

(introductory music)

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**MARYN:** Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Hi, everybody. Maryn here. We have an amazing guest today talking about absolutely one of my most passionate subjects. We have my friend, Stephanie Vuolo, here. And we're going to be discussing nutrition in the childbearing year. Now officially, Stephanie is a certified nutritional therapist. She is an American College of Sports Medicine personal trainer and a certified Crossift coach. But more personally, Stephanie is one of my very best longtime friends. And gosh. I think it's probably close to 15 years that Stephanie and I have been friends. I was just reflecting on how when we met that long ago we were pretty young. And neither of us had children. And we met in New York City as part of the Road Runners Club. So anybody that's a runner knows that that's a pretty prominent running club in the country.

It was really fun to do relays and all kinds of things together in Central Park that long ago. But what's really cool is that essentially we've come to a very similar place in our lives now and with what our passions are. So I went into birth and took that direction. And Stephanie went the other way but kind of a similar way into nutrition. And I love that we have very similar concepts going on, very similar philosophies. You're going to hear all about that today from Stephanie as she talks about nutrition. So one last thing—I'll mention it again at the end. But her website is [primarilypaleo.com](http://primarilypaleo.com). And I think that says it all. It's a paleo perspective but very down to earth, and you'll hear what she does with that. She does do online and Skype consults. So if you hear something you want to ask her or want to make a time with her, go to that website and contact her. So long introduction. But welcome, Stephanie.

**STEPHANIE:** Thank you. It's so exciting to be able to talk to you in a professional manner about things that we love and get our messages out there.

**MARYN:** Yeah. It's almost kind of funny. Since we don't get to talk that much anyway, here we are doing a podcast for everyone to hear. But yeah. Let's just dive in. Why don't you just kind of take over and let everyone know where you're coming from and what you want to talk about today.

**STEPHANIE:** Great. Well, I'm excited to talk to you today about nutrition for the childbearing year because it's such an important part of conception, a healthy pregnancy, a healthy delivery, and a healing postpartum period. So I was hoping we could talk a little bit about how to maximize the nutrient density of your diet prior to

conception boosting the body and making it the most capable for conceiving a healthy baby and growing a healthy baby.

**MARYN:** Yeah.

**STEPHANIE:** You and I both have a lot of background in our passion for nutrition and trying out different ways of eating, adopting different diets. All based in a whole foods approach.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** And I think that we have taken that into our pregnancies and how do we nourish ourselves so that we can feel our best. And like most women putting a lot of pressure on ourselves because we want to make sure our baby is getting the nutrition that they need to fully develop. Develop their brain. Every cell is being created from scratch, and we need good quality ingredients to make the best product.

**MARYN:** Yeah. That makes sense. So is this approach for women of any diet variety or diet type? What are kind of the building blocks there?

**STEPHANIE:** Absolutely. I think that what we need to focus on is what all diets have in common. So there's lots of documentaries out there about—like *Forks Over Knives*. And there's one where the guy went on that juice cleanse for three months and never felt better.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** Why is that? And I believe that it's really just a whole foods approach, which means not relying on a diet that comes from packaged foods.

**MARYN:** Mm-hmm.

**STEPHANIE:** And I defined packaged foods as those with labels that have more than one ingredient in them. So obviously, we can buy nuts that are packaged, but they should just contain the almonds and not have a lot of different coatings or sugars or fillers on them.

**MARYN:** Right. Cool.

**STEPHANIE:** So taking an unprocessed approach really gives our body a chance to get the maximum nutrient value out of food. And the best time we have to control what we eat is really before we get pregnant.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** We feel better. We have more time. We're getting more sleep. We're having more energy. And I think it's really classic when you think back to a first pregnancy when we don't have some of the distractions and the demands of parenting there's so much that goes into every milestone, every week. We're looking at the books or the websites to see what is going on for my baby at week seven. What's developing here? So pouring that energy into what we're eating prior to conception is a really useful tool. And a common theme that occurs in many who are looking to conceive or preparing to conceive is the idea of detoxing and cleaning up their diet.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Talk about that please.

**STEPHANIE:** Well, obviously, some of the big things that people avoid are alcohol.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** They may quit smoking. They may reduce the amount of sugar that they're eating or cut out soda from their diet.

**MARYN:** Mm-hmm.

**STEPHANIE:** It's important to create a—I don't know how to describe it best. But a fertile environment, right? You want yourself to be maximizing their potential. You want your liver to be processing hormones, so that you are maybe getting regular menstrual cycles, that you do have some predictability, and that your body is able to handle the demands of creating a human from scratch.

**MARYN:** Sure. And what would you say the ideal amount of time is just sort of for your average American, let's say, before she gets serious about conceiving to kind of go through this diet—looking at her diet closely process?

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. That's a good question. For a woman, I would say at least three months prior to conception. For the average American. And the average American is really relying on a lot of processed foods and has a heavy grain based diet that's typically low in vegetables.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** And I don't—I know this is about the childbearing year, but the preconception period is really important for the male when it comes to conception especially because it takes sperm at least 60 days to mature. So for a male, we're looking at beginning the process of cleaning up our diets and paying attention to what we eat greater than—maybe around four to six months prior to conception.

