

(introductory music)

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MARGO: All right. Hi, everybody. Welcome to the “*Well, Actually...*” podcast, a production of the Indie Birth Association. And I am Margo Blackstone, your host. And today I have a very special guest that I have been really excited about talking with for a bunch of months now, and we finally have found time to connect and to chat. So welcome today. Our special guest Jena la Flamme. Welcome, Jena.

JENA: Thank you, Margo. Very happy to be here.

MARGO: Awesome. So before we dive in, I’m going to just tell you a little bit about her, so you have some context. Jena la Flamme is an expert in pleasurable weight loss and unshakeable body confidence. She’s the author of *Pleasurable Weight Loss: The Secrets to Feeling Great, Losing Weight, and Loving Your Life Today* and the founder of the Pleasurable Weight Loss movement. Her profound teaching shows that pleasurable weight loss is neither a contraction nor an oxymoron. And I’m going to hopefully get to talk with her a lot about how this connects with pregnancy which maybe isn’t apparent right off the bat from this short bio. But I am so excited to talk with her. And let me tell you a little bit—more about her before we dive in. And I think you’ll see the connection here.

So she learned to trust the wisdom of her female body and to trust pleasure and then came the peace with food. Her figure and her body image transformed. And then since then, Jena has devoted her life to showing women around the world how to be in tune with the innate wisdom of their bodies and how they choose to be at peace with food while feeling great every step of the way. She takes a fierce stand for all women who take pride in themselves and their feminine nature, which is super badass, and I’m so glad she is joining us today. So welcome again, Jena.

JENA: Thank you.

MARGO: So I guess before I ask you my first question I wanted to say just a little bit about how I found you. I had a faithful friend, who recommended your book, *Pleasurable Weight Loss*, in a group that I was in. And like most women, I’ve had my own issues with food and dysfunctional eating and messed up body image. And I’ve been on the past lose—trying to lose weight on and off throughout my life. And so I thought, “Oh boy. Another weight loss book,” but this was someone I really trusted. And I really respected her sort of holistic approach to things. And so I sort of felt that

call in me and that resonance and felt like, “Okay. This one maybe is different.” And so I ordered your book, I think, the next minute. And I’m so glad that I did. And as I was reading it for my own purposes and trying to heal my own relationship with food and my body, I was just underlining things. And I was like, “This connects so deeply to the work I do as a midwife.” And so I’ve been recommending your book to lots of people and reached out to you to say, “Hey, can you talk to me more about these connections?” And so I’m so grateful that you agreed to do this. And I’m excited to hear what you think about some of these observations I made while I was reading your book.

JENA: Me too. Very excited to be here.

MARGO: Awesome. So my first question for you or first topic I wanted to sort of dig into was this idea of the female animal that you talk about. I’m kind of going to let you talk about what that is. But I felt like that—this approach, this idea of the female animal is so fitting for pregnancy because women when they’re pregnant often feel their physicality so much more acutely. Their hunger is more intense. And their body just—they have so much awareness of what’s happening in their bodies and so much more and so much newness is happening.

JENA: Yeah.

MARGO: And so that shift to thinking about my body as her, as sort of my female animal, really helped me think about my own body. But can you tell us about what that concept is? And what are the best ways to tap into that—to our female animal?

JENA: Okay. How I came to have this understanding about the female was after more than 10 years of really struggling with my body and hating with my—hating my body. I started being bulimic when I was 14. And I first thought I was fat when I was 12. And I say thought I was fat because, at that point, I wasn’t. I was a healthy girl with this idea that I was fat was just—yeah. Complete conditioning. I had seen adult women say they were fat. And I’d absorbed this collective obsession with being fat, being thing, and just like a child—what they see around them is what they become, and that’s what I became. So by 14, I was hating my body. I was bingeing. I was purging. And I look back now, I was just a barely growing child, who was doing this destructive act of eating with guilt and eating too much in a hurry and secrecy and sticking my fingers down my throat. It was a really sorry sight. And I really suffered with that for a long time.

Eventually, I stopped the purging part, but I kept bingeing. And that’s when I did gain weight. And I—oh, I really tried to control myself. I went to nutrition school. I learned about nutrition. I thought that would help. Then I was just bingeing on health food. And it seemed like an uncontrollable part of me that just wouldn’t be satisfied and had to overeat to feel something. So when that changed was when I was complaining, as usual, “Oh my god. My body. I want to be—I don’t like my body. I want to lose this

weight, but I don't know how to control myself." And my teacher said, "I know why you're struggling with your weight." I was like, "Why?" He said, "It's because you're not listening to her." And I was like, "Who?" He said, "Your body." He said, "There are two of you. There's your mind and your body. And your body is an animal. Literally, a warm-blooded, furry creature. An animal. And it's not an it. She's a she. Your body is a female animal. And she's a living, breathing, wise, intelligent, decision-making animal that like all animals in nature naturally knows how to eat, when to stop, when she's full, when she's had enough. You wouldn't imagine a monkey in the forest not knowing how to eat. It's preposterous. All animals, in nature, they know how to eat to be in balance, so does your body. The problem is you haven't been listening to her. The problem is you haven't been respecting her."

