wise. Again, this is a time during pregnancy when women are normally feeling really good. And, again, why would that be? It's, I think, a lot of reasons. You're comfortable in the pregnancy. The nausea is gone. The baby is, obviously, growing. Uterus is, obviously, growing, but it's not at its max. So you can just move around easier. And the blood volume expansion. To mention that again.

Other signs I didn't talk about. More subtle signs, if you're not going to do clinical testing because I'm not doing that. Signs are feeling good, believe it or not. And not having nausea. And having energy. And not experiencing pain anywhere especially around your liver area. That sounds kind of odd, but it's one of the signs that you probably have done a really good job expanding your blood volume. Often your veins,

your vessels in your hands and your arms, will look more full at about this time in pregnancy. So you want to be hydrated as well to kind of check that out. But if you're looking at your blood vessels, you'll notice they're more plump. That's another good sign of blood volume expansion.

Another one would be a weight gain. And, again, this might mean you're on a scale. It might not. So this might not be something you want to check out. But a lot of us can just tell, I think. We can tell that the baby has grown, and we can tell when we have gained weight. And I think at this point in pregnancy, we do notice it. And I don't know that I'm quite there yet. I'm only 25 weeks. But in the next couple weeks, I'd say, for me, 26, 27, 28 weeks, I'm sure I will notice a pretty good growth spurt in the baby. And whether or not I decide to step on a scale may or may not notice that I probably will have gained a little extra too. So that's pretty normal because, really, it's blood that's being measured. It's not fat or anything. It's blood. It's that 50 percent extra blood volume.

So those are some other signs to just kind of reassure you. But the main ones are just really basic. That you're feeling good and your baby is growing. Those are the best ways to know that everything is going well, and you're probably getting enough. So let's see. Exercise. I think I was going to go there, and then I kind of went off on a tangent. But exercise is great at this point for all the reasons we just talked about. It's just easy to get around, and you have energy. So encouraging you to do that. And for me, that means walking, hiking, nothing too cardio intense. I'm not feeling it this time to be at a gym or do anything super organized. That's just me.

But the exercise that I do do which is walking and hiking is really beneficial. So encouragement that you don't have to be somebody that spends lots of time at the gym or does anything super structured but simply taking a walk with the dog, with the kids. Alone. Is great. And one of the best things you can do for yourself in pregnancy, get the blood flowing, the heart pumping, breathing air, sunshine. And doing that an hour a day ideally or maybe even more depending on how much time you have. And if you broke it up throughout the day so maybe a morning walk and an evening walk or whatever. I usually just do a morning walk honestly. By the evening, it's too much for me. I'm tired. Too much going on household wise.

So in the morning, get a good solid hour of hiking before it's too hot here. And that's feeling really good. The other exercise type thing to mention that we could all be doing at this point in pregnancy and throughout is just our simple exercises that Katy Bowman has taught us. And if you don't know what I'm talking about, you can email us or certainly look on her site. We do have some handouts of hers that we use. So she's a biomechanist and specializes in sort of alignment during pregnancy. Alignment in general. But alignment during pregnancy and just has some really simple stretches for

us all to do every day. And the point would be keeping our body in alignment during pregnancy and our pelvic floor healthy, so that we're able to go into birth and have everything function well.

So keeping up those exercises is something I try to do. Probably not the best, honestly, at keeping up with it. But squats. That's one of her things is that when your muscles are stretched and you're kind of used to doing these series of stretches she has that eventually the point is to be able to get into a really good squat at least a couple times a day. So motivation for you as well. I'm also motivating myself here that squats are good and that you really can find opportunity throughout the day to do them. At least with kids you sure can. So squat down to pick all the puzzle pieces up off the floor. That's one of my favorites. Squatting down to change a diaper or put clothes on a kid or just to fold laundry. Whatever. But it's feeling really good, and I'm not a squatter by nature, I don't think. I've had to sort of learn how to squat like lots of us do. So that's feeling really good. And I can see myself keeping that up through the rest of the pregnancy. And we'll see. We'll see how that goes.

