Future Baby Health: Key Preconception Care Steps Transcript

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Introduction to Dr. Joel Warsh

Hello and welcome back to the Beyond Infertility Summit. I'm your host, Dr. Aumatma, and I'm going to introduce you today to Dr. Joel Warsh, also known as Dr. Joel Gator of the popular Instagram parenting channel.

He is a Board-Certified Pediatrician in Los Angeles, California, who specializes in parenting, wellness and integrative medicine. He grew up in Toronto, Canada.

He's got many degrees in kinesiology, psychology, epidemiology and community health. In addition to earning his medical degree from Thomas Jefferson Medical College.

He completed his pediatric medicine training at the Children's Hospital in Los Angeles and worked in private practice in Beverly Hills before starting his current practice, integrative pediatrics and medicine.

Dr. Gator has published research in peer reviewed journals on topics including childhood injuries, obesity and physical activity. He has been featured in numerous documentaries, podcasts, film, Summits and articles including CBS, Fox, LA Parent, MindBodyGreen, and many others.

In our chat today, we're going to talk about what makes for healthier children. As a pediatrician, Dr. Joel or Dr. Warsh has a unique perspective on what it is that makes children healthy.

Why Health Before Conception Matters

And he's going to share about what we can do in the pre-conception period to support that even more. Join me as I talk to Dr. Gator or Dr. Warsh. Let's go. Dr. Gator, welcome.

It's so great to have you on the Beyond Infertility Summit. I'm very excited because you bring such a unique perspective in the health of our future children.

So thank you for being here. Thanks for having me. I'm very excited to talk and really to discuss fertility and parenting before the child is born. Because I usually see kids when they're born, but it's so important that we realize that our health starts even before that.

And that's what I talk about a lot, is that everything that we do matters and these are the things we can think about. Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So let's talk a little bit about that.

I think a lot of moms become what when they get pregnant, they start thinking about like the nutrition and what am I doing and how do I support this baby and I want my child to be healthy.

But you said something unique, which is the health of this baby is actually determined prior to conception. Tell us about that. Yeah. So I think it's important from my perspective as a pediatrician that I talk about kids a lot.

But that's not the way that health is. Right? Health is not a fraction by just your heart for a cardiologist or just kids for a pediatrician. Our health starts before I see the child, certainly during pregnancy, but even before pregnancy, because our health is vital and we're literally built of what we eat and our kids are built from us.

And if we're not healthy, then it already puts them at a disadvantage from the day that they're conceived. It can make it harder to conceive. Even when you're talking about just conception and general fertility, it's much more difficult to conceive of.

You have chronic conditions, other issues that you're dealing with, and so that it all goes together in terms of our

health matters for our kids health and yes, if you haven't been thinking about this before and you are trying to conceive or you have already conceived, then it's never too late.

Everything that we do matters and there's no downside. And we don't want to make somebody feel bad as a parent. Oh, I wasn't thinking about this to go.

And so therefore that means my child is doomed. Now, that's not true. But what we're talking about is building resilience and giving our kids the best chance to be healthy.

And the healthier we are, the healthier it is likely that our kids are to be. And our kids are more likely to be resilient and healthy if we are, kids have an increased risk of having a chronic disease if we have one.

Healthy Eating and Real Food

Now, over 50% of adults have a chronic disease around 50% of children have a chronic disease. Some studies cite that even with a parent as a chronic disease, that could be 50 to 75% of kids will have a chronic disease as well.

So it can be much higher than even just the already high rates. So it's really important to remember, again, that our health matters and everything that we do matters, but not to be stressed about it, just to be mindful of it.

Yeah, absolutely. I think that it this idea that I can't go back in time. Right. I can't change what might already be. My child is five. It's too late.

It is what it is. But for those that are in that pre-conception period, maybe they're not pregnant yet. Maybe they're struggling with fertility. What are some of the stats in terms of like health of mom and dad?

There's a lot of research coming out around that as well. And how does that how is that influencing the future baby? It's really hard, I think, with the statistics it's hard because if you're talking about preconception, then there's not a lot of really good studies.

People thinking about getting pregnant. It's usually you see it after they already are pregnant, but I've seen even studies that have shown that there's a 20 to 50% increase in conception just by eating healthier, just by sleeping a little bit more, just by decreasing your stress level.

So these are like pretty simple concepts, but they can have a huge difference in terms of your ability to conceive. And not all of them are the best studies.

But I think that the general consensus in the way that that we're moving in, the understanding that we're having, is that our health matters. And if you want to increase your chances of conception, whether it be 50%, whether it be 200% increase, but whatever study you want to believe in, there's no downside to eating healthier.

There's no downside to sleeping a little more. There's no downside to trying to get toxins out of your life and thinking about these things. There's only a positive right.

