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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. It's a special one today. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors, [AG1](#). In today's episode, we are talking about what we put in our bodies. And one of my favorite things to start my day off with is AG1. I seriously feel different when I drink it. I feel like I have more energy. My brain clears up. It truly helps me kick off my day.

AG1 is a foundational nutritional supplement that delivers daily nutrients and gut health support and is backed by multiple research studies. So you can trust what you're putting in your body. I just mix one scoop of AG1 with really cold water, hand to heaven, my water was not cold this morning, and it was not my favorite. I love it so much when it's very cold. I throw in some frozen lemon juice, and then I stir it up, shake it up, and I'm good to go.

If there's one product I trust to support my whole body health, it is AG1. And that's why I've partnered with them for so long. It's easy and satisfying to start your journey with AG1. Try AG1 and get a free one-year supply of vitamin D3K2 and five free AG1 travel packs with your first purchase at drinkag1.com/soundsfun. That's drinkag1.com/soundsfun. Check it out.

Intro: Today on the show, you guys are in for a special treat. I get to talk with my new friend, Melissa Urban, who is the co-founder of Whole30, which centers around holistic health, reducing inflammation, rebalancing hormones, and so much more.

Since its inception in 2009, Melissa's Whole30 program has empowered over 2 million people to make smarter choices about their health. And two of those people who have been massively affected by Whole30 are me and my mom. So we thought, why not bring on Mrs. F Downs too? We both got to speak of our experience with Whole30 and how it has impacted the way we feel. We love talking about spiritual health, emotional health, and physical health here at That Sounds Fun. So I'm excited for this conversation.

Melissa also has a brand new book releasing tomorrow called *The New Whole30: The Definitive Plan to Transform Your Health, Habits, and Relationship with Food*, which really builds upon the mission of Whole30 and offers an even more accessible program. Plus a hundred new recipes, including plant-based ones as well. This is so fun. Y'all are going to love this. My mom is an all-star co-host. It is "bring your mom to work" day.

So here's my conversation with my friend, Melissa Urban, and my Mom, Mrs. F Downs.

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Annie: Melissa Urban, welcome to That Sounds Fun. I am so thrilled and honored that you are here.

Melissa: Annie, I've been looking forward to this for like two months now. I can't wait.

Annie: I know, me too. Thank you so much. I cannot wait for us to dive into the power of when your whole self comes together, including how you eat and how you live. Also, you've been very generous because I said, We need to have another guest on the show because none other than Mrs. F. Downs herself. Mom, hello, Pam Downs. Welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Melissa: Hey, I'm so excited. I'm on the podcast.

Annie: I am too. We are so excited. I cannot believe it. Normally we ask at the front what sounds fun, but we'll save it to the end. I want us to just jump in. Melissa, can you back us up? Will you kind of tell us the top-level vision of Whole30? Because we're not here to talk about a diet. Diet culture is annoying and boring.

Melissa: No.

Annie: But there's something about what we're putting in our bodies affecting who we are. Can you kind of talk about where this all started for you?

Melissa: Yes. At its heart, Whole30 is an elimination and reintroduction program designed to identify hidden food sensitivities, restore a healthy emotional relationship with food and your body, and create new healthy habits for navigating stress and discomfort. That's a tall order. But it's the program that's been around since 2009. It's helped millions of people change their health habits in relationship with food.

What *The Whole30* does is it takes this idea that there is no one size fits all when it comes to diet. And everybody's like, yes, that makes sense. Of course, there isn't. You have to figure out what works for you. And then people say, how do I figure out what works for me? And Whole30 is really the answer to how. You eliminate, you reintroduce, you compare your experience, and then that gives you a blueprint for the foods that do and don't work well in your unique body and allows you to take that information and create your own sustainable, joyful food freedom plan, whatever that looks like for you.

Annie: Yeah, this beautiful, *The New Whole30* book that is releasing, I mean, even in the beginning you say like, Hey, as you start reintroducing, we're not trying to have you lose weight. That's not what this is about. This is can you find a sustainable... we'll use the word diet here, meaning what you eat, not a diet. But have a sustainable diet for your health and for your flourishing as a human.

Melissa: Yes. You know, we've all been indoctrinated into diet culture. We've all been indoctrinated into the idea that your body size is correlated with your health, that people who are in smaller bodies are more worthy and more valuable, and more moral. There's been moral attachments to the food that we eat, that it's labeled good or bad, and we're labeled good or bad based on what we eat.

What we try to do is provide an alternative to help people figure out the foods that make them feel their best without focusing on the scale, without trying to make themselves smaller, without that diet culture language or philosophy. We don't feature before and after photos in bikinis. There are so many things that we do differently to give people an alternative space that still allows them to play with food and decide for themselves which foods work best outside of that kind of environment we've all grown up with.

Annie: Okay, Mama, why are you here? Why did I use my one card to call my mother and say, please come be on the podcast? Why did we pick today, Pam Downs?

Mrs. F. Downs: Well, my doctor had done a blood test last fall that showed I was not absorbing vitamins. Then my homeopathic doctor and she kind of worked together and gave me supplements to try. None of it was working. Earlier this year, my homeopathic doctor said, "I want you to do Whole30 and then let's reintroduce and see if the reset makes a difference and if you can tell what it is." And oh my gosh, I have not felt this good in years. I mean, my energy level went through the roof. It was just amazing. The reintroduction very clearly identified that both gluten and corn and nitrites are bad for me.

