PWE54: Holistic Approach to Endometriosis with Melissa Velasco

Aubree: Hi, love. This is episode 54 of the Peace with Endo Podcast. I’m your host, Aubree Deimler. I am an author, coach and energy healer who helps women with endometriosis naturally manage pain, increase energy and find peace with endo. Today’s episode features Melissa Velasco, a fellow endo sister and founder of Eighty-Six the Endo.

She is a Registered Nurse who has spent over six years providing education and care to adults battling illness and disease. In 2017 she was diagnosed with endometriosis. Since her diagnosis Melissa has devoted her spare time to providing research-based education, advocacy and support to people struggling with endometriosis.

In today’s show Melissa shared what has helped her feel better physically and emotionally with endometriosis and advice for those of you who may be new to the holistic journey; The importance of mindset with endo, especially when you’re on the holistic path; Managing endo in a working environment; The power of setting boundaries and being open with management and co-workers about the realities of living with a chronic condition.

I hope you enjoy our conversation. Now on to the show.

Hey Melissa. Thanks so much for being on the show today.

Melissa: Thank you for having me. This is really exciting.

Aubree: So, let’s go back to the beginning of your journey with endo. Do you remember what you were feeling? What you were thinking back then?

Melissa: Oh yes. Well initially fear. I mean when my... the whole process started with me going to the doctor because of us being unable to conceive and so I had a fear of infertility and so of course as we get into the questioning with my doctor he brings up endometriosis and infertility and so it was fear and anger initially, but once I had the... the diagnosis it was complete validation.

©2019 Aubree Deimler, Peace With Endo
And it just validated that everything I had experienced up until then was... was just... not normal. It was... I was right. You know? So that was... that was really validating and then once I had the diagnosis, I mean... once we had the diagnosis because really it... it felt like it was me and my husband going through it together. I mean he experiences the reality of endometriosis, just in a different way.

But once we had that diagnosis I definitely felt empowered to kind of take charge of the situation, face our infertility, face it head on, face on the... the endometriosis and find ways that I could learn about it, and that's really what I do best is go and research and learn, **so I felt empowered to take charge.**

**Aubree:** Awesome. So what then inspired you, like what steps did you take after you got diagnosed?

**Melissa:** Initially was an elimination diet and looking into... my doctor had had me do like a food sensitivity test, which now I know is not the best way to go about it, but it did help me with my elimination diet and that was really difficult. I mean going from eating a primarily American based diet with I mean Hispanic influences, because I am Hispanic, so like eating cheese and gluten all the time and going from taking everything out and trying to work my way up and to see what... what I can eat.

I definitely went into a state of depression, but I fought it and I got to a point where I now know a diet that I can tolerate and I also started looking into like mindfulness, meditation, yoga and those modalities have really, really helped me in my process through healing.

**Aubree:** Nice. So, when you started on this holistic journey like what problems or symptoms were you looking to solve?

**Melissa:** I mean primarily pain, obviously (laughs), but yeah the pain. I mean after my surgery I had my pain come back within two months and that’s when the holistic journey really, really started but I had the pain, I had fatigue, I had joint stiffness. At one point we thought I had Rheumatoid Arthritis and I went through so many testing for that, so all of... all of these things that I’ve tried have been to help alleviate joint pain and headaches and the fatigue.

**Aubree:** So how are you feeling now after making all these changes?

**Melissa:** Oh definitely much better. I notice that if I don’t follow my schedule, I guess, then I definitely feel the symptoms start to kind of creep back in if I... if I go days on end with not having the proper amount of sleep, without having my mediation or yoga, without following my diet. I mean, I’m only human, so once in a while I’ll have these cravings and I let them get the best of me and then I kind of

©2019 Aubree Deimler, Peace With Endo
pay... pay the price and so I go back to what I know I should be doing. So, it’s... it’s definitely helped.

I mean doctors are going to tell you what you might want to do. They might want to prescribe things, but do your research. You in the end are going to know what’s best for you, what your body can tolerate.

I mean there’s so many memes also with like yoga being something that’s going to cure endometriosis and people will say that’s not curing that. It’s not a... meant to be a cure. It’s meant to be a useful tool in helping alleviate symptoms. So do your research, be open to trying new things and give it a good go. Like a one time of meditating, a one-time class of yoga, that’s not going to really give you a sense of whether it works for you or not. You have to be willing to put in a little bit of work to see the benefits of it.

Aubree: Exactly. And a lot of times I think people are looking for like that one thing (laughs) like...

Melissa: Yeah.

Aubree: Like the one supplement, or the one food or the one diet, or whatever it is.

