

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Hi. Maryn here. Today I'm talking with my friend, Bridget Nielsen. Bridget is—where do I start? Bridget is a beautiful person. She has been a friend of mine and my family's for a long time. And in this context, Bridget is our vegan, vegetarian genius. So Bridget has been vegan for a long time which she talks about on this podcast. But more importantly has been a great consult for me over the years as I've worked with vegan and vegetarian mamas. So I asked Bridget to come on the podcast today to just share her wisdom about ways to make the most of a vegan and vegetarian diet during pregnancy. Ways that we, as birth workers, can support women in this. And overall, just get more educated, more powerful about such a cool topic. So listen in as I talk with Bridget Nielsen. Hey, Bridget, welcome to my podcast.

BRIDGET: I'm so excited to be here. Thank you so much for having me.

MARYN: Me too. I am excited to talk with you today about this whole idea of vegan and vegetarian diets during pregnancy. And I think a lot of our listeners are birth workers, so I think we'll probably be jumping back and forth between how we can support these women and you actually trying to help support the actual pregnant or maybe prepregnant woman that is going down this path. So let's jump right in. I know you have some really great information to share about prepregnancy just from your own research and learning. So go for it.

BRIDGET: Yes. One of the big things that I'm seeing just in talking to you, seeing other mothers, which we'll get into in a minute I'm sure, are something like the deficiencies that come up from just a vegan vegetarian diet especially when the baby is needing a lot more fuel, and the mom doesn't have that much to give. So really one of the big things that has come up as I've done my research is preparation because it's one of those things that, for some reason, I think that vegans—or vegetarians can tend to be on the just in the pocket of being kind of healthy enough for enough having nutrients. And so really packing it in before getting pregnant is going to be key. And one of the big things too is then that we've seen is absorption because one of the—because the toxicity levels of us, of all humans are so high that some of the time even during the pregnancy when it's like, "Okay. Well, I'm deficient in this. Let me start taking more of that," it's not actually bioavailable. And they're not getting the nutrients they need. So in the preparation is actually doing a lot of cleanse and detox before the pregnancy, so

that you can kind of get everything working and moving so that you can really absorb what you need to when the pregnancy actually happens.

MARYN: Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. I mean I'm kind of jumping ahead, but I think of the lack of gut absorption just people in general and even amongst vegans and vegetarians can really affect a pregnancy. It can affect iron levels and all kinds of things. So how do you get someone started in that? What are your recommendations to start that process?

BRIDGET: Yeah. I think some of the best ways—because there's so many different—yeah. Toxins and stuff too that can go into the baby. But through just basic infrared sauna, hot yoga, sweating is one of the best ways to get it out on that kind of level. ON the toxicity level. You can do bentonite clay, activated charcoal. Going into kind of the juice cleansing and stuff might not be as good because we're not wanting people to lose a bunch of weight and kind of go down that route right before.

MARYN: Right. Right. So more of a natural detox?

BRIDGET: Exactly. And introducing, like you were saying, on a gut level different fermented foods and kefir and probiotics and just really creating a regiment around that and then the sweating and the detox will just be able to have the gut ready to do its work for you as well as you're going to be able to absorb and not going to have as many toxins in the way.

MARYN: So when do you recommend people start that? I mean ideally. We all know sometimes people get pregnant, and it's not planned or whatever. But if they can, months before? A year before? What are you recommending?

BRIDGET: Yeah. If, ideally—because you said ideally—

MARYN: Mm-hmm. Ideally.

BRIDGET: I can use that. I would say years before, to be honest. Like where I'm at right now, I'm a couple years in advance, and I'm like, "Okay. We need to really do this," because there's a high amounts of toxins in the body and stuff. So if we could get—I mean even if it's just a few months, that's going to be really helpful. But if we can get some advanced cleansing going on, I think the whole thing is going to be way better for the mother and the child.

MARYN: Yeah. That's really interesting. So natural kind of ideas, like you were saying, like a sauna, sweating. What are some other maybe diet related things you're thinking about?

BRIDGET: Yeah. I mean it's funny because as I've—as I was looking into this to prepare for the—our talk it's—the things that we need on the nutrient level some of the time comes with the detoxification built into it. So if you think of things like chlorella or even parsley or cilantro, those kinds of things are really nutrient dense. They're really what we need. And the funny thing is they actually cleanse us out. So even just incorporating some of those things, like the parsleys and the cilantros into food or into juices and kind of giving the liver a little bit of a gentle detox to get everything going, is going to be just a nice kind of simple way that we can introduce things without going too extreme and being like, "Okay. I need to do a 7-day fast." And it's like no. That's not—I don't know if that's the best.

