

Balance365 Episode 123 Transcript

ANNIE BREES

Welcome to Balance365 Life Radio, a podcast that delivers honest conversations about food, fitness, weight, and wellness. I'm your host Annie Brees along with co-founder Jennifer Campbell. Together we have a team of personal trainers and nutritionists who coach thousands of women daily and are on a mission to help women feel happy, healthy and confident in their bodies on their own terms. Join us here every week as we discuss hot topics pertaining to our physical, mental and emotional well being with amazing guests. Enjoy!

ANNIE

Hello, my friends! Welcome back to another episode of Balance365 Life Radio. Today we are talking about a topic that I don't think we have ever covered on our podcast and that is gut health. What is gut health? What does that even mean? What are microbiomes? What are probiotics? Do I need them? Maybe I need them. Should I need them? We are answering all of those questions and more in today's episode and, let me tell you, we get a little personal; there might be a little too much TMI if that even exists. It doesn't really exist for me, but it might exist for you, about Jen and my gut health. But we have an expert and just generally lovely human, Chelsey Love. She is a registered dietician under the College of Dietitians of Alberta and she has been practicing as a dietitian since 2010. Her goal is to help educate, motivate and support individuals to help them achieve their goals. She's down to earth. She's got a great sense of humor which, let me tell you, you're going to need in this episode, and she helps answer all of our questions and so much more about gut health. Enjoy!

ANNIE

Jen, we're back with another guest. And I'm so stoked, because this is a topic that I actually don't feel like I know a lot about but I do know that there's a lot of poor information. [Laughs] I don't know -

JEN CAMPBELL

A lot of woo?

ANNIE

Yes. Yes. So, I am so stoked to have her on today's show. Chelsey, welcome to the podcast. How are you?

CHELSEY LOVE

I'm doing well. How are you?

ANNIE

I'm so happy to have you. I'm doing great. I'm so excited to talk about gut health.

CHELSEY

So excited to be here. My husband is so happy for me because I go on and on about Balance365 podcasts. He can't believe that I'm on the podcast.

JEN

[Laughs]

CHELSEY

I'm really excited, too.

ANNIE

You are on the podcast.

CHELSEY

[Laughs]

JEN

Chelsey, tell us why you are qualified to talk about gut health.

CHELSEY

So, I'm a registered dietician. So what that means is, I have a Bachelor of Science in Nutritional Science plus a one year internship program. Plus, we need to prove continuing education every year and we have to pass a national exam. So we're not just, you know, a quote, "nutrition coach." We have more training compared to a lot of different nutrition professionals. And that's not to say that dietitians are the only nutrition professional. But that's what makes us a little bit different, is our title is protected by our college.

JEN

Right. And you're qualified to work with people with multiple health issues that... Of course, you can work with the general population, but you can also, you probably work with people who have diabetes or PCOS or just different considerations when it comes to their individuality with nutrition.

CHELSEY

That's right. Yeah, we're licensed to practice medical nutrition therapy, MNT.

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

Yep.

JEN

Cool.

CHELSEY

Yeah.

JEN

And you've been doing some coaching for Balance365, which has been super fun.

CHELSEY

Yeah, I had my first one last month and then another one coming up.

JEN

Awesome. Yeah, we love having you. And our people love you, too.

CHELSEY

Oh, that's good to hear.

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

So, I think there's probably a lot of topics we'd love to pick your brain on. But today we're talking about gut health. What is it? Is it a thing? Is it not a thing? What about probiotics that I hear is, like, should I be spending money on that? Should I not? Do I need supplements? Do I need to be worried about my digestive health? Because it seems like everyone has digestive health issues now.

JEN

It reminds me of how, like - the diet industry will grab on to anything and then take it to the extreme.

ANNIE

No, never.

JEN

[Laughs]

ANNIE

Stop it.

CHELSEY

They want to give you a problem and sell you the solution.

JEN

Yeah, like, how can I make this an issue?

CHELSEY

Exactly, yeah. No, it's a huge topic. The research is really exploding. Like in the last 10 years. It's really interesting. There's some really cool promising research in this field. But there's also a lot of misinformation, a lot of hype. And often the hype doesn't match the actual evidence. So, it's a big topic for sure. And there's a lot of people trying to capitalize on, again, giving you a problem and selling you the solution. You know, to, quote, "improve your gut health." Well, what is that?

JEN

Yeah, so tell us what does gut health even mean? We have a perception I think, like the perception is you got an unhealthy gut or you have a healthy one. And I want a healthy one. And if this product says it gives me a healthy one, well, I want in on that. So, what is it?

CHELSEY

It really is kind of a buzzword term because there's no standard definition of what gut health or what a healthy gut actually is. You could think of it as an absence of disease. So, you may have a healthy gut if you do not have IBS, you don't have Celiac disease, you don't struggle with things like chronic constipation or diarrhea. And so if you're doing pretty well overall and your quality of life is not affected by issues such as these, you could say that you have pretty normal gut health. On the other hand, you could have a structural condition and be asymptomatic. For instance, like there's people with Celiac disease, who really don't have a ton of symptoms.

JEN

Mm hmm.

CHELSEY

So you could, you know, if you didn't get tested for it, be walking around thinking that you're doing okay, and your gut health isn't great at all. On the other hand, you could have a lot of symptoms like, why am I bloated all the time? Why do I look six months pregnant at the end of the day?

JEN

Right!

CHELSEY

I'm only going to the bathroom twice a week. Right? And feel like your gut health is poor. But there's no actual structural issue.

JEN

Mm hmm.

CHELSEY

A lot of gut health stuff is just normal digestion. It's normal to feel bloated. That's part of digesting carbohydrates, especially fiber, which we'll talk a lot about on what our bacteria does to fiber. And so a little bit of bloating is totally normal and not an indication of, quote, "bad" gut health.

JEN

Right. You're having gas. It's just a part of having a digestive system.

CHELSEY

Exactly. Everybody toots. [Laughs]

JEN

Yeah, especially Annie. [Laughs]

CHELSEY

[Laughs]

JEN

I'm just kidding.

ANNIE

You just had to, you just had to. [Laughs]

JEN

I just had to. [Laughs]

CHELSEY

Dietitians are very comfortable talking about poop and toots by the way.

