Episode 69 - Saunacast: Birth Freedom, Gut Healing & Healthy Starches
Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast.

Katie: This episode is brought to you by Pregnancy Exercise. If you've never heard of this website, it's a great online resource for pregnancy and post-pregnancy exercises for moms. The founder, Lorraine Scapens, is a pre- and post-natal exercise specialist, and she shares her knowledge with other women and helps thousands of women to have a healthy and pain-free pregnancy to prevent diastasis and pelvic floor muscle dysfunction and to get back in shape safely post-pregnancy. Her website has a ton of great information, as well as some specific programs that you can do from home to get back in shape after pregnancy or to have a really comfortable healthy pregnancy without losing strength in the first place. So, check it out. Go to pregnancyexercise.co.nz/wellnessmama and make sure you use a coupon code, wellnessmama, for an additional 10% off.

The other sponsor for this episode is the Wellness Mama Cookbook. And, yes, that is my cookbook. But I wanted to specifically talk about it for a second because I've spent a lot of time compiling this cookbook as a resource for busy moms. As a mom myself, I know that you just don't have extra time to spend hours and hours each day in the kitchen. And this is why the cookbook contains all of our family favorite recipes. Many of them you can make in under half an hour using only one pan, so you can save on the dishes as well. And they have sneaky veggies, which use veggies in place of a lot of the refined ingredients in many foods. I know that your family will love the recipes as much as ours does, so grab it at any major bookstore, on Amazon, or check it out on wellnessmama.com

Hi. Welcome to the Healthy Moms podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and I am here with my friend Heather from mommypotamus.com for Saunacast Round 2.

Heather: Hey. I'm so glad to be here.

Katie: Yeah. It's always fun. So, yeah. What's life like?

Heather: Well, apparently I left a bar of soap in your fridge. So, I guess life is a little more hectic than I thought. That was really fun to just find out. But it sounds like you've had a little bit more of an exciting week than I have, not leaving soap in random people's fridges. What have you been up to?

Katie: Yeah. So, I've kind of been reliving my college days with my interest in politics again. And not politics in general but just, in our state right now, women don't have the right to choose how they birth, especially home birth. And that's a big deal because we have really bad C-section rates. We're on the top 10 list of highest C-section rates. I think we're about 35%.

Heather: Wow.
Katie: And repeat C-section rate is over 90%. So there really aren't a lot of options for women. And there's a lot of misinformation about licensing midwives and a lot of misunderstanding about certified professional midwives. So I've been spending time up at our state Capitol and meeting with legislators and trying to get a bill passed that would allow us to license home birth midwives in our state, midwives who are trained and certified, and people would have legal recourse. And these midwives would have access to the supplies they need, and the labs, and ultrasound, and things that would make home birth even safer for women in Kentucky.

Heather: Wow. That's amazing. So, I don't live in Kentucky but is there a way that I could support or, like, at least stay up to date on what's going on in Kentucky and around the U.S.? Because this is a huge, huge issue. I've moved states and found out I was pregnant. And it was really scary for me because I wasn't sure what the laws would be, and I didn't have any midwives immediately to talk to. And the laws were different. They did affect me. And it's kind of a scary situation when you feel like, at first, like, things worked out for me, but that you're not in control of your birthing choices. I feel like that is one of the most fundamental things to women, to be able to birth in the way that feels right to them. So, how can we stay up to date on it?

Katie: Yeah. So, I'll be posting updates on my Facebook page. But, also, there's a group called the Kentucky Home Birth Coalition if people are interested in finding out in Kentucky specifically, but there are also other states, like Alabama and South Dakota, who are trying to license as well. Right now, 31 states, including Tennessee, license professional midwives. So, like, all the states around us do, we just don't. And we used to. And we ironically had the largest midwifery school in the country. We just don't license them in our state. So...

Heather: You have the largest midwifery school, but no, there's no state-licensed midwives?

Katie: Yeah. There's a few, I want to say, under 10 nurse midwives in hospitals but no licensing of certified professional midwives. And, like you said, that really is a fundamental right for women and a very individual one. And what may be right for someone is certainly not gonna be right for another. And I definitely think women should have the right to choose hospital birth, even C-section, even though that's not the option I would choose. But the flip side of that is women should be able to choose to birth at home and just...there's so many implications there. So, we're really just working to get that legalized in our state.

Heather: You're speaking as someone, too, who has literally birthed in every possible way except for, like, in the back of a car or on top of, like, a purple giraffe. Because, you've done, like, the C-section thing, the VBAC thing. What else have you done?

