

Balance365 Episode 57 Transcript

Annie: Welcome back to another episode of Balance365 Life radio. Before we dive into this topic, I wanted to share a really sweet review we got on iTunes and this is from Becks H and she says "As I learn more about the damage that diet culture has done and is continuing to do in my own life and in general, these ladies are a breath of fresh air. It's like having a chat with encouraging girlfriends who can answer all of your questions. I always learn something and I always an up in a good mood plus listening while I work makes tasks and chores more bearable." Thank you so much, Becks H, I appreciate the review and to everyone else who has left a review for us on iTunes or Spotify, we read every single one of them and they mean so much to us, thank you.

Alright, let's dive into this postpartum topic. The postpartum period can be a time of great love but it can also be great sadness. If you've had a baby you've likely experienced the insane amount of pressure placed on postpartum women to "bounce back" quickly after giving birth, from magazines to media, to even well intentioned friends and family, women are praised and applauded for making it appear as though they never even had a baby. With such high expectations for women it can feel impossible to feel like you aren't failing. Our bodies go through so many changes in the pregnancy and postpartum stage, it's common to hear women in awe of their body's ability to grow and birth a child but on the other hand, insecure and confused about how their post-partum body looks. On today's episode of Balance365 Life radio, Lauren, Jen and I discuss our personal experiences with postpartum body shame and suggestions on how to cope and if you want to continue this discussion, we'd love to see you inside our free private Facebook group Healthy Habits Happy Moms. Enjoy.

Ladies, the gang's all here. Yay! All three of us are back together.

Lauren: Yay!

Annie: Jen, how are you doing today?

Jen: Good.

Annie: Good. Lauren, how are you?

Lauren: Good.

Annie: Again. You know, we act like I haven't talked to Lauren twice already on two different podcasts. I've done this intro already.

Lauren: I'm still wonderful.

Annie: Good, good. I'm happy to have both of you here with me today because we're talking about a topic that comes up frequently in our podcast or in our community and I'm kind of surprised we haven't already dove into this in our podcast but that is postpartum shame. Which kind of used to be our bread and butter, that was like how, we were then Healthy Habits Happy Moms, we really started as pre/postnatal talk and training experts.

Jen: Yeah, I mean we still do talk about pre and post natal health, women's health, we've just expanded from there.

Annie: Yeah, but it's like kind of going back to our roots today, like we used to talk about this so much and we still do inside of our Facebook community which is Healthy Habits Happy Moms on Facebook, if you're not a part of it, it's a pretty a free private community which if you have more questions or you want to continue the discussion on the podcast today inside there is a great place to do it.

But we want to talk about postpartum body shame because it's something that the 3 of us have absolutely experienced at various stages in our life and it's something that we hear from a lot of women in our community that they also experience and that's large in part because there's an insane amount of pressure on postpartum women to "bounce back" after giving birth and it's not surprising because we live in a culture unfortunately that fends over women who lose the baby weight and don't even look like they've had a baby or they are able to slip on their pre-pregnancy jeans shortly after leaving the hospital and intentionally harmful or not this message, the message to women is clear that women are encouraged and applauded for having a baby and then essentially destroying any evidence of having done so and it can feel incredibly hard when you see all of that to not feel like you're failing if you don't achieve those results, right?

Jen: Yeah, I mean, I think the message that we get becomes an expectation almost like if you aren't one of those women that "bounces back" then there's something wrong with you.

Lauren: Or you better at least be trying your hardest.

Jen: Yeah.

Lauren: If you're not trying, what's wrong with you.

Annie: Absolutely and I just, I do want to be clear that there's a lot of ways that shame can kind of show up or present itself in the postpartum period and that can be, like, function related which we've talked about a lot in our community as well as far as diastasis recti, incontinence, hernia, pelvic floor dysfunction, sexual dysfunction. It can also show up as mental and emotional related shame which is something I know Jen's been very vocal about postpartum depression, anxiety, O.C.D, just general sadness or depression but we really want to focus on shame as it relates to your appearance or your body today on this episode and some of the ways that can show up is, you know, feeling like you still look pregnant after giving birth shortly or a while after. It can change your belly shape. You can feel shame or embarrassment or concern about stretch marks, your skin, your hair, maybe carrying additional body fat or weight, more cellulite, baggy or loose skin, which, to me, I'm reading this, listen, I'm, like, "Yep, that sounds pretty par for the course for pregnancy, postpartum."

