

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Hello and welcome to Unstress. I'm Dr Ron Ehrlich. Setting up healthy eating habits starts from, well, the womb, actually. And there are some opportunities and challenges in introducing healthy foods to children. Particularly before they actually get a chance to have a choice, or voice any opposition. If you got onto the web for advice, there's an endless stream of information that can be overwhelming. Well, my guest today is nutritionist and herbalist Brittany Darling. And her mission is to help you get really clear on what to eat to better your health on every level and guide you to which nutritional and herbal medicines can support you so you can live your best life. A life with less pain, less inflammation, where you feel calmer and less stressed. That's a familiar term. And where you have healthier digestion and a stronger immune system.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And what better place to begin that journey than at the beginning of life. The early years. And especially when it comes to introducing solids. Now, whether you have children or not, if you are a fussy eater, or know children or people that are, this will give you some insight into how that may have come about. And if you do have children, also some great insights into ensuring it's a good start. I hope you enjoy this conversation I had with Brittany Darling.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Welcome to the show, Brittany.

Brittany Darling: Thanks for having me, Ron. I'm excited to be on your show.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Thank you. We're excited to have you. Now listen, I've got two young grandchildren, and if I've been through this before when my kids were growing up. They're now in their 30s, or 29 and 32. But watching my grandchildren and three and six months, you know, the starting of solids is quite a big deal. And you've written this great book, Starting Solids. How do we know when our kids are ready for solids?

Brittany Darling: Look, they'll be showing signs that they're ready. They'll be launching themselves toward your food, trying to grab your food. They would have lost their tongue thrust. And mainly they'll be able to sit upright in a highchair and hold their head up. If their head's flopping around all over the place, that's a sign that they're not ready. But if they're able to show some head control, that's definitely a sign they're ready. And when they're showing interest in food.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Hmm. Listen, I mean, you know, one of the things also that has struck me in this whole process, as now an observer, is when our kids were growing up we had one or two books to consult. But gee, when you get online now, it's mind-boggling, isn't it really, what's available out there. And so, this book that you've written has made ... You know, I mean, I know you, Brittany, and I can just imagine this is very, there's a lot of evidence, a lot of research that's gone into this.

Brittany Darling: Yeah, absolutely. Look, it is evidence-based, and I think that's the most important thing when you're introducing solids, is to stick to that, you know, to the Australian Dietary Guidelines to some degree. Because that's where the evidence is. But there is so much information out there. You know, do you do baby-led weaning, do you do ... You know, what approach. There are so many different approaches. And I feel like it can be quite

overwhelming for parents. But the bottom line is that you should just be feeding your kids real food. You know, like stuff that you eat. Hopefully, stuff that you eat. Hopefully, you're eating whole food. Hopefully, you've got a healthy diet. And if you don't. Now's the perfect time to do it, because your child is going to see what you're eating, and they're going to want to eat what you're having. So, yeah.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: What is ... You mentioned baby-led weaning, because ... I guess that's waiting for your kid to tell you, "I'm ready."

Brittany Darling: Yeah. Yeah, and also it's letting them feed themselves, basically. So, you'll put, you know, a bit of chicken in front of them, and they pick it up and feed themselves. So, you're basically following their lead. So in my eBook, I do a bit of both, actually. I like a bit a puree because I like to just get the nutrients in. As a nutritionist, you know, my main priority is to get those nutrients in. But at the same time, I want to teach the baby or the child the skills to feed themselves. And that's that whole hand-to-eye coordination, which you get through that baby-led weaning approach.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Because you mention the loss of their tongue thrust, which is really interesting, I mean, and holding your head up. So we're talking reasonably early.

Brittany Darling: We're talking early. It's generally between four to six months. So, the old recommendation was four months, and that's been relaxed a little bit. And they're now saying that you can start to introduce solids around four months. And when they say start to introduce solids around four months, let's be real. They're having like half a teaspoon of puree. You don't, you know, start out giving them a whole bowl of something delicious. It literally starts off as little tastes of food. So it's not a huge amount of food that you're giving them around that four-month mark if they're ready. It's often just a little taste after their milk feed.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Because I was ... Well, you know, thought I would share with you this. On Sunday night I had them over, and there I was feeding my six-month-old, and he just kept on going. You know, he loved it. He just ... So, is it self-limiting? Do we just let the baby guide us, as to ...