Annie: It did not take us long getting home from dinner on vacation for Mom to say, "Nope, gluten is absolutely not coming back." Okay, Melissa, so you've got me. I should tell you my story. I was diagnosed with PCOS 20 years ago. I do not say I have PCOS because I don't have it. It doesn't have me, but I was diagnosed with it and insulin resistance. So I've spent my whole life doing what much smaller body people do and my body not changing at all.

So at some point, thank God, I learned how to, best as I could, untie my size to my health, from my health. And in that, started going like, Well, what actually makes me feel different and what actually gives me more? And Whole30 was the trick for me of going like, Oh my gosh, my body does not let... which is what they tell

everyone with PCOS ever is gluten and dairy do not help you at all. And the more I live in that lifestyle, the better I feel.

So you've got a 44-year-old woman and a 70-something-year-old woman — Mama, I won't throw out your... Well, that's your demographic, a perimenopausal, premenopausal, and a postmenopausal woman. Talk to me about what you're seeing generationally like this. Are you hearing this story a lot from a 40-year-old and a 70-year-old?

Melissa: I'm hearing this story a lot. Yes. It's so interesting that our fastest-growing demographic is like age 55 and up. And I think it's because... So I just turned 50. I am also in menopause officially. Like my uterus is like a rusty old bucket, we have decided, right? Which is cool. I'm here for it. I'm down for it. But I think what we have been sold especially is that as you get older, especially as women, stuff just starts to go, you're just not going to feel good. You're not going to have as much energy. Your hormones are going to go all over the place and there's not really anything that we can do about it. So sorry. Good luck. May the odds be ever in your favor.

And there are so many women who are my age and my mom's age, because my mom's done the Whole30 several times as well, who are like, No, that's not good enough. I still want to have energy. I still want to sleep better. I want smoother digestion. I want to be able to exercise and maintain my movement routine. I don't want to go on prescription medication for my high blood pressure or my high cholesterol or be told that I'm prediabetic. Like there has to be something that I can do.

The Whole30 isn't going to fix everything, right? It's not a medical cure by any means. But food can have a really powerful impact. And if you go through the experience as you did with, you know, both of you with eliminating, reintroducing, and discovering that certain foods just don't work well for you. And in the absence of those foods, you can all of a sudden have more energy, have better sleep, have fewer cravings, have smoother digestion. There's no area of your life that that does not spill into. And that's the real power of Whole30.

Annie: Mom, will you talk about what did... when you say you have more energy now than you did three months ago, or than you did at the beginning of the year, what does that actually look like in your every day? I really don't know this.

Mrs. F. Downs: I'll tell you the thing that first cued me that I had more energy. Normally, I do dinner and after dinner, I sit down and it's everything I can do to go back in there and put up the food and clean the kitchen is like kills me. I realized after, I guess maybe three weeks, I just jumped back up after dinner and went in there and I

cleaned everything up and put it away. I went, "Oh my gosh, I don't feel tired. I just felt great."

So it's been very interesting how much better I feel. And I feel like I'm sleeping more productively too. I've always been a pretty good sleeper, but it feels like it's, I'm resting more than I was.

Annie: Melissa, will you talk about that energy part? Because I think a lot of us, and you talk about this in *The New Whole30*, a lot of us don't realize food is hurting our energy level because we just go like, We don't know what it's like to not have pizza. And so we don't know that the reason we're slumpy... I always say that gluten makes me feel like a tranquilized bear cub. I can do it on my days off if I'm willing to feel that way, but I don't often want to feel that way. How have we not noticed?

Melissa: I can't tell you how many people have said to me until their Whole30, I had no idea that eating and your stomach hurting every time you ate wasn't normal. I didn't know that wasn't normal. And what happens is that we just become so used to the way that we feel that it feels normal.

Before my first Whole30, I used to have to go to the bathroom... like it happened real fast. And I was not regular. And I felt like I just... everything moved too fast. And it never occurred to me that that wasn't normal, because that's all I knew.

So often what happens is people don't realize that they're having these negative symptoms, because they've just, you know, kind of been adopted into their everyday life. And until they start feeling better and achieve this sort of new normal, people will say, "I didn't know that I didn't need sugar and caffeine at 2 p.m. I can now work and focus from lunch until the end of my day and feel great. I didn't know that I didn't have to sit down after dinner, I can still go about my evening and clean and tidy and do things and still feel like I have the energy for that."

So once people realize that there is a new level of normal accessible to them, then it's like, Well, I don't want to go back to that. I'm not going to go back to that. And so it really helps to motivate people to maintain these healthy habits, because they've discovered that there is such a clear correlation between what they eat and how they feel.

Annie: Whenever I'm doing a spiritual fast, whether it's a day or a couple days, whenever, and I get a headache, I'm always like, "Are you paying attention?" Because something you're putting in your body is you are withdrawing from when you're not putting it in your body. And so it just reopens my eyes to... And spoiler alert, it's sugar. Spoiler alert. I love me some ice cream. So it's sugar for me. I know that.

But it's really interesting with all three of our decades represented here and thinking about all the men and women listening, I mean, it's hard to believe that how we adjust eating after all these years, quote, quote, would actually make a difference. How long is it going to take if someone's like, you know what, I actually do go to the bathroom really quickly after eight or actually don't feel...? I mean, Mom said it took her three weeks to feel different. Is that pretty normal?

Melissa: It actually is normal. And that's so remarkable. I think even for me is that the body really has the ability to adjust that quickly. And some things take longer. It took me about six weeks to fully sort out my digestion after my first Whole30.