**MARYN:** Mm-hmm.

**STEPHANIE:** In order to ensure the healthiest sperm production that are going to be the most potent and the strongest.

**MARYN:** Yeah. That makes perfect sense ideally.

**STEPHANIE:** And I want to focus on this preconception. But one of the most powerful ways that women detox chemicals, heavy metals, and all other sorts of toxins that our bodies just naturally are holding actually occurs during breastfeeding which I think is a huge motivator for a woman who is looking to conceive to try to commence that—those systems to detox prior to conception and prior to breastfeeding.

**MARYN:** I see. I see.

**STEPHANIE:** Toxins are bound to fat. And so breast milk is primarily fat based.

**MARYN:** Right. Yeah. That's really interesting.

**STEPHANIE:** So those toxins come out.

**MARYN:** Yeah. That's a really good point. Yeah. Better to get rid of it while you can rather than pass it on, I guess.

**STEPHANIE:** Exactly. And there's a ton of research about really how limited we are in our ability to protect our unborn children from the chemical exposure and heavy metal exposure, just environmentally that we have. And there's a lot of research done on what types of toxins babies are naturally born with. And there's a huge burden and load that the scientists have detected which is sad. But I think we just need to put that into perspective that there's really no way to get—no one magic pill to have a completely untoxic child. There's just—we're surrounded by things that are passing through our bodies and that we then pass on. But the idea is that we can control the foods. And so how does detoxing work? I think is an important thing to address.

**MARYN:** Yeah.

**STEPHANIE:** Our bodies are always naturally detoxing. It's the way that we purify our blood. It's what our liver and our kidneys are designed to do. But when we are eating a standard American diet, high in chemicals and processing and hormones and all the other stuff that's found in our food, the burden becomes so large that, first of all, the pathways get clogged, and the process becomes less efficient. Secondly, it never gets an opportunity to sort of get a break or to go to a deeper level which is why when people simply cut out, let's say, refined sugars, sodas, lots of processed grains like breads and muffins and what not, they start to experience detoxing symptoms which include headaches, hot and cold sweats, blood sugar drops. So it's even that subtle. Just that first level can have a really big impact.

**MARYN:** Hmm. Yeah. I believe it. So with the preconception or, I guess, actually conception, what nutrients should someone focus on? I mean you said whole foods, and I think most people are clear on what that is. But certainly, there's different categories and things that we need. So what are you focused on when you're helping someone with that?

**STEPHANIE:** When I'm helping someone with detoxing, it's adding in lots of leafy green veggies, green veggies, and vegetables that are colored throughout. So colored throughout means when you cut it, it's not white on the inside. So zucchini—a zucchini is a great example of that. Really, deeply pigmented on the outside but when you cut into it, it's white. Are zucchinis bad for you? Absolutely not. But you're going to get more nutritional bang for your buck when you eat kale and when you eat red and yellow peppers, for example, because they're pigmented throughout. And so that means that there are more phytonutrients and antioxidants and phytochemicals, phytonutrients within those foods.

**MARYN:** Right. Yeah. That makes sense. So I know, for me, and when I'm helping people in pregnancy like protein, for example, is a pretty important part of growing a baby. How does that fit into the preconception period? Because if you have somebody that's vegan and they're getting ready to have a baby, is it enough to just have vegetables? Or what else is part of that whole picture?

**STEPHANIE:** Well, I would say it's two parts. It's the one part we mentioned which is drastically reducing the amount of processed foods that enter the diet. And many vegans are very nutritionally aware about what goes into their bodies. But a lot of vegan food is still heavily processed.

**MARYN:** Sure. Yeah.

**STEPHANIE:** So doing the best we can with that. Secondly, healthy fat. There's a lot of research about ancestral tribes and hunter gathering groups, who especially during the spring when couples were sort of partnered up really pushing fat based food products which include the raw milk, blood, which obviously we don't consume in our society. But in our society, that would be butter. It would be coconut oil. It would be avocados, walnuts, eggs. Fat is critical in every cell. Every cell wall is created by lipids. So we need to consume dietary fats especially the Omega-3 rich ones in order to make another human. And also it's important for our hormones. So I think—there is an epidemic of infertility in our country. And I forget the statistic, but I want to say about 25% of it is completely unexplained.

**MARYN:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**STEPHANIE:** And I cannot imagine that it's not dietarily based.

**MARYN:** Right. Yeah. I agree with you. And gosh. I hope people hear that about the fats and really retain that and pass it on to women that they know because I think most of us still know people that are doing this low fat thing. And that may work for them in their lives wherever they're at. But I agree with getting ready to have a baby and being pregnant, there is just no room for low fat variety of anything. And it horrifies me when I see somebody trying to avoid the butter and the sour cream and the oil when they're pregnant because that's what our baby is made from. And that's what the brain is made from. So I think that's really important because it's just not a cultural thing for a lot of people.

