Calm Your Storm with Meditation and Heal Your Thyroid Transcript

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Introduction and Ariel Gartenu2019s Background

Hi there. It's Dr. Jen. Welcome back to the Heal. Your thyroid and reversing Hashimoto's summit today. Ariel Garten is here. She's the co-founder and chief evangelist officer of Muse.

And this is a leading consumer, neuro technical, technological and meditation company with a background in neuroscience and psychotherapy in our area is dedicated to bringing easy to use and accessible tools for wellbeing to the masses and her unique background has taken her from working in neuroscience research labs to opening a fashion design label to being the female founder and CEO of a Silicon Valley backed brain computer interface tech startup Interessen, which is the technology that sparked the creation of Muse.

So Muse is a brain sensing headband, an award winning wearable technology that assists and trains meditation. It's used by hundreds of thousands of people, including Mayo Clinic and Nassar.

And this helps the brain tackle meditation and teach meditation, do it. So thank you so much for being here. I would love for you to share a little bit about your personal journey from going from research lab to fashion design to to muse.

Sure. So I was trained as a neuroscientist, but at the same time, I was fascinated by making stuff. And so even as a teenager, I had a line of clothing that I sold and I became a fashion designer while I was training as a neuroscientist.

But it turned out that neuroscience won out. And then I became a psychotherapist and along the way began the creation of this device, muse, that tracks your brain during meditation and gives you real time feedback.

Because I, as a psychotherapist at that point was teaching my patients how to meditate, and I sucked at it. And as a neuroscientist knew the scientific research behind meditation and why it was so great but couldn't do it myself.

And then I as you can hear, I had a lot of things going on at the same time. And so they all compounded prior to the creation of music and a stress related illness that caused my brain and body to be very hyper reactive in a way that's probably similar to a lot of people who are listening.

And it was through the process of meditation and learning to manage my stress and overcome my thinking that I was able to improve my own health and quality of life dramatically.

So went from, you know, at times being able to eat very little and having very little energy and ability to do much to being back to a very fully functional and moving.

Yes. And that's so important.

How Stress Affects Hashimotou2019s and the HPA Axis

A lot of people don't realize how important this stress axis, adrenal axis has on our system. It can really make or break healing because you can have medications upon medications.

And if you're not fixing that part of it, it's not going to help. So let's dove into what's the relationship between Hashimoto's and stress? Sure. So stress exists both in the mind and in the body.

Stress is typically triggered by the amygdala, which is the part of your brain that's constantly scanning for danger and looking for things that are scary, that will be stressful when you encounter them.

And so when the amygdala finds something that is intimidating to it because of that fear, it sends a message that then travels down the axis, hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis, which then triggers cortisol moving throughout our body and a whole range of stress responses, as well as triggering more stressful thoughts produced by the amygdala.

When you have thyroid dysfunction, the HP axis is quite thrown off because the pituitary also interacts with the thyroid and is part of the regulatory cycle between the thyroid and the pituitary.

So this can lead to both the HP axis activation and I have a little baby here. Probably many of the people on the call will identify with having a tiny little baby.

Will you try to have the zoom call? And believe me, meditation is a big part of why I'm still smiling while she's feeding and. Giving an interview. Yes.

So the access to activation of the JP, you're going to. Do some editing here. So in the HPA axis is activated. It causes dysregulation of the thyroid.

And this can happen in two ways, either by actually just regulating thyroid hormones, which then exacerbate Hashimoto's, or by the fact that many people with Hashimoto's and thyroid conditions have underactive levels of underactive thyroid and as a result have disregulated thyroid hormones which then interact with the access and make the entire body and the entire system more vulnerable to stress.

So both stress can dramatically exacerbate Hashimoto's and similar symptoms. And having Hashimoto's can make you far more susceptible to stress because your body is less able to regulate hormonally.

So stress management is critically important to both. Make sure you don't exacerbate it, make it worse, and to help somebody who, you know, might feel a little bit more disregulated, because just hormonally you're going to feel more anxiety and feel more stressed because that's your chemical makeup at that moment.

Oh, yeah, I actually I see this again and again. It goes hand in hand, Hashimoto's and some sort of adrenal access problem and disregulation, whether it was a trauma as a child or daily stressors or really with the pandemic, a lot of people have just had this post traumatic stress presentation and it's not that a lot of us are disregulated.

So what exactly is meditation? Because a lot of people just talk about it, but no one really tells you how to do it or what it is. So meditation is not a weirder woo woo thing.

It's a practice or a training that leads to healthy and positive mind states. So in meditation there are many different forms, but the most common is a focused attention meditation and then a focused attention meditation.

