Are We Raising the Sickest Generation? Transcript

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Introduction and episode overview

Hey team, you're in for a treat today. I'm joined by Dr. Joel War. She's a board certified pediatrician who started inside the traditional system and said something isn't adding up.

And in clinic, he's seen chronic issues like eczema and allergies and asthma and behavioral stuff. explode. He says even healthy families are experiencing this and this is exactly what we're experiencing as well, right?

Boots on the ground. And we talk about what's actually driving this rise and how to think like a detective instead of a desperate Googler. And we also talk about when medications help versus when they just buy time and how to work with your pediatrician without feeling dismissed.

and we also take a deep dive into a very sensitive topic with a lot of nuance and a lot of respect and that's vaccines and I don't believe we've ever talked about this before on the podcast and it's not about fear-mongering and it's It's not a prescription.

It's about informed decisions and individualized risk benefit and how to advocate for your child if they're already inflamed or reactive. So by the end, you'll have a lot of practical steps to lower your child's inflammation this week and questions to bring your doctor and a saner path forward most importantly.

So let's get into it. Is your child struggling with itchy nights and endless flare ups? I'm Andra McHugh, mom of four and host of eczema kids. Here you'll find natural solutions that actually work so you can heal your child's eczema without steroids, without the overwhelm, and finally see calm, healthy skin again.

Let's get into it. Dr. Joel Warsh is a board-certified pediatrician who started in the traditional medical system and realized something wasn't adding up.

Kids are sicker than ever with eczema and allergies and asthma and other more serious autoimmune symptoms and families are left bouncing between medications and creams and googling at 2 a.m.

and Honestly, Dr. Joel, that's why every single person is listening here because someone in their family is struggling with subpar health, mainly itchy, scratchy skin and allergies.

And they're trying to find real answers and not with fear or dismissal, but with real clarity. And what I really appreciate about your work, Dr. Joel, is that you bring the conversation back to something reasonable, which are informed decisions and personalized care and respect for parents who just want to protect their kids in the safest way possible.

Dr. Joel, welcome to the show. Thank you for having me on. I'm excited to chat. I really want to start there. You've said we're seeing the sickest generation of kids in modern history and everyone listening is living that.

What has changed? What are the things that you see that are driving this in your practice? Yeah, I think it's really, really unfortunate. And as a pediatrician and a dad, it's very frustrating to see what's going on with chronic conditions.

Why chronic childhood conditions are rising

I mean, the latest statistics are that about 50% of kids have a chronic condition, about 75% of adults have a chronic condition. Those numbers are insane.

It didn't used to be that way with maybe around 5%, you know, 20 to 50 years ago. So obviously something has

changed. You know, not everything we've done in the world is bad.

I mean, we used to die at 40 a long time ago. So, you know, we're a little better at infectious disease, but certainly there is something we need to learn about chronic disease because we're just seeing such a upswing in cases and it's really across the board.

I mean, you're seeing an increase in eczema and allergies and autoimmune conditions and cancer and autism and neurodevelopmental concerns and behavioral concerns, literally everything.

So I think that's very alarming and very frustrating that we don't actually know, I think, what's going on. I mean, it's not even something we were really talking about all that much until the last year or two.

And I think we do need a deep dive into really the triggers. To me, I really think the big factors are our food and toxins. I think those are the big two.

But we don't totally know because we never, I think, really studied in the ways that we need to. So I started doing this after I had two kids struggle with severe, severe eczema.

And my first had celiacs. I mean, so by the time I had my third daughter, I was three for three on kids with autoimmune conditions, which is just bananas.

You know, like my husband and I are fit. We eat vegetables. Like we don't eat a lot of processed foods. We filter our water. you know, everyone listening is in that exact same boat.

They're doing everything right. They're eating organic food and filtering their water and they're using clean products and their kids are still struggling.

Can you go a little further into that disconnect? Yeah, well, I think, I mean, especially with eczema, which is kind of, you know, your specialty, I think that's one of the most interesting topics, just given the fact that it's so common.

And I think it's hard to know exactly how common, but at least from what I'm seeing in the office, it's almost all the kids, like almost every kid, you know, maybe like three quarters.

I don't know exactly the number, but I think it's hard to get exact numbers just because it's a rash and then everyone documents it and we don't exactly know.

It's just a rash. You know, qualified can obviously be a pretty bad rash, but it's not always necessarily documented or maybe a kid with mild eczema. You don't know that it's eczema, so it's not documented, but it's a lot more than even when I started my practice, but we're just seeing it spiral where so many kids are having this.

And that's where I think it's tough. I mean, certainly there's a genetic component to it. I think that, you know, for some kids, some families, they have conditions in their family, so it's genetic, but that doesn't explain the explosion and it certainly doesn't explain the explosion even in people that like you said are extremely health conscious.

I think that gives you a leg up and it probably decreases your risks but there's still plenty of families in my practice which are very health conscious that their kids still have eczema or other conditions.

I think it's lower than what the statistics are because I think what you do matters but ultimately We only have so much control over environment. And I think that's the bigger issue here is that even in the best case scenario, we're still stuck with the food that we have.

We're still stuck in the environment that we live in. We have the air. We can't really change it. I mean, you could get some plants or filter, but that only affects it so much.

I get bottled water, but it still comes from somewhere, you know, still chemicals. You can eat the best quality food

possible, but it can still be sprayed and all sorts of crap.

So ultimately, for so many kids, I think just the baseline is already above what their bodies can handle. And the things that we can do can maybe minimize it or maybe for some people can keep you under that level when you're going to see symptoms.

But for a lot of people, it doesn't matter. Like you're just exposed to so much. that no matter what you do, they're still having some outward symptoms.

So that's why we're seeing it so much is most people don't really have access or even if they think they're eating healthy, I mean, you're only eating so healthy, like there's no top level of where you can go unless you have your own farm.

I know, that's where we were. It was kind of mind boggling. As healthy people, the reliance on processed stuff is still quite high. Really looking back, my first step was just to eliminate all processed foods.

And that made a huge dent. And that was an effort because, like I said, there's a surprising amount of processed foods in even a healthy person's pantry.