Melissa: And it’s not that way with endometriosis. I mean we should probably know that with how complicated it is, so you have to come at it with different perspectives and in different ways, trying multiple things.

Aubree: Exactly. And it all adds up I think, so there’s not like one specific thing you do, but as you start to change all these little things I think that’s when it starts to add up, and it adds up over time.

Melissa: Yes. Definitely. I can attest to that. (laughs)

Aubree: Absolutely. So, did you have any doubts at all along the journey, like did you consider going back and using conventional type medicine? Because I know the holistic journey can bring some pain (laughs).

Melissa: It did. It did. I mean at one point I was battling a severe state of depression having to change my diet so drastically and having to realize that I can’t do these workouts. I used to be very, very physically active. I was an athlete in high school and knowing that I can’t do those like cross fit, which I laugh at that now, but at one point I actually did cross fit (laughs) and I just... I can’t do that now and it’s just kind of being Ok with the fact that I have my limitations, but that doesn’t mean I can’t do anything and it doesn’t mean that everything’s going to be difficult, but yeah. I definitely battled a state of depression and I had some doubts.
When I started my... my blog, Eighty-six the Endo, I kind of went into this... like should I even be doing this, because I don’t know everything about endometriosis and how am I going to share with the world about endometriosis if I don’t know, but it’s a journey and I understand that we all have to start somewhere, and so I’m just bringing people along for the ride.

**Aubree:** Yeah. I think that’s great and we need more stories out there of women who are doing it and...

**Melissa:** Mhmm.

**Aubree:** That provides inspiration I think.

**Melissa:** Yeah.

**Aubree:** So what then helped you, like you said you dealt with some of the depression, some of the emotional impacts, what helped you through some of that?

**Melissa:** I love music, so that’s a big thing for me. I love to sing, but other than that honestly my blog. It’s become a really amazing outlet for me. It’s a creative outlet where I can just write what I want to write and... and lay all my emotions out there (laughs) and so I find that it’s been really a sense of... it’s given me a sense of like peace I guess because I’ve been able to lay out all my emotions, and it’s also given me a sense of community because people have reached out to me and I’ve been able to connect with people that way.

**Aubree:** Nice.

**Melissa:** Mhmm.

**Aubree:** Yeah. I agree. I started blogging back in 2012 and I can say the same. It gives you a little bit of purpose and a little...

**Melissa:** Yeah.

**Aubree:** Place to share and connect with others for sure and I think even if somebody doesn’t want to go that public, you know, and...

**Melissa:** Oh yeah.

**Aubree:** Like on the Internet. I think that journaling can be helpful too, just you know... I did a session of that with myself last night, where I was feeling some of those emotions and it just helps to... to get some of that out I think in a tangible type form so it’s not just sitting in your head.

©2019 Aubree Deimler, Peace With Endo
Melissa: Exactly. Yeah. If you just let it stir and sit it can definitely send you into a spiral downhill and we’re trying to lift ourselves up, right? (laughs)

Aubree: I think writing, at least for me, is connected more to that intuitive... I think inner guide, in a sense and I think when you write it out you can really get... get those messages that you need to hear that I think come from yourself in a deeper place.

Melissa: I love that. Yeah.

Aubree: So Melissa what would have happened if you continued to experience the symptoms you had with endo and didn’t follow the holistic way?

Melissa: Honestly I think I would have lost my job. (laughs). The symptoms were so severe that if I didn’t do anything my call in rate would have increased and it actually had already, so what helped me keep my job were my benefits, but even those are limited and there was a point where I was very scared that I was going to lose my job, so I mean being a nurse, it’s... it’s a very stressful environment and so I needed to do something that would help me alleviate the stress and meditation and yoga have done a lot of that for me and so has... so has the blog and the eating correctly like that...

That was really difficult teaching my co-workers what I can and can’t eat but in the end they’ve all been very supportive and not offering me stuff that they know I can’t eat and... and some of them have been so gracious enough to like find something and bring it to me, so that’s been nice.

Aubree: Yeah that is. I remember that too, that workplace transition (laughs).

Melissa: Yeah.

Aubree: Because it seems like everything is always based around food. I know the place that I worked it was always bagels or like people were bringing in donuts or like constantly.

Melissa: Donuts! Patients… Patients are always bringing us donuts (laughs).

Aubree: Exactly. So, there’s that constant temptation (laughs)

Melissa: Yeah (laughs)

Aubree: When it’s at work and it’s easy… easily accessible and in your face (laughs)

Melissa: Yeah. I will say I have given in every once and a while and I think a big part of your journey through endometriosis is a mindset shift and the times that I have given in to eating the gluten or the dairy I’ve allowed myself to enjoy it.