MARYN: Right. Right. Well, and that's what I love about you, and that's why I wanted to talk about this with you. I think there's tons of people out there that claim to be experts in certain kind of diets. But I find a lot of it to be really extreme feeling for essentially a very nourishing time of life. So I think those recommendations sound really reasonable and—or sound really more like lifestyle based than pumping any kind of supplements or, like you said, doing a heavy juice cleanse. They sound pretty natural.

BRIDGET: And that's really the thing because it's—it is a lifestyle. And when it can be morphed and introduced over time, if that's possible, then it's going to be something that goes through the whole pregnancy and isn't a shock to the body as well. So I think that's important.

MARYN: Sure. And I don't know. You'll have to tell me what you think about this. But yes. We're talking about vegan and vegetarian diets, but there is no reason that people of all diet types couldn't do this as well, right?

BRIDGET: Yeah. Yeah. It's just one of those things where there's—it's more sensitive, I think, to the vegan, vegetarians, for some reason, to their system. But I would recommend this to everyone because there's up to 200 chemicals in the woman's body before birth which then gets passed on and stuff. So it's we're going to need to all do this, but this is just going to be extra advantageous to the segment we're looking at today.

MARYN: Sure. And, of course, the partner as well, right? Ideally.

BRIDGET: Yeah. Because there's that support, right? That's needed that's going on because if the partner isn't on the same page then it makes it a little bit harder probably for the woman especially going into the pregnancy so if it can be a team thing. You guys do that, right?

MARYN: I don't know if we do that. I mean we're definitely—Jason and I are always on the same page of baby creation. But I haven't really gotten on him too much about his diet and things over the years. But that's another topic.

BRIDGET: He does well though. He does well though. I mean he does some cleanses sometimes.

MARYN: Yeah. He does. And we're both frequent green juice drinkers even though we're not vegan or vegetarian. So I think opening up these conversations is really where it's at. Like especially if you haven't had a baby or haven't been pregnant before, just kind of it's the beginning of a coconversation with your partner about important lifestyle things.

BRIDGET: Absolutely. Definitely. Yeah. Go ahead.

MARYN: Yeah. No. I was going to just move ahead unless you had more to add with the preconception segment. Anything else?

BRIDGET: The only other things on the other spectrum of the preconception would be really introducing then, at that point, the good essential fatty acids like the high fat to get that going.

MARYN: Oh, I so agree with that.

BRIDGET: So that we're really extra nourished, so that was one of the big things that I think vegans especially would need whether that's just tons of avocados and coconuts and then really getting in the omega-3s like the chia and the flax and the hemp seeds. So just really packing all of that in, so that we're really—the fat is there to create a baby.

MARYN: Yeah. Well, again, it's why I love you. I feel like that's so reasonable and so balanced. And not that this is a podcast on today infertility or whatever. But I'm sure you've come across people in your line of work that are vegan and really struggling with not being able to conceive. I feel like I see that a fair amount. And I'm not a nutritionist. I'm not a doctor. But I can say that it seems like it often does come back to this lack of fat. There's other factors. What do you think about that?

BRIDGET: I completely agree. And there's a lot of studies out there about the longevity of more of a fat based vegan diet than a fruit based, sugar based vegan diet and especially in this category of creating children especially when we have higher omega-3 or at least balance omega-3 to omega-6, which is challenging because most of everyone across all diet regimes have higher omega-6. But if you do have a balanced omega-3 to omega-6, it ups reproduction potency tremendously. And the birth weight and all those kinds of things too. So really getting in those omega-3s through the chia and the flax are going to be really important.

MARYN: Yeah. I can't wait to talk more about that. You've helped me before. Full disclosure for everybody listening. Bridget has totally been a support for me whenever I have questions, and I have a presentation out there somewhere on the web about different diet types. And Bridget really helped me come up with ideas for vegan and vegetarian diets. So gosh. It's so interesting and complex how well you can do one of these diets. I think the stereotypical way of being vegan or at least—maybe it was in the past, right? Was just salad eaters and that's kind of it. No. Really. I think a lot of people are still kind of living in that world and missing out on, like you're saying, fats or really paying attention to the balance of what they're doing.

