Else Nutrition: Plant-Based Baby & Toddler Formula

Episode 239 · July 22, 2021 · with Hamutal Yitzhak

IN THIS EPISODE

Hamutal Yitzhak, co-founder and CEO of Else Nutrition, joins Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC for this sponsored episode about a different path for baby and toddler nutrition. A mother of four who spent her career in infant nutrition — including leading it for Abbott in Israel — she explains how her own children's dairy intolerance, and her partner's granddaughter's life-threatening reaction, pushed her to build a plant-based alternative to dairy and soy formulas. Else's products draw their protein from almonds and buckwheat and their carbohydrate from tapioca, kept as whole ingredients and minimally processed — no breaking down and reconstituting — to match the nutrient profile of standard formulas. Hamutal describes who the products are for (families dealing with allergies and intolerance, plant-based households, and health seekers), the clinical studies needed before an infant formula can be a sole source of nutrition, why the taste surprises people, and what is coming next: a ready-to-drink line, a complementary food for babies six months and up, and a FODMAP-friendly range of real foods for adults. Where does the name Else come from — and when does its founder sleep?

About this transcript: *This transcript was created with AI-assisted transcription and reviewed by our team. It may not be 100% accurate — names, medical terms, and phrasing can occasionally be mis-transcribed. For exact wording, please listen to the episode audio.*

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Welcome to the informed pregnancy and parenting podcast. I'm your host dr Elliott Berlin today's episode is content sponsored by else nutrition a trailblazer in the field of nutrition for babies toddlers and kids Did you know that for over 100 years baby formula protein sources have almost exclusively come from dairy and soy? Else set out to change that creating high-quality clean label plant-based products for babies toddlers and kids Who may have food allergies or who simply embrace a plant-based Lifestyle and are unwilling to accept the overly processed chemical laden formulas that have for so long been the only options available since its conception in

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: 2019 else has been offering the best whole food based toddler nutrition in the industry Produced under the highest standards for quality and cleanliness and made without common allergens like dairy soy or gluten It's bringing a real choice for better early childhood nutrition to this and future generations I'm joined today by else's co-founder director and CEO to learn more about else's mission the current product line and to find Out what's in development for more complete nutrition options for kids of all ages Come on. Tell you talk welcome to the podcast. Thank you for having me. Thank you. Everyone I think your mission is noble and Welcomed by many people who are looking for better choices and plant-based choices and

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Unique because I haven't seen products like this before but let's start at the beginning Where are you from and how did this become important to you?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So I'm a mother of four and I've been in the industry of infant nutrition for my entire career actually since I started working and I started as the Product manager of Similac here in Israel and became later the head of Infant Nutrition for Abbot Israel and I also initiated some of the health revolutions for infants and children here in Israel including the B-spinal a revolution here for baby bottles and accessories I was was responsible for that as well And when I was the head of the infant nutrition for Abbot for many years I was exposed to the degree of issues that babies had with the current products available I've seen the intolerance issues the allergenicity issues and When it touched my personal life when I had children who were

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: intolerant to dairy and then the real trigger was when it really came to my partner's Granddaughter's life when she was a baby She was actually severely intolerant to dairy to the extent of life risking situation and then We couldn't stand aside any longer and we started developing else for her initially and then To make a long story short We found ourselves with a real product that helped her and then we thought it could help everyone else

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Are you dairy intolerant yourself or just your kids were yes?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: My kids were but I'm also they're intolerant, so I tried to avoid dairy as much as I can I almost don't consume it. I

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Mean making a nutritional product for kids is a huge undertaking I mean, it's a great idea to say wait a second. These kids are not digesting dairy products. Well let's make one without dairy products, but there's a lot of regulation on what can go in there, what has to be in there and what can't go in there. How did you go about getting started?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So the fact that both myself and my partner and the other partner later down the road are all coming from this industry with many, many years of experience just added to that. It's not just being a parent that trying to sort out a problem. It is really very professional issue and we had the capabilities, we had the know-how and the knowledge to start looking at it, to start looking at the standards, at the regulatory restrictions, at the structure, the chemical structure of the human milk. We had the capability, we had the initial terms in our hands to be able to start developing it and that's how we came about it. It was both the need and the capability that we've had.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I think the first question people will have is there's nutrition that's coming from dairy and soy protein in particular in traditional products. How do you add those nutritional

requirements into a product that's totally plant-based? Yeah, so actually our revolution