**STEPHANIE:** Right. And it applies for both the vegans, the standard American, the paleo followers. It really doesn't matter. We can all afford to get good quality healthy fats into our diet.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Yeah. That's an awesome idea. So what are maybe some trickier ways that you do that? I mean, obviously, we could just cook in butter or oil. But for people that are looking to maybe get a little bit more in, I know I'm always looking for new ideas.

**STEPHANIE:** Mm-hmm. Well, I think the first thing is to really understand how—and actually, I should put that in—on my website. A refreseher. I have a whole fat primer.

**MARYN:** Oh cool.

**STEPHANIE:** So I'll make sure that that gets somehow linked to you. But it talks about the different types of fats and oils that are available and how to properly use them. And so what happens is is that most folks rely on olive oil for cooking. They might cook with butter, and then they used a prepared salad dressing or they might use an olive oil. So it's very limited. Olive oil is great especially if you're getting a cold pressed olive oil. There's lots of plant compounds that go into that oil. However, looking at walnut oil—walnut oil is great on salads. So I use walnut oil with a little bit of either balsamic vinegar or fresh lemon juice or apple cider vinegar. It doesn't matter.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** (cross talk) all of my salads. And so it's high in Omega-3 fatty acid.

**MARYN:** Yeah. That's a great idea.

**STEPHANIE:** And then just upping the quality of the fats and oils that you're using. So seeking out avocados, which avocado oil is one of the new trends. One of the nutrition trends in 2016. And I think what's great about that is it's also being sold at Costco. When we're buying a good quality oil, it can be a big investment.

**MARYN:** Yeah. That's a good point.

**STEPHANIE:** And the cheaters way—because Omega-3 fatty acids are super important. And I'm personally I don't feel that I can get too many Omega-3 fatty acids into my diet. So I do supplement with a good quality fish oil that I purchase in the refrigerator case at the grocery store pharmacy.

**MARYN:** Mm-hmm.

**STEPHANIE:** Because I really want to make sure I have those anti-inflammatory fatty acids in my diet because not only am I regenerating my own cells, but I want to make sure that my body is in a position to produce another human hopefully.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Well, personal question then. Fermented cod liver oil or not? Or what are you buying? What should we be looking for?

**STEPHANIE:** As a nutritional therapist, that—and the Weston A. Price follower, the fermented cod oil, I've heard presentations about it. And I'm conflicted because it sounds like it works for a lot of people. And so I'm not one to dispute that. Personally, I feel like there might be a little bit of marketing spin to it because it just seems a little bit faddish to me.

**MARYN:** Sure.

**STEPHANIE:** So I personally do not use it. I've been satisfied with the results that I get. And also I do give my daughter Omega-3 fatty acids in a supplement as well. And I've been satisfied with the response that I've gotten with her body. And she's five. And I've been using those for at least three and a half years with her.

**MARYN:** What kind do you guys like? Because my kids don't really care and I need a recommendation. They'll eat up anything like that. They love it.

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. The brand that I—I can't remember—I think it might be Nordic Naturals. And they're chewables. It's a soft gel and strawberry flavor. I mean it tastes like candy to them. I'm okay with that. I mean it's a health product. But I think a lot of children if you start them young enough are actually okay with the liquid cod liver oil.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Yeah. My kids do the cinnamon. And it looks—I mean I can't. It's too nasty for me. But they can do it.

**STEPHANIE:** Right. And so I just want to touch on that briefly because we do want to include our vegan friends. And there is a new Omega-3 fatty acid. I don't know how new it is. But it's algae based.

**MARYN:** Oh cool.

**STEPHANIE:** And plant oil based. And it is in a liquid form. I personally don't like the taste of it. It's a little bit too roasted for me because it is liquid. But it's been an obstacle in the past for a vegan to add an Omega-3 fatty acid because it's all fish based.

**MARYN:** Sure. Yeah. Okay. That's a great recommendation. I know there are definitely vegans listening. So that's a great base just for preconception and getting everybody on the same page with the whole foods diet. Now let's move on to hopefully the inevitable. Someone finds themselves pregnant and wow. Let's go from there. Where do we start? That they can eat anything or they can't eat everything? Or what?

**STEPHANIE:** Well, I think for me—from my own perspective, I suffered from such debilitating all day morning sickness and food aversion from about five and a half weeks until 21 weeks.

**MARYN:** Wow.

**STEPHANIE:** And so my perspective is—and we know it's always kind of a cliché and a joke about pregnant women and their food aversions or their food cravings.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** We can't control what's going to happen. We can't predict. I could prescribe a nutrient dense, well balanced, high in all the right things, just the right amount of calories and fat and protein. Chances are you're not going to be in the mood for it when you're pregnant. So I think it's important to really commit to that preconception period and understand that you're laying the foundational groundwork. You're sort of planting seeds in yourself, nutrient seeds, that are going to be used while you're pregnant.

**MARYN:** Yeah. That's a great way. I mean I know there's a lot of women that kind of feel bad or guilty once they're pregnant and they just can't eat the way they want to.

