Beyond Allergies: Could Mold Be Affecting Your Child's Brain & Behavior? Transcript

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Introduction to Mold and Brain Health

It's not a dirty or clean question because a lot of these things are microscopic, invisible. You're not going to see it. It is not like that mold on the bread in the fridge, right?

It invisible, mold toxins, and visible to the naked eye, you know, microscopic. We can breathe them in. They can go straight through the blood-brain barrier.

can go all around the body. So it's not as if this is an old or dirty home problem. But yeah, it is all connected and these phases of rapid development, It's so, so important to keep the being able to focus on that, right?

And not kind of survival mode from day one, having to, keep up with that constant influx of toxins. Everything is connected and I'm here to tell you how.

I am Dr. Laura Hanson with Connect My Brain. This podcast is for moms who are concerned about their child's development. The brain impacts our mind, body, and overall health.

I explain how your brain is wired, what happens when it's out of balance, and how early childhood development not only impacts your child but can affect you as an adult years later.

Want to know how to improve your life? Join me and learn about your amazing brain and what it can do for you. Hey everybody, it's Dr. Laura with Connect My Child's Brain.

I am so excited because I have another guest on my podcast, and I think this is just such a wonderful way for my audience to hear other perspectives on some things that we've even talked about in the past.

And today I She is the detox doc and she is going to give us all kinds of great information about mold and how it plays a part in a child's ill health and maybe even an adult's health.

What we can do about it, what we need to look for and what maybe are some red flags that we really need kind of pull apart and make sure that we're addressing our body appropriately.

So Dr. Diana, thank you so much for coming on my podcast. Welcome. Thanks so, much Dr Laura. It's great to be here. Great. Well, tell us a little bit about yourself and then just go ahead and jump in.

Tell us what you want us to know.

Dr. Dianau2019s Mold Exposure Story

Absolutely. So I am a conventionally trained MD. I did primary care, actually did pediatrics for a while. And so I was going my merry way as a regular doctor.

My family and I moved into this home. which was a rental, which we knew had mold, but it had been covered up and so and been painted over slash cleaned, quote unquote.

And so we know that there was mold there, But we didn't know That mold could actually really make us sick beyond respiratory issues. So I had just gone out of residency.

We had two young children and we're in this house and We started getting sick. So with a variety of different symptoms, because the thing about mold is it doesn't cause the same symptoms for everyone.

So it can be very confusing and can fly under the radar because people think, well, if I had mold, I would have X, Y, and Z symptoms. But it's not always the case.

My husband is prone to gut issues. He got worsening gut issue as well as other things. I got more of the invisible symptoms like insomnia, feeling of something always in your throat, Globus sensation, various things like that, mental health issues.

And then our kids got varying symptoms as well. So as far as my son went, he got the respiratory symptoms, which were a little bit more classic. We said, okay, well, maybe those are due to the mold.

were the allergic symptoms. And then our infant daughter at the time, she was very colicky, like she didn't sleep well in the house. She was just super irritable and it was doing all of the techniques and things that I had learned in med school and nothing was working.

So our rental, thank God, ended up coming up, so we moved. And most of the family started feeling better because, well, as we learned later, we were breathing in less mold spores and toxins.

but my husband really didn't get well and so we did a functional medicine workup for him because we had exhausted all of the conventional medicine resources and we found so many things on that work up.

So, you know, his gut was inflamed, he had a high toxin load, had inflammation, systemic wise too. So he had a long road to recovery, but that really shifted my perspective on, well, medicine in general, I would say, because I thought to myself, okay, For me, why did I not learn about these tests, you know, GI map, mold toxin testing, some of these inflammatory markers in med school, and am I missing this with my patients too?

And then, I really decided that I wanted to go ahead and help others with mold and gut issues because that was originally he had the worst trouble with his gut.

So through functional medicine, thankfully, he was able to heal. And of course, my cooking. But, you know, it's just, I'm so glad that, we found out about this because, who knows what would have happened.

