Alessandra Torresani - Before Birth

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IN THIS EPISODE

Actress and podcaster Alessandra Torresani joins Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC at 37 weeks pregnant with her first baby to tell the before-birth half of her story. Alessandra — Claire on The Big Bang Theory and host of the Emotional Support podcast — lives with bipolar disorder, and she traces the journey from the temper tantrums and threshold-crossing perfectionism of her early childhood, through a misdiagnosis of depression at 15 that put her on antidepressants, to finally being diagnosed at 21–22 and finding herself again on Lamictal, the medication she stayed on for some 12 years. Told for years by multiple doctors that pregnancy would be hard for her, that she could not stay on her medication, and that she would have to come off it to conceive, she and her husband Sturgis — who courted her for eight months after a Halloween party where she was Lilo from The Fifth Element and he was a demon baby, and who accepted her bipolar disclosure with a simple "okay" — decided she would slowly wean off, surrounded by her mom, her husband, her therapist and her psychiatrist, with acupuncture, diet, alpha biotics and transcendental meditation in place of the medication. She talks candidly about a second trimester that was the hardest of her pregnancy, about why so many women are afraid to tell a doctor they are struggling, and about the maternal-mental-health season of her own podcast. Then the conversation turns to the birth just weeks away: a hypnobirthing course with Alicia Tambury, a plan to labor at home as long as possible with Sturgis and her mom Marsha (and dogs Pee Wee Herman and Dottie nearby) before heading to the hospital — in part, she jokes, because she loves hospital socks — an intention to go unmedicated paired with a clear-eyed readiness to pivot if an emergency calls for medication or a C-section, and the painful perineal-massage moment that first made the physical side of birth feel real.

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DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: To the informed pregnancy and parenting podcast. I'm your host pregnancy focus car breaker. Dr. Elliot Berlin My guest today is an actor and fellow podcaster who uses her platform to raise awareness and erase stigma surrounding bipolar disorder she's come on the podcast to share her personal experience with bipolar disorder in general and in the pregnancy in

particular and Her plans for her upcoming birth in the next month or so Alessandra Torres sunny. Welcome to the podcast. You said it correctly. That was wonderful. I was up all night All night doing all that research trying to figure out how do I pronounce this obnoxious name? And you did it. I kept coming up with foods like pastas and things. Yes. Yes. Yes

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: You could say my last name is like tortellini, you know

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Every time I think of you I'm up about four pounds. You're right. You're like, oh Alessandra. Oh, that's right. Tortellini. Let's go Okay, so let's start the beginning you're a fascinating person I got to know you for about an hour Yeah, and I was blown away. I was like I need another hour come on my Gracious to say yes. Let's start at the beginning. Where are you from originally? Sure

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I'm originally from Los Altos in the Bay Area and I was born at Stanford University So, you know up north but I moved to LA when I was nine So I would say that if anything LA feels more home to me I don't really remember or recall, you know, a lot of childhood memories there up north

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So this is this is my home base. Yeah NorCal also sounds like a diet food

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Exactly Do siblings I am an only child

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well, I think you're more than enough

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I think so. I mean my mom was not planning on stopping and then I just like came in like a tornado and she was like Who is this thing singing and dancing all the time? What is enough? Yeah

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, I see it you have personality for at least two people

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I'm a Gemini too. So I think that's probably why the twins twins

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, I wonder which one we have today on the podcast. Maybe I can have we have a fun one. Okay good And next time I want the other one Uh Just to contrast Uh, so you're an only child you grew up in NorCal, but you don't really have child memories from there

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: No, I mean I do but i'm just saying enough where for me my home base my friendships You know the people that I went to middle school with that i'm still best friends with like everything is here in la And everyone's kind of based out here now. No family is up north anyway, so we didn't go back and forth You know for family holidays Everyone kind of moved to la or london or san diego, so We keep it local or really far away. It's like one extreme of the next. Yeah, seriously. That's quite a drive Yeah, it's long drive

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And then did you guys move here for something specific?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: For me Actually, you know We moved here because I had a tv show where I was a host Of a kids club up north in the bay area in san francisco that I would record every saturday you know, I'd have school all week and then recorded on saturdays and We decided to try out pilot season and I got bit by the a camera bug and my mom had gone to business school at

UCLA. She had gone to Anderson school of business. So she loved LA and it didn't really matter where we were. So for her, she was like, let's move over here. This is a better fit for the entire family.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So many questions. Did you study acting or camera work or anything like that before you went piloting?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: No, I didn't. Um, I had a teacher, like she taught young students. She was not a youth. Yeah. A teacher of young actors. Thank you so much. See this pregnancy brain is actually a real thing. No, I mean, I had taken classes and I had, you know, done privates and coaching before I had gone in for auditions, but it was something that I hadn't experienced until I really was out in LA. I mean, is that you, you just love to be somebody else. Yes. You know, I love being other people, first of all, but secondly, I love performing. I was a national jazz and tap champion when I was a kid.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Me too.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: That's oh my gosh. How cute is that?