BRIDGET: Yeah. I think there's been some—I don't know where it originates but some conditioning around the idea that if it is vegan then it is healthy.

MARYN: Yes.

BRIDGET: And just that. Period. It's like I'm healthy because I am vegan. And that logic is very strange because there's so many other components to it. And like you said, it can be either just the salad eaters. I ate a piece of fruit for lunch. Or it could be the other extreme of I'm just pounding like crazy nutrient lacking carbs of whatever quality. So it's one of these two extremes, and it's like to play this game of vegan, vegetarian. It takes a lot of kind of planning and understanding. And one of the reasons that I think it even exists is to connect more deeply with food, with our bodies, with nature and see what pops. See our relationship to it, what we need, what we can give.

MARYN: Hmm. Yeah. That's really beautiful. Well, maybe we can kind of go off on a little segue for a moment because you said something I did want to talk about. And I actually mentioned it this morning when Margo and I were recording our other podcast. Just that you and I have talked about the fact that being vegan, for example, is a lifestyle choice and a pretty high intensity commitment. And I don't say that judgmentally. I think it's amazing your creations and what you're able to do with food. But kind of being honest about it, I think for people that again maybe think it's just grabbing a piece of fruit for lunch when you're pregnant. The time and energy and effort that I've seen you put into food is amazing. So can you talk about that in a way that—I don't know. We can understand.

BRIDGET: Is empowering?

MARYN: Yeah. Totally. Yes. That.

BRIDGET: So yeah. I mean when we went—okay. I was raised vegetarian. So—

MARYN: I didn't know that.

BRIDGET: - I've been vegetarian—yeah. Yeah. My brother was colic when he was born and from all the formula milks and all that. So all the toxicity, right? That was happening. And so anyways, because of that my family went raw foodist and went really extreme and went—and through that became full vegetarian. So I was raised vegetarian. And with that, at the time growing up, I was healthy. We would juice. We were vegetarian. I was quote healthy. But during that time, I was anemic. I know that I was anemic growing up because as I've gotten more adept at this over the past five, ten years I'm not anymore. And I'm like, "Whoa. I wasn't getting the nutrients I needed," so there's an intelligence to it. So at this point, with where I'm at and kind of going to the next stage of I've been pretty strict vegan for six, seven years, it's like we make 98% of our food. And that's pretty intense, I think, for most people that have busy lives or other kids or whatever. And I mean we make most of our food. I know exactly what I'm doing. I know that I need more of this fat, so I put this into my recipe and do this and do that. And I'm very aware of what I'm missing or what I need more of. And there's a very intuitive relationship that goes with it. And a lot of work. And we have different systems that we've created to where in community settings or in different grouping settings we support each other in making the food and stuff. But it's pretty intensive.

MARYN: Yeah. I mean I wanted to share just running into you Bridget at the store is quite an education. It's happened a handful of times. Bridget's cart is full of all the good stuff and tons of bulk nuts and bulk everything. And essentially raw ingredients that you're taking home to make incredible recipes out of. So yeah. It's not food that's coming in any way formed or packaged already. That's amazing.

BRIDGET: Yeah. Yeah. It is amazing. And so it's one of those things that you don't have to go quite to that extreme. But there does have to be an absolute consideration and education. It's really a self education because it's like well, you're creating your own diet. And I think even if you have different kinds of diets it's like—it's really important for us to know what we're eating and what it's doing to our bodies especially in the category of, "Oh, I'm going to then generate a child from what I'm eating." I think it's just—it's our responsibility.

MARYN: Right. Well, and you talked about intuition. I want to kind of touch on that. Again, Margo and I were talking this morning. Everybody can hear that podcast as well. But we were maybe being a little sarcastic about people that claim intuitive eating because I think there are a lot of people out there doing that. And we run into that with pregnant women. It's like how much do we sort of watch somebody go down a path that isn't super healthy just because they say that's what their body needs versus someone, I think, that has really worked on that as you have. So I wanted to just get your feedback on how you have honed your intuitive skills for your own eating over the years. And what that has looked like or meant to you?

BRIDGET: Yeah. Part of it's experimentation. Part of it's like okay. Introducing certain things, taking away certain things because then it's like whoa. I didn't know that I was anemic necessarily growing up. It was like my bruises would stay longer, but I didn't know because I hadn't been exposed. So it's one of those things where with a little self education and experimentation you're like, "Oh, it feels really good to have that extra chlorella and these deep, rich, green, local, organic salads," or those kind of things. It's like, "Wow. This feels different." So I think part of it's that. On the vegan front, one of the things that puts me in check and I think would be a good indicator is when—do you exercise? And when you exercise hard and you're like building muscle can you build muscle?