Brittany Darling: Oh, absolutely.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah.

Brittany Darling: Babies and children know how to regulate their appetites better than us. So long as you're not giving them sugar, and all those kind of foods. Because, you know, sugar does trick the appetite, and you are able to eat more and more, and you sort of crave more and more. So as long as they're eating whole foods, and they want to go for it, go for it. You know, they really do know how to regulate their appetites better than adults.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And when we're talking about solids, I mean we're not talking about actual solid food, necessarily. You mentioned puree. How do parents get started on

introducing solids? You know, when would that be? Or rather, not when, but what are we feeding them? You mentioned puree. What, just of food we're eating?

Brittany Darling: Yeah. Yeah, well, that's one approach. So, as ... Yeah. If you're eating a really healthy, well-balanced diet yourself, you can literally puree up, add a bit of water, add a bit of milk, or add a bit of bone broth to your food and blend it until it's smooth. Or some babies, when they're older, around nine months, can tolerate a few more lumps and bumps in their food. So that's one approach, that they just eat what you're eating. And that's so easy. That's so easy for every parent to do that. And then the other approach is, and I've got a whole heap of recipes for purees in the first part of my eBook, is literally a serve of veg, so whether it's sweet potato, with a bit of chicken thigh in there, or an egg pureed through there, or ... It's basically, my purees, to start off with, are vegetable with a sort of high iron food, because they do need that iron replaced around the six-month mark. Because breast milk is a poor source of iron. So that's why we always focus on iron-rich foods, to begin with when starting solids.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: I must say, I've been really impressed with my granddaughter, who loves liver pate, you know, so-

Brittany Darling: Great. Perfect.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And I mean, that's a food that we don't think of giving kids. But you know, that could be ... That's in there too, I guess when you say iron.

Brittany Darling: Yeah, exactly. And there's a chicken liver pate recipe in the book, and you'll see it's actually on the front cover of Starting Solids. So, I feel like all those traditional wisdoms have been lost. We used to feed our children organ meats. I mean, my mum used to feed me brains and liver and kidneys. And now, they're kind of yucky foods. No one really cooks with them. But I really think that chicken liver pate is a great way of going about it. I mean, yeah, I guess it's an acquired taste. But it's a great source of iron for kids and for babies.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah, because you can sneak it into food, as well.

Brittany Darling: Yeah.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: I mean, the only proviso that my daughter made me make was not to add brandy and flambe it beforehand. But still. But what are some of the common misconceptions about starting solids?

Brittany Darling: Look, I think the biggest misconception is, everyone is afraid of allergies, so they try and avoid nuts, they try and avoid all the common allergens. Eggs, seafood, to ... Obviously, they're afraid of their child having a reaction. But the new evidence says that the sooner you introduce those allergenic foods ... and even exposing them to those allergenic foods, so it might be that you're having some peanut butter toast, or a handful of peanuts when you're breastfeeding, so, therefore, you're kind of exposing them to peanuts in that way as well. The sooner you introduce those allergenic foods, the less likely they are to

become allergic to them. There was an Israeli study where they ate these disgusting little processed peanut snacks, which I don't recommend. But the whole point of the study was that these Israeli kids are eating these peanut snacks as one of their first foods, from four to six months. And they have the lowest rates of peanut allergy, out of the whole world.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah. Yeah, I did see that. And I mean, it's part of ... That is an issue. It was one of the things I was going to ask you about, because the statistics, you know, I know you and I both attend a lot of Mind Forum stuff, and we hear the statistics about one in three kids have allergies, and one in four have asthma, one in 10 ADHD, one in 100, autism. They're pretty frightening statistics. But we're kind of protecting our kids, and that's not necessarily the best approach, is it? Not just in foods.