For people who have autoimmune conditions, or chronic pain or chronic fatigue, or joint pain and swelling, it can take longer to really see the full kind of scope of benefits. But what we determine on *The Whole30* after watching millions of people go through it over the last 15 years, is that days like 13, 14 are the sweet spot for a lot of people.

Annie: Oh, interesting,

Melissa: And sometimes people wake up and it's like you flip a switch. And you wake up and you are in energizer bunny mode and your mood is amazing, your energy is amazing and steady and high and your self-confidence is up and people are hitting PRS in the gym and their skin is clear and people are telling them they're glowing.

For other people, it's a bit more of a slow accumulation of benefits. But it tends to happen where just like Ms. Down said, you know, right sometime around week three, I realized I didn't have to sit down after dinner. And it's like, Oh my gosh, that's a really big change. But it's remarkable the benefits that you can see in just 30 days of elimination. Like remarkable. That's why the program works so well is because it's a short enough period to feel attainable. But people can see radically transformative benefits.

Annie: Mom, I talked to the women that are in your age bracket. When your doctor said, "Hey, the way to feel better is to adjust what you're eating," did you think I can't do this? It'll be too hard for you and Dad together. This isn't going to be fun. I mean, to be fair, it is not as fun as just eating pizza three times a day. So, Mom, what were some of your feelings?

Mrs. F. Downs: Well, I really didn't hesitate at all. Because you know, Dad and I really eat fairly healthy anyway. I had given up desserts in 2017. So I didn't have any...

Annie: Has it been that long?

Mrs. F. Downs: Yeah.

Annie: And we still offer every time we eat. We're always like, "Mom, do you want some of this?" She's like, "Literally stop." Seven years.

Mrs. F. Downs: So I use the day-by-day and wrote down my food and stuff. I loved it. But you talked a lot about the sugar dragon. And every time you did, I was just like, I don't have that.

Annie: That's the one that she slayed a few years ago.

Mrs. F. Downs: I know that was done. But I really didn't hesitate to do it because I knew that I want to feel better. I don't want to feel like this, you know. And I knew that we could do it. I knew your Dad will cooperate because he wants to eat healthy anyway.

The only negative of the whole experience was I just had to get used to chopping and cooking as many vegetables as I did. Because where we normally did them for dinner, now I'm doing them for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. But once my energy level came up, that was no big deal. You know, it was not a problem.

Annie: Talk about that, Melissa. Talk about roadblocks like that, where people go... So you should know about me. I don't use my kitchen. It's a hallway with a fridge in it. I mean, I'm not a cooker. Though Pam Downs taught me. You did, Mama. It's not on you. It's on me. You taught me how to cook. But talk about the added time that Whole30 does require if you're really going to do it.

Melissa: It can require some added time. We have a ton of resources about planning and preparation. Planning and prep are key on the Whole30. Even if you already eat healthy, it really is a different animal when you're completely eliminating things like added sugar or, you know, grains from your diet, you've got to read every label.

What I will say, though, is that people find their groove pretty quickly. Some people want to meal prep for an entire week, all on a Sunday night, and they get it all done in two hours. Other people like me, I like to meal prep a little bit every day, I find chopping vegetables incredibly stress relieving. I love it. I love it. It's my like nighttime routine, where I'll throw on an audiobook, and I'll chop my veggies, and do my meal prep.

So people kind of find their groove. And as with any new habit, it gets easier with practice. And what I find, especially when couples do it together, or family members or roommates, that time that you spend in the kitchen, the idea of going

through the recipe book with my kid and being like, What do you want for dinner tonight? And he's like, let's do turkey taco casserole. And then we're making a list together and we're maybe prepping together. That time spent in the kitchen, a lot of people say to me, has really felt like quality time and it has brought people closer together.

You know, I think the act of self-care and creating a meal for yourself also feels really good in it. It gives people a sense of pride but also helps to build their kitchen confidence at the same time.

Annie: I'm curious, because I think this is true. Mama, tell me if this is true for you. But I think a thing that we all would love is food freedom. Right? I think there is, especially those of us who grew up really in diet culture and like 20-year-old Annie didn't care all about food freedom, she wanted to be as small as possible, and then would not hit what the goals were. But how do we do a thing like a Whole30 that feels like a lot of focus on food, but actually end up in food freedom. So many people listening are probably already going, I don't want to be on a diet. I don't want it. Like, why is Annie doing this? But I think it leads to food freedom.

Melissa: Yeah, it does. That's the whole point of The Whole30. The Whole30 would not exist if it was just a prescriptive diet. In fact, it's important to point out that it's not. We don't eliminate foods on the Whole30 because they're bad. We don't think that everyone should avoid them.

We eliminate them because according to the literature, they can be problematic to varying degrees across a broad range of people. So this is a self-experiment to help you figure out the foods that are and are not problematic for you. But once you go through elimination and reintroduction, which elimination is 30 days reintroduction is maybe 10, you now have this super solid blueprint that tells you gluten works like this in my body, dairy works like this in my body, corn works like this in my body, sugar works like this.

And then it doesn't matter what Time Magazine says next week or what this wellness influencer starts talking about. You know the foods that work best for you. And then you get to apply that in whatever way you choose.

So you already said, you know, gluten is not my friend, and it leaves me just feeling sad and tired and down. But if it's a day off, and it's worth it, I'm going to eat the gluten. And that is your food freedom. We're not saying don't ever eat these foods again. We're not saying if you have negative consequences you should cut them out of your diet.