Katie: Yeah. So that's the part, that's why it's such a cause near and dear to the heart for me because I started off just listening to the doctor. I'd never thought to research a lot of things with the first. So he was just the typical hospital intervention birth. And then the second was my natural hospital birth. The third was a C-
section that saved my life, and I'm very grateful for medicine and that it was possible. And our fourth I had in the hospital, which was a VBAC. But number five and number six I actually had no choice but home birth and not only that but technically illegal home birth in our state because no hospital within 300 miles of me would let me deliver a breach baby that was technically a VBAC even though I'd had a VBAC previously. VBAC is essentially non-existent in our state, in hospitals.

Heather: And especially breach.

Katie: And especially breach. And not just one but I've now had two breach home VBACs. The last was also a water birth. And realizing, like, to some people that might seem extremely dangerous, and they might make a different choice, but for me, that was the right choice. And that was what...and I absolutely knew that without a doubt. And so it's very important for me, even if I never have another baby, that other women in the same situation can make that choice. Because it's not like you're offering them the choice between a VBAC at home and a VBAC in the hospital. Until our hospitals get better, it's another surgery or VBAC. And that's a huge difference, especially knowing the World Health Organization saying the C-section rate should be 15% or less, and we're already 20% over that, and, like, 75% over that for VBACs. That's a huge health problem.

And it's not only costing our state a ton of money but it's costing moms a lot of their health, and limiting the number of children they can have, and creating health problems. No abdominal surgery is without risk. So, just, it makes me really sad that our state doesn't respect the rights of birthing women, and I hope that...I'm confident and hopeful. We have some great legislators. I've been meeting with them. They're wonderful and they're open. I just think there's a lot of misinformation and fear that surrounds home birth. And I hope that we're able to cut through that and to reach a good conclusion. Because I think women deserve that all over the country.

Heather: Are you sure that you don't wanna go back into politics? Didn't you say that...I mean, I know you, so I know that you, like, triple-majored in college, and one of them was, what, politics?

Katie: Yeah. Polly sci.

Heather: I will move to Kentucky and vote for you if you would like to run for office. But, you know, actually, one of the things you just said, like, it is definitely a super important thing for moms. But it also affects children, like, in a life-long way. Because I know you've probably...I don't know if you...I know you have shifted in your understanding between your first baby and this last baby and how birth, like, it sets up our microbiome. And so, can you talk about that? Like, I know you've done a C-section. And can you talk about where did the awareness of the microbiome fit into those birth things, those birth orders?

Katie: Yeah. Exactly. So, it's been a fun thing. It's like what we wish we could tell ourselves previously.
Heather: Yes.

Katie: Like, what we wish we had known. But, with him, I hemorrhaged. I didn't have the chance to research. I didn't plan on a C-section. He was supposed to be a home birth and, obviously, super grateful for that. But I wish I had known back then that there are things you can do even in a C-section because what the research is starting to show is that there's a microbial aspect to birth that we didn't understand before. And we thought, like, the amniotic fluid was completely sterile and nothing crossed the placenta, which we're coming to understand is not true and that baby actually starts to develop certain prebiotic gut bacteria in utero and then the birthing process seeds their gut for lifelong gut health. And as a C-section mom myself, like, I totally understand that people don't have the choice to birth naturally at times. And, thankfully, there are things you can do, even in a C-section, like you can take a vaginal swab of the mom and seed the baby's skin and eyes and nose and mouth and kind of simulate the same type of bacterial transfer as going through the birth canal. And it's not a perfect match, but the outcomes are a lot better.

And there's a really great film called "Microbirth." They interview a lot of the researchers that are in the front lines of this research, and basically, they're finding that babies who are born naturally have lower rates of, like, allergies, and autism, and auto-immune disease, and even obesity and heart disease later in life. And since all of those are becoming huge problems for our children's generation, I think that's something very important to address. Because we're not just looking at hospital vs. home birth for safety. There's a whole microbial aspect that could definitely shift the odds in the favor of home birth because you're controlling the microbial environment, and that's the mom's natural environment. So I think that's an aspect we really need to look at, especially before you just try to make blanket statements that hospital birth is safer because we're just starting to learn that there is this whole other world that we didn't know about before.

Heather: That's true. You know, the Microbirth documentary people are coming out with a book and I pre-ordered it. It should be out in, like, the next couple of months, and I am really excited because I think that they've gone even deeper in their research, and I cannot wait to read it and find out what they've discovered. But I know something that you actually mentioned to me once that I think is really helpful, and I wanted to tell you what you told me. And that is that although moms are adapted to their environment, which means that we're producing all kinds of immune factors in our breast milk that are directly related to our environment that we pass on to our children when they're born...so when we switch environments, like if we're going to a different location, our bodies may not have time to catch up and basically get the lay of the land and then start producing all those immune factors immediately.