Brittany Darling: Yeah. Yeah. And also, it comes down to the whole hygiene hypothesis, as well. That we're too clean. We're wiping every surface with antibacterial sprays, and ... I mean, I'm all for food safety. Obviously, there needs to be an element of that. But also, it's fine for the kids to play in the dirt. It's fine for you not to ... just to wipe down that, you know, kitchen bench surface with a clean rag and some water. Everything doesn't have to be antibacterial. We don't have to use hand sanitizers before we eat, and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, there is a hygiene element to that, as well.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: So, what are some of the signs of kids, say, lacking in nutrients? You know, like there are obviously different nutrients for different stages, sort of. Six months, twelve months, two years. What are some of these key stages that kids might go through?

Brittany Darling: Yeah. So I mean, the most common nutrient deficiency is iron. So, typically if I'm seeing a kid clinically, it's usually because there's something that's come up, and they're worried about their child. So typically, if I see them in the first year of life, I will text them for iron. I'll do their ferritin studies.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah.

Brittany Darling: And a lot of kids are low in iron. And symptoms are sleeping problem, irritability, behavioural problems. They're tired. They fall asleep in the car constantly. You know, they don't want to walk, they're lethargic. I mean, anyone who has ever been iron deficient knows, you know, you don't feel great when you're iron deficient. So, that's probably the most common nutrient deficiency I see. And the main cause is excessive cow's milk consumption.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Ah. Okay.

Brittany Darling: Yeah.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: That's interesting.

Brittany Darling: There are a lot of kids high on the dairy. They're really having a lot of dairy in their diet, and not a lot of high iron-containing foods. So, we really need to balance

that out. The calcium that's in the milk competes with iron for absorption, and cow's milk is a really crappy source of iron. So that's, yeah, generally the problem.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Wow. And that ... I mean, gee, you know, we need milk for healthy bones. We hear that so often. Well, we hear that.

Brittany Darling: We do, but we don't need that much.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: We hear that.

Brittany Darling: We don't need that much.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah.

Brittany Darling: We find that a lot of kids are really hooked on the dairy.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah.

Brittany Darling: They have really heavy dairy diets. So it'll be, you know, loads of yogurt, milk with every meal, yeah, there's typical, I find, lots of cheeses. Lots of dairy, very dairy-heavy diets, I'm seeing.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, it's incredible. And like, the other thing that strikes me, too, is when kids, now this is before they're introduced to solids, they are ... Well, even while they're being breastfed, the kid may be colicky, and often I think people, women, don't associate what they're eating with their child's colic, as they're breastfeeding them, they don't make that connection, but it can be important. Is that true?

Brittany Darling: Yeah, it can be important. Look, colic's a tricky one. It's so multifactorial. Like, it can be so many different things. It could even be overstimulation. You know, the baby's been out all day, and that can cause colic. Or ... Colic's a really tricky one. It can be, definitely, what the mother's eating, though, and that's always important to address. And if you are going to do an elimination diet, to make sure that you do it properly. Because otherwise, you're not going to know what's working and what's not. But yeah, colic's a tricky one., I can't really give you one thing for that.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah. And the other one-

Brittany Darling: I wish I had the cure.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: The other is, you know, that when kids are ... You know, the caesarean's becoming a more common thing, too. And of course, it's a pretty important event, as they pass down the birth channel, for the gut health.

Brittany Darling: Yeah.



Dr Ron Ehrlich: What should people be doing, when they're had a caesarean and they're sort of starting to feed their kids, and want to get the benefits without having gone through that process? How can we compensate?

