Feed Your Family with Clean Ingredients: Special Guest, The Ingredient Guru Transcript

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Podcast Introduction and Guest Welcome

Your genes hold the answers to your family's overall health. I'm Dr. Paula Kruppstadt and on the Get to the Root with Hope for Healing podcast, I sit down with experts in genetics, functional medicine, and family care to explore what's really going on beneath the surface so you can stop guessing and start healing.

From personalized insights to practical tools, we bring you whole family wellness that starts at the root. Welcome to the Get to The Root podcast. I'm your host, Dr.

Paula Kruppstadt. And today we have Mira Desi. She is the ingredient guru who is joining us. So when you're standing in the grocery store and you try to figure out, can I buy this?

Should I should I feed this to my child? She's going to bless us with her expertise. Mira is a great teacher, she's an author, and she is known as the ingredient guru.

So Mira, thank you for joining us today. Absolutely. Paula, it is such a pleasure to spend time with you. Yay. I love always sitting under Mira's teaching.

She, I learn something new every time I hear her speak. she speaks at our local functional medicine meetups and she's just a joy to listen to. And she has practical take home messages.

So I'm going to read a little bit about Mira. As I said, she's called the ingredient guru. She is a nutrition educator, author, and public speaker who helps people understand what is really in their food and everyday products so that they can make informed choices for their health.

she is longtime advocate for ingredient awareness and practical wellness. She teaches simple, sustainable strategies for creating healthier homes and lifestyles And she was the recipient of the 2025 National Association of Nutrition Professionals HEAL Award.

That is so cool. Thank you. And that was in recognition of her leadership and commitment to nutrition education. So through her writing classes, presentations, she empowers individuals and families to live healthier, more informed lives.

So thanks for joining us, Mira, and let's take it away. All right. So a couple of questions. When a parent is standing in the grocery store trying to do the right thing, what's one label reading myth you wish that they would let go of immediately?

How to Read Labels Without Overwhelm

You know, I think the biggest myth that so many people struggle with when they begin to develop an awareness of the fact that maybe not everything in the grocery store qualifies as food is this desire to do it all at once.

They feel like they have to be on top of all the things. And quite frankly, it's going to take you five hours to grocery shop that way. Really, what I'd rather you do is figure out what's the most important thing for you and your family.

Maybe there's a particular ingredient you're trying to get rid of. maybe it's better quality dairy products, maybe its pesticides in produce or whatever.

Start there. Learn there, master that and then move on. Because if you it a little bit at a time, you will make a whole

lot more progress than overwhelming yourself and your family by trying to do it all at once.

That's an excellent point. We've talked about this before, but it's progress, not perfection. And that perfection is the enemy of all progress too, that black and white thinking.

that's An excellent principle. Let me see. we often see front of package claims like natural, made with whole grains or no added sugar. So from a functional medicine perspective, how misleading can these be for families?

My goodness, that is such a great question. Unfortunately, food producers are allowed to use front of package labeling to try to entice us to buy their product.

And there is a lot that they can put on the front that really is highly deceptive. One of my favorite examples to share with people is that you see something and it says made with organic some ingredient here.

And so you think because it has the word organic, usually in big bold letters on the front of the package, that means the entire package is okay. If you don't flip that package over and look at it, you may not realize that many of the other ingredients are not organic.

Just because one ingredient doesn't mean the entire package has to be. The issue that I have with that is those front of package labels tend to very buzzword focused.

So a long time ago, and you probably remember this, decades ago the buzzword was how many whole grains were in something. So it's like made with five whole-grains, nine whole grain, whatever, they're putting whole grains in everything.

Then it was probiotics. Now it's protein. And so they use that to try to attract you to think that what's in there, because everybody knows we need more protein, that you're going to buy it.

But truthfully, is it the kind of protein we needs? Is it type of the protein that's going support our body? It it an amount of proteins that are going be significant or make a difference?

Like we have to remember front of package labeling belongs to the manufacturers. We still have flip it over and look at that ingredient panel. Okay. Excellent points.

Now, when we talk about busy parents and both parents are working and food prep and meal planning can be very, very challenging. What are the top two to three ingredients on a label that should immediately raise a red flag, especially when you're trying to feed your children?

Yeah, and I would say, sure, especially when you're trying to feed your children, but really when trying feed anybody in the family. There are so many ingredients that appear in our food.