So, there's, you know, this, like, issue. The baby is colonized by whatever environment it's in to some degree, you know? You can swab the mouth and all of that. But then there's like the touching, and like the clothes and the sheets, and stuff like that. So, you told me once that you can bring, like, blankets. Not freshly washed ones but, like, ones that kind of represent what's in your home. Bring those up to the hospital and have mom...have those on the bed with her just to sort of simulate the environment that she's usually in. Because sometimes
that's the best option or maybe that's the option the mom wants where she feels most comfortable. That was really cool, and I'd never heard that before, so I'm just...

Katie: Yeah. So, like, even in a hospital, if that's where you choose to birth, then you can kind of hack the environment to make it better for you. Or I know moms who have gone into a C-section with...they'll buy the baby blankets that their hospital uses offline and, like, the mom will sleep with them and the husband will kind of, like, pull a bait and switch and switch out the blankets when the baby is first wrapped up so that that's what's immediately coming in contact with them.

Heather: Got it.

Katie: And just so many things like that. I think that's going to be really interesting. I'm really curious also to read the new book and to find out more research on the researchers who are looking at this. But I think it's something really important for us to delve into in the future.

Heather: So you've been talking about skincare. So we were just talking about babies and the microbiome, how it affects their immune function from day one and how it affects everything from obesity and diabetes and all that stuff. But we're still microbial, we're still covered in microbes. Or at least, we should be. So, help me out here because I know you've been writing about skincare and how we can include good bacteria on our skin.

Katie: Yeah. So this has been another fun area of research. I think you and I both love delving into the microbiome, into bacterial research. But basically the idea is that, just like birth starts our gut microbiome, it also starts our skin microbiome and our environment, of course, influences that. But also with our limited understanding of the microbiome for the past few decades, a lot of skincare products actually disrupt the natural flora of the skin. In fact, a lot of them naturally contain antibacterial substances.

Heather: Yeah.

Katie: And there was recently a lot of news about banning a couple of those, even in soaps, because they're now finding that they're creating more problems than they're solving.

Heather: Yeah.

Katie: And even the leading researchers seem to now say, like, soap and water is the best thing. You don't need all these other sanitizing agents most of the time. But we're finding out that the skin, just like the gut, hosts its own colony of bacteria and so does the mouth--we have all of these diverse microbiomes in our life,
our home, even—and how that influences our bacteria. So, a lot of us have diminished over time our skin bacteria. And I know, for me, like, in college, I used whatever smelled the best. I loved all these super smelly products that probably killed a lot of my skin bacteria.

And so there are now researchers who are looking at that aspect and even companies, like, there's one called Mother Dirt, where they have a bacterial spray. I mean, that sounds so weird to people in today's world. Like, "You're gonna spray bacteria all over you when you get out of the shower." But that's what you're doing. It's called ammonia-oxidizing bacteria and it feeds the beneficial bacteria on your skin and helps them to kind of replenish and grow.

So, just really fascinating research. Even I found it interesting to read that they're saying now sweat is almost like a prebiotic for the skin because certain compounds in your sweat can feed the beneficial bacteria. So then you look at so many of us are sedentary and don't exercise. So, we're not getting sweat, we're killing our gut bacteria with, like, scented perfumery anti-bacterial products, and even our diet's maybe not the cleanest. So we're losing out on all of these microbial sources. I feel like you're lucky because you live on this gorgeous farm out in the country and you get to interact with dirt.

Heather: Where, like, all the bacteria...

Katie: All of our kids these days, they're dirt-deficient. And you've written about this, too.

Heather: Yeah.

Katie: You get to interact with all the good dirt.

Heather: I know. Well, you're kind of making me laugh because, first of all, I know for a fact that, at some point, my husband is...from this point I knew, as you were talking, that my husband is gonna walk into the bathroom and he's gonna be like, "What are you doing?" And I'm gonna be like, "I'm spraying bacteria on myself." And this is going to be yet another "things Katie talked me into" moment, and the truth is it's not like you ever do talk me into it. It's like you mention it, and all of a sudden, I'm like, "Let's do it. Let's go jump in -200 degree cryotank," or whatever it is. But I've never done this. What did you say the name of the company is?

Katie: Mother Dirt.