MARYN: Like do you get tired or not?

BRIDGET: Do you get tired? And is your body able to create and build muscle? And I think even for a woman that's an important thing because a few years ago I was doing different exercise things. And then I started, again, experimenting and taking some vegan protein powders. And people in the class were like, "Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Your muscles came in. You have definition." And I didn't before. And so it's one of those things that okay. That's just me, and it's fine whatever way that goes. But if I'm going to be creating a child through my body and through my nutrition, I'd better be able to build myself. And so I think that's one of the really important things for vegans and so looking at it in terms of pregnancy getting foods in there that do have actual growth factor. So just coconuts and (inaudible) phytoplankton and certain things that can actually grow a child.

MARYN: Grow a person.

BRIDGET: Exactly. So I think really looking, experimenting with yourself and saying, "Can I grow myself? My physical body? What is feeling like it's missing? What is feeling like it's not?" And it's like we just don't know until we finally get that food or meal that we were missing, and then we're like, "Oh my god. I was missing this." So I think really testing it out and getting a variety of foods and nutrients, and part of it is the cleansing because our body, especially our guts, tell us what we want to eat. So it's like, "Oh, I feel called to eat this salad or this one thing." And it's like when your gut is really healthy and when you're cleansed, you're probably going to want something different. And it's going to be a cleaner—you're going to be a cleaner vessel of that intuitive eating. So I always say you can't listen to your body—what it wants to eat—until you've cleansed it out, given it what it needs, and then it really knows.

MARYN: Yeah. That's really interesting. I think the conundrum, the obvious one, is people in pregnancy that are kind of already in that. They're already pregnant. They're already in it. And just the various issues that come up around whatever it is. Lack of

appetite or craving something that isn't really that great for them or, like I was saying, saying that they're following their body's cues but not getting nearly enough. Not enough calories. Not enough minerals. Not enough of anything. It's a tricky place when the cleansing is not something that can be done.

BRIDGET: Yeah. Definitely. Well, one thing that can—there's a few things that can be done which it's great is even just introducing chlorella. It can nourish and detox in a way that's not going to say hurt the baby as well as the cilantro parsley type thing. That could actually be done during, and it's going to reduce the toxicity levels. Open up the body to receiving and feeling good while not hurting the baby. So there are things that you can do just by introducing some of this healthy stuff. And so that your body is just in a better space.

MARYN: Sure. Yeah. Sure. And especially in food amounts, right? So tiny bits of cilantro in your salad or whatever. People can get crazy about parsley in pregnancy. So do that at your own risk. But honestly, a little parsley in your salad I don't think—it's not going to hurt a healthy pregnancy. We're not talking about drinking gallons of parsley juice.

BRIDGET: No.

MARYN: Yeah. But just little additions to whatever you're doing.

BRIDGET: Totally.

MARYN: Yeah. Those are great recommendations overall. It's a good reminder even for me. Sure. Why not? Why not add some cilantro to my juice or whatever?

BRIDGET: Yeah. Definitely. Yeah.

MARYN: So what other—how does your brain break up the categories of food? If we're talking about pregnancy, we've already talked about the importance of fats. What else is on your checklist for a healthy vegan to make sure that she's getting enough of in pregnancy?

BRIDGET: Right. Great question. Some of the—so the top deficiencies that vegans have—so I kind of look at those, I guess, so that it's like okay. Those are covered. So iron, vitamin D, calcium, B12, omega-3, which we covered in the fats, and then protein. So—

MARYN: Oh man. That's such a good list. I want to talk about all of them.

BRIDGET: Yeah. Let's talk about all of them. So those are the main things that just vegans are missing by themselves let alone creating a kid. So let's start with the easy one, vitamin D.

MARYN: Okay. Yeah.

BRIDGET: Which helps the uptake of calcium. So I guess they go hand in hand, right?

MARYN: Right.

BRIDGET: This is the most simple one. It always freaks me out because it's like all you need is 10, 15 minutes in the sun a day even if it's cold depending on what the region is. Is you just need to get in the sun that long. One thing that people don't know is that vitamin D is a fat based, hormone that sits on the skin. And so after being in the sun, most people go and take a shower, and they wash their skin. And if you wash with soap after you are in the sun, it washes away the vitamin D. So that—

MARYN: That's crazy. I did not know that.