What we're saying is, now you have the tools to be able to identify for yourself the foods that are worth it when you want it. And you know how to include them in your diet in a way that feels joyful and delicious and honors cultures and family traditions, but in a way that still keeps you feeling your best. That is food freedom.

Annie: Mama, tell me why it matters to you to be as healthy as possible.

Mrs. F. Downs: Well, mainly for my family, you know, because I just want to be here for them and I want to do everything the Lord has called me to do with my life. And I don't want my health to be a deterrent to that. So I just wanted to be the best I could be.

And I'll tell you, it really has led to food freedom for me because, you know this, Annie, most of my life, I have participated in a weight loss program. I mean, I've paid the monthly subscription to their website. And I canceled it yesterday.

Annie: Hey, okay, Mama. Okay, Mama. You did? Really? You canceled it yesterday?

Mrs. F. Downs: I did. Because I'm like, I don't need it anymore. I don't ever need it again.

Annie: Wow. That's cool, Mom.

Melissa: That's moving. Honestly. Truly. That's the best part of my job is listening to stories like that. It makes me so happy.

Mrs. F. Downs: It's been great. And you provided so many wonderful resources. I mean, the Real Plans app had so many great recipes on it. The book's so good. And then Day by Day was so good. I mean, you really have designed it so that it was so easy to do, and understanding the reintroduction was so easy too. So thank you.

Annie: I mean, to me, that's a super important part, Melissa, is the reintroduction, because that's you get the knowledge that you didn't have. I mean, multiple times in the last few weeks, Mom's been like, Let me tell you what doesn't work for my body that I didn't know.

Melissa: Reintroduction is such an important part of Whole30. And I think for the first several years of the program, I didn't focus on reintroduction as much because there were so many resources to be created and so much to talk about during elimination. People found eliminating the foods that they loved really challenging. So we really built out that portion of the program. But then I started to realize that we're kind of skipping reintroduction or blowing it off. And I'm like, Well, you're missing half of the learning experience. You're going to give up these foods that you love for 30

days and you're not going to learn as much as you could or anything at all about how foods work for you if you don't reintroduce.

So we've really been hammering that reintroduction is part of the Whole30. You haven't finished the Whole30 until you've reintroduced. But that also gets to be the fun part where you get to bring back the foods that you've missed. Reintroduction is just as much about identifying the foods that do work well for you as it is the foods that don't. And then being like, "Sweet. I love my hot buttered popcorn. I love my hummus. I love my black beans. I love my white rice and my oatmeal. And all of those foods work well for me. So I eat them every day now and I feel great about that. And it gives me the confidence to say yes."

Annie: Mom, tell your black bean story that you told me yesterday.

Mrs. F. Downs: Okay, I didn't obey your instructions. Tom and I have this recipe we just love that has cauliflower rice and black beans and corn.

Annie: At the same time.

Mrs. F. Downs: That was my first time to do them. I did them together, it did not go well, and I have no idea which one it was. I tested again today and I know corn's the problem.

Annie: Corn's the one. You figured it out.

Mrs. F. Downs: Well, for sure. But beans may be too. I'm going to have to do beans separately as well. But I didn't follow your instructions, I'm sorry.

Melissa: I will not say I told you so. I absolutely promise I'm not going to do that. But that is why you reintroduce only one food group at a time. You really treat it like a scientific experiment so that you can figure out. And you don't have those confounding factors of like, wow, now I feel like I've been hit by a truck. Was it the gluten or the dairy or the wine or the sugar?

Annie: Yeah, you don't know.

[00:23:37] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Shopify](#). Listen, I love every single lemonade stand I see in the summer. Little entrepreneurs getting out there. And you know what could make their checkout experience easy when no one's carrying cash, which I am never carrying cash? Shopify. Okay, fine.

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Remember that link and really every other link you could ever hope for are in the show notes below or we'll send them to you every Friday in our AFD Week in Review email. You do not want to miss it. You are getting the best of us in our weekly email. So you can sign up for that in the show notes as well.

Sponsor: Listen, we all love something that is custom to us. Clothes that have been tailored to finish just right or makeup that's the right shade for our skin tone, a piece of art custom made exactly the way we like it. That's why you've got to check out [Prose](#). It's custom hair care. And I'm telling you, every time I use Prose, I notice so many benefits, healthier, shinier hair being some of them. And y'all talk about my hair all the time.

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Now back to our conversation with Melissa and Mama.

[00:27:13] <music>

Annie: Melissa, your new book, *The New Whole30* comes out August 6th. Today they are hearing this on August 5th. So it comes out tomorrow. Tell me what is *The New Whole30*? Like kind of explain to us if this just worked for Mom, the plan she's had and if it's what the millions of us who have participated in the Whole30 program have done, what is new about *The New Whole30*?

Melissa: I wrote the flagship book, *The Whole30*. I wrote it in 2014. It was published in 2015. That was 9, 10 years ago. And a lot has changed over the last 10 years. In part, the science has been updated. We have a lot more science about how various foods work in our bodies. And so I really wanted to go through and do a deep dive into all of the different rules that we have for the Whole30 and make sure that we still have solid scientific footing. And you'll find a few small but effective rule changes in the new book.

Annie: Wow.