And I tend to believe that the numbers don't matter that much is the common sense of this matters. If you are surrounded by a bunch of chemicals and toxins in your body, has to deal with those is going to make it harder to have a baby.

It's going to make it more likely that baby is going to have complications. And that's not rocket science. That's obvious. Right. And so if you want to do something today as a parent, we'll start being mindful of some of these things and start to increase the likelihood that you are going to be healthy, increase the likelihood that your child's going to be healthy and just make some simple shifts.

You don't have to change everything, but every little bit matters and every little bit helps. And we are seeing with the chronic disease epidemic that a lot of people are not doing these things.

A lot of people are sick. And as a doctor, as a pediatrician, as something that takes care of patients, I have seen how many people can change the trajectory of their health by making small changes.

And you don't even realize how much changing up your diet can make a difference. People will say as a doctor, Oh, you have this autoimmune condition, it's for life.

And then I've seen people change up their diet and it goes away. So not always, but it is possible. And when you're talking about bringing another life into this world and trying to give a child the best opportunity, then if changing up your diet a little bit, if exercising a little bit more, if these simple things can make a huge difference, then why not try to do those things? Why?

We don't want to have to get you on medications.

Reducing Toxins in Daily Life

We want to improve your health and your child's health without having to do those things. Sometimes you need it, but usually there are other things that we can do.

And again, we're talking here about pre preconception thinking about it. So these are the things that you can do regardless of your health, regardless of any situation, because there's never going to be a downside to this. Yeah, yeah.

So when you're talking about eating healthy, I know there's a lot of debate about what that actually means. What is your perspective on eating healthy?

To me, that means eating real food as much as you can, meaning purchasing items and then cooking it yourself, making it yourself. So anything that's prepackaged, preserve served, it has a very long chemical terms on them.

You don't even know what they are. It's probably not that good for you. So I'm a big proponent. People say, What's the one thing you could do to make the biggest difference right now?

And I always tell parents, read the labels on everything. If you turn it over and there's a bunch of words on there that you don't even know what it is, it's probably not good for you by something else.

It doesn't mean you have to go from eating chips to eating broccoli every every single meal. But there are better versions of chips. There are things that you can make like you like, let's say a chicken nugget.

You don't have to buy a prepackaged chicken nugget. You can make it yourself. And then you at least know what ingredients are going in there. And you can slowly improve your health by not introducing your body to as many toxins and giving yourself the nutrients that you need to be healthy.

We again, we forget that we're actually literally built of what we eat and our food already is devoid of nutrients compared to what it used to be, because we're mass producing everything.

And so if you add to that prepackaged foods, you add to that the toxins and the preservatives, then it's no wonder that so many people are getting sick because we're just not getting the nutrients that we need.

So if so, what a healthy is to me is buying real food, cooking it yourself as much as you can, and then at least you're getting, quote unquote, real food like almonds and apples and chicken as opposed to something in a package.

Absolutely. That I think that sounds simple enough for all of us to be able to do in terms of toxins. And like toxins are a big deal and a big conversation in the fertility world for sure.

How can we get rid of toxins in our environment? I feel like they're everywhere. They are and it's very frustrating

thing. Right. And it can be overwhelming. Just we're talking about diet.

It can be overwhelming, but it doesn't have to because our bodies, our impressive and we have great detoxification system, we have liver, we have kidneys, we can get most things out, but at some point our bodies get overloaded.

And so what I tell my families and parents when I speak is really just focus on whatever it is that you can do to make small changes that can make some sort of difference.

Because, again, it's 1% here, 1% here, 1% here. And for most people, if you make those small changes, if you're mindful of the purchases that you make, then that's going to be enough.

And big areas where where we're exposed to toxins that can start with breathing, we're breathing the air around us all the time. And you can get an air filtration system.

You can put plants in your home that clean the air. These are simple things that you can do just to improve the air that you're breathing. Also the water you can get your if you're drinking tap water, you can get the water tested.

You can see what's in there. You can get a filtration system or you can get a filter for the drinking water that you have in your fridge, whatever it is.

And again, it's if you're drinking water all day and you get a filter and you get some of those chemicals out there, then that that can make a difference if you're purchasing products.

But on your skin or your body that goes in your body, especially if you're pregnant. Right. These are important things a lot of people don't think about it.

They don't think, oh, I'm putting on makeup or I'm getting this soap or this lotion or hand sanitizer or whatever it is. And you forget that your skin's an organ and everything's going in your body, and especially something you're using every day or fairly consistently.

You just never know what we're going to find out in five years that was toxic or that was a problem for fertility or a problem for the baby. So the more natural products that you can buy, the less likely it's going to be a problem. And that goes back to reading labels.

If you're buying a cream or a lotion, read the label. Try to find things that are more natural and have real words that, you know, like Calendula and shea butter and coconut oil and whatever it is.