Brittany Darling: Yeah. I mean, the best way to give your baby the beneficial bacteria that it needs, having not gone through the vaginal birth canal, is to breastfeed. So, there are studies showing now that, if you exclusively breastfeed for the first six weeks of that baby's life, that the baby's microbiome will actually come to the same, if not, you know, similar to, a baby that was born vaginally.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Oh, great. That's good-

Brittany Darling: So, if you have a caesarean, the best thing you can do is breastfeed. And then if breastfeeding doesn't work out for you, there's always baby probiotics. And I always recommend going through a practitioner for that. A pediatrician, and nutritionist, a naturopath, someone who knows what they're doing, to get the right strain and dosage of that probiotic. But that's another way that you can give them good bacteria to set up their microbiome for the rest of their life, essentially.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And then, in terms of that gut health once we're into the solids, what are some of the things that will help promote that, in terms of the choices there?

Brittany Darling: Yeah. So, fermented foods are a really good one. So yogurt. Sauerkraut. I know that seems like a really weird thing to give to a baby, but you know, some finely cut up pieces of sauerkraut, that's another way of getting good bacteria into them. And also, giving them prebiotic-rich foods. So, prebiotics, things that help the gut bacteria to grow and survive. So these are found in things like legumes. Prebiotics you can also find in ... I've gone blank. Ron, where do I find prebiotics?

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Oh, no, no, no. It's the vegetables, really.

Brittany Darling: Yeah, vegetables. Fibre.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Just incorporating them into the diet. You know.

Brittany Darling: Fibre-containing foods. Yeah, exactly.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah.

Brittany Darling: And some formulas now add gos, which is galactooligosaccharides, to their formula. Because obviously, the evidence is overwhelming, that prebiotics are essential for establishing that healthy microbiome in the first two years of life.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah. Yeah, okay. Yeah, so what would be some tips you'd ... Because of one of the things that, fussy eaters, my goodness. That's got to be the biggest challenge for parents. You know, kids that become fussy eaters. I mean, I guess avoiding them becoming a fussy eater. Let's start with that first.

Brittany Darling: Okay, so the best thing that you can do to avoid fussy eating is to give them a variety of foods. So, bitter foods, things that you wouldn't typically think about giving a baby. We tend to sort of give our baby's sweet purees because we know they're going to love them. Because breast milk is sweet. But giving them pureed broccoli, or pureed bitter green leafies, giving them some legumes pureed. Giving them a really good variety of foods that we typically don't think about giving babies. And definitely incorporating bitter flavours. Again, the sauerkraut is another bitter one. So a variety of textures and flavours. They say that the more texture you can give your child up until that nine-month point. So making sure that your purees ... initially, you'll start off smooth, but as time goes on and as your baby can tolerate it, they become lumpier and thicker in texture. And that also helps to prevent fussy eating.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah, I often think that's it's a reflection of a parent, really. You know, if we've got a kid this a fussy eater, I'm almost, you kind of look back a little bit further. It's like when I see people coming into the surgery, the dentist, for the first time, and the babies, they're children, young children, have never been in before. And they are totally freaked out. And you kind of think, wonder what went on there. You know, we kind of are going to see the dentist. And so, the person says, don't worry, don't worry. Don't be stressed. Don't be stressed, we're just going to see the ... dah dah dah dah dah. And if we did the same thing when we took the kids to the pictures, the cinema, they probably wouldn't want to walk into the cinema either. And it's the same with the fussy eating, too. You know, like, I wonder, oh my kid's a fussy eater. Really? Well, let's have a look at what you've been eating. So this modelling is really important.

Brittany Darling: Yeah.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: But once ... I mean, I can see at nine months, there's going to be, or you know, at the early stages, they're not going to be pushing back on this. But once you've got a fussy eater, say you're about two or three years old, and I can see that they can be pretty headstrong, how do we change a fussy eater? What do you think? What's the ... some tips for that?

Brittany Darling: Yeah. So, there's a whole heap of factors that come into play here. For some kids, it can be a sensory issue. So that's a separate thing, and I think that seeing a speech pathologist that's trained in SOS feeding can be really beneficial in that instance.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Hang on, hang on. SOS feeding?

Brittany Darling: Oh, SOS feeding. What does SOS feeding ... I don't know what it stands for, actually. It's-

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Okay. So, seeing a speech pathologist because there's a problem with the-

Brittany Darling: With-

Dr Ron Ehrlich: ... oral muscle, musculature and ...