Sure, and even in a healthy person's pantry, let's just say like Whole Foods or something like that. Like you're still getting better food than maybe you're gonna get in a lot of other places, but the food is still shipped in half the time.

You know, let's say you get fruit, like an apple or something, or I don't know, a banana. Like you're still getting it shipped from another country. It was picked.

several weeks ago maybe a week or two ago it was still you know maybe got one through x-rays who knows what was sprayed in after it was picked who knows what it's actually sprayed in or what sprayed around it even if you're getting an organic banana just because it's organic that just means it didn't use a non-organic pesticide but they could have used something that we don't consider a pesticide but even though it is or it's under the organic labeling but that's still not necessarily better for you or maybe it was sprayed in a bunch of stuff after in the shipping or when they get it to the store or it's covered in wax so there's just there's all these steps and layers to our food even in the best case scenario and I think the important thing is to try to know where your food is coming from as much as you can get it from local places get it from farmers markets but that's just not always available to everybody or very practical But even in the best case scenario, I think it's tough.

And that's where families such as yourself, you could be like, well, I'm eating all organic. I'm eating great. I'm doing all the best that I can. And that could still be bad.

Like, it's probably better, but still bad. And like you said before, I mean, these kids are coming into this world. Like, my kids said their bucket's already full before they've even had a step on this earth, right?

A breath on this earth. Like, my other baby was full out born with eczema. Like, they said she had a neonatal rash when you know, her discharge papers and it just grew and grew from there.

I mean, it was the saddest thing to watch. All three of my kids at that point, their inflammation buckets were overflowing in various ways. And there are a lot of things that you can do at home with the best intentions.

Like you really can, I believe, as a mere mortal parent, you know, bring down those inflammation assaults that are just attacking your child and your family at all the time.

Like there really is a lot that you can do But I want to talk to you as a doctor, as a professional. We look to people in white coats to really help us to bring our babies into the world.

And then once they're here, help us foster their childhood so that they can grow up and be healthy, happy adults.

Environmental triggers and detective work for eczema

And I know my first experience in the pediatrician just wasn't that way. because my kids were ill, so I brought them to the pediatrician, because that's what you do.

And I know, you know, most of the people I talked to, they had kind of the same reactions, and you talk a lot about vaccines, and I would love to get into that with you, because that's a really hard conversation to have, and it has a lot of stigma, and there's a lot of fear around both sides of that conversation.

And I was wondering, what do you wish parents understood before making these decisions? even before jumping into vaccines, I'll do that in a second. But the other thing that we just didn't talk about, which I think is important because we just kind of talked about food, was I think with eczema, it's not just food, right?

And I think you don't want to be doom and gloom. You don't want to scare people away from like, oh, I shouldn't eat organic or oh, it's impossible. No, it is possible.

You see all sorts of kids who have some eczema that they get better, have terrible eczema, that it gets much better, that it goes away. And there are lots of things that you can do.

And I talked to parents about kind of being Sherlock Holmes and you have to You have to think through, okay, my eczema got worse. What did I do? Where did I go?

What did I eat? What did I touch? Because you can oftentimes figure out the big triggers. You're not going to change the whole food system. You're not necessarily going to be able to always go to a farm.

You're not going to always be able to do everything. But if you do investigate, then sometimes you can figure out the big triggers. And sometimes that's a certain kind of food.

So maybe your kid's sensitive to the gluten or dairy and you cut that out and they do much better. Or maybe it's something in their environment. I've seen kids where their parents just couldn't figure it out and then they switched schools and then it went away.

and they realized like maybe it was something they were spraying, maybe something they were sitting on or had a family that was going to a certain park and they realized they were there one day and they realized that like the people were there spraying this chemical over the grass and the kid was always playing in that grass and they were like oh and they they stopped going to that park and eczema went away.

So it's like eczema is an outward expression of inflammation in the body. And so there are many reasons that your body can be showing this rash, which is sometimes a good, it's like your body crying out saying, look, I'm inflamed, you know, do something, there's something that's making me not feel good.

And I think that sometimes you can figure it out by just being investigative. It's not always easy, it can take months, sometimes years, but I think if you come from that lens and do whatever you can, then over time you can hopefully pick out a few triggers, minimize inflammation, you see it get much better.

And that is what I see. almost always on my patients. Like there are a lot of kids that come with terrible eczema on those first month or two and over six months, a year, two years, it completely goes away.

It's much, much better. They don't usually have to use steroids, you know, things like that. Like I'm not against using medication when it's really severe, but Yeah, obviously that's not ideal if you're just giving them, you know, putting steroids on every day.

That doesn't solve anything. So there are many, many kids that I've seen kind of go through over months and their parents figure out multiple different things.

They change up their diet, change up the formula. If they're doing formula, maybe something mom's eating, if they're breastfeeding, that they pull out and over time you slowly see it start to get better.

And that's very encouraging because it can be really tough as a parent when you're in that scenario to really see the long-term benefits of doing all this stuff, but it actually does matter.

And I would say like, you know, probably in the high 90%, it's like probably like somewhere like 99, you know, 95% eczema really gets better when parents are detectives and start to figure out and have that lens.

So I don't want it to be all doom and gloom before we jump into the vaccines, which is obviously more fun topic, but I think like there is actually a lot that you can do and that makes a huge difference.

I just want to say that first. Then, you know, on the topic of vaccines, I guess just to go back a little bit before we jump into vaccines and when it's related to eczema.

So I am a pediatrician in Los Angeles. I'm not against vaccines. We do vaccines in our office. My personal belief on vaccines is that people should be forced to do anything.

I think we should have conversations and ultimately we should be providing informed consent and giving as much information as we can to help educate so that people can make the decision that's right for them.

I have people that do the regular schedule in my office, some that do a slow schedule, some that don't do it. Most people vaccinate in the office, but I don't force people to do it.

This is kind of my belief, and over the last decade, being in this integrative space, you realize really quickly that people have a lot of questions about vaccines when they're more holistic.

I mean, more people have questions in general now, I would say, but certainly in that space, and I was getting more and more questions, but… It was such a censored topic that it was really hard to talk about it online.