BRIDGET: Right. We aren't taught this. And so that could be one consideration as to why maybe vegans are is it's like just make sure that if you've been in the sun that you don't wash with soap on those parts for up to 24 hours.

MARYN: Great tip. Okay. What about the—again, I guess it's back to the same issue that we started with which is gut absorption, right? Because doesn't that really affect vitamin D. I mean I'm seeing people here in sunny Sedona who by lab values are deficient in vitamin D.

BRIDGET: Yeah. It's true. I mean the thing is too—but the sun also helps the gut health. And so it's one of those things that we've destroyed it pretty bad. Our guts and stuff. So I think it just takes some work and time to rebuild it. But as far as okay, you're already pregnant. What do you do? I mean I think it's just—honestly, the first thing that came to me is well, doing all the things that you need to do. So being in the sun. But honestly, telling your body, being like, “Okay. I'm aware now. I didn't maybe know what I was doing before. Let's absorb this into the skin. Let's feel—let the gut come back alive. Let the gut be nourished by the sun.” I think it's actually going to take conscious reprogramming of what the body has been doing because it's just been kind of running on consciously kind of in defense mode of what it's been going through. And so I think reprogramming it and going like, “Hey, I'm with you now. I'm aware of what we're doing,” is one of those things that if you don't have—if you're already pregnant and you don't have a lot of time to say rework the whole gut system and everything that that's what you got to be doing.

MARYN: Right. And what about a supplement? Do you recommend a vitamin D supplement of any kind?

BRIDGET: Yeah. I mean—yeah. Take the supplement for sure. Take the supplement and sit in the sun as much as you can. So it's do all of it. Do what you can.

MARYN: Sure. Cool. All right. Well, that one was sort of simple. What's next?

BRIDGET: Yeah. Right. Let's go with B12. The B vitamins, I guess you could say. So the B vitamins—it's again connected to the gut, which is funny because the animals the way that they get it is it's actually produced in their gut from eating greens. So it's one of those things that I feel like if the gut was healthy it would be able to—maybe not fully make B12. But it would be able to adjust itself. Some good sources are chlorella is a great source. Spirulina is a great source and then adding in the Bragg's nutritional yeast. Those are three great ways to get in the B12.

MARYN: Yeah. And I'll highlight that because that was new information to me. Bridget is the one that taught me that it has to be Bragg's variety, correct?

BRIDGET: Yeah. Because some of the other ones that they didn't—the yeast strands didn't take—they're not taking that into consideration like the Bragg's are consciously making sure that those are in there.

MARYN: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Well, I'm glad to hear you say that. I mean when I'm working with people as when you are working with people everybody is an individual and you're trying to treat everybody as uniquely as possible. But over the years with vegans, it's been a concern of mine. B12 in particular. Again, over the years, I feel like I've encountered vegans here and there that swear that they're the vegan that isn't B vitamin deficient. And I don't know. Sometimes I feel like I don't what end is up. Are they? Are they not? Is it just individual? Would you say in general there's a pretty good chance that a person eating a vegan diet is going to be deficient in that? Or is it just most—

BRIDGET: Yeah.

MARYN: Yeah. All? Most? What?

BRIDGET: Yeah. I would say most unless they're really working on it. But given, even me that hasn't been one of my major focuses for instance, and I probably am somewhat deficient in it. And I'm very aware of what I'm doing. So and I'm—so I would say that most are, and so it would just be like okay. Taking those extra—yeah. Steps.

MARYN: Yeah. I mean I feel like that, and I'm not vegan or vegetarian. It's been something that's come up for me in the last couple of weeks even where I've been like, "Huh. I think I need more B vitamins." It's just probably an absorption thing too. But anyway, it's kind of a probably cross diet type related deficiency in some cases.

BRIDGET: Yeah. And if you are going to take it—for whoever is listening—the vitamins, taking them on an empty stomach, that's—I mean even though that's kind of

basic. But taking them first thing on an empty stomach is going to be the best way for them to go in. So—

MARYN: Yeah. Well, it may or may not be possible for some of the pregnant people, but it's (inaudible).

BRIDGET: When it is, it is. Yeah.

MARYN: Awesome. How about iron? That's a big one too that I see.