**STEPHANIE:** Right. And worried. I mean I remember how worried I was. I was so food averse. I was following a paleo diet before I conceived. And once I—this food aversion hit, I wanted—I craved all of the things I grew up eating which were frozen French bread pizza and bologna and cheese on a hamburger bun. All these things that I hadn't eaten since I was probably five or seven years old. And I did not eat them while I was pregnant. But I was eating basically oats. Gluten free, frozen waffles and applesauce. I mean I think I pretty much ate that for at least three months. I did not eat a vegetable. I would choke down meat just trying to get some protein in. And it was hard for me because, obviously, I had the knowledge of what I needed to create a healthy human. And I couldn't not force myself to eat anything. And I was even eating



those lemonhead candies. I mean I was desperate for just something to help me feel better so that I could eat.

**MARYN:** Oh, I know. I think it's extra cruel when you do have the knowledge, and you really, really want to stick to what you know is good for you. And you find yourself—I mean I've done that too. Find myself in the candy aisle looking for sour patch kids. I haven't eaten one of those for 25 years. But it happens.

**STEPHANIE:** The important message there is listen to your body which is really part of your whole process when it comes to pregnancy and birth. And trust your intuition. And know that you're doing the best that you can. And your growing baby is not necessarily going to suffer because of this. And I think it's worse to feel like you have to force feed yourself.

**MARYN:** Yeah.

**STEPHANIE:** With that being said, naturally, there are things that we would be eating when we're pregnant if we can stomach it. And so things that are high in vitamin A are great. So cod liver oil is a great example of that. Liver, in and of itself, is great because of all the nutrient that it has. And also if we look at it from a Chinese medicine perspective, you want to eat the organs that you want to heal. And often, nausea is related to some liver clogging.

**MARYN:** Oh gosh. Yeah.

**STEPHANIE:** And it would be great to get some of that into our diet. So luckily, there is desiccate liver pills.

**MARYN:** Yeah. I was just going to ask you about that. Are those okay? That sounds like a good substitute, right?

**STEPHANIE:** I think it would be a great substitute. My whole perspective in pregnancy is all the rules go out the door. And we talked about that when we were chatting before our call for a few minutes. I was talking about my friend, who was vegan. Ethically vegan. Against eating animals in any form. And she called me to say, "Could you please bring me some cheese? And I'm not sure if I want you to tell my husband, but I really need to eat cheese right now," because she was just so ill. And I was trying to have her embrace the idea of please listen to your body. Your body is telling you to eat this, and it is—it's consuming your mind. So you're not a bad person because you're choosing to do this.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Definitely not. Okay. So this is a huge question. I'm not sure that you can answer it either. But is there a physiological reason that we do crave certain things? Why is it that we seem to crave carbs more in pregnancy? And why is,

generally speaking, the idea of greens for a lot of women especially early pregnancy so repulsive? Is there a reason for that?

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. I wish I—I wish that we could scientifically come up with the reason for why this occurs. But honestly, I believe that if we're looking at ourselves evolutionarily as hunter gatherers it seems to be a way to safeguard against consuming a toxic food. So we know sweet foods were safe.

**MARYN:** Interesting.

**STEPHANIE:** So wanting sweet—our sweet sensors are just so hardwired. It's why we crave them and why we want more of them. But if we were in a hunter gatherer society, it would be limited, right? You could only have berries seasonally. And you eat them until they're gone. And then you don't get them again. Bitter foods were typically toxic. And so greens are more bitter. That's the only idea—

**MARYN:** Theory.

**STEPHANIE:** - and theory that—and I have to honor that. And I really tried to do that when I was pregnant. Honoring why I didn't want to eat the food. And also just trusting my instincts. I remember having this terrible craving for smoke salmon. And I remember calling you about this. "Is this okay? Am I going to get food poisoning if I eat smoked salmon?" And I ended up eating it because—I mean it's ultimately—it's a packaged food. It's pretty well standardized and safe. It wasn't something that I was doing at home. So just trusting our bodies and letting our cravings kind of guide us. But with that being said, there are ways to take a craving—so I had these cravings for pizza.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** What I really wanted was melted cheese and tomatoes. I couldn't get enough tomatoes even during this food aversive time.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** So what I ended up doing was grilling chicken breasts, really lean chicken breasts, and melting cheese and tomato sauce over it in the oven.

**MARYN:** That's a great idea.

**STEPHANIE:** And that really helped me get that cheesy, tomato thing that I needed, and it helped mask the chicken that I was not a fan of. And it kept me from eating foods that don't agree with me like gluten. So seeking out the best quality product that you can get that still meets your need.

**MARYN:** Yeah. That is the absolute best advice. I feel like I need to follow that more if I should ever get pregnant again. I always find that hard because I'll be the same way. And I think it's definitely emotional. Like you said, craving foods from your childhood of which pizza is definitely one for me too. And yeah. Just on the same page that gluten makes me feel terrible, so finding other ways—and like you said, trying to narrow down what it is that you're actually craving. I think that's really helpful.