You know, thankfully that's not the same anymore. I mean, I think people are much more open to having discussions now, but that certainly was the case even just a year or two ago.

And during the pandemic, especially, I got super frustrated with everything going on and the censorship and that kind of pushed me to write a book. But I knew that if I was going to talk about vaccines, it had to be, you know, extremely from an educated place.

I had to go through everything. I had to know my stuff really well. because obviously, you know, it's so censored that it has to really be, you know, non-confrontational, but educational.

And so I really tried to do a deep dive. That's why I wrote Between a Shot and a Heartplace. It's been wonderful. Since then, I thought I was going to get all sorts of hate and all sorts of censorship, and that hasn't happened, which has been…

really nice. You know, my general position with the book or in the office, I just never tell people what to do. I want to provide information, educate, and then you can do whatever you choose.

And I think ultimately, there's still a lot of information that we just don't know. And I really wanted to write something that's balanced. And it's really hard in the vaccine world because it's so polarized that you see, you know, very pro-vaccine books, very anti-vaccine books, and there's not a lot in the middle.

And I think that's not helpful to most of the parents, which are not necessarily educated on that topic, but concerned about it and want to become more educated.

And, you know, I've heard from friends, their friends got a vaccine and had a reaction or maybe you had a reaction

to a COVID vaccine or whatever it was, and now they have questions.

And I think that's reasonable. I think you should have questions about something you're going to you know, vaccinate your child, many of them, in the first couple years.

And eczema is a big topic. I mean, eczema is a very, very reasonable concern as it relates to vaccines and whether vaccines have anything to do with triggering it, anything to do with making it worse, anything to do with it at all.

Maybe yes, maybe no. And the research still, if you look from a bird's eye view, still says no. You know, it doesn't have anything to do with eczema, but it's, you know, I would say pretty biased research.

And certainly there are some studies that show that it might. And if you talk to parents, if you look in the office, it certainly does create inflammation in the body.

I mean, it's literally meant to stimulate your immune system. So I've seen it certainly many times make eczema worse, whether it actually causes it in the first place.

I don't know if there's any real way to know that unless you do the right studies, but it's a really reasonable topic. So I'll stop there. I'll let you ask questions and we can go from there.

Parents, are you exhausted from battling your child's eczema? You've tried the prescriptions, the creams, the elimination diets, and the flares keep coming back.

I'm Andrea McHugh, mama for and host of the eczema kids podcast. Two of my children suffered with severe eczema and I know the sleepless nights and the nonstop itching and the frustration of feeling like nothing works.

That's why I created this podcast to share what actually does from natural solutions that calm the skin to practical everyday tips that make healing actually possible.

You'll find hope, clarity, and a path forward here. Follow eXimaKids wherever you get your podcasts and head to eXimaKids.com for free recipes and resources to start your child's healing journey today.

Well, six years ago, I brought my kids in. I said my first two, we went through the vaccine schedule. And candidly, we've never talked about this on a podcast we've been going for almost four years because it is such a stigma topic.

And yeah, I don't want to get a bunch of hate and all the things. It's an important decision and it's a crucial decision and everyone needs to make it for themselves.

but my baby's skin was falling off, right? Like she was clearly immunocompromised. And during that pediatrician visit, he said, you know, put on these steroids and there's not much more you can do than that and PS you're behind on vaccines.

And to which I said, I mean, this is the first time that I had voiced an opinion back to them, you know, regarding this. It's just like, I feel like she is too immunocompromised to move forward with that at this juncture." And he clearly disagreed, but, you know, we didn't do it at that time.

And if your child already is experiencing eczema, what would you say to their concerned parents surrounding vaccines? The issue with eczema is if you were to look into the mainstream medicine, the mainstream medicine would say, well, there's no reason you can't do it, right?

And that's kind of the mainstream position. You stick to the schedule. There's not really much in mainstream medicine that says that you should do anything other than the regular schedule.

So ultimately, I can never make a recommendation for anybody. The only recommendation you can make is the

CDC schedule and anything outside of that I think is personal choice.

It'll be super arrogant to me to be like, oh, you should follow Dr. Joel's schedule. over the CDC. There are a lot of people that have studied this for a long time, but for anybody who has any sort of medical condition, at least to me, it does make sense to be more cautious and to be more questioning and more thoughtful when you're going through anything, whether it's a medication, a vaccine, anything else.

It doesn't mean you should or shouldn't do it, but if you are seeing that it's triggering your symptoms, making them worse, then I think at least it's prudent to have a conversation and to think about, you know, maybe those are the kids that should go slower, do one at a time, push some of them back that are less important.

You know, those are not unreasonable questions. It's not that you shouldn't get vaccines, you shouldn't have protection, but if your kid is having bad reactions to anything, like if you have a bad reaction, Moxicillin, don't just give it to them.

Right? So if you had it and you're like, well, the eczema got way worse the day after. I don't think you should just disregard that. Obviously it could have just happened.

Like the eczema could just happen to get worse that next day. But if you're stimulating the immune system and this is an immune reaction, I don't see why it couldn't make eczema worse.

I think it probably does. Like that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it, but I think that ultimately it will affect your body. That's what it's supposed to do.

So that's something that a parent with really bad eczema needs to be mindful of. And certainly in my office, there are many families with their kids that they have, you know, any sort of condition and certainly eczema is probably the most common.

Most of those families choose to go slower. They still do it. They just might do one at a time, might space it out a little bit more, and they just kind of see how things go.

If they're not having issues, they could go a little faster. But if it does seem like it's really triggering their eczema, well, if you're working to kind of heal your skin, then setting you back leaves you open to other infections and other problems.

So you have to kind of weigh those pros and cons. And that's what I don't think we do enough of in medicine is kind of weighing the risks versus the benefits.

Certainly for a kid who has a really bad eczema, their skin's open, they're oozing, they may be getting infections, like triggering that and making it worse if that's what happens.

happens in your kid.

Vaccines, informed consent, and individualized decisions

That's the reasonable kid to me to say, well, I know there's a risk your kid could get polio, but like that's one in a hundred million. Like we haven't had polio in four years.

