**Navigating 7 Months: Baby Sleep, First Foods & Mom Challenges S6|EP8**

Join us today for a fabulous follow-up episode with Julia as she navigates the joys and challenges of little 29-week-old Aurelia. We have a lovely chat about the delights of this stage. Aurelia is now sitting independently, exploring toys and savoring her first foods with a balance of purees and self-feeding.

Julia also shares her journey through mom grief, not mom guilt, but mom grief, and the challenge of juggling career and motherhood. For those moms who are battling with adjusting work hours to create more time with their little ones, it's a really triggering look at what the challenges of work-life balance bring to moms. We also dive into the topic of seven-month-old sleep patterns.

We talk a little bit about dummy patrol and how to get rid of those dummies, and we look at Julia's strategies for those unpredictable nights. So it's a great episode. Tune in for a heartwarming journey of love and discovery and parenting wisdom.

Welcome to Sense by Meg Fora, the podcast that's brought to you by ParentSense, the app that takes guesswork out of parenting. If you're a new parent, then you are in good company. Your host, Meg Fora, is a well-known OT, infant specialist, and the author of eight parenting books.

Each week, we're going to spend time with new moms and dads just like you to chat about the week's wins, the challenges, and the questions of the moment. Subscribe to the podcast, download the ParentSense app, and catch Meg here every week to make the most of that first year of your little one's life. And now, meet your host.

Welcome back, moms and dads. This is Sense by Meg Fora. I'm Meg Fora, and I'm, as usual, absolutely delighted that you're joining us today.

Thank you for following us each week, for subscribing to the podcast, and also for reviewing it. Those are all things that really help to make sure that other moms find it. Today, I'm really excited because we have our regular guest, Julia, on with us again.

We've been tracking Julia since Aurelia was born. It's hard to believe, but she's already 29 weeks old. Welcome, Julia.

Hello, Meg. Thank you. I cannot believe that you are halfway through the year.

You're more than halfway through her first year. Yeah. No, no.

It's bizarre. I know that planning her first birthday will be around the corner. It sounds crazy to say.

Again, I know that the first time around, time didn't pass as quickly. In fact, it dragged. But yeah, this first year absolutely is whizzing by.

It's difficult to believe that she's seven months almost. But this is just, for me, the cutest stage because now they're sitting. They are super easy compared to what's coming in a few months' time when they're moving.

But they've also got the independence of being able to use their hands. Is she sitting more stably now or are you still having to prop her up with a lot of cushions? Yes. A couple of weeks ago, I think probably three weeks ago now, she went from being a little bit wobbly and having obviously some practice in her high chair to now being able to sit completely independently, which is really, really sweet.

She's starting to become like a big girl. I know that crawling is around the corner and then it'll be walking. Gosh, yeah, the time will fly.

But it's wonderful to see. She is a little bit more independent that way. And of course, now, as I'm sure you probably remember with your kids, that she now refuses to lie down.

She starts screaming. If you lie her down, she wants to be sitting and looking at the world. Yeah, absolutely.

And I think the reason that's such a great stage and makes their lives a little easier is that they can now use their hands for something really constructive. So what are you finding in terms of toys she's loving to use and use her hands for? So she loves things that are nice to chew, of course. So there's obviously a lot of things being brought to the mouth.

And so the toys she tends to prefer have got a little bit of kind of chewy resistance. So that tends to be things that are either made of rubber or silicone, nothing that's too hard and doesn't kind of provide any feedback, I suppose, on a sensory level. So she has a sort of silicone apple that, again, all these things that I had with Santi that were handed down to me.

So she loves that. She loves her teething toys. She has a silicone string on her dummy.

So that also is something that she chews if it's on her. So anything along those lines, she really, really enjoys. You know, it's so interesting that you talk about that texture, because many years ago, toys weren't really soft and chewy and rubbery.

They were very much more hard and solid, like you describe. And then Sophie Giraffe came out. Have you got a Sophie Giraffe? I had one for Santi.

It then went missing and I haven't repurchased it because they cost a fortune. And then I'd leave them a day later. I mean, it's the most incredible thing because it's such a clever toy, because I think that long neck gives them a handle that they can hold on to.