Heather: Okay. Well, I've never tried Mother Dirt but I really, really wanna spray bacteria on myself. And you're right. I mean, I live on a farm. So, I feel like we're pretty bacteria-wealthy. But, at the same time, you
know, I'm so interested in this whole concept that I couldn't help it. I sprayed my whole house in bacteria, like, positive bacteria. Because, you know, Dave Asprey, he had an issue with, like, mold in one of his houses, and he created this probiotic for the house to kind of create a beneficial house microbiome. And I was like, "Well, you know, we bought this new house." It's new to us and it's out in the country and it smelled a little musty. And I don't know if that's just because it was closed up for a long time or what but I was like, "What could it hurt?" So, like, I mean, if I've sprayed bacteria all over my house, I might as well try spraying it on my skin. So, that's pretty cool. Excited to try that out.

Katie: Yeah. And so the other funny thing that I realized with this. So I started researching it, and 60 or 70% of the people who start using this type of bacteria...because also you have to understand, like, body odor and negative bacteria, it's part of the imbalance.

Heather: Ooh.

Katie: So, like, 60% of people stopped using deodorant altogether because...

Heather: Are you serious?

Katie: ...their body naturally corrects. Yeah. So, it's fascinating. Also, people with acne are seeing cool things happen just because it's like there could be a bacterial element there that we don't understand yet. So I thought that was really interesting, and especially thinking of our kids because my oldest is only 10. But I'm like, "Oh gosh, they're gonna start, like, sweating and...

Heather: Yes.

Katie: "...getting hormones in the next few years. So what if they could just start with that? What if our kids don't have to undo all of this stuff that we have to fix in ourselves and they could just start with good bacteria on their skin?"

Heather: That's really cool. I can't wait to try that.


Heather: Okay, so speaking of prebiotics, there are prebiotics for the skin and then there's, like, prebiotics for the gut. Have you done much research into resistant starch and what we're learning about it these days? Because I have been, like, really fascinated by it lately.
Katie: Yeah. I would love to hear your take because I will say I started researching a long time ago, got super excited, took way too much plantain flower at one time and then backed off for like a year.

Heather: Sorry, I'm not laughing, but okay, oh gosh. Yeah. So, you know, my husband and I, we were like the antibiotic generation and, like, my version of eating healthy was eating a health food cereal but then dumping half a cup of sugar into it. So, sugar feeds, usually, it typically is the preferred food of pathogenic bacteria. So I had all kinds of gut issues by my early 20s and I've been working toward improving gut health ever since then. I just want the most diverse population because the more diversity, the more stability and the more resilience.

But, you know, when we got onto a gut healing protocol, I sort of developed the mindset that, like, all starches are bad. And that's because they're usually restricted on gut-healing protocols. I didn't realize at the time that that was a functional purpose. That the purpose was to restrict them, restrict the food source of all the bacteria in your gut until you rebalance it because you don't want to feed populations that are out of control. You want to get those populations under control and then raise levels of your beneficial.

And so, we went through a pretty long period where we were sort of restricting starches in general and I came across research in the last couple years that just keeps growing that's indicating that, you know, long-term keeping that down starves our good bacteria. It starves our whole internal ecosystem. And it's really important. So, we've been incorporating resistant starch, which is basically starch we can't digest but our gut microbes can. And they produce all kinds of things that make us happy, you know, when we do that. Like, they produce vitamins and I never say this right but butyrate, is that right?

Katie: Yep.

Heather: I'm wincing. I can't ever talk about...I can't pronounce words that I can spell.

Katie: This is the curse of blogging. It's like, we can spell, like, methyl tetrahydrofolate reductase but then we have to say it out loud and like, blah blah blah.

Heather: But that's pretty much it. Or, like, you have to stop if you're doing a tutorial. Like, I've done this in the kitchen so many times, and my husband's listening to me, "You don't say it that way." So, yeah, anyway. But just speaking about the microbiome, it feels like we're learning about it. It's like, it's the world outside in. It starts with us, it starts with birth, and then it's all over our skin, and then, you know... I'm just really interested, I've been really interested lately in introducing more prebiotics into my diet and it's been really interesting to see, like, we've found that, like, potatoes, cooked and cooled potatoes are really, really good for us. And we're trying out some things with beans, too, which has been really interesting. I'm giving this to you because I lost my train of thought.
Katie: Well, and I know you also have an awesome recipe. You've talked about tigernuts on your blog.

Heather: Yeah.

Katie: And you have a great recipe or several recipes, I think, or several posts that mention it. We can link to those. But, like, you can make cookie dough balls. Am I saying that right?

