

A sunburst graphic with numerous thin, light gray lines radiating from a central point behind the text.

Healthy Moms Podcast

BY **Wellness Mama**[®]
simple answers for healthier families

Episode 125: Understanding Food Intolerance &
Fighting For Your Family with JJ Virgin

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

This podcast is brought to you by myobuddy. This thing is one of my daily go-to's for relaxation because it combines the benefits of infrared heat, percussive massage and vibrational therapy for what I can only describe as a mixture of deep tissue massage and myofascial release all in one device. It has really reduced my muscle tension and my need for massage and many people with conditions like MS, chronic fatigue, etc are using this for muscle relief. Also, many athletes use it for faster recovery. I personally find the biggest benefit for relaxation and for fascia work, but you can try it out at wellnessmama.com/go/myobuddy and make sure to check the show notes for a special discount.

This episode is brought you to by Joovv red light therapy, which has become an integral part of my daily routine and here's why. Joovv has red lights with specific wave lengths of red light that increase ATP, which is Adenosine Triphosphate Production, in the body by supporting the mitochondria. Now since ATP is responsible for not just your energy that you feel, but pretty much everything that happens in your body, this is a big deal. This therapy is also known as photobiomodulation and it has well documented benefits for skin health, for energy levels, for recovery after injury or surgery, for improving thyroid health (which is what I'm using it for), and even as an anti-aging device because it increases collagen production and hair growth and reduces hair loss. So lots of cool benefits. You can check it out, the one that I use, at wellnessmama.com/go/joovv. You can also check out the show notes for more information.

Katie: Hi, and welcome to "The Healthy Moms Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com. And I am so excited to be here with today's guest. JJ Virgin is the founder and CEO of Mindshare Summit and JJ Virgin & Associates. She is a celebrity nutritionist, fitness expert, co-host of TLC's Freaky Eaters and a regular guest on Dr. Phil, Dr. Oz, and many others. Her simple philosophy of, "Your body is not a bank account. It's a chemistry lab," has helped thousands, and she teaches her clients how to eliminate food and carb intolerances so they can transform their health and their lives. She's the author of four New York Times bestsellers, and her latest book is my favorite, "Miracle Mindset," which shows warrior moms how to be strong, positive leaders in their families which she is certainly an expert at. While exploring the lessons in this book, she fought to save her own son's life, and we're gonna talk about that amazing story. She also hosts the "JJ Virgin Lifestyle Show" podcast which is great. And somehow, in addition to all of the work, nutrition and fitness, she is also a business coach and mentor for many entrepreneurs through the Mindshare Summit. So, JJ, welcome. Thanks for being here.

JJ: Oh, good to be here. Thank you.

Katie: Well, I'm so excited for this because I think you are such a role model and an inspiration to moms, especially because I still have young kids. You've raised kids. And so I love that we get to talk about the mom side a little bit today and the mindset side. And if it's not too personal, I'd love if you could start by telling your story, and especially Grant's story in how you came to understand the "Miracle Mindset."

JJ: All righty. Definitely not personal and definitely something that I wanna get out to the world because you mentioned it in introducing me, I think that the world needs more warrior moms out there. And you are a great example of one, by the way, Miss Katie. So it was right before "The Virgin Diet" was coming out, like literally weeks before. And just to kinda set this up, I am the sole financial support for my family. I had two boys at the time, they were 15 and 16. And I'm also one of those people that goes all in. So I had written "The Virgin Diet," it's a food elimination diet that...gosh, you know, I started it with weight loss but it can help with

everything from ADD, ADHD, auto-immune. And I just thought, you know, "This is gonna be it." Like, I need to get this message out to the world.

So I took the advance that I had gotten for the book and I invested every bit of it into a public television special and some other marketing, and I actually borrowed, too. So I was completely in. This thing had to work or I wouldn't be able to support my family. And I was coming home from taping some videos. And I walk in the door, and my 16-year-old son, Grant, was in a bad mood. He was being a typical teenager, kind of wanted to go do something that his dad had already said no to. So I was backing up his dad. And he stomped out of the house. And it was about dusk when he did this, stomps out of the house without anything on him. I figured he's going over to a friend's house.

I went into the garage to do some burst training. And the next thing I know, my 15-year-old son runs into the garage and says, "Mom, Grant's been hit by a car and airlifted to the local hospital." And it was really like, Katie, at that point, like everything, sort of, became a movie that I was watching and I couldn't really quite grasp it. I mean, I think that our brains do this to protect us from something so horrific. Because, you know, I always said that no matter how stressful work got, relationships or anything else, I could always handle as long as my kids were okay.

And obviously, you know, an airlift is a bad thing. So we couldn't figure out what was going on with him. He was a "John Doe" at the hospital, the only reason we even knew that he was in the hospital was my ex-husband and his other son drove by this big accident scene a couple blocks from the house, saw a paramedic, the paramedic looked at my other son and said, "A kid's gotten hit and you look just like him." So we knew Grant was there but we didn't know what was going on. They wouldn't give us any information. When we got there, they put us in a conference room. So, you know, it's just going from bad to worse.

The doctors walk in and they told us that he has a torn aorta that kills 90% of people on the scene. He had multiple brain bleeds and he was in a deep coma, deepest one that you could be in. And he had 13 fractures. And they said that if he didn't get this torn aorta repaired that he would die sometime in the next 24 hours. But they couldn't fix it there because it was a very specialized surgery that they didn't do at this hospital. And they didn't recommend us airlifting him to the next hospital because he'd never survive the airlift. He also said even if he survived the airlift, he's not gonna survive the surgery. And even if he were to survive the surgery and the airlift, he'd be so brain damaged, and I mean, this should get every warrior mom's hackles up, he'd be so brain damaged it wouldn't be worth it.

And I still remember like looking at this doctor going, "Wouldn't be worth it." And my 15-year-old son at the time, he looks over at this doctor, and this is what I'm so proud of, so here's a 15-year-old looking at this doctor saying, "So, maybe a 0.25% chance he'd make it?" And the doctor said, "That sounds about right, son." And Bryce said, "Well, we'll take those odds." And he looked me and goes, "It's not zero." You know, and it just kind of shows you in life you just got to have some thread of hope to hold on to.

