Needed Nutrition With Co-Founder Julie Sawaya

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IN THIS EPISODE

Julie Sawaya — new mama and co-founder of Needed — returns to talk with Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC in this sponsored episode about why most prenatal vitamins are not cutting it, and what better perinatal nutrition actually looks like. Julie explains how testing her own nutrient levels while preparing for pregnancy revealed major deficiencies despite taking supplements, and how that discovery led her and her co-founder to rebuild the prenatal from the research up: optimal nutrient forms, meaningful dosages, no unwanted additives, and third-party testing of every batch. She breaks down Needed's powder, capsule, and new essentials prenatal options, and why a so-called prenatal is really a perinatal vitamin for before, during, and long after pregnancy. Then the conversation widens to the rest of the plate: algae-based omega-3s and what the research says about DHA and preterm birth, why protein form matters and collagen supplies amino acids pregnancy demands, and how pre- and probiotics support the gut and vaginal microbiome. Finally, Julie turns to the other half of the conception equation — a new three-part men's line built around sperm health — and what is still in development for women.

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DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Welcome to the informed pregnancy and parenting podcast I'm your host dr Elliott Berlin for most of us supplements can be confusing in general and especially before during and after pregnancy Even if you know what to take it's hard to differentiate the pros and cons of the myriad of brands and products in Today's episode sponsored by needed nutrition We will talk about the various vitamins minerals proteins and other important nutritional elements We'll discuss what they do how they're sourced and how to tell if you're looking at the best product for you My guest today is a new mama and the co-founder of needed a nutrition company set out to empower women to Understand and meet their nutritional needs before during and after pregnancy

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Since co-founding needed while at Stanford's graduate business school the list of innovative supplements has grown Substantially and most recently they have taken the awesome improvements in sourcing absorb ability Combinations and dosing and are launching some incredible supplements for men Julie Sawaya. Welcome back to the podcast

JULIE SAWAYA: Thank you. It's great to be back

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You know, some listeners will have heard it others should go check it out right now But you generously shared your pregnancy and awesome birth story with us in a plain old podcast I was so curious about your nutrition company that we talked about it a bit there, too But let's recap how you got started

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, absolutely. So Needed is really a company that Arised out of a need that I and my co-founder Ryan discovered that we had when we were in the preconception period of our lives, so we weren't yet trying for a baby, but a lot of our friends were in that life stage and Ryan and I are both lifelong nutrition nerds have both done nutritional trainings and as part of our own health journeys tested our nutrient levels and discovered that we were not just marginally deficient but hugely deficient in several key nutrients that are super critical for pregnancy and this surprised us because at the time we were taking supplements and thought that we were doing all the right things in terms of

JULIE SAWAYA: What we were eating and how we were preparing our bodies for pregnancy and what we discovered after digging more into this Is that the vast majority of women upwards of? 95% of women who take a prenatal vitamin are deficient which is somewhat astounding I think because so many of us think that we eat healthfully we do our best and we take a vitamin to fill in the gaps and The unfortunate reality is that most prenatal vitamins are meeting just the bare minimum needs They're really not designed to set you up for optimal Nutrient status and to feel your best before during and after pregnancy. So it was a pretty natural Evolution to decide to start the company once we discovered the problem

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Do you think that is because people are so focused on convenience? Like I want to just take one pill a day and not think about it again

JULIE SAWAYA: You know, I think that it's probably more so driven by the supplement manufacturers than consumers You know, I think women are we're smart and we generally in this life stage of pregnancy. We prioritize What's best for ourselves and our babies and I think you know when you know, what's important? What we find is that you know women are often acting on that, even at great inconvenience to themselves. It's not super convenient during pregnancy to skip out on alcoholic beverages or some of your favorite foods like sushi, but women often do it because they're told that that is what's best for them in their baby. And I think the reason that most prenatals aren't cutting it is that, truthfully, to deliver women the optimal levels of nutrients

JULIE SAWAYA: that they would need, it takes more than one or two pills a day, and it takes more than a handful of gummy vitamins. And it also takes education. So both the products need to be more complete and we need to be educating women around what they should be looking for. And in the absence of those two things, I think supplement companies have defaulted to what's easy, what's

gonna keep women taking this product, whether or not it's really fully meeting their needs. Many of us who've been there understand that it can be challenging to take more than one or two pills a day or to stomach something other than a gummy vitamin. But I think the reality is that those solutions really aren't cutting it when it comes to optimal nutrition.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I used to take a gummy vitamin, but I had to stop because I eat too many of them.

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, and they taste like candy. It's not a surprise that they're popular, but what I think is helpful to understand is that when it comes to supplementation, what we really wanna be looking for is optimal nutrient forms and optimal dosages. Those are two incredibly important things. And oftentimes the better nutrient forms tend to be more expensive than the less well-absorbed. And I guess I should take a step back. What I mean by better forms are the forms that your body can best utilize, that can best put to work. Oftentimes these are forms that exist in nature that are not quote unquote synthetic, and they tend to be more expensive, more difficult to source. And they also can tend to be larger molecule sizes,

JULIE SAWAYA: which is something that I didn't realize until I started working in the supplementation world. But that's a big problem when it comes to prenatal vitamins, because it's just not possible to fit in the better nutrient forms in a meaningful dose. So a dose that's actually gonna set you up to feel well in one or two pills a day or gummy vitamins. It's just simply impossible.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay, you said something really powerful, which was that 97% of women take prenatal vitamins, yet 95% are deficient in nutrients that they need. So obviously you really started from the ground up building a new prenatal vitamin. How did you do it?