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: is groundbreaking in terms of the protein source, although soy is also plant-based protein and it has been in the market for dozens of years. The only problem with the soy was that about 15 years ago it was discovered that it may have issues with the hormonal system and may disrupt the hormonal system. There were concerns in the medical community. I mean gradually it has been declining and you know pediatricians have stopped recommending it. So it really is currently only five percent of the market but it used to be 30 percent. So there's no issue with using a plant-based nutrition for infants. The only thing is that you have to actually demonstrate it as bioavailable. It's really that is really digested in the infant's body

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: and the second thing is that it has to be bioavailable. This is what we are creating. We're taking the proteins from almonds and buckwheat. Altogether the profile is very similar to that of a human meal. This is part of our invention but we are processing it in a minimal way in a most natural way to be bioavailable to the body and we will have to demonstrate on a clinical study that it supports proper growth. This is something that we are doing right now. We're in the midst of that process. You have to do that in order to get certain certifications? For an infant formula we currently are actually selling or marketing the toddler nutrition product, kids nutritional product and many

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: other products which are not considered infant nutrition for sole consumption only for complementary consumption. This is something we're entitled and we meet the standards. Just to be clear, for infants they can safely drink it but not yet as their sole source of nutrition and then you're doing the clinical studies to show that this could be an option for sole source of nutrition. Absolutely. Yes, we believe it is but we will demonstrate that on a

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: clinical study and a preclinical study. What's considered toddler? Is that after 12 months? Yes, exactly. All right, so who specifically is your product designed for else nutrition? Your product's designed for obviously people who want plant-based. Yes, generally speaking I would say

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: that we designed this product for everybody. In the long run we see ourselves as you know actually replacing the soy's role on this planet in terms of infant nutrition. We want to be a replacement for soy or a very legitimate alternative for dairy so that a mother that comes to the shelf and doesn't have any hesitations, no second thoughts, just looking at the shelf and thinks that I might take this one or this one. It really is compatible and just the same but in order to create that notion and that trust we have to start with the groups that are in the need and these are of course the allergenic and the intolerant ones or the vegans and flexitarians who wish to avoid using animal-based proteins or animal-based

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: ingredients and there's another group that we are targeting which is the health seekers that understand that what we are doing is cleaner and minimal processed nutrition which is very important to those people. So I mean our innovation is not only about being plant-based, it's also about the way we process the ingredients which is a completely different and groundbreaking method in our space. I can explain later what we are doing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay yeah I would love to get into how you make your product in the next segment but you use the term flexitarian. What does that mean?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So flexitarians are about the third of the population in North America as well. in some countries in Western Europe. So they actually wish to avoid consuming animal-based ingredients. And they do not purchase those ingredients or those products in their weekly purchase for their home. But what they're doing is that if they have an occasion where they have to consume those ingredients or those products, like, you know, in a restaurant, they would, but they try to avoid it as much as they can. I mean, they're not orthodox. They do consume that to a very small extent.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. I mean, would you say these are the people that start out with meatless Monday?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: Exactly, yeah, yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. You know, you must be doing something right because you have endorsements, literally global leaders in pediatrics and nutrition who are behind else. So obviously I'm not an expert in this field, but everything you're saying makes sense to me. And like you said, those micro groups who are really looking for very specific things are gonna flock to you, but you're gaining popularity on a more global and all-inclusive categories.