Heather: Yeah. The cookie dough balls are, like, the easiest thing ever because it's literally like you put three things in a bowl, maybe four, and then you just, like, stir. And that's my version of every recipe actually. But it has been a really good thing to work into our diet because we actually did gut health work-ups on my family. I love to run labs. I wish I had, like, an unlimited budget for running labs but, at least, you know, I do the best I can. And one of the things they said is, like, eat more fiber. And I was like, "Whoops." I focused on, like, getting the grass-fed meat and getting the butter and I forgot about this, like, extremely boring side, called, you know, you need insoluble fiber and resistant starch. So, I'm working that back in and starting to try to write more about that because I think it's gonna be something like the microbiome. We're gonna start understanding we have to nourish that internal ecosystem to flourish.

Katie: Yeah. And just, like, I love to...we've talked about the seasonal aspect of so many things and maybe that's how gut health works, too. Like, you do have to avoid starches when you're trying to fix it.

Heather: Yes.

Katie: But then maybe you need, like, an abundance of resistant starch and to go super heavy on the vegetables and fiber and greens for a while to bring it back into balance with the good bacteria and I love that balance doesn't have to be every single day. We've talked about this so much, that you don't have to eat the perfect diet every single day, but if you get it over time, then your body can equalize that out and maybe sometimes you do need more or less of certain things. And in the end, you can achieve balance.

Heather: Yeah. And I feel like the body is in so many ways...I mean, there are times when it gives us signals that are off, but mostly it's like, really, really wise. That is a thing that blows me away. Like we've run lab tests on my family and the things that even my kids, they have these intuitive senses about what they want and what they avoid, and when we run labs, they match up. And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, it just blows my mind." And it's so cool because they're learning at that age to listen to what they need. So I think we have in our head, like, this idea, like you said, that you have to do it all in a day. And you don't. Like, there are cycles. And if you just keep listening to your body, it all kinda works out.
Katie: And I feel like kids are kind of born...if you give them basic real food when they're little, they are so good at that. Like, there are days when they don't want to eat any meat and they just want vegetables. And then the next day they only want protein and they don't want any meat or they just want potatoes. But by the end of the week, they've eaten a really balanced diet.

Heather: Yeah.

Katie: And maybe that's what their gut bacteria needs. And that's so cool what you said about the labs. Because we've done this more so with my husband and I but on some of the older kids as well, and I always used to say, like, between all my kids, they eat really healthy. Like, one loves protein, one loves fat, one loves vegetables, and their labs and their mutations reflect that that's exactly what they needed. And my husband and I both have VDR mutations and I've always said, like, he's a sponge when we go to the beach. Like, he just sits in the sun and I can, like, see him soaking in the sun.

Heather: Yeah.

Katie: And now, understanding, it makes total sense. So, I love that intuitive wisdom of the body that I think we sometimes ignore and probably should listen to a little bit more.

Heather: Yeah. We get so used to following the rules according to expert or whatever that we forget to listen to ourselves. There's just, there is no one-size-fits-all. I mean...

Katie: Exactly.

Heather: It's so weird how we interact with our environment. I was actually reading about this one parasite. It's so freakish. I'll have to find the article to link to so that you could share it, but basically it was like there's this one, I don't know, microorganism, I don't know if it's a parasite. But, when men get it, they dress sloppier. It actually affects their behavior. And we know that our gut health affects our behavior, but sometimes certain microbes create different neurotransmitters that can, like, affect how we behave. When women get the same thing, they dress more stylish. They make more of an effort. So, same organism, and our interaction with it changes based on whether we're a dude or a girl. And so I thought that was really interesting. And it's just proof that literally there aren't...there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Katie: That is just wild.

Heather: I know. I'll give you the...I promise it's a real thing.
Katie: Well, make sure to link to it for sure, because I want to read it too. And I think actually, to wrap up, that's the perfect point is you have to understand, like, all of us who are bloggers, and especially, I would say, even more so people who are health researchers and doctors and practitioners, a lot of us get here because we had an issue that we had to fix and so we've spent an entire, like, a ton of time researching this thing to fix ourselves. And there's that saying, when you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Heather: Yes.

Katie: And a lot of practitioners have their thing that they are super good at and amazing at, but if that's not your problem, it's not going to fix you. And so--I think you would say this too--even for us, the things we write about, like, nothing is going to work for everybody.

Heather: Right.

Katie: And you should absolutely, as much as possible, develop that intuitive wisdom and research for yourself. Never take advice from anybody just at face value. Always do your own research. Try what works for you. Be your own guinea pig but within safe limits.

Heather: I could not agree more.

Katie: Awesome. Well, thanks, everybody, for listening. It's always so fun. We could talk all day long. And we probably will actually continue talking all day long.

Heather: Probably.

Katie: But thanks so much for listening. And we'll see you next time on the Healthy Moms podcast.

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