But if it's real words, probably, or it's more likely to be safe and less likely to cause an issue. And you can do that. You can buy furniture that's not sprayed and chemicals you can buy clothes that's not spraying chemicals.

These are all things that exist and are possible and it doesn't have to be more expensive. But at least if you're mindful, then when you're making each of these purchases, then hopefully little changes here and there adds up to a big difference.

And for someone who may be trying to get pregnant over a year, that decrease of a load of chemicals by five or 10% can make a huge difference for them.

And it can also make a difference for your baby. And when we talk about kids, is one meal making a big difference and probably not right? If you eat a piece of cake or whatever it is now, I'm not a big fan of You should never do something, but it's not about the one meal.

It's about adding it up over five or ten years.

Building Resilience Through Lifestyle

If you're having a lot of sugar at every meal for five or ten years, if you're eating a lot of preservatives and chemicals and toxins at every single meal over five or ten or 20 years, that's what adds up to a chronic disease.

It's not the one meal. So sure, if you have a party, whatever, do what you got to do. It's not just get people into never eating cake again. It's just more about the mindset.

If you're mindful of the fact that over the next year you want to get pregnant and then you're going to have you're going to be pregnant for nine months and then you're going to have a baby.

So that's now two, three years. If you change up your diet a little bit for two or three years, that matters. I think it matters. And most of the time I find that when people make those shifts, pre-pregnancy pre-conception, they stick with them for a longer period of time and they're also passing those lifestyles on to their child.

Right. So if that's like you were doing this, it felt good. You're like, Oh, my body feels better. I got pregnant. I had a healthy baby. You're already in the template of doing those things that you can continue doing once you have your baby.

Exactly. There's no any, I don't know, celebrity influencer out there that says, oh, this is the right diet for everybody, or this is the one thing that's going to cure all diseases.

There's no such thing. There's no one diet that works. You're right. There's no one thing that you can do that to keep you healthy. It's a mindset. It's a lifestyle.

And it's a it's an acknowledgment to yourself that I have to be conscious of everything that I do, everything that I purchase, everything that comes in my home, everything that goes in my body or on my body.

And that is going to move you in the right direction. And just like you said, that's what's going to be passed on to your child and not in a move away. Right.

You know, let's be conscious of what we eat. We want to be healthy. We don't want to have a bunch of diseases. As we're getting older, when we're ten years old, we want you to be as healthy as possible and so possible you can be the healthiest person in the world.

And still that whatever the influence of genetics and whatever, you can still get something. But our goal as parents is not to keep our kids completely healthy at all times and never get sick.

Our goal is to make them as resilient as possible so they can deal with whatever comes their way. And if we're imparting upon them a mindset of of a healthy lifestyle and a mindset of being conscious of the choices that we make, then hopefully that's going to impart upon them to be mindful in that same way, and it's going to keep them healthy for the next 20 years.

Yeah, absolutely. You used a couple of times this word resilience and I love it's one of my favorite words. I'm curious how you define resilience, especially for our children.

I, I define resilience as being able to handle whatever comes their way. So to me, when I mention it, it's, if you're going to be a kid, you're going to get exposed to a bunch of viruses, you're going to get exposed to all sorts of things, and can your body reasonably handle it?

It doesn't mean that you should never get sick, but it means that you are reasonably handling things that come your way. You're handling it within an appropriate range, and then your body's coming back into balance.

So we're trying to stay in balance and you're providing your body the tools that it needs to maintain that that homeostatic balance and overall be healthy and.

Well, yeah, I've never really defined it exactly in my mind as a good solid something along those lines. Okay. Yeah,

I'm so but in terms of stress, since that's a really big topic, what are your thoughts on how people can support their bodies to be more resilient with the stressors that we have in our world?

Great question, everybody basically everybody seems to be very stressed these days. Right. And we were never meant to be stress in this way. We were never meant to be so chronically stressed.

And I think we're just really at the tip of the iceberg in terms of our understanding of how that affects us. But I think we certainly are at the point where we understand that it negatively affects us in general.

Everybody can handle some amount of stress, but if your cortisol is high, if your neurotransmitters are off for months or years, then that can lead to long term complications.

And there was a landmark study, I think it was in the sixties where they took patients that either they said that they were stressed or weren't stressed and they put viruses in their noses.

I don't know who was volunteering for its studies, but viruses in their noses. But they did it. And the people that were lower stress had much lower rates of getting sick.

Stress, Fertility, and Hormonal Balance

It was like 2 to 3 times lower rates of getting sick from the people that just mentioned that they were more stressed. So this is something we've known for a long time, that it affects our immune system.

It makes us less resilient. So that word again, but it's just we're more likely to get sick. And that carries on to chronic disease and probably to fertility as well.

I would imagine that's true as well. Is the more chronically stressed we are, the harder it is to do just about anything. And we're not going to be we're not going to get to a zero level of stress.