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: We can go on tour together and it'll be like Vaudeville.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Wow, do it. But I did that. And that's kind of how all of the camera, you know, and acting and being bit by the bug happened because I was performing on stage and I had got asked to audition for this kids club where I was a host. And I got it out of, you know, a couple hundred kids there was four of us and I was like, this is what I meant to do. I meant to be in front of a camera. So any opportunity I could to perform, I would perform.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You don't talk about dad.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: No, dad is not in the picture, but dad was in the picture when I was younger. I just don't talk about debt. It's not a bad thing, but no, my parents got divorced when I was like 15, maybe 16, but he was living up North and then coming back and forth. Like, so we had two places.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, I mean, was that hard at 15?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Um, you know, I don't think so. But then again, I don't have anything to compare it to. There's a part of me that's like, I wonder what it would be like if my parents separated and got divorced when I was really young. Maybe I wouldn't be so aware of everything, but I was also aware of my relationship with my father and we didn't have a great relationship. So it didn't matter if my parents stayed together or weren't together because our relationship was so strange. So it didn't really matter what my mother ended up doing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: But that makes sense. But then you said dad is out of the picture, meaning you don't have a relationship with him now.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: No, no relationship. No.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, if it makes you feel any better, I don't have a relationship with him either.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Good.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I'm glad I think it's the second thing we have in common. So as our, what'd you call it? Dr. Berlin, so many things.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I've been feeling people walking down the street just probably can't even tell us apart.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Absolutely not. Are you kidding me?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: You're the one with the small belly.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I I'm not sure about that.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: She's really popped. It's really popping.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: These burritos are popping too. I eat a burrito a day. That's my go-to. So third thing in common, we are the same person.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: There you go.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: All right. So you came here for pilot season. You booked a show.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I'm trying to think of when I had booked a show. I hadn't booked a show yet, but I had been consistently booking guest spots and movies and continued to work. And then we just decided to come here full time. It just absolutely made sense. So when I was around 11 years old, that's when we permanently moved here from the Bay area.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Do you have a genre that you prefer?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Comedy. I love it. I enjoyed doing drama. I can't imagine not doing that either, but there's something so special about being able to make someone laugh, especially on a sitcom because it's instant gratification. So, and I do any theater, you know, I never got into theater, which is so funny. I would love to eventually, but it never kind of fell in my lap per se. I was never in New York. I never did Broadway. Maybe in the future. Maybe that's the next step.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Stand up.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I did stand up when I was younger. I haven't done it in forever. I haven't done it as like an adult. I did it when I was like young.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I feel like it's time to bring your standup back because you're fricking hilarious.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Well, I'll tell you, I think the baby's going to be a standup comic because I have funnier jokes. I'd never been funny or I'll say that. And I've never had one liners that have been better. And I'm pretty convinced of it that it's because of the baby. And yeah, I don't know. We'll see one of us. I'll bring standup back.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You're the baby I'm bringing standup back. Okay. So now bipolar, tell us about that. Where does that journey start for you?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: The journey started when I was about two, three years old. I would have temper tantrums and not like a normal temper tantrum as a kid out of nowhere. I would. us be smiling and happy. And it first started when I was on a plane with my mom and I just started banging my head against the window. And there was no rhyme or reason. She was panicked. When I was five years old, I couldn't cross thresholds. I was such a perfectionist that I couldn't go from one side of the front door of my house to literally the other side of the front door of my house. And I couldn't go into the dance studio. At the time, I had not yet gotten my black belt, but I was in karate in Taekwondo. And I couldn't enter the studio.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I was so afraid of not being better than the day before. And I ended up going to hypnotherapy. And that saved me when I was around five. That saved my life, truly. And it started to come back when I was about 14 to 15 and I was misdiagnosed, depressed. They put me on antidepressants, which makes your highs higher and lows lower if you live with bipolar disorder. So I didn't properly get diagnosed until I was 21, 22 years old. And I was coming off a show called Caprica, which was the prequel to Battlestar Galactica. And an acupuncturist who was someone that I worked with forever had mentioned to me, you know, has anyone ever said you could possibly live with bipolar disorder because you have very similar symptoms to all my creative clients.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: And it was like, I was explaining how I would feel like there would be explosions in my stomach of a sense of like a volcano like erupting inside. I was getting numbness on one side of my whole body. I was getting these migraines. I was getting these feelings. And he was like, this is kind of all what my clients go through. I think maybe you should check it out. And I had a panic attack and I ended up going to the doctor and the psychiatrist said, well, of course you live with bipolar disorder. How has no one ever told you this? So I've been waiting since I was, you know, 15. And yeah, it was a new doctor. So, you know, it took a long time for me to finally figure out what the situation was. It's not a problem.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: It's just what it was, you know? And I was medicated and became my true authentic self. Like I felt like me again and not being out of control.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, how is it diagnosed?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Well, the crazy thing is about bipolar disorder is it's one of the last things on a checklist for a psychiatrist to look at because when you go into a doctor, you're not talking about the highs that you're having and how you're feeling amazing and that you're unstoppable and untouchable. You're going in there talking about you're depressed. You can't leave the bed. You're living with insomnia. I was up for three days straight and it was not bothering me. I would drive for hours and hours on end just back and forth, not knowing what to do with my evenings. You don't go in with the, I feel amazing, right? Like overly amazing. And so that's why a lot of the times bipolar disorder is completely misdiagnosed

