

# Protect your bump

WE MEET THE WOMAN WHO IS ON A MISSION TO MAKE OUR EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENTS HEALTHIER, PARTICULARLY FOR OUR CHILDREN

**A**ileen Chen is a mother of two little girls and the co-founder and CEO of Belly Armour, we caught up with her and asked her about her innovative Belly Armour.

## WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN THE BUSINESS?

Along with my co-founder Michael, we oversee all aspects of the business, including product development, global distribution, marketing, and manufacturing.

## WHEN DID YOU LAUNCH YOUR LABEL AND WHAT INSPIRED YOU?

The concept of Belly Armour began when I was pregnant with my first child. I was a banking executive who was constantly connected to my mobile phone, smart phone and laptop. Like most expectant mothers, I researched extensively on how to give my child the best start in life. All sources advised pregnant women to eat healthy, exercise, and avoid toxins like alcohol and certain chemicals – all of which I did diligently. However, one obvious

component in my everyday life which concerned me, about which there was little advice, was the radiation-emitting devices that surrounded me at home and at work.

What were the health impacts of those?

I researched more into this “everyday radiation” exposure, and was shocked at what I discovered.

Increasingly, research was indicating potential health risks from everyday radiation (non-ionizing radiation emitted by sources like cell phones, computers, wireless towers and power lines). Already it was well-accepted that this type of radiation can have a biological impact and there was much confusion and debate around how it impacts our health. The concern is greatest for young children and during pregnancy when DNA replication and cell growth are at their highest rates. The current safety standards in most developed countries are outdated, created nearly 20 years ago when the usage and infrastructure of wireless technologies was not nearly what it is today. The standards also did not account for the



NURSING COVER FROM BELLY ARMOUR

younger population, which now comprises a large percentage of the population utilizing wireless devices. Almost all cell phone manuals direct the user to keep at least 1/2-1" distance from the users' body at all times (this is not how most people use their phones!), and some include warnings for pregnant women and children. In 2011, the World Health Organization categorized cell phone radiation as a possible carcinogen, and many governments worldwide have already been advising precautionary measures against the growing prevalence of everyday radiation, particularly for more vulnerable populations like pregnant women and children. France had previously banned the marketing of cell phones to children, and went even further with recent legislation to ban Wi-Fi in environments catered to children under 3 years old, due to health concerns.

Given the mounting evidence and advice of health experts, my co-founder and I felt compelled to inform more people and seek viable solutions to reduce this exposure. We started Belly Armor on a two-fold mission of (1) increasing awareness of this health issue so others can make more informed decisions for themselves and their families, and (2) providing effective solutions and simple tips for those who want to lower their exposure. We started out with maternity apparel, and have since expanded our collection to include nursery (with nursing covers and low-radiation-emitting baby monitors) and fertility (with men's boxer-briefs) to address customers' needs in different phases of their lives. Our products are now distributed in more than 30 countries, and we work with our distributors globally to continue educating about this issue wherever we have presence.

#### CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE TEAM?

We are a group of conscientious parents who are passionate about this health issue we address, and importantly, about leaving a

healthier, better world for the next generation.

#### WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF SETTING UP THE LABEL?

The health issue of everyday radiation is admittedly not yet common knowledge in many countries.

Most scientific and medical experts who are vocal about this health concern compare the current awareness of this issue to that of tobacco in the 1960s.

As with tobacco, asbestos and x-rays, they warn that it could take years for scientific evidence to conclusively affirm health risks and then translate into policies to safeguard people, but that there is sufficient scientific evidence to warrant precautionary measures.

Educating about the issue can be challenging, but the awareness globally has already increased dramatically in the past couple of years with a lot more discussion about this issue, even in mainstream media.

We are ever more dedicated to our mission given the strong feedback and support we've received globally.

In this increasingly wireless world, it's impossible and impractical to disconnect. However, given the emerging evidence, it seems prudent to reduce radiation exposure and foster a more balanced relationship with the technologies we enjoy and benefit from -- with simple precautions like shielding the pregnant belly from direct contact with wireless devices, limiting toddlers' use of tablets (also prevents weakened hand dexterity from excessive tablet use), keeping cell phones out of pockets and bras and away from bodies, and turning off wi-fi routers when not in use.

Of particular concern are children, who will be using electronics and wireless technologies throughout their entire lives (and probably in ways we cannot fathom today).

To me, it's similar to taking simple but risk-reducing actions such as wearing seatbelts

and staying within speed limits when driving cars.

### WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF WORKING FOR YOURSELF?

I can have direct impact on almost every aspect of the company. I can combine my passion for an issue with my passion for entrepreneurship and creating something of value. I can also have the invaluable flexibility needed as a parent of young kids – I am able to control my days and adjust my schedule as necessary when personal matters arise.

### HOW IS YOUR LABEL DIFFERENT TO OTHER SIMILAR LABELS?

There are some other brands in this product category, particularly in some East Asian countries where this product category is more established.

However, Belly Armor is currently the leading global brand of anti-radiation protective apparel and accessories, because of our commitment to the quality of our products, and the ease of incorporating our products with one's existing wardrobe and lifestyle. We have been fortunate to receive multiple industry awards and coverage by The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, Pregnancy and Newborn, amongst others.

Safety and effectiveness are paramount for us, and our products have been independently tested to be 99.9% effective in shielding the radiation emitted by electronic devices, and to be free of toxic chemicals, heavy metals and common allergens.

We design our products around the modern, active parent, making it easy for them to provide protection and incorporate our products into their wardrobes and lifestyles. For example, many expecting mothers already wear maternity bands – so we provide bands that can be discreetly worn under any clothing and provide some belly support (Belly Band Embrace), or bands that can be worn outside of

clothing (Belly Band, offered in neutral colors as well as Hot Pink!).

Our customers love the versatility of our Belly Blanket Chic, which is super light-weight and great for the home, office and travel, able to be draped under any device on the lap or near the belly. Many multi-tasking moms who leverage nursing time to catch up on calls and emails love our stylish Nursing Covers which have the valuable features of other premium nursing covers (such as a rigid neckline for view of the baby, contoured shoulders for discreetness, and pockets for storage) while providing the shielding functionality. We also designed our apparel products to be washable and easy to care for.

In addition, our brand focuses on increasing awareness about the health issue and advocating for safer use of technology. We partner with the scientific and medical community to educate about the state of the science, including organizations like Healthy Child Healthy World (the leading non-profit in the US addressing environmental hazards facing children), of which we are one of their Trusted Partners.

### WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER PARENTS WANTING TO START THEIR OWN LABEL?

Do something you are passionate about, something that you strongly believe in. Otherwise, your interest and motivation may wane over time, and you may feel increasingly conflicted about your time and energy spent on the venture versus on other responsibilities and interests in your life.

Also, do good planning upfront before you dive in – understand the market demand, target customers, competitive landscape, differentiators of your products/services, your strengths/weaknesses, and the resources/support required to get started and keep things going for a period of time.

Knowing these, you will be able to test the

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