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, so I think with that realization that prenatal vitamins aren't cutting it, we started from scratch, really looking at the clinical research to better understand what do women actually need? What is the research telling us they need? We didn't start by just looking at what's available easily off the shelf at a supplement manufacturer, which is what most companies do. They start with, okay, how do I get a product to market as quickly as possible? We need a prenatal vitamin, go to different manufacturers and see what's easy to do. What have other people done? And what's a formulation I can easily copy? We've taken a completely different approach to this. We've started on an individual nutrient by nutrient basis,

JULIE SAWAYA: looking at the clinical research and because there are nutritional research gaps for women broadly and especially around pregnancy, we don't stop at the research. We partnered with a collective of women's health practitioners who focus on the perinatal life stage and who regularly test women's nutrient and hormone levels to understand what women actually need. And this really data set that we've gleaned from women's health practitioners is absolutely vital and it's one of the things that makes us so different than other companies is that everyone has access to the same clinical research. Not everyone follows that research, but everyone has access to it. No one else is really tapping into a collective of perinatal health practitioners

JULIE SAWAYA: in the way that we have in formulating products. And therefore we feel we have the best understanding of what women actually need of any company on the market.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And in addition to making sure that the things that are in there are optimally sourced and for optimal absorption, there's also sometimes things in perinatal vitamins that you don't want.

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, absolutely. And that's a really key step. So, the things that we hit on already is looking for nutrient forms that your body can best use, dosages that are gonna set you up to really feel your best that are not based around just the bare minimum needs that women have. And the third thing we would emphasize and it ties in directly to the fourth is you wanna make sure that your perinatal isn't including what we call unwanted additives, or these are filler ingredients generally, sometimes they can be nutrients that simply you don't need in a prenatal, like the mineral boron. It's in many prenatals and it's sort of baffling to us. Why? Because there is a safe upper limit and most of us

JULIE SAWAYA: are consuming plenty of boron in our diets. So it's kind of a perplexing one, but that's an example of an unwanted additive that you really don't need in supplement form. Other unwanted additives would be food colorings, which is sort of surprising in 2021. I think many women in the pregnancy life stage are looking to avoid unnatural flavorings, unnatural colorings, and yet the prescription prenatals, which if your care provider is an OB, which for many women, that's the case. And your care provider recommends any supplement, vitamin. It's generally a prescription prenatal. And what I think is surprising and unfortunate is that the prescription prenatals are some of the worst offenders when it comes to these

JULIE SAWAYA: unwanted additives. They tend to have harmful food colorings in them, nutrients that you don't necessarily need, nutrient forms that your body can't absorb well, and oftentimes fillers like magnesium stearate and others that are used as binders or fillers. And they're just not something that we want to be consuming every day, especially during pregnancy.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, it was one of the first things my wife noticed about her prenatal that was prescribed to us was the food coloring. And she doesn't eat food coloring and pretty much anything. But then on the other hand, she thought, but it's prescription. It must be a better supplement in other ways, but that's not necessarily true.

JULIE SAWAYA: It's unfortunately not. And it's extremely common to see prenatal prescriptions that include entirely synthetic nutrient forms. We have on our website, which I'm sure we will be able to share in the show notes, really comprehensive review of we've taken a look along with our perinatal practitioners of 75 of the leading prenatals on the market, including the prescription prenatals. And they really do rank among probably the worst options out there. But I understand the temptation to take them because it's recommended by your doctor and it's covered by your insurance. And, you know, we really hope that through our work at needed, we're able to change that paradigm so that there is better

JULIE SAWAYA: coverage of your prenatal vitamin. It is an investment. It's a once in a lifetime chance to set your body and your baby up for health. That's really going to impact you for the rest of your lives. It's something that insurance companies should be covering whichever prenatal you choose to take. As a side note, if you do have an FSA or HSA, which are flexible spending or health savings accounts, you can use an FSA or HSA to buy your prenatal vitamins, which is not something that I realized. I think many women don't realize, but yeah. And then, you know, the fourth thing that

we really suggest is to look for a prenatal vitamin that does third party testing. This is really important because

JULIE SAWAYA: what's on the label isn't necessarily what's in the bottle. And that can be true in terms of the nutrient quantity. It can be true in terms of things that you want to avoid, like heavy metals and, you know, other contaminants like mold, which can be present in supplements. So, you know, it's not a requirement, unfortunately, for vitamin companies to be third party testing. But, you know, it's a really, really important step. And at needed, we third party test every single product batch that we make. This is going well above and beyond what the industry standards are. We just feel it's absolutely essential because it's a product you're consuming every single day. You really want to know that

JULIE SAWAYA: it's high quality. And you can ask supplement manufacturers to see their third party testing results. They won't always provide them to you, but it's a good litmus test of does the company actually stand by what they're doing if they'll actually send them to you. And we do, by the way. So, please feel free to reach out.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's awesome. You guys don't just have a prenatal multivitamin. You have multiple options for prenatal multivitamins. Tell me about that.