And then, of course, it was one of the first toys that did come out with that kind of lovely rubbery texture. I mean, they're now everywhere. But yeah, they do love those type of things that they can just get to their mouth.

And is she also getting food to her mouth now? She is. So we've kind of found our groove with the feeding. It's very much still a balance, as we discussed, between feeding her purees or mashes that she can basically take in and will nourish her and then practicing her self-feeding.

So it'd be pretty much a 50-50 every day. So I make a plan that every day she has one or two food items that are whole. So for example, she's having butternut and strawberries.

So she's got a whole kind of handle of roasted butternut that she can hold in her hand and she munches on it happily. And the same with the strawberries, I keep them whole for her and she brings them to her mouth and breaks them down. I mean, you know, those gums, you think they're going to be soft when you get your finger caught in there and they are like a vice grip.

It's quite something. You think because there's no teeth in there, it's not going to be painful. But, well, she really does have a lot of strength in her jaw.

So, yeah, I don't know, she's really thriving with all of the hand-to-mouth stuff and holding on to her food and doing it much more confidently than she was in the beginning. Yeah, that's great. So that mixed feeding definitely comes into its full now, and certainly with chilli, she'll be taking over more and more control.

So that sounds awesome. And are you managing to get in some proteins? Because those are often a little bit more tricky with the meats and that type of thing. Yeah, exactly.

So that's something I haven't done in terms of whole foods yet, but it is something that is in her kind of purees and her mashes. So she is having things like chicken and things like fish. We are also obviously in the process of introducing the allergens.

So I haven't done everything yet, but we've done the big guns. We've done peanut and almond and macadamia and fin fish and a few other things. And so far, so good with those.

Luckily, so no kind of allergy or indeed any kind of sensory issues so far with the feeding, which has been quite lucky. That's amazing. And how does she manage when big pieces come up? Is she gagging or is she choking? And do you know the difference? Sometimes she gags.

So I did have to learn the difference. And that's one of the things, especially the first time around, that I think can cause a lot of anxiety. And it's funny enough, the other day when she was eating something that was making her gag, finally, it's the purees that make her gag way more than the food that she self feeds on.

And she was eating something and I can't remember what it was, but it was making her gag. And you do get that inevitable lump in your throat as soon as it happens, because I think your instinct is that there's something wrong. But I think once you do have a little bit of experience, A, it's much easier to tell the difference between choking and gagging.

And B, I think that you learn to trust that instinct. So I do really feel like there was one time I remember Santia, funnily enough, on Christmas day, he would have been eight or nine months old at that point. And he was eating a piece of fillet.

And a piece of it got stuck in his throat. And I have absolutely no memory of this happening, but I know that it did, because my family told me it did. I saw it and in half a second, I saw that he was choking on it.

And I picked him up and did the rescue, the kind of hitting his back and putting him over with his head down. And out the piece came, but it was absolutely instantaneous. It was completely instinctual, because obviously I had that kind of basis of having done a CPR course, thank goodness, which obviously I recommend.

But I knew exactly what to do in that moment. And I knew in that second that it wasn't gagging, that it was choking. Luckily, it wasn't anything major.

But I do think, again, like with lots of things with motherhood, I think learning to trust that instinct is really important. And it helps a lot with the gagging versus choking thing. Absolutely.

And I think it's worth just touching on that for moms. I think gagging is so common. And what usually happens is they go red in the face when they're gagging, and they make a noise when they're gagging.

So those are the two things to watch out for, noise and red in the face. And then usually it just is that they've got this fabulous gag reflex that's really protecting them from choking. And the best thing to do in that case, I always say to moms, is to have a poker face, to just watch them do it and to smile and they'll get it out and just be totally chilled with it, even though inside you're going, oh, what's happening? But a gag, you just leave to its own devices, because the biggest risk with a gag is that a mom freaks.

She sticks her finger in to get the food out and actually manages to wedge the food deeper, because actually the baby's gag reflex is much more efficient at getting food out than a mom's finger is. So if your baby is gagging, definitely don't do anything. Choking is a totally different thing.