And oh, Margo, it was like ah. In the gut. And I felt these ears perk up on the side of my head, like critter ears. And this voice inside saying, "Hey, he's right. Listen to this guy. You are being mean to me. You don't—you put me down. You don't respect me. You don't admire me. You don't listen to me. And you haven't given me a chance. You just think I'm bad and wrong and punish me. And I'm smarter than you've been giving me credit." And that was defining moment. That changed my life. That I wish to awaken every women listening right now that there's two of you. There's your mind and your body. And your body is an animal. And if you're pregnant right now, you are probably acutely aware that there's an animal growing inside you. And as Margo was saying, this is a time when the physicality, the animal nature, is really pushed to the surface. And we feel this force that is greater than the mind. And the mind doesn't make that baby, that conscious, confident mind that can add up numbers and read sentences in books. It's not her. It's the animal. It's a creature inside of you.

And really, pregnancy is the ultimate magic trick. It's like wow. Amazing. Holy shit. Let the mind be humbled. It's really a lot about the humbling of the mind. The mind that thinks it knows better. And oh my gosh. All the women that have argued to me, "I'm not attractive. I'm not beautiful." And it's like some dictator in their mind passing the judgment on the body. And it's like, "Who are you to be so all on a high and pushing this body down low?" It's really not personal. It's what we see in the patriarchy. It's what we see with the environmental injustice. "Oh, Mother Earth. Fuck her. Mine her. Poison her rivers. It doesn't matter. She's there for us to use." That's what we've indoctrinated—been indoctrinated with with our bodies. "Oh, the body. You can just use it. Abuse it. It's yours to do what you want with."

No. It's not. This is a turning point that it's through the wins and the struggle that change everything. And it makes everything a struggle is getting through pregnancy will be easier, more enjoyable when you can relax into this humbling of the mind. And this surrender that maybe somebody knows more than you. Thoughts and feelings. And she takes of sensations. And this is the gist of it is that her intelligence is all about

feelings. And it's about—in the simplest terms, we feel good. We feel bad. If it makes you feel good, expansive, enlivening, providing safety, and thriving, and consummation of life or it's something—cause of contractions, pain, stress, (inaudible), suffering. Your body knows. At all times, your body knows. And it's when your mind goes against that and then things get really complicated. And that's what happened to us is that we've been indoctrinated. If it feels good, probably bad for you. It feels good. You should probably feel guilty about it. It feels good. Don't tell anyone. Let's just let that be your guilty secret.

And in nature, the opposite is true. If it feels good, good for you. If it feels good, it's health giving. If it feels good, that's your ticket for survival and try and go for it. After you evolved, as humans, everything that felt good was healthy. Lovemaking, food, fire, sunshine, babies. It's just like wow. There was no such thing as an unhealthy pleasure. Now in the modern day, we have junk food. We have computers. Facebook addiction. We have so many complexities that it takes more discernment. If it feels good, it's good for you and yes. But let's look at it closer. Eating a pint of ice cream. Does it feel good in the moment? But it has a hangover. You have a sore belly right away. Sugar breakouts. Sugar headache. Hormonal upset. Okay. Eating a whole pint of ice cream in a binge actually doesn't feel good. If you're distinguishing between true pleasure and counterfeit pleasure. The true pleasure is (inaudible), sustainable. It's like Mother Earth itself. It gives. It gives. It allows you to have more of it.

Counterfeit pleasure is one—overspending on a credit card. It's easy and (inaudible). You have a bad feeling afterwards. Having a whole bottle of wine by yourself. You feel the effects. You know the difference between true and counterfeit pleasure. But we blur them, and we let ourselves feel guilty. And we put them all in one lump. Tuning into your animal is to really understand the difference, to include the true pleasure. And that's when your body says, “Yep. I want the foods that are good for me. And I don't want the crap. Yeah. I love to be active because that's really fun. Or I love meditation because I find the silence (inaudible).” Whatever it is. The things that are good for you become what you enjoy, the most pleasurable. The things that aren't health giving, you're like, “Ugh. I put away. No thank you.”

So this is what we're talking about. A lifestyle of not needing to shift too much or mentally strategize but listening to the animal body, supporting your body, and the more you can relax, the more your body feels safe. The more your body is willing to let go of weight. It's willing to have that glow—the fear of it's okay to be beautiful and sexy and get attention. And you just feel better and better the rest of your life basically.
(inaudible)

MARGO: Yeah. That's a good segue, I think, into the second question I had for you. And I can hear you pretty well. There's moments where you're sort of fading in and out. I don't know—

JENA: Oh okay. I hear—thanks for letting me know.

MARGO: Cool.

JENA: (cross talk)

MARGO: That's all right. Okay. So the second question I had for you was—so we need pleasure. I really love that piece of your book, obviously, *Pleasurable Weight Loss*. That's a huge piece of what you're talking about. And you've mentioned a little bit briefly so far. And that we can choose healthy and unhealthy versions of pleasure or the counterfeit and true as you were sort of making this distinction.

JENA: Mm-hmm.

MARGO: And so I guess part of what I took away is that we need to use that discernment that we have and choose the things that are true pleasures for ourselves. And my question for from my midwife brain is so what does this mean for the pregnant woman who comes to me and says food isn't enjoyable to her anymore. She's not finding pleasure in food, or it feels like a job for her to eat because she's hungry all the time. What might I be able to say to that woman? Or what might you say to that woman who is listening who says, "Oh, the idea of pleasurable eating is awesome. But I'm not finding a whole lot of pleasure in eating right now"? Or she has morning sickness or whatever that looks like. I'm curious what you're going to say.

JENA: Well, that's a few different—(inaudible). Let me ask you professionally. Why is a pregnant woman hungry all the time?

MARGO: You're asking me why pregnant women are hungry all the time.

JENA: Yeah.