ANNIE

We are, too. We're all moms here. It's like part of our life, I suppose. But, I mean, not just because we're moms but because we're humans in general. So I guess I have a question, does the average person need to be concerned with gut health? And if so, when should they be concerned with it?

CHELSEY

I think that would vary depending on the person. So I think if you have symptoms that don't affect your overall quality of life, so meaning you can have variations in your normal, right? We like to ideally go to the bathroom, have a bowel movement, once or twice a day, once every other day. But some people's variation of normal could be they go once every three days. And as long as it's not like super hard and dry and hard to pass, that person's once every three days might still be within their normal. Right? So there's so many variations of what is normal with digestive stuff. On the other end of the spectrum, if an individual is dealing with diarrhea and they're going 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 times a day, it's an emergency, they're afraid to leave the house. That's not normal. If you get diarrhea occasionally because you're hungover or you drank too much coffee in a day. Again, that's variation of normal. So it's tough to say like, what's the cutoff of normal and abnormal? It's looking at you know, somebody's life often.

JEN

More like maybe you're looking for not necessarily one thing, you're looking for patterns and frequency and even just personal discomfort perhaps.

CHELSEY

Oh, exactly. Like a little bit of cramping or like feeling a bit bloated. I ate a lot of broccoli today, I'm bloated, is different than severe pain, you're laying on your floor in the fetal position. You know, like, that's not okay. You shouldn't have to live like that.

JEN

Right. Can you explain how gut health is different from microbiome? And what, like, how do we differentiate between those two?

CHELSEY

Right, so I would describe it as, the microbiome is a part of overall gut health. So, gut health would be more of the umbrella term. And when we're talking about gut health, we must talk about the microbiome, meaning the trillions of micro organisms that live in our gut. And when we talk about microbiome most of the time, we're talking about bacteria, specifically, but it also includes things like viruses and fungi. So it's one of the most important branches of gut health.

JEN

Okay, so they're not one in the same.

CHELSEY

Right.

JEN

So, I don't know how to say this, improving your microbiome, like, quote unquote, here, because we're saying there's not one perfect microbiome to have, is not a quick fix to fix your gut health. Like, gut health is an umbrella over many different aspects of your digestive system, would you say?

CHELSEY

Yeah, exactly. Yep. And your microbiome -

ANNIE

Good job, Jen.

JEN

Thank you. [Laughs]

CHELSEY

- is affected. Good job. It's affected a lot by dietary changes, which is exciting, because that's something that we do have control over.

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

So with gut health, and I see how you could kind of use those terms interchangeably. With the microbiome specifically, there's certain things that we have no control over. Where we live. So people in Asia would have different things, or biomes, as people in North America. We can't control how we were birthed. Right. So -

JEN
Right.

CHELSEY
Vaginal versus C section, we can't control that. But the dietary changes we actually do have control over. So, that's why nutrition and gut health and microbiome and all of that is so exciting because it has some control, maybe not as much control as some would want you to think.

JEN
Right. So there's that messy middle.

CHELSEY
Exactly. Yeah.

JEN
And so what behaviors would you want to see in somebody who would have a, I don't know if I should use these terms, healthy gut. Positive microbiome, do I say those?

CHELSEY
Yeah, sure. So, you can kind of think that each individual's microbiome is unique, like a fingerprint.

JEN
Okay.

CHELSEY
Yeah. So they're all a little bit different, and we're not actually sure exactly what would be a perfect microbiome. So, there's certain things that a healthy microbiome might show you, like appropriate immune function because the immune system is supported by our microbiome big time.

JEN
Oh, wow. So that's not woo. That's not the woo, because you hear that a lot, in the -

ANNIE

I thought for sure that was woo.

JEN

In health circles -

CHELSEY

Oh, no. It has a huge impact on our immune system. And it basically trains our immune system because we don't want an underactive immune system and these aren't like, you know, very scientific terms, because we need to heal ourselves when we get sick and have injury, etc. But we also don't want an over active immune system. And then you get into you know, things like being allergic to harmless foods and stuff like that.

JEN

So that would be an overactive, that's what allergies, that's where they come from.

CHELSEY

Yeah, that's part of it. And so what's really neat is there's some cool research on the hygiene hypothesis. We're very hygienic. Like, and obviously we want to be to a point, for health. But things like having a pet in the house or not going overboard with antibiotics soaps or hand sanitizer. I mean, in the age of COVID-19, it's a very hot topic, hand sanitizer and that. But actually not over cleaning everything may have some positive effects on things like reducing chances of asthma and allergies.

JEN

Interesting.

CHELSEY

Yeah. Especially in the first three years of life. Birth till about age three. That's when we see lots of changes to our microbiome.

JEN

And it's something that kind of establishes in those years and then stays constant, or?

CHELSEY

It is fairly stable in adulthood.

JEN

Okay.

CHELSEY

We can change it. What's the percentage, I believe it's about 40 - 60% is fairly stable and the other 40 - 60% we can, it can change with environment, antibiotic use, dietary factors, stress, etc. But that first three years of life is crucial.

JEN

Wow. So we want our zero to three year old laying on our dogs and -

CHELSEY

[Laughs]

ANNIE

Rolling in the dirt.

CHELSEY

And, you know, definitely there are some benefits to a vaginal birth compared to a C-section birth when it comes to diversity in bacteria, obviously, you know, we don't always have control over that.

JEN

Yeah, we have to acknowledge like, because I formula fed my first baby and I remember just all this, like, horrible shame around, seeing benefits of breast milk and then being like, "My kid doesn't have it." But then understanding that our health is actually so diverse and multi, like, that one thing is not going to make or break my child's gut health or that kind of thing. So a C-section does not make or break your child's gut health or, yeah.

CHELSEY

Correct. Yes, multifactorial, zooming out.

JEN

Zooming out. Yes.

CHELSEY

And yeah, you know, you do what you can, what you can control and you let go of the stuff that you can't.

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY
Definitely.

JEN
Yeah, so the real hot supplement right now are probiotics - actually prebiotics and probiotics. They're also very pricey. And I'd love to know your take on the impact. The other thing to note is that probiotics are also an umbrella term, aren't they? Because there's many.

CHELSEY
Yeah. There's not a kind of general probiotic. Very strain specific and disease specific. So the question, should I take a probiotic? Well, like a lot of stuff in nutrition land, it depends. which I know is a very annoying answer, but -

JEN
Our audience is used to it.