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. And that's true with my clients whether they're pregnant or not. Like the craving for ice cream. What is it that you're actually craving? Would a blended frozen banana with some nut butter and cocoa nibs still that craving because it does taste like soft serve ice cream? Or are you looking more for the minerals that are contained in dairy, and so it's—your body is just seeking out that.

**MARYN:** Well, how do they figure it—how do you advise people to figure that out? Just to try different things and see if it satisfies it?

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. Absolutely. Like, “Hey, let's try this frozen banana thing and see if that's going to help you.” Or maybe we need to supplement with some powdered magnesium to see if that is what your body is looking for because there's a lot of research that we're somewhat magnesium deficient in our society.

**MARYN:** Right. Hey, that's a great side question or segue maybe. Ideally, I understand we get our nutrients and minerals from food. But because we are deficient and the soil is deficient and all that stuff, are there supplements that you do recommend kind of for everyone?

**STEPHANIE:** No. I think that everyone should be evaluated on an individual basis. I do have a grievance with prenatal and pregnancy supplements because I don't like everything all being together. And iron being taken with calcium doesn't work. So it's like why are they putting that in the pill and charging us so much for it? So I like to have things taken separately. So when you can control the dosage and you can control when you're eating it and if you need it. But overall, I think that it doesn't hurt to supplement your B vitamins because you are going to eliminate any excess. So you might be losing dollars that way. But if you're looking for an insurance policy, that's kind of a safe one.

**MARYN:** Sure. And do you recommend a B complex? Or is it too individual to say?

**STEPHANIE:** No. I think a B complex is a safe bet. And then I think iron, obviously, is important especially if you're going through a major food aversion or you're on a restricted diet because of how you're feeling. That you reach a point where your iron levels do drop.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** And so I do think that that's worth seeking out a supplement that is really going to bring those levels up.

**MARYN:** Sure. What about—and I really don't know how you feel about this, honestly, because we've never talked about it. But what about herbal infusions like for iron or any of these minerals? Because that's been my thing lately. I just can't get enough of nettles, in particular. I don't know why.

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. No. I think that's great. But I think the challenge is—and I tell my pregnant clients and my pregnant friends start drinking your herbs. And you really instilled that in me. But I think the flaw that people make is that they'll drink one cup of pregnancy tea a day.

**MARYN:** Oh, right. Right.

**STEPHANIE:** And I think you need to be drinking three to four cups of that in order to really reap the benefits.

**MARYN:** Yeah. I think that's kind of a staple of making an infusion which is kind of another topic, but I don't think a lot of people even know the difference between making a cup of tea and in infusion. So go look that up if you don't know. But making herbal infusions, I think is way superior to any prenatal pill like you're saying.

**STEPHANIE:** Right. And drinking that throughout the day. And so if the taste is turning you off, adding water to that. And for me, I didn't want hot things. So I would ice them. And that was quite refreshing. And I found that compared to my pregnant peers I was not getting a lot of the pregnancy side effects that they were getting like leg cramps and other feeling more fatigued and things like that. So I think the herbs are super important.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Yeah. I love rotating them. And I think that's one of my most favored recommendations if people are into it is to kind of rotate the herbal infusions. And it really seems to cover your bases other than food, of course.

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. I think though for the women that I work with just even drinking a cup of an herbal tea that would benefit their pregnancy is really off their radar. And so even if you have to buy the prepackaged tea bags and you just make a really rich infusion from that, the idea is understanding that food is medicine. And whether you're drinking herbs or adding nettles—this is a great time of year in the spring to be adding nettles to your diet. Can really benefit you.

**MARYN:** Yeah. So what about absorption? Can you talk a little bit about that? Just because you know a lot. And my basic understanding is just you can eat all the great food in the world but are you actually absorbing what you need?

**STEPHANIE:** Right. Yeah. And I think that's a chronic problem in our society whether we're pregnant or not. There's so many food sensitivities that people are experiencing and digestive challenges. And certainly, the system is taxed during pregnancy with compression on the intestines and the slower transit time and things like that. So really basic things would be chewing our food more completely.

**MARYN:** Oh, I remember that great advice you gave me years ago.

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. It makes such a big difference. It doesn't cost you anything.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** And then the other thing that is kind of rampant in our society is just being stressed and short on time. So we're eating on the run, and we're eating in a hurry. So if we can slow down and create a little bit more intention so that our brain can register that food is coming in which then turns on that parasympathetic process of digestion by getting the salivary enzymes activated, by getting a really full gastric juice release so that the food can be broken down. Because once it gets into the point where it's going to be absorbed in the small and large intestines, it's too late if the particulars are too big or they weren't broken down properly before they got there.

**MARYN:** Gosh. That is such a great reminder. I mean even not being pregnant. Who relaxes eating with a bunch of kids? It's such a challenge.