JULIE SAWAYA: We do. Yeah. So we started off and, you know, when I spoke with you last year, the prenatal vitamin that we started out with was actually a powdered prenatal vitamin. And we started with pattern not by accident. Powder is a form factor that allows us to dose nutrients optimally, especially the nutrients that tend to be bulkier. And those are nutrients like choline or minerals like magnesium and calcium. They're essential to be included in a prenatal and they're lacking or dosed extremely low in the vast majority of prenatal vitamins simply because it takes up a lot of space. So going back to those one or two a day pills or gummy vitamins, you can be pretty much assured that if you're taking

JULIE SAWAYA: a one or two a day pill or gummy, that you're not getting enough choline, magnesium, calcium. So the powder option that we offer, it's a vanilla flavored powder. It blends in smoothies. It's dosed extremely comprehensively across 24 vitamins and minerals. And it also has an antioxidant blend in it for days that maybe you're not consuming as many fruits and vegetables as you'd like. I've been there in the first trimester. Those days can be challenging. So the powder's a great option. We also have a prenatal multi-capsule option which is almost identical nutritionally to the powder except for slightly reduced dosages of those three nutrients I mentioned, choline, magnesium, and calcium. Simply because dosing at the level we do in our powder

JULIE SAWAYA: would be about 10 to 15 capsules. And I'm pretty certain that just about nobody would want to take that in their prenatal vitamin alone. On a daily basis. Yeah, it can be a lot, but the capsule's a great option. A lot of our customers end up taking a half a serving of the powder in the morning in a smoothie and capsules in the afternoon to kind of break it up. That's a really great tip if you're feeling like you're in the first trimester and you're feeling nauseous or later in pregnancy or at any point you're feeling like you need an energy boost. Breaking up the dosage of a more complete prenatal like ours is great in terms of making sure you feel well throughout the day. And you get a little bit of an energy hit

JULIE SAWAYA: in the morning and later in the day. And then the third option for our prenatal multi that we are super excited to be launching this fall is our essentials prenatal. And this is the most complete prenatal on the market. That's in three capsule form. So it's three capsules a day. You can take them together or you can break them up, especially in the early weeks of pregnancy when many women are feeling really nauseous or really strong food aversions. You can take just one capsule with each meal of the day. It's really easy to consume and it's far more complete than those one or two a day prenatals that we've been talking about.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How does it compare to your other two prenatals?

JULIE SAWAYA: So it includes the same number of nutrients, all optimal nutrient forms. We never compromise on nutrient forms including what's important. The dosage levels of most nutrients is reduced in the essentials but you're still getting a meaningful amount. Many, many orders of magnitude higher dosing than you would be getting from the prescription prenatals or one a day. The nutrient that it's really important not to skimp on especially since this product is designed for the first trimester is folate or B9. You might also hear it referred to as folic acid which is the synthetic form of folate. We use the optimally absorbed form methylfolate and we dose it the same across all three prenatal multi options

JULIE SAWAYA: because of how critical folate is in early pregnancy for baby's neural tube formation.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You know, the term prenatal is actually a bit of a misnomer when it comes to vitamins because you don't only take them while you're pregnant before you give birth.

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, no, I so agree. And it's really important and something we feel so strongly about advocating for is that women start taking a prenatal vitamin up to a year before you want to conceive. And that can be tricky. Many pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned but being on a comprehensive prenatal vitamin anytime you think you might become pregnant or even before, you know, it can be super supportive to be on a comprehensive prenatal vitamin when you're on hormonal birth control because hormonal birth control can deplete nutrient levels. But it's great to start taking it well in advance of pregnancy because the nutritional status that you come into pregnancy can drastically influence how you feel in the early days of pregnancy.

JULIE SAWAYA: So things like pregnancy nausea or lack of energy, ability to conceive, you know, on a more speedy timeframe, all of that can be influenced by your nutritional status. And then something that I think is really cool to know as many women who suffer from first trimester nausea, I think tend to feel anxious about, am I consuming enough for baby? And what do I do if the only thing I can eat is really like refined carbohydrates? Am I gonna be okay? And I think the great thing to know is that if you are adequately nourished coming into pregnancy, you have an abundance of reserves for your body to draw upon. So that if you have several weeks or even months of really not feeling your best where you can't be eating a fully comprehensive diet,

JULIE SAWAYA: that's okay. You're gonna be okay. You and your baby will be just fine. And then postpartum, which is an experience that I have lived through over the last year, my daughter is now 14 months. Nutritional needs are actually even higher postpartum than they are during pregnancy,

which I think is fascinating. And in many ways it's sad that until recently the recommendations from ACOG and other organizations was not to continue taking your prenatal vitamin postpartum. Thankfully that has now been updated. And the guidance is really that you should keep taking a prenatal vitamin throughout the duration of breastfeeding. Even if you're not exclusively breastfeeding, it's still a huge demand on you.

JULIE SAWAYA: body and baby is continuing to take nutritional stores from you. And, you know, even taking a prenatal vitamin postpartum, if you're not breastfeeding or beyond the time period that you are breastfeeding can be really supportive because the third trimester of pregnancy, when baby's brain and growth is really accelerating is nutritionally so demanding that without proper supplementation, it can take a long time to replenish your nutrient stores. It can impact things like thyroid health, hormone balance, energy, mood. So taking a high quality comprehensive prenatal postpartum is absolutely essential.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So really, we should call it a perinatal multivitamin, one that you take before, during and after pregnancy, and it's super appropriate for all three stages.