So maybe like we could push that back a little bit, work on your eczema, let that improve a little bit. And then, you know, do your vaccine in two months or whatever.

Like I don't think that should be out of the realm of discussion and certainly should be something that doctors should be open to discussing with you because you as a parent have to weigh the risks versus the benefits, right?

Everything has a risk. If you get a vaccine, it has a risk. If you don't get a vaccine, it has a risk. And you have to

look at your own child and say, well, my kid's the one having really bad eczema.

Like maybe the risk from whatever disease is to me is smaller than the risk of their eczema flaring. So I'd rather wait a little bit. And yeah, they could get measles.

They could get whatever disease. Like that's possible. But you have to weigh what that risk is in your specific situation. And that's how you do every other thing in medicine.

Like, I don't know why that's controversial. It's not to say you shouldn't do it, it's just we should be able to weigh those and have those discussions and ultimately the parent should understand, okay, if I don't do this, here's my kid's risk of getting haemophilus influenza.

Here's their risk of getting pneumococcus. Here's what could happen if they get haemophilus influenza. Are you sure you want to wait? That's a reasonable conversation.

My job is not to tell you what to do, it's to give you that information so you can choose what makes sense for you and different parents are going to have different responses to that question.

So with my first at her one year vaccines, there's quite a load there. And these are 12 month old babies. So she did the full slate. She was not experiencing eczema or anything at the time.

And two weeks after that, she was like a different child. She was just a little more complacent. She didn't smile anymore. She just kind of chilled and I worried, you know, as a mom that I just destroyed her spirit.

And thankfully she shook it off in about two weeks and got back to herself. But, you know, of course you hear about these crazy stories where kids are forever vaccine injured.

And I was wondering if you could explain that. Like, what does the term vaccine injured even mean? To me, it's the same as any other medication. Like, you can take a medication, have a reaction, and that can cause all sorts of problems.

I mean, that's true of any medication, vaccines or not. There's nothing controversial about that. I mean, you certainly can have reactions from vaccines.

You can have seizures. We have documented Guillain-Barré syndrome, which is an autoimmune neurologic condition, encephalitis, so inflammation of the brain.

There are many things that have been documented to be true from vaccines. And we have a vaccine court, which has paid out billions of dollars for serious injuries.

So it's possible. It's documented as rare. But just like you take any medication, you can be allergic to it and have a serious reaction, you can have harmful access to a food.

There are ingredients obviously in vaccines, so you could be allergic to those or have a bad reaction to them. So it's a possibility anytime you take any medication or any vaccine that you could have a bad reaction to it.

There's nothing woo-woo out there about that. And I think the big question is really, okay, how often does this happen? And how severe are the reactions?

And what I think is the big missing piece from the literature is really a good understanding of the long-term risks from vaccines. and how that plays into chronic disease.

We just don't really know. The only research we have is really epidemiological and not the best research. And we haven't seen studies that have looked at vaccinated versus unvaccinated kids to really have an understanding of the long-term risks from vaccines.

Like we understand the diseases. We understand if you get the disease, what's going to happen to you, how bad they can potentially be, how many people get the diseases every year.

We understand how the vaccines work. We understand how well they work. We understand, I think, in general, kind of short-term risks of fever and pain.

But the long-term risk we don't really understand because most of the research is really short-term done by the companies not studying vaccinated versus unvaccinated kids.

And we're certainly not studying the cumulative. schedule and how that may affect your immune system in ways that we don't totally understand. And so I think something like eczema really is a factor here because the vaccines are really like their job is to stimulate your immune system and does that affect it in some way that puts you more at risk to have eczema, worsen your eczema that was already there, give a child eczema that wasn't going to have in the first place.

I don't know the answer to that. I mean, it's so hard to know because In general, we give kids vaccines on day one. So if you have rashes after day three, was it because of the vaccines?

Was it already going to be there? Do the vaccines make it worse? If you get a reaction at two or three months, it's so hard to tease that out unless you do prospective studies where you're studying vaccinated versus unvaccinated kids to really see those long-term risks.

I mean, I've certainly taken care of kids with eczema that never had a vaccine, so it's not like vaccines cause all of eczema or any of these conditions.

I mean, that's for sure true. But I don't think it's an unreasonable question with skyrocketing rates of chronic conditions to say, do vaccines play some role in some kids?

What are the genetics? What's the situation? And that's true of that or anything else. How do antibiotics play into that? How do toxins in our environment, metals, the foods that we're eating, how do all these things play in?

And it's not simple. It's certainly not like, oh, vaccines cause all eczema. Like, I don't believe that. That doesn't make any sense. And I've taken care of kids that never had a vaccine.

So that's not how it is. It's complicated. But to be like, vaccines don't have anything to do with that, I also think that's really minimizing the question and not studying it appropriately.

And I think that the correct question really should be, do vaccines play into this in any way? And if so, why and how? Because let's just say that they do.

Let's just say that one of the ingredients in there is increasing your risk of asthma, allergies, autoimmune conditions, eczema. Wouldn't we want to know that?

Wouldn't doctors want to know? And you'd be like, okay, well, then can we make a vaccine without that ingredient? Like, that doesn't mean you stop vaccinating.

It just may be like, let's say aluminum in there is the problem, because that's the thing that people are concerned about the most. Okay, well, then maybe there are alternatives you could use that the vaccine work just as well, but you take that out and then you still get the protection, but also you minimize your risk of asthma or whatever.

It's way too simple to say there's no research that shows that there might be correlation. There is research out there, good research that shows that there might.

There's more research that shows that there isn't, but you also have a huge bias about vaccine research and that people that study these things have a bias around vaccines in general and anything that shows a vaccine might

cause a problem gets kind of thrown out the water and like all these people are crazy and you know they don't want to publish it.

So we have a very one-sided literature at the moment and that's what makes it really hard to know what the true truth is. around this topic. And that's why I think we need prospective trials, which would answer the questions.

Besides aluminum, what are the other top three ingredients that people are most concerned about? Well, I think thimerosal, so mercury, was a big concern for a long time.

