Brain Builders: Shaping Your Child's Future Through Early Development Transcript

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Introduction to Brain Health

Welcome back to ADHD, Autism and Chronic Disease Parenting Summit. I'm here with the amazing doctor Spencer Zimmerman, a brain health expert and the author of Brain Reset Seven Steps to a Healthier Brain.

Thank you so much for being here with us to chat today. Thanks for having me. I'm excited to share with your audience. It's a very, very important topic and I'm really, you know, excited to dive into brain health a little bit more because I think that's a topic that's becoming more important to parents that are really starting to think about how I can help my child's brain develop as well as possible, as well as there's just a lot more information about mental health out there these days and just developmental disorders.

So maybe we can start, you know, as an expert, what are you seeing? What's going on with brain health? What's going on with developmental disorders? What's the what's the landscape right now?

Yeah. So right now, over the past few years, they've looked at the amount getting diagnosed with like autism, ADHD, even motor development. I mean, the rates are just going through the roof on all of them.

And especially in Covid, they've been changed. Some of the developmental milestones where it's like, oh no, it should have been here, but now we're going to back it up a little bit more. It's like, did we do this because we're just seeing so many delays.

We don't want to put that on the insurance industry, right. To cover occupational therapy and PT that those kids would have possibly been getting.

Rising Developmental Concerns

Yeah. No I yeah I mean it's insane. I talked about this a few times and I think it's really interesting. They did changes the milestones. I think you know to some degree they were aiming to make it more about finding issues you know.

And originally it was more like what was the 50th percentile. And now it's more like what's the 75 percentile? So that's one part of moving it back. But I think also, you know, just from looking at it and seeing what's going on, I think there is a landscape of trying to move things back a little bit to try to normalize some things, which I don't feel like we should be normalizing.

So I think it's kind of a blend of the two, and that's very concerning. It's very concerning that we're at a point where we're even considering, you know, what is normal changing.

And I don't know how we got here. I think that's that's very disconcerting. Correct. There's been a lot of that within pediatrics and many other things.

Right. Age of teenagers going through menses and starting their cycles. Right. Like has changed significantly from where it was previously. But you know, when we get back to the brain, there's a lot of things that have changed.

But there's also a ton of research over the past decade that just wasn't really there in how to get your kids going on the right foot for development.

Yeah. And let's let's dive into that a little bit. So, if you're a parent who is concerned about brain development, I think everybody should at this point, you know, when is it important to start thinking about this and what are some

of the things that we can we can start to do for our kids?

Some of the simple things we can think about at home. Yeah. So there's two different categories that we're going to talk about. So you've got those of you that are planning on having kids and may not have one yet. Right.

And you're just trying to make sure you've got everything right. But then you may have a little one. The beginning of their development starts at conception.

So it's mom, dad, where's your health at? You know, the more research they do, they're like, holy smokes. Like the amount inflammation you had in your body, your exercise level, your sleep, your stress, all of that impacts your child's brain development.

Because the nervous system develops so early in utero.

Early Brain Development and Prenatal Health

It's not one of those things that like, oh, right before delivery, it's actually one of the very first things that starts developing, you know, what about that ten week mark?

So early things from that standpoint matter. You know, especially as we've heard a lot more about DHEA over the past decade, like, hey, yes, it's not in most prenatal vitamins, but you need to make sure you're getting plenty of DHEA because that helps with brain development.

Right now. On the other side, if we look at the way the brain develops after kids are born, it's really through sensation. It's through motor activity.

Motor activity drives the development of the brain. And one of the concerning things is we just see kids being so sedentary. They're getting tablets for everything.

You know, the activity level isn't there. We look at the playgrounds compared to like when both of us were growing up and parents. Right. Like what's happened on the playgrounds.

Yeah. Now I'm like, I mean, half the people aren't even in the playgrounds anymore. And if they are there, it's like, it's not the same thing as it used to be.

And everyone's kind of watching their kid really closely, not letting them really exercise. Everyone's afraid of them getting hurt. I mean, yeah, I totally agree.