Let's see. Practice contractions. I think that's an interesting topic at about this point in pregnancy. So everybody knows what I'm talking about, I'm sure. Some call them Braxton-Hicks, practice contractions. I like that word better. That term better. Your uterus is just warming up, and that actually starts pretty early in pregnancy. I don't know. I could be wrong, but I think it's like eight weeks. But truly, most women don't notice those at that point because their uterus is still pretty small. But allegedly, that happens. So in other words, our uterus is warming up almost from the beginning especially if we've had babies before.

And by now, by about midpregnancy, there is probably a couple practice contractions a day that you might notice. I certainly am especially on certain days. So days where I haven't maybe drank enough fluid or maybe I'm just more active. Or maybe I'm more tired. I think all those things kind of contribute to me noticing them more. And if you haven't had one before, it's just—hmm. It's just a tightening. I know that's not probably so helpful. But it's certainly not a real contraction. It's not a labor contraction. It's sort of high up on the belly, and it's just where your uterus gets really hard. So sometimes it makes you feel like you have to pee just because it squeezes everything.

Some women say they kind of confuse it with the baby moving which I do understand. I don't know. Probably the baby moving can trigger one too. Even touching your uterus can trigger one just normally. So, again, at this point in pregnancy to have a couple a day is considered just really normal and typical. And they're not bothersome. They don't hurt. Obviously, this isn't labor. There is no change up inside your body. Not that you're checking that, hopefully, or having anyone else check it. But if you were, practice

contractions don't bring about any kind of cervical opening necessarily. It's just simply a muscle contraction just like you would flex your arm. It's just your uterus getting ready.

So that's something that's going on. And I know, for me and for lots of us, that those will increase. That's sort of the normal way of things. That in the next 15 weeks, they'll increase. And that's—yeah. Kind of where you are at by the time you are ready to birth. Lots of practice contractions. So, again, right now, there's no pattern to them or anything. And they're just random. They stop, usually, if you pee or increase your fluids or increase your calories. So that's not to be confused with preterm labor. And this isn't a podcast about preterm labor but just that sort of little disclaimer there. That it's possible somebody could sort of go into preterm labor at this point. And that would not be a great thing.

So you'd want to differentiate somehow these practice contractions from something else going on. And something else going on would be contractions that are really coming in a pattern and are strong and changing and feeling not like practice anymore. Perhaps really low. Maybe some discharge or fluid leaking. These would all be not great things midpregnancy. But something you would want to be aware of so that you could perhaps get help or stop a preterm labor situation from progressing. So that's something that's usually mentioned at about this point.

But, again, most normal, healthy women aren't going to experience preterm labor. They are going to just have a couple practice contractions today. And, of course, there is many reasons for something like preterm labor. But the simplest thing to do if you were able to rule out the more complicated things would just be to, again, increase your calories and protein and what you eat. We live here in a hot desert climate, and it is true that dehydration can cause lots of contractions. Hasn't happened to me but I know that it happens. And women that are unaware, sort of, of being dehydrated can wind up in the ER being monitored for contractions. And they are simply due to dehydration.

So it's something to keep in mind. As good as you're feeling at this point, you want to run around, get things done. It's a great time to do that but not to neglect, of course, what your body needs because it does matter. You and your baby and your placenta all need lots of nourishment still. So that's kind of the physical manifestation for me of being midpregnancy.

The baby. I haven't talked about the baby at all. The baby is much bigger, of course, than she or he was—I don't know. Even a month ago. It feels to me. Not everybody is used to feeling what baby parts are what in their belly, but this is a good time to start. It might still be a little tricky at about 25 weeks just depending on your own body and how well you can feel and how practiced you are. But the general thought is by about 28 to 30 weeks that we can determine position. So, again, whether or not you can do that on

yourself yet may just require practice. But it's not hard. So if you're poking around and feeling your baby, which you really can do daily as much as you want, I think babies generally like these—this little massage and time we spend with them in that way. At least mine does.