ALL
[Laugh]

CHELSEY
All the evidence based practitioners. So, for general health, like, just to quote unquote "healthy." No, you do not need to spend money on expensive probiotic supplements to just take as part of your usual regime. I know I have clients that come to me, you know, for the first time and I always ask what they're taking and a lot of them are taking, you know, whatever probiotic they found at the grocery store because they heard probiotics are good.

JEN
Yeah.

CHELSEY
And like a lot of supplements out there, it can be a waste of money actually.

JEN
You just are literally pooping it out.

CHELSEY
Yes.

JEN

Yeah, it's not doing any... Yeah.

CHELSEY

Exactly. And so some people will say, "Well, okay, might help, won't harm." But it's worth mentioning that it's harmful if you're wasting \$60 a month, in my opinion.

JEN

Yeah, I was gonna say that. They're pricey, right? If you're taking one a day, you're probably looking at 60 bucks a month on probiotics.

CHELSEY

They can be, yeah, dollar a day is very common. Yeah, at least. For sure. So, for general health, not worth it. For certain disease states, there is - there are some probiotics specific to the strain that will give you the desired outcome that you're looking for.

JEN

Right. So you could have an issue, but you could also be taking the wrong probiotic that isn't actually the one giving the benefit because they're made up of all different types of bacteria.

CHELSEY

There's so many different strains, and you could be taking, you know, these 10 strains in your probiotic, but the thing that you actually need is in this other probiotic, and you're not getting it.

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

So by far the most up to date, evidence based, you know, public friendly resource, in Canada, the website is probioticchart.ca. In the US, it's usprobioticguide.com.

JEN

Oh, and they're evidence based, reliable resource. That's fantastic. Thanks for sharing that.

CHELSEY

It's fantastic. So I use it. So health professionals use it. And it's also, like, I'll tell clients to check it out too. It's also an app. So it's a free app in Canada. It's called Probiotic Guide Canada; in the States it's Probiotic Guide US. And you can look up if you want women's health, adult health, pediatric health, if you're looking for a certain outcome, post antibiotic associated diarrhea, Celiac, H pylori, IBS.

JEN

So, I guess we don't have to get into the strains because I know you don't want to start doing medical therapy on our podcast, but... Nutrition medical therapy... What are some of the issues people might have where a probiotic could be beneficial to them?

CHELSEY

Yes, so a very common one is IBS or irritable bowel syndrome.

JEN

Okay.

CHELSEY

There's actually some brands with specific strains that have been shown to help decrease the severity of symptoms of IBS. So, IBS is a whole range of symptoms. You can have IBS more in the spectrum towards constipation and then on the other side of the spectrum or diarrhea or you can actually have IBS that you kind of cycle between both. And so, you know, IBS is something that kind of sometimes gets diagnosed when other things are ruled out. Like there's something going on. We screened you for Celiac disease that was negative. You don't have Crohn's colitis. We think you might have IBS,

JEN

Right, which is irritable bowel syndrome.

CHELSEY

Exactly. Yeah. And so there's really cool research in nutrition labs for IBS, but you don't want to do too many variables at once. So, you don't want to go home from your doctor's appointment, say "I have a diagnosis of IBS. I'm going to start this new probiotic. I'm going to start this diet," because then you don't know -

JEN

Which one is, yeah, and I think that's very common, actually, is that you overhaul your life, you know, and then you attribute all of your success to one thing.

CHELSEY

Exactly. Yeah. So, IBS for sure. So, antibiotics, obviously, can change your microbiome. So, it's not that it quote unquote, "wipes it out." It's not like it... Antibiotics don't kill all of your good bacteria. That's incorrect. What happens with antibiotics is that it can change the balance. So, we want a balance of positive bacteria, neutral bacteria and negative disease promoting bacteria.

JEN

You want that? You want the negative?

CHELSEY

Yeah, you will have some negative and it might not mean that you're automatically getting symptoms, in the right balance in the right amount.

JEN

Okay.

CHELSEY

So, antibiotics come in, and sure it changes it. It might reduce the number, might reduce the variation, the different types. And so it can be helpful to take a probiotic like even during the course of antibiotics at least two hours outside and then after the antibiotics as well. That's an indication that makes sense. But you don't have to take it chronically.

JEN

Right. It doesn't become your part of your daily...

CHELSEY

Exactly.

JEN

How long would you recommend someone take probiotics for after finishing around of antibiotics?

CHELSEY

Well, depending on the brand, but often at least four to six weeks.

JEN

Oh, interesting. Okay.

CHELSEY

Oftentimes, you'll see the bottle is a 30 day supply or 60 day supply. And usually, that's pretty good. But I'd want to look at that probiotic chart. And they'll give you the right dose and the research and the strength of the research and yeah, that's a good resource to go back to for even that info. But I will remind listeners to talk to their health professional, obviously, like, talk to your pharmacist. They know a lot about probiotics, too.

JEN

Okay. Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense.

ANNIE

I have a question.

CHELSEY

Yeah.

ANNIE

I have taken antibiotics and, you know, probably as many times as a 37 year old woman who's fairly healthy has, and I've never once taken probiotics afterwards. Should I be? Or is it only if I'm, like, struggling with gut issues, digestive issues following?

CHELSEY

Yeah, you know what, if you don't notice a difference, you may not need it. Because what you'll do is you'll get back to your normal routine. You'll, y'know, you're going to build your bacteria up with good fiber intake and stress relief and exercise and good sleep. And so, you know, if you were having a symptom like after antibiotics, you're dealing with a lot of diarrhea, then I would say yes, maybe you should consider a probiotic. But if you don't notice, you might not actually need it.

ANNIE

Okay, great. I just wanted to get some free medical advice on the podcast. Thank you.
[Laughs]

JEN

[Laughs] And what about kids, Chelsey, because there are probiotics marketed towards children.

CHELSEY

Yeah, yep, same. Again, check out that resource because there's a whole section on pediatrics. So, there's some that are backed by great research.

JEN

Awesome. Okay, so if children have IBS or have taken antibiotics or have any of these same digestive issues. Yeah.

CHELSEY

Totally. And what's really cool and interesting is the same strain doesn't always correlate from pediatrics to adults.

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

One strain works in kids really well but it doesn't do much for adults.