BRIDGET: Iron. Okay. So truly—I think that the iron thing comes down to the quality of the food being eaten. I mean my biggest thing is truly organic and truly as local as possible is going to be critical to actually have the nutrients in it because we can say that spinach has iron. But it's like it depends. If it was just transported across the country and how it was grown and la ti da.

MARYN: Oh my gosh. I thought of that this morning. I was making my green juice, and I had a box of spinach. The poor spinach. It looked so sad. I'm like how could this be worth anything except a green color.

BRIDGET: I know. And the nutrient—I mean just over the past 50 years the nutrient content of, particularly spinach, but all of them have gone down tremendously. But even just in transportation, I think the nutrients go down at least a third if not—

MARYN: Oh my gosh. That's so depressing. I am so depressed by that.

BRIDGET: I know. It is depressing. But the good thing is in most places—maybe not the East Coast winter. But in most places, you can get local farmer's market greens that have more of the nutrients and just came in, just cut. So I think that that's really important. That's one of the big things because when I see the anemic thing now that I'm—I know that I'm not. I'm like, "Okay. What's the difference?" I'm like well, I'm eating really good quality, and I'm having a good quantity of greens. If you were just full on, I'm having the deep, beautiful kale that's organic and local and the spinaches and these different herbs and the different stuff. It's like I can't quite see how that can happen, if it's being done right. So I guess it's one of those things to check. It's like well if it is coming up then it's not enough.

MARYN: Yeah. Well, I would say that that's a problem for pregnant women kind of all of the time. It's—there's not enough of a lot of the categories whether it's actual kind of stomach space that's reduced and people don't feel like they can eat a lot. Or sometimes it's even aversions like raw vegetables for a lot of pregnant women is really hard. So anyway, yeah. Lots of reasons why I guess.

BRIDGET: Yeah. And I understand that. And to add, chlorella and spirulina are really good sources of iron. I mean when I had my moon, which is like losing the blood. I need to rebuild the blood. The first thing that I go for is chlorella spirulina. I just go straight for that and the deep rich greens. And to mask it because, like you said, sometimes you can't stomach it—to mask it, I always like to do the chlorella or even the greens in a smoothie with acai or berries. And that masks that ugh.

MARYN: Fishy taste.

BRIDGET: The fishy grossness. That'll mask it. So it's kind of like a nutrient—putting in all of the greens that you need but then making an acai bowl out of it. And then that will take away the grossness.

MARYN: Hmm. Nice tip. And if—yeah. Well, it's encouraging to hear that sometimes you need to mask food to get it down, Bridget. That makes me feel better.

BRIDGET: Yeah.

MARYN: Other iron ideas? Because honestly, I could use them too. I think it's just, again, one of those categories that people need help on.

BRIDGET: Yeah. Seaweeds and sea veggies, which, again, is in the category of grossness for most people. But really getting in the sea vegetables and the seaweeds. And I always love to mask this. And I always get them from Iceland. You can get Icelandic seaweeds, which are just—don't have any toxic—don't—have a much lower toxicity than say the Pacific. But masking those by gently tearing them up and stuff and putting them into soups, putting them into beans, putting them into all of those kinds of more legume style things. They they're also, in many ways—the Japanese use wakame and some of the different seaweeds for digestion, for absorption. And it has—we were talking about iron. We're talking about calcium. We're talking about proteins. Some of them even—it said that they had B12. So it's one of those things that when I'm looking at the deficiencies and then I look at some of the heavy hitters that hit in all categories I'm always seeing the spirulina, the chlorella, the sea vegetables, the chia, and the flax. I'm like they keep coming up because they're doing all of it for us.

MARYN: Right. Yeah. Well, gosh. I can do chia. I'm still working on the sea vegetables. That's a hard one. Not having grown up or for many, many, many years just like never having even had that stuff, I think it's a hard taste.

BRIDGET: It is a hard taste. Can you do nori?

MARYN: The seaweed.

BRIDGET: Yeah.

MARYN: I can. And actually when in a couple of past pregnancies, that was really appealing to me. So who knows? I probably needed it. But yeah. It's just not a part of my routine, so it's a good reminder to vary. I think having different ideas is helpful for any one of us. And it's amazing how you can just really get stuck in kind of a rut I think. Pregnant or not.