Melissa: In addition, I've gone through a really big evolution over the last 10 years. I went through a very public divorce and business split. I had a baby. I got a concussion and I've been navigating like chronic illness from post-concussion syndrome. All of these things have really changed the way that I talk to myself, the amount of empathy that I have for myself, my own understanding of my privilege, a better understanding of other people's lived experience. And so when I started talking to myself differently, with more grace, with more empathy, with more compassion, that naturally kind of impacted the way that I talked to Whole30 years.

So in this new book, you'll find a more welcoming, inclusive, more compassionate tone. I look back on some of the things I wrote in 2014, and it was authentic to me

then. But I'm like, I wouldn't say it like that today. I don't like that I said it like that. That doesn't feel good. So I was able to update that in the new book.

We've got the new plant-based Whole30 program. So if you don't eat any animal protein or any animal products, you can still do the Whole30 with our 100% vegan plant-based. There's just as many resources and a shopping list and a meal template and FAQ. Then we've got over 100 all-new recipes because our food landscape has changed a lot too and we wanted to really represent all of the diverse cultures in our Whole30 community with culturally appreciative and inspired dishes in the new book.

Annie: I mean, I thought it was really interesting in the... I mean, I just like reading this and loving it. I feel like I might want a bigger straw in this drink. But the part where you say, which program is right for me? You're like, "How much meat do you eat? How much meat do you not eat? Do you want to just do dairy and eggs?" I mean, you literally lay out which one is right.

I would imagine over the last decade when you say there is more science, it's because scientists can study people who've done Whole30.

Melissa: I certainly hope so. I really hope that there is. Listen, you know I've always said, Annie, I've never had a good idea in my whole life. Any good idea I've ever had related to Whole30 has come from my community. And so we had so many people who were saying, I want to do the Whole30, I want to be a part of the community, but I don't really feel welcomed because I can't do the original Whole30 as written. And it was like, we can do something about that. We started work on the Plant-Based Whole30 in 2020. So yeah.

Annie: That's awesome. What a gift to update it and go like... it shows a lot of humility too, Melissa, to say, "I'm allowed to grow and change, and so here is my growth and my change inside of this program that so many of you already love." I just think that is really impressive. That's beautiful leadership that I will model decisions after myself.

Melissa: Thank you.

Annie: Mom, do you have other questions? What else was coming to your mind for Melissa?

Mrs. F. Downs: Well, one of the questions I had is you talk about not trying to use Whole30 non-compliant... I mean, compliant ingredients to make an item of food that you really shouldn't be having, which I understand completely. Once you are in the reintroduction phase and you realize you aren't going to ever have gluten again,

does that rule still apply or is it bad to use gluten-free flour and make some of the things that you can't eat anymore? I mean, what's your opinion about that?

Melissa: It's a great question. First of all, nothing you do with food is ever bad. Nothing. Ever. Unless you use food to like, I don't know, kick a kitten. Nothing you do with food is ever bad. Not happening. Unless you throw your bread at somebody maybe while they're driving.

So what you're referring to is called the pancake rule on the Whole30. And what it says is that you're not allowed during the elimination phase to recreate baked goods or pasta or cereal or chips or french fries with technically compatible ingredients. Because if the goal of the program is changing your emotional relationship with food and changing how you respond to stressful situations or discomfort, if you can still eat potato chips and french fries and brownies and bread on the Whole30, your habits and your emotional relationship with food probably won't change that much. There's a lot of research built into the pancake rule mostly done on the subject of addiction and recovery that we've applied here.

Once you are through reintroduction and into your food freedom, now you get to explore, well, I can't do bread with gluten in it, but how does a gluten-free bread feel? Does it satisfy that knack, like, you know, that urge to put something in my sandwich? Does it impact my digestion favorably? Do I really enjoy it?

We use a Canyon Bakehouse gluten-free bread. It's really good toasted, and that's what we use around the house. So I want you to explore that in your food freedom. If you can't do dairy or you don't do corn, could you do a corn-free tortilla chip substitute in your food freedom? And does it taste just as good? And do you enjoy it just as much? And does it feel better in your system? And if it does, that feels like a wonderful swap to me. And I'm so glad that those products are available now for you.

Annie: I told Mom when we were on vacation, our family was on vacation, we were... I can't remember, Mom. It was burgers or sandwiches or something. And she said, Do you want me to get gluten-free bread? And I was like, that's not what I use gluten-free bread for.

Like at this point I've learned that that actually doesn't make the experience better. I'm just as happy with a burger with lettuce wrap at this point because the gluten-free bread isn't as enjoyable to me as a real one.

Melissa: Exactly.

Annie: But there are times where I'm like, Can I get a cake? Can I get a cupcake? Can I get a cookie? And I'm all about those. Or toast, like you said. Like a grilled cheese is still in my life. It just is a little bit different. But on a normal day, I'm like, don't waste my money or my time on gluten-free bread because it's not the best.

Melissa: I feel like that about the gluten-free pastas. I love Banza pasta. My kid loves them. I buy them all the time for my kid, but they don't work in my stomach. My digestion does not like them. So it's one of those things where the substitute may be a better fit, it may not be a better fit. But in your food freedom, you get to play around with that and figure that out.

Annie: I love that. Mom, what's the thing you wanted that you want to remake now?

Mrs. F. Downs: There's really only one sweet kind of thing I like, which is a particular grocery store's blueberry muffin up at the lake house. That's the only sweet kind of thing I eat, and I only eat it at the lake house. So I want to try to make a blueberry bread out of gluten-free flour that would satisfy that.