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: because you're not going in there with all the notes. And so what I always ask people who feel like they're going through something to always bring in, even when

they're feeling their best to their psychiatrist so they know, hey, look at these levels, look at the differences. And that's kind of how it works. And I think it's very easy to give a 15 year old who's hormonal antidepressants, right? It's much harder to actually have the conversation and see what's actually wrong with them.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And that's the thing about bipolar, there's not a cure for it. There's living with it.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: There's living with it. I mean, I do know a lot of people that do, it's basically like a neurofeedback therapy where they kind of reprogram your brain. So there are like new different types of modalities and things like where people are like, oh my God, this works. Sure, it may work, you know, and it's also genetic. So that's a problem too. You know, so you have to know. You can't change all your genes, at least not yet.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, exactly.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: And the medication works. The medication works, but you know, it's not something that it's like one size fits all. You know, it definitely has to constantly be monitored and constantly be changed. There were times that I had to up the dosage. There's times I've had to lower. Other people have to also be on antidepressants on top of the Lamictal, which is what I'm on. And the medication that I'm on specifically Lamictal, which is Lamotrigine, it's also used for people who have seizures, who have epilepsy. And then there's other ones. There's a lot of different types, but it's to whatever mood stabilizes you the best, I like to say.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So, I mean, I have a million and one questions, but how does the medication work? What does it do?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: It balances you. I mean, truly, I think that that's what it is. It balances your brain. It balances the chemicals.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I'm picturing like the zone diet.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Like, you don't want your blood sugar to go over this or under that. want to keep it in the zone. Because I know that sometimes when people talk about on medications like that is that they feel number like it's not extreme highs and lows. But then they also don't feel like they feel everything that they want to feel. Right. I think that the reason why

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: me particularly was put on the McDonald's, which is also called the Motrogen is because it's what's given to a lot of actors and a lot of musicians. It's a type of medication that does not have that numbing feeling. I've had that numbing feeling before with certain antidepressants and other medication. So I'm able to identify what makes me feel that way. This doesn't make me feel like the extreme. Oh my gosh, I want to punch my hand through a mirror and break it right now because that's how frustrated I am. You know, it doesn't allow you to that next level. But I will say I certainly feel my emotions. I'm certainly able to cry on the spot for an audition. I still have those feelings. It's just not the super high.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: And there still are manic episodes that are involved. Even when you are on the medication, especially when I was on it, I still felt and had to learn how to control that through other tools. What I'm on is not numbing for me. And I feel like if you are feeling that way, then maybe it's not the right medicine for you.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Are there side effects that you have?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I didn't have any side effects. A lot of the side effects are like rashes and migraines and stuff like that. I'd been on it for almost 13 years. Like I'd been on my medication for 12 years. And I never had anything that was truly dangerous that I would say. I noticed my headaches kind of went away when I stopped taking it. But I don't know if that was just hormonal, if that was because of being pregnant. I don't know. That I can't quite say whether it is or