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, that's exactly right. I think the term perinatal isn't as well understood, probably, as the prenatal, but absolutely. And we get this question a lot from our customers of I'm about to be postpartum or I'm newly postpartum is your product for me? And the answer is yes. We recommend looking less about the label. There are some postnatal vitamins now available on the market. These tend to be, in some cases, less nutritionally complete than their prenatal counterparts, or they're exactly the same other than like five milligrams more of vitamin C, which is a kind of comically funny adjustment. It's mostly marketing. We're glad that the marketing's out there because it's raising

JULIE SAWAYA: awareness for the need. But the most important thing is, is your multi comprehensive? Is it something you can take at all stages of the perinatal journey? And does it deliver the nutritional dosages and forms that your body needs? That's what to focus on, not if the label says prenatal or postnatal. I'm learning a lot and I'm sure the

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: audiences too. And like I said, in the introduction, it's tricky. I mean, you look at a packaging and labeling and sometimes you get the wrong idea about a supplement. And with your expert input, we now know a lot of what to look for beyond the picture on the front of the bottle. The truth is, though, that in addition to vitamins and minerals, full perinatal nutrition before, during and after pregnancy requires more. Let's take a quick break. And when we come back, we'll talk about the other nutritional supplements. We'll be right back. If you've ever struggled to Welcome back to the Informed Pregnancy Podcast. We are talking to needed co-founder Julie Sawaya, learned a lot about prenatal, quote-unquote,

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: multivitamins in the first segment. Now we're going to talk about the other nutrients that are important for pregnancy and beyond. Let's start with Omega everybody's talking about Omega 3. What is it? Where does it come from? Why is it important?

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, well, this is a great one and one that we were really passionate about helping women to understand their needs for so Omega 3 It's considered a micronutrient. It's an

essential fatty acid. So it's a fat soluble nutrient that's really really critical for brain development for Nerve development for eye health for mood. It has many many functions you've probably even heard of Omega 3 being important for heart health and In pregnancy the form of Omega 3 that is often recommended is DHA Which is a form of Omega 3 that is really primarily found in Fish like salmon or anchovies or sardines. It's not abundant in Plant based foods and it's really no longer all that abundant in foods like beef

JULIE SAWAYA: Although grass-fed beef would be a good source if you are looking to source your omegas other than through fish but during pregnancy consuming the recommended two servings a week of fish can be a challenge for nausea or food aversion reasons or maybe you're trying to avoid heavy metals and What's cool is that fish actually source their Omega 3 from algae Which are vegan and so when we look at Omega 3 for pregnancy our preferred source of Omega 3 is algae. It's vegan. It's got low heavy metal exposure It can be cultivated in a controlled environment So you actually know that the you know Nutritional content is there and it's a highly sustainable source of Omega 3 Unlike fish which has a lot more question marks around it. So

JULIE SAWAYA: DHA is a great form of Omega 3. There's extensive research around its role in the perinatal life stage Everything from maternal mood to baby's brain development. It's even been studied in a really comprehensive research project called the Cochrane review Looking at the role of Omega 3 in preventing one of the most critical pregnancy complications which is preterm birth and what's been found is that Omega 3 status is directly linked to likelihood of preterm birth and that improving maternal Omega 3 status specifically DHA can help to prevent preterm birth Which is really astounding and I think just a great example of where we've learned so much about nutrition and how

JULIE SAWAYA: Important nutrition is in the perinatal journey and yet oftentimes it's under emphasized and Unfortunately, so because it's not that nutrition can always prevent a bad outcome or a suboptimal outcome But why not do everything we can to set ourselves up for the best chance of success

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, yeah, I've been taking your Omega for quite a while now. I love it I don't have a baby inside me But I weirdly feel like it's helping me with just general stress and anxiousness

JULIE SAWAYA: That's awesome to hear. Yeah, and that may be due to the fact that our Omega 3 we include beyond DHA We include EPA which is another form of Omega 3. That's not abundant in plant-based sources EPA is really important for mood and it's been studied around anxiety and even some attention and focus related Disorders as being highly supportive. So we love the combination of DHA and EPA and What's amazing and this is true for so many nutrients, but this is just a small example. I'll focus on EPA has actually been shown to help improve EPA actually I should say DHA EPA and then the nutrient choline which we spoke about earlier Choline is really important for babies brain development

JULIE SAWAYA: The reason we include all three of those in our Omega 3 DHA EPA and choline is because the three work synergistically together To ensure enough Omega 3 DHA crosses the placenta to reach baby Which is just I think fascinated and so cool that nature is really emotional about the way that She delivers nutrients and nutrient pairings and combinations and we just try to

replicate nature where we can to Have the you know replicate her absorption. It's not possible to Recreate everything that nature does, you know the number of nutrients that are present in a fruit like, you know a strawberry It's just simply impossible to recreate perfectly But where possible and where there is research to support it we always aim to

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Just like you have options with the prenatal multi you also have options with the Omega

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, tell me about those we do so we have a powdered version of our Omega 3 which is is intended to be blended into things like lattes or smoothies. We did a clinical study on this product a few years back and showed that this product is five times better absorbed than a standard fish oil pill. And the form of that powdered omega-3, it's called liposomal omega-3. Liposomal delivery is how nature delivers omega-3 through breast milk. If you've ever looked at a can of infant formula or supplemented your baby with formula, you might notice that infant formula contains DHA. And the reason for that is because infant formula is looking to replicate breast milk. DHA is a really important component of breast milk.

JULIE SAWAYA: And the format that DHA is delivered in breast milk is through these molecular structures known as liposomes, which essentially just protects and helps to optimally deliver the omega-3. And this is important because omega-3 is a fat, as we mentioned, fats are subject to it going rancid and so the liposomes help to minimize rancidity, minimize any gastric upset. If you've taken a big fish oil pill before, you might've experienced that unpleasant stomach feeling or burp back effect in our liposomal omega-3.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. Nobody likes the fish burps.