Choking is silent and it's blue. So the face is blue or white and it's generally silent. And that is really a kind of a medical emergency.

And what you did is obviously absolutely perfect. You know, kind of turn them upside down, give them a good whack on their back, upwards and down, so that they, well, up the chest, down the body, and it'll pop out. But for those moms who don't know the difference and who are feeling anxious about this, and a lot of moms do feel anxious, two things.

We've got a course inside the app called Get Confident with Choking, which is run by a nurse in the UK who's absolutely fabulous, Sammy. And so it's really, really worth having a look at that. And then the second thing is that I actually did a podcast with Sammy very early on in season one, and that is really worth going to listen to.

So if you are kind of navigating that choking versus gagging stage, it definitely is worth going to listen to that mom. So yeah, but it's an exciting stage, this feeding stage, isn't it? It's lovely as they explore the world. It is a lovely way of seeing them experience something new.

I think a lot of it is kind of visual, certainly in their early days. And it's really nice to see them get to grips with different textures. And it's also playtime for them, you know, it's not just about nourishment.

So that's also fun. Absolutely. It's all about sensory and exposure.

And I mean, as you actually said, the two things that haven't arisen are allergies and sensory issues. And both of those are because you've done a good staged exposure, which is absolutely fabulous. And obviously that she has a typical sensory profile.

So that's really, really good. And have there been challenges over the course of the last couple of weeks since we last chatted? You were going away when we last spoke, actually. Yes.

Yeah. So that was last week. You know, it was, again, as with a lot of the things that we talk about, it's got a few layers and it's kind of complex.

On the face of it, it was a very busy week. So I didn't have a lot of time to dwell on the fact that I was away from the kids and away from Vito. You know, there were sort of moments that it forced me to confront a lot of my feelings around being a working mom.

And I think it made me reflect a little bit on actually just how hard this year has been. I know that, you know, I sit on these podcasts and I make it sound like the journey with Aurelia so far has been easy. And in comparison to what it was like with Santi, it has been easy.

There are a lot of practical reasons why she is an easy baby and I've had a much easier time. Having said that, it's been a much, much harder journey from an emotional point of view for me because I wasn't working the first six months of Santi's life. But I had to go straight back to work within weeks of Aurelia being born.

And there's a huge amount of loss in that. And I know we've touched on the whole kind of mom guilt thing before, which I mentioned at the time, I don't really believe in. And in fact, this trip really crystallized it for me.

I realized that it's not mom guilt that I feel, it's mom grief. Like it's a real sense of loss at the time I'm not going to get back with her. And that made me feel really sad while I was away.

And it's still even now when I think about it, it makes me feel quite upset. And it makes me realize that I have to make some choices next year about what it is I'm doing work-wise and how I structure my time so that I am spending as much time as I can with my kids. Not everybody has that luxury.

I'm perfectly willing to admit that. But I am flexible because I'm a freelancer and maybe it's time to think about reducing my hours and therefore my income. So there are sacrifices to be made so that I can spend more time with them.

So it was very interesting from that point of view. Yeah, it's so interesting. I'm a bit like you in that I'm, well, I don't know, but I say yes to everything.

That's my default position. So yes to being a mom wholeheartedly, yes to being a working woman wholeheartedly. And sometimes in life, and I see this in my work, is that I get offered the most incredible opportunities and I just keep saying yes and yes and yes.

Yes to going to speak here and yes to writing that book and yes to this contract in this jurisdiction. And I recently was reading something on LinkedIn where this person said it was so wise. He said, for everything you say yes to, you are actually saying no to something else because there's only X amount of time.

And so it does make me think when you talk about that, that you are actually saying no to being a full time mom. You are saying no to certain time when you do make the choices to say yes to your career. And it works the other way as well.

The loss and trying to get back into your career when you have taken a full break with your little ones is really, really hard. It doesn't mean that there's an answer. It just is that there is loss regardless which way you look at it.