So fast forward a couple years, got out of the medical system and now I run my own practice, which is all through video visits. And I'm based out Virginia, but I help people nationwide really through wellness coaching.

But I am an MD in Virginia and it's just such a great opportunity to see people heal who have been just dismissed or gaslit by the medical system, or who just didn't know that mold could cause a variety of health issues.

So that's my story, and I love what I do. That's great, I find it so interesting. I've had such an opportunity to talk to so many MDs that, like you, started down a traditional path of medicine and had some kind of personal event show up in your life and kind challenge you using the tools that you know in order to try to resolve.

And when you didn't get resolution, you found another path and then you do you ask yourself, why didn' I learn that? Now, I'm a chiropractor and I love that we learn the whole body.

But the thing I feel I don't understand why we didn't learn more of pharmacology because so many people are on prescription medicine and sometimes this particular element comes up in chiropractic that we want to expand our license to include the ability to prescribe.

Many chio-practors get very upset about it. I I would love the opportunity to tell somebody, this may not be the best prescriptive medicine for you, but we never get that one passed.

But I try to work more with holistic doctors like yourself and we can always collaborate and things of that nature. I love that we are expanding. our perspectives.

And at the end of the day, what is it really going to do? It's going put the real emphasis on the patient and what's

really in the patients best interest.

So how are your kids doing now? Are the kids better? Yes. Yeah, thanks for asking. They are doing very well, thank you. My daughter, who was born in that home, unfortunately was predisposed to developing more autoimmune issues, so she developed PANS.

Why Children Are Especially Vulnerable

So basically, neuropsychiatric syndrome that hers was triggered, like ultimately was trigger after a viral illness, but You know, I truly believe that she was predisposed to developing that kind of thing due to being born in a moldy home, but thankfully I was able to catch that and knew what it was pretty quickly whenever it happened.

So despite the fact that had some pretty serious symptoms with that, was I able, again, to use functional medicine in order to help her heal from that.

But yeah, a wide range of medical issues we've been through, You know, thankfully everyone is doing quite well. And yeah, healing is possible from mold illness for sure.

Well, a couple of things I'd love to just kind of put into our conversation, especially to help the audience understand. So kids are very susceptible.

when they are developing, not only to mold, but any illnesses, because those children are in developmental windows. And so the immune system is really maturing that first three years of life.

The gut is matering the first couple of years. You're also learning to crawl, you're learning Your sounds are developing over the first three years, so they really call this a neuroimmune interface.

And so it can impact a child when their little systems are overly stressed in one capacity or another. and impact their development. But if you were older and this happened to you and you had a solid maturation process of your immune system, et cetera, could probably fight things better.

And you let me know what you think, but I think kids are almost you know, highly susceptible to things because they are in these developmental windows.

Do you believe that too? Absolutely. So I work with a lot of families and a of times kids are strongly affected by mold. Especially like I said, if they were born into that environment, instantly your immune system is getting that onslaught of toxins that you are having to deal with 24-7 if you're breathing it in.

The thing again about mold is it causes a lot of inflammation. So that is an issue for growth and development. It's an issues for like food tolerance.

You can see a lots of food intolerances. Skin issues, I see a lot with kids and mold. I really wonder how many kids who have eczema, it's actually environmental as in their indoor environment, usually gets blamed on the outdoor environment and allergies to that.

But then a lots of times those steroid creams and things like that don't always work and then they just keep getting put on stronger medications. Many times there is an environmental component as far as indoor environmental goes with eczema.

And the other thing is too, you were talking about learning to crawl. Yeah, the kid is crawling on the floor and there's like mold settling in dust or, some spores are heavier than others, different species of mold, but You know, they're like rolling around on the floor and they are, even if the home is clean, right?

It's not a dirty or clean question because a lot of these things are microscopic, invisible. You're not going to see it. It is not like that mold on that bread in the fridge, it's invisible mold toxins, and visible to the naked eye, you know

microscopic.

We can breathe them in. They can go straight through the blood brain barrier. can go all around the body. So it's not as if this is an old or dirty home problem.