And again, we don't want to try and do them all at once. We just want learn a little bit at a time. If I had to pick my top three to avoid, however, the very first one would be artificial anything.

artificial sweetener, artificial color, and artificial flavor. We don't need those. They're made from non-nutritive ingredients. they do not nourish the body in any way, shape, or form.

So if you see the word artificial anywhere in the ingredient package, sometimes it appears on the front of the package. Weirdly enough, it'll say made with artificial and natural flavor!

Ingredients to Avoid: Artificial Additives, Carrageenan, and MSG

We do need it. Artificial anything is out. Another huge ingredient that I am vigorously opposed to is called carrageenan. And this is made from a red seaweed.

And we've been taught that seaweed is good for us. Unfortunately, this particular type of seaweed and the way that it's been processed is really bad for gut health.

It disturbs the microbiome and is so challenging. Especially when we look at kids, we have to remember they're not just little humans. The amount of things that's in food or personal care products or other items that they are consuming is going to have a bigger impact because proportionally, it's affecting them differently.

They're smaller, so they getting a higher dose. they may not be processing it the same way. And so for their little guts, We want to make sure that we're protecting them as much as possible and avoiding something like carrageenan is huge.

What are some of the things that we would find carragenan in? Here's the really sad part. It appears in virtually every single aisle of the grocery store, including the pharmacy.

In lunch meat, I have seen it in soups, dairy products, frozen foods, packaged canned things. Really, it's an emulsifier and that's why it gets used a lot because it makes things stay together and it is cheap.

I actually had a client at one point. We had worked together and cleaned up her gut health. She was having a lot of gut-health issues, and so we figured out what was the right plan for her.

And then probably six to eight months after we stopped working together, she contacted me and she said, something's wrong. My stomach is really off. I'm having lots of problems.

with bloating and pain and diarrhea, and I haven't changed my diet." And I said, well, let's go back to basics. Let's look at all of the ingredients again.

And one of things she discovered was that the cottage cheese that she was buying, they had changed how they were making it. They were now using carrageenan in it, And she had thought that because she identified it as a safe brand that she could just eat that and it was like her favorite high protein snack.

And so, yeah, it, was a problem. Well, thanks for telling us where it's at. It's very discouraging that it says so many things. So before I interrupted you, you said artificial anything, kiroginin, and then what's the third thing?

Number three, especially for kids, is monosodium glutamate. And this one is really, really difficult because it hides under so many different names. I think the easiest way to get started with avoiding MSG is to look for anything on a label that says that it's got a glutamine in it.

if it's autolized or hydrolyzed. Those three words will knock out the vast majority of what is essentially monosodium glutamate. And the challenge is it really affects our brain.

It can be problematic when it comes to sleep issues. it can cause allergy issues for some people. If they're highly sensitive, it could cause headaches.

Especially when I see children who have migraines, that is a huge ingredient that I encourage their parents to become very knowledgeable about and watch out for.

Yes, we talk a lot about MSG and it can be quite yucky. And then if you add in, it's called glutamic acid decarboxylase. It's a genetic identifier. When we have that on our genetic panel, you know, We're all over the MSD, but for folks to remember, hydroxylate and autolyzed.

Those are the things that, you know, like yeast hydroxylate and what are some of the other things it would say? Autolyze or? Yes, I can say auto lies to use the extract.

Okay. It's on my desk. I pulled it out for us. Thank you. While you're looking for that, I would say people I think are familiar with Chinese food. That used to be in a lot of Chinese foods.

It still is in some. So this is a two-page spread from my book, The Pantry Principle. Everything that's in orange is either monosodium glutamate or free glutamic acid, which is what's going to trigger something similar.

You know, if it says yeast extract, that is another trigger. If it say calcium caseinate, soy protein, anything, because it will say like textured soy proteins or those kinds of things.

Go ahead, go ahead. Yeah, textured protein. So a lot of those, how they're processed makes a huge difference. And if you see something that says soy protein, then we need to do a deeper dive and figure out how was it processed and is it safe for consumption.

Some of them can be, some of the are not. What about nutritional yeast? Great question. Nutritional yeast actually can be a very nourishing substance because of a lot of the micronutrient content that's in it.

And the challenge is simply to watch out for if somebody has food allergies. There are some people who may be more sensitive to that particular ingredient.

It's not a very high percentage, but it can be. One of the nice things about nutritional yeast also is that it's got a cheesy flavor. It is good when we have kids where we're having to take them off of dairy, and we want to add that flavor that we like.