And so we went to see Grant. And it was the most awful thing I've ever seen. He literally had bones sticking through his skin. He was covered in road rash, a tube coming out of his brain to monitor the pressure, he was on a respirator, like everything's beeping. And Bryce walks up to him and says, "Dude, you look really ugly right now. But if anyone can pull this off, you can, you are super-strong, you're tough. You've got this." I don't know where Bryce got this from because my ex-husband and I were completely, like, losing it. And he just kinda propped us up.

So we went home, threw some stuff in a bag, drove to the hospital not knowing what we were gonna go find there. And two and a half hours in the middle of the night, and once we got there, it was a totally different situation. There were five surgical teams. The doctor who was in charge of putting the stent in just walked up to me and said, "You don't even need to worry, I totally got this. You just go." He took me, walked me out of the scene, which was important. You know, he said later, "I had to get out of there," because there were literally five surgical teams prepping my son for surgery. He's in a coma. It's all full-court press." They take us up to a waiting room.

A couple hours later, he comes in, it's now like 8:00 in the morning, he walks and he goes, "All right, stent's in, he's fine." He goes, "Now, I don't know if he'll ever wake up. That's not my part. I'm just the plumber." And we went in to meet the neurosurgeons. And the neurosurgeons are like, "We don't think he'll ever wake up, blah, blah, blah." And I said, "I'm not listening to this. Of course, he's gonna wake up." And I just kinda made a decision from that point forward because, you know, I've always believed that you get what you expect. And I thought, you know, "I'm just gonna expect really big." You know, so if we fall short, it'll still be okay. At this point, my litmus test was like anything's better than dead. I can't fix dead. We can do anything. I've got amazing connections. So I looked at Grant, I was holding his fingers and I said, "Grant, you're gonna be 110%." Turns out his name means warrior, and I just said, "I just need you to fight. I can pull in all the most amazing resources but I need you to fight."

And it was four and a half months in that hospital, weeks in a coma, and it's been five-years-plus working through a very severe traumatic brain injury where he had to literally, at 16 year old, he had to start all over again, learning everything, how to eat, how to walk, how to talk, how to write, who he was, everything. And it's stretched us in ways that I can't believe. But we were sitting around the table last year and talking about gratitude. And my 15-year-old son, who's now 20, said, "You know, we are all better because of this." And Grant actually now, he's so much better than he was before the accident in so many ways. And there'll be deficits like, you know, he'll always have a brain injury but it's so much better. And, you know, he's got a little hearing loss but he's better than before. And, you know, we're all better than before.

So now, my big crusade with this is to get that message out that the thing that scares me the most with all of this, Katie, is what if we had listened to that first doctor? How many people listen to that first doctor or listen to the teacher in school who says, "They can't write," or listen to that person who says they're no good at their job, you know? How many people listen to someone who is in, you know, supposedly a higher position than them and let that determine their life or their death?

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think of that on a much less serious scale for me, like for finding out my thyroid problems. I went through several doctors who told me it was all in my head because they were only testing a couple of hormones. And then finally met our good friend, Alan Christianson, who, like, was able to fix it and diagnose it within, like, minutes. It was amazing. But, like, I have goosebumps listening to your story because, I mean, that's every mom's worst nightmare, I think, is getting that kind of a phone call. And you have been through that and emerged better, which is incredible. But what do you think really made you able in that moment to have that mindset and to fight? Because certainly, all of us will fight for our children, and I fully echo your statement about warrior moms. I think moms have a unique ability to change society and to change the future of health because we're raising the next generation. And in effect, I think moms are the only ones who truly can, to some degree. But how did you in that moment, like, find that in you to rally and to fight like that? Especially because doctors are considered such an authority figure. And to have a doctor tell you

basically there is no hope, how did you find that in you to fight?

JJ: So, one positive note here is my ex-husband's whole family are doctors. You know, all my closest friends are doctors. So I knew they were human and that I was getting an opinion, right? And I think that's always something important, just like with your thyroid condition. You were getting an opinion and that's it. That's all you're getting. And if it wasn't the opinion I wanted, I was gonna go look for others. So we had that going for us. And turns out that my ex-husband's sister-in-law went to school with this doctor who saved Grant's life. I mean, so we were like on the phone with people at that hospital looking for answers. But, you know, the internet is a great equalizer, and even if you go, "well I don't know any doctors", it's amazing what you can come up with very quickly if you jump on Facebook, Instagram, start putting the word out to people, what can come to you.

But I've got to back up a little bit because even the willingness to do that came from a different place. And, you know, Katie, I actually wrote a whole book. Now, we're, you know, renaming the book, "Warrior Mom," because that's really what it's about. But I wrote the whole book and I didn't really realize I wrote all the lessons, the things that helped me get through what's been the last five and a half years of just really having to manage mindset to make it through. And, you know, Tony Robbins says 80% of life is really mindset. And I actually think it's probably more like 95%, it's really what's gonna guide how you show up and that strength you have.

And back when I was 30, I was a personal trainer, and I was in grad school, and I had this amazing client. She had grown up in trailer park in Kansas, and she was a self-made multimillionaire, hugely charitable, doing amazing work out in the world. And I just, you know, to me, she was everything. She was who I wanted to be. She was the ultimate role model of just the go-giver, you know, changing the world. And as we're walking down the beach, she goes, "Why are you in grad school?" And I said, "I'm in grad school because I wanna help more people." She's like, "Huh," you know. And I always knew when she began, "Huh." I'm like, "Huh." I said. And she goes, "What are you gonna do after grad school?" I said, "I'm gonna go get my Ph.D." She goes, "Why are you doing that?" I go, "Because I wanna help more people." "Huh." She goes, "You know, those don't necessarily correlate, like getting more education doesn't mean you'll be able to help more people." And I said, "It doesn't?" She goes, "No, if you wanna learn how to be more successful, I'm happy to teach you." Now, I mean, it would be like, you know, Deepak Chopra saying, "If you wanna learn how to meditate, I'm happy to teach you." You know, I'm like, "Okay, I'm all in," you know.