BRIDGET: Absolutely. And that's kind of the big overall theme that I'm seeing is it's like okay. If we can get a variety, which is some—which is hard especially with everyone's daily lives and stuff. But that's why I'm like okay. If we can just go with the ones that are going to be the best bang for your buck and the most nutrient dense in most of the categories, okay. Let's just focus on those. And then say—and then mask them. If they can't be—if they're just not palatable, mask the sea vegetables and stuff.

MARYN: Yeah. And I feel like you made me something that probably had sea vegetables in it. And it didn't bother me when it was cooked like that. So it is a good reminder.

BRIDGET: Okay. Good.

MARYN: Okay. What about protein?

BRIDGET: Okay. Protein.

MARYN: That's the big one.

BRIDGET: That's the big one. Do you remember when we had that fun day date? And we were like, "Okay. What are the vegan places?"

MARYN: Yes. It was so fun because—yeah. I was so tired of vegans telling me that they were getting enough protein by eating spinach. It's irritating. When I can see what you create. So yes. Go ahead. Protein.

BRIDGET: Well, to start, what was the amount that they—of protein needed for pregnant women per day? What was that?

MARYN: Yeah. So if you follow the Brewer Diet, which that's mostly what I recommend or at least the kind of info structure of it—it's on average about 75 grams of protein a day. Maybe more, maybe less for different people. But on average.

BRIDGET: Okay. That's interesting. Because I've been playing with that actually in preparation for the call. Getting in—I got to 30, 40 grams of protein, vegan protein, and a nice variety in one smoothie. And I was like yes. I was like, "Yes. I did it."

MARYN: Okay. You need to share that recipe, if you want to. We can add that maybe to the web page.

BRIDGET: Yeah. I like that idea. So it's not hard. Let me just start by saying there's a lot of possibilities. But it's just one of those things of adding variety and counting. I mean and just being like okay. Am I really getting it? Am I really hitting that number? So some of the top ones in the different categories in the nut category, macadamia nut is 7 grams per fourth cup. Peanuts, if you don't have an allergy, is 7 grams again. Pistachios, almonds, walnuts, all those are above 5 grams per fourth cup.

MARYN: Nice.

BRIDGET: Now the thing about—the good thing is is the bioavailability of protein for vegans is, in many studies, is higher and—than in animal proteins. So that's good. But why are people not absorbing it? Honest, nut category and some of the seeds you have to soak them. You have to soak them and sprout them to make them bioavailable, so that you can actually absorb the proteins.

MARYN: Yeah. I mean that is so important. I feel like I've known that too for years. But I'll be the first to admit that it's hard in my life at least. There's not a lot of soaking and sprouting going on. But if you're pregnant and you're needing to eat all the time, it's certainly worth getting into that routine. I'm sure you have one of how you do it.

BRIDGET: Yeah. Definitely. And the good thing about the nuts is I mean you just put them in water for eight hours before you go to bed. It doesn't require any special things. It's just putting them in water. So that's not too bad. But it is a noteworthy thing so that they are—so that you can actually get the proteins out of it.

MARYN: Right. And are you suggesting the same with rice or other grains as well?

BRIDGET: Yeah. So—

MARYN: Yeah. I'm jumping around.

BRIDGET: No. That's good. So as far as grains and legumes, same thing. I mean wild rice. I mean it's not as important say to do—it's—if you can't, okay. But at least rinse it. But black wild rice 7 grams again per fourth cup. So the black wild rice is really nutrient dense and has a lot of protein. Buckwheat. Which you can do buckwheat pancakes and add extra protein into that, so that's a fun source. Brown rice does have a good amount. And then legumes is where it really comes in because you've got—peas is one of the most protein rich vegan protein. So split peas. So if you can do split pea soup or something like that that's going to be 10.6 grams per fourth cup. That's a lot.

MARYN: Yeah.

BRIDGET: And the nutritional yeast getting the B12. So, again, there's these crossovers of the protein and the B12 and then black beans, red beans, lentils, all of

those have a lot of protein. So there's a lot of possibility. And I didn't even say seeds. Seeds like the chia seeds, again, has the protein, has the omega-3s. Hemp seeds. So there's a lot of variety of ways that you can eat to get the stuff in.

MARYN: Mm-hmm. Yeah. I mean you always make it sound so yummy which is what you're good at.

BRIDGET: Oh good.

MARYN: Yeah. I mean this is neither—I don't know what I expect you to do with this information. But I feel like the vegans that I've seen—not all of them—just here and there sometimes people are excluding even more food groups. And that gets really frustrating when you're trying to help them. So I get no animal products. But you are really utilizing all of the other categories and mixing and matching and sprouting and soaking. So it's hard when someone is like, "Well, I also don't do nuts. And I also don't do beans." And I'm just like, "Hmm. Okay."