We can use nutritional yeasts for that. The next question, Mira, is how does chronic low-grade inflammation show up in children? What are signs that parents might miss that are actually connected to diet?

Yeah, that is such a great question. You know, part of the challenge is some of what shows up as low-grade inflammation actually ties into a number of other things.

And so we need to do journaling, documentation to make sure that we're paying attention. and then seeing how it all comes together. So some of the more common things obviously would be like digestive complaints, bloating, constipation, frequent stomach aches, that kind of thing.

If we have kids who have a lot of dry, itchy skin or eczema or rashes, those kinds of things can potentially be a sign for inflammation. I also find that for some kids we see inflammation when we frequent illnesses like a lot of recurring colds, a lots of ear infections, and a a sore throat.

Those kinds of things can show an immune system that's kind of run down. And those are all really good times to, of course, reach out to your pediatrician and discuss concerns about seeing this general continual pattern.

Inflammation, Sugar, and Food Allergies in Kids

Because kids should be highly energetic and running around and enjoying life. And so if they're having these issues, we want to make sure that we're looking at what's going on from a foundational level.

Now, if a parent can't overhaul everything at once, where would you suggest they start to reduce the inflammatory load in a realistic, sustainable way?

This is slightly different than what we led with the picking the top two to three ingredients. I think the biggest is sugar. Sugar is so challenging for the system.

And one of the big issues that we have is, so many of products that are marketed to children are incredibly overloaded with sugar I have seen things like granola bars that have five or six different kinds of sugar in them.

You need to read the entire ingredient panel. And if you start seeing syrups and rice syrup or molasses and honey and sugar and whatever, adding all of that up becomes an issue.

Food producers generally don't want to use just one kind of sugar because they don t want it to be the number one

ingredient. They've learned that consumers are getting a little too savvy for that.

And, if we see sugar as the No. 1 thing, chances are we're not going to buy it. but we don't tend to read all the way through and see how much sugar is in there.

And sugar has a twofold impact on children. One, it kind of overstimulates them and then exhausts them. So their little systems get revved up a little too high, and their immune system has to respond.

It does that by pulling micronutrients from their system. Then we start having deficiencies in things like magnesium and just a number of different micronutrients, potassium, that sort of thing, because the body's trying to recover from that.

The other thing that happens is often many of the things that are so sugar-laden are sort-of filling to the point where we then don't get a nourishing diet and we're not those foods that actually going to support the system.

So we want to make sure that we are watching out for sugar. That's definitely a biggie. I think another thing that's really challenging is a lot of grainy products.

A lot things that are geared towards kids tend to be exploded grains, you know, cereals and puffy things like chips and those sort of things. Again, non-nourishing, somewhat filling for a little bit, and we wind up developing this uneven eating pattern that doesn't support the child very well.

Then the third thing that I think is important to pay attention to, and obviously we have to look at everybody as bio individual, but making sure that if we had any concerns about food allergies that we address those.

Talking to someone like yourself who's a functional medicine pediatrician and making that sure we're getting to the root of that because When we have children who have food allergies, sometimes the way they respond is not a typical, oh, we've got a rash, or we got sneezing, whatever.

We can have systemic overload as the bot is trying to process. Usually it's one of the top nine allergens. be paying attention to that. You know, what you said as far as inflammation and micronutrients, we tend to see very, very commonly in our sick children, their zinc is really, really low and we have this inverse relationship with the copper and the zinc and they're angry, they have tics, there are anxious.

And so we work really hard at trying to balance that deficiency or the imbalance Now, you know, a lot of parents feel pressure to get their kids to eat certain foods.

So as a holistic nutrition educator, from your perspective, how does pressure at the table actually impact a child's relationship with food? I think a lot of people grew up with the, I put it on your plate, you're going to eat it by golly, and just that sort of drill sergeant mentality.

And I personally have come to believe that this just creates a sort disordered relationship with food. We really need to learn patience and understand that for some kids, part of it also is learning Why not willing to eat this?

Is it a taste thing or do they have like a hypersensitive palate? Some children do. And for them, certain tastes are just incredibly triggering. Some of them it can be a texture issue.

Perhaps they had oral sensitivity issues or a temperature issue or different reasons that they don't like it. And sometimes it could be they just think they do not like because they have not tried it because there is this fear of new things.

I mean, think about when your kids were little and they were learning how to walk. Everything was fearful. Standing up was a little fearful, taking those steps was little nervous.