I literally moved into her house and lived with her for six months, and it was like she was my Mr. Miyagi. And for six months, I thought she was gonna teach me how to be successful in business, how to make a bigger impact. And the first day, she put a rubber band around my wrist, and every time I had a limiting belief or a negative thought, I was supposed to snap it. And this is the type of stuff we did over months. And the first week, I'm like, "Oh, no, what have I done?" Like, "When am I gonna learn?" And I kept asking her, like, "When am I gonna learn how to be more successful in business, how to make a bigger impact?" She goes, "You're not ready. You have to have the mindset for it first."

So all of the things that help me, even that first night, tell that doctor, "Hey, we're gonna overrule you." And, you know, what I passed on to Bryce saying, "We'll take those odds," what we had to do in the hospital over, and over, and over again when, you know, the biggest thing we could see that whole day was that maybe he wiggled a toe or his eyelid fluttered and, you know, you had to go, "All right, he's gonna make it," you know, everything came down to those tools that Kay Smith had taught me over six months when I was 30. And then I

forgot about it, Katie, because it had been such a part of me, it just became who I was that I manage my environment, I didn't let negativity around me. I didn't even have my own mother come to the hospital for a while because she's one of those people that, you know, I mean, bless her, this is how she was raised, that she looks at the glass half-empty and everything is, you know, "Oh, my gosh, what if he dies?" And I was like, "I cannot be around that right now. I can't even think that way," right, at all.

Katie: Yeah. I think that's a huge key. And I love if we could, like, segue into the health side of that, too, because I feel like where I see that a lot, and where I've even struggled with it myself, is having that limiting mindset when it comes to health or seeing like, "I've always had this health problem, like, it's never gonna be fixed and it's never..." So and I know that you have helped so many people with that. So, how can people learn from that when it comes to their own health and their own struggles they're going through?

JJ: You know what was interesting? I thought about it when...because here it is, "The Virgin Diet" is about to come out, and it made me realize how much bigger that book was, that it wasn't about weight loss at all, that it was really about, you know...I work at weight loss. I've been working in weight loss since my teens. And the biggest thing people say in weight loss is, "I'll start tomorrow," right? And I kept thinking, "Man, what if I'd walked into this and I hadn't been at my most healthiest," whatever that is for me or for you. Because I find, for so many people, their health is holding them back and it seems so overwhelming that their biggest thing is, "I'll start tomorrow." Or they just give up, they say it's their genes or, you know, it's their age or whatever.

And I think it's really about being your best self, whatever it is, and continuing. And this is my through line for my business, is that we really are our best own doctor, we're our personal health detective. I write all of my books to take you through a journey to uncover which foods work for you and which foods don't, how many carbohydrates you should have, you know, what type of exercise you should do, because there is no set formula. And all of these things, we all have our own health challenges. My gosh, I blew my knee out at 17 and I had to have a total knee replacement. And, you know, I've got Hashimoto's and we've all got our thing. Everybody's got their thing. That's what I tell both my kids, too, "Hey, we're all gonna have those." And I don't know one person out there in the world who is better because life is easy and does well because life is easy.

So these are our own personal wake-up calls that help us step up to the challenge and be better because of it. Because that's how we get better, right? One of the things Kay Smith used to say is, "Don't wish it was easier." She said, "Make yourself better." I say, "Make yourself stronger." And, you know, hey, what if the wake-up call of having a thyroid condition made you really focus on everything that you could do in your health and it prevented you from having heart disease, or cancer, or anything else? We don't know what could have been around the bend. And also look at what having a thyroid condition has done for all of the people out there that you serve. You know, by you then going, "All right, this couldn't be right. There's got to be more to it," and going and digging, and finding the answers out there. So I look at these things and say, "Everybody's got something, everybody." I don't know someone out there, and I've coached tens of thousands of people now and impacted hundreds of thousands with these books and I've yet to meet someone whose imperfect health doesn't have any issues, right? It just doesn't happen.

Katie: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Even at health conferences, I feel like we all got there because we had our own struggles, and I always say that the joke is people go into psychiatry to try to fix themselves. And I think a lot of people go into health and nutrition for the same reason, trying to find our answers.

JJ: Exactly. And they're the best practitioners, right?

Katie: Exactly. And I think that's the key. I love that you talk about that because it's easy, I think, to, like, try to outsource your health to a doctor and to just take their opinion, like you mentioned, and run with it because they're supposed to know the answers. But I think the key is we can't outsource responsibility for our health. We can always get those opinions and it's great to consult experts. But at the end of the day, you're the one who has to take responsibility for that even if you disagree with the doctors. I think that's amazing that you say that.

JJ: And as a mom, we take responsibilities for our kid's health, but also, and I think it's a really important shift, is not only to start to realize from an early age, "Hey, do the research on vaccines, do the research on what to feed your kids." Like, you own that. And, gosh, the internet's made it easier than ever as long as you know the sources you're getting it from. But as soon as possible, start to hand that responsibility over to your kids to start to teach them to step up. And they might make some mistakes along the way, but I remember letting my kids take their Halloween candy and I was like, "Go ahead, have what you want." Minute they did it, like Bryce threw up. And Grant's like, "Wow, I'm eating this and it's just making me feel sick and hungry." And they were done, right? They connected the dots, and they went, "Wow, this doesn't make me feel good." So look at how you can help teach your kids and have your kids start to take responsibility, too, because if they get that in an early age, man, is that powerful.

Katie: Yeah, I totally agree. I think a lot of times, we underestimate kids. Mine are much younger than yours. My oldest is only 11, but he typically makes really good decisions when it comes to food. And it's not because I'm, like, controlling his food input when we're out places, I really do let him make the decision. He just knows because he understands what those foods do to your body. I think that's a great point. So if a mom is, kind of, in the earlier stages of this, or especially has younger children and is just trying to, kind of, learn how to advocate for herself and for her children...I know there's a lot of fear a lot of moms have with, like, especially standing up to a doctor or being able to fight like that. So, how can people start changing their mindset and shifting that in their own lives?