That's been pretty much taken out at this point, which is, I think, good. Formaldehyde is a concern just because people get concerned about it. It's really small amounts in vaccines, but certainly that ingredient sounds scary.

Aborted tissue, so fetal aborted tissue, is concerning for some parents. Some of the viruses are grown in aborted fetal tissue. Other preservatives, chemicals, I mean, anything in there really I think has some concerns, but I would say metals are probably the biggest concern, aluminum being really the latest concern.

And how often do you see, I mean, like, I don't know, just a guess percentage-wise, like, when people come to see you, how often are heavy metals, like, playing a role in their chronic disease?

I think it's hard to know. I mean, we're surrounded by metals all the time. So I would think, probably everybody, I would think that the metals, our environment, aluminum, you know, cadmium, all the metals that we see in our environment, we're getting way too much of it, lead, compared to what it used to be.

Our body can handle a little bit. These are all things that are natural in the world in general, but I think we're being exposed to so much more of them.

It's in almost any food you test now, you get in trace amounts, but it's in there. So I think we're getting more than our bodies were ever intended to get.

And I think that our body can only process so much. And I think we're falling off the cliff for some kids, probably most people at this point, where we're just exposed to too much and not just metals, but just other chemicals, toxins, all sorts of long ingredients we can't pronounce.

all sorts of things sprayed in the sky and pesticides and everything, no matter how good and clean your life is, we're just bombarded by all these things.

And we have an amazing system, liver, kidneys, that we can get rid of a lot, but probably not everything. And I think that's why we're seeing so much chronic diseases is just too much.

for everybody and certainly for kids that are just growing. If you're eating even the best case scenario, you still might be exposed to too much, but certainly most people are not eating that way.

We eat all sorts of ultra processed junk. And so you're getting even more of that. And then you're also just not getting nutrients that you need. So you're not just getting bad stuff, but you're not even getting the good stuff that you need.

So how do you expect your body to function? Like, I just don't see how it would if you're not getting nutrients and getting too many chemicals. Like, of course, you just think about a fish.

Like, if you don't put fish food in, and you put a bunch of chemicals in their water, they're not going to survive very long. Like that's what we're doing to ourselves and we just don't think about it.

Yeah. Most of these kids, they don't just have eczema, right? They have constipation and sleep issues and a lot of times behavior issues and anxiety. I mean, what does that tell you about their immune system?

I mean, to me, with kids that have multiple conditions, it means your immune system's probably off. I mean, it's not getting what it needs for whatever reason, and there's probably many reasons.

And sometimes it can be difficult to untangle, but usually the first steps are pretty similar for most people. I mean, unless it's like super, super severe, then obviously there are different things you might do.

But for, you know, kids that's like a little bit constipated, a little bit of stomach issues kind of come and go, a little bit of eczema, I mean, that just means that your body is really fighting hard to kind of keep that homeostasis, that balance.

Often the best thing that you can do is really kind of go back to the drawing board, think about all the things that you're purchasing. What are you doing?

Where are you going? And try to get that kid back in balance as much as you can. And oftentimes that's going to be through food. So getting rid of that ultra processed food, minimizing the added sugar.

more fiber, more fruits, more vegetables, more real food, more cooking. I think that's a big part of it. But then also moving. I mean, nobody moves enough anymore.

So getting more exercise, making sure we're being more active, getting into nature more, getting more sunlight, making sure their sleep is optimized, which a lot of people are not.

We're on the springs way too much. So, you know, stress anxiety is a big part of that, minimizing that. I think is a big, big factor and toxins and chemicals.

Like what are you spraying around your home? What chemicals are you using? Are you using makeup? What cleaners are you using? What are you cleaning in?

What's the sheets cleaned in? Like all these things are small steps that you can start to work your way back and you can do that without spending a lot of money.

You know, there are lots of things you can do, lots of testing you can do, supplements you can get on, all sorts of things that you can potentially do, but you know, those aren't always available to everybody.

or that easy to do, but the other stuff, you can certainly do it. I mean, it doesn't cost anything. It can be cheaper to get rid of some of the chemicals and toxins and just, you know, use vinegar or water.

You know, food obviously can be more expensive, but doesn't necessarily have to be. So I think there are many things you can do that are the same price, cheaper, or maybe, you know, if you're focusing on spending, then spending it on better food is where I would put the most bang for my buck, I think, in terms of if you can do something that's going to spend some money, I think getting better quality food is always going to be number one.

Yeah. I mean, which takes it back to like what we were talking about initially, right? Like there are so many things that you can do to control your environment and what your child is exposed to.

And all those things that you just mentioned, just bit by bit by bit, if you are consistent with those, it makes a big difference for these growing, you know, developing bodies.

So yes, like we talk about that all the time. It's just like, what can we do? Like we're in this position and like, how do we start to reverse this and stop this pattern?

But when you've done- I think it's a really important point to kind of sit on for a second here is, You know, medications work quick, right? And there are medications that can help with things, but if you really want to reverse it and you really want to see a long-term change, and these are the kind of things that really work long-term, like, you know, steroid medicine, it's going to work, right, in general.

Like, if you take a steroid by mouth, if you put a steroid cream on your skin, like, it does heal in general, unless it's really bad, for a couple days, then it just comes back.

There's nothing wrong with using a medication in the short term, especially for severe illness or something like that to get you back on track. I don't have any issue with that and I'll use it if need be, but I just think that's not the solution.

That's not the discussion that needs to be had. Giving a parent a steroid cream to me is not the solution. That's just like… All right, in the severe scenario, here's what you can use as your backup army.

But what you need to be doing is all these other things that kind of move the needle forward. But it's slow. You're not going to get rid of eczema unless it just happens to be that you're allergic to something.

But let's assume that's not the case in general. Then it's something that takes a while. Right? So it's something that's slow moving. You remove one food that's triggering.

Oh, the eczema is a little better today. Oh, I'm not going to this place anymore, which is causing inflammation. Okay, that makes it a little better. Like it's a slow process, but you're aiming to have a much better eczema in six months or a year than you are today.

And you're aiming to get better and better with less outbreaks and worse outbreaks and worse issues over a year or two years.