JULIE SAWAYA: Not very pleasant, but our liposomal omega-3 is pretty unique in that way. And then earlier this year, we launched our omega-3 capsule format. And both of our omega-3s contain DHA, EPA and choline. The capsule omega-3 contains a higher amount of choline as well as the antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin, which are really important for eye health and brain health in baby. And we really like these nutrients to be included as well for women who are in the fertility journey because antioxidants are super important for egg health and overall fertility outcomes. So both options are amazing. Both are vegan. They're both really easy to take. And our omega-3 capsules are bergamot-scented, which is kind of like a citrusy fruit

JULIE SAWAYA: in the lime lemon kind of category. We also have scented capsules inserts that you can add to your order, which recently launched that are great for those who are especially prone to heightened smell during pregnancy. The capsules inserts are awesome. They're actually great with our multi-capsules as well. I love the citrusy lemon. Others like spearmint. We have two flavors and both of them are great.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I take the capsules of the omega and they're super pleasant. I'm kind of sensitive to smelly supplements.

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, I think so too. I think they're great. They really don't taste like fish and they're very pleasant and easy to take.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: All right, let's talk about protein. You need more protein during pregnancy. Why?

JULIE SAWAYA: You do. You need more protein during pregnancy even from the beginning to help with blood sugar regulation. Pregnancy is a time essentially of blood sugar dysregulation. It's a difficult time for your body to maintain homeostasis and protein is really essential for maintaining that balance. So later in pregnancy, there'll be a test for most women of looking at your glucose levels to essentially screen for a condition called gestational diabetes, which can be a complication that if untreated can be threatening to mom and baby's wellbeing. But all women during pregnancy have a harder time balancing blood sugar, even if you don't have this condition and blood sugar dysregulation is, you might not necessarily be able to pick up on,

JULIE SAWAYA: do I have gestational diabetes or blood sugar dysregulation? Some of the ways you might notice blood sugar dysregulation early on is nausea. Protein intake can seriously help with minimizing nausea. So it's really important to get in in the beginning but not always practical. And it can be very difficult in pregnancy. At the beginning, many women have versions to meat or fish or other forms, eggs, other forms of normal protein intake, which is why we really like to recommend supplemental protein. But as with everything, the form matters. So that's blood sugar regulation in early pregnancy. Let me quickly touch upon why protein is needed later in pregnancy. So baby is growing, the placenta is growing, both of those require protein.

JULIE SAWAYA: Protein essentially are amino acids that are the building blocks of our bodies. It's really essential to ensuring that baby develops properly, that your placenta develops properly and that both of those develop on time. And protein needs were always understood to be higher in pregnancy, but research suggests that our estimates of what women needed during pregnancy were off by as much as 60%. So essentially take your body weight pre-pregnancy, that's essentially what you need in the first trimester and your body weight later in pregnancy, that's the amount that you need later in pregnancy. pregnancy, and that's denominated in grams. So, you know, if you weigh 130 pounds, you need 130 grams more or less of protein to maintain your needs.

JULIE SAWAYA: And that's a lot. It's a lot of protein. It's probably close to double what most women consume at a life stage outside of pregnancy.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So you talked about the form of protein being important.

JULIE SAWAYA: Yes, so protein is not all created equally. And many of us, when we are able to consume protein through our diets, we are consuming a lot of, you know, especially those of us who are more health conscious are typically consuming lean proteins or plant-based proteins. You know, think of the boneless skinless chicken breast you might be eating or chickpeas or hummus. Those forms of protein are great, but they are typically lacking in several amino acids that are really important for pregnancy, two of which specifically are glycine and proline. The reason to call out these two amino acids is because they are conditionally essential during pregnancy, meaning your body can't create them or synthesize them during pregnancy.

JULIE SAWAYA: They need to be consumed directly through diet or supplementation. And both of them are really important for baby's wellbeing and development, as well as for functions like skin

stretching and birth recovery. And the protein form that's highest in glycine and protein is collagen. And collagen comes from more or less the tendons or the skin of animals. If we were eating nose to tail the way our ancestors did, you might not need collagen protein or bone broths, which are both in vogue these days for many reasons, gut health, beauty benefits. But I think what's great to know in the pregnancy life stage specifically is that the placenta is largely comprised of collagen. So if we're not consuming enough of these amino acids

JULIE SAWAYA: that are rich in collagen, it's much more difficult for our body to optimally grow baby and support baby. I will say this as a former vegan and a former vegetarian that I understand the concerns that some women have with consuming animal products and in particular, something like collagen, eating the bones and tendons of animals doesn't necessarily sound all that appealing. What I've personally decided and what I would recommend women look into is the difficulty of maintaining optimal nutrient status. Following one of those diets, it is absolutely possible to have a healthy pregnancy as a vegan or vegetarian mama. But one area that it's really difficult is in this area of the amino acids

JULIE SAWAYA: that are just not found in plant-based foods in abundance. And so I've personally made the choice, something that makes me feel good about consuming our collagen is that we source our collagen from grass-fed bovine that come from New Zealand. They're pasture-raised, pasture-finished. We third-party test our collagen for heavy metals and test amazingly. The product itself, it's a completely neutral tasting powder that blends into smoothies, soups, you name it, lattes, teas. It's a really, really easy way to get in your protein needs. And something that I wish I had known earlier in my perinatal experience is that a lot of the plant-based proteins that are out there in supplemental form tend to be really high in heavy metals.