But then once they figured it out, it was great. It can be the same thing with food. What is that on my plate? I have

never seen that before. So even just getting something on the plate, that the child doesn't have to touch, they just have do acknowledge that it's there can be a win.

And then slowly over time, it' like, oh, can we touch it? Can we taste it, or can take one bite? But it takes a long, for some children, It can literally take 20, 25, 30 exposures to a food, gently, increasing that exposure before they become comfortable with it.

So good to hear that, you know, the buzz number in pediatrics is 12 to 15, but it's so true if you stack on other things like maybe potentially tethered oral tissues and, just texture where they taste it and they gag, have that anterior gag reflex.

We'd actually like to share one more thing, because I have had this. I've had some parents where if we're introducing certain foods, we have to be very careful about which parent is introducing it.

For example, I had one family that I worked with where mom had a very adventurous palate and dad did not. Mom tended to work evenings, so dad was more responsible for feeding dinners.

And what we learned was new foods could not be introduced at dinner because dad would sit there and go, he's feeding the kid and they're responding to his face.

Like, don't do that because they are going to learn from you. He was like, oh, yum. Here, I'll taste some. Now you want some? Like that's great. They'll respond to that.

But if you're like Like, I'm giving this to you because your mom said I had to. That's not going to go over very well. Yeah, so true, very true. So if you have parents that you're working with that they're really worried that their child isn't getting enough nutrients, how do you balance reassurance with intervention?

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That is a really great question and I think it's one that a lot of parents are very concerned about because our job as parents is to nurture and love and raise these little humans and help them become full-fledged adults.

I'd think that one of the biggest things I like to encourage them to remember is we do not have to have a perfect diet every single day. As long as we're getting generally what we need, go with that.

The other thing to remember is that children go in phases. There will be times when your two-year-old will eat like a linebacker and you're like, where are you putting that?

And then there will other times where your nine- year- old is like I'm not hungry and they truly aren't hungry because that's just the developmental phase that their body's in.

If it goes on for an extended period of time, then obviously we need to look at that. But children don't eat a consistent amount every single time and their diet does not need be perfect every day.

I do think if we have concerns, again, it kind of comes back to document. Write down, what is your kid eating? When are they eating, how much are the eating.

You have to measure everything, but just eyeball it and have concerns. That's a great time to go to a pediatrician who can, you know, look at them developmentally.

Are they on the charts? Are the meeting growth? You know doing okay. If we have concern, then there are certainly tests that can be done to find out if nutritionally they need a little more support or if there's something else going on.

But I think the biggest challenge also is just to remember that they change and grow. I really appreciate hearing that. It's so true. Okay, well, let's look and see where they are on the growth curve.

Let's check out the weight. Now let us check the height or the length. And if they're less than two, their head circumference. Kittos will eat like birds and then all of a sudden they'll eat like a linebacker, like you said, and then their feet will grow longer than they'll grow taller.

And that's typically what we see. The other thing that I also like to point out to people is some kids, it depends on what their body composition is, there are some who grow very evenly.

It is my experience that more kids tend to chunk up a little bit and then they shoot up. And so we also have to remember, is it developmentally appropriate?

And if you're concerned about that, that's a great time to talk to your pediatrician. Excellent. I love hearing that because that is something that we see.

And it does the body composition. You look at the parents, you ask how they grew. This was dad, just a skinny little thing and just as short as could be until he hit 14 and then he grew six inches.

But also those developmental stages, we see a toddler with a very protuberant abdomen and they eat and the pork out. And then all of a sudden they go on strike for three days and As long as their mouth is glistening with saliva, they're not urinating too much.

It's just looking at the big picture. But when you just have one kiddo, it's kind of hard. Then when add a few more, learning how each kid eats. So Mira, It has been a delight meeting with you today.

And so would you tell us the names of, well, the Pantry Principle is the name of your book. At one point I was carrying it. I don't carry any books now in my office except our curriculum, but tell about the pantry principle and we're going to put information in our show notes on where folks can find you.

Tell us what you do. You're in the Houston area. you obviously do consultations. Yeah. So tell us a little bit about that if someone wants to find you and work with you.

Sure. Thank you so much for asking. My book is called The Pantry Principle, How to Read the Legal and Understand What's Really in Your Food. This honestly is a reference book that I wrote because I had so many clients who had the same questions over and over again.

It can be really challenging to find information about these ingredients that are in our food. And I personally believe that nobody should need a degree in biochemistry in order to understand how to eat.