JEN

Right, right. Okay. And so we've got IBS, round of antibiotics. You said Celiac would be another issue you would recommend probiotics but you would say look up the certain strains first.

CHELSEY

Yep.

JEN

That have research behind them. What else? What am I missing here?

CHELSEY

Traveler's diarrhea.

JEN

Okay.

ANNIE

Wait, what's that? What's that?

JEN

[Laughs]

ANNIE

Is that just like? [Laughs]

JEN

What happens when Jen goes to Annie's house?

ANNIE

[Laughs] That's what I was thinking, home girl, home girl travels! Every time we get together and she is off her routine, she is miserable.

JEN

I get constipated for days and days when I go to Annie's or anywhere! Like, it's just, like if we go up to the -

ANNIE

Yeah, it's not just my house.

JEN

- ski hill for five days, it's like, I gotta be home. So I hate going anywhere.

CHELSEY

You're so normal. I promise you that. And part of that has to do with like, it's different water than your city. You're eating differently or sitting because you're traveling, you know, maybe less active and like lots lots of factors. So, yeah.

JEN

Should I use a probiotic when I travel? I don't have diarrhea. I am, like constipated and yeah, it's brutal. Like I was - last summer where I was on day five and I was curled up in a ball. [Laughs]

CHELSEY

Ouch.

JEN

I can't eat anything else because nothing's coming out.

CHELSEY

You can search constipation. I would do that instead of the traveler's diarrhea.

JEN

Okay, good.

CHELSEY

Constipation. Yeah. Because even there's some foods that do qualify as a probiotic.

JEN

Okay.

CHELSEY

Specifically Activia yogurt.

JEN

Okay, I can do that.

CHELSEY

At least in Canada, they can actually put probiotic on their label because they reach the criteria that Health Canada has set for a probiotic food.

JEN

Okay, but that's quite the health marketing there, isn't it? When you're saying you actually don't need to go out of your way to have it unless you have an issue.

CHELSEY

So Activia, the specific probiotic, though, is good for constipation.

JEN

Okay. Now we know.

CHELSEY

That's right.

JEN

All right.

CHELSEY

Yeah.

JEN

Well, thanks for bringing that up, Annie. [Laughs]

ANNIE

Oh, says the woman who called me out on passing gas like 15 minutes ago. [Laughs]

JEN

[Laughs]

ANNIE

Karma, Jen, karma. But okay, on a serious note is traveler's diarrhea just literally diarrhea as a result of traveling. Is that all it is?

CHELSEY

Yeah. You're in a different environment. Yeah, you're picking up different bacteria and pathogens that you're not used to.

ANNIE

Because honestly, like, I've always associated that with just like a difference in schedule and routine and food. But maybe there's a little bit more to it than, like, what I'm actually consuming in the water, in the air.

CHELSEY

Yeah, that too. It's all of it for sure.

JEN

Don't you want to go on a trip with us, Chelsey? [Laughs]

CHELSEY

I know, let's get some margaritas going.

ALL

[Laugh]

JEN

Two opposite digestive issues over here.

ALL

[Laugh]

ANNIE

You know what, if you've run a business for six years with someone, you're like, you have to be able to have these conversations. Like, otherwise you're miserable.

JEN

Annie won't leave the bathroom and Jen can't get in it. [Laughs]

CHELSEY

Maybe I'll be somewhere in the middle.

ALL

[Laugh]

ANNIE

We're a good time, we swear. Okay, so anything after traveler's diarrhea?

CHELSEY

Yeah, there's a bunch more so IBD. So that's inflammatory bowel disease. So that includes Crohn's, Colitis. So, very specific, very specific issues for sure.

JEN

Awesome. And so if somebody has those issues, talking to their doctor or probably preferably a dietitian and perhaps a pharmacist for what the right probiotic is for their specific issue.

CHELSEY

Yeah. And it's definitely worth consulting a dietitian to help you get the full picture. Sometimes people will do their own thing and they'll start an elimination diet. They'll go on, like, a probiotic that we wouldn't recommend. And there's so many variables. It's kind of hard to put the pieces together. You know, we want to rule out Celiac before you go gluten free.

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

Some people will go gluten free as an - let's see if this helps my gut health.

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

And now -

ANNIE

I did that.

CHELSEY
Yeah? [Laughs]

JEN
After traveling?

ANNIE
No, no, it was like a, it was just one of the many diets I tried.

JEN
I did as well. It was the Wheat Belly, the Wheat Belly era in time.

CHELSEY
I remember, I can picture that book. I remember it. Yeah. Didn't read it. I couldn't bring myself to read it. [Laughs] But yeah, there's a, it's kind of step by step, right, before you eliminate stuff, especially gluten, typically, I'm getting people to talk to their doctor, get that blood test to at least rule that out. Because what happens is, if you cut out gluten before you get screened for Celiac, if you do have Celiac, now you're healing your small intestine. And so if you get tested later, you might have a false negative because you've started to heal yourself. But we really need to know if you're Celiac or not. That's a big deal. It's like, you can't share the cutting board. It's not just, like, get gluten free pasta. It's you can't share a toaster with your family. Like it's a big deal.

JEN
Right. So on the topic of supplements, are there any supplements even outside of probiotics that people need to have to take care of their digestive health if they're just generally healthy people with diets that have a variety of food in them?

CHELSEY
The short answer is no. Honestly, in nutrition land, we love to say food first. Supplements supplement a diet, right? If, like, there are supplements that are decent, like, there are fiber supplements like psyllium which is the main ingredient in Metamucil for instance. So, some people will choose to take Metamucil when they're finding it really tough to get enough fiber in and that's their thing. They take it every morning or every night and it helps them stay regular. That's a fiber supplement and that works for them and it's fine. It's fiber, like, no problem. But it's better to try to get fiber from your diet overall so that you don't need to supplement.

JEN

Yeah, I mean, I take supplements. I take a protein supplement because I personally just don't gravitate to, protein as something I get jazzed to eat. And we take fish oil in this house because I also don't get jazzed to eat fish unless I'm literally sitting right beside the ocean. And we take vitamin D in this house and so we look at supplements as what are we not getting?

CHELSEY

Yep.

JEN

And yeah, for sure. Otherwise, you are just wasting your money.