I can start feeling or just noticing where are you feeling movement? Where are you feeling kicks? Do you feel hiccups? Where do you feel that happening? I can feel the baby's head now, and it's down which is exciting because it was not head down a couple weeks ago. But right now, at least in this moment, there is clearly a head down in my pelvis. And because I've had so many babies, I can feel it. And that's really cool. So I can feel that and the back of the baby. And I can guess position pretty well in my own body at this point. And baby is definitely getting bigger and moving lots and having more organized times it seems of sleep and movement. So I couldn't tell you what those are exactly, but I know sort of the baby is quiet when I go to bed. And when I'm ready to wake up in the morning, it seems like the baby is too.

At this point, babies in utero sleep a whole lot. So feeling movement every minute of every day at 25 weeks isn't something everyone experiences. And if you aren't, it's not because that's weird or there is anything wrong. Sort of medically speaking, I guess—they're the ones that probably came up with this. At about 28 weeks when you would say to somebody, "Hey, this is a good time to start counting how much your baby moves during a certain time period per day." So I think that's all very interesting. And for some women, that's really helpful. They may need a certain time of day to sort of tune in. And there's nothing wrong with that because taking the time to tune in is taking the time to tune in.

So for some women taking the time, maybe after dinner to tune into the baby or right before bed, and notice that the baby is moving a bunch is often a really beneficial thing. And, again, that would be more noticeable in a couple weeks. So about 28 weeks. Whether or not we need to keep charts and records of how much the baby kicks, I think it just depends on each of us as women. And I think many women are in tune enough with what's going on that they're sort of—how do I say? Like just being aware. They're aware of the movement of the baby all day.

So certainly, if you were feeling no movement at all for a long time or an entire day then that would be something that may concern you. But, again, it's only at about 28 weeks that sort of anyone starts being concerned with how much the baby is moving just because before then there are so many variables. So the baby, your body, what pregnancy it is. So yeah. Try not to get too uptight. I know it can be hard when you start feeling the baby move if you don't feel it for awhile. But as the pregnancy progresses generally for most women and most babies, the movement becomes almost



constant with definite sleeping times. But lots of movement. So that's normally how it goes.

So that's a little bit about the baby. I feel like I've been connecting more with the baby which has been really fun through, I guess, dreams has been one big thing for me. And honestly, being physically able to feel what the baby is doing in my body—maybe I'm kind of a nerd, a midwifery nerd here, but that just helps me connect. I don't think that's necessary by any stretch. But that helps me. And the dreams have been really cool. And I've had lots of sort of tricky dreams.

I was so sure that this baby was a girl. And I think I still am deep down on most days. And it doesn't even matter truly. It's just one of those things that is fun to guess, in a way, and see if you get any signs about. But I had a dream just last night that it was a really great birth, and that it was a boy. And that was the second dream I had had. So, again, it doesn't matter to me at all. And I also recognize that our interpretation of things like girl, boy, what kind of person this is on the outside is probably different than when these souls are on the inside. That's just my kind of feeling about it. That they're not identifying necessarily with these very structured words that we may apply to them. They're simply just being in there, and they are able, I think, to communicate and connect with us.

But, again, the vocabulary may or may not be the same. So boy, girl. Whatever. Who cares? But it's been cool to kind of meet the baby in dreams, and I always enjoy that connection. The dreams have also helped me reckon some fears lately. I feel like this is the point in pregnancy where I'm getting into thinking more about the birth. And seeing birth, myself—not my own, but seeing birth sort of regularly I realize that things come flooding back. So if you've ever had a baby before, you can remember a lot about it, I think, as it gets closer. Something even physical about your body remembering.