Of course, we want to keep dust low because mold likes to hang out with dust. But, you know, I was cleaning regularly and we still had mold issue. And many of my clients have, fairy clean houses, but you can still have molds.

It can be behind your walls or anywhere like that. But yeah, it's all connected and these phases of rapid development, It's so, so important to keep the body being able to focus on that and not kind of survival mode from day one having to, keep up with that constant influx of toxins.

Oh yeah, absolutely. So I've had a lot of cases just brought that piece of the mold into the conversation. And one of things that I saw quite a bit of, now you spoke about functional medicine, functional labs really look at the true biochemistry of lab that just is focusing on one little thing and you get a range that maybe has been stuck in that range for a very long time.

It really is looking at the individual blueprint of what that individual is going through. So I've seen where, especially with pediatricians, because I do more pediatrics than anything, but like the parents will get these labs and it just looks like everything is on fire.

They're getting a mold exposure lab. They'll go through these protocols, pretty horrific protocols. And they've got the best intentions and they're really working on it.

Then they go back like a year later and do another test. Sometimes it could look worse and sometimes it just doesn't look like anything is happening. Can you speak to that?

What's really going on? Absolutely. So yeah, and this can be very overwhelming for people. I mean, not to mention, you know, expensive and just there's a lot that comes around mold and it's just can take over life.

Just want to acknowledge that.

Testing, Labs, and Detox Approaches

But so my approach to it is that yes, I'm in the urine mycotoxins test, which is probably what you're seeing or many times is what people get that shows one piece of the puzzle.

And that's what toxins are you peeing out right now? which is useful. It's the only direct measure of mold toxins. So, but that's, the question that it answers and that alone, right?

Like, what are you peeing out right now? It doesn't necessarily mean that the exact amount that is left in your body also because especially with kids, I can see very high levels and then sometimes in their body it could be less, right?

But we don't test, we're not gonna do a biopsy and test mycotoxins in the body. So the only way we can test the blood for mycotoxin is myco toxin antibodies.

Either one of those two tests is good, but yes, they can fluctuate depending on what you're peeing out at the current time. And so I have to take this in context.

I usually do gut testing like a stool test for like that gut dysfunction, the microbiome inflammation, things like comprehensive stool analysis and then an organic acid test or O test and that is really good to show you.

Some can speak to the fungal overgrowth. It also is informative about the mitochondrial health and sort of the

cellular health. All of those together, as well as blood inflammatory markers, can show me a full picture of what's actually going on with the child.

So take that in context of symptoms and exposure, because zooming out from the potentially 80 to 100 pages of labs that people may get as part of this workup, the broad strokes that we have to deal with in a mold detox, if you will, is the environment, right?

We want to make sure you're in a low mold environment. You're not going to be mold-free because there's mold pretty much everywhere, but we want it to below in mold.

Mold spores, a mold spore here and there is usually not gonna be a problem, But if it's a large amount of mold or if your very sensitive to mold, then we wanna make it really, really low-mold.

And then, so I keep going back to the gut because I focus on the got a lot more than a a shorter regimen overall, because if you're not digesting your food, if your not breaking down your nutrients, your neurotransmitters are messed up, you can't grow, kids can grow.

Kids can heal if their guts are in a dysbiotic state or dysfunction. I do gut work really first and environment, of course. And that also leads to the next thing, which is a healing diet.

So it's broad strokes for me, like environment dietary nervous system and gut. Then yeah, we do some detox supplements, but yes, people come to me on a very, very long list of supplements and usually I try to streamline that because In many cases, it's too many inputs.

Kids can start reacting, and also they get supplement fatigue, right? Like, why am I having to take this and my friends are not? And why do I have to have take all of this stuff, you know, when they're pushing back and then they just say forget it and they are like spitting it out and not even taking it.

So, we don't want to get to that point either. And so I totally get that. And most of these supplements, you know, come in a variety of different forms.

So generally we can get away with like a smoothie with a few things, thrown into it, right? So it's so important with kids to not make it a whole, medicalize it into this 20 supplement situation.