JULIE SAWAYA: They tend to concentrate metals like arsenic and lead. And this goes back to the earlier point of ask the supplement company that you're purchasing from to see heavy metal testing. It's not uncommon to find higher levels of heavy metals in plant-based proteins like pea protein or brown rice protein. And that's why it's really important to ask the supplement manufacturers that you're supporting to see their heavy metals testing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well, some of our patients talk about putting it into yogurt or oatmeal, especially in the first trimester where nausea is more common. You know, a bunch of our patients who haven't been able to keep down other things are able to sneak in the collagen protein and it doesn't make them sick. So... I love perinatal. Yeah. And then also, you know, we've been giving it to people whose babies are growing on the smaller side. And it's just anecdotal, but a recent case, the mom, the obstetrician and the perinatologist were all kind of surprised by how much the baby picked up in terms of catching up to the normal growth curve. And, you know, they had been expecting to have to deliver very early and she ended up making it to 38 weeks

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: and have a seven pound baby. So, you know, now they're recommending, hey, I don't know for sure, but I'm looking to this protein from needed. Let's talk about one more thing before we take a break, which is the microbiome support. There's a lot of research on microbiome, a lot of buzz about... microbiome, there's a lot of benefit to a healthy microbiome. How does Nita address that?

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, so the microbiome is so important for fertility, pregnancy health, and postpartum health. And when we look at supporting the microbiome, we look at several different aspects. So many of us understand that our gut is a biome, that there is bacteria living in our gut that influences many things like digestion and immunity and day-to-day how you can feel, how well you absorb your supplements or nutrients in your food. And that's really critically important to support, especially because during pregnancy, your microbiome undergoes a shift. It's accommodating a foreign object, a baby. And this is a really intricate shift that impacts your overall immune system and your gut, your digestion, the speed at which you

JULIE SAWAYA: assimilate nutrients from your food. So supporting your gut health during pregnancy is very important. It's also important to understand that your gut health is really directly linked to fertility outcomes and hormone production specifically. So we like to suggest women focus on gut health in the preconception period as a way to regulate hormones and cycles and ensure your body is able to produce that intricate dance of much needed hormones, like progesterone and HCG early in pregnancy. And then beyond gut health and hormone balance, the vaginal microbiome is really important during pregnancy. Whether or not you are planning for a vaginal delivery,

JULIE SAWAYA: the vaginal microbiome is in many ways a gateway of preventing infection or bacterial overgrowth of bacteria that you don't want to be in that birth canal or that passage into the cervix. And so supporting the vaginal microbiome before, during, and after pregnancy is very important. And lastly, something that I think is really helpful to understand, especially for moms who might have been hoping for a vaginal delivery and ended up having a cesarean delivery, the baby's microbiome actually begins forming in utero. We previously thought that birth was the event at which baby's microbiome was formed. And it remains a really, really important one. But now we have research showing that the uterus is not a sterile environment,

JULIE SAWAYA: that baby's biome is actually formed, you know, really from early stages of pregnancy. And so supporting your microbiome during pregnancy and postpartum is a great way of helping to support your babies, even if baby doesn't get that beneficial vaginal bacteria seeding. And the ways you can do this postpartum is through skin to skin. Baby, you know, it's on your skin, your skin is a biome, your partner's skin is a biome. Anyone who's touching baby postpartum has the ability to impact baby's microbiome. Breast milk is another biome. And the skin to skin contacts or breast milk has been shown to be influential in baby's microbiome beyond actually the milk that's coming from mom.

JULIE SAWAYA: It's actually the skin to skin contact. So I like to point that out as well as just the picture of how our bodies have evolved to seed baby's microbiome during this early life stage is really beautiful and very cool. And we take all of that into account when designing our microbiome support, which is our women's pre-probiotic. It is a uniquely tailored pre and probiotic. By that, I mean, it includes probiotic strains, which are bacterial strains. We use ones that are clinically studied to support maternal and infant health outcomes. And the most important thing to look for when you're choosing a probiotic is specific strains. This will be denoted by letters and numbers after the species. So a species might be

JULIE SAWAYA: lactobacillus and a specific strain would be lactobacillus rhamnosus HN001. That's a little bit esoteric, but if you remember nothing else, look for specific letters and numbers on your probiotic. That's really important. And it shows that the company paid up for a strain that's actually been clinically studied, not just using a more generic strain. So that's very important. And then the other thing to know is that it is impossible to supplement for every single strain that would be optimal to be in your gut microbiome. And that's where prebiotics are really helpful. You can think of this as really fiber that is food for beneficial bacteria strains. So it's great to include prebiotics alongside

JULIE SAWAYA: probiotics so that you're nurturing what's already in your gut microbiome, helping it to flourish, and then also introducing the new probiotic strains that we want to be there. is a big hit. I think it's an important one to be taking, especially in the third trimester if you're planning for a vaginal delivery. Group beta strap is a concern later in pregnancy. Most women will be screened for it or offered to be screened for it. And there are many reasons as we spoke about to start that beneficial biome preparation well before that third trimester. But if you need to prioritize in your budget a time period to be focusing on probiotics, I would suggest doing so at the beginning of the third trimester.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I have been taking your women's omega-3 and your women's pre and probiotic for a long time now, and I love them. But I may not have to take those much longer. When we come back, we'll talk about why. We'll be right back with Julie Sawaya. Welcome back to the Informed Pregnancy Podcast. We're talking to needed co-founder Julie Sawaya. We haven't talked yet about where to find needed online.