Managing severe eczema and steroid use

And that to me, is the better goal and a very attainable goal if you come at it from that lens because also you don't have to do everything. You don't need to spend millions of dollars.

You don't have to do tons of tests. You don't have to throw out all your food. You just start to make small changes. And I think that is the big thing that medicine is missing because you just don't have the time in modern medicine to work with families in this way or even necessarily the training or the thought processes in that way.

It's so attainable, it's so doable, and it's so common sense almost that you don't even need a doctor for it. But you do need to have some guidance and think in that way that it's possible to see these changes, but you can't expect a change tomorrow.

Like, and that's what I think too many people want. It's like, oh, the eczema, I want it better. I want it gone. And that is not going to happen with a natural method.

It takes time. But you do for sure, especially, I would say of all the conditions that you see, eczema is the one which I would say you get the most success with this kind of approach because it's basically always some sort of environmental trigger that's creating this eczema.

And it's not severe in the sense for most people that it's like, I don't know, like a terrible autoimmune condition or you're talking about like celiac disease or other things where there's a lot more damage that's already been done.

Eczema really seems to be much better for most kids, but after a few years, if you just are a little more mindful. Yeah, absolutely. And everyone listening is, I mean, they're so researched and they're so careful.

And, you know, sometimes it gets really hard living this way when you just don't know what it is that's triggering it. And it's clearly a handful of things and it just takes a little bit to sift them out.

And I would say from experience of doing this for a while now, You have to have a little bit of patience sometimes and also just that spirit of continue to try and continue to think about it because it is so many times that I have, and it's not me that figures out, it's usually the parents, right?

Because it's like, I'm not there with them. So your practitioner's not at home with you. And there's so many times where the parent comes like, it could be a year or two years.

I figured it out. It was this. Sometimes it just takes a little bit of time. And especially for kids that have bad eczema, I would say it's much harder to figure it out than kids that have mild eczema.

Because if it's bad, you can't really tell what's making it worse. Because it's already bad, it's always bad, so it's really hard to see like, oh, I ate the tomato today, it made it worse because it's already bad.

Once it starts to improve, then you can start to see like, oh, now it got much worse. Okay, what did I do? Like you have a lot more of a runway kind of to see the worsening to figure things out in that way.

But I want to encourage people if you're kind of going through this journey and you're like, oh, I've tried everything and I've been doing this for six months and it doesn't seem to be getting better.

That's not that abnormal. But what is actually normal, I would say, is for the parents that keep with it, they do figure it out eventually. I mean, it's not always, like, one thing, but they'll be like, oh, I realize, like, I was using this thing and it seems like that's, like, I stopped using it and it got so much better.

Like, sometimes it's not always intuitive. You're like, I'm eating healthy. I'm doing all the things. I'm going here. I'm taking, like, what if it's the park you go to?

Right? Like, you know, you could be doing all the right things, but it could be sprayed in some crap that like that's causing your kid or making it worse.

So you can't always figure that out. Sometimes you're just going to keep thinking about it over time. And you do. You're doing everything right. You've cleaned up the diet.

You've swapped out the soaps. You've put air filters in every room. Maybe you even live on an organic farm. And still, your child is scratching, bleeding, awake all night.

The flares won't stop and no one can tell you why. No parent should have to watch their child suffer, especially when you're already doing everything in your power to fix it.

That's why I created the eczema kids podcast. I'm Andrea McHugh, mama for health coach and the founder of eczema kids. Two of my own children battled with relentless eczema and I know firsthand how heartbreaking and exhausting it is.

Here we go beyond surface level fixes. You'll learn how to uncover hidden triggers, prepare your child's gut and calm their skin from the inside out. You'll hear the real stories of families who found freedom and insights from practitioners who are rewriting what's possible.

Because eczema isn't just a skin condition, it's a message from the body. And when you listen, you can heal. So follow eczema kits wherever you get your podcasts and start your child's healing journey today.

Yes, it's 100% reversible, and you can 100% do it. And most of the people that are listening, they're in the bad, right? It's really bad. My kids were certainly that way.

The flares were so intense. They weren't flares. It's just like that was how we lived. And you can't tell if this scab is even worse today than it was yesterday.

It's just one big scab, and it's sad. And that comes with a lot of lack of sleep, because their kids can't sleep because they're in so much like pain and they're itching so much and that exhaustion, you know, drives them to do things that maybe they don't want to do or maybe they're just didn't know that there was another way.

But a lot of people then result to steroids just to get like over the hump, right? Like this way of living is so hard in a lot of people's cases. And when they're doing that and then they're realizing like, okay, this isn't like having the actual results that I want it to, like it helps for a night, but then it comes right back.

Can you just talk to us a little bit about what is happening in those cases? And then if you've been doing like more long-term use, like tell us about what's going on when kids are experiencing TSW.

I think with eczema, the frustrating part is we still don't really know, even in the medical community. I think it's still a big mystery, you know, for a lot of the autoimmune type conditions, exactly why your body kind of triggers itself or what's going on.

I mean, to me, I've always thought of it as it's just inflammation. It's your body's way of reaching out, letting you know that it's inflamed, something you're doing, something they're eating, something they're exposed to is irritating the skin, you know, for a lot of kids.

even can be just the food like they have sensitive skin they're born in that way and they're just more sensitive and so stuff touches their skin it causes irritation something they're going and doing it causes irritation now they're drooling it causes irritation so that's why you see it a lot of times like around the face and in the chin because it they have it already but then they're drooling and just never gets better because it doesn't have a chance to heal it's always being being attacked and then they're also the other things that they're doing are so that that's where I think that you really see this this kind of cycle this worsening And that is where, you know, someone goes to the dermatologist or it's really, really severe.

They often will put them on medication because you do, I think, need to help the skin to heal over enough that all the natural stuff can work. I haven't really seen the natural stuff cure really bad eczema.

Like, that doesn't seem to help. I mean, I think those things are important to do and to get in the better habits. But ultimately, if it's really, really bad, then oftentimes the medication kind of push them back in a better direction.

start with the natural stuff, keep doing the natural stuff, come off of the medication and keep doing the natural things and that seems to work the best for most people in the short term for severe eczema.