And I suppose you need to look at, we all need to look at what are the things we can't get back and maybe time with our little ones is that thing. But a very, very difficult challenge and one that most women actually really do confront. And many women, they don't have a choice.

Yeah, exactly. And it's fairly, if not unique, it tends to be something that women go through more than men. I know it's something that Vito struggled with after Santi was born because he had a fairly traditional setup and couldn't spend all day at home and didn't work from home and could only see him for a few hours a day.

And that was also very, very difficult for him, as I'm sure it is for lots of men in that more kind of traditional household setup. It is tricky, but I think the reality is that it's the large percentage of moms you have to deal with this. And it is hard about not being able to have it all, certainly not at the same time.

So, yeah, it's a balancing act. And I love that phrase, mom grief, because I do think you do grieve. I mean, I think a lot of becoming a mom is grief.

There's a sense of loss and therefore grieving. And so, yeah, very interesting and absolutely no answer because it's just everybody's unique, difficult. You just have to do what's right for your family, I think.

Yeah, no, you certainly do. Absolutely. And then what about the juggle of two? How are you coping with that? Yeah, look, I mean, it's busy and it's chaotic.

Every day kind of brings a new challenge. We go through phases where Aurelia is more demanding or is up more at night and then I'm more exhausted and I'm having to deal with Santi, who's obviously got his own demands. As a slightly older child, he is on his way to being four soon.

And he obviously, especially as a boy child, has lots of energy and it can be quite hard work at times. So it really just depends on the day and the season. But we are getting to the point where we can do a lot more with him together.

So this is a very kind of simple, silly example. But for example, we can bath them together now. So whereas before it was just way too kind of chaotic at bath time to put Aurelia in the bath with him and also just from a stimulation point of view, now it's actually something that, first of all, it is more convenient for us on many nights.

We don't do it every night, but where the schedules align, we do. But also Santi loves it. I mean, he's obsessed with her.

So we're very, very lucky we don't have that kind of difficult sibling rivalry situation with him. But I think that is because he's a little bit older, but he is nothing but in love with her. So he wants to do everything with her from the second he wakes up in the morning.

And so when I say to him, let's go and have a bath, you can have a bath with Aurelia, he sprints to the bathroom and he's so excited. So and he's gentle and, you know, he's careful not to splash her and stuff. So that's lovely.

It's lovely to be able to do things with them together. And as she grows up, I think those opportunities will become more frequent. And so, yeah, it's as always, it's a mix of some stuff is easier, some stuff is harder.

And every day you just have to try and juggle as best you can. And remember that some days are awful. And the next day you just have to kind of try again.

Yeah, absolutely. So at the seven month stage, are there any challenges that you're coming up against? Sleep, feeding, development, health? This episode is brought to us by ParentSense, the all in one baby and parenting app that helps you make the most of your baby's first year. Don't you wish someone would just tell you everything you need to know about caring for your baby? When to feed them, how to wean them, and why they won't sleep? ParentSense app is like having a baby expert on your phone guiding you to parent with confidence.

Get a flexible routine, daily tips and advice personalized for you and your little one. Download ParentSense app now from your app store and take the guesswork out of parenting. So at the seven month stage, are there any challenges that you're coming up against? Sleep, feeding, development, health? I suppose there's sort of two things.

The one is that it's look, it's not a challenge. It's more, it is a challenge, but it's more for my personality type than anything else. Before, until she started solids, she was obviously on three hourly milk feeds.

And I, as we've spoken about, had been fairly religious about that. And that sort of schedule helps to contain my anxiety about all sorts of things. And now, because we're having to fit in the solid meals, I'm having to be much more flexible about A, the volume of milk feeds, and then their frequency as well.

So I'm having to be more intuitive, I suppose, as opposed to having this really rigid schedule, which is not my natural inclination. But I'm actually trying to lean into it. I'm just trying to use my instincts a bit more with how to tell when she's hungry.

Because that's the thing is when you're on this very strict three hourly schedule, for example, I don't really have to think too much about whether or not she's hungry. I just shove the bottle in her and she drinks it because she's a baby and off we go. Whereas I'm having to learn her cues perhaps a bit more now and be a bit more sensitive to when I think she might be hungry.

