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[00:00:06] Before we get started with today's episode, I would like to quickly read you our podcast disclaimer.

[00:00:13] This podcast is for educational purposes only, and it is not a substitute for professional care by a doctor or other qualified medical professional. You should always speak with your physician or other healthcare professionals before doing any fasting, changing your diet in any way, taking or adjusting any medications or supplements, or adopting any treatment plan for a health problem.

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[00:01:13] All right. And now we'll get started with today's episode. Hi, everyone. It's Megan Ramos here with another Bitesize episode of The Fasting Method podcast. This week, I want to address a common theme that has come into our inbox recently. People have been asking what my preconception fertility diet was like.

[00:01:40] To be quite honest, I hadn't made any changes to my nutritional strategy going in to starting a family. My husband and I began our fertility journey in August 2021. We were initially going to start our family. COVID happened. I thought we would wait just a little bit until the world calmed down, so we put a slight pause on everything. And then we found out that we were moving from Toronto, Canada, to San Francisco, California, in the United States. So we decided to even wait longer until we were situated in California to start our journey. So it was a bit later in life, but it's been a heck of a journey for us. But during this time, I just continued to focus on my nutrition the same way I had for the last several years while I had been in, quote-unquote, 'maintenance'. So what does my diet look like? Well, as a cycling female, I do change my diet from the first half of a cycle to the second half of the cycle.

[00:02:50] So every month, a woman's cycle's divided into two parts. The first part is called the follicular phase, and this is where your ovaries are producing follicles. Around ovulation, one of those follicles has become dominant and releases an egg during the hormonal changes that occur at ovulation. Ovulation marks the middle of the cycle. The second half of the cycle, which is sort of typically day 15 to day 28 if you look at the textbook analysis, is called the luteal phase. And it's during this phase of the cycle where there is an egg, it has been released, it is traveling down the fallopian tubes into the uterus and, if conception happens, this is when it will happen.

[00:03:39] Now, my diet in the first half and the second half, I did make some changes. In the first half of your cycle, estrogen-- or estradiol rather, is the more dominant sex hormone that's being produced. It's a good appetite-suppressing hormone. And during this particular time, you do have some heightened insulin sensitivity as well. So during this part of the cycle, though, because appetite is a bit suppressed, it is easier to fast. Hormones are less implicated if one does fast and being in a state of ketosis or fat-burning or fat-fueling has less of an impact on our sex hormones as well. So during this particular phase, if I did want to do one of my quarterly extended fasts or I felt like I needed to do a 42 or 48, I would do it during the first half of the cycle.

[00:04:42] Now, I'll tell you, the last few years have not been that exciting. We were locked down, we were moving. There was a lot going on, so I didn't do a whole lot of 42s or 48s here and there. It wasn't really warranted. Prior to being at home more often once the pandemic started, I travelled a ton for work and we would often eat out and have no choice but to eat out. And when we eat out at restaurants, even though we think we're eating good quality foods, you might get a fabulous grass-fed steak, for example, or really great wild-caught salmon, but it's cooked on a grill that's covered in rancid vegetable oils.

[00:05:29] Prior to the world slowing down, I would more often do 42s and 48s, but during the last few years leading up to getting pregnant, there wasn't a whole lot of travel happening so, at the most, I would do a 24, really if my schedule called for it. For a long time, I was taking a class on Wednesday evenings. It started at four and I didn't have time to eat dinner beforehand - it would have been too close to lunch - so I just decided to do 24s from Wednesday to Thursday. I did that for several months and it just worked out for my schedule. So I would let my schedule dictate whether or not I did any fasting in this particular phase but, typically, I would do about 16, 18 hours of fasting every day, only eating two meals and not snacking.