But if your kid has oozing skin and is miserable and crying and not sleeping, they need to sleep, right? That's also going to help. So if they're just not sleeping and they're scratching and they're making worse and anyone who has eczema if you're older, like you know.

It's that cycle, like you're scratching it, it makes it worse. So you have to stop that cycle before it's going to get better. So that to me is where the medicine can really come in handy and where I would use it or send some dermatologist and be okay with it.

But other than that, if it's the more mild, then that's where you got to do the natural stuff and just really try to be a detective and see if you can.

And there are other things you can do. I mean, there's research on omegas being helpful and vitamin D being helpful. Nobody seems to get enough sunlight these days, so make sure you get outside more.

Probiotics have some research that they might be helpful in some cases, so those are things you could consider. And to me, those are like the big ones.

Not too much else has a lot of evidence, other things you can do. I mean, then there's like oatmeal baths and people put like the socks on, you know, other things like that.

So there are other stuff that I think people have done that are helpful sometimes. But it's worth to try all of it. You know, I think if your kid has bad eggs, it's worth to see what works because nothing's going to work for everybody.

But ultimately what does work is kind of the stuff we talked about before. That's what I've seen. I mean, with topical steroid withdrawal, people hear that term and they're not sure if that's what their child is experiencing or if that even happens.

Could you take us through a little bit what that means and what's happening in that case? If you're using a steroid, it's kind of throwing a bomb at the rash, right?

So you're using steroids, you're trying to decrease that local inflammation. It does usually work unless it's really bad, but you're not, again, doing anything about the root cause.

You're not doing anything to deal with the root of the inflammation. So whatever was causing that inflammation is probably still there. And so what you see often when using a steroid is as soon as you come off the steroid there, the rash comes back.

If you use it for a very long term, it can thin the skin and other things, but I think, you know, more talking about like in the short term. So we see that all the time, like you use steroids for a couple days, it just comes right back.

So that's why I think it's really important if you're working with a practitioner for doing that, you've got to start on some of these other things at the same time.

So that way you can be using those natural creams, eating healthier, taking your vitamins, whatever it is. So that way when you start to come off of the steroids, then hopefully you're moving in a better direction and you have decreased some of that body inflammation that you don't just see it kind of pop back and get worse again right after you come off those steroids.

And sometimes that also means kind of tapering it down a little bit. So you might be doing it twice a day or three times a day, and then you go down to twice a day, and then you go down to once a day, and then you do it every other day for a little bit.

And that also sometimes helps for some families too, where if you kind of just do it for a day or two and then just comes right back, you might have to taper it down a little bit.

So that way you're still giving that support and giving more time for the skin to heal, but not doing it as much. So that does seem to help it from a medical sense for people that are using steroids for their eczema, which It does help.

I mean, I've seen it many times where the kids have really bad eczema like on their heels or something and they like use it in those spots and it does get much better and that helps for the body to, I guess, get back to a better place because if the skin's open then it's not just the internal inflammation.

Now you have the external inflammation. You have the bacteria on your skin that's supposed to be there and the fungus on your skin and then you get a bacterial infection and a fungus infection.

Your body's dealing with that too and that also increases your inflammation and so even Just because of that, you have more inflammation and it can never get better.

So that's where I think the steroids do help to kind of close that skin over. And at least then you don't have that external inflammation also. It's complicated.

I mean, it's frustrating for sure. No question about it. It's a frustrating condition. For the parents that are there and they feel scared and overwhelmed or like they failed their child, what would be your message to them?

Yeah, I mean, you definitely haven't failed your child in any way just by listening to something like this.

Root-cause healing, prevention, and practical next steps

We're all trying to figure it out. Medicine doesn't know the answers. So nobody knows the answer to eczema. There's something that you did to cause this.

I mean, and even if it was something that's like in your house, something you're doing, you don't know, right? I think the job of a parent is to try to figure things out as we go.

We try to do the best that we can based on the information that we have. And if you're noticing some symptoms, then the best thing that you can do is try to figure out as best as you can, what are those things that you can do?

How do you make it better? How do you improve it? And that to me is good parenting. Like that's what we always need to do. It's nothing that you've done.

It's nothing that you aren't doing. It's just, you are doing it. Like you're trying to learn, you're trying to educate, you're trying to figure out what it is.

And it's not easy. I mean, it's not easy for me. It's not easy for anybody. You have all sorts of, I know like super holistic minded high-end practitioners, their kids still get eczema.

You know, kids still have conditions. So you can do everything right, you know, right, whatever that means, air quotes. And your kids can still have all sorts of conditions.

So you can't beat yourself up over it. You have to do the best that you can. And you got to keep moving forward. And hopefully, over time, you can figure out some of those triggers and improve it and help your kid to suffer less.

Hopefully, also, we are starting to push back in medicine. and in politics and in all sorts of places to see some of these bigger changes because ultimately that's what we need.

I mean you need to focus on your own kids but we also need to figure out like how do we improve our food system and how do we get more local food and how do we decrease some of these chemicals and toxins and how do we improve that so that way on the grand scale most kids, you know, most parents don't have to think about this like we shouldn't have all this eczema, we shouldn't have all these chronic conditions.

but we live in an environment that's really not conducive to being healthy from a chronic condition standpoint. So we have to also change that. And the more that people get involved and push back and ask questions, the more that we see change.

And we're seeing a lot of change, some good, some bad, but certainly the politics have changed and we're seeing a lot more discussion about chronic disease, which we never had before.

So I think at least from my standpoint, it's good. and hopefully over the next decade, we'll see some change that's positive towards our kids' health because we've seen a lot of negative in terms of our kids' health.

With Secretary Kennedy, I know not everybody loves him and not everyone loves everything that he does, but I think without question, no one's ever talked about health in this way and no one's ever brought the world really certainly you know America to a discussion about politics is certainly polarized but ultimately we need that discussion to see change and you know some change is going to be good some change is going to be bad but ultimately we need it and hopefully this at least catapults us to a better place in the long run because people are are getting involved and educated and angry and you know all sorts of things so I think like from that standpoint it's good that we we are discussing this and and you know you can agree or disagree with his policies and what he's doing but but ultimately for me I think it's a good thing that we're discussing it and you know wherever you disagree push back and let's see change and and again everybody has the same goal I think which is healthy kids and not everyone agrees on how to get there but we do know that there's a chronic disease epidemic so we do have to change something.