Annie: Oh, there you go. Also, Mom, we can shout out that grocery store, Ingles.

Mrs. F. Downs: Ingles!

Annie: Thank you, Ingles! This is a reverse sponsor. Ingles has not paid us to talk about them, but we don't mind saying go to your local Ingles and try the blueberry muffin because it is excellent.

Melissa: I love it. But I bet Danielle Walker would have an awesome recipe for that. Just saying.

Annie: I know.

Mrs. F. Downs: I bet she would.

Melissa: I'm sure she would.

Annie: We should look. Yeah, that's a great idea, Mom. I mean, Melissa, even hearing Mom describe it like that is like she's not trying to make a muffin, she's trying to make bread. She's like, let's just make a bread. Mom, will you still only eat it at the lake house or are you going to eat it at home too?

Mrs. F. Downs: I don't know. It depends on how healthy it is. I looked at one that had a lot of zucchini in it and the blueberries. If it winds up being a healthy alternative, then I might eat it, you know, more than just at the lake.

The other thing I'm going to keep doing is having vegetables for breakfast, because I am now a major fan of all the hash recipes that y'all had. I just love all of those. They're so good.

Melissa: I love that.

Mrs. F. Downs: Yeah, that's something I'm going to keep. I'm going to keep doing that.

Annie: You mean like chopped up potatoes with other vegetables too and then you put eggs on it?

Mrs. F. Downs: Well, you can or you can... There's one that had sausage in it. Several of them you could put the egg on top. I basically love the one that has sausage in it. And because I could use the Whole30-compliant sausages, it worked great. Now that I know nitrites don't like me, I'll probably keep using all the Whole30 compliant.

Annie: We had what you might call a bacon mishap at the lake house, Melissa. A little bit of a bacon mishap.

Mrs. F. Downs: Because I'd done Applegate the day before and there was no problem at all, but I just did run out. So when I made bacon the next day, I just used the regular bacon and... Not good.

Annie: Even her energy pretty quickly, Melissa, she was like, I don't feel like I felt yesterday.

Melissa: That's the thing, right? Food impacts us in such wildly different ways. It's impossible for me to make any recommendation that says everyone should eat this food or everyone should stay away from this food. So what you have now is this solid self-experiment where you know, based on your own personal experience, that this does not work well for you. And then it doesn't matter what anybody, including me, says about nitrites. You know they don't work for you, and you're just going to keep buying the Applegate No Sugar Bacon, because you know that makes you feel good.

Annie: I'm the same way with collagen, sadly. It does not work in my body. And everybody says, stronger joints, collagen, and my body just doesn't like it. So I'm like, I'm gonna have to eat more blueberries and beets and all the other things because my body does not like collagen in pill form.

Melissa, talk to us for just a minute, as our bodies are changing, everybody listening's body is changing, but particularly 40s, 50s, 60s, our bodies are changing as menopause is coming. How does what we eat... The other option is, you know what, my body's gonna change. I'm just gonna eat what I wanna eat. I've looked as hot as I'm gonna look. Here, I just wanna now... you know, I just want it to be easy. Talk to us about why, as our body's changing — we're thinking about our emotional health and our spiritual health — why does it matter for us to kind of dig in on this versus going, I'm old enough that I can quit doing this now?

Melissa: Well, your mom already said it. I want to feel my best. I don't just want to live to be old enough to be able to play with my grandkids. My kid's 11. It's going to be a few years. I want to be old and energetic and vibrant and full of life and full of energy and still able to keep up and feel really good and not have that experience wipe me out for the next three days.

We are always changing. Our context is always changing. Our stress levels, our activity levels, our bodies, our environment, all of that is always changing. So I often will say reintroduction is a lifelong process, a lifelong experiment.

Even in my food freedom, I haven't done a Whole30 since 2020, and I probably won't ever do one again. I don't need another one. I know what works well for me at this point in my journey. But I'm always playing around with my food freedom because in some seasons where I'm really active, I need way more carbohydrate, and all the rice and the oats feel great. And in other seasons where maybe my stress levels are high and I'm traveling a lot, gluten is never worth it. It's not worth it in those contexts because I don't want to feel bloated. I don't want to feel slow mentally and I don't want to break out before I do media.

So I'm always thinking about: is it worth it? Do I want it? I think the Whole30 can be a great reset for people to come back to periodically if they feel like either a life situation, a holiday, a vacation, a stressful event, a change in life status, maybe the grieving process, or just a slow slide where you realize you haven't been paying attention as much and now all of a sudden you don't feel as good. The Whole30 is a fantastic reset to get you back to that place where you get another experience to figure out what works well for you and you get back to a place where you know you have felt good in the past.

Annie: But even if you say... this is a personal question. Even if you say, okay, here's *The New Whole30* cookbook, here's all these recipes, like we don't have to stop eating the recipes after 30 days, right?

Melissa: No.

Annie: Like we can keep... okay, okay, great. I'm like, you never done Whole30 again, but these recipes are insane. Like I want to keep trying them.

Melissa: They are. Most people find that after their Whole30 is over, the meal prep, the cooking, as your mom said, the cooking of the vegetables in the morning, it just feels routine. And most people feel really comfortable and confident. They've already identified like five or ten Whole30 meals that are hands-down runaway favorites.

I might take a Whole30 recipe, like a chili, sweet potato chili, and I'll add black beans to it because I know that works well for me. Or I might take a different taco dish and instead of wrapping it in lettuce wrap, sometimes I might do a corn tortilla because that works well for me. But the bulk of my meals are still Whole30 because they make me feel my best and they're so easy to prepare at this point. And my whole family loves them.