**STEPHANIE:** Right. Right. Who takes a few deep breaths? And for me, I don't—I only have one child, and I'm up and—throughout the meal getting her stuff. So it's like—it's very different. So I would start with that. I would start looking at the mechanical aspects. Taking deep breaths and chewing more. And then sure, there's tons of different options for aiding digestion. I always seek out the natural ones first.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** So looking at raw apple cider vinegar, looking at adding kombucha to sip with meals. Bone broth is my other elixir that I love all of my clients to be adding to their diets. So if we look at bone broth, which there's actually even great bone broth products so you don't have to make your own if you're short on time—

**MARYN:** Yeah. I was just going to ask you that. You can read my mind.

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. We're old friends, Maryn. We're old friends.

**MARYN:** I was just thinking that this morning really. I'm like I love making bone broth. And I do probably every other week. But on the in between weeks, I was like I'm wondering how bad the bone broth in a box is.

**STEPHANIE:** The bone broth in a box is actually a really great product. I'm really proud. Pacific Foods. I'm proud of them as a company for making that switch to adding not just broth but a bone broth. And then at least at my co-op here in Seattle, there are frozen bone broths that are really, really rich. So just seeking that out. Sometimes butchers make the broth.

**MARYN:** Interesting.

**STEPHANIE:** But I have a few tips on making it at home. One is just make a double batch and freeze half of it in—they have these large ice cube oval silicone molds that you can get off Amazon. That might be about a half a cup each. So you can freeze that and then defrost it as you want to use it. That way it won't go bad.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Great idea.

**STEPHANIE:** And then the other thing to sort of aid absorption and increase digestion is seeking out probiotics.

**MARYN:** Mm-hmm.

**STEPHANIE:** I'm just having a—I had a side conversation with these two five year olds in my daughter's class because one of them had dirt on his face. And then he ate it. And I said, "Well, you're really not supposed to eat the dirt. But there are probiotics in it." And he was like, "What are probiotics?" And I said, "That's a great question. They are little, happy, smiling germs that our bodies want and need to help us break down our food and to keep us healthy." So that's what I think of them as. That's what they show them on in the children's probiotics bottles. These little, smiley, happy things. And it does not hurt us to add fermented foods into our diet whether you ferment them at home. Luckily, there is a plethora of fermented products on the market, even pickles, that are naturally fermented.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** And then if we have to go the supplement route, I really don't think that that's a negative. You just want to buy the best quality probiotics that you can afford. Preferably, that was kept in the refrigerator at the store. And I like to rotate brands. and this can be especially important during pregnancy because our digestion and our transit time changes. So finding the right probiotic with the right blend of what you need at that time can really help move things along and give you what you need.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Gosh. Probiotics. That's a huge topic. We'll have to do something just with that. Yeah. I mean I feel like I have so many questions and have gotten so many questions about quality and the different bacteria and what they do down to—I had heard from somebody not long ago and I don't have any research basis for this.

That probiotics shouldn't be used all of the time. You should give your body time off. Any thoughts about that?

**STEPHANIE:** I don't—I would, again, trust my intuition on that. Sometimes I personally don't feel like taking it. So I just honor that. I don't think it hurts. I mean think about all of the probiotics we're exposed to, right? When you go to a new place for a walk, when your child goes to a new school, when you go to a new home to visit friends, when you go to a restaurant. We can't get away from bacteria. And there is a lot of theories that really our whole role as animals is just to move bacteria and microbes around. So I don't think that you necessarily need to take a prescribed break. But I think it's great to try different fermented foods. Try a different company that makes a fermented food. Try making your own fermented food. Try out different probiotics. Walk barefoot in your backyard. Pet a new dog. There was a great article—I think (cross talk) in *The New York Times* magazine a year or two or three ago about probiotics and then what happened when we took an antibiotic. And it showed that people who had dogs or who pet dogs had specific strains of probiotics in their body that those not around animals didn't have.

**MARYN:** Wow. Well, I am hooked up with probiotics then.

**STEPHANIE:** Yes. Maybe that's why you like dogs so much.

**MARYN:** Oh my gosh. Maybe. I don't know which way it goes there.

**STEPHANIE:** Well, and we should definitely talk about probiotics because there's the whole fecal transplant, and there's all of these different products on the market trying to get new bacteria onto our bodies.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Well, let's save that for another time because that's a huge topic. Did you want to talk a little bit more or at all about nutrition actually during the birth process? Or did you want to move on to postpartum time?

**STEPHANIE:** Well, I think the most important thing—and your listeners and followers probably already know this—but it is important to eat and drink during the birth process if that feels right to you.

**MARYN:** Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

**STEPHANIE:** And I feel like that's been a huge disservice in getting that message out to women that they're not supposed to eat or drink. And that's really just kind of a covering your ass medical wise, right? In case there is an emergent situation. But people come in off the street having eaten and had something to drink that have to go into emergency surgery.

**MARYN:** Sure. Sure. I know.

**STEPHANIE:** (cross talk). But the benefit from fueling your body for this athletic performance especially an endurance event that can last some women days—

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** - it would be ridiculous to not be fueling the body. And then once you get weak and unable to perform what is required, I think that just further opens the door for the need for extra help from the outside.