And then, you know, things like adjust the amount of milk in the bottle and things like that. So that's quite interesting. And yeah, yeah.

So I mean, it's an interesting stage. What happens at this age is that kids are actually having two hourly feeds. So it's actually a milk, a solid, a milk, a solid, a milk, a solid, you know, through the day.

And if you do, and I mean, at this age, I always say, yes, kind of second six months, you go on waking a milk, which as long as they haven't had any milk in the night is usually a fairly good feed. And then two hours later at approximately eight o'clock breakfast, and then a 10 milk and a snack, 12 or one lunch, two or three milk and snack, and then five, six, five o'clock dinner, and then six or seven o'clock milk. And then what you'll find is that either the mid morning or the mid afternoon milk will actually drop away.

And that'll happen in the course of the next month, that one of them will just be like, you will have made up 120 mils and she'll only drink 60. And then, you know, like she's taking that down. And then in that particular snack, replace that milk with some, usually a liquid protein type thing like a yogurt or a dairy or, you know, a nut milkshake or whatever.

So, but that's very typically what happens at around about this age. Is that what you're experiencing? Yeah, it's roughly along those lines. You know, some days it can be quite unpredictable, but I think in terms of flow, it does kind of go that way.

Something I actually realized now I wanted to ask you in terms of strategy, and this brings me to my other point about my other challenge or sort of situation, is that her nights are quite unpredictable in the sense that she can go one night sleeping through until five, sometimes almost five, sometimes six, hallelujah. And then the next night she'll, I'll be on dummy patrol, which is actually worse than getting up to do a feed. It's actually more exhausting, which I figured out yesterday because I was a zombie all day long, literally every two hours, dummy and dummy and dummy and dummy.

And the reason I was doing that is because she first woke up at 11 and, you know, it's not feeding time. We're going to give her a bottle. So I just put her dummy back in and she went back to sleep.

And then I just repeated that throughout the night until I got her to hop us five, in which case she had her morning bottle. And then other nights she will wake up at, let's say hop us two, let's say four. It can be anywhere in that range screaming.

And then it's, it's a bottle and, and we stretch it in the morning. But what I wanted to ask you was a, is that normal? I suppose. And B my instinct is to make those overnight bottles as small as possible.

Is that what I should be doing? Or should she be having the normal amount like she hasn't there, which is a pretty big bottle. It's kind of one 51, 80 sometime. Yeah.

So first of all, obviously, and you're not doing it, but just try the moms. Do you don't wake a baby at night at this age? And it's from six months onwards, as long as they're on full protein and good solids in the day, they can go without milk completely. So that is absolutely no problem.

My recommendation for this age is usually to only dummy once. So if that, if it happens that let's say she wakes at 11 or one or three, I would probably use a dummy for that waking because it's just once. And she, and she will either push through to the morning or then we'll push through a couple of hours and then have a milk feed.

But the second waking I would either, if she's getting made really well. And if it's before one, I would give water. And if it's after one, I'd give her milk.

And if then, if she does a second waking, so let's say she went dummy at 11, but she had nightmare night the other night, dummy at 11, water at one, woke at three, I would give a feed then at three. So kind of working on those sort of things like almost like a triage, dummy first, next waking water, next waking milk. And if it's after two o'clock in the morning or one or two in the morning, then just give it, give it milk because they'll just settle a lot quicker.

The problem with getting into the dummy thing is that they, that can become a habit, a real habit. And actually at this age, she can in fact learn to use her dummy herself. So is she putting a dummy in her mouth herself during the daylight hours? She doesn't have it in the day.

She only ever has it when she's in her cot. Okay. So is she able to, when you put her down in the evening, can you put it in her hand rather than in her mouth and she'll put it in herself or she's not quite that dexterous yet? She's not quite.

And also what often happens is it'll, she'll bring it to her mouth and then it'll go flying out again and then go, there's a whole sort of in and out situation. She hasn't quite mastered any kind of control over it. Let's put it that way.