JJ: You know, I love and I just re-watch Simon Sinek, "Start With Why." And I think you get the strength from the why and the purpose, right? That's always the biggest place. And if your strength, your purpose, and your why is to help raise happy healthy kids, then you start with that, and then you also realize, go in armed. Like when I go into a doctor, like every morning, the doctors will come into the hospital and do grand rounds, well, I'd reached out and I'd gotten a lot of information. I knew what was possible and I knew what was available, and I was asking questions, and I wasn't going to accept no or, you know, getting brushed off by people, right, which didn't make them necessarily happy. And those, they kept coming in for grand rounds earlier, and I kept getting there earlier. I was like, "We're not missing."

But, you know, I think gone are those days where the doctor knows it all. There's just too much to know at this point. And if you come in as an informed consumer with very smart questions and ask the questions. And if you don't understand something, ask. Because what I find with, you know, when I was in grad and doctoral school, I felt like they were teaching us how to talk over people. Like, most of what we were learning was just how to use bigger words and I'm thinking, the best person out there has amazing bedside manners can explain to you exactly what's going on and how to help yourself. Like Dr. Daniel Amen, he's a great example of this. He's one of Grant's doctors from before the accident. And he literally sat down with him after we did the SPECT scans, explained exactly what they meant, exactly what he needed to do to take care of his brain, right? And he's willing to work with other practitioners as well. And that's another key thing. If you go to see

someone and their way is the only way, and they won't work with anybody else, and they make you feel like you don't know and they're condescending, fire them. Fire them, right? Look at how many doctors you had to do before you found the awesome, magical doctor, Alan Christianson, who made you know you weren't crazy.

Katie: Yeah, exactly.

JJ: So...I think, like, we stop listening to ourselves. Your gut knows. It's like going, "This couldn't be right. That doesn't sound right." I remember early on, I had such bad skin growing up, Katie. It used to drive me...I mean, I was so self-conscious, my whole teen years, starting at age 11. I had bad cystic acne my whole teen years. And do you know we went to dermatologist after dermatologist, and repeatedly, they said, "Food has nothing to do with it." Makes me so upset to know because, you know, I mean, I fixed my acne once I uncovered the food intolerance issues and the whole thing with dairy. Sugar alone wasn't fixing it. So you have to just keep questioning and finding those right doctors.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And not being afraid to fire them, I think that's the hardest shift to have. But then once you do that, you have so much power because you are able to, like, look at them as what they are, which is a consultant for your health, which is important. But if they're not doing that job that you're paying them to do, you're paying them, not the other way around, then find someone who will. And I see this all the time as a doula, pregnant moms, because it's like, I know moms who advocate for themselves so much, and for some reason, when they go into labor and they're in such a vulnerable time, it seems so much harder to stand up to those doctors and to say, "No." And so I've had to, like, encourage moms throughout pregnancy, at times, like, you get to choose your provider and you can say no to them. Like, don't use language, like, "My doctor won't let me."

JJ: Yeah. What is that? Like, what are you talking about? "My doctor won't let me." You're not in jail. You know, you've got to find that person out there who is a partner in your health with you and a partner in your kid's health. And if you bring in questions, doesn't treat you like you're stupid, or that's ridiculous, or, "Where did you find that," you know, that is out there for you, that it's an open forum.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And so you mentioned food intolerances and how that was a key for you. And I wanna delve into this because I know a lot of moms are wondering about that with their kids. And there's a lot of information out there, but a lot of confusion as far as how do you actually identify food intolerances and how do you remedy them. And this is obviously the topic of a lot of your writing. So let's talk about that. How do you encourage people to find food intolerances?

JJ: Yeah, it was interesting. You know, a lot of this started back when Grant was young because at age five, six, he started to have some behavioral issues. And I did a load of testing and we pulled him off of gluten and dairy. In retrospect, I would never have bothered with any of it. I would have pulled him off of gluten. Had I known then what I know now, I would never have had my kids eat gluten, or dairy, or soy. They didn't do any soy, but they did gluten and dairy. And I never would have had them have it to begin with. But I didn't know. So I pulled him off of it when the testing came out that he had issues with it.

I just personally come from a place where I think gluten is evil. What can I say? I just don't think it's a health food. I think it's important to test, and I'd like to go through...Tom O'Bryan's got the best information on how to test for celiac. I think it's important to look and see if you've got a genetic issue with gluten intolerance or celiac. But I don't believe gluten is good for any of us because it makes your gut more permeable. And, you

know, I used to think, "Hey, food intolerance," where your gut's more permeable and your body launches an immune attack to the food you're eating. I used to think that was something that you really had to worry about as you got older. But it's not the case anymore because the key factors for food intolerance are gluten, which releases something called zonulin which makes the gut more permeable.

Stress, and we've got kids...I mean, kids shouldn't be stressed out. This is crazy. They shouldn't have the demands on them that we put on them. I absolutely put my foot down, and I started doing it, Katie, early. When my kids were young, I was going, "Oh, my gosh, they should be in, you know, the kid's gym, and they need to be in the art class." And like all of the sudden, I went, "Why am I doing this?" Like, they just wanna be home playing and digging in the dirt, and I don't need to go have them in 20 classes. I just need to hang out with them. But we've got stressed-out kids eating fructose, and artificial sweeteners, and GMO foods, and gluten messing up their gut and getting food intolerances. So first step is I don't think any kid should have gluten, and I'm not a fan of dairy either unless you know that your kid is not intolerant to it and you're getting grass-fed, unpasteurized, and fermenting it. So if you can go that route, great.

I do think that food sensitivity testing, something called an IgG4. I'm not a fan of something called an Alcat. I found too many false positives. But there's something called an IgG4, and it can be done as a blood spot or a blood test, can be really beneficial for looking for outlier food sensitivities. But in all the years that I've done a lot of testing, I noticed that the top foods sensitivities were dairy and eggs. And then the next ones were soy, and corn, and peanuts. So that's where those came out. And gluten's a different type of test. So what I find the easiest thing to do is just pull out gluten. Just make it not a part of your kid's diet as much as possible. And be aware of this because then, if you go to one of those school parties where they feed them the worst crap you've ever seen, I don't know...are your kids homeschooled? They are, right?

Katie: They are, yes. So, we, like, get to avoid a lot of that.

