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Autoimmunity: What it is and How it Occurs

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We are facing an epidemic of allergic (60 million people), asthmatic (30 million people), and autoimmune disorders (24 million people). Autoimmune diseases include rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, multiple sclerosis, psoriasis, celiac disease, thyroid disease, and the many other hard-to-classify syndromes in the 21st century.

These are all autoimmune conditions, and at their root they are connected by one central biochemical process: A runaway immune response also known as systemic inflammation that results in your body attacking its own tissues.

Your immune system is your defense against invaders. It is your internal army and has to clearly distinguish friend from foe — to know you from others. Autoimmunity occurs when your immune system gets confused and your own tissues get caught in friendly cross-fire. Your body is fighting something — an infection, a toxin, an allergen, a food or the stress response — and somehow it redirects its hostile attack on your joints, your brain, your thyroid, your gut, your skin, or sometimes your whole body.

In most cases there is the Epstein Barr Virus that is still present from a much earlier activation. There are now links showing a direct relation between Epstein Barr Virus (EBV) and both MS (multiple sclerosis) and LUPUS.

Epstein-Barr Virus (EBV) belongs to the herpes family of viruses. It is sometimes referred to as Human Herpes Virus-4 (HHV-4). Viruses are tiny parasites that enter our cells and reproduce, potentially damaging or killing our cells along the way.

EBV infection can be subclinical, which means that a person is carrying the virus but does not have overt symptoms, or it can be clinical and cause infectious mononucleosis. Getting an EBV serum blood panel done is important. Sadly most medical doctors are not taught how to read the results for a correct evaluation. They rely on the lab to determine for them as to whether or not the virus is still active. We now know that if ANY of the EBV titers are positive ... you have an active issue in your body.

EBV has also been linked with chronic fatigue syndrome, an illness characterized by severe to debilitating fatigue that impairs daily function and is often made worse by exertion, exercise, headache, sore throat, and other stresses. It may be accompanied by enlarged, painful lymph nodes; sore throat; headache; painful joints; abdominal pain; muscle pain; low-grade fever; and cognitive difficulty, especially difficulty concentrating and sleeping.

EBV is associated with other, potentially life-threatening diseases, including lymphomas and autoimmune diseases. Hodgkins disease and non-Hodgkins lymphoma are malignant processes whereby cancer cells arising from the immune and lymphatic systems proliferate beyond normal levels.

Conventional approaches (standard medical) don't have a method for finding the insult (virus, toxin, etc.) that is causing the problem. Functional medicine (Naturopathy) does provide a number of answers!

In this country, autoimmune diseases, when taken all together, are a huge health burden. They are the eighth leading cause of death among women, shortening the average patient's lifespan by eight years. The annual health care cost for autoimmune diseases is \$120 billion a year representing nearly twice the economic health care burden of cancer (about \$ 70 billion a year).

Unfortunately, many of the conventional treatments available can make you feel worse...Anti-inflammatory drugs like Advil, steroids, immune suppressants like methotrexate, and the new TNF-alpha blockers like Enbrel or Remicade can lead to intestinal bleeding, kidney failure, depression, psychosis, osteoporosis, muscle loss, and diabetes, not to mention overwhelming infection and cancer. When used short term these drugs can help people get their lives back. But they are not a long-term solution. They shouldn't be the end of treatment, but a bridge to cool off inflammation while we work to find the root cause of the disease. These drugs do nothing to address the numerous hidden causes of the inflammation that is confusing your immune system.

Recovering from Autoimmunity: Addressing the Root Causes of Inflammation

My client ended up on a long misadventure through the medical system before she came to see me. For years she went from doctor to doctor getting all kinds of labels for her problems but no real help in treating them.

This hard-working, once healthy professional had suddenly developed a series of inflammatory conditions including chronic sinus infections. Many doctors just handed out antibiotics for these infections.

She eventually developed severe chest pains and went to the emergency room. While she was there, doctors found swollen lymph nodes and told her she had lymphoma, a form of cancer. For three weeks she lived in despair until the biopsy results came back. It turned out she didn't have cancer but an autoimmune disease. Which autoimmune disease? The doctors weren't quite sure ...

She had many abnormal blood test results — like low white blood cell and platelet counts, high levels of auto-antibodies of all types (antibodies that attack our own tissues), high immunoglobulins (the foot soldiers of the immune system), and autoimmune thyroid disease. But doctors had a hard time putting their finger on what was wrong. They couldn't label her.

Meanwhile, she developed metabolic syndrome and weight gain (pre-diabetes / insulin resistance) as a result of the runaway inflammation in her body.