CHELSEY

Yeah, there's certain you know, supplements like women of childbearing years could take folic acid, right, like these make sense. You know, if you're thinking about getting pregnant, and in the next six months, you could start a prenatal right vitamin like, yeah, supplements do have a role. But just like you said, it's let's figure out what you actually need. Like in Canada, we need vitamin D. We need to take that all year round. That one makes sense, for sure, to supplement. Absolutely. Especially in January. [Laughs]

JEN

Yeah. [Laughs]

CHELSEY

But really all year. [Laughs] Definitely. There are some other supplements that, like, fiber, well, it's actually a type of fiber, prebiotic supplements that are like fairly new-ish on the market. Do you guys know what prebiotics are?

JEN

No, I just know they're talking about I guess there's a push, it's like the new probiotic is actually the prebiotic, and then it's like, "Agh. What do I do? I just want a healthy gut." [Laughs]

CHELSEY

"I just want a healthy gut. I just don't want to be bloated." No one wants to be bloated and we want to have regular poops. That's what we want. So, prebiotics are the fuel source of the probiotics.

JEN

So the food?

CHELSEY

Exactly. It's what the probiotics, the good bacteria consume to live. Their food.

JEN

Is your food not enough for them? The food you eat?

CHELSEY

The prebiotics are from our food. So for instance, a prebiotic food is oatmeal.

JEN

Oh, so you're saying it's also sold in supplement form but it can also be your oatmeal.

CHELSEY

Exactly.

JEN

Oh, okay.

CHELSEY

Food first, right? Prebiotic rich foods are things like oats, flax seed, bananas, asparagus.

JEN

High fiber carb foods.

CHELSEY

Exactly.

JEN

Because our microbiome likes carbs and fibre.

CHELSEY

Yes, especially what they call resistant starch. Have you heard of that before?

JEN

I feel like as a nutrition coach, I should say yes to this but I just have to be honest here.

CHELSEY

Yeah, that's fine! So, there's carbohydrates. So, most carbohydrates that we consume are broken down and absorbed in the small intestine. So sugar, right? Starches kind of thing. Fiber, though, we don't actually break down and absorb ourselves. Fiber moves right along to the colon. And that's where the bacteria will ferment and use those prebiotic fibers for fuel.

JEN
Okay.

CHELSEY
So, you eat a potato and you're going to absorb the starch that you can absorb. And then the fiber, the resistant starch part is going to be used by your gut bacteria in your colon.

JEN
Right on.

ANNIE
Sounds like a party. [Laughs]

CHELSEY
It is a party. So yeah. So chickpeas, lentils, beans, artichoke, asparagus, oats, bananas. Oh, and onions and garlic are really good too. The problem though, is this list is almost overlapping with common foods that are terrible for IBS. [Laughs]

JEN
Oh, okay.

ANNIE
I was gonna say, those sounds like bloating foods to me, like, onions in particular.

CHELSEY
You're right.

JEN
Do you get bloated from onion?

ANNIE
Well, I love onions. I will put onions on everything but I also noticed that it causes [laughs] gas.

CHELSEY

They ferment in your colon.

JEN

I did not know that about you, Annie. We're taking things up a notch here.

ANNIE

Get more intimate.

JEN

I find actually beans. Beans for me are an issue. Not so much that I avoid them but like I can expect even a wee bit of cramping sometimes if I really overloaded with beans and then yeah, totally bloated and gassy.

CHELSEY

Definitely. Yeah, that's common. It can help to do canned over dried.

JEN

Oh, who does dried? Who does that?

CHELSEY

I know, who has time? And rinse them really well.

JEN

Okay.

CHELSEY

And some people will take an enzyme with them, kind of like when people take Lactaid for lactose intolerance. Yeah, it's called Beano. So some people take that enzyme when they have beans and lentils to help you digest the sugars that are in the beans that are making you feel so bloated.

JEN

Okay. So when we're experiencing this kind of thing like bloating, this is a little side note here. So Annie gets a bit bloated when she eats onion. I feel a bit bloated when I eat beans. It doesn't mean anything.

Unknown Speaker

Correct. The bloating you're experiencing, that's not debilitating, you know, extreme pain, especially chronically. That's part of normal digestion.

JEN

Okay, I don't want to call it a certain diet but, they call that out as unhealthy for you and harmful to you. And so, their whole diet is about cutting those things out and reintroducing them back in. And so, you know, you hear that message long enough and you start feeling that in your body, you start thinking, is this harmful to me, right? But you're saying it's just a normal part of the digestive process, like, nothing's harming you.

CHELSEY

Nothing is harming you. Your body is so good at digesting all sorts of foods, including foods that cause that fermentation in the colon and, therefore, make you feel gassy and bloated. These foods are health promoting! Beans, lentils, you know, onions, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, these are all you know, cancer fighting.

JEN

They're a real marriage killer though.

CHELSEY

[Laughs] Yeah, define health right?

JEN

I'm like, "Get downstairs."

CHELSEY

[Laughs]

JEN

"You're not sleeping with me."

CHELSEY

But yeah, I know some diets that cut out a lot of these foods. And really, when you look at the research, you don't have to cut them out to be healthy.

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

There's compounds in a lot of these foods called lectins. So, some people are a little bit worried about lectins and what they do for inflammation and, the truth, is when we cook foods like beans, like, we would never eat those raw anyways, those compounds are denatured and are not an issue anyways.

JEN

Those compounds also exist in some vegetables as well, don't they? Like brussels sprouts? For example, I can have some brussels sprouts but when I overload myself on brussel sprouts, which I do because I love them so much. Is that right? Am I correct here, that they have a similar -

CHELSEY

And it can be related to just a lot of fiber at once as well. It might not be the overall compounds, it just - you might just have had 15 grams of fiber at that meal.

JEN

Right. As you were saying, don't ever pin it on one thing. Look at the whole. Zoom out.

CHELSEY

Right. And so if you have a lot of fiber at once, that's not necessarily a bad thing as long as you're hydrated and you're drinking a lot of water to move the fiber along. But you might find a high fiber meal very bloating anyway.

JEN

Right, okay. But would you say that like raw brussel sprouts would have a different, once you cook them, they might have a different impact? Because we have a like a salad mix we buy with lots of raw, it has raw brussel sprouts, raw cauliflower, broccoli, and yeah, I just feel like it's pretty crunchy in there after I eat it raw.

CHELSEY

Totally. Yeah. People tend to find it better tolerated and less symptoms when they're cooked.