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So yes, I mean, this phase of infant nutrition is definitely led by professionals. I mean, they set the standards, they set the goals of this industry. And I don't think they would have, I mean, they might, if this world would have continued to rely on a single source at their end, as long as you provide the nutritionals or you provide the proper nutrition to support the baby's growth, it's fine. But they are part of this world. They are also consumers and parents, and they see that the need is there and the need is based on real issues and problems that they see every day in their clinics. They understand that it comes from the market, it comes from the parents, it comes from consumers. They see the trend on the general food

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: where dairy consumption is being declining and shrinking all over the world, especially in the Western world. And the reason why they endorse it is that they believe and they're looking at the nutrient profile and they see that the nutrient profile is identical. What they are expecting us to do is follow the clinical regulatory pathway to demonstrate the proper growth. And after we do that, I don't think they have any issue. I mean, they expect us to do that. On the other hand, they understand the need and they see the opportunity that we are bringing such a unique solution where they don't have other solutions. They don't have an alternative to offer their clients. This is where the endorsement is coming from.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well, I'm fascinated and I'd like to learn more, especially about your unique process in how you make your products. We're gonna take a quick break and we'll be right back with Kamotel Yitzhak. Welcome back to the Inborn Pregnancy Podcast. We are talking to Hamotel Yitzchak, the CEO of Else Nutrition. All right, Hamotel, you mentioned that the makeup of your formula is similar in composition to breast milk. Can you tell me more about that?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: Sure, so let's be more cautious in saying that because I don't think any other formula in the world can claim that it's identical to breast milk. This is something I assume will take

time to get there. We're not there yet. None of us is there yet. I mean, breast milk has all kinds of life substances like antibodies and all kinds of substances that are not mimicable. But what is mimicable by the other brands or the standard formulas is and this is what we're doing. We created the same profile just like any other standard formula. And this is the way we created the product. Initially, the only thing that even makes us better in my eyes or in my humble opinion is that we are using whole ingredients in order to create

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: that profile and other formulas do not. They cannot use whole ingredients. They have to break them down to their nutrient level and then they have to because cow's milk is not the same in profile, just like the human milk. So they have to break it to the casein, to the whey, to the fat, to the carb and change the structure, the chemical structure of the natural ingredient and then reconstitute it. And then it becomes a more artificial or processed food, which is not in our case. We keep the ingredients whole. So I guess we will be talking about that in more detail soon.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. I mean, we can jump into it because you talked about your sources of protein, for example, being almonds and buckwheat. So are you saying that the nutrition in these ingredients is naturally similar in carbohydrates, fat and protein to human breast milk?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: Yes. The way it is manifested in any other standard formula, it will never be the same. I mean, anyone who would claim to have the same profile is misleading in my eyes. It's not the same, but we are just the same as any other standard formula or any other formula in the world in the way that our profile is built. We have the same amino acid profile, the same fatty acid profile in the same carb profile. And altogether, the overall structure is exactly the same as any other different formula that is sold in this market.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Right. But yours comes from whole food, which I am understanding to mean that, like you said, you're using cow's milk because it's so different than the profile of breast milk, that it has to be broken down into its components, altered, and then reconstituted. Whereas with your ingredients, that doesn't have to happen. So what does happen?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So we've managed to create a formulation or composition that I'm taking the fat content and the protein content, as well as the carb as whole from almonds and bapy together, they create the full amino and fatty acid profile of any standard formula and then tapioca actually serves as the lactose substitute, so altogether they create the full composition in a magical way. I'd say, I mean, it's something that we've actually discovered, but what we have to do is create them to make the protein and the carb bioavailable. So what we are doing is we are processing in a very minimal and very gentle way without altering the chemical structure of our natural ingredients, just with using enzymes or mechanical processing, not with

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: chemical processing or any kind of fractionation or derivatives that actually involve chemicals or solvents or very high profile acids in order to break the ingredients down to then reconstitute and make them very similar to the required composition. In our case, we don't have to do that. We can do without it. And that's why we keep all the fats from the almond, the healthy fats, just the same in their structure. We keep the almonds as is. We just have to minimally process them as well as the pathways. And this is what we're doing. This is the magic in all that. And actually we see the results of that already happening in the U S we see so many parents that actually testify that this