Yeah. So what I would definitely be doing now at this stage is with any of those dummy occasions, once she's in her cot, don't put it in her mouth, put it in her hand. And then initially of the first few nights, just guide her hand to her mouth.

So she works it out herself and put three or four dummies in the cot. And what you'll find is that she will actually start to reach for those in the middle of the night. And if you do, like, if you're doing a dummy patrol at like 12 o'clock, go in quietly, put it in her hand and say, you know, dummy, so that she starts to actually think, okay, I'm going to get that dummy on my own.

And by eight months old, babies can definitely navigate the dummies themselves and use it themselves. And then actually in an ideal world, she'll reach for that instead of calling you at all. So definitely start teaching her the skill of putting the dummy in for sure.

Okay. All right. We'll definitely do that.

Cause I don't want to be doing the two hourly stumbling into her room and putting the dummy in, hoping I'll go back to sleep afterwards. Yeah. Those are always the ones that confuse you.

Cause then you stop and you think, okay, could she be teething? Because very frequent wakings like that are not normal for her. So either she's uncomfortable, either she's teething, maybe she had too much stimulation during the day, or maybe she didn't have enough movement stimulation. Those are the things that I'd be thinking.

What was yesterday like? Was it very sedentary? Like where we, you know, was she just sitting the whole day with very little stimulation? Did she have enough movement stimulation going in a pram, going in a car, you know, whatever, getting out. And then also some sunshine, those types of things, and particularly living in South Africa, giving them sunshine in the day is good for their circadian rhythm. So I think about all those things, think about her food.

I definitely would be considering teething if she does it, you know, waking every two hours. And she's probably about ready to teet. How are they doing? Yeah, look, the gums are, there's definitely a little bit of whiteness on the gum.

I suspect it's imminent. She, look, I don't know that we, it's hard to tell cause there's no tooth that's come out yet. I think that she, in terms of personality, is the kind of baby that isn't going to be incredibly difficult when a tooth comes out or at least not for long.

And so she's almost difficult to read because Aurelia's version of like getting upset is squawk, squawk, okay, complete silence after that. So like, it's quite hard sometimes to tell if she is uncomfortable and is it teething or, and as we discussed the other day, you know, the teething doesn't go on for long. So then just when you think it is teething and then nothing happens, oh, okay, not teething.

What could it have been? So you're sort of constantly trying to figure them out, but there's no tooth yet, but I do, I do think it's around the corner. Yeah, it will be. And so you'll watch up all those symptoms of, there's acrid smelling poos, lots of mucus gnawing on her hands, definitely.

What's interesting, you just mentioned something there that some babies don't actually teeth like hysterically and don't get completely disrupted. And that is definitely true. And it tends to go with that sensory personality.

The more sensitive child over-responds to burps, over-responds to reflux, over-responds to teeth. And when they get sick, they get really, you know, very, very irritable and you're very easy babies just don't over-respond. So I think you're right.

You're probably going to have an easy time of the teething. Hopefully. Well, it's been lovely to connect again, Julia.

Always wonderful to connect with you. I have a feeling that by the time we speak next, she'll probably be starting to put herself into a tummy position for crawling soon. So watch that space.

That's when things get busier. Yeah, that's going to be quite hectic. That's when things are really going to kick off, I think, in this house.

Yeah. I mean, the lucky thing with second babies is that the house is already toddler-proofed. Well, it's baby-proofed and toddler-proofed.

I suppose what you do need to watch out for is that you haven't got any older toddler toys lying around that are dangerous for her. Yeah. And I think probably more importantly, her parents are toddler-proofed.

So we're now, you know, you're getting a little bit more relaxed this time. You know, not every single sharp corner is going to get a little perfect cover on it. You know, there'll be some bumps and scrapes, but that's absolutely normal and not something I'm going to fuss about.

So yeah, it's going to get very hectic very soon. Excellent. Well, it's been lovely to chat again, and we will definitely touch base with you soon.

So thank you so much for bringing your questions and your comments. Really appreciate the time. Thanks, Meg.

Catch you next time. Thanks to everyone who joined us. We will see you the same time next week.

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