You're focusing your attention on one thing. Usually your breath, your mind will eventually wander away from your breath onto a thought. And then it's your job to notice that your mind is wandered and bring your attention back to your breath.

So it's a really simple exercise that's quite profound but can be hard to do. So again, you're focusing on your breath, mind wanders, notice a go, come on back.

So most people think that meditation is just letting your mind go blank. It's not so like first thing, anybody who thought about that, it's okay, let that notion go.

It's really about training your attention and your ability to observe your own thoughts and then to shift out of a thought and onto something else.

What Meditation Is and How It Helps

So how this becomes so relevant in our lives, in our stress, is because we have our amygdala gives us a thought

about a thing that stressful. Oh, no, you know, I'm in traffic and it's awful and I'm going to be here forever.

And then you feel this arousal in your body and then you get more thoughts and more feelings were thoughts, more feelings. And in meditation, what you do is you are able to observe, okay, I'm having this thought about being in traffic and you're able to train yourself to say, You know what, I don't need to think about this traffic right now.

I can actually let that go move my mind away and just come on back to focusing on something I want to be thinking about and put on a podcast and you learn as you feel the sensation in your body, like your chest tightening because you're in that traffic, you can just take a deep breath because you can observe that your chest is tightening.

So you bring in a meditation practice in that moment, some breathing practices to just calm your body and then calm your thoughts and then let go of those anxious thoughts and just be in the present and all of a sudden stuff so much better now. And I think the resilience like it helps build your stress resilient because we're never going to get rid of all the stress.

There is no way to just stress less. You know, people have a lot of things going on there juggling a bunch of balls. And sometimes even if you tried and not have a lot going on, things still come up like, you know, people can get sick or I know a lot of the women I see, they're not only dealing with young kids, they're dealing with elderly parents.

So it's not like they can take any of those away. Right. I mean, sometimes if someone has a job that is super, just like taking them down stressful. Sometimes I've had patients, they've changed jobs and that's really helped their health.

So I think though that actually taking stress away is just not going to happen, but how our body responds to it and building up that resilience or that ability to handle the stress in your body to handle it.

Another thing I don't think people realize is that like we endure a lot of stress, like our bodies are very tough. So the fact that we're seeing all these people with these stress related illnesses is not surprising.

So, yeah, I just wanted to build on that, particularly this notion that stress happens, you know, life happens, and it's really how we manage it. I am currently talking to you well, my 14 month old is crawling around.

You're probably hearing some noises. She's playing with some peas she's making out. And I could be sitting here feeling very stressed, like, oh, no, you know, she's making noises that shouldn't be.

And to be honest, I feel like a little bit of arousal that comes up, a little bit of stress, like, oh, now and then I just take a deep breath and I let it go and I, you know, might have thoughts about it.

And I move those aside because they're not helpful. So a meditation practice doesn't get rid of the things in your life that are stressful. It allows you to manage them really effectively so that you can feel calm, connected and at ease in whatever you're doing.

Yes, and that's a great point, especially with kids. Right before the interview, I thought I had locked my bedroom door and my kids and I'm like two of the three cats rushed in.

Two of my four kids rushed in. I'm like, okay, guys, let's go. Oh, we got to get this done. Especially our topic of choice today. So how does meditation actually relax the mind and how does this relate to healing?

There? So when you meditate, as I said, you're focusing your attention on your breath, your mind wanders, you then notice it and then you return your attention back to your breath.

So in that process of noticing that your mind has wandered on to a thought and then choosing to let that thought go and come on back to something else, in that moment, you are fundamentally changing your relationship to your

thinking.

In that moment you're saying, Hey, I don't need to follow that thought. I don't need to think all of the stressful things that are in my brain. I can actually choose to let those go and to focus on something that matters.

So, you know, in this very moment, for example, in hearing my daughter go, you know, I'm hearing her make noises, it draws my attention for a second. I then say, actually, she's safe. It's fine.

I can let that go. I can come on back to speaking to the speaking to the audience here. And that becomes a very natural process, whereas one could very easily instead get caught up in the thoughts in your mind, which then trigger more stress in your body.

Because our thoughts trigger stress, as I said, triggering the axis axis, which then releases cortisol into your body, which raises your heart rate, which constricts your blood vessels, which increases your blood pressure.

And it just regulates your hormonal function. It really causes a lot of downstream damage to your body, which then makes you feel the stressful sensation, which gives you more stressful thoughts.

So meditation helps you intervene by moving your mind away from the stressful thoughts. Not that you're ignoring them, but that you're recognizing that you have control over how you manage them and helps you manage the sensations that come up in your body.

So it doesn't feedforward. Yeah, like you said about your daughter, she's safe. I, I recognized that, and I was able to move on