JEN

When they're cooked. Okay.

CHELSEY

So, if someone's dealing with a lot of gas, and they've noted, "Wow, I get really gassy after eating vegetables." I might suggest let's try no raw ones this week -

JEN

Right, right.

CHELSEY

- and see how that goes. Because oftentimes, the cooked versions work pretty well. Even of the same food.

JEN

Yeah. Awesome. So, can we ask about - we'll move on from supplements and all of our little side notes that we keep doing. I find the impact of dieting on the microbiome fascinating. And what I find most fascinating about it is that people do it to improve their microbiome often or their gut health. And so I'm referring to not just, like, an energy deficit, I'm referring to the very restrictive diets that either cut out carbs, like keto. I'd love to know about that since I was keto for so many years. And the carnivore diet is quite big right now. Yeah. Annie and I know a guy.

ANNIE

He will probably listen.

CHELSEY

[Laughs] Yes, I hear you. And you're right, low carb diets and no carb diets are, it seems, they're more popular now than ever. I was hopeful that it was going to be the 2018 thing. But here we are. And they're still really popular. And so the first thing that you have to know from a gut health perspective is the most important thing that we can do for our gut health slash our microbiome is to eat enough fiber.

JEN

Which are in carbs.

CHELSEY

Which are in plant based foods. So, carnivores don't eat plants. [Laughs]

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

And we need between 25 grams and 38 grams minimum. So for women, the minimum is 25 grams. For men, it's closer to 38 grams. And across the board, like, in North America, we're getting only about 50% of that.

JEN

Oh, wow.

CHELSEY

Like 11 to 15 grams on average, because, you know, more people are maybe eating, you know, white bread instead of whole grains. And we're, you know, we're not eating enough vegetables as a whole.

JEN

And I'm sure there's like socio economic disparities that increase that difference as well.

CHELSEY

Absolutely. Yes. 100%. And so, we worry about diets that don't have enough carbohydrates, firstly, for so many reasons. But if you're not eating plants, it's impossible to get enough fiber to fuel those bacteria. So again, fibers, prebiotics - prebiotics fuel the probiotics. Probiotics make up a large portion of your overall gut health. So we're worried that if you're not getting enough fiber, it can affect your, both your variety and your numbers of bacteria.

JEN

So, would you consider again back to this healthy gut thing that I keep trying to make it black and white for you, but would you consider a healthy gut has a large variety?

CHELSEY

Yes.

JEN

Okay.

CHELSEY

Variety is king. In fact, there was one study, speaking of variety - To get lots of variety of bacteria, we want a variety of plant based foods. And specifically, 30 different plant based foods per week.

JEN

Ooh, I don't know if I'm meeting that.

ANNIE

30 different...

CHELSEY

So if you had oatmeal.

JEN

Yeah, okay. Once you put in whole grains and beans -

CHELSEY

Berries.

JEN

Yeah, I was thinking fruits and vegetables.

CHELSEY

So, like nuts, seeds, grains, legumes, vegetables, anything from a plant. I wouldn't count oil because that's just pure fat and no fiber. But anything else that comes from a plant would count.

JEN

Okay. Yeah.

ANNIE

That's kind of fun. That's like a fun little challenge. I'm curious.

CHELSEY

I know, like, count how many different plant based foods you're getting in a week and see if you can get close to 30. Fun challenge.

JEN

This is when nutrition can be fun, like, when you're not disordered about it and your choices and things aren't rooted in diet culture, you can just see it as a science, right? Which is probably, that's why you do what you do and you're a dietitian and you like talking about this stuff because food just is really fun for you.

CHELSEY

It is and what I love about nutrition science is that you can pull yourself away from diet culture. So that salad now is not, "I need a salad to lose weight because it's low calorie." It's "I'm getting five plant based foods in the salad and I'm gonna feel great and full and satisfied and it's good for my health because of my gut."

JEN

Yeah, because it's so different. It's such a different experience to pursue a variety of foods and getting "healthy" quote, unquote, when you actually feel mentally healthy. Versus when you're not mentally healthy, everything you do is rooted in diet culture, getting healthy, actually, usually just means low calorie or, you know, restricting this or shifting that. So, yeah. So would you say when somebody like me goes on keto for many years, my microbiome variety shrinks right down?

CHELSEY
That's likely.

JEN
Right. Okay.

CHELSEY
Now you would have other things working in your favor. Like for instance, stress reduction is favorable for your microbiome because stress is terrible for it.

JEN
But if you're a really stressed out keto dieter. [Laughs]

CHELSEY
Yeah, that's right.

JEN
That is terrified of a carbohydrate landing on her plate.

CHELSEY
That's a good point like, you know, the stress, different stressors. And then also exercise is good for your gut health or your microbiome. But to a point.

JEN
What if you're over exercising and on keto?

CHELSEY
Well, that's stressful. That's not good. [Laughs]

ANNIE
I was just gonna say 'cause sometimes I think there, isn't there like an exercise induced, like, diarrhea sort of thing, like too much intensity, right?

CHELSEY

Exactly. Yep. And a huge psychological component there too. Like if you're running, you know, your first half marathon and you're excited and nervous, you know, they're saying basically, our gut is our second brain. And so you're nervous, so you have diarrhea.

JEN

Oh, I used to, that used to be me before exams in university.

ANNIE

Yeah. That was me in college ball like, college softball. Before games. It's like, now? Like, really?

CHELSEY

Yep. Because your brain and your gut talk to each other. And -

JEN

Oh, I love the human body! It's fascinating.

CHELSEY

Yeah, totally. And so, you're right. I mean, you can have diarrhea because of exercise if you're over exercising that ends up being an extra stress. So kind of general, you know, 150 minutes per week is a nice kind of general sweet spot as a general rec, but obviously depending on the individual, that varies.

JEN

Yeah, what they have access to.

ANNIE

So in Jen's case, former Jen, keto, exercised, super stressed -

JEN

Also calorie deficit, usually all the time because as often as I could, which is also a stress on the body. Not saying people shouldn't pursue calorie deficits at certain times of their life, but, like, I just had a combination of factors that were very hard on me, really.

CHELSEY

You kind of had a perfect storm going there. Can you think back, I'm curious. Did you get sick a lot? Like I wonder if your immune system...