[00:06:26] Now, during this first phase of the cycle, I would typically stick to a more ketogenic, low-carb approach to eating, but I would intentionally carb cycle two to three times a week. What does carb cycling look like? Well, carb cycling is when you structurally plan to consume some healthy carbohydrates. And in my books, I lean into tuber vegetables or root vegetables, primarily things like red potatoes, purple potatoes, sweet potatoes. I will lean into those and I have a small portion of them was one of my meals in the daytime. So during this first half of the cycle, I would typically eat more low carb, but I would do carb cycling with some potatoes two to three times a week.

[00:07:19] When ovulation happens, you do start to feel more hungry. There's a big shift in hormones that happens and after ovulation, progesterone becomes the dominant sex hormone and testosterone is more elevated in the second half of the cycle than the first half of the cycle. And these are appetite-driving hormones. They also cause your body to be a little bit more insulin resistant. During the second half of the cycle, it's also important to have a little bit of starch or to periodically raise your glucose some to support progesterone production. So during the second half of the cycle, I wouldn't necessarily do much more than 16 or 18-hour fasts. I still did my 24s on Wednesday because that was convenient, but it wasn't a time where I was going to start to experiment with 42s, 48s, or throw in a five-day fast. During the second half of the cycle, despite there being a little bit more insulin resistance in the body, I would still focus on the same dietary strategies, but I would typically have a smaller portion of starch each day at dinner time. This helps support progesterone production, which largely occurs in the evening, so having it at dinner time can help support its production in the evening and really optimize your sex hormones and your monthly cycles.

[00:08:52] So again, this is what I did for maintenance and this is what I did for supporting fertility. And I carried this diet on for several years because I was getting fabulous results. I wasn't having any symptoms of PMS. I wasn't seeing my weight change at all throughout the month, maybe half a pound of water retention in the second half of my cycle but nothing more than that. I didn't have sleep issues, I didn't have cravings for foods, and I had a very normal and healthy cycle. When they would do examinations of my endometrial lining, it was also quite optimal. So the hormones that were being produced were being produced quite adequately. I would regularly check my hormones using a urine test called

the DUTCH tests from a company called Precision Analytical. And I would check this about every six months just to make sure my hormones were optimal. And in between I would supplement with some bloodwork just to see where my hormones were sitting. So this was, you know, to me confirmation that my diet, my strategy for eating was serving me well.

[00:10:05] So essentially, I just followed the diet that I was on in maintenance, and it carried me into my fertility journey. And to be quite honest, it's largely the diet that I do follow while I'm pregnant. Now, in pregnancy, I do not fast more than 14 hours a day. I do not find I need to snack constantly. My appetite was really awful in my first trimester. I didn't have an appetite. I felt like I could have fasted for three months. It was pretty brutal. The nausea was 24/7. It lasted for a solid 18 weeks of pregnancy. It was bad. So I would eat when I was hungry. I wouldn't try to force eating around certain periods of time if the nausea was really, really awful, but the food choices were all largely the same. Now, I would follow a diet that looked more like the second half of my pre-pregnancy cycle where I would have a little bit of starch every day.

[00:11:12] So, you know, typically in the life of Megan, my diet in pregnancy has been, breakfast, I will have some eggs, I will have some avocado, and I would also have some bacon. Now, I do want to preface this by saying I have really weird bacon. It's not just any bacon. This bacon is 98% meat and it actually is very little fat. It comes in sort of these weird, round, square shapes. It's not like your typical bacon strips and it comes from avocado-fed pigs in my region. So it's a very different fat profile and a very different nutritional profile than the bacon you would find at the supermarket, even the organic stuff with no added nitrates and whatnot. So it is very, very protein-heavy and it does have a bit of a different nutrient profile.

[00:12:17] At lunchtime, this has been my worst time throughout my entire pregnancy for appetite. It has been awful, and trying to supplement protein. And I actually saw this on our Facebook group, the free Facebook group that The Fasting Method does have. People are constantly asking, especially lately, how to get more protein in. So one of the strategies that I would do at lunchtime is to have a cup of broth and add in one to two scoops of collagen, just sort of depending on how I was feeling and how my protein consumption had been going for the day. It's very important to make sure we are getting in adequate protein, especially in pregnancy, but for women and men as we get older, it's also really important. So when you have a cup of bone broth and you add in a scoop of collagen, that's roughly between 20 and 25 grams of protein, depending on the size of the mug that you're using for the broth. So I use a larger mug and I figure I'm getting about 25 grams of protein in just from the broth and the collagen alone.