You know, and like, your motor activity goes in right to your cerebellum. It goes in your pride. And that drives frontal lobe development. Frontal lobes about focus, concentration, mood regulation, executive planning, right impulse behavior and all of that.

But when your kids don't get it, are we shocked that they now are getting diagnosed with ADHD? Because really, if we look at ADHD, all it is is abnormal connections within the brain and kind of delayed development, right?

Things like that. That's what it is. Or we look at kids that have autism. Same thing. It's impaired neurological development due to a wide variety of things.

But no matter what's causing it, motor activity is essential. So like, you know, mega rounds were fantastic because that drove a lot of a stabler input.

Vestibular input is essential for brain development, but just having kids be active, maybe it's a trampoline. Maybe you get a little trampoline in your house, right?

Just one of those small little ones, right? Just let them bounce on it. Like, who cares? Yeah, we have one guy loves

it. I love the little ones with, like, the cage are on the outside, you know, because I'm.

I am worried about him falling out of it or getting injured on the trampoline, but the one with the cage is pretty safe, I feel like. So I agree. Yeah, with the cages. I mean, odds of them getting hurt.

Not very good, but let them be active. You know, we've we kind of went from like almost what we'd call no parental supervision. Right? It's like kids, you're just going to go and do everything to a, there's so much supervision that we're stunting their growth.

It's like, no, actually it's okay for kids to get hurt, right? It's okay for them to be in the dirt and to explore senses and, and let them be creative.

That's another big thing. Like let them get messy, let them get into things that allows them to be creative. Because when they're creative they're exploring, they're developing new pathways.

You know versus being so defined from the very beginning. Yeah. No I couldn't agree more. And I think it's that goes back to balance.

Motor Activity, Play, and Sensory Input

You know I think that you know obviously we don't want them like falling off a super high playground and getting a, you know bad concussion or brain injury.

But at the same time we don't want to over parent them so much that they they never get hurt. They never play with dirt. They never get to scratch. I mean, that's those things are our normal and a part of childhood.

And you also have to learn. You have to learn what hurts. You have to learn. You know, what you should and should not do within reason. And that's like kind of scaffolding and being there to make sure to protect your kid from the serious stuff, but not from everything.

But I think, you know, just like you said, I agree that we've gone too far. We're trying to over parent a little bit and trying to protect them from from everything.

And that I think is a problem. And going back to something else that you said that I couldn't agree more with, that was one of the in my book, Parenting at Your Child's Pace.

It's one of the things I talk about right at the beginning, which is we need to be thinking about our kids health from even before they're born, right?

You know, we don't always think about those things. You know, as a pediatrician, it's, you know, we start I start seeing kids from when they're born. But that's not really when their health begins or health begins in utero or even before that, really, it's the health of the parent.

And then certainly when they're in utero and developing, I mean, why wouldn't what the parents are doing matter? Why wouldn't what mom is doing matter and things get in to the baby?

I mean, you're literally built of the nutrients and of everything that is in your mom, right? Like that's that's what we're built of. So if there are more chemicals and toxins, then why would that not be incorporated?

Why would they not affect things? I mean, we're lucky, you know, the body is amazing and it's magical. And we have great detoxification systems and the where the baby is born in the womb, it's it's a pretty good, protection for the baby.

So not everything that we do gets in there, but certainly some does. We know that we've seen it in environmental working group studies with how many chemicals.

And there's hundreds of chemicals like almost 200 chemicals in the, the cord blood. So yes, I mean it affects you and our body can handle it. Right. But just to some degree.

And then it we're getting to the point where it's which over over. You know what we can handle I think and that's one of the things I think is driving it and sounds like it's kind of that you think that similarly.

Correct, especially when we look at like autism and a lot of these other neurodevelopmental disorders, I mean, it starts in utero in a lot of these cases, just from inflammation, from chemicals, stress, infections, whatever, right.

Those inflammatory things disrupt neural connections. And when we look at brain plasticity, it's really the brain's ability to adapt and learn. And we often think about neuroplasticity as if it's this ultimate good thing.

But it can also be bad, right? So like whenever you reinforce, you know, like you bribe your kid to do stuff, but you're rewarding them with something negative, right?