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: not. Well, we're just warming up with you. We're going to take a quick break. When we come back, we'll find out about the dude in your life and the impending baby. We'll be slash Dr. Berlin for up to 30% off. Welcome back to the podcast. We're talking Alessandra Toresani. Ah, the pasta. Okay. Tortellini. Tortellini. All right. Let's talk about this. Where'd you meet this wonderful guy?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I met my fella, Sturgis, another complicated name. I met him at a Halloween party. And he courted me for let's say eight months and then I finally gave in. I hadn't been single for a really long time and I was determined to be single and just be on my own and kind of re get my life together in my head and balance myself out. And then when I was ready, kind of everything opened up and I was like, oh my God, why did I never think twice about Sturgis before? Like oh my God, I'm going to marry him. It's been almost eight years.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow. It feels like when you think of Sturgis, you get more religious because you keep saying, oh my God, religious.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yeah. He would laugh at that.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So wait, a Halloween party. What are you dressed as?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I was dressed as Lilo from the fifth element. I don't know if you're familiar with that movie. I had the orange Bob and I had the bandage like white, like nothing on basically, and he was a demon baby. So, you know, I think that's what kind of threw me off. That's what he was dressed as. That threw me off the first time the demon baby.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I would have thought you'd be, I don't know why I attracted to something like that. Okay. And then Bruce Willis is who I was trying to think of.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Was that a yes, yeah, it was.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. Okay. So you finally gave in and started dating.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: The demon baby, the demon baby.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How did the relationship unfold? Like, did you think at the beginning, wait, this could be the one. This could be serious.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I truly loved him from the beginning. And I thought he was just the greatest because he was very different than anyone I'd ever been with before. And, um, in a way where he was, he's super evolved.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Does that mean he's not an amoeba?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yeah, he's exactly. But, you know, he practices like transcendental meditation and he, you know, just is such a reader and wants to know everything that's going on. And he absorbs everything. And, you know, I had a lot of judgment from almost all of the men that I dated with my bipolar disorder. So I had made a pack that the next guy dated, you know, sentence out of my mouth would be like, by the way, I live with bipolar disorder, either live with it or not, because I was sick of being told, Oh, well, you're crazy and you're this. And so I said it to him. I was like, you know, I live with bipolar disorder. And he's like, okay. And what, you know, like he didn't question it. I'm a demon baby. He's like, I'm a demon baby.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: He's like, trust me, I got way worse problem. Um, but it was just a very adult relationship in that sense where it was still lots of fun, but he really knows how to nurture and take care of me, like on a spiritual level that I've never had before.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So a deeper relationship.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yes. Much.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. So it sounds like early on, you're like, this is different. I like this. Maybe this is it.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yeah. Yeah. I thought so. We were together for, let's see, we've been married now going on two years on the 4th of July and you know, fireworks, total fireworks. And I don't know. We were just very slow and moved in together and lived in sin. And I was not happy about that. Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. Close your ears. Everyone close your ears.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: No wonder why you can't bring up God when you talked about him, right? You were not happy about it.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Oh, no, I was like, we have to be engaged before we get in a house together, all this stuff. But then I kind of was like, all right, well, maybe I should get to live with somebody first. And it was the best decision that I think we made overall at the beginning.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I was not happy. I always encourage people to sin whenever possible. It usually pays off.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Pays off. It's more fun. Sinners always prosper.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. So did you start talking about kids? Is it something you're on the same page about from the beginning?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Um, you know, it's funny because I think that I don't, I asked him this question the other day. I was like, I wonder what we started talking about kids. He's like, I don't remember not, not talking about it, you know, but there was no specific sit down. Like, okay, are we going to have children together? I think that it was always an assumption that if we stayed together, that there would be kids and just kind of see when it would happen. But it was never truly a plan. It was never a thought, you know, like, oh my God, I wonder if he's someone that wants to have children. Like it just naturally happened. I think he does.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: He's the younger sister. Oh, okay. So is that interesting to you? Is it interesting to me when, and what I'm saying now you kind of have a sibling too. Yeah. Oh my God.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Totally. And her husband's the best. Like we have the best time.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, that's great. So, yeah, I just went interesting because you didn't have siblings before.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. Yeah, no, I mean, I feel like. Like, it's been a good time. We have fun.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. But then before you decided to have kids, you must have been doing something to decidedly not have kids.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yeah, I think once we got married, and then the conversation, you know, of when are we gonna have children, COVID was hitting, it was like, what is going on? Everything is different. The world looks different. And I also was someone that was told for as long as I can remember that I probably would have a really hard time having kids from multiple doctors. This is not but no rhyme or reason, like no rhyme or reason. I didn't have fertility tests, nothing. They just would say, Oh, well, you've been on birth control so long. So it's probably going to be very hard. Or they would say, you know, Lamictal, you know, with living with bipolar disorder, it's really hard to get pregnant.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: And you can't be on your medication because it'll harm your baby. So you have to get off your medicine. So these are things in the back of my head that I had been told for years, that I said to him, I was like, Okay, well, you know, if we're going to do it, I'm 34, and this is the time to do it times a ticket, you know, and why don't I slowly start getting off my medicine, see how I do see how I feel. And then if I'm totally fine off it, then let's start and see what happens. And that's what we did.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And so I weaned off my medication to take medication if you need it and still be pregnant or is that risky for the baby?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Well, there's many opinions depending on who you ask and what doctor you ask. You know, the research in my People magazine article that came from the University