JJ: You never had to take them to...I remember going to one of these school parties and they had Beanie Weenies. I didn't even know what a Beanie Weenie was, like, or a mini weenie, it's like these little weenie things in, like, sugar sauce. And then they had punch, and then they had juice. And then they had cupcakes. And then they had like these fruit roll-up snacks. I was like, "Like, where's the food?" You know, it's the absolute most gross thing. But that's the challenge with school, is these parties. So you always have to make sure you bring your own and be aware if your kid does have outright celiac or gluten intolerance because they'll eat a little bit and feel awful.

But ideally, you're keeping the gluten out of their diet and you can do an IgG test to check on the other things. Obviously, we don't want kids on soy either, that's...it's not good for anyone, but especially not good for children. Get them off of soy. It causes girls to develop fast, and boys not to develop. So you do not want the estrogenic effects of soy. You wanna really watch that. That's one of the issues with a lot of the milks, too, especially in the plastic cartons since you're getting estrogenic effects from that. So you're so much better when you unprocess their diet, get out the GMOs, obviously, and that solves a lot of these food intolerances in the first place. Because if you unprocess someone's diet, get out the soy and the gluten, and get the sugar impact down, and the artificial sweeteners, obviously out. I can't believe they put artificial sweeteners in kids' supposedly...first of all, these kids' foods, that's the biggest part of the problem, like kids' meals at restaurants and kids' foods. Like whoever thought of taking something where you put artificial colorings and artificial sugars in something, put it into a little cute little package and call it a kid's food? Like, what are you trying to

do, poison your kids? Like, why would you do this to your child, you know?

And then you wonder why they have behavioral problems at school. Like, it's just insane. I'll never forget they gave my kid a pound of M&Ms because he won some Christmas wrapping sales contest. They give him the pound bag of M&Ms. They give it to him. I'm not there. What do they think he's gonna do? So, you know, then they call me saying your son's climbing up the walls. I'm like, "Why?" And they told me what they'd done. I'm like, "You keep him. That wears off, I'll come get him."

But, yeah, so I think one of the biggest things that we can do is, A, keep these foods out of their diet, and again, gluten being the worst culprit, and soy obviously just as a problematic food. And then I would do testing for celiac and gluten intolerance so you're aware if there's gonna be an issue, if it does sneak in when they're out. And then you can do IgG4 testing for the other ones just to see if there's any issues. But the challenge is food intolerance can develop at any time due to a leaky gut which can happen due to stress, and gluten, and fructose, and different types of pain medications. And the other thing to be aware of is if you have used any antibiotics, you basically have scorched earth, the gut microbiome, and that takes months to rebuild. And so you're gonna also wanna look at keeping your child on a good probiotic as well.

Katie: Yeah, that's a great point. And I love that in "The Virgin Diet" you have, because for someone on a really tight budget, if the testing isn't doable, you have a way to just remove those foods and gauge reaction and test it for free, like just change your diet for an amount of time. So I love that. I think that's super practical.

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Katie: But I know that I'm gonna get objections, because I do every time I talk about gluten being bad and sugar being bad, from people, going, "No, everything in moderation, like this is not balanced. This is not healthy. You're creating all these bad mindsets in your kids by not letting them have these foods." And I think

you answered this question perfectly. So, what do you say to the people who say, "No, everything in moderation?"

JJ: Would you say that about mercury, and would you say that about arsenic, and would you say that about lead? Like, because that's how we have to look at gluten and sugar. Sugar is our number one recreational drug of choice. Now, here's what I did, though, with my kids growing up, because I didn't pull foods...like, we didn't have, you know, sugar foods and gluten foods in the house. But they would get the occasional go out, and if they were at a party, they could have pizza. You know, they had those things, and they were around, but they weren't mainstays of our diet at home. And that's really the difference. Like, when they went to grandma's house, they had cereal milk, which they were like, "Wow." You know, I'm like, "Thanks, mom." But at home, that just wasn't what they had for breakfast.

And so when you teach your kids, and here's what super cool, exposure equals preference. When you teach them to eat the good stuff first, the other stuff, when they do eat it, they'll notice that they feel awful. Kids don't wanna feel bad, you know, that their tummy hurts and that they just don't like it too much. It tastes sweet. So that's what I did, was I just kept the good stuff in the house and I didn't say they couldn't have the other stuff. With Grant, I had to, because we pulled out gluten and dairy. But with Bryce, we didn't. And later on, in years, we found out, you know, that Grant, little bits here and there weren't throwing him off. Now, they do again. He has no gluten. He's totally connected the dots and doesn't eat it, knows what it does.

But I think if you teach kids to eat healthy first and then if they are at a party, as long as you know that they aren't gluten-intolerant, they can have little bits of it, it's gonna be okay. It's not the birthday cake once in a while that creates the problems. It's the everyday dessert. I was raised on Pop-Tarts or Cap'n Crunch in the morning and dessert every night for dinner. That's what creates the problem. Those habits, if you teach them that these occasional treats are something that you can have when you're out at a party, that's different. But again, you've got to make sure that they don't have a genetic issue with gluten intolerance or celiac because if they do, that's like saying, "Well, I can just swallow a little bit of this poison." It is toxic, and it's a poison to them, and it's hurtful. And that's what I'd also tell you, is with a lot of these foods, it's not an everything in moderation, because again, it's basically a poison to the system.

I mean, look at artificial sweeteners. In seven days, they did a study, seven days, you've disrupted the gut microbiome enough to create glucose intolerance that can lead to diabetes. Seven days. So we've got to look at these things as what they are, they're toxic and they're poisons. And then you reframe it. Because no mom's gonna say, "Oh, I just gave my kid a little arsenic. It's okay, everything in moderation."

Katie: Yeah, I think that's so key. And also, like, realizing, gluten is not a food group and sugar is not a food group, you can get help healthy carbohydrates from other sources.