MARGO: Not all of them are. But I would say a good number of them end up eating every 2 or 3 hours when maybe they were used to being able to go—if they weren't tapped into their female animal before pregnancy and maybe were used to skipping meals and going longer than maybe—I hate to use the word should because I'm not in their body. But someone who eats 2 meals a day and is running around and doesn't have to listen—and maybe her female animal is being quieter. I don't know. Before pregnancy and then they're pregnant. And now they're eating 3 meals a day and 3 snacks a day and they're waking up at 2:00 in the morning hungry and needing food to get through the night even, say, at the end of pregnancy.

JENA: Professionally, do you think that is really the body authentic craving? Or is that compensation that they need to eat that much? Feel that they need to eat that much?

MARGO: That's such a good question. Part of why I wanted to talk to you. I don't know. I mean I have one daughter, who I was pregnant with. And so I only have my own—my one experience of a full term pregnancy. And for me, I definitely was more hungry. I needed more food than I need when I'm not pregnant. So I don't know. I've only been in my body, but that certainly felt that way to me. That I needed to eat more frequently and, obviously, larger amounts. I never did feel like eating was a job. So that isn't really a question from my personal experience. But I do hear that from women who are just sort of exhausted with the process of having—of feeling like they need to feed themselves so frequently. They're just like, "Oh, I don't have time for the things I want to have time for because eating has become this full time job." And I feel like these are often women who, before pregnancy, maybe weren't nourishing themselves as much, and it's difficult for them to now be (cross talk). I don't know.

JENA: Got it. Got it. All right. Well, so first of all, compassion. If you can relate with this, I feel you. And I completely understand as someone who has—I was going to say I'm single. I'm married, but right now my husband is away. And I'm—I feel like a single person when I'm alone. And how tempting it can be to skip meals and something like the coffee is an appetite suppressant. You can go on stimulants. And you can eat less. You can be up in your head. You can be effective and fast and get things done. And I see the (inaudible) in that. And it seems like having a child is this ultimate surrender to the animal. You're on her level now. And she—now it's—just like in PMS a woman is more sensitive, and she's often more intuitive. And stuff that will trigger her that will come to the surface, it can be there all month. It's just now she's sensitive enough that it gets through.

And it might get—come through in an exaggerated way in more a trigger, but, actually, there is something there. So I feel like that same metaphor here. It's coming through like whoa. Food is taking so much attention. Okay. Maybe it feels excessive right now, but maybe there is some medicine there that's what you really need is to ground and pay attention to the elements, the water, the fire, the earth as they make up the food, as you are doing something sublimely magical which is creating life from scratch. You should be so lucky that you're hungry, and you've got a good appetite. And you're feeding your baby and—you know? That's great. Are you really going to criticize your body? Right now it's like the body just needs respect. Respect the animal. She's making a baby. Oh, hail, the female creature, right? It's amazing. It's one egg, one cell—combines as one cell and grows in the womb all the way to a miraculous child that can then live a hundred years. Wow.

And you're complaining that you need to eat 7 times a time including (inaudible)? Just get to the big picture of this is—your body is your teacher right now. There's a reason she wants to eat 7 times a day. Let's just trust it's a good reason. Be curious. Okay. You want to eat 7 times a day? What snacks do you really want? What food do you really want for dinner? When you wake up at 2:00 a.m., as much as any snack, what do you—let me just give it to you animal as you're asking for it. And you may find when you give yourself full permission to want that snack you realize just put a spoon into your partner and like just (inaudible) a snack or something. You don't really want snacks, if you're allowed to have it. If you're not allowed to have it, forbidden fruit has that pull. I'm not supposed to—oh, rebellious. Yeah. Okay. I want it.

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

JENA: If you say, "I can have whatever I want. I can—my animal is free to follow her instincts. For these 9 months, she has carte blanche to (inaudible) here because she's making a baby." And let me be curious and respectful then there's a good possibility. How does that sound?

MARGO: Mm-hmm. Yeah. I think something that came to mind while you were just responding was that there is such a lack of respect. And this idea that women can do it all and have it all, and this is a really interesting time that we live in. I have a women's studies degree, and so I'm not criticizing that—the feminism movement or anything. But just this idea that I feel like I see a lot of women who think, "I can get pregnant, and my life will be the same until I have the baby," as opposed to taking really seriously this job of—you were saying. Our female animal is creating a baby from scratch, and it's a big job. And it's not something that happens while we're continuing full throttle necessarily with our other things we've been up to. It does take time and effort, and it's a—at least part time job.

JENA: Mm-hmm.

MARGO: And maybe more than a part time job if someone hasn't been really practicing self care and listening to her body before pregnancy. Thank you for that.

JENA: You're welcome. And just one more thing to say in that it can be that the reason you don't want to feed yourself 7 times a day is because you want someone else to feed you 7 times a day. You want help. And you want support. And I am so blessed I married a man whose dad owns restaurants, and he grew up from the time he was a teenager working in the kitchen and has this sense that every meal needs to be a masterpiece. Just of the mouth and visually. He cooks for me all the time. I manifested that. What can I say? I told the universe, "Please. I want my food to be supported." And anyway, I am a lucky woman. you might not have that available. And then looking for you, perhaps, you could inspire someone. But there's—I mean let me say where

there's a will, there's a way. If you make it nonnegotiable that you need support, you're going to find a way. You need inspiration. Eating 7 times a day and it being a drag is not pleasurable.

MARGO: Right.