BRIDGET: Oh gosh.

MARYN: How is this going to go?

BRIDGET: Yeah. Yeah. I mean I guess the question is is like is that really—why? If it's an allergy, okay. But why? Because I mean even me as a pretty strict vegan, if I need to, I'll eat eggs when I'm pregnant. My dedication is to the kid. And I understand legumes aren't as digestible or there's certain like oh, the nuts have these certain things. And it's like okay. But there's a lot of good stuff they do have. And if prepared the right way and if gotten with really good quality, they're going to help. And getting as much variety as possible, it's like we got to use the building blocks we have to create an epic kid.

MARYN: Yeah. An epic kid. Well said.

BRIDGET: And I was going to say a heavyweight champion. Like a weighty, like a strong kid.

MARYN: Yeah. Well, I think we could talk forever. I mean even just those things alone. Having variety and being flexible and I always love to hear people say kind of a similar thing which is maybe I don't eat these foods kind of in my normal life. But if my body is lacking or if I feel like I need it or whatever whatever, I am willing to be flexible. So I know there's a lot of emotion, of course, in food. And there's a lot more wrapped up in it than, I think, meets the eye on most days. I think that's key to really any sort of diet type, right? Is just being flexible and trying to listen to your body as best you can.

BRIDGET: Definitely. Yeah. Yeah. Being flexible. And it's one of those things you can be strict with yourself, but it's like okay. Do you really want—you have to be really careful with the kid part because then I understand that certain strictness is to be—to do better for the kid. And like that's where it's coming from is to do better. But yeah. Just making sure everything is in place.

MARYN: Well, but sometimes I think it's a little dogmatic. And I don't mean vegans, per se. It could really be anybody. I mean the paleo movement is a whole other topic that we're not going to talk about today. But women who are like very sincerely indebted to this whole idea and not really willing to change and oh, it's not paleo. And I can't eat it. Anyway, I just don't have as much tolerance for that during pregnancy because, like you say, it's about building this baby. It's about doing what you need to do to expand your blood volume. And I say to people however you want to eat to do that, for the most part, I don't care. I don't care if you're vegan. I don't care if you're paleo. Whatever it is, but are you meeting the needs of this pregnancy? It still has to come back to that.

BRIDGET: Yeah. Absolutely. Again, there's this deep responsibility to be really, really smart about it. And I think just our diets can become so—we can become so narrow minded or dogmatic around it that it—we have to look beyond ourselves to what's really needed.

MARYN: Yeah. Well, that is a perfect wise statement to end on I think.

BRIDGET: Yeah.

MARYN: So thanks for joining me. I'm sad you're so far away, but it was nice to get to talk with you on the phone a little bit.

BRIDGET: Yeah. For sure. It's great connecting.

MARYN: Yeah. And would you like listeners to be able to reach you? Do you have a website you want to send them to or anything, if they have any follow up questions? What can you—what do you want to leave us with?

BRIDGET: Yeah. Sure. My website is—I'm sure the spelling will be somewhere on the page.

MARYN: Yeah. I'll put it up.

BRIDGET: Yeah. bridgetnielsen.com. And then I am starting to do more food type videos on my YouTube channel too, which is Bridget Nielsen on YouTube. So you can find me there as well.

MARYN: Awesome. Oh, awesome.

BRIDGET: And I have some recipes. I actually do have some recipes on my website. I forgot about that. And I do have a recipe book, a digital recipe book, too with some of these vegan recipes of how to use these different nuts and seeds to make yummy things.

MARYN: Oh, yeah. That's awesome. Okay. And if you want to get me a smoothie recipe to put on the page, I will. If not, maybe it'll appear on your site one day soon. So whatever you want to do, that's great information though. Thank you so much.

BRIDGET: Yeah. Thanks so much for having me.

MARYN: You're welcome. Well, thanks for listening everybody. Check out the Indie Birth site for new content. You can always leave us a review here on iTunes. I know it's a pain, but if you listen on iTunes or even if you don't, it really helps us to have positive reviews. And indiebirthmidwiferyschool.com is enrolling for July 2018, a couple more weeks and months to get your applications in, if you're interested in that. So have a great day and talk to you soon.

(closing music)