of Massachusetts, you know, it's only a very, very, very small percentage of a chance that a child who had a mother that was on Lamictal would be born with a cleft palate. But then there's no tests on what happens X years later, there's no tests on what happens with their mental health, what their board. So there's a lot of things that are up in the air. But it was also something that I was told was not even an option was to stay on it. And not just from one doctor, this is multiple doctors. So it's been a really rough pregnancy in that sense.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Because when you tell people you live with bipolar disorder, and you're off your medication, you get judgment from multiple different sides. And you get confusion from multiple different sides. You know, I went to a specialist for the baby, because they thought that there might be this heart thing. And was a great doctor. But he asked if I was still on my Lamictal and I said no. And he was like, Oh, well, you can stay on it. And then he starts googling something, he's like, actually, I wouldn't stay on it if I were you. And my husband's like, Okay, you know, so the point is, is there's not enough research that's going on when it comes to mental health and mental illness in regards to pregnancy, or pregnancy in general with medication.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: And so that's kind of what I'm here for is to have that conversation through my own experience of the unknown and hearing 20 different million sides of a conversation about, you know, what I should be doing for my baby in regards to my mental health. You know, but then you can't have a Pepto-Bismol because that harms the baby and you can't have a licorice tea because that harms the baby. But then there's no real backed up research other than, you know, a few things here and there. So it's really tricky.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I heard if you take Pepto during pregnancy, the baby comes up pink. I would love that. That would be adorable. That's not true. It was just a joke. It would be adorable. And Nyquil. Okay. So yes. So was it scary like you had been on the medication for so long and it was doing so well, but it wasn't scary to get off of it.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: It was scary, but it was also something that I had prepared for mentally of I'm going to have to do this. So if I am going to do this, not only am I going to have to have my mom and my husband as my witness 24 hours a day watching me. And I had to know that if it got bad and it's mania came up when I was weaning up the medication that they would have to put me back on. You know, and I knew that, but I had different modalities that I had set up. I made sure that I did, you know, acupuncture and I made sure that I was eating a proper diet. I did something we were talking about on podcast the other day, alpha biotics. That's what I did to reset the nervous system. You know, I was doing anything that I possibly could for my mind and my

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: body and my soul. And I practiced transcendental meditation. I went back into my teacher to get re-aligned and, you know, I was doing everything I could to substitute. And that's not for everyone, but it worked for me.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Does that mean that after you have the baby, there's some sort of thought that you might stay off the medication if you're coping without it? Or is it?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: No, I don't think so. I think that, you know, it depends if I'm able to breastfeed her. or not, because I know women stop breastfeeding and, you know, just do formula and

then they get back on their medication. And some women stay on their formula. Not anymore. Um, and then some women do take their medication and stay on their medication while they're pregnant and while they're breastfeed. So I think I'm kind of at a point of let's see what happens when the baby comes and if the baby can latch and we'll go from there, you know, play it by ear. Yeah. I mean, yeah. I mean,

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: do you feel a day to day difference now that you've been off the medicine?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Um, the second trimester was absolutely the hardest for me, which is interesting because every woman I talked to loved the second trimester and they would giggle and laugh and have a great time. And for me, I was on the verge of having suicidal thoughts and just wanting anyone to just take the baby out of the stomach for five minutes so I could just scream and punch and just like lose my mind because I was truly having an out of body experience with hormonal, you know, rush from the chemical imbalance. And then you don't know, is it because I'm pregnant? Is it because of this? But I was very lucky. I have a great therapist that works with my husband and I, because he's never seen me without medication.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: So he doesn't know what it's like to handle that. So I've had a personal psychiatrist, I have a therapist, and I have, you know, other doctors that kind of just watch and manage me, but never did I have to get back on the medication. So I was very lucky, but it's scary because you don't want to go into your OB and be like, by the way, like, Hey, I hate myself and I want to like lose my mind. Like you don't want to do that. You know, you have a few minutes with them, you know, the average they say you see your doctor seven minutes, you know, you don't want to be like, Oh my God. And I tell people this too. You know, I'm in a very privileged situation and life. Most women are not. And, you know,