JEN

I can't remember, honestly. I also drink a lot. [Laughs] So, there's my carbs. It was like, university days. Yeah, I was really hard on my body back then. I actually, I don't know if I've ever shared this on a podcast before but I almost had to leave university my first year because I was so unhealthy and depleted. I dropped, I went down to a 60% course load and also barely passed that. So, diet culture had a significant impact on my life. And I also see that I'm your average, I was your I'm your average 21 year old today. Not just your average 21 year old, but your average dieter, right, like of all ages. It's not uncommon to find somebody who is doing a restrictive diet while over exercising, getting very stressed out about the tediousness of it and maybe even not sleeping because they have a brand new baby. Like, it's just such a perfect storm for driving yourself into the ground.

CHELSEY

Absolutely. And then, you know, we talked about the gut and the brain being so connected. And so then, you know, of course, we're going to have, you know, greater risk of things like anxiety, depression.

JEN

Yeah. I wanted to ask you about that, which is a good segue into that because we hear a lot of things around mental health and gut health. Now, is that true?

CHELSEY

Yes. With an asterisk, of course, it's never black and white. And you know, taking care of your gut health is not the same as cognitive behavioral therapy.

JEN

Right. "I am so depressed. I need a probiotic right now." [Laughs]

CHELSEY

Exactly. Like, it's not your antidepressant. It's not going... Food is wonderful, but it's not medication, right? Medication is wonderful when it's needed. And yes, so, it can have an effect for sure. They are connected but we have to be careful not to, you know, overstate.

JEN

Over connect them or -

CHELSEY

Yes.

JEN

All your mental health issues are driven by your gut health. Because that is essentially what the diet industry is doing with the gut health marketing stuff right now.

ANNIE

It really seems as though it's like being positioned as the cure-all.

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

Cure your gut and like everything magically else improves.

CHELSEY

Yeah.

JEN

I saw it promoted for lactation, in a mom Facebook group the other day, like, low milk supply. Have you tried, have you addressed your gut health?

CHELSEY

Oh, gosh.

JEN

It's so bad out there.

CHELSEY

Wow.

JEN

Sometimes I forget how bad it is. And then I pop into like, mom Facebook groups and I'm like, "I gotta run. I'm so triggered. I'm out of here."

CHELSEY

They're the worst. They are the worst for sure. But yes, I mean, nutrition and medicine, it's so multifactorial, for sure. And so it's part of the conversation. But it's never as simple as X equals Y.

JEN

Right. Yeah, absolutely.

ANNIE

Chelsey, what are some of the other, like, big myths you've heard about gut health?

CHELSEY

Oh, gosh. There are some wild things out there for sure. I saw, not that long ago, celery juice being the next healer of your gut. So of course that trend kind of came and left but...

JEN

It's so funny everyone juicing celery thinking this is it. And I'm like, "It's over. Is that still it?" [Laughs]

CHELSEY

This is not it, you guys.

ANNIE

It ain't it. [Laughs]

CHELSEY

The thing that's so good for your gut, you've just removed: the fiber. [Laughs]

JEN

Oh, yes, because juicing removes fiber. We talked about that in Balance365 a bit. We might have talked about it in a podcast before, about juicing being a thing. It's like if you want some juice, have some juice but understand that a smoothie is probably a better choice, really, when you think of all the fiber that you take out when you juice.

CHELSEY

Yeah, for sure. And like, yes, the juice has some vitamins, right, some antioxidants and not saying it's totally worthless. But to make the claim that it's going to heal your gut...

JEN

Right, right. And a smoothie really would be more satiating for somebody who, like, juices. Juice isn't going to keep ya -

CHELSEY

Oh, exactly.

JEN

-going between breakfast and lunch.

CHELSEY

Yeah, put some protein in there. Put some ground flaxseed. Check off a bunch of plant based foods right in a smoothie.

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

Any other, any other big myths?

CHELSEY

Yes. Okay, so there's some misinformation about artificial sweeteners and their effect on the microbiome.

ANNIE

Ooh. Tell me about this because I drink diet soda.

CHELSEY

Okay.

JEN

As do I.

CHELSEY

Yeah. Everything in moderation is our dietitian cliché, however. [Laughs]

JEN

Except Diet Coke. [Laughs] Yeah.

CHELSEY

The myth is that artificial sweeteners, quote, "kill" your bacteria, which of course is not the case. And there's a lot of reasons why the studies aren't great. So there's very few human studies. There's a lot of studies in gut health land, microbiome land, in rodents. And humans are not rodents.

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

So yes, you can take a rat study and look and see what happened and then take that and make a hypothesis that you can use for another study on humans. But we can't look at a rat study and say, "Okay, this is automatically true for humans."

JEN

I guess everything you've told me makes me feel like gut health research must be incredibly difficult to do, just talking about how people even around the world have different prints as you, as you've said, different microbiomes. So, how can you even apply North American research to Asian research, kind of thing? Is that correct?

CHELSEY

Yes. I mean, it's different geography, it's different bacteria. It's different diets.

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

Different levels of things like pollution even.

JEN

Yeah, that's fascinating.

CHELSEY

Variations, right? And so in a rat study, you know, you can feed a rat whatever you want, and you can make it as strict as you want. Whereas, you know, humans, they're free to eat what they want. They have jobs. [Laughs] We're not rats in a cage. We have cravings. We have kids and responsibilities and...

JEN

Yeah, and stress.

CHELSEY

Yeah. And so the other studies looking at artificial sweeteners also have low participant numbers. So sometimes you see a human study and it's, like, 10 people. And you're like that's hard to make conclusions for the general population with this number of people. So aspartame, which is probably one of the most studied things in nutrition, there's so much controversy and misinformation about aspartame. From a gut health perspective, it has no effect on the microbiome.

JEN
Oh!

CHELSEY

We're not worried about it from a gut health perspective. Saccharin and sucralose, and sucralose is Splenda, does seem to interact with microbiota. And so what that means is, we're not quite sure what it does. It might reduce the number of bacteria or the variety. But again, humans aren't rats. They were giving the rats in the saccharin and sucralose studies, the equivalent of 13 to 17 cans of diet soda.

JEN
Oh. [Laughs]

CHELSEY
Annie, do you drink 13 to 17 cans a day?

ANNIE
No. I probably could. [Laughs] If you give it to me in fountain pop form.