Like candy, for example. Like they're going to develop that like, oh, I'm only going to do that then if I get candy and we can't talk about brain health without talking about nutrition as well.

And it's really important, you know, like I've got five girls, my youngest one will be turning three in July and you've got to parent and you've got to feed your kids what you know is truly good for them.

It is so easy to let other family members, friends, societal people, right? People from church, whatever it is to feed your kids things that you know they should never have.

And sometimes you would allow them to have it and you're like, I know this isn't good for them. It's got tons of dyes. It's going to be massively inflammatory.

It's ultra processed. So it does require a lot of courage from you parents, from us, you know, that are parents to step back and be like, look, I get it.

You want it, right? You want the graham crackers, the goldfish, you want all of that, and that's all you want to eat or you just want to eat chicken nuggets of mac and cheese every single day.

But that's not how we develop healthy brains. And what I found is if you cave to that, it can be hard to get them to get back to normal. But if you start them off from the very beginning and they just know healthy, guess what?

Nutrition, Neuroplasticity, and Healthy Habits

It's really not a big battle right now. I agree. And can we just I want to clarify neuroplasticity for a second, just in case some people don't don't know what it is.

I think that's a very important concept. And so maybe we can define that. But also what I did want to chat very briefly about with that as well as, you know, when we were just starting and training or, you know, maybe ten, 20 years ago, it was very common, common knowledge and air quotes that, you know, the brain made its connections and then it doesn't really changing as you got older.

And that seems to really have changed over the last couple of decades, and much more of the research that I have ever seen more recently says that, you know, you can continually change things.

You know, this goes back till you when a child gets injured, you can create new, new connections. So that way you can kind of work around it and you can still function really well.

Whereas if an adult does that, then that's not really true. And and certainly you have more neuroplasticity when you're younger. But but that is very much untrue that I think we can still see neuro neuro plastic changes throughout life.

And I think that's really important for parents to understand in the in relation to developmental disorders, because that means if there are some is something going on, then that means that we can do something about it to go in a little bit better direction, which I think is really important, because if we understand the concept that it's possible, then we maybe take up that challenge to see if there's anything that we can do to help the function of the brain a little bit more.

So maybe you can chat about that, correct? Yeah. For so long there was just all these limitations, right? Like, oh, your kid takes an injury, you've got this window.

If you don't do something within that window, it's too late. And then there's like, oh, well, your brain's fully developed in your 20s. It's like there's a difference between being have the most mass that you're going to have, right?

And the most connections and the right connections and your ability to adapt. So the brain can always adapt and learn. Because any time you learn something new, whether it's good or bad, that is neuroplasticity at play.

And you'll actually have neuroplasticity pretty much until the day you die. The only people who lose it before death are those with neurodegenerative conditions, at which point just the amount of inflammation, they don't have neuroplasticity in the way they should.

So don't you know whether your kids get ADHD or autism or maybe they don't have any of those? You're just like, look, I want my kid to be as sharp as possible.

You can do things to strengthen the brain, because the brain is very much just like a muscle. If you want to strengthen your bicep, you do different exercises, then strengthen your quads.

Well, we can do the same thing for the brain, right? Like if we want to challenge parts, your brain responsible for balance and coordination, that may be different than something we do for impulsivity.

Right? So there's there are ways to challenge the brain and to really help develop, you know, and depending on the age of the kid, you can do more, you know, like two year olds, three year olds, worlds.

Honestly, it's about letting them explore. It's about letting them really be a kid when they get a little bit older. 910 now you can do stuff where you look at eye movements, because with eyes we can map out much of the brain with how it's functioning.

And then there are actually rehab strategies that can be done and say, hey, we want to improve your frontal lobe versus your pride a lobe, right? And help from that side.

And how about technology? What where are we. Where are we at with technology in terms of helping with brain development? I mean, we're getting new new programs and apps and AI and all these things, you know, and, Neuralink, lots of stuff coming down the pipeline for for neural development.

So what what are some of the things that maybe parents should be aware of? And, you know, some things that you've found that could be helpful or at least people can consider looking into in terms of brain development.

Yeah. So when we look at healthy brains, there are really three things that healthy brains have in common. They're fast, they're accurate, but they're also cognitively flexible.