©2019 Aubree Deimler, Peace With Endo
haven’t beaten myself up and told myself like you’re bad for doing that, like just enjoy it and those are usually the times I have minimal symptoms. Yes, I’ll still have like a mild flare, but if I am in a different mentality where I am upset with myself for doing it, then I definitely feel the symptoms. **So, mindset has a big... it has a lot to do with how you can change your life with endometriosis that’s the best way that I can put it.** (laughs)

**Aubree:** Totally and I agree with that too and that’s the advice I always give my clients, like if you’re going to eat it enjoy it in the moment because if you add that extra stress then you’re not going to digest it and I think also with the mindset piece the big shift for me came when I realized that I didn’t want it, so instead of thinking like I can’t have that, like that’s a restricted food, so then shifting to well I don’t want that, like that’s not going to make me feel good if I eat that, so just a little shift there instead of making it restrictive to, you know I deserve to feel good, and I’m going to make the choice that’s going to serve me.

**Melissa:** Yes. That... I love that. I actually had a moment of that yesterday when I saw a box of brownies (laughs) So, it’s true you know it’s not going to make you feel good so why...

**Aubree:** So what then has endo taught you along the way?

**Melissa:** That we are some of the strongest people I will ever meet (laughs) I mean the community is just amazing. I... there’s no other words for it. I love it. It’s brought me a lot of comfort and support so I see women every day, whether it’s online or even some local women who I’ve met. We are so, so strong and there’s so much that we can do, so I think that endo has just taught me that we are stronger than we think.

**Aubree:** And how has that impacted then other parts of your life, like stepping into that strength?

**Melissa:** That’s a good question. It’s allowed me to kind of step up... in even my roll in nursing I’ve been able to kind of set boundaries with co-workers, with my management and we’ve developed a... a schedule that works well for me and that came from this confidence that I felt after realizing how strong I am.

**Aubree:** Nice. That’s so important. Setting boundaries...

**Melissa:** Mhmm.

**Aubree:** Especially living with a chronic illness and having stuff that comes up and that’s good that they’re working with you and for sure.
Melissa: I know that not so many people have that so I mean we’ve heard so many stories of people with endometriosis losing their jobs or having co-workers or management that just don’t understand, so I’m very thankful.

Aubree: Right and I think for a lot of ladies what I’ve seen and myself included is it teaches you to speak up for yourself (laughs)

Melissa: Yes.

Aubree: I think, you know, a lot of us it takes a long time to get diagnosed and I think there’s that whole long process that can happen.

Melissa: Mhmm.

Aubree: It just teaches you I think to be an advocate for yourself and that can spill out into other parts of your life.

Melissa: For sure. Yeah.

Aubree: So what words of wisdom can you share with other endo sisters who may be listening right now who feel like there’s no hope?

Melissa: Oh I hate that. I hate the no hope. There’s so much hope (laughs) but really it starts with us. We need to speak up. We need to educate ourselves and advocate ourselves like you just said. We need to speak up for not only ourselves but like our sisters and our moms, our cousins, all the women in our lives who really believe that painful periods are normal and I think a big part of that is learning to be open about menstruation and not fall into this stigma that we can’t talk about it. We need to break that stigma and there is hope. We’ve just got to fight for it.

Aubree: And I know that can be hard a lot of us grow up... I think that’s a society thing where...

Melissa: Oh, yeah.

Aubree: The period, the whole thing is... there's a little bit of shame on that.

Melissa: Mhmm.

Aubree: So do you have any tips for somebody who might be feeling that shame or like wanting to hide in a sense what’s going on with them?

Melissa: Well for me it’s been just a matter of it’s absolutely normal. It’s a normal part of our bodies and it shouldn’t be something that we’re ashamed of, of course we’re taught that but kind of educating family members about the fact that you know it’s... it’s a normal part of me. It’s what I go through every... every month and it

©2019 Aubree Deimler, Peace With Endo
highly impacts my health. You have to be able to understand how I’m going to process it, how it’s going to affect me and... and learning about just basic menstruation is... is a start to that, so I wish we didn’t have the stigmas and that shame surrounding it but... I realize that it is a reality.

**Aubree:** Right and I’ve come across ladies who are secretive about it with work and not wanting to let, you know, other bosses or their supervisors even know like this is going on.

**Melissa:** Yeah.

**Aubree:** Or looking for a job even and trying to (laughs) bring in the topic of endo. I know that... that can be like hard to do for some.