JENA: This is one of those things that you need to figure it out. Get support. Get someone to help you. Call on your sisters. Yeah. Find a way to love it. It really is one of those things. You find a way to (inaudible) eating. I call it pleasurable eating. Connecting with your animal, first and foremost. "Darling, we're going to eat together now." Super intimate. "Body, my creature, my female animal, you and I are going to eat together now." Keep on. See inside her as you eat. As you taste it. As you smell it. And having a sensory experience of the food with the 5 sense while breathing and relaxing. I could go into great detail. I'm trying to give a 60-second encapsulation. There's a process called pleasurable eating which when you—you do notice so much more, and you get more pleasure. And then you actually need to eat less because you're more satisfied because you had so much pleasure out of what you got. It sounds too good to be true, but it actually is scientific and works for weight loss and just—just enjoy your food in pregnancy. You digest better. You assimilate better. So it's definitely better for baby. How does that sound?

MARGO: Yeah. Doesn't that sound great? That brought to mind something I have started doing really recently. Like this month recently. I made a really big, fun batch of all organic, no refined sugar—are you familiar with fat bombs? Fat bombs. Coconut oil and peanut butter and just a tiny bit of maple syrup and sea salt. So I made these really fun essentially peanut butter cups but with good, organic ingredients. And I've been bringing them with me to prenatal appointments. So I just love what you said about the asking for support to—whether that's from your midwife or from your community or getting together with people and cooking big batches of freezer meals together. And we talk about that a lot in the postpartum time, in the midwifery world at least. But I think prenatally is just as important. So I really love that you said that, and it makes me think of some more fun ideas I'm going to try incorporating into my practice and my community.

JENA: Great.

MARGO: Yeah. That's a great point. I'm trying to prioritize my questions here because I have so many of them, and we have our finite amount of time. But let's see. Okay. So I feel like you've already touched on this a little bit. So maybe let's just see what you think. But it's a big question that I have as a midwife. So overeating is the focus of your book. And I've—like I've said to you, I would love if you wrote a pregnancy specific one one day. So I'm hoping that that's (cross talk).

JENA: Thank you. Thank you. Okay. I will.

MARGO: But I am curious about something I feel like I see a lot in my work. Sort of the other side of the coin. So someone being like, “Oh, I’m so hungry. I’m eating 7 times a day.” And then the other side of the coin, being that we live in this world where we’ve been conditioned into restrictive eating, and we’re focused on depriving ourselves. And we’re afraid of pleasure. And so I see a lot of the women I see when are pregnant these beliefs and fears seem to overshadow their appetite. But I don’t know because I’m not in their body again. I don’t want to presume to know more than them. But it seems like there’s a segment of the population at least that I work with who that seems to be happening. So can you talk a little bit about that? And what you might say to that? Is it afraid to eat—maybe the amount that her body is asking her to? Or maybe isn’t hearing the cries of her female animal?

JENA: Yeah. Tell me a little bit more of what you’re noticing. Describe her. Give me a 60-second population.

MARGO: Describe this woman to you. This woman may be—I don’t know. Okay. I’ll make one up kind of. This is an amalgamation of a bunch of different clients I’ve had. So maybe has 3 or 4 kids already. And is pregnant again. And I ask her to do a food journal to share with me if she’s so inclined. And she gives it to me, and then she says, “I’m just not—I don’t have time. I’m not that hungry.” And she’s maybe eating a bowl of cereal for breakfast and a quick half a sandwich or a sandwich for lunch and sort of—what I would consider sort of a skimpy dinner for even a not pregnant person. And she’s like, “Well, I’m just not that hungry.” And she’s really not gaining weight super well. And maybe she has a history of having early babies, which is—some at least anecdotal and some scientific evidence to show that not eating enough foods—even early term babies so like 36, 37 week babies who then have a hard time latching and nursing. And it’s just an optimal picture. So someone who says—who even has a history that makes us think, “Well, maybe you’re not getting enough.” And she’s saying she’s just not that hungry, and she doesn’t have time. And she doesn’t see it as a problem.

JENA: Okay. Okay. So I guess it’s asking permission. What degree of feedback can I give you? How—yeah. To what degree do you want to hear what I have to share? And that may not be the most elegant way to say it. But basically getting her permission to really tell it as you see it. And then if you see that to say, “Hey, I’m noticing that—I believe you’re under eating. It’s my professional opinion observing you that you’re under eating. And that you’re putting your child at risk here. And that it seems like you’re scared. And I have so much compassion for you here. Can we talk about what’s going on beneath the surface?” And I mean telling someone they have a problem that they think they don’t have is definitely not going to go anywhere.

So it would be clear with a sensitivity. So what's on the other side of this is women—this is so much pressure on us to be thin. And the horror stories I hear of what parents say to their children is just—it's child abuse in terms of telling a child that their body is not good enough. That they're fat. That they're thin. Just commenting. Obsession on the body. It's really not okay. It's not appropriate. It's definitely a form of misogyny and objectifying the woman's body as if she's the cattle or the sheep or some part of the family farm, and her body is under the ownership of the patriarchy. It's not okay. And so many of us have internalized beauty can only be this way. We can only be acceptable if we're small, if we're thin, if we eat less. And then if we're successful at that and we're rewarded for being thin, then all the more we need to stick to that. And this woman—this is you missing—my heart goes out to you. And I've been that way. I was bulimic. Same thing. It's really doing something that your body does not want to do. It's just controlling. It's obviously a whole different extreme example.

But I would say the—what's available if she's being controlling is to—or the fear is understandable. The conditioning. The mixed up messages that have come in. The beliefs. It's not your fault that you're doing this. And there's some leap of faith that there's another way where you can truly drop in to the primal, physical animal intelligence. That instinct. That self preservation instinct. And that you can live not only through your head controlling your body but through your body guiding. And that can include, especially in pregnancy, eating more. And yeah. I would say lean into that fear. And what you have to gain by becoming more animal and wild and less controlled and more instinctual is so worth it. And it's worth the overshooting the mark a bit and not getting it perfect. And we're not looking for perfection. We're just looking for authenticity. And you're allowing your body to be half the leader of your life. This is a critical time to do it.