product is creating

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: miracles to their child and they're so thankful. for us to bring that product because it actually healed their child from whether it was allergenicity or intolerance or eczemas or behavioral issues that were created due to the fact that the baby was not sleeping well because the food was not absorbed. We have dozens of those stories and we see that our theory actually is reflected in reality and becomes a true story.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's amazing. And again, it's so refreshing to have choices and to have whole food choices, even for very young children. I do have this question. So when you take all of that nutritional necessity and bioavailability into account in making a product, how do you then also make it something that tastes good, that kids want to eat?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So I'd say that our taste is really delicious and I'm not objective, of course, but according to our customer base, which is getting bigger and bigger every day, I think the fact that we are using the ingredients as whole and we're not breaking them down in an artificial way. The fact that we are using natural foods and that they're all plant based, so they have this earthy flavor, very natural and neutral. It creates a great taste and I think our customers can testify on that. I mean, it's a fact you can see the reviews everywhere, even on Amazon, which are really objective platforms. People are speaking about the taste as one of the benefits of the product. So I don't know how it came about, but it's natural and it's good.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Do adults like it?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: Of course they do. And one of our intentions is to develop a series of products for adults as well. Those who may be suffering from all kinds of issues with their digestive system as well.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow. I'm looking forward to that. How would you describe the taste? What does it compare to?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: I'd say that if you can just imagine a very mild combination of almonds plus buckwheat, which both of them could be strong, but during to our processing, the taste is very mild and very, very gentle, but still maintains the aroma of the almonds plus the buckwheat. Pioca gives a bit of sweetness to the product. It's a very natural one. So altogether, it's a very earthy flavor and very neutral one. I don't have any other words to describe it.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, I'm going to have to taste it for myself.

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: Yeah, I would encourage that.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I'm going to do it. What are some ways that you can take your health nutrition and

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: kind of incorporate it into other foods? Sure. So I believe that there are lots of parents that are also incorporating that into, you know, cupcakes and shakes and whatever they're doing at home for their kids or their whole family. It's a great supplement for every food that you're making. Of course, it's important to have a certain amount or certain quantity to really support the

growth of the child and not only use a very small portion of that, but if you want to incorporate that to any food that is blessed, I think it will fill in the gaps of nutrition, especially if you're concerned that your child is not properly eating, is picky or whatever, that will always fill in the gaps for that. That's a great product for that as well.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: We see like an else recipe guide coming out soon.

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: Yeah, there is. I mean, on our website, there's quite a robust recipe book that nutritionists and dietitians created for us and everybody can use that as well.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: All right. I'm learning a lot. We're going to take a quick break. When we come back, I want to find out about your products, specifically what products you have on the market now, especially in the U.S., and what you're working on for the future. We'll be right back. Welcome back to the Informed Pregnancy Podcast. We are talking to the CEO of Else Nutrition, Chammu Tal Yitzchak. Okay. So obviously your company is in a major growth phase and you have new products in the pipeline. So let's talk about what's

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: available now. So I started selling the toddler nutrition product in August 2020. It's almost been a year now that we were in the market and the growth, the progress is really amazing. We see growth in Amazon and almost 20% every month. And that means a lot to us. That means a lot to our clients. There's a lot of satisfaction. And there's another product that was launched just a few weeks ago, which is the Kids Complete Nutrition. That's actually a product that's aimed for three to 13 years old kids. I know that there are moms who are looking at their peak years and wonder where they can fill in the gaps with a natural plant-based product that really provides complete nutrition, not something

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: beside it, something near it, something which is really complete. And this is what we are providing. And also our kids product is... is less than 50% sugar content that all the leading brands, which are not plant-based, but anyway, there are complete nutrition products in the US. And all of them, without exception, contain double the amount of sugar, or even more than that, than what we do. We actually don't add any sugar. We just use tapioca syrup, but it's also considered as sugar anyway. But the product is excellent in taste and contains calories from healthy fats and proteins, instead of getting them from sugars. And that's one of the most important parts of that.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, are these products that you're talking about, do they come as a powder, do they come as a liquid, or both?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So currently they come as powder, but by the beginning of the next year, we'll have a liquid product as well. In different skews, different flavors.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, flavors.