Jen: Or you, just, you know, you've never had a baby.

Annie: You just have a body.

Jen: Yeah like so these are just trigger things for women and you know, we, you know, we talk about this so often but really we have been set up for failure in postpartum, as women, you know, women get set up for failure in that, first of all, nobody talks much about postpartum and two, there isn't a very realistic portrayal of postpartum. I mean, it's coming, it's coming, I think we've got more pages, like social media accounts of stuff that popped up with women sharing a more realistic postpartum but I mean, when I was having babies, I started in 2009 and ended in 2013, there was nothing out there like there is now. There was a lot of women going viral, like, I mean, I'm talking across the world for how they looked postpartum. Just, you know, international headlines, it's crazy.

Annie: Well and that's one of things you wanted to share, you found a couple studies that kind of reflects your experience because I remember one of my first conversations with you was you had, would it have been your third round Heidi Klum?

Jen: I had my first around the same time as Heidi Klum I think had her fourth or her third and she was on the Victoria's Secret runway at 10 weeks postpartum and all the power to Heidi Klum, for sure, it's just that, you know, she probably spent 10 weeks preparing for that, she was probably preparing for it in her pregnancy and it just wasn't a realistic, you know, postpartum journey, you know, not many women, you know, would look like.

Lauren: Not many women's lives look like Heidi Klum's, right?

Jen: Yeah.

Lauren: She has help in every area of her life right and a lot of us are doing this more or less on our own, so it's not going to look the same.

Jen: Right and also after she was on the runway I mean everybody made such a huge deal out of it and then there was articles everywhere talking about, interviewing her on her diet and exercise regime leading up to that and she was on a very strict diet and she had, she was working out tons and so there was just no gentler message out there at the time and I really thought that should probably be, like, I should have, I clearly should have been doing that kind of thing and I did feel really ashamed.

Annie: Right, there's this like inferred, like, standard, like, this is the standard for her when, in reality, like, she gets paid to look a certain way and do a job based off of the way her body looks which we can dive into a little bit later. And like, and you don't, so like the expectations are just different, you know and the standards are different but there is that, when you see that put on a pedestal, her put on a pedestal for doing this thing with her body after pregnancy, there's this inferred "I should be doing that as well" or that's what's expected.

Jen: And I also wanted to note that postpartum body shame is incredibly complex but most women headed into postpartum at that are feeling ashamed about their bodies already carried quite a bit of shame beforehand, like the

shame, the body shame always existed and it does exist in millions upon millions of women and postpartum just intensifies it.

Annie: Absolutely, I know just on a personal note, I felt like, as you noted, starting right away in pregnancy that my body was changing faster than my thoughts and emotions and mind could process and it was just, you know, and that carried well into postpartum and I'm 2.5, who says that, 2.5, 2 and a half years postpartum and I still feel like I'm seeing changes in my body with like my hair and my skin, like, I feel like my hair is starting to grow back a little bit and it's like your body is just changing and I just remember thinking that it was changing faster than I could process, I could emotionally, like, keep up with it. It seemed like I got comfortable with one aspect or the way my body was feeling or looking or functioning and then "Oh, we're going to pivot, we're going to change, we're going to grow a little bit, we're going to expand a little bit or shift a little bit" and it can be challenging.

So we, but you know, with all that said we also understand that a lot of women at this stage have a desire to feel more confident and you know, ultimately I remember feeling like I wanted to regain some sort of control because as a mom, it felt like so much of it was out of my control and I just wanted to control something and a lot of times, in our experience, we see women trying to control their bodies or their food or their exercise as a way to like do that thing, to gain some control, so we just wanted to share some steps, essentially that might help you overcome or work through some postpartum body shame. Yeah?