MARGO: Yeah. And I would say your book is such an awesome source of some of these exercises too when someone is committed to taking that leap. And you talk about diversifying the pleasure portfolio, I think is what you—I think you quoted (inaudible). And getting—looking at our sources of stress and all of these pieces of self care that we talk about. But I feel like your fear book has helped me reframe it as not just a mental health thing. And it makes it easier for me to talk to people about it being—like you said, it makes us better able to digest our food. And it's—maybe could help someone in this situation who is just, in their pregnancy, starting to question some of these beliefs they've had about their body and about what's okay and getting her in touch with the female animal maybe for the first time in her life.

JENA: Sure.

MARGO: So yeah. So your book is, I think, a great starting point.

JENA: Yes. It's called *Pleasurable Weight Loss: The Secret to Feeling Great, Losing Weight, and Loving Your Life Today*.

MARGO: Yeah. Yeah. And I always have a copy in my midwifery office.

JENA: Oh, that's sweet.

MARGO: People that I've mentioned it to are like, "Oh, how does that relate to pregnancy?" I'm so glad I'll be able to point them to this podcast. This is why. It's the same.

JENA: Mm-hmm.

MARGO: So yeah. So I guess this is sort of an extension of that question. And so I don't know how much you want to talk about it or not. But I definitely want to ask more specifically. So something I struggle with as a midwife is striking a balance—or maybe there isn't a balance. Maybe I've been approaching it in not quite the right way. But sort of for the sake of discussion, striking a balance between trusting a mom's intuition around her eating and her instinctual eating and then feeling like she might need guidance and some level of prescription around amounts of servings per day. So, of course, there's the official ACOG, the obstetrician perspective, and they say pregnant women need this many servings of this and this many servings of that and this many calories. And then there's this other approach, but it's a similarly prescriptive approach that a lot of midwives use, which is the Brewer diet. And Dr. Brewer did this really fantastic work looking at how whole food—essentially, it's not rocket science, right? It's a whole foods diet and letting—giving women access to good food if they were perhaps really struggling. A lot of the women he (inaudible) were poor, lived in the inner city, were women of color, and they didn't have great access to food. So giving women access to whole foods when they were pregnant improved their pregnancy outcomes.

JENA: Totally. Totally.

MARGO: Like no shit, right? So nothing terribly exciting. But I've been guilty of—especially when there is someone who maybe gives me back a food journal and it seems like maybe not enough food. I'm certainly—I've certainly said, "Look here. Look at this Brewer diet checklist. It has these different servings, the different categories of food. And let's see how many servings you're missing, or if there is any categories overall that you're maybe not getting enough of consistently." Using it as sort of a benchmark and we talk a little bit about it in our childbirth education class. Our whole first week is about pregnancy. And a huge chunk of it is nutrition. And I do a lot of nutritional work with clients suffice to say. But I've used that as a tool, but I also, as I'm reading your book and even before, I didn't always feel the most comfortable doing that because I do believe that we have what we need. And so I guess I'm just looking for

some wise words about how to either find that balance or if I should be directing all of my efforts into talking with someone about their instinctual eating (cross talk) moving through pregnancy instead.

JENA: Okay. So I think it's both and. I think there's this thing called instinctive therapy. They do these tests in Germany where they put out just this whole huge buffet for people. And it was like a special experiment where people over a long period of time could anything they wanted. And they found out at the beginning people ate junk food. The (inaudible) and the refined things. But over time, they came to eat the whole foods. When you're really eating for pleasure, whole foods make you feel better.

MARGO: Right.

JENA: Healthy food makes you feel better. The unhealthy food—okay. You can get a short term like, “Oh, sugar rush.” But it really is the case that whole foods—it's just obvious. You get the whole nutrition. You get the less refined crap where they make more money telling you refined things. It just makes sense that back to nature. Whole foods is the way to go. So I think there's a trap on the fat thing. That a lot of people have this fat phobia. A lot of women have this. “Oh, don't put too much oil in it.” I'm the opposite. I would say I put oil on everything. And love butter. And don't have that fat phobia. And I really think the fat phobia—yeah. It's a really unhealthy virus. So if you have that in yourself, that's something you really need to be aware. And like you said, the under eating. If you're skimping in the fat department, that's a really red flag and just completely unscientific. And don't do that. Take care of your baby. Take care of yourself. Don't be—don't fall for the propaganda on being scared of fat.

MARGO: Totally.

JENA: But in terms of the Brewer's diet, it just sounds to me like you're offering education. It doesn't sound like you're proselytizing like a diet obsession. It sounds like you're trying to use it diplomatically as an educational tool. And I think teaching by individuality at the same time. Everyone is different. Here's a framework of high quality food for you to find your—where you are in the scale. But I think intuitively it sounds helpful. And then to teach the pleasurable eating and instinctive eating at the same time.

MARGO: Yeah. Awesome. Yeah. It's a—I like that. A both and. And sort of this back and forth with both. And cool. That's super helpful for me. So I wanted to talk about sexy stuff. Okay. So I love in your book how you talk about sexual anorexia. And you were talking about, obviously, more than food in your book and finding pleasure in all these different places. And, of course, then we have to talk about sexual pleasure since that's one of the most pleasurable things we can participate in. So—and you talk about regularly orgasming and finding ways to fully embrace your sexuality and how that

makes it harder to be in this controlling mindset and this deprivation mindset and less likely to be driven to self destructive behavior. And you talk about dopamine, and it's all really cool and scientific and great.