Broad strokes are so import and I think they get missed whenever we start dumping on a ton of supplements. I agree. First of all, you've got to find out, can they even swallow a pill?

And then if you find that they can't, there's going to be, I think, a lot of pushback because they could be so stressed out that even the idea of trying to swallow something is very uncomfortable.

I totally agree, too, about start with the gut and let's clean it up. But I agree with you too. Man, you got to look at that environment. You can work on so many things from the inside out, but if you live in an environment that's still just knocking at you, You're going to feel like you're not getting results.

You are going get discouraged and you are gonna go, yeah, I tried that, but it didn't work. I'm sure you've got some great ways for people to determine how can they determine the level of mold that or let's say their concern.

How can figure that out? Are there ways to get good quantifiable evidence that your house has too much mold in it. Yeah. So the best way, and of course I'm on the medical side, so for environmental questions, like I generally stay in my lane, but I do work with a lot of people on environmental side.

That being said, the way to figure that out is with an environmental assessment from a pro. versus like I am one of those mold kits at the Lowe's or Home Depot.

Right, and this is the best. I mean, this the ideal, right? And sometimes it's not possible. But if finances allow, if

budget allows, I would definitely get a full assessment by an indoor environmental professional.

And those assessments are going to vary widely, so people can reach out to me or look on the ICI website. There's a variety of lists. You want to make sure they're certified.

Not every state has a license for mold assessors. Most states, in fact, do not. So it's very easy for someone to just start checking homes without having a lot of experience or knowledge base.

So it's one of the things where you really want to be careful, as with everything, with who you get to come into your home and tell you whether or not it is safe there.

So they are generally going to do a couple different tests. They'll compare the outdoor air to the indoor air, which is really important because, like I said, there's going be probably a little bit of mold, but you don't want it to much higher than the outdoors air.

And then also looking around for any moisture issues because mold is a moisture issue. Any mold issues is the moisture. We got to find out where the moistures coming from because any moister and an organic material to feed on like, for example, drywall.

Mold can easily grow within 24 to 48 hours. If there's any kind of water damage event, any leak, then it's very important to dry that out quickly. Otherwise, mold can potentially grow in 24-48 hours, it is a survivor.

Mould grows really easily. Bathroom, kitchen, all those places that have a lot of moisture and water going on. So BEST is a full environmental assessment.

Generally, they do air sampling and surface tests. If you're going to do a DIY test, so a lot of people like the ERMI test which will tell you exactly what species of mold are there.

This is going to be the most detailed DIY test. There are pros and cons. So I'm in a mold pros group, and some people love it. Some people don't. It just depends.

But that is an example of a test that you can do to see which actual molds are in your home as opposed to just levels. Definitely, I would consult with a pro if at all possible.

Yeah, I think that's wise, but I'm not even sure if that is a licensed field here in Georgia. I am going to check that out because I that why some people have felt like, well, it's not a real thing and mold is real.

Do you recommend an air purifier for the home? Yeah, so the most important thing to control the mold growth in your home is going to be dehumidifiers.

So keeping the humidity approximately less than 50% and I have the little humidity meters that I My house or sometimes you can monitor that in different ways, but it can vary, of course, throughout the home.

But dehumidifiers, especially in humid environments or humid climates, are going to be key. Of course they can get too dry, and some areas are gonna be drier than others and you may not need as many, with dehumanizers.

And then yes, air purifiers are very effective. If it's a true HEPA air purifier, that's going to be very helpful to remove those mold spores and those other mold byproducts.

So absolutely, dehumidifiers, air-purifiers to keep the air quality good. Do you have ones that you recommend? Is it like on your website and things of that nature?

Do have resources that people could go and look at what your recommendations would actually be? Yeah, so for dehumidifiers, they're not too complex. So I would generally say any regular Amazon dehumanifier is going to generally be fine.

It's just pulling water out of the air. Air purifiers are a little more complex, right? So, I like a couple of different brands and I do have links to those on my link tree, which, you know, like air doctor, it has to be a true HEPA.