Jen: Yeah.

Lauren: Yeah.

Annie: OK, alright, let's go. So the first one is to quit comparisons and this can be on a couple different levels but we would encourage you to let go of comparing your pre-pregnancy body with your postpartum body and also comparing your bodies with other women, which is just good advice in general but a lot of times we hear women comparing their prenatal, their pre-baby body and their post baby body and we would offer that it doesn't have to be better or worse that it's just different.

Jen: Yeah, I mean a lot, there's, this conversation happens constantly but it's women comparing, you know, how long it took them to get back to their

pre-pregnancy weight or, that's a goal, right, so it's like "I'm 5 pounds from my pre-pregnancy weight. I'm 15 pounds from my pre-pregnancy weight." It seems to be the goal for a lot of women postpartum. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, it's just that, it's sort of like believing you can predict what your body is going to look like and feel like after puberty.

It's a major, major hormonal event, major physical changes happening and you don't really know what your body is going to look like on the other side of pregnancy and into postpartum and the other thing, you know, we've kind of touched on this but our own postpartum body standards is that postpartum is yet another chapter of a woman's life where her body is going to look different so there is, one study I pulled that actually interviewed a whole host of women in Australia who were giving birth and inside that study women talked about their utter, like, their, just, their shock around postpartum, like, their their prenatal classes had all revolved around labor and delivery and nobody had really talked to them about postpartum, like what they would look like, how they would feel and there was an acceptance of their body changing during pregnancy because it was very functional.

But postpartum they felt, they didn't feel there was a function for that changed body anymore and it and they were shocked at their bodies didn't go back to how they looked pre-pregnancy and so I always encourage women to look at postpartum like another chapter right, so pregnancy is a chapter of life where your body will be changing and may not look or feel the way it had before but postpartum is also another chapter where your body definitely has a function, where now you are recovering from birth and many women will be nursing a baby, some women not, which is fine. But that's just another chapter where your body has function and and a job to do and it's going to look different.

Annie: Yeah and we always say in our community too that postpartum is forever, like once you're postpartum, you're postpartum forever so there's no, like, timeline for, at least we wouldn't prescribe or suggest or a timeline for which any of this is normal. It's all very individual base and person-specific. Like some women change, gain weight, lose weight for a variety of reasons, at a variety of rates and it's not, like, prescriptive, like, this is what you should be doing.

Lauren: I think for me, what really, something that really helped me was exactly what Annie said, realizing that "pre-baby body" like, that's gone, like, I will have a post baby body forever, like, it's never, it's always going to be different and it's not

better or worse and it doesn't mean I can't get, you know, some semblance of, you know function back. I can still lose the some extra fat that I put on. I can get stronger but it's always going to be different than it was before. And that's OK. That's how it's supposed to be.

Jen: Yeah and it's also important to remember that fat has a function as well, it's not just, you know, excess weight that we've put on that's unnecessary and it's like, it's crazy out there on social media that, you know, what women become consumed with. There was a period of time where every time I logged into Pinterest the very 1st pin at the top of my feed was how to lose fat during pregnancy and I could see that it had been pinned thousands and thousands of thousands of times and it's just, it's just such a symptom of what women are so concerned about in pregnancy, right, it's yeah, it's just become this massive concern because we live in this society-

Annie: That fears it.

Jen: Yeah that has set up this expectation for us but it's no different than everything we've talked about on this podcast before, it's just during a different chapter of your life. The marketing machine is still the same and the marketing machine is still there for pre and post natal women so it is, you know, holding up an unrealistic standard for women, making them feel ashamed that they don't meet that standard and selling them something in order to try and meet that standard. And you see there's like all these things like stretch marks creams on the market that really don't have any evidence behind them whatsoever. Because whether you develop stretch marks or not is probably mostly based on your genetics. I had stretch marks well before I hit pregnancy. I got them in puberty so I knew some would probably be coming during pregnancy. My sister had stretch marks, my mom has stress marks, you know, and there's all these industries that have popped up around women's bodies being wrong, even during pregnancy and postpartum and one other study that I pulled was a media study done on 3 popular pregnancy magazines and upwards and over 50 percent of the advertising inside those magazines were ads about weight loss or getting your body back. So you're already being bombarded with this messaging during pregnancy that your primary goal postpartum should be erasing any signs that you have become a mother.