So I'm left up writing the book. It's MailPo on Amazon. You can get it, you know, ebook, audiobook. print, whatever works for you. And then I do work with people.

The easiest way to find me is on Substack these days. So I have a Substac, miradesi.substack.com. I publish a free newsletter every week that talks about things that are going on in the world of food, as well as holistic lifestyle and nutrition information, and that's the easiest Wonderful.

And one last thing, we did not rehearse this or ask about this, but would you tell our audience about the Feingold diet? Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

Reassurance, Growth Patterns, and Nutrient Concerns

So Benjamin Feangold was a Kaiser Permanente pediatrician who discovered that many of his, he was an pediatric allergist, and he discovered patients did so much better when they removed certain things from their diet, artificial colors being one of the biggest.

But we also had certain preservatives like sorbates and things like that. And he discovered that when parents really removed that from the diet The patients improved, their allergies improved.

Their behavior improved their metabolism improved and unfortunately that was probably what 60 years ago at this point and we're still fighting this issue.

There was a huge study, I want to say it was back in 2003 that it published in Lancet that looked at tens of thousands of children in two different age cohorts and basically agreed with one of the doctors Fine Gold had said.

And in many countries around the world, they do have warning labels on their artificial colors and that sort of thing. We're still fighting that issue here.

Artificial colors are made from petrochemicals. They are really not good for us. There's no nutrition in it, and it's overwhelming to the brain, especially.

I am grateful to see that we are making One of the things I like to encourage people to remember, however, is it's not just food. It's also in personal care products.

If you have blue, white, and red toothpaste, you're getting artificial dye. just to watch out for those things and remember that this man figured it out a long time ago.

We're still proving that theory over and over again. Yeah, you know, so many times when things like this are discovered, the person who comes up with it is vilified or they're made fun of, but know now it's in medical school curriculum.

The other thing I'd like you to talk about is natural vanilla flavoring and let's just say it okay because this is reality and it grows and people need to know so please about natural vanilla flavoring?

Yeah, I guess what I'd like to start with is the fact that when we see the word natural, it means very little. In terms of animal products like meats and things, that means they have not been given added hormones and that sort of thing.

But when see it on other things it could be anything. The description of what classifies as natural is so broad. and so diverse that it means basically nothing.

Natural vanilla flavor is used when they don't want to use vanilla, which has become very, very expensive for environmental reasons. And this is made from something called castoreum.

And you will never see the word castoreum on a food label, except for apparently a particular type of liquor that they sell in Sweden, I think, that's made with it.

And they're very proud of it, castorium in plain English is the anal gland secretion of beavers. Not sure who figured out it was vanilla flavored. I will say there's not a lot of it in the food supply because we don't have as much of a beaver trade as we used to.

We no longer hunt them for their skins or that kind of thing. The reason I like people to know about this though is because it is still used, it does still exist, and it's another really good example of how deceptive a label can be.

If you see the words natural vanilla flavor and you think, oh, that's vanilla, the answer is no, maybe not. it. I really encourage people when you get curious about things like that to do a little bit of a deep dive or come check out my substance and see if I've written about it because I do write about those things all the time.

Yes, so nasty beaver anal glands for natural vanilla flavoring. Well Mira, thank you so much for joining us and So you, y'all should check out her sub stack and then the pantry principle.

I have my own copy and I love all those references where you do, you talk about all what MSG, the names that it hides and it's in so many things. And you know, Mira, I really appreciate you taking some time to give families practical tips when they're doing their grocery shopping and especially just one step at a time, not trying to do everything all at once.

And then the overachievers, you try it and then you're like, i can't do this. Then you stop and it's like oh, we're back to square one again. So thanks again and I would also like to gives a shout out to our sponsor, Fagran Genomics, because We also show on our precision genetics, the receptors that people have for the common vitamins.

And so if you lack those receptors, you can supplement that with food. Food is our medicine of choice. Then if it's extensive, You can test and give yourself just what you need at the right amount and the Right time.

Mira Desi's Book, Substack, and Feingold Diet

So Mira, The Ingredient Guru. and the Pantry Principle. And again, thank you so much for joining us today. Thank you, Paula. It was really lovely to see you and to chat with you.

This was fun. You too. Thank You, Mira. Thanks for joining us at Get to the Root with Hope for Healing. If this episode helped you follow and share it with someone who needs it and leave a review, it helps others find us too for a free consultation.

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We'll see you soon.