There's never a moment where I serve somebody a Whole30 meal, if you've come over for dinner and somebody's been like, what is this weird food? Everybody always just says, like, this is delicious. I love it. Nobody ever realizes that anything is missing. And that's what I love about our recipes.

Annie: My favorite story of Danielle Walker's recipe is I legitimately cried the first time I had her ranch. Because I had been without dairy for about a year and then I tasted it and I was like, Wait, I'm going to be all right. I'm going to have a normal life. I'm not going to have to live without this forever. And so it is amazing.

[00:40:58] <music>

Sponsor: Listen, y'all know this about me. I do not love going to the grocery store, so being able to order all my groceries and have them delivered is a game changer. I try to stick with healthy options, and that's why I love Thrive Market. It makes shopping for healthy groceries easy, stress-free because I don't have to go anywhere, and tailored to me and you and your family needs.

There's over 90 plus ways to filter your grocery aisles, like low sugar, high protein, kid snacks, nut-free, and you'll save so much time and find exactly what you're looking for, all while having it delivered right to your door. They have some of my favorite snacks. Y'all, the purely Elizabeth granola and gluten-free oatmeal, it is so good. I love all the crackers from Simple Mills. They carry those as well.

Not only do I save time shopping as a Thrive Market member, I also save money on every single grocery order. On average, I save over 30% each time, you guys. Save time and money by getting it all in one place with Thrive Market.

Go to thrivemarket.com/thatsoundsfun. And my friends, get 30% off your first order plus a free \$60 gift. That is awesome. That's thrivemarket.com/thatsoundsfun.

Now back to finish up our conversation with my mom and Melissa.

[00:42:17] <music>

Annie: Mom, is there any recipe or any meal that you want to cook that you haven't found a recipe for yet? Is there anything that you want to know if Melissa's made it?

Mrs. F. Downs: No. She covered all the bases for me. I mean, even the protein salad, I mean, Tom loved that. And so I just would make that for the whole week and we'd have that for lunch every day. I mean, there were just so many great recipes. I mean, I really wasn't missing anything.

Annie: Mama, you're an excellent co-host because Melissa, the next place I wanted to go and we'll finish up here is, every Instagram reel I see is about women getting enough protein. So on Whole30, we don't want to clog up our system with beef three times a day. How much do you encourage women to like, do we need to be counting our macros? Do you want us to think about how much protein we're getting every day? Where does protein fit in for you as a leader in this industry?

Melissa: Protein is obviously a really important macronutrient. And interestingly, I think people are so confident talking about protein because it's the only one that hasn't been villainized. We villainized carbs, we villainized fat. But protein is the only one where everybody's like, yeah, protein is good. So everybody's like, great, now I need 400 grams of protein.

I think your protein needs are highly variable. I think it depends on your muscle mass, your activity levels, your age, your body type. So there is no one-size-fits-all. Our registered dieticians basically recommend that no grown adult should eat less than about 75 grams of protein a day, but you don't need to count macros or use any kind of internet calculator to do it.

So on Whole30, we have a meal template that basically says eat three meals a day. Start with one to two palm-sized servings of protein. And if you're small and less active, maybe it's one palm. If you're my husband and you're doing like jujitsu and two workouts a day, it's two palms. Maybe it's four palms. But that's a really good place to start.

And because on the original Whole30, you're eating lots of animal protein, which tends to be very protein-dense. You can mix it up. You can do any kind of poultry.

You can do beef. You can do pork. You can do eggs. There are also a lot of ways to sneak a little extra protein into your diet.

So if you're drinking a mug of bone broth in the afternoon, that could be as many as 10 extra grams of protein. If you're able to tolerate collagen and you want to do collagen in your morning coffee, that's 10 extra grams of protein. You could do a plant-based protein powder, like a pea protein powder compatible with both the original and plant-based Whole30. That could be an extra 10 to 20 grams if you need it.

Those are great ways for people who are active, who are on the go a lot, maybe pregnant people, maybe, you know, teenagers who need extra calories or people who are involved in sport for them to get extra protein. But I don't think you need to count or weigh or measure or track your food. I find in most cases that doesn't lead to a healthy relationship with food.

I think a meal template is a great place to start until you can tune into your body's cues and let your energy levels and your performance in the gym and your recovery and your mood dictate how much you should be eating.

Annie: It's been such a game-changer to feel like my body and my brain are on the same team. And so I've been able to go like, well, if I really want a hamburger, I'm going to eat a hamburger because what I don't know is I may be about to start and I need the iron. So I am paying more attention to and listening more in the last couple of years than I ever have.

Mom, any other questions you've got before we talk about what sounds fun?

Mrs. F. Downs: Well, the only thing I was going to say is that I know you talk about this in the book, but it is a little scary reintroducing once you have one that doesn't go well.

Annie: Oh, interesting.

Mrs. F. Downs: I haven't reintroduced non-gluten grains and I'm kind of scared to. But you do a good job of it, encouraging everybody to just go on and do it.

Melissa: Actually, I love that you brought that up because our reintroduction schedule is created so specifically for that very reason. So if you are to reintroduce something, say it's gluten grains one day, and you don't have a positive reaction... and when it comes to a food sensitivity, that doesn't always happen right away. Those can have a delayed onset. It may take even a day or even two days for symptoms to show up.