So as I was reading this part, I was really underlining a lot since we talk so much about oxytocin and the release of oxytocin. Obviously, it's the hormone that we release when we orgasm, and the hormone that makes our uterus contract and get the baby out during labor. And all the other fields that are also looking at this obviously. Oxytocin is a hot topic at the moment. I don't pretend to know much about it beyond my realm of labor and birth. But—so I'm wondering—I definitely believe that orgasming regularly and this feeling sexy and giving ourselves permission to feel sexy helps ensure a smoother labor and birth from just anecdotally seeing that. But a lot of women struggle with their libido and changing body image in pregnancy. And so I'd love your advice around how to talk to mamas about this need, this hunger, and how do we approach this topic with pregnant women. Some women say, "I'm horny all the time. And sex is the best ever. And my husband loves it." And whatever. Then other women are like, "I would never want to see a penis ever again in my life."

JENA: Oh really? Wow.

MARGO: So there's a wide spectrum there. But I'm just curious what your thoughts are.

JENA: Well, hmm. I think, again, so much of it is conditioning. I'm just guessing that the one who is saying, "I don't want to touch a penis again," that there's been subliminal conditioning from childhood that pregnancy and hottest sex of your life don't go together. It's some trauma somewhere along the line that has made this disconnect. And I would hold the example—the one that says, "I'm horny all the time, and my husband is so into it," is that being the natural way. That being the way nature wants it. Nature wants you, in your pregnancy, to be (inaudible), to be orgasmic, to be—from what I understand, having studied the documentary *Orgasmic Birth* and there's another similar one, that birth—and that orgasm is the way the baby got in. And orgasm can be the way the baby gets out. And that's about a high state of presence and awareness of sensation, of full embodiment, and this can be the most tantric, amazing time of your life when you are creating life. Wow. You can just have your head held high. You can have this self esteem that certainly no other man can have where you just worship yourself for being life itself. Creating. And you worship that part of you where it happened which is your pussy. And since they're reasoning like, "Oh, I don't want a dick near me," that's possibly—maybe she doesn't want a dick. Maybe she wants a tongue. Or maybe she wants something a lot softer, more sensual. Maybe she just wants a feather. A feather to caress her yoni for hours and she doesn't want the penetration in that way.

That may be the body's way of saying, "I actually like how the sex is. But it doesn't mean that I want the sex." It means there needs to be an evolution of the quality, and that can start with yourself and your own self pleasuring. You know how to touch yourself in that sensual, beautiful way. Of course, it's going to change and be more sensitive. I can certainly say from what I've heard from sex positive people who have really enjoyed pregnancy sex—(inaudible) is something amazing available. Your hormones are so heightened. I don't know. I'm definitely looking forward to it myself.

So don't miss out and get help. And I mean you say get help from where. Often, it's hard to know where to go for this. Certainly, you can get help from me on your relationship to your sexuality and allowing that. I know it can be (inaudible). It's really easy to say just like, "Oh yeah. Let yourself get into it," when there can be just such heavy roots and reasons for the suffering so—or for that disconnection. But I will say it is possible. However shut down you may be feeling to fully awaken, fully flower, and like may we all—I saw that in the *Orgasmic Birth* video. They were kissing. She was tongue kissing her hubby while—during the labor in the bath. Did you see that?

MARGO: Oh yeah.

JENA: Right? And I was like, "Oh my god." Just my whole world cracked in two. I had no idea this was possible. And she's actually my friend, Amber Harnell. My belly dance teacher—or let me just say. A belly dance teacher I've known who has three kids told me that she had joint in her labor. And I was like—I really respect this woman. She's a healthy woman, and she found that that's okay. That it was relaxing her. That it was working for her. I was like okay. Respect. What were you going to say?

MARGO: No. That's—yeah. Bringing pleasure into the labor environment can only benefit the smoothness and the effectiveness and—of the labor as far as getting the baby out and as smoothly as possible. So yeah. That's awesome to hear. And that's a great film for people to check out if they haven't seen it. *Orgasmic Birth*. I believe you can stream it on Amazon now for a (cross talk) bit.

JENA: Oh great. Mm-hmm.

MARGO: And the—I don't want to say the flip side of that is a lot of women even who I think are really sex positive and have pretty low stress lives and awesome self care. Some of them do—or a lot of them experience labor as painful.

JENA: Sure.

MARGO: But in that—but then afterwards don't say that it was painful in the way that it was not—it was not traumatic. It was not—it was sort of like—there was real pleasure in that pain, if that makes sense. And that the process of labor and birth was still

ultimately pleasurable. But such a big discussion. I know, for me, I've birthed one baby. And contractions themselves are not pleasurable to me at all. But the actual letting her out of my body, of getting her through my pelvis and through my vagina felt really good.

JENA: Wow.

MARGO: I don't think it was orgasmic, but it was—I would do that part over a thousand times. It was awesome.

JENA: Wow. That's amazing.

MARGO: Yeah. I might not be the best case study just because I wouldn't say I did have a very pleasurable pregnancy. Just I had a lot going on emotionally. And—yeah. So I think I would have a different experience in the future. And I ended up having a very long labor, and I often attribute that to the stress that I was under. And the lack of (inaudible) and the lack of support and the lack of the things that—if I were to be pregnant again, I would put into place because now I have a really clear vision of how much it does affect things.

JENA: Yeah. Now you know better.