[00:13:30] Now, collagen is not a complete protein. There have been a lot of people that have reached out and asked me that question recently. It's not a complete protein, but it does contain a variety of essential amino acids as well as some non-essential amino acids that are really nice to get into the diet. So it definitely enhances the protein quality, amino acid quality that you do intake on a daily basis. And I will say I am recording this podcast eight months pregnant and I do not have one single stretch mark. Meanwhile, my mother got them almost instantaneously the day she became pregnant with me. So I thought, genetically, I'm doomed. It's kind of like they always make us feel like we should feel when it comes to genetics and our health outcomes. So I've been taking my broth and collagen for a very long time on my eating days, and I've continued to use it as a really great lunchtime source. And it's just easy to go down.

[00:14:35] Something else that I would typically have for lunch is cold food. So if you're out there and pregnant and struggling on nausea, cold food is your friend. And I love a good full-fat, A2-only sheep yogurt. There's one that I get in my neighborhood. It's a farm, I believe, called Bellwethers. It's a California-based company. I think it's in Sonoma, but I'm pretty sure you can get it across the United States. But at the end of the day, it's A2 casein, 100%, so non-inflammatory dairy source and it's full-fat sheep, so it's just amazing. It's a little tangy. And to it I add things like nuts and seeds. I'll add in some berries to it as well, and that largely makes up my lunch. The sheep yogurt itself is actually quite high in protein and excellent in fat, so that's something that I would have at lunch.

[00:15:36] And then dinner, I've had a huge meat aversion, which is just crazy. To know me is to know that I do like my animal proteins, and I've really struggled, but I seem to go on waves with things. There's always something that I can tolerate really well, so I've had chunks of time, like three-week spans of eating the same thing over and over and over again for dinner. Luckily, most of those things have been able to be some form of grass-fed beef, which I think's really important to get in during pregnancy as well. So I would have that, a vegetable, and then a small portion of one of my colored potatoes or sweet potato at dinner time.

[00:16:20] And that has been it. Now, I do look forward to my palate expanding, some, post-pregnancy and enjoying food again. [laughs] It has been difficult, I will say that. Those are foods that I ate very often over the last several years and the foods that I'm eating almost on a daily basis now.

[00:16:42] Now, pre-pregnancy, when I was having two meals a day, I would alternate and sometimes have, you know, that bacon, avocado, eggs at lunchtime or, you know, eggs and avocado and salmon at lunchtime instead. So those would be some of the changes going from the three meals that I'm having in pregnancy to two meals pre-pregnancy.

[00:17:06] So I hope that helps. I know a lot of people have actually recently booked single sessions with me to learn about pre-conception nutrition. There are some amazing resources out there. I'm a huge fan of Lily Nichols. She has a great book called Real Food Pregnancy. I highly recommend it. I would definitely get the book because there's a lot of information, a lot of great references, and some awesome recipes, too, so you're going to miss out on the Audible version from that, but it's still great to listen to. I actually own it on Audible, too, so I've been able to go through and refresh over the years. So I'm just a huge fan. But really it's about food quality. Food quality means higher nutrients and just sticking with those real foods.

[00:17:59] So, everyone, you know, we wish you well on your journeys wherever you are. And even if you're not cycling women, even if you're a man who's not pregnant, these are still dietary strategies that are very helpful for you. Men can carb cycle, post-menopausal women can carb cycle. You know, we still need to prioritize protein. There's some really great and creative ways to get protein in with some broth and collagen and things like sheep yogurt, adding them onto meals or making meals out of them.

[00:18:33] All right, everyone, thank you again, and we'll be back next week with another episode. Bye for now.