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: if you go in whether you're medicated or not into the hospital and say, Hey, I'm not doing well as a pregnant woman and I would like to be monitored. Someone needs to check me and make sure that I'm okay. I need help. You know, the state has the right to take control of your body and take your kid that's inside you. Like, you know what I mean? Like, and put you on medication if you don't really want to be on medication or take you off or adjust or say that you're an unfit mother. So why would anyone want to open up to any, you know, like official like doctor, you know, it's scary.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It doesn't become the bigger talking point when you see the tragic effects of unchecked mental illness in general, and especially in relationship to the transition to motherhood. But then, you know, it just feels like there's a bunch of people in the organization spinning their wheels, but not really making major traction. Now, you know, learning to early will support so that maybe you prevent or lighten the effects to recognize early, to intervene early and just awareness so that it doesn't come to that where someone who's totally unassuming just loses it. And, you know, next thing they're worried about is losing the baby to the government.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: And a lot of women, um, what I've learned like through the interviews that I've done on my podcast, the season interviewing specialist and postpartum depression and whatnot, a lot of doctors have told me that women get bipolar disorder while they're pregnant and

never had a mental illness before, or they get severe depression or, you know, things that they never had to deal with before. So that's even scarier, right? You're just like, is this a normal pregnancy, you know, side effect? Like, is this what it's supposed to be? You know, is this a symptom? You know, you don't know. And you're ashamed to talk about it, especially with postpartum depression. People don't talk about it enough. I've had friends that suffered through it and family,

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: and I didn't even know because they were afraid to talk about the fact that they had no connection to their baby.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. I just said in an interview, it's going to air soon with a person who shared very, very raw, open experiences. But she in retrospect had some signs of OCD before pregnancy. And after her pregnancy, you know, once the baby was here, she had harmful thoughts, suicidal for herself and thoughts of harming her baby. And they did like this little mental health email at her doctor's office. And she lied her way through the entire thing because she was terrified that they would team her and take the baby. So there's got to be more to it than that. Yeah. Your work in your podcast and you also bravely sharing your experience will hopefully be one of those enzymes that moves this process forward. I hope so.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I want to do something for change. And I'm still trying to figure out what that's going to be. But this is just the beginning. of me wanting to create a larger movement with other beautiful, wonderful parents.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's amazing. You're going to have your baby soon. We're towards the very end was 37 weeks.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Whoa.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: They call that term.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Term.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. 37 weeks. If you had the baby, you would no longer be a preemie.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Really? I did not know that that is term. I hear so many different things always, so I'm so confused. So I hope she bakes for 42 weeks. Well, that's my goal.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You like your toast crispy.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I like it crispy.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. Well, when we come back, we'll find out more about your plans for the upcoming birth. Welcome back, Al centrum. I have questions for you about the birth. You're like a few weeks away. Do you have a loose plan for the birth?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I do. I actually took a beautiful course and then follow up with someone that you interviewed, Alicia Tambury through hypnobirthing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: The Jedi.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yes. The Jedi master. So I will be doing a hypnobirthing birth, but at a hospital. So not an at home birth, not at a birthing center. I'm still doing it with my OB and everything. So yeah, yeah. So I'm like, oh, I would not do it at home and I would not do it at the birth. I feel like if I did it at home, it wouldn't happen. Like there would be something that I would be bothered by or I just feel like I need professionals to watch over me. You know, like a lot of people get more people at home these days and you get it. No, but I get to perform for strangers. You know what I mean? I have a brand new audience that I'm going to get to.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I didn't even think about that. I think you should go from room to room at the labor and delivery.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I have to tell you, I'm specifically only having a baby at a hospital because I love hospital socks so much and I'm out of them and I need to go pick up some more. So that's really why I'm going.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I know it to get you. Hospital socks and some formula, just in case. Okay. So who's coming? Who's the cast of characters?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: The cast of characters is my husband, Sturgis and my mom, Marsha.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And you and the baby and well, yeah, obviously the stars.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yes. Okay.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Are you going to labor at home first for a while or are you going to go right away?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I'm going to hopefully be able to labor at home as long as possible and then go in. You know, today I actually had my appointment with my doctor, who was really great on telling me exactly, you know, if your water breaks and this happens, then do this. If your water breaks and you don't go having contractions, this is an issue that we're going to have to talk about. You know, so I have like certain plans like that laid out, but for the majority, I would like to be at home until right then. I don't want to have to also drive there and then them send me back.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So far you from embarrassing.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: About 20 minutes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Not bad. Okay. So are there other people that you would like to labor with you while you're at home or you like it?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: No, I like my core group. I like the triangle, the trifecta.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You know, is there a dog?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: There are two dogs. They're above me right now and I have Pee Wee Herman and Dottie. So they will be here with me.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Are they the best?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yeah, I could never give birth. I don't think with Pee Wee Herman in the room with me.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I think you'd be surprised. He's an essential character.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Okay. But I plan on like sitting in a bath and just being there and just like relaxing and then just, you know, breathing through it. I mean, I've heard so many of the birth stories on your podcast that I feel super prepared. I have to be honest because of that.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wait till you hear this one with Alessandra tortellini tortellini. Okay. So once you get to the hospital, do you want to medicate? You want to go lighter, heavier?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: The intention is no medication, but I'm also aware of what it means to pivot in an emergency and that if I needed a C-section or something went wrong or whatnot, that medication and surgery would be the way to go. So I think I like to do it as natural as possible, but that's why I'm also very cautious that things can go wrong. So I'd like to be prepared at a hospital with, you know, my doctor.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: All that sounds really cool. Like you have a sort of a vision and you have flexibility with your vision for whatever comes up once the ball starts rolling.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yeah, I think you have to.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It ends better that way. No matter what happens, it's not like you had this rigid plan and if it didn't go exactly according to that, then you're let down. But what is the motivation for wanting a more natural birth less medicated if things go that way?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I'm someone that's very in tune with my body, like in my entire life I have been. And I'm someone that does better, as we said, not numb, right? Just like my brain, not numb. I do better just feeling all the feels. Also, my mom had a natural birth. So I think that that also was something that was always in my head. Not that it inspired me or anything, but I just know what a bad ass she is and that if she can do it, I can do it.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, that means you already had one natural birth. There you go.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I'm O natural.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Are there any things that you're excited about regarding labor or anxious about regarding labor?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: You know, it's so funny. This just happened to me in the past week and a half where we started doing the perennial massage. Yeah. When the fella, and it was so painful and it was like a disaster. And it was awful. And I was like, oh my God, this is going to be so painful birth. And it's weird. I've been so focused on my mental health and making sure that I was as clear