**MARYN:** Sure. Yeah. I mean I know. It's common sense, I think, to us and, certainly, to a lot of people listening, right? That our uterus—uteri—do need calories and nourishment during that process. and yeah. Margo and I always—only half joke that we could easily teach a class on that. Just like eating during labor. Margo, herself, is probably an expert just because she had a really long labor, and she says, very confidently, that there is no way she ever would have gotten through it had she not kept feeding herself.

**STEPHANIE:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. It's an athletic event.

**MARYN:** Yeah. For sure.

**STEPHANIE:** Which is another thing we should probably talk about in the future. About exercise. And the role of exercise and why that's important and how it prepares your body and what's safe and what's not.

**MARYN:** Oh my gosh. Too many topics. Not enough time.

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. Let's just recap. For pregnancy, there's tons of recommendations. And I already talked about that before. That I could prescribe a perfect pregnancy meal plan for seven days that would give someone everything they quote on quote need according to the RDA for their nutrients. And we're just going to try to do the best we can. And I look at wellness as a continuum. So on one side of the continuum, we have sickness, right? We don't feel well. We don't look well. We have lots of symptoms that are undesirable. And on the other end of the continuum is optimal health. And I think it's unrealistic that we can achieve optimal health. It seems like such a black and white issue. And my goal for my clients—and I hope that people adopt this for themselves is that we just want to keep moving one step closer to optimal wellness. Doing the best we can with the time that we have, with the resources that we have, to make the best possible decision especially when it comes to our nutrition.

**MARYN:** Yeah.

**STEPHANIE:** And not the best. It's the best possible.



**MARYN:** Yeah. Well, again, I think it comes back to what we've already talked about which is we feel like we need to be super human during pregnancy, but our bodies often have other ideas about the way things need to go. So I agree. That's always my advice as well when working with people is just to do the best they can. Not to feel like they're being criticized or they're not doing well enough. But to just—yeah. Like you're saying take a step every day to do the absolute best you can for you.

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. And I think that's hard for women in general. Pregnant or not, right?

**MARYN:** Sure.

**STEPHANIE:** Because we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to do it all and achieve in all areas and I don't think the media really helps with that especially when it comes to pregnancy because you see all of these pictures of celebrities two weeks after they've had a baby that they look like super models, right? And it's an unrealistic expectation of maybe what the rest of us are going to be doing.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** Or the priorities that we're going to have for ourselves.

**MARYN:** Well, and I think the lack of support that we have—really most of us we don't live in villages anymore. And I think it's just hard. I mean I think back to some of my last pregnancies having a bunch of kids to take care of. And I couldn't even put one foot in front of the other some days to go to the store and come up with a recipe and make food. So times like that, it really makes you wonder just how we all could help each other more to make those things happen. If food had miraculously showed up at the door that would have been so nice. And I think that's true for lots of us. It's just like we can't think through it sometimes. We need help.

**STEPHANIE:** Right. And I think that's what leads us to what happens postpartum and post birth.

**MARYN:** That's a great segue.

**STEPHANIE:** Because that's probably one of the best gifts that any family can get would be the meal service.

**MARYN:** I agree.

**STEPHANIE:** Would be having those—there's great resources online where friends can sign up and pick a day. And the parents can put the limits on, "Please just leave the food. We're not going to open the door." "Please don't give us anything we have to return to you because we're not going to keep track of it." Whatever that is that they

need to work. And I've had a few friends who really didn't want to do that because they didn't want to ask for help.

**MARYN:** I know.

**STEPHANIE:** And I think that it's just great if a group of friends or community can get together and say, "It's great that you want to do it yourself, but we really want to do this for you."

**MARYN:** I agree. I agree. That is gold. I always say that no need for baby gifts. No need for any other kind of attention from mom that has just had a baby really. Just bring her food. Or feed her family at the very least.

**STEPHANIE:** Right. And we talked about infertility and unexplained infertility being a huge problem for westerners. And the other huge problem that—I don't have the evidence scientifically on why this is such a huge problem, but I know there's many factors. Is milk supply. And I think sound nutrition starting with preconception all the way through postpartum plays a huge role in that. And I don't know if you gave me this idea after I had my daughter. But setting up a mini bar in my room. Did you tell me that? Or did I come up with that on my own?

**MARYN:** Well, I don't know. You mean just a table where you have all your stuff?

**STEPHANIE:** Yes. So I would literally bring a thermos of hot nursing herbal support tea that I would be able to drink throughout the night. And I would have these paleo cookies with lots of dried fruit for energy in them. And I would have cut up fruit. And I would—I left it in my bathroom. And so in the middle of the night when I got up to feed my newborn, I would eat. And it was easy, right? Because I would just throw a few cookies down and drink some tea. And it—our bodies need that fuel. And I think under eating and not eating the right things early on in the postpartum period can really set folks up for having a milk supply issue.