JULIE SAWAYA: Yeah, you can find us at thisisneeded.com. You can also find us on Instagram. Easy to remember. It's just at needed is our Instagram username.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I'll repeat those at the end again, but thisisneeded.com and at needed on Instagram. All right. I said before the break that I was taking your women's supplementation and I'm sort of excited to announce that you've taken all these great innovations and the approach that you take with specificity and quality to women's supplementation and now are applying it to men's supplements, especially for men who are going through the perinatal period before, during, and after a pregnancy. So I don't think most people think about men needing a prenatal vitamin. Tell me more about your thoughts

JULIE SAWAYA: on this. Yeah, I think it's very much overlooked, but men are 50% of the conception equation. Up to 40% of infertility or recurrent pregnancy losses is determined to be male factor. Men are a really important component when it comes to conceiving an optimal baby. And, you know, typically in that trying to conceive time period, what we're often focusing on is optimizing male sperm health and the parameters around sperm. That's sperm counts, sperm motility, morphology. And, you know, we at Needed are really focused on how can nutrition influence the health of sperm over the typically 90 day time period where sperm are developing. You know, women were born with all of the eggs or the follicles that will become eggs,

JULIE SAWAYA: you know, that we will ever have or really kind of formed at our birth. But for men, sperm turns over every 90 days, which in many ways, it's a great thing because if you are thinking about trying to conceive, or you're maybe wanting to optimize your health as a male partner, you don't have to commit to it forever. But that 90 day period before sperm mature is really, really influential.

And so some things to focus on overall for nutrition for men, I think overall for men and women, it's helpful to understand that fertility is really just a marker of how healthy you are. So beyond the health of your sperm, you know, there are ancillary benefits for men like hormone balance and healthy libido,

JULIE SAWAYA: hair health, hair coverage, energy, and, you know, heart health, brain function, all of these other aspects of health that are really important, not just in the preconception time period, but all throughout the dad years. And Dr. Berlin, you are a dad to four, and you can probably attest to the nutritional demands on a man in the perinatal journey, don't end with conception. There's a big role for men to play in supporting the health of mom and baby all throughout that life stage. And we are really focusing on setting dad up to feel his best the same way we work to set mom up to feel her best.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, in terms of the earlier stages, like conception, I've talked about on the podcast before how my wife and I have struggled for a long time to get pregnant before the first baby years of trying naturally trying with assisted reproductive technologies, and nothing was helping. And it was ultimately when we kind of ran out of medical options. They just said, we have nothing left for you. We don't think you'll ever have a baby together. So you should look at adopting or you should look at embryo donation or egg donation. We just took a break because we were so broken. We had no money left. We had no relationship left. We're all over the place on the rocks. And I'm just personally emotionally and physically

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: broken. So we decided to just take time to heal ourselves. And that's when we got much more involved in more holistic things. like hours long bike rides on these beautiful groomed bike trails where we were living in Nebraska and we started to take a closer look at nutrition and exercise and things to calm the nervous system like meditation, yoga, acupuncture. But what we didn't have available to us was supplementation that was custom tailored to the prenatal period for, not even prenatal, preconception period for men or women. And looking back, you know, it sounds like it would have been an amazing help to us. So although we didn't have it, thanks to Needed, now it's available.

JULIE SAWAYA: I love that you mentioned some of those other aspects like lifestyle and stress management, getting adequate sleep, all of that is also so important in this preconception time period for both men and women. And nutrition isn't the only thing. We are really, as a company, focused on optimal nourishment, which we define all-encompassing. It's not just nutrition. It's the other things that you need in your life to feel fully supported.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Ken, you know, I would never take away from the incredible really sacrifices sometimes that women make in terms of caring babies, delivering babies, feeding babies with your body. And the other things that moms do in a way that I don't feel like I can do, sometimes just physiologically and sometimes just it's incredible to watch how a mom interacts and raises a baby. But I have other roles that I do, and I'm a pretty hands-on dad. And I would say that, obviously, after the kids are born, you're getting older. But I feel like if you're not careful, the parenthood stage can age you a lot faster than you really should, than your biological age. And having good nourishment

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: all around, like you said, making sure to get enough sleep and exercise and downtime and nutrition, wherever you can enhance any of those pillars of health, you should. And it'll make a big difference on how you feel and how your overall health develops. And so, again, now you have a supplement that's custom tailored towards men during that period. And I'm going to take them. They are coming out now. You have a three-part men's line that you're starting with. Tell me about the products. Yeah. So, like women, so for women,

JULIE SAWAYA: what Nia is really known for is our four-part complete plan. For men, we've developed a three-part men's plan. And what it really includes is a men's multivitamin with 23 optimal vitamins and minerals. We've spoken about what's important there. It's nutrient forms, quantities, all of the same rigor that went into our women's multi has been applied to the men's. And it also has added antioxidants. Antioxidants are absolutely critical for sperm health and for overall vitality. So a couple of the nutrients to focus on for men's multi, many of these are also really vitally important for women, but it's helpful to understand where the research for men fits. And nutrients that we understand are

JULIE SAWAYA: really crucial for men's sperm health are nutrients like vitamin C, which is also an antioxidant, folate. Folate is so critical for sperm health or sperm morphology. So like the shape of sperm, how intact the DNA in sperm is for vitamin E, which is a fat-soluble nutrient. Very, very important. Sperm essentially require proteins. They require fats. Those are two really, really important nutrients that sperm need to be healthy. And so we want to set them up with optimal fats and vitamin E is a really crucial one. And then the mineral zinc is also very important to be included in a men's multi. Many of us are deficient in zinc. Abundantly zinc is found in things like shellfish, which many avoid for personal

JULIE SAWAYA: religious reasons or preferences. And it's difficult to get enough of it through our diets. Other nutrients that men really should be focused on that we're passionate about beating the drum for is omega-3. And we spoke a lot about the role of omega-3 for baby's brain development for maternal mood. Omega-3 is also a crucial fatty acid that impacts sperm health. And our omega-3 like our women's omega-3 includes DHA, EPA, the two forms that are best used by the body that are both very supportive for dad's brain health beyond as well as choline and antioxidants. You'll hear antioxidants across all three of our men's products because they are that important to sperm health, especially in that 90 day conception