JJ: Yeah, what deficiency...I got attacked, Katie, it was so funny, when I was doing this. I got slammed and unfortunately, I reacted. And then all my friends were like, "You shouldn't react on Twitter. Now, you're just sending it everywhere." But this nutritionist attacked me on Twitter, saying I was creating deficiencies by telling people to pull out of gluten. And I'm like, "Well, what deficiency is it that I'm creating? Because I'm totally confused." Our body does not need gluten, and our body does not need sugar. These aren't things that we create nutrient deficiencies from. They aren't part of a well-rounded diet. If you teach a kid to eat a well-rounded diet...and I had picky eaters, so it had to be more like they would eat chicken, they would eat steak, they would eat salmon, they'd eat broccoli, romaine, lettuce, carrots, and they would eat berries, you know.

So, you know, they were picky.

But there are so many different things that you can do now without gluten, and sugar, and soy. There's tons of options out there. And if you teach them to not go...like, you look at all the kids' foods, they're so sugar-sweetened, you're training them, you're waking up their taste buds and training them to thrive on sugar, and you don't want to create a sugar burner with your kids. I mean, gosh, one in five kids are obese. Kids shouldn't be obese. When I was growing up, there was one kid in the whole class who was overweight, not obese. You know, 70% of the adults are now overweight or obese, 40% obese. If you're an obese kid, your risk of being an obese adult is 70%. And you know what? Sugar is at the core of that.

The biggest thing you can do to impact your kids' health is lower their sugar impact. Teach them to appreciate savory, spicy, and the natural sweetness of fruit but not to overdo fruit. It's not free food. That's your role as a parent. I mean, don't poison your kids. And I do not believe that, you know, everything in moderation with a little bit of sugar every day. Again, birthday party, a little piece of cake here and there, not gonna be a big issue. But also, they aren't gonna really like it that much when they haven't been eating it. Tastes too sweet, Nikki.

Katie: Right. And I bet your boys are probably really good eaters now, and not so picky because they've now had a lifetime of exposure to all these healthy foods.

JJ: And you know what? I never nagged them growing up. Again, if they were somewhere, they could have the thing, but they didn't go crazy on it because, first of all, kids actually get full as opposed to adults who are like, "Sure, we'll have the dessert." But they really learned how to eat the good stuff first. And my one son's...Bryce is off at college and he orders his food from AmazonFresh which is cool because I could actually see what he's ordering. And he orders grass-fed beef and pastured chicken and, you know, all sorts of vegetables and quinoa, and it's super cool to see that this is what he's choosing to do. He's actually the food editor over at JJ Virgin because he writes recipes and makes all sorts of amazing delicious stuff. And Grant is really careful about what he eats because he totally notices a difference with his brain. I mean, I was really proud of him because I thought he was staying off of gluten, but he lets some sneak back in, and all of a sudden, he goes, "Every time I eat gluten, I get mad for the next 30 minutes. My whole mood goes down." And so he just, he won't eat out. He's really careful about it.

Katie: Wow, that's awesome. And I think that's a good point. If you wanna find the balance as a mom, it's like when...your house, you control that, like what foods you're gonna allow in your house and which foods you aren't. And I would say as a mom, we have a responsibility to provide really nutrient-dense foods for our kids. And if you wanna have that, like, leeway or the balance, let that be outside of your house, but in your house, you have the control of what food they're gonna consume. And you have an obligation to them to get them enough nutrients. And so I think that's a great point. You mentioned that sugar is a recreational drug of choice and I would love for you to go a little deeper on this because I think a lot of people are like, "Yeah, whatever, sugar is bad." They don't really buy it. So, why is sugar so bad?

JJ: I stole that line from our buddy, Dr. Mark Hyman, when he said that I'm like, "That is so good." You've got to look at what these foods do. And by the way, sugar does this, oh, dairy gluten do, too. They have an opiate-like effect on the brain. But it's interesting, they did a study with rats where they gave them morphine and then they gave them Oreo cookies. And they gave them the choice between which one of these that they have because they both lit up the same pleasure center in the brain. They were testing that. And they actually

started to choose the Oreo cookies over the morphine for the effect on the pleasure center in the brain.

Sugar lights up our brain. It is absolutely addictive. And, you know, the more you eat, the more you want. And the challenge is, it's not only addictive on the brain, it also changes your metabolism so that your body starts to rely on the sugar for energy and can't access stored fat for fuel. So you get totally dependent on it. And, you know, some of us are genetic sweet tasters and have a sweet tooth, and the more that we eat, the more that we want. And we actually start to dull our taste. Like, we can't even taste as much, so we need more, and more, and more. So that's why I say it's so important early on.

Like, I look at a lot of the kids' food product and they have so much sugar in them. I mean, these cereals...and this is what makes me so upset, these cereals that have the American Heart Association stamp of approval on them or the foods out there that will say "No sugar added," but they use apple juice concentrate, which by the way, is higher in fructose than high fructose corn syrup, and they can say, "No sugar added on them." We've got sugar everywhere and it's basically making our kids, again, it's disrupting their metabolism by making them more insulin-resistant which makes them forced to rely on their next hit of sugar for energy. And, you know, it's creating early diabetes and fatty liver. I mean, we have fatty liver in kids now. But then also, it's giving your brain a hit. It's driving serotonin up. And then the minute that your blood sugar comes down, it starts to come down, and you need another hit again, so your brain and your body become dependent on it.

So it might feel good in the moment, but it really is devastating to our body and our health, and we become dependent on it. It's perfect for the food industry. It's why it's being used all over the place. And you just look at the last 30 years when we got this wrong message from Bruce Ames that fat was creating heart disease. They pulled fat out. They put sugar in. And look what's happened over the last 30 years. And then they thought, "Well, we'll pull the sugar out, we'll put the artificial sweeteners in," which are actually worse than sugar because of what they do to disrupt the gut microbiome. And so we know now this doesn't work. It is so clear this doesn't work.

But now, we have a nation of addicts. I mean, if you looked at this and you look at what sugar does, it's at the root of all the major diseases, heart disease, cancer. It feeds cancer, diabetes, dementia, osteoporosis. If you look at all those things and you had any type of medication that was creating these problems, you'd pull out in a second, right? I mean, if you knew there was a drug that was creating these problems, no one would ever give people that drug.

But yet we're giving kids milk, and cookies, and apple juice. Apple juice, apple juice has more high fructose corn syrup in it than a coke. You know, we're giving kids juice. We should not give kids juice. We should give kids a piece of fruit and a glass of water.