So I started to just sort of be fearful about some of the actual sensations of labor, believe it or not. I'm not that close to labor. But, again, it's not months and months away. So yeah. Just kind of reliving, "Okay. What does it feel like again?" It's not pain. I wouldn't say that. And that isn't actually what was scaring me. I think the intensity is what has overwhelmed in previous births. And my mind knows that that's all as it should be. That there are those minutes of overwhelm, and that's generally about when the baby is going to come. So I know all these things in my head, but yet my body was wanting to sort of go there and relive it.

And the dream I had last night was really reassuring. I feel like yes. Dreams do help us work out our emotions and our issues. And this dream was about me going through that part in labor that I was fearing, that really intense, scary part where the baby is almost here. And in my dream, it happened so easily, and I really just breathed through

it that I didn't remember it. And here I was though with this baby I had just birthed. And funny enough, in the dream, I was asking our photographer friend to show me pictures of what I had just done because I didn't remember. So kind of funny. But that came on the heels of some conversations this week, honestly, with some midwife sisters. My literal, actual sister, who is a great support, and just kind of talking these things over with them.

They've both—the midwife friend and the sister—have both had babies before. And so they knew what I was talking about. And if nothing else, it was just them being able to listen and say, "I totally know what you mean. I know that part. And what are you scared of?" And it was just a really nice way of being taken care of as I start to process the impending labor that will bring this baby. So, again, just kind of fun to do that this week and then have this dream that kind of really helped me sort it out.

So not to say I am 100 percent ready and able at this point to labor and birth this baby. I'm definitely not. I have got 15 weeks, and I need every minute of those weeks in many ways. But this gradual processing, this gradual emotional release and understanding no matter what—if we've birthed before, if we've had what we consider traumatic births, if we've had what we consider great, orgasmic, perfectly perfect, wonderful births, I think it doesn't matter. I think as we get close to birth we start to second guess things. We start to have fears come up. And it's okay. It's okay. This is what we do as women because we know that labor is a giant unknown. And we can't control it more than we do.

So this working it out whether through talking with our sisters, our friends that understand, other women, or whether it's journaling about it or dreaming about it. These are the ways that we work things out because we must come to a place of confidence. And as many babies as I have had, I wouldn't say, again, that I'm at a confident place right now. But I know that's as it should be. So for you too, if you're working things out, you probably are. It could be completely different things. Probably is. Maybe it's stuff in your relationship or with your family or your kids or who knows? But, again, I think this is the point in pregnancy when we really start to dig a little deeper.

And we will come through it. But this is the intense time, in a way, of that emotional exploration. So that's kind of where I have been at. Other than thinking about birth in those ways and feeling some of the things, I haven't given things too much thought yet as far as planning. And I don't know what I will do. I guess I'll find out. And you'll probably find out as far as real plans. I had thoughts earlier in the week after seeing a water birth that maybe I would go that route again or at least have a pool. I haven't for the last two births. Just sort of thoughts like that. Nothing concrete. No plans. Nothing

decided. Just, again, entering that space of starting to prepare, starting to think about how this might look.

Ahh, well that was a mouthful. Hopefully, you were able to identify with some of that. And if you're not pregnant, you're just getting a taste of these crazy things that go on in pregnant women's heads. And if you're supporting women, I think it's always cool, too, to just hear about how women support themselves because really that's the best thing we can do for ourselves is be aware of what we're feeling in our pregnancies and in all kinds of ways.

And definitely ask for support and help when we need it. Being pregnant in a vacuum is not fun. And although I don't seek medical care from the outside, at least unless I would really need it, I do seek and value emotional support. So I think as women and pregnant women we can use that and to remember that it's okay and probably will help you a lot to find that support.

So thanks for listening today. This was kind of a chatty podcast. We're here to remind as well—we've started a new online class, a birth class. It's five classes. And you can do it all at your own pace. So little advertisement for that because if you like what I'm talking about and you feel like you identify with some of these things then I think you would love to take this class. And whether you're supporting women or about to go through a birth yourself, you'll really, I think, get some new ideas and thoughts in your head. So Margo and I both do that class. You can find it on our site. And that's it for today. Thanks so much.

(closing music)