JULIE SAWAYA: time period. And then lastly, the third part of the men's plan is a men's pre-probiotic. That is like our women's pre-probiotic. It is specifically tailored and includes targeted strains that have been studied to support male fertility, male gut health, the sex. basically the microbiome that semen exist in, which is fascinating. I think many of us don't think of seminal fluid as containing a biome, but it does. And it can impact fertility outcomes for both partners. It can also impact if a man has a female partner, it can impact her vaginal microbiome. So even if as a woman, if you're doing everything you can to ensure that your vaginal microbiome is optimally healthy, this is important too, because UTIs are prevalent during pregnancy,

JULIE SAWAYA: you should be considering the male microbiome, the seminal microbiome, as a potential contributor to vaginal bacteria dysregulation, which I think is fascinating, not very well

understood. And we are really excited to be able to deliver a product that is specifically supporting the male gut and seminal microbiome. And then the last component is added antioxidants. And the antioxidants across our three men's products all differ, they all play a slightly different role, but the central idea is protecting against free radicals. We want to ensure that the sperm maintain their shape, that they're able to swim optimally, that there are minimal DNA defects, all of that that's so, so important for the preconception time period and really beyond.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And you guys are coming out with another men's product.

JULIE SAWAYA: We are, yes. So another of those antioxidants that are so crucial for men's sperm health is a nutrient called CoQ10, coenzyme Q10. It's really, really important for men. If you see a men's multi, you may see a small amount of CoQ10 in it. The clinically effective amount of CoQ10 is quite a lot. It's 400 milligrams, which can be pricey. It is also a dosage that's very supportive for sperm health and preconception, but it's not necessarily a dosage that you need to be taking all throughout the dad years. For that reason, we've designed a separate men's fertility support product that will be coming out later this year or in January 2022. So stay tuned for that. That combines CoQ10 and a number of other

JULIE SAWAYA: really fascinating herbal and nutrient compounds that support sperm health. So that would be a product that you would want to take just during that 90 day or however long your preconception time period or trying to conceive window is. And then the other three men's products are great every day, products you can take safely all throughout the dad and parenting years.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Are you in development on other products for women?

JULIE SAWAYA: We sure are. We're always developing new products for mamas because there's so many needs in this life stage that are unmet. And one of the ones that we're most excited about is an herbal and botanical support product for maternal stress. And this is a product that is intended for both the preconception time period because trying to conceive can be very stressful. And we know stress is an important factor in fertility outcomes as well as postpartum. There's a lot of taxation on maternal adrenals, postpartum, lack of sleep, caring for and worrying over the health of a baby. And we're just so excited about this product. It'll be launching for pre-order maybe by the time this episode is live.

JULIE SAWAYA: It's a great, great product and it's breastfeeding safe and something that I've been taking for months myself as a breastfeeding mama and just so excited to share this with other moms. And then a few other products in the works, we have a sleep support product that's safe for all stages of pregnancy, which is awesome because insomnia in later pregnancy is real and much more to come.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, it's incredible that, you know, in school you have this realization that supplementation, especially for women, is severely lacking and needs a rebuild. And the amount of research and development and testing and perfectioning the products that you have, I don't know how you guys do it. And now you're coming up with all these great follow-up products that each one could just be an incredible thing by itself. And it's clear that you're thinking through what is needed, what's missing. And for you and Ryan going through pregnancy, it's firsthand. Like, now you're

actually, first of all, reaping the benefits of your own labor, but also seeing firsthand what's really missing. And wherever you see something that could be better supported,

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: you set out to make a product to do it. And so I'm grateful for it, for being able to share your products with my patients and with our audience and with my family.

JULIE SAWAYA: Well, thank you. It truly feels like life, work, mission, calling and life alignment. So I feel privileged to be able to do this. And honestly, the education side of it is as important to us as anything. I think helping women understand what they need, helping them to feel supported. know, this is a really tricky life stage to navigate through. And perinatal nutrition is very complicated and we hope to be an educational resource, whether you ever try our products or not, we hope to be an educational resource. And we mentioned a few of those resources earlier, but we have a guide on what to look for in a prenatal vitamin that lays out some of what we discuss in this podcast, as well as going more specifically through individual nutrients.

JULIE SAWAYA: That's a great free resource on our website. This is needed.com. And we also have a review of the 75 leading prenatals on the market. So you can get an honest assessment from our perinatal nutrition collective to better assess what you uniquely need. And you mentioned, you know, we're doing a lot. I think this wouldn't be possible without our really dedicated collective of perinatal health practitioners. You know, we're a small company, a women founded company, but we're really backed by an amazing group of perinatal health practitioners that are so passionate about what we're doing and helping us to do all of the research and product formulation that's behind us.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I love what you're doing in terms of the supplements. And like you said, the education is super important as well. And I believe that this episode will be really informative for a lot of people who just wonder what do we need and how do we get it? And how do we get it the best way possible? I'll repeat that your guys website is this is needed.com. This is needed.com. There's a lot of educational information there. And of course, people can learn more about the products and order them directly from there. And you connect on Instagram at needed and E E D E D at needed Julie. Thanks so much for being here and for everything that you do. And to our audience, thank you for listening. And if you want to connect with us, find us on

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Instagram at Dr. Berlin, T O C T O R B E R L I N.

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