MARGO: I know better. Know better, do better. So yeah. So that's really cool. And—

JENA: One last thing to say on that. I was recently at a lecture by the Ecstatic Birth founder, and he was describing a birth. That it was—he didn't use these words. But it was—how I interpreted it was like foreplay. If you're going to fuck before you just stick the dick in there, you want to caress and—oral sex, and I think that's the right way to do it. Is that full build up and it takes 45 minutes for a woman to reach her full peak of engorgement. And that's a great time to go all the way. So she was describing preparing the vagina as if for sex but for the birth. And the first to attune (inaudible). But this was the concept that I was imagining was this opening. But I didn't really ask too many personal questions. But the essence was preparing the tissues. Oh yeah. That she went from having an episiotomy—so being cut open—to the second pregnancy being ripped to the third pregnancy no ripping at all. And this (inaudible) with her births. And in this process of relaxing into it more and going all the way to bringing this direct opening of the vagina. So I thought that was amazing. That was next level for me. I just (inaudible) to go.

MARGO: Yeah. Well, and it's such a—I teach a lot of free birth workshops in my community. And we're having people teach—or Indie Birth workshops in other communities now too through a new program that we're starting this month. And one of the things I talk about is that birth is sexual. And for some reason, this is still such a

foreign concept to people. It's somehow been erased from our understanding. I can't imagine that our ancestors hundreds and thousands of years ago didn't understand that. That that's, like you said, orgasm is what gets the baby, and that's what gets the baby out. The same hormones. It's the same pieces of our anatomy, which aren't pieces at all. It's all interconnected. But you know what I mean. And so—and I really, really, really loved what you sort of were suggesting just that even if someone is not interested sex, they've thought about it previously just to be creative and really listen. Again, just coming back to that listening. What do you—what would be pleasurable? Maybe it's just that you want your partner to give you a massage or whatever.

JENA: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

MARGO: And so I really appreciate you saying that. And I hope people do reach out to you, if they're needing more support and feeling, like you said, closed off. It's important that the people don't feel that way in pregnancy and to do the work.

JENA: Yeah. Totally. Don't guilt yourself for feeling closed down. Just know that it's a process, and it's a worthwhile adventure to heal.

MARGO: Yeah. Well, awesome. I have one last question for you.

JENA: Okay.

MARGO: So I love the way—we're sort of switching gears again. But I love the way that you frame the punishing exercise versus pleasurable movement.

JENA: Mm-hmm.

MARGO: And this is something that I talk a lot with my clients about too, and I've love to just hear what you think about how that relates to pregnancy. And what you might say to someone that—because, again, I feel like a lot of people on one side of the spectrum or the other where either they're like, "I haven't made movement part of my life." And now they're pregnant, and they're like, "Oh, maybe I should do that." Or clients who are super, super active, and now they're pregnant. And they're wondering, "Should I keep being,"—and maybe even they have been doing what I would consider more punishing exercise and how to (inaudible) that in pregnancy into something more healthy. So what are your thoughts?

JENA: Cool. So the whole concept of punishing exercise comes from this no pain, no gain, calories in, calories out model that you just got to work the body. Work hard to burn the fat and build the muscle. And it just—it's a means to an end. It's something that's got to be done. It's very much a factory mentality.

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

JENA: Does that resonate?

MARGO: Yes. Definitely. Which is, I think, what most people are exposed to especially as women. If we're—even people in my family are like, "Oh, I can eat back my calories," or, "Now I get to eat this many because I burned this many." Yeah.

JENA: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So this an instant red flag because it's the mind dictating the burning of calories. I mean what a mental concept.

MARGO: It's very male. Yeah. Very masculine.

JENA: Very male. Very mental. Very disconnected.

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

JENA: And here's the basic essence of one on one to get to know your animal body. Your body's metabolism (inaudible) put into one of two states. In the stress mode or the relaxation mode. In the stress mode, there's a perceived danger. Something I need to protect myself against. This is what you don't want to be in in pregnancy because it translates to that soul in your womb that there's a danger. You want to be in relaxation where you're letting your body that—the baby knows this world is safe. This is a wholesome world. I'm whole, complete, safe, loved, belonging. Life is good. That means digest, assimilate, and burn calories at its peak. So it's about how you feel, and how you feel is not—it can never be measured in number. It's an authentic feeling. Do I feel good? Or do I not? And you always know that truth about yourself and know that you can know it.

So when it comes to exercise, if you're doing exercise that makes you feel stressed out, you don't like the gym. You don't like the sport. You're just like, "Ugh. I'm just doing it from this mental place." You don't really feel for it. If you didn't have to lose weight, you wouldn't do it, then that's a wrong movement I would say. That's actually a really good question. If I was my perfect shape, would I be doing this form of exercise? Yes. Then great. Then I can say a whole hearted yes to everything I do. I do a lot of dance. Partner dance. Belly dance. Hula dance. Different things. Yoga. Pilates. Roller skating. Biking. Making love is great physical exercise. It's not a chore. It's definitely not a punishing exercise. It's a pleasurable movement. So if you think, "No. Nothing will be pleasurable for me," that's just a lack of imagination. That's just being—yeah. Being unwilling to be curious about, "No. What is my body curious about?" All animals like to move. And it can be walking as a first start. That's a great first start. And then maybe it's swimming or roller blading or—dancing is the number one I recommend for all women. And it expands. And I, ideally, challenge you that there is no place for pleasurable—for punishing exercise. It stresses you out. It's counterproductive. Just don't buy into it. And let's define that pleasurable movement. Be creative. Be curious.