What's one thing you think modern pediatrics does right and one thing that really needs to change? I think modern

medicine in general does really well in terms of emergency care.

I think we're really good at treating infections and broken bones and MRIs and x-rays and all sorts of things and surgery, like that's something we've come a long way.

And birth too, like, you know, a lot of people used to die on childbirth and they're not really so common anymore. So we're much better at those things, but we're really bad at chronic disease.

So I think the big thing, the change in modern medicine is more focused on prevention and more focused on root cause and a little less on antibiotics and treatments and vaccines.

And we saw that with the pandemic. I mean, it's the perfect example where we know who was most at risk during the pandemic. It was those with multiple conditions and obesity and diabetes and other chronic conditions.

And that was the perfect opportunity to push an agenda of healing and to push an agenda of let's get more vitamin D, let's get more movement, let's see how we can decrease our risk of cardiovascular disease, let's promote exercise, like how do we fund that?

How do we fund more movement? How do we get better healthy food? Like that was a perfect opportunity to be like look who's not doing so well, let's decrease that in our population and instead we focus so much on vaccines.

And, you know, vaccines can be helpful, but they're not magic. And, you know, ultimately we'd have a lot more bang for our buck if everybody got healthy than if we had another vaccine.

So I think like that's where we have to kind of move is away from this one magical product. to focusing more on our general health and prevention and not general prevention in terms of just vaccines.

I think both things can be important, but I think we focus so much on vaccines over the last, you know, maybe two decades. And I think we need to shift that back a little bit, a little less focus on vaccines and a lot more focus on the big preventative things that health can get involved in and food and exercise in promoting that and supporting and making it available.

I mean, maybe more funding for HSA so people can use it, more availability for those things, subsidies for healthier food, I don't know, whatever it is.

I think that's the future if we actually want to get healthier versus just another vaccine. I think you're not getting much bang for your buck with vaccines versus if we can actually heal a population and decrease obesity and decrease chronic conditions.

That is one of our big problems right now is these chronic conditions and not as much infectious disease anymore. Lastly, wrapping up, I want to be respectful of your time.

I could talk to you forever. Thank you so much for doing this. But what's one simple thing that families could do this week that would actually move the needle for their child's health?

Read the labels on everything. I think that's by far the simplest thing is just start becoming educated, reading labels, learning about ingredients. And we've been so trained in our generation as we grew up of like faster, cheaper, easier, look at the box, marketing, all that stuff.

And we were never trained really in reading labels. And I think that's the most important thing when you're buying something. And ideally, buy real food that doesn't really have a label and then make it.

But if you certainly are buying anything that's prepackaged, then read the label, look for real words, look for ingredients that you know, start to learn about anything that's on there, and try to minimize all the things that you don't want.

And I think if you do that, then you get a long way. And it doesn't have to be more expensive. You can look at two bags of chips and be like, all right, which one has better ingredients?

And buy the better one. And if every single decision you make moving forward has one of the factors that you're making a choice on, then you're going to get a long way.

It's a lot of small decisions, it's a lot of small improvements, but those add up over 10 years. So I think if you can become, I guess, just cognizant of the choices that you're making and have health be a part of it, not just money.

I understand, you know, financials are obviously important too, but I think that one factor We have a convenience factor, we have a money factor, but then we can also have a health factor.

And you can weigh all the three of those when you're making a purchase. And I think that that should be a part of it. And I think for so long and for so many people, health had nothing to do with the purchases.

They're like, oh, this is cheaper. This is more colorful. This tastes better. And they didn't, you know, we didn't really get trained in eating healthy or buying, you know, when you buy a bed or whatever.

Which is the cheapest one? Which one looks the nicest? Health was not a part of it. But I think if you bring that into the equation, then you're going to make more health-conscious choices and that's going to make a huge difference in the long run.

Dr. Joel, I really appreciate your time today. You are such a wealth of information. Where can everyone find and follow you? Yeah, so the easiest places would be Instagram or X at Dr.

Joel Gator. The book is Between a Shot and a Hard Place, and I also have a Substack with the same name that's been doing great. It's been super fun doing Substack and writing every day, and it's been near the top of Substack for a while now, so it's been pretty cool.

I think a lot of people are really interested in learning about vaccines, learning about kids' health, which is never True before, you can find me there as well.

Perfect. All that will be listed in the show notes. Thank you again. Have such a good day. Thank you. Before you hit stop, remember this. Eczema is your child's inflammation talking.

It's not a life sentenced to steroids. So be a detective, not a desperate Googler. Track what's changed the day the rash spiked. And if you find yourself in a doctor's office, ask about the risks and the benefits of each recommendation.

Meds can be a bridge, but the root cause work is the fix. That's the takeaway advice from Dr. Joel today. And if you're ready for a clear path out of that flare cycle, get into the eczema elimination method at eczemakids.com.

And if you need relief while you heal, the natural eczema shop has you. the Skin Comfort Trio, prebiotic tea, and other truly helpful basics. Everything in there is like taking supplements through the skin.

It's medicinal, effective, and non-toxic, guys. And if this helped in any way, follow the show and text it to a friend who's also up at 2 a.m. with an itchy kid and do me a favor.

I will make it worth your while. Can you email a screenshot of your podcast review to support at xmakids.com and I'll send you a 30% off coupon for anything in the shop.

You are not stuck. Your child's skin can calm and you can lean the way. Take care, friends. I will talk to you next week. Thank you for helping with my eczema.

Love you. Thank you for listening today, friend. I know healing your child's skin isn't easy, but you're doing it one

smart step at a time. If this episode gave you a little hope or a better night's sleep, leave a quick review so more exhausted parents can find eczema kids and finally rest easy too.

Follow, share, and let's help more kids heal. Take care.