And then there are so many different kinds of air purifiers and I could talk about them for hours, but basically there types of air purification.

Assessing Home Mold and Air Quality

And if you're really, really sensitive to mold, you may want multiple different types. So sometimes if what's called an active air-purification system, I like Air Oasis for that.

But just kind of the HEPA baseline, like broadly applicable, usually is Air Doctor. Okay. Well, that's really great. I wonder if somebody is thinking, boy, This is what my problem is.

I really appreciated that you shared how you got into this because of what you experienced with your family. So I think maybe if we could expand a little bit more, like your husband had gut issues.

What were your issues? I had mental health symptoms. Like what? What kind of mental? So generally, I'm a pretty even-keeled, very optimistic person. And I had severe anxiety as well as depression sometimes during the time that we were in that home.

It was very out of character for me and also written off as postpartum. So basically, we are thinking it was just very significant post partum and just continue dealing with it.

There's something that is really common with mold, which is called globus sensation, feeling like something's always in your throat because mold can cause inflammation because you're breathing it in.

It's getting in there as well. So that can be, and it can also cause post-nasal drips. So I had that, kept getting checked, my throat checked and everything was fine.

Cause of course you didn't check for mold. And then yeah, with the kids, it was like everything from skin to behavior to like fatigue. My toddler, or my son was a toddler at the time and he was getting tired as a toddler, which is a huge red flag because they have endless energy.

So that was definitely something that we were very concerned about and we got the whole regular medical tons of blood work for him and everything was normal.

So, that one of the major symptoms as well. That's really interesting too because let's dive into some of that even more because I think so many times people are experiencing different symptoms and were certainly not saying that It's always going to be mold, but man, what's the mechanism behind mold impacting so many different things in the body?

Yeah, so there's a few different factors there. So genetics play a role. About 25% of people have HLA-DR variants that make it harder to detox mold toxins.

That can run in families. As well, the state of your gut. Again, my husband had already had a lot of gut issues. His gut was already not healthy. he just was susceptible to it getting more and more damaged.

And then the state of your nervous system. So for me, you know, I was in a very stressful residency time of life. and so I Was having a lot of, stress and everything like that and postpartum and Everything.

so, i was more susceptible To like the nervous System issues because it was already being stressed and taxed. And of course stacked exposures so if you had you know moldy.

College dorm for example and then you move into another molding place and any moving to another movie place

maybe you don't think much of it. These exposers can actually stack because mold can cause chronic symptoms.

because of that inflammation that can then stay with you. Sometimes it's developed into what's called chronic inflammatory response syndrome or SERS. And some of my clients have that, some don't, but either way, it is some degree of inflammation, that has been triggered by mold and sometimes there's mast cell issues too, which is issue with the immune system being too overactive.

So then you can stay in that vicious cycle and we have to cut that off by doing some other work that we were talking about a bit ago. Wow, I think I'm gonna send my daughter to you.

My daughter was living in a very moldy house and I was like, you have got to get out of here. The landlord would come over that the girls would try to tell him there's mold.

He'd come with a toothbrush and bleach and that was the only thing he would do. And my daugher didn't feel like she could make the move. And then one day, she noticed mold on her clothing in the closet, and that was it.

They were out in 48 hours. She had to take every article of clothing to the dry cleaners. I don't know how good that it was doing, but it cost her $1,000 to get her clothes cleaned.

And I've always wondered, Do we have anything lingering? And of course, I've tried to get her to do some tests, but it might do better if I just send her you.

What would be the first test that either somebody can do? Or what would the be first tests that you would recommend? Something simple. Let's just try to start simple because I know it's a panel.

It's all kinds of things. if that was something to really dive in and do some work over, what would be the first test that could help somebody kind of see the light?

Yeah, so I developed a mold symptoms questionnaire over the years of my experience. And so this is a free questionnaire. Because some symptoms are more common than others with mold illness.

So that is the first thing that I would actually do. It's not even a blood test. Just go through that symptom questionnaire, it's online. and then it gives you your result, like immediately.