Here is a quote from one her "specialist's" notes: *"Whether she has lupus or Sjogren's syndrome is a bit unclear. Regardless, she merely needs observation and no therapeutic intervention at this time."*

This unfortunately is all too common. What exactly did they plan to observe, how bad she felt? Or would they just wait for her to get worse before intervening?

That's when she came to me. Using a functional holistic approach, a new way of thinking about the underlying causes and imbalances in chronic disease, I began by asking her some simple questions to track down the BEGINNING of these seemingly disrelated illnesses. **(NOTE: I always work with the**

client to track down when the whole situation started. There is ALWAYS a starting point to any major illness... and that starting point is 1 of two things: 1. severe emotional trauma (loss or threat of loss in the immediate family) or, 2. Parasites/illness following a trip out of the country.)

Then I went hunting with correct alternative and standard testing for toxins, allergens, and infections — all common causes of inflammation — and found the real physical causes of her symptoms.

We also sat with her for a while and did a bit of counseling to help her find the spiritual/emotional/mental causes to the onset of her troubles. We know that there is ALWAYS some level of major emotional trauma in the “family unit” for any type of autoimmune disease to start. When the spirit becomes overwhelmed with grief or fear or anger or disappointment then the body follows and also becomes overwhelmed and confused and starts to attack itself. Helping a client to find their point or area of overwhelm is key to “healing”.

On the physical side she had taken so many antibiotics that altered her gut flora or bacteria and promoted yeast overgrowth. Fungus and yeast flourished in her body, growing between her toes, on her toenails, in her genital area, and scalp. She had Helicobacter pylori bacteria that we found in her gut. She had a leaky gut and reacted to many foods, including dairy and gluten. She was exposed to toxins at her job and had high levels of mercury in her hair tissue mineral analysis. And she had chronic sinus infections. So we went to work cleaning house. I suggested handling her yeast with natural anti-fungals and the H. pylori with Mastic Gum, got rid of her food allergies, fixed her gut, detoxified her from metals, and cleaned up her sinuses. This was all done in a matter of months with her working diligently to follow the programs. Then I helped heal her immune system by supporting it with correct nutrients based on testing her body. I gave her zinc, fish oil, vitamin D, herbs, and probiotics, and put her on a clean, whole-foods, allergen-free, anti-inflammatory diet.

At her next follow-up visit, I asked how she was doing, expecting her to say that she felt a little better. However, her response surprised even me. She said she felt fine.

“What about the fatigue?” I asked.

“I have great energy.”

“What about the bloating and gas?”

“Nope.”

“What about the reflux?”

“Gone.”

“What about your sinuses and chronic phlegm?”

“All clear.”

“What about your memory and concentration problems?”

“All better.”

And she lost 15 pounds.

When her labs came in, they confirmed what she had told me — they were all back to normal. Her white cells increased and immune markers calmed way down. She and done everything right: changed her way of life (diet), was conscientious about taking her supplements and allowed us to monitor her progress along the way.

This client's results simply reflect the application of a new model of thinking about problems called functional medicine (Naturopathy) — it's a way to get to the root of health problems and treat the underlying causes of what ails you instead of suppressing symptoms with medications.

If you have an autoimmune disease, here is what you need to think about and do...

Nine Steps to Treating Autoimmune Disease

- . Check for hidden infections — yeast, viruses, bacteria, parasites, Lyme, etc. — with the help of a medical or holistic doctor, and handle them. (this is one of our specialties... we know how to test you correctly! Just give us a call)
- . Check for hidden food allergens with IgG food testing (we offer the easiest testing method for food allergies (give our office a call at 337-989-0572)
- . Get tested for celiac disease, which is a blood test that any doctor can do.
- . Get checked for heavy metal toxicity. Mercury and other metals can cause autoimmunity. We utilized Hair Tissue Mineral Analysis testing for this.
- . Fix your gut (the most important thing we do)
- . Use nutrients such as fish oil, vitamin C, vitamin D, iodine, selenium, and probiotics to help calm your immune response naturally.
- . Balance adrenal and thyroid hormones naturally with bio-identical hormones and clean diet (no gluten, soy, sugars, no dairy, etc.)
- . Exercise regularly — it's a natural anti-inflammatory.
- . Practice deep relaxation like yoga, deep breathing, biofeedback, or massage, because stress worsens the immune response.
- . Find the hidden or un-discussed emotional trauma that occurred in your life so you can truly heal inside and out
- .

Give these steps a try — and see if you don't start feeling less inflamed. As I said earlier, the answers are right in front of you. Treat the underlying causes of your illness and you will begin to experience vibrant health once more. I personally know this works... I "had" Hashimoto's thyroiditis over 8 years ago... my antibodies are normal now!

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