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: Yeah, flavors, which are all natural flavors or natural ingredients. So next to come this year are also products for six months for babies as a complimentary food. It's not complete nutrition because we're not allowed in terms of liability, but we are allowed to sell a near composition, not exactly the same as a powdered spoon-fed product, just like a cereal, but it's a more complete and balanced nutrition than just a baby cereal. And that is coming to the US market. Of course, all

these ranges coming to Europe as well, very soon. But we're looking at the US market now. This is what our conversation is about. So these are the products that we anticipate to have in the US market. Fodder, kids, six month babies, complimentary,

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: and the liquid product. These are the coming to the market products that I can refer to.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I'm waiting for the adult products.

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: Sure. This is coming right for you. And we just received a FODMAP friendly certificate just very, very recently. We just announced it. And FODMAP is actually a product that is friendly for people with IBS, irritable bowel syndrome. I think one of the seven in the general population is suffering from all kinds of digestive problems or issues. And this is what we're aiming at at the first place for adults. We wanna create the same benefits, which is clean nutrition, plant-based of course, but also a complete and balanced nutrition products for all those people who currently need to eliminate products from their diet in order to feel better. We want to enable them to actually eat foods, not powder, not liquids, but real foods.

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So what we are doing is creating a full series of products in many categories like pastas and bakery foods and cheese replacements and meat replacements. Everything is currently done in a lab to first test visibility, texture, taste, and everything else that has to do with it. And once we're satisfied, we'll move forward to test the market, to test all kinds of other factors that we need to be testing. And we anticipate to have this series of products in about a year from now coming to the market.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow, that's a tremendous undertaking. I didn't realize that you're literally else nutrition is just in its infancy, no pun intended. And you have massive plans for growth to help basically people of all ages with better nutrition. And I'm certainly looking forward to those products coming out. My real question is, when do you sleep?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: That's a good question.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You have four kids and this new baby that must take up all your time and energy. It's amazing how much you're doing over a short period of time. You're growing exponentially with so much else on your plate, no pun intended again.

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: Absolutely. I mean, it's a wonder where you get these energies when you have this type of baby in your hands and the energies are coming.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So you're ready to sleep less that I can tell. Where does the name come from else?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So I think the name came from the fact that we didn't want to make all the rest of the products. We didn't want to de-legitimize them. We just wanted to say that we're different. We're creating an alternative. So it mainly came from this notion that we are an alternative. We're different, we're something else without saying anything against anyone.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's nice. And it's great to have options. Where can we find else online?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: We can find else, first of all, on our e-store at elsenutrition.com, where we started, on amazon.com and also on some other e-tailor platforms in the US like PlantX and Thrive Market. But we're also international currently. So we are on Iherb, available in about 180 countries.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh wow.

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: This is for the online platforms. There are also brick and mortar retailers that carry us for sure. If you want me to elaborate on that.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Sure.

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So we are carried by several retailers and we're just growing all the time. So we started in Sprouts Farmer's Market then. Big Y, Raley's, PCC, and many other food chains, which I don't currently remember all the names, but they're definitely on our website, on our store locators. So everybody can find the store that's near his location. And we're growing all the time. So it's every week we are actually announcing another retailer that carries us.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's wonderful. How can we try the else products either in stores or online?

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: So if you wish to get a sample as a parent or as any consumer can just connect through our email info at elsenutrition.com and they could get a sample of the product. They can buy the product. We have discounts for the first purchase. If anyone else has any questions, I'm pretty much available in my email. You can find it on our website and I do answer everybody who wants to have any queries or questions. So I'm happy to further discuss.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's amazing. How much tell thank you so much for taking the time to explain and share your wonderful ideas and products with us. And I almost would love to maybe follow up in a year and see where you are again, because it sounds like you're moving at a very fast pace.

HAMUTAL YITZHAK: Absolutely. I'll be very happy to share my experience from the next year and see how it goes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And at home, thanks for listening to the informed pregnancy podcast. If you like our program, share us with your friends, leave us some feedback in your podcast app and for more pregnancy and parenting related media, visit informedpregnancy.com.

Enjoying the Informed Pregnancy Podcast?

Visit us at **informedpregnancy.com** for episodes, articles, and resources for pregnancy, birth, and beyond.

Want more? Subscribe to **Informed Pregnancy+** at **informedpregnancy.tv** for films, series, and exclusive content.