Katie: Yeah, I agree. So what if someone is, like, a self-identified sugar addict and they definitely have a sweet tooth and it's a regular part of their life. How do you break that? Because if it's an addiction like, how can you break that cycle?

JJ: Yes. So it was interesting when I wrote "The Virgin Diet," I genetically do not have a sweet tooth. I was raised by an adopted mom who's got a massive sweet tooth. And that's how I was raised and all those things. And I basically started bringing myself off sugar in my teens. But sadly enough, I thought I was bringing myself off sugar but I just traded one sugar for another. I was eating frozen yogurt and I was eating black licorice. I thought I was doing better, you know, because I had the honey instead of the...and it was ridiculous, I wasn't.

So it took years to really understand this. And when I wrote "The Virgin Diet," the biggest question I got asked was about sugar. And I noticed people, there were two camps and a lot of people fell into both, unfortunately, as they were confused, like, "Well, isn't honey okay? It's all natural, right?" I'm like, "Well, arsenic is natural, so is mercury, doesn't make it healthy." Or they were like, "Well, artificial sweeteners, they don't have any calories, that must be okay." Or they were just controlled by it. They couldn't quit it no matter how hard they tried.

And I really set out to clear up the confusion but also break that addictive cycle. And I was convinced that I could take someone and help them move from being a sugar burner to a fat burner but also get rid of their sweet tooth in a matter of weeks. And I knew that the problem that we had. And here's what you never wanna do when you're trying to fix this, is go cold turkey. Because if you've trained your body and your brain to rely on sugar and you just pull it out, you will crash so fast and you'll go racing back for the cookies. And for a lot of people, they actually don't even realize how much sugar's sneaking in. They don't realize that the salad they just had with the dried fruit and the, you know, the candied walnuts and the raspberry vinaigrette was a sundae. They didn't realize that that latte and the healthy morning muffin was just, you know, loaded with sugar. They didn't realize the marinara sauce had as much sugar as like, you know, six Oreo cookies. You don't realize where it's sneaking in. That's crazy.

So the first thing I help people do is realize where it's sneaking in. This is all sugar impact diet. And then I created a new framework for looking at sugar that really looks at the impact of it. So instead of looking at glycemic index, which can set us up to fail because all it looks at is a measured response of 50 grams of a carbohydrate and your blood sugar response to it, which no one really eats that way. You might eat that way if you're eating a bunch of potato chips. But it certainly isn't if you're sitting down to eat broccoli. So it's a really weird way to look at food. And it also doesn't take fructose into account because fructose doesn't raise blood sugar. Instead, fructose goes straight to the liver and if it can't be turned into energy there, it starts being turned into fat which is what it's most likely fate is. And while it's doing that, it's also made the gut more permeable on its journey. And it also didn't raise any of your blood sugar so you're still hungry, your body doesn't realize you ate anything.

So I wanted to make sure that this new framework looked at how much your blood sugar and insulin increased because you'll see something like the artificial sweeteners impacting insulin and you'll see something increasing your blood sugar. But you didn't eat a 50-gram dose of it, you put into the mixture of a meal. And then I also wanna see fructose and I wanted to contrast that with fiber and nutrient density. It's the difference between having a glass of orange juice versus having an orange, you're getting the fiber, you're getting, of course, all the nutrient density. But I wouldn't have someone drink orange juice because you just pulled the fiber out and just got this big hit.

So I created a new framework. I went through and help you identify where all the sugar's sneaking in, things like the marinara sauce and the light salad dressings, all the places we'd never expect. And then, and this is what's so key, I created a tapering system so that we go from high-sugar-impact foods to medium-sugar-impact foods to low-sugar-impact foods and we taper over the course of one to two weeks based on how someone lands on the sugar impact quiz. So I always have people, and everything that I do I felt you self-identify from the beginning. We've got to know our starting point, and that really is based on symptoms. And then I have you taper down. And then you go through a two-week period, and this is so powerful, where you pull off fructose out of the diet, because fructose, the reason we're using it so much in sweeteners is it's super sweet. And because it's super sweet, the more of it you eat, the more you want. But also the more fructose

you eat, the better your body gets at getting fructose straight to the liver and turning it into fat.

But you can turn that around quickly which is what the second cycle of this program does, is it helps people quickly get poor at processing fructose so they're not as good at making fat. And then you go back at the end of that period and you re-challenge to see how you're doing. Like, how does that sweet tooth food taste and what does it do to your body. You connect the dots between what you're eating, and how you feel, and also your weight. And that helps you then determine, because one of the big questions I get asked is, "How many carbohydrates I should eat?" And I go, "Well, it really depends on the quality of carbohydrates." This whole idea of simple and complex carbohydrates is silly. So instead, I created the sugar impact scale so you could really determine where's quality, low-sugar impact foods or high-quality carbohydrates. And then you can figure out how many do you really need to eat in a day. Should you be keto? Should you be higher carb? Because it's different for everybody. And some people can thrive on keto. I find most women suck on keto. It's difficult if you've got thyroid conditions, adrenal problems, and fertility issues. This is not where you should be. So it really helps you determine where you should be and where your kids could be. But if you have someone with a brain injury, they'll do better there.

So, you know, that's where I really set out, that the big difference with this program is this concept of don't try to go cold turkey. You will set yourself up to fail. You've got to taper this down and make that transition to help your body shift from being a sugar burner into a fat burner. And once you do that, it's like you just got set free.

Katie: Yeah, I can say that from experience. And I think what perfectly illustrates this point, and I'd love for this to be where we start to wrap up, is you are famous for saying, "Your body is not a bank account. It's a chemistry lab." Because I think a lot of people still buy into the idea of like calories in, calories out, and that kind of method of eating. And I will say, like, having been to your events, I know that you, like, walk in your real life and you serve these things at your events, but you embody this way of eating and this way of healthy food. And also you maintain an incredible level of fitness all the time. So I'd say you're very well qualified to speak to this. But can you explain what you mean by that statement, "Your body's not a bank account. It's a chemistry lab," and how that applies, especially, like, to the food things that we've been talking about, with the sugar, and the gluten, and the dairy?