CHELSEY
[Laughs]

ANNIE
But no.

CHELSEY
Or the equivalent of 30 packets of this little Splenda thing. 30 in a day. And so, of course, bad things are gonna happen to a rat at that level.

JEN
Yeah.

CHELSEY
It's like, we're not gonna eat that much.

JEN
And we're gigantic organisms, human beings. And a wild day for me is 2. If I have 2, I'm like, "Wow, I just had two diet sodas today." And I think sometimes people take this research that goes to extreme ends of amounts and they don't think about how the toxin

is in the dose. Right? It's like taking two Tylenol for a headache or taking 20. Like, eventually it's not good for you.

ANNIE

I even think I just saw a study on diet soda come out and, essentially, as you know, Josh Hillis, our good friend, his comment was, "My takeaways: Diet soda is fine to drink. If you can choose water instead of a diet soda, drink water. Otherwise, it's fine." Like it was just, like, so common, low level like, right? Don't overthink it, like.

JEN

Maybe don't have 30 a day, right?

CHELSEY

Sure, we want of course to drink more water, like, water is good for our health. Diet pop is not a health food but you can absolutely enjoy it in moderation.

JEN

Yeah, and for me, I guess, I mean, now we're going into diet soda and aspartame. But for me, it's like if I'm having a sweet craving that's mouth hunger and not actual hunger, a diet soda often just does it for me, where I don't... I'm not digging in the cupboard for cookies.

CHELSEY

Yeah. Not a problem with that at all. And so, be skeptical when you see big claims like, you know, heal your gut or, you know, this kills your bacteria or, you know, ruins your microbiome.

JEN

Yeah, there's like gut healing protocols, diets that are, yeah.

CHELSEY

Keeping in mind that, in general, the microbiome is quite stable.

JEN

Hmm. Okay.

CHELSEY

We can't control it all. It's not zero percent to 100%,

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

It's that like, you know, 30 to 40%.

JEN

And you would say, and so what I'm getting out of this whole interview is that your recommendation for controlling that 30 to 40% is to eat a wide variety of plant based foods. Don't worry about the pre- or probiotic unless you are having ongoing issues that may require it. For example, you could have Celiac, undiagnosed Celiac etc. But even in that case, check in with a doctor, dietician, to help you navigate that world.

CHELSEY

Exactly. To really simplify, eat lots of plants, eat a variety. So, lots meaning, you know, we want half of our plate of vegetables, right, like two cups at lunch, two cups at dinner when you can or working up to that.

JEN

All or something here.

CHELSEY

All or something. Totally agree. The variety, so not having the exact same salad on repeat, you know, forever,

JEN

Right.

CHELSEY

Mixing it up, like, put a different vegetable in there, have a different fruit in your smoothie.

JEN

Costco has five different kinds of bagged salads and I get all five.

CHELSEY

There you go. Just remember that different bacteria like different fuel.

JEN

Right, okay.

CHELSEY
So, variety is king.

JEN
Is king. Okay.

CHELSEY
So lots of plant based, lots of variety, manage stress, exercise in your sweet spot that it's enjoyable and don't fall into the hype of the all or nothing. You know?

JEN
Yeah, sounds like some great general health guidelines are great for general good gut health.

CHELSEY
And it's not sexy. I'm not going to sell a best selling book.

JEN
Right. [Laughs]

CHELSEY
Just eat fiber, but yeah, usually the unsexy stuff is the most useful.

JEN
Yeah, absolutely. Chelsey, this was so great.

ANNIE
Yeah, really informative.

CHELSEY
Good.

JEN
Can we, would you like to share your news with our audience?

CHELSEY
Sure. Yeah. I'm expecting baby number two.

JEN
Yay!

ANNIE

Yay!

CHELSEY

Yes.

JEN

We're very happy for you.

CHELSEY

I have a three year old and a newborn come November.

JEN

I can't wait.

CHELSEY

Yes, we're very excited. It was quite the news to - pardon the pun - digest during this COVID-19 time. We were kind of like, "Oh my god, what have we done?" But we're happy. We're really excited.

JEN

Awesome. And where can people find you?

CHELSEY

Yeah, so my website is chelseylovenutrition.com. I'm on Instagram where I'm the most active and I'm @dietitanchels and I'm on Facebook, Chelsey Love Nutrition.

JEN

Okay, we'll link to all that.

ANNIE

And I think we mentioned at the beginning but she is one of the experts in our Balance365 coaching program. So, Balance365 coaching members can jump on coaching calls with Chelsey.

CHELSEY

Yeah. I can't wait to chat.

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

Thank you. This was so informative, such good information. Thank you so much. I can't wait to go check how many plant based foods I'm eating in a week.

JEN

Chelsey, do you ever feel like your job becomes myth busting constantly? Because there's just so much misinformation out there.

CHELSEY

So much. Yeah, the internet is a wild place, for sure. And the problem is, there's so many self proclaimed experts, right? Everybody eats, so everyone thinks they're an expert on nutrition and...

JEN

Or if they've lost five pounds, they are now -

CHELSEY

They're now a coach.

JEN

Yep.

CHELSEY

Yes, exactly. And they there's a lot of companies trying to sell you something. So it's the next big thing. And so yeah, often as a dietitian, I'm like, "Hey, guys, hold on. Focus on the basics here."

JEN

Yeah, I mean. We see the same thing. And it's like trying to convince people that the basics work and eating in a balanced way works and that, for a lot of our audience, the answers to their weight loss lie in consistency with the basics, not going back to dieting, stress management, building up resiliency, and sleep.

CHELSEY

Huge.

JEN

Yeah. So they just, it's hard to wrap your head around when you've been sold that there's a secret your whole life, right? And accepting, wow, these lifestyle factors really are what I need.

CHELSEY

Yeah, exactly. Something that you can stick to and be consistent with is so much better than trying to try the next diet or expensive supplements.

JEN

Totally. Well, thanks for being in the messy middle with us.

CHELSEY

I'm happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

JEN

Thank you so much.

ANNIE

Thank you. Talk soon.

CHELSEY

Okay, bye, guys.

JEN

Bye.

ANNIE

Hey everyone! if your mind has been blown, while listening into this podcast just wait until you work with us. Let us help you level up your health and wellness habits and your life inside Balance365 coaching. Head over to balance365.co to enroll in next month's coaching round. See you on the inside.