MARGO: Yeah. I love that you talked about belly dancing a lot in the book too, I think. Just now that originally—at least as I understand it—I'm not a belly dance expert. But I know that some of the belly dance teachers I know have told me that it originated as sort of a fertility dance.

JENA: Yeah.

MARGO: A pregnancy and birth dance. A way to prepare for labor and birth. And to increase fertility since there's so much action going on near the womb. So I think that's a great—

JENA: Totally.

MARGO: Yeah.

JENA: Yeah. Just to say one thing on that. You imagine women before there were hospitals, before there were drugs and possible surgery, when literally we died—women died in childbirth. And that was just the reality of evolution. And we are the daughters of the ones that survived. And hallelujah. What brilliance, what wisdom. And part of that was having this dance that created the—supported the muscle to do the job.

MARGO: Totally.

JENA: That's genius. So building it into the culture of women doing this dance that creates an incredible dexterity and power in the womb area, in the vagina, and then—just the whole energy of the body. How to move the current through the body and life force—well done, women. So yes. It's my understanding that historically belly dance had that prescriptive function of supporting a woman to be ready for birth without a modern hospital essentially. Yeah.

MARGO: That other piece of doing it with other women and having that amazing sisterhood and that—just that connection through dancing together, I think, is probably part of the magic of that too.

JENA: Mm-hmm.

MARGO: Beyond even the—just the physical—physicality of (cross talk).

JENA: Totally. Totally the empowerment. The sisterhood.

MARGO: Yeah. And being able to dance through labor with the women you've been dancing with. It just feeling like a natural extension of your life as opposed to we have so many things now to prepared us for labor or to do it right. Hypnobirthing and this and that. And while I think all of those things have their place, it's really hard to incorporate

those tools into someone's labor—in your own labor if it's not just an extension of your everyday life.

JENA: Mm-hmm. Totally.

MARGO: That's (inaudible) to prepare women for labor and birth is to do it—what you're suggesting is (inaudible). Already having pleasurable lives leading up to the experience and having support and having natural and pleasurable movement as part of our lives. It's not just another day. But in some ways, it's just another day, and we're utilizing all those tools we've already been (cross talk).

JENA: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Totally. Totally. It's a good excuse to get into it if you're not yet.

MARGO: What's that?

JENA: It's a good excuse to get into it if you're not yet.

MARGO: That's right. Well, I think those are all of my questions. I mean I can come up with 10 more. However, our time is coming to a close. But is there anything else you wanted to share with our listeners before we sign off today?

JENA: I would say let this be an experience—let your pregnancy be an experience of increasing your esteem, increasing your appreciation of the magic of your body, of the cycle of life. That you are a reborn child with wonder and with playfulness and birthing and let your mind be the servant of your body. The devoted, respectful, chivalrous, goddess worshipping mind that holds compassion towards the animal first and foremost. And kindness. Being kind. Being a friend to yourself. Being a friend to your body. That's what counts the most.

MARGO: That's are excellent pieces of advice. And I just want to say thank you again so much. I really deeply appreciate the work that you're doing out in the world. And I'm so grateful to—probably not by any accident come across your work. And so that I can share and try and incorporate some of your ideas into the work that I do and share it with pregnant women. So really, from the bottom of my heart, thank you so much for the work that you are doing.

JENA: You're welcome.

MARGO: And I'm going to try and come up with other ways to rope you into helping us out over here at Indie Birth.

JENA: Sweet. Look. I have something. A special gift for your listeners. May I share it?

MARGO: Yes. Please.

JENA: So I've created an introduction—introductory email course, eCourse, called *Seven Days of Pleasurable Weight Loss*. And it's totally free. It's at pleasurableweightloss.com. And you get these—yeah. You get the first steps. You get the practices. You get some recipes. You get to test it out. And that's completely free. Also the other thing I talk a lot about is unshakable body confidence. So pleasurable weight loss. Again, with pregnancy, it might not sound immediately compatible because it's a time you are intending on gaining weight naturally. So I would still say that the spirit of the process is about things that are going to be really helpful in pregnancy. So you can read between the lines and still clearly understand what's applicable to you and really knowing what's best for your body. I love to talk about unshakeable body confidence too. And that is something I would love every pregnant woman to have. That unshakeable, unshakeable, unshakeable body confidence that arises deep from within independent of the fluctuations of the mind. So that's something—it will—going through the pleasurableweightloss.com will sort of guide you also into the unshakeable body confidence. So that's all there together. My book is on my website, pleasurableweightloss.com/book. You can find my book there, *Pleasurable Weight Loss* and on other places online too. Book stores. And I've got a program coming up called *Six Weeks of Pleasurable Weight Loss* that's an eCourse, an online video community group mentor program—online group mentorship program. And so come over to pleasurableweightloss.com, and you will get in the know of everything that's going on.

MARGO: And I'll post a link to your website along with the podcast when we put it up in the next couple days, so people can find you. Awesome. Well, thank you so much, again, for being with us today. And I look forward to conspiring more with you in the future, I hope.

JENA: Thank you so much, Margo. It's an honor. Good luck, everyone. Stay in touch.

MARGO: Thank you. Until next time. Yeah. Until next time you can find out all the things we're up to over at indiebirth.com. Make sure that you find us on Facebook. And we have lots of awesome articles and photos and different ways to interact with our community every day a couple times a day there. And yeah. As always, if you have ideas for podcasts or things you want us to talk about, myself or Maryn, feel free to get in touch with us at margo@indiebirth.com or maryn@indiebirth.com. We love hearing from you. Thanks, everybody.

(closing music)