**MARYN:** Oh yeah. For sure. I think some of it is definitely the age old not wanting to keep gaining weight or wanting to lose weight that someone feel after they've had a baby. But I agree. It's all about the most nutrient dense things I would think. So any good suggestions for that? Just like if a woman has this new baby and other kids I would know about that? Not feeling like she has tons of time to make stuff. What sort of ideas would you suggest?

**STEPHANIE:** Well, things that are easy to eat with one hand.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Good idea.

**STEPHANIE:** Yeah. Good idea. And depending on the age of the kids, you could have them get involved with that as an activity. So skewers. So you can make fruit skewers. Having trail mix. Kids love to make trail mix, and you can do coconut flakes and sunflower seeds and lots of unsweetened, dried fruit with a variety of raw nuts. Making cookies. You can make raw cookies, so you don't even have to bake them. You just need to make up the dough. Or Larabar style energy bars or balls—

**MARYN:** Yeah. That's a great idea.

**STEPHANIE:** - are really easy. Just put everything in the food processor. The key is having things available that you can eat with one hand.

**MARYN:** Sure.

**STEPHANIE:** And making it so that you can grab it. So if you're upstairs in your home nursing your newborn at midnight, 2:00, 4:00, and 6:00 and the food is in the kitchen, you're not going to go get it.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** So create a space where that's available.

**MARYN:** Yeah. That's a great idea.

**STEPHANIE:** And then there are—I talked about don't eat processed foods. But there are actually a lot of raw products, if you go to the raw food section of your store where they're prepackaged but minimal ingredients and all whole foods based bars and cereals and granolas and kale chips and crackers. So that you can get a nutrient dense, enzyme rich, portable, shelf stable snack that has a lot of nutritional value, so that you're not reaching for Oreos or chips. Things like that. That are not going to provide you with what you need.

**MARYN:** Right. Yeah. That's a great idea.

**STEPHANIE:** And it's interesting for me—this is a little bit TMI. But we're in the birth community. But after my daughter was born, she was in the NICU because she developed an infection. And new mom, I was pumping because I—they wouldn't allow me to feed her with a bottle. And I would bring my milk, which hadn't yet come in or wasn't supposed to have come in, up to the nurse's station, so that they could store it or do whatever they needed to do for me. And then the nurses, every single time, would comment on what I was bringing them. They couldn't believe how much of it there was considering my milk hadn't come in, how rich and creamy it was, the color. They said—they're used to seeing a lot of premies and the moms are bringing milk in. And they

were telling me that the milk—the other milk that they would see would be watery and thin and pale. And we all know what we eat goes into our breast milk.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** So it's really important to seek out those rich, hardy, nutrient-dense foods when we're looking to have our body create a substance to fuel our child.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Right? That's pretty amazing when you put it like that. Yeah. Yeah. Well, I always say too that the obvious is your foundation for nutrition whether it's preconception or even in pregnancy that, ideally, allows you to have the resources to make milk. It's really hard to start from scratch. So if you really haven't taken great care of yourself during a pregnancy and, unfortunately, a lot of women don't, but our bodies are somewhat forgiving. And we still are able to birth. But breastfeeding can just be an absolute nightmare. And, of course, there is many reasons for when breastfeeding is hard. But just sort of basic. Basic nutritional the way through is what we're talking about.

**STEPHANIE:** Right. And so from a scientific perspective—and I'm also not a scientist. But I do do research. What can we control about breastfeeding? We can control skin-to-skin contact.

**MARYN:** Right.

**STEPHANIE:** We can control, to some extent, how well rested we are, right? So for a new mom, you might not be getting a lot of sleep, but you can be off your feet as much as possible.

**MARYN:** Sure.

**STEPHANIE:** And we can control what goes into our bodies. We can't control our babies latch. We can train them for it to be different, but we can't really control it. We can't necessarily control some of the deeper things that are going on that might prevent our bodies from producing milk or from having a really strong supply. But we really can control what goes into our body.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Gosh. That is perfectly put. And a great way, I think, to end this podcast just because that's exactly, I think, what we both believe, which is we have so much power. We certainly don't control so much of this process, but we do have power in certain areas. And nutrition is for sure one of them. So thank you so much for talking with us today. I think this has been awesome, and we'll have to schedule some more time together.

**STEPHANIE:** Thank you. I would love that. It's at least a great excuse for us to catch up with each other.

**MARYN:** I know. With the world listening, but that's okay.

**STEPHANIE:** That's okay. We'll try to keep it professional.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Well, I think we did pretty well. So I am actually going to repeat your website that way people can contact you there. Stephanie's website is [primarilypaleo.com](http://primarilypaleo.com). And, again, she's available there for consults even online through Skype whatever. So if you're listening from afar, you can certainly contact her. And I know she would be glad to help you. So thanks so much for listening, everybody, today. Have a great day. Be sure to check out the Indie Birth website for everything new. We have our Wise Woman Circle going strong. Perhaps Stephanie will contribute a call to that. But this week we had Laura Shanley. We had Stephanie Dunn and Gail Hart this month. So we are just rolling with so many great speakers and topics for you. So check out the Wise Woman Circle amongst other offerings. Have a great day.

(closing music)