During our reintroduction schedule, you're going to reintroduce one food group into a day of otherwise Whole30 meals. Then you're going to return to the elimination phase for two to three days. And what that return to the elimination phase does is if anything negative pops up, it allows you a few more days without any triggers in your system, potential triggers, to allow those symptoms to calm down so you get back to a place where you feel your best.

But it also, if it stirs up cravings or, you know, makes you feel like, okay, well now I'm just going to go like raid the pantry because I've reintroduced wine, it gives you another day or two to allow those reactions to subside and for you to get really curious about it. "That was interesting. That did not go well. Why didn't that go well? What was I experiencing? What will I do differently next time?" So by the time you get to your next food group, you should be back to feeling Whole30 good, and you should be able to bring that food group back into an otherwise great feeling environment. So if you do have a negative effect to that as well, it's not going to pile on top of the last one.

Mrs. F. Downs: Right.

Annie: Brilliant. Yeah, that's awesome.

Melissa: Yeah.

Annie: Okay, Melissa, what did we not say that you want to make sure we say?

Melissa: I mean, I think this was such a great discussion about the reason I wanted to write *The New Whole30* and sort of what's in it for everybody. But I think more than anything, while we do have a lot of doctors and registered dieticians and healthcare practitioners prescribe the Whole30 to their patients like they did with Ms. Downs, you don't have to be sick to benefit from the program.

If you just want more energy, deeper, more restful sleep, fewer cravings, smoother digestion, improved self-confidence, better focus, maybe you want to figure out if food is contributing to your allergies or your acne or eczema or migraines or anxiety. The Whole30 is such a good, accessible way for you to lean into that yourself.

Annie: Yeah, it's beautiful. It's such a gift, really, Melissa. There's a lot of reasons God put you on this earth right now, but one of them is to help us get to do why God put us on the earth.

Melissa: Thank you.

Annie: So I'm really, really thankful for your work. The last question I always ask, Mama, I'll start with you because you know how to answer this and then give Melissa a second to think. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, you got to tell us what sounds fun to you. So, Mama, what sounds fun to you because the show is called That Sounds Fun?

Mrs. F. Downs: I want for you and Sally and Tatum, my three daughters-

Annie: My sisters.

Mrs. F. Downs: I want all four of us to go to England and do a trip where it's like literature and tea. And I want to get Amy Rambeau, our travel agent extraordinaire, who's an expert in all that, to plan us a quaint, wonderful trip that also includes Durham, because I want to see the cathedral, where you have your awesome encounter with the Lord that you wrote about in *Remembering God*. That's what I want to do.

Annie: Okay, Pam, are you and Dad paying for this trip? Because I'm interested. It sounds great. Merry Christmas to all your daughters. I can't imagine any of the three of us saying no thank you to that. I think the only problem, Melissa, is we have one grandchild on this side of the family so far, and he is four, and he is everyone's favorite person, so I'm not sure we all want to be gone from Sammy that long, but I will go. That's a great answer, Mom. Good answer. I will be following up about that. Consider this a warning that you're about to get an email about our trip to England.

Melissa, tell me what y'all do for fun. What sounds fun to you?

Melissa: Okay, this is going to be real lowbrow compared to that, but we've been giving this a lot of thought. I would like for a mama raccoon and her two baby raccoons to wander into our property in need of assistance. They don't have rabies or any sort of diseases. And then I would like to feed them things like peanuts and dog food and fruit and then they just become like... they're still wild but they love us and then they just come visit us every day and we set up treats. This is the dream that my husband and I have been discussing for like a year. That sounds fun.

Annie: I really respect that. At some point, I need to connect you with my friend Kelly, who does feed a chipmunk every day on her porch. And she protects the food from a squirrel. It happens. It can happen for you too.

Melissa: It's not too much to ask.

Annie: That's right. Melissa, thank you so much for making time to do this today. We are so grateful.

Melissa: It was a joy, Annie. Thank you so much, Ms Downs. It was so good to meet you and hear your Whole30 story.

Mrs. F. Downs: Thank you. I'm thrilled to get to meet you too.

[00:50:53] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, wasn't that great? Well done, Mom. Excellent co-host. I'm very impressed, Mom. I'm very impressed. And extra impressed with Melissa Urban. Isn't she amazing? Okay, grab your copy of *The New Whole30*. Go follow her on social media. Tell Melissa, thank you so much for being on the show. I love having these conversations around our physical health and being able to do what we're called to do for as long as we possibly can.

So I'm really thankful for Melissa and for Mom for showing up with us today.

If you've got any questions from this episode, you can drop them in the Q&A box on your Spotify app, if you're a Spotify listener like me, or send them to us on Instagram @thatsoundsfunpodcast, we'll try to answer them there.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. Anywhere you may need me, that is how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you, and I will do the same. Today and this whole week, let me tell you, all that sounds fun to me is getting ready for this weekend. It is our live event at the Ryman on Sunday night and a big fun weekend leading up to it. If you want more information, AnnieFDowns.com/Ryman. There is a lot there. Whether you're coming to the show or not, there is a lot to do this weekend in Nashville. Oh, it's going to be fun.

Y'all have a great week. We are over here planning our tail feathers off to make sure everything's ready for the weekend, but we'll see you here on Thursday with y'all. Listen, legendary, legendary week. My Mom, Melissa Urban, and on Thursday, gospel legend, Babbie Mason. Y'all. Okay, Thursday, Babbie Mason. We'll see y'all here.