minded as possible for nine months that I didn't even think twice about, oh, Hey, like I may be like torn apart, like, you know, jaws and like things are going really for the worse and it's a horror movie. And, you know, I didn't think about being the pain because I've been so focused on taking care of my mental health that it was the first moment where I was like, Oh my God,

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: this is not a comfortable feeling. Like a feeling I'm familiar with. This is not great. But then I did my hypnobirthing, you know, meditations and affirmations and, you know, hypnosis. And I realized like, you know what? It's okay. I'm glad that I acknowledged that that pain was there, but I'm going to overcome this. So I think that I needed to experience kind of that one moment to know, okay, I'm aware that this is going to happen now.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Does that mean that you continue to do the pair of neon massage and it doesn't have the same sharpness for you?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Exactly. Yeah, yeah. And it was about, you know, playing like the rainbow, relaxation when I was doing it and certain things to change and it truly does help.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's cool. I mean, it just means that you have that potential for the other intensities that come up between now and the time you're holding your baby.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yeah, absolutely.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Isn't it, you're one of those couples that are cool doing the pair of neon massage together. I know that some couples are really not into it. Sometimes she isn't, sometimes her partner isn't. Guys in particular, one guy put it to me, and he's like, well, you know, she wanted him to do it. He didn't want to do it. And he's like, look, if I need like a prostate procedure, I'm not bringing it to you.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Oh my God, that's hilarious. You know, I'll say, I thought that he was going to be so grossed out and weirded out by all the birth videos in our hypnotherapy class. And he was like, this is the coolest thing in the entire world. Neither one of us is like grossed out by blood or like gore or anything either. I'm a big horror movie buff. I love horror. So I thought he was going to be like a little queasy to seeing these like, you know, at home bursts and these water bursts. He was like in the class asking for more. And I was like, put your hand down, sir. And I think this is a fetish. Like, you know, all these like strangers, we don't know these couples, like the guys are like queasy in the corner. And mine is like, can we see more?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: I'm like mortified. I was like, enough is enough. But I think that, you know, we've been through a lot together. And this is just another fun experience. We like experiencing things together. We have a good time.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's awesome. Amazing.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Have you worked during the pregnancy?