So you can have them do something and like okay, let's switch this way. And they just go. Now if you've got kids with autism, you'll find out. You try to break that routine.

That flexibility isn't there. So that's really the criteria I use. And yeah, there's all sorts of technology right? I understand lots of kids are getting tablets.

We've like for us. Right. We've got a switch, but we got one. We got the dance game, we got the sports game. So it's like, hey, well maybe you've got games, but we're doing things that are based upon physical activity and maybe you don't do.

All the ones are based off physical activity all the time. That's okay. But do things that challenge, hey, do you have to process information? Do you have to think outside of the box?

Right? Is there some like puzzle solving going on? And if so, that's going to help your kid much more than a game that you'd be like, yeah, that's just pretty mindless.

There's not a lot to it. Exactly. Not totally. I totally agree with everything that you're saying. I love.

Practical Tips for Parents

I love hearing and love hearing when, you know, different practitioners say the same things that I'm saying to patients, it's always it's always nice to hear that you're not you're kind of echoing the same things in the circles.

And I would love, love to finish up with, you know, getting really practical and getting down to, some of your biggest tips for, for parents or some of the things that you feel like anybody at home could do or should do for, for their child's brain development.

Maybe there's some supplements or herbs that you think are generally pretty good for people or activities that you want people to do, or some simple tips of of what a parent could do this week at home if they're considering brain development and where they would start in terms of developing that for their kids.

Yeah. So there's a wide variety of things. But, you know, if you eat fish like just wild caught salmon, you know, like kids will eat salmon. They like it.

But we often are like, oh, well, that's kind of an adult thing, you know. No, like give it to them, give them lots of good fiber. And then it's hard to go wrong with a good quality probiotic for their gut health, because we know a lot of the gut immune system impacts brain development as well.

And then play cards play like for us, we play rummy cube all the time, you know. Now can we do that with the toddler. But you know, even seven year olds, they love that.

Play it and let them do it. You know that's going to help challenge their brain. They've got to do math. They've got to say, what are sequences? What are patterns? And lastly, just be active, right.

Go on walks with your kids, get them rollerblades, get them like whatever it is, you know, let them go on bikes, let them jump on little trampolines because it really is the foundational steps.

You know, there's all this fancy stuff we could talk about. The fancy stuff only really matters if you've harnessed and utilized the foundational steps.

And usually if you've harnessed foundational steps and you've done it enough, you don't even need the fancy stuff. Yeah, beautiful. I mean, I in my book, I call it the Seeds of health, foundations of health.

So, you know, stress, environment, toxins, exercise, diet, sleep. It's like it goes back to that every time. And you want to you can get fancy when you're talking about brain health, but you don't you don't need to.

I mean, if you're not doing the basics like eating healthy or getting any exercise, then all the other stuff is is not really helpful. I mean, it can help you maybe a little bit, a little bit, but at the end of the day, it's just a patch.

It's not getting back to what you actually need to be doing. So I couldn't agree more. You know, we want we can talk about all the fancy stuff, all we want to, but if you're not getting down to the the nuts and bolts of the basics of

what your body needs and as a foundational, you know, as a foundation, then, you know, we're going to be unhealthy.

And that's what we're seeing right now. I mean, that that's what's going on, right? That's why we're having an autism epidemic.

Where to Find Dr. Zimmerman

That's why we're having a developmental disorder epidemic. That's why we have a chronic disease epidemic. It's because the foundations are gone. We have too many chemicals, not enough nutrients, not enough exercise.

It's not that complicated. I think. Correct. It really is the foundation. Yeah. Awesome. Well, I mean, I really appreciate you being here. I really appreciate you sharing your knowledge.

Can you tell people a little bit more about where to find you and, you know, your social website, anything like that that you would want people to know about?

Yeah, you can find me on any social media, doctor Spencer Zimmerman. So whether it's TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and then Doctor Spencer zimmerman.com would be the best website.

Awesome. Well, thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and hopefully everyone gets out there this week and, gets a little bit more exercise and works on that brain health for their family.

Thank you for for sharing your wisdom. Yep. Thanks for having me.