Lauren: And it causes a real fear even during pregnancy.

Jen: Right.

Lauren: About what's coming, what's going to happen.

Jen: Right, absolutely.

Annie: I just had a phone call with one of my closest friends, she is pregnant and she's struggling with gaining weight during pregnancy and I assured her over and over and over again that this is exactly what your body's supposed to be doing, like, this is your body's job, like this is normal, this is an expectation but she's already kind of bracing herself for, like, weight loss postpartum, like, I'm putting on all this weight and I'm going to have to lose it and it's like, "You know, actually, you don't have to. You don't have to."

Jen: Yeah, you don't have to do anything different, really postpartum and a lot of women's bodies will settle in. So I look at my three experiences and in my third experience I was not dieting and in my first two I was just, you know, hyper focused on the weight loss postpartum and in my first two I lost weight very quickly and you know, again my whole goal being finding my "pre-pregnancy weight" but it just consumed me, right and I had, especially in my second pregnancy, I had all these pelvic health issues going on but I could not pause to deal with those because I was just, I just was obsessed with losing this weight. And then by my third one I wasn't dieting so I wasn't hyper focused, I wasn't doing anything differently than I had maybe done in pregnancy as far as just, you know, eating balanced meals and all of that and guess what? I lost the weight anyways, like, you know, without stressing over it and so what we say is like, you know, we always say this, but, "Cultivate healthy habits that work for you in that season of your life and let your body be what it's going to be. Let your weight be what it's going to be and that is probably what's healthiest for you."

Annie: Well and especially to consider that as a mom, new or not, whether it's your first or it's your fifth, babies are stressful, you know and then maybe you've got some other kids on top of that, maybe you're returning to a career in the home or outside the home or whatever but I mean, at the bare minimum, caring for a baby and yourself in that stage of the game is stressful and then so many women want to throw additional stress of dieting and workouts, which dieting is a stress on your body, it creates psychological stress. I mean, Traci Mann is coming on our podcast this week, it's echoed in her book *Secrets From the Eating Lab*, like it's additional stress on your body.

Jen: Yeah, measurable, you measure your stress levels, that when people are dieting their stress levels go up.

Annie: Yeah, their cortisol is higher and it's, like, you know, cut yourself some slack.

Jen: Yeah, absolutely and then it leads into a cycle, right, so there's this the stress cycle where, like, you're super stressed so your cravings intensify, which Lauren can talk more about that if she wants to and then all those cravings intensify and you end up in that binge and restrict cycle, right, even postpartum and it's so intense because you are already so stressed, fighting those cravings, then trying to restrict, which leads to more stress, which leads to more urges to binge eat and yeah, it's just a really messy, messy cycle that I think if more women were honest, they would say they were very, very stuck in in the postpartum chapter.

Annie: Absolutely. Moving on, I know I just said that once you're postpartum you're postpartum forever but with that said, I also want to offer that now is not forever and what I mean by that is how you're feeling now about your body, hopefully, likely, I mean, assuming it's, if you're listening to this you might be feeling some negative emotions about your body or maybe you've experienced that in the past or you're kind of preparing for it in the future but know that feelings ebb and flow and as uncomfortable as it can be to lean in and shine a light so to speak on the dark feelings that you're feeling, it could be the thing that helps you step forward from self loathing to self-love and Vienna Pharaon was actually on our podcast, if you don't follow her on [mindfulmft](#) which we can link into the show notes on Instagram, she's a just a wonderful uplifting account. She's a therapist but she encourages, a couple weeks ago she had a post about how to cultivate self-love and her answer was the only way to love yourself is by exploring all the things you hate about yourself. The practice of self-love can't be fully successful if we hide and reject the parts that actually need it and so I guess with that, what comes to mind for me is when I'm feeling some type of way, when I'm feeling a negative emotion or shame about a body part or an aspect of my life or trait of myself, instead of kind of running and hiding from it or distracting myself with other thoughts or behaviors to actually kind of explore, like, what is this, where did this come from, why am I feeling like this, where did I learn this, when did this start and see what answers you come up with and in my experience, the

more I do that, the more I'm able to lean into those emotions, the quicker they pass.