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Well, if you consider podcasts working, yes, I have. I've continued that up. Still doing that at 37 weeks. But I have not been on, in quote unquote, a TV show or movie while I'm pregnant. But I have been auditioning and testing and doing things like that up until just a couple of weeks ago, I would say, as when I told my agents actually, because I kept it really quiet because I'm someone that's superstitious. And I was afraid that something might happen. And you know, so I just didn't tell anyone because I wasn't showing until a couple of weeks ago. But yeah, I did a big meeting where they knew I was pregnant, but they don't start shooting till August. They know that baby will be out by then. So they were like, we don't care,

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: have her audition and come in and be pregnant. So that was a weird experience to have this giant belly, like in front of like 10 suits, you know, you're like, oh, this is interesting. Like, this is different, you know, never experienced this, but it was cool. I was not alone in the room. So it was great.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's true. You always have a little partner. And also for them, it's very safe because you definitely.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: won't be pregnant then. Yes. Yes. Definitely won't be. Definitely won't be. Tell me a little bit about your podcast. Yeah. My podcast is called emotional support and it's funny podcast. It's a little bit of Howard Stern. It's got the, you know, intensity of a doctor show, you know, it's got a little bit of everything, but I've been really lucky because I have a lot of famous friends that all owe me favors. And so they've all come on and been just amazing guests and they've been able to share their experience about mental health and mental wellness. And in the first three seasons, I had different types of doctors and specialists that would come on and kind of just share. And this season is dedicated specifically to maternal mental health.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: And so I've been interviewing my friends who are moms who are currently pregnant. And I've also interviewed you. That was a fun interview. Yeah, we had a great time. I interviewed specialists with postpartum depression and you know, all different types. There's a crystal healer that comes on that talks about a spiritual pregnancy. And she's like literally 39 weeks pregnant while she does this. And then she gave birth like the next week after our interview. I was like, Oh my God, you're so awesome. Like this is so cool. I've been hoping someone goes into labor during our podcast, but it hasn't happened yet.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It hasn't happened yet. Not yet. It will. It will watch it.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Well, look, we still have four minutes to go. We saw four minutes and we don't know what's going to happen. But it's been fun. And so it's about really just sharing different stories because that's what I've realized during this entire pregnancy. The one feeling that I would say that I have felt is alone because even though I have an amazing partner, like I've shared, there's something about experiencing this and the highs and the lows alone, where you don't feel heard and it's really scary. But when I hear other women's stories of what they've gone through, I know I'm not alone. So that's what I'm hoping that I can make that change and bring awareness to, you know, men to illness and pregnancy and just pregnancy in general,

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: that it's a wild ride, you know? Yeah. I think that's a universal description.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. Yeah. So let's do it again. W F R W F R wild different ride.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Okay. So where can we find you online? Oh, you can find me at Alessandra Torsani, Alessandra Torsani.com. Or if you want to follow the podcast, it's spelled like emotional support. So it's at emotional support pod.com at emotional support, anywhere you can find podcasts. It plays everywhere and leave me a review. I love those. My ego really gets boosted and I just live for them. This girl is nuts.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Hold on. I'm just finishing my review. I take that as a compliment. I know you do. That's why I said,

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: yeah, I can't wait. You're coming back, right? To tell us how the whole thing goes. Absolutely. I'm going to tell every single detail and remember I'm a horror movie buff, so nothing is going to be left out. I can't wait. Actually, you're so animated. Like whatever happens, I know that I'm going to feel like I'm in there on the table, having it done. Oh, yeah. Yes. I mean, I'm not sure it's going to be as great as the episode where someone held your head, you know, while they were giving birth and all that. Sarah's and my doctor and your doctor. But yes, just that thing. You know, it could be. I mean, I think you should try to outdo her. Listen, who knows? I definitely want the more people and the more strangers,

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: the merrier it's going to be. It'll be a full blown performance.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I love it. I love it. All right. Thank you, Alessandra for being here and for your time and for the work that you're doing and such powerful people who take their cards and they look at their cards and like, wow, this is a interesting hand. And then just turn it into a major winner for themselves and for others. And that's you. So thank you.

ALESSANDRA TORRESANI: Thank you. Appreciate it.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. And I'm going to see you online there at the Instagram and we're on there too. If you want more pregnancy and parenting information, visit us at Dr. Berlin D O C T O R B E R L I N. Oh.

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