**Melissa:** Oh, of course. I can definitely see that. I have a... just a different kind of situation because of my... what I do, but it's for people who I work with who aren’t nurses, or in... they're more on the ancillary side where they're schedulers or something more desk associated where they don't have the healthcare background I do have to be... I have to speak to them differently about it and I understand that.

**Aubree:** When you got your job were you already... did you already know you had endo? Or was it...

**Melissa:** I actually had just been diagnosed (laughs), but I didn't tell my manager at that point, no (laughs).

**Aubree:** So how did the topic come up for you?

**Melissa:** It was about six months into the position and my call-ins were becoming more and more frequent. My symptoms were becoming more and more frequent and I realized I just had to have the conversation with him so he understood why, so I asked for some office time and I basically brought it up as I know you've... you've noticed that I've had more call-ins and I want to be open with you and honest with you about what's going on with me and so I was diagnosed with endometriosis and him being a nurse himself he knew what the diagnosis was and then I actually learned through that conversation that he has family members who go through it so... or something similar, so it was actually really rewarding for me and for him to be able to open up about this... about the diagnosis and it's benefited our productivity in my... in... on the unit and my productivity.

**Aubree:** Yeah that's great and I think a lot of times when you do speak up that’s what you find like somebody knows somebody or somebody might even have it, like I didn’t even know you had it, because people don’t talk about it so...

**Melissa:** Yeah.
Aubree: So that definitely is something I notice as well. (laughs)

Melissa: Yeah.

Aubree: Being obviously open about it and ultimately I think, you know, the fact that you're taking charge of your health and making all these changes in essence really makes you a more productive employee, maybe then others because you're taking care of your health and really more aware of what impacts you so you can be more productive.

Melissa: I hope so. (laughs)

Aubree: Maybe I’m just… from my experience working in an office and all the food and...

Melissa: Yeah. I definitely feel like I’ve done what’s right for me. Sometimes I do feel like I’m falling behind, but then I have days where I feel like I’m doing really well, so... it’s an ongoing battle. We know there’s no cure, so it’s going to be a day-to-day thing and you just have to take each day at a time.

Aubree: Well thank you so much Melissa for sharing some of your story with us today. Do you have any...

Melissa: Of course.

Aubree: Do you have any final words of inspiration for our listeners?

Melissa: I would just say listen to your body. **You can learn so much by listening to your body**, learning how to manage the symptoms is going to start with you just kind of journaling and jotting down what... how you're responding to foods, or how you're responding to stress or little events that happen in the day, so that was something I did at the beginning of my journey was actually create a little chart where I was at the end of each night I was writing down what may have caused the pain, the nausea, the fogginess, so that... that's a little something I hope I can pass on is just listen to your body and start by writing everything down.

Aubree: Yeah. That’s good advice, and I think a lot of times we skip over that stage of awareness and just tuning into this is how this is making me feel, this is how this is impacting me and that can be hard at first if you’re not used to listening to your body if you might be disconnected from it, but like you said writing things down can help and starting to track things, and start to figure out what your triggers are.

Melissa: Exactly.

Aubree: Well thank you again for coming on the show today. How can our listeners connect with you further?

©2019 Aubree Deimler, Peace With Endo
Melissa: Well thank you so much for having me. I’m on Instagram. That’s like my main social media that I like to use, so Eighty-Six the Endo and of course my blog is eighty-sixtheendo.com, and that’s spelt, it’s not the numbers 86 (laughs) and I also have a Facebook page as well, but I’m more... I’m more in tune with my Instagram following (laughs).

Aubree: Awesome, and I’ll be sure to include links to your social media and your website so people can connect with you further.

Melissa: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Aubree: Thank you.

Melissa: This has been fun. Great conversation.

Aubree: If you enjoyed this episode I invite you to subscribe to continue on the journey. Leave us a positive review and share with your friends so more endo sisters can find the show and get on track to finding peace with endo.

If you need further support on the holistic journey, I am here to help. I offer one-on-one coaching and group support in my private membership program, Peace with Endo Connect. Reach out to me over at peacewithendo.com if you’re interested in chatting further.

You can also find me on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @peacewithendo. Hop on over and share your thoughts on the show, or simply say hello.

Thank you so much for tuning in. I hope you find some peace in your day today. Sending you so much love. Bye for now.
All information provided within is for informational and educational purposes only and should not be construed as medical advice or instruction. No action should be taken solely on the contents on this podcast. Please consult your physician or qualified health professional on any matters regarding your health and wellbeing on any opinions expressed.

When trying any suggestions posed, please do so at your own risk. You are responsible for consulting your own health professional on manners raised within.