JJ: You know what's so cool, is now, I don't sound crazy saying it. Because 25 years ago, I was a trainer, you know, I told that story earlier, and I was in grad school, and guess what we were taught in grad school? If you wanted to lose weight, you would eat less, exercise more. And I had all of these...my majority of clients were 45-year-old women and 55-year-old men. And when I had them eat less and exercise more, especially the women, it didn't work. In fact, some of them got worse. And I kept thinking to myself. First, I thought, "They must be cheating," right? That's the first thought, I will admit. And the good news is I got to take a group of them to a resort. And I took them there and I got to control their food and their exercise. And what I noticed was some lost weight, some stayed the same, and some gained. And there was no way they were cheating.

So, therefore, I had to look for a new hypothesis. And I thought, "What if what we're being taught is all wrong?" Because there was nothing I was being taught in school that I thought were stupid and wrong. You know, so I was like, "What if this one was wrong, too?" Because I knew as a trainer, if I made people worse, they weren't gonna hire me again. And that's when I started really studying diet. And I knew that our physiology hadn't changed in the last 20 to 50 years, but our approach to eating had changed dramatically. And I was right in that phase where everyone was cutting fat, and watching calories, and becoming insulin-

resistant. We just didn't understand it yet. But that's what I started to find in all the literature, was how, you know, the biochemistry of all of this and even the biochemistry of exercise which wasn't being taught. It's when I switched from having people do long, slow-distance training to high-intense interval training and weight training. And people thought I was crazy back then. Because I was like, you know, "Stop all that cardio, just go lift weights." You know, "Stop focusing on eating six times a day which is what we were taught to do, eat three times a day. Give yourself a good 12-hour overnight fast."

And it was interesting because, you know, I was literally being told by doctors, "It doesn't matter what they eat, it's just the amount of calories." I'm going, "I'm watching these people and they're eating more food and they're losing weight. They're working out less." I mean, back when I was first doing this, I used to work out two hours a day. Now, I work out maybe 30 minutes a day, five days a week, and I eat more. And back when I was doing this, I was eating a low-fat vegetarian diet with lots of cardio and I was 22% to 25% body fat. Now at 54, I'm 15% body fat, you know, working 30 minutes a day, and being super clean with my eating. But it's, basically, I eat protein, fat, and lots of non-starchy vegetables, little slow low carbs. I mean, I eat a high-fat, optimal protein, loads of fiber diet. It's simple. I'm not hungry. I never worry about my weight. All of it's a non-issue now, you know.

And this is what I teach people to do and it just makes it simple. But when I first start talking about it and said, "You know, it's not about the calories, it's about where they come from," you would've thought I was saying, "You know, the earth is flat." I mean, people thought I was absolutely insane. Now, 25 years later, it's kind of accepted knowledge and we get that but we really need to look at food as information. You really need to consider that everything you're eating is telling your body something. You wanna make sure that your food is telling your body to balance your blood sugar, which is everything, balanced blood sugar is everything to lower your inflammation to have great energy, to have better focus, and to burn off stored body fat. And that is all about what you're eating and when you're eating it. That makes all the difference.

Katie: Yeah, it makes so much sense. And I feel like, especially for kids, if the food we're eating is sending messages to our body, and especially like the blood sugar connection with my kids, I've noticed, like, that changes their behavior drastically. And I see this in other moms who change their diets. And I'm like, "How can you, to some degree, like, don't stack the odds against them?" Like, if you want them to behave and to do all these things you want them to do, don't stack the odds against them and make it so hard for them.

JJ: Exactly. If you give your kid like Goldfish or Skittles for a snack, and then you're mad at them for being a brat, you know, shame on you, right? I mean, there's no way, if you gave me Skittles for a snack, I'd be a brat, you know.

Katie: Yeah, exactly.

JJ: Right? I mean, hey, that's part of the reason I'm really careful about the food we feed at the conferences because I want people to have great energy all day long and not crash and burn. You look at most these conferences, and in the afternoon, people are just done. And it's because they just had the most ridiculous crappy lunch. You know, it's just like "boof," they're out. So, yes.

The best part about all this stuff is when you do this for your kids, it makes your job as warrior mom so much easier. It's so much easier. And, one final thing, Katie, I know that one of the reasons that my son was able to survive the unsurvivable, he was literally dead on the pavement, was we had him on fish oil. And we had him

on fish oil before the accident happened which protects your brains. You never know when your kid's gonna hit their head. And we all hit our heads, and you hit your head, you hurt your brain. A concussion is a traumatic brain injury. And one of the easiest ways to protect your brain is fish oil. So, especially if you can't get your kids to eat fish, make sure that they're taking fish oil. And there's lots of yummy different choices out there now like little, yummy fish puddings, I do a lemon drops smoothie one. So, there's great choices but that's super important along with the eating the blood sugar-balanced diet.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. And we make sardines a regular lunch option at our house, too, just for the food-based person.

JJ: Okay. Now, you're showing off. Now, you just went into Star Mom category. And one other thing that can help, too, is, in this sugar impact diet, we have these amazing scales. I can make this available to everybody through your podcast link. And we have these incredible scales and you can just see what's high-sugar impact, what's medium, what's low. Just start to focus on feeding your kids more low-sugar-impact foods and you'll help change their preferences. Remember, exposure equals preference.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. And definitely, those links will be in the show notes so everybody can find it. But also let people know where to find you online. I know you have a podcast, you have a website, you are everywhere online. Where do you want people to find you first?

JJ: Probably easiest is to go to my website at jjvirgin.com. And then you can jump off into my social media sites and my podcast, which I hope we have your podcast date set.

Katie: I think we do. I'll make sure we follow up on that.

JJ: Make sure we do. Okay.

Katie: Awesome. Well, again, all those things will be in the show notes at wellnessmama.fm if you're listening and can't write it down. Definitely encourage you to find JJ and follow her because her work is very research-backed and very easy to implement with kids even, and I think you're doing amazing work, JJ. Thanks for being here.

JJ: Thank you. I appreciate you.

Katie: And thanks to all of you for listening. I'll see you next time on "The Healthy Moms Podcast."

If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.