Jen: Right, the other thing is to understand that self acceptance is such a crucial component of body satisfaction and self acceptance does not necessarily mean you love every part of your body and this goes for postpartum, so full honesty here, I don't love the way my postpartum body looks and I don't love the way it feels so I just find it extremely uncomfortable, not just my stomach but like big breastfeeding boobs, I just can't handle and I'm not used to because I'm actually very small chested normally. I just, all of that stuff just is very uncomfortable.

Lauren: Yeah so....sorry...

Jen: Self acceptance isn't about loving every part of your body or even necessarily loving the way it looks, it's just about accepting, accepting it all and taking it all in, right?

Lauren: Right, yes so for me, I am the newest postpartum out of the 3 of us. I have a one year old and I remember this very, very clearly because when I had Benny we were already, we had already started this company, right, I have been in this process for years but I remember, just not, I was maybe 2 months postpartum and I just didn't feel like myself, right I didn't, I didn't love the way my body looked and like you said, I didn't like how it felt, it felt foreign to me and I didn't feel like myself and what helped for me is to realize that now is not forever, like Annie mentioned. It was, it opened my eyes because we have a lot of people come into the Facebook group and talk about, you know, I haven't lost the baby weight yet and I, you know, I don't feel like myself or whatever and we're like well how far, you know, how long ago did you have your baby and they'll say, you know, 6 weeks, 8 weeks, 12 weeks, whatever and as a non postpartum Mom, you look at that and say "Well, that's a blink of an eye, right, like you are so newly postpartum" but I remember being in that space and to me, it felt like it was taking forever. And I knew, like I knew all this stuff, right, but still being in that place, having your hormones changing, your body still constantly changing. I just need anyone in that space to remind themselves that now is not forever and it does, in the moment, feel like a long time but it will pass. Like, I'm a year postpartum now and I'm still going through postpartum changes but I'd say probably for the first 6 months or so I was like kind of in the thick of it as far as my postpartum body went for sure.

Jen: Right and actually in Balance365 we don't even recommend anyone even be thinking about anything fat loss related until they're out of the thick of it, which for some, you know, that differs for every woman, I know we kind of said ish, around 6 months postpartum, like if you're thinking about fat loss before 6 months postpartum you're just probably in the wrong area of your wellness wheel at that point and then I think it was, when you're around 6 months postpartum, Lauren or had you said you kind of came out of think of it around four months postpartum, I can't remember now. It doesn't feel like that long ago.

Lauren: Yeah it was like between 4 and 6, like, there was, I mean, it was kind of cyclical, right, like the baby would sleep through the night then he wouldn't sleep through the night and so it just kind of depended but between like 4 and 6 months is when I started even working on, you know, anything fat loss or even really health related.

Jen: Right, it is just survival, right, survival.

Lauren: Yeah, I started just by, like, "Well, let's get some veggies in everyday, Lauren. Let's get some protein."

Jen: Which is a very realistic look at what postpartum looks like right and on that sleep front, my third, he didn't sleep through the night until I weaned him when he was one and I honestly didn't feel like I was coming out of the thick of it until then. So I really think like you know it's just so dependent from woman to woman on what that feels like and but that's why that acceptance piece, that self acceptance piece is so important, right, like now is not forever and you can wake up in the morning and you can acknowledge that your breasts feel really heavy and you do not like that feeling or your belly feels, you know, very large and it's in the way and you are not, you know, it's just and you just, you don't enjoy that and that's not where you want to be but just that acceptance can wash over you of this is just, "this is not forever, it's just right now."