Brittany Darling: Yeah, and also sensory issues around feeding. It's a special program that a lot of speech pathologists and also OTs do if there are sensory issues around feeding.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Okay.

Brittany Darling: And it basically is a program to desensitize those sensory sensitivities. But yeah, if you've got a fussy eater, from my perspective as a nutritionist, it would be, you know, looking at what foods they like, and seeing we can slightly alter it. So that we're not completely changing everything, but we're slightly altering it into a more nutritional way. So it might be, if they're having white bread with Kraft peanut butter on toast for breakfast, that we might change that a slightly more wholemeal type, kind of bread, maybe with some seeds in it, and we'll change it to like an ABC nut butter.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah.

Brittany Darling: Instead of just the Kraft peanut butter. And very slowly, slowly making changes to the diet-

Dr Ron Ehrlich: ABC being almond-

Brittany Darling: Almond, cashew, Brazil. Yeah.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Almond, cashew, Brazil. Yeah.

Brittany Darling: Yeah. So just getting a more broad nutrient profile in there. Without rocking the boat too much.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah.

Brittany Darling: Because no one wants to mess with a two or three-year-old. But yeah, just slowly, slowly making changes to the diet. And then also modelling the behaviour. You know, you've got to sit with your children and eat meals. Because it really is a case of monkey see, monkey do.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah.

Brittany Darling: You know, you've got to teach them to sit at the table. Oftentimes, two and three-year-olds are sort of these, you know, roaming ... they'll roam around the room and do a drive-by and pick up something and keep walking. And that's not great for the digestion. So, you've really got to sit at the table with your toddler and model those good, healthy eating behaviours.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah. Yeah. Now listen, what do you think ... Taking a step back from your role as a nutritionist, because we're all on this health journey through life, what do you think the biggest challenge is for people on their health journey through life, in our modern world today?

Brittany Darling: I think the biggest problem is, there is so much information out there, and it is so overwhelming. We don't know whether we should be keto, or paleo, or low carb, or what ... Everyone's kind of looking for the diet that they should be eating. And there's so much confusing information. And I think ultimately, the answer to that is just to eat real food. Food that doesn't have labels, so then you don't have to bother about reading the labels. And knowing where your food comes from, as well. So, trying to shop locally. Trying to support local farmers. Knowing where your meat comes from. Opting for grass-fed, when you can, or organic. And yeah, basically it comes down to eating real foods.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Well, that's a good note to finish on, Brittany, because part of your eBook is a good way of giving people some ideas and choices. So, thank you so much for joining us today. It's been great talking to you. We'll have links to that eBook and your website. And look forward to talking again.

Brittany Darling: Thanks so much, Ron.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Now, we will have links to this great eBook through Brittany website, Whole Food Healing. It's interesting to hear about peanut and other allergies. It's a huge and growing problem. The study that Brittany referred to exposed children to peanuts from a very early age, and found a significantly lower incidence of peanut allergies than those that avoided them completely. I think the exposed group only ended up with about three percent of participants developing a peanut allergy, while the avoidance group ended up with 17 percent of the group developing allergies. A huge difference. The SOS feeding that Brittany also referred to stands for Sequential Oral Sensory approach, and is a way of assessing and treating children with feeding difficulties and weight growth problems, from birth to 18 years old. It integrates posture, sensory and motor and behavioural learnings. It also takes into account medical and nutritional factors. We'll have links to that as well.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: We are also back to that concept of modelling behaviour. And just eating real food. Now, how revolutionary is that. Listen, it's a great eBook. Starting Solids: A Healthy Guide to Feeding Your Baby and Starting a Lifelong Love of Whole Foods. We will have the links to that as well.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And while we're onto links, there's a new app. Our app, Unstress, is out. So go to the iTunes App Store, search and download. As I said, we're going to have links to that on the show notes. So, until next time, this is Dr Ron Ehrlich. Be well.

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