But again, there are things that you can do, right? There are things you can do to minimize your stress, like turning off the news and minimizing your use of social media, or at least curating your feed to be something that makes you a little bit happier and just being mindful again that our stress levels matter.

And we don't always think about these things in terms of fertility or our unborn babies health, but I think there's no doubt that these things affect it in a significant way.

And I think that over the next ten, 20 years, we're going to see a lot more research on this, and we're going to realize just how much stress is a major factor for infertility, for chronic disease, for childhood illness or adult illness.

Yeah, absolutely. I think stress is playing a role in some way in everything that our bodies are dealing with, from fertility to pregnancy, postpartum health and future health.

So I definitely I feel like it often gets such a bad rep too, though. It's like everything is stress. Oh, you have this is stress. If you have hypertension, it's because of your stress.

So there's a little bit of people who are getting numb to this idea that stress is impacting us. But I also think that there are just our physical bodies were not made to handle this level of stress on a ongoing basis.

Yeah, and I'm not a fertility specialist per se, but I would think just as a doctor in general, that one of the most common sense, most effective things that somebody could do if they're having trouble conceiving and they want to do something from a natural perspective, I mean, doesn't cost any money, doesn't cost medication, isn't a medication, is to really focus on their stress and see what are the things that they could do to minimize that stress or to address it.

And there's a major stigma around mental health and major stigma around going to a therapist or something like

that. But there are so many practitioners that are amazing out there that can work on stress reduction techniques, help you to go through some of the life traumas that you've had or whatever may be some of the major, but you're not going to get rid of all stress in the world.

But if there are some major things that are really impacting you from your childhood, from your adulthood, things that are major stressors in your life right now, that maybe you could look at them in a little bit different way or get a little different perspective on it, or maybe some different coping techniques.

Then if you decrease your stress by five or 10% for you, that can make a huge difference because your stress is affecting all your hormones in your body and things are all over here and getting having a baby, conceiving, a lot of it is about hormones and the right balance in your body at the right time.

And if if your cortisol super high, that might throw off other hormones and then that might throw off your ability to conceive, I would think, just logically speaking.

So I think that if you can bring that back into a more balanced range and that will give your body a little bit more wiggle room to work on conceiving and having a baby.

That's my kind of $0.02, not as a fertility doctor, but to me, I don't see how that could be wrong. I don't I think over time we'll figure out more of that.

But it's it's still a burgeoning field, I think. Yeah, absolutely. Is there anything else that you see as a pediatric specialist that you feel parents could do in that pre-conception period to really support the health of the future child?

I think it's important to recognize, number one, that what you're doing right now matters. I don't think people say that enough, but it makes a huge difference.

And sometimes actually, I think a lot of the time one of the really good motivators for health can be our kids or trying to get pregnant or thinking about getting pregnant.

And so this is one of those life situations like periods where maybe that'll be the switch for you to help with your own health and then also your child's health.

And take this as a chance to move in a little bit different direction and just focus on the little things.

Practical Preconception Tips and Closing

Don't get overwhelmed with it. I think that's a big mistake that people make. They try to change everything too fast. You don't have to go through your closets and throw out all your food.

You don't have to move it to the middle of the mountain somewhere. You can do these things if you want to, right? You can move to the middle of nowhere.

You can turn off your phones and you can do that and probably have a little bit less stress and you probably will eat a little bit healthier. But it's not practical for most people.

What is practical and doable is to make small changes when you purchase things, try to learn about some of this stuff. And in terms of diet and nutrition toxins, see what you're exposed to.

You think about the big things like the air that you breathe, the water that you drink, what your what foods, your purchasing, what are you getting them?

Organic or not? Are they genetically modified? Not like the little things like that. You start learning about making small changes. It's going to make a huge difference in the long run.

So yeah, I think my big tip is don't get overwhelmed by it because you don't have to do everything. Little bits make a big difference and most people, if they're mindful of these things, you see them moving in a better trajectory.

And I see it all the time where people come in sick and they make these lifestyle changes and then they come out the other side a lot healthier without really spending a lot of money or getting on a lot of medications or doing either supplements or doing it's just changing up their lifestyle and being mindful.

And I think that's something that that everybody can do if they choose to and they want to do it. Yeah. Awesome. Thank you so much for being with us today.

Where can people connect with you? Try the easiest places on Instagram, @drjoelgator or raisingamazingplus.com. Perfect. Thank you so much, Dr. Gator, for being with us and for sharing all of your wisdom.

I think it's you bring such a unique perspective about what's happening with the health of our children that it's a really interesting topic and it's great to see we really can start thinking about the health of our children before conception.

Yeah, thanks for having me. I'm so honored to be here and to speak to the future healthy patients. That's what I want. I want the future healthy patients so that we can get to everybody now before they even conceive.

And that's the the best time. Yeah, absolutely.