Annie: And I think that moves you into a space of being very neutral about your body which I know we've talked about with Janelle on the sisters podcast that she really felt like neutral is a good place for her to be at various points that she wasn't able to, like, as you said, love all aspects about her body, which I don't even think is the goal, I don't even know if that's possible, if it is possible I haven't experienced it yet but you can just be kind of like "Oh, this is what it is."

Jen: Like, well, if you don't pour all your self-worth into the way your body looks then self acceptance can be easier, right? But when you've poured all to yourself worth into how your body looks then it is absolutely devastating to have to endure postpartum.

Annie: Absolutely which is a great segue into our third recommendation is to remember that your body isn't the problem and this is so easy for the three of us to sit here and say now that we're a year plus removed from giving birth but the antidote to your postpartum body shame is way less about dieting down to your pre-pregnancy weight and way more about cultivating self acceptance and Lou Ullrich, I hope I'm pronouncing that right, this, I love this quote of hers. She says "Bodies inevitably change, the more attached we become to their shape, the more we will suffer" and that's essentially what Jen was saying, that, I mean, even, you know, from puberty to college to, you know, high school, college, pre-pregnancy, baby 1, 2, 3, like, I mean, my body is just like, it is constantly evolving, you know.

Jen: If we lined up our bodies from, you know, if we had a picture taken on all of our birthdays and lined them up from ages 0 to age 99, you would start to see that your body is always evolving, we are always changing whether it's your shape and size or you know, your skin is changing and that's just it. There just needs to be an acceptance around that, period. Bodies change. Period.

Annie: Yeah, you can't stop it.

Jen: So never get too attached to any one way that your body looks.

Annie: Yeah, absolutely and again this is easy for us to sit here and say but I want to remind our listeners that this is something that we, the three of us, have been practicing for years and years and years and years. This didn't just happen overnight where we're just like "Oh, we're done dieting, we're done with self-loathing, we're done with, we're done you know with shaming ourselves." Like, this has been a practice and I think, you know, the three of us were being honest that we still have days or moments, you know, where we're not loving everything about ourselves or we're struggling a little bit more than others for whatever reason and but now we have the awareness to say "Look, this is just a bad body image day or a bad body image week or I'm feeling in this type of way because X, Y, Z happened and it will pass and it doesn't mean that it needs to affect my behaviors or my actions or how I'm moving forward."

Awesome. OK, well, anything else you ladies want to add? I feel like we could talk a lot more about other aspects of postpartum shame as well.

Jen: Yeah, I think this is a good initial dive.

Annie: Dive into at least appearance which is what brings women to us, because again, we've been conditioned to think that our body is the most important aspect of our ourselves and so we get a lot of women in our community, especially with the name Healthy Habits Happy Moms that are like "I'm a new mom and I had a baby and now I need to, you know, lose my weight-

Jen: I want to get healthy so that means I need to lose all this baby weight and it's like, "Is that healthy?" Like, we just need to pause here and let's just question that a little bit, like is that healthy for you, right now? Especially as quickly as possible, right? Like, we talk about this on this podcast constantly, losing weight as quickly as possible is about one of the most unhealthiest things that you can do to your body and postpartum is no different.

Annie: Absolutely.

Lauren: Yeah.

Annie: OK, good chat, I hope we left our listeners feeling uplifted because I feel uplifted like, "Hey, like this is this is all normal."

Jen: "This is all normal and we've all been there." So we get you, girl.

Annie: Yes and if you want to, like I said at the beginning, have more support, you know, doing things like a media fast could be helpful. It could also be helpful to join our community continue the discussion here as I mentioned already, Healthy Habits Happy Moms on Facebook. We have a really, really great community of women that would love to work out any sort of emotions you're feeling about your postpartum body or even if you're pregnant or even if you're 5 years, 10 years postpartum, every woman is welcome in there. So we hope to see you on the inside and thanks for joining me ladies.

Lauren: Thanks.

Jen: Bye.

Lauren: Bye.