And it'll tell you, you know, if you're pretty low in the numbers there, then, it may not be mold, there may be something else going on.

Symptoms, Genetics, and Recovery

If it's higher, than it is more likely to be related to environmental illness, because mold often comes with bacteria and other stuff too, but, just speaking mold in like a blanket sense.

So I would say mold symptom questionnaire is what I do and then I take a look if someone has had just conventional labs like a CBC, CMP because sometimes even if maybe they're normal according to a regular doctor, maybe we can see some signs of like liver stress because toxin load is hard on the liver.

or maybe we can see some signs of inflammation. So I would just take a look at your regular labs. I have a guide on what there are signs on regular lab that can show potential mold-related stress on the body.

That would just be the first couple of steps I would do. And I will, when we wrap up, I'm going to have you detailed where somebody can find that questionnaire, because that's really good.

Sometimes I think people need a few things that they can just kind of experience for themselves to see, could this be a step that I should take and take a look at?

I also love how you described the state of health that somebody's in. I talk about that a lot, especially when I work with so many kids with developmental issues.

And what was your state-of-health when you got pregnant? And everybody's typical response is, oh, I felt great. Well, a feeling doesn't really describe the true state that you're in, and even in this conversation, Getting yourself prepared to have a baby, I think, is one of the most important things that we as women, as couples, could do in order to make sure that our child is going to be going in the best direction as possible.

So I, too, really look at that idea of state of health. It's so important to help people understand there's many things you don't know without really diving in and knowing that, you know, even like the brain.

So I do like a lot of brain mapping as well and the Brain Mapping shows you how these little cherubs have actually developed over time and how it correlates to, I hate the word behavior, but the behavior that people are concerned about.

So I love your approach. I think it's great the way that you go about it. It's awesome that, you started off in this traditional way and you had your own life experience and look what it has done for you and how you can help people.

That's terrific. Go ahead, wrap us up. Tell us where we can find these things. Where can we find you? How do we get in touch with you?" And then, of course, give us one last pearl.

If we need to know something that we haven't talked about, what would that be? Great. Thanks, Dr. Laura. So you all can find me on the detox doc on all platforms.

That's my social media and my website, which is drstafford.com with a doctor spelled out. And we'll link the mold symptoms quiz for you. I would just say if you feel like something is going on in your environment that's affecting your health, trust your gut, right?

Because a lot of times people maybe even had someone come in and test your home. You know, if feel something there is affecting you health or you're feeling better at home or better other places than at when you're out of the home at all, then it's worth looking into to see if there's something that you are breathing in that can just either be remediated or what needs to be done.

Thank you so much for being part of this podcast. I really appreciate it. Everybody, listen, this is some really good information. I know here in the South, mold is a big issue.

And we want to make sure that we are addressing all of the things. Sometimes it really seems like a lot. What now? What is it that I'm going to have to experience?

But we can't help that. That is something, and I love how Dr. Diana was talking about, you know, things stacking up. We live in a time. It's just an unfortunate situation.

There's a lot of issues. And if we really want to get on the other side of our health, we have to go through it. So I bet somebody has heard something in this podcast.

I'm going to ask you to share it with that person so that they can have another outlet to look at and potentially take some steps towards better health.

Resources, Final Advice, and Wrap-Up

Now, over here at Connect My Child's Brain, we have a couple of events. It all depends on when you actually hear the podcast. You might hear this before our last event, but the first Saturday in June is our workshop free for parents, 12 to 1, Talking about primitive reflexes, the last Saturday of the month, 12 to 1, no charge, we're going to do the babysitter club.

We are looking to help anybody, grandparents, parents, young people. How do I work with a child that experiences challenges? My big reason for doing this, I want to help moms and dads get a date night.

It's so important to get that rest and relaxation. So make sure you share the podcast, make you subscribe, Make sure to share Dr. Diana with anyone that you think could benefit from understanding a deeper story about mold.

Dr Diana, thank you so much for being with us today. Thanks, Dr. Laura. And as always, be blessed. Thanks for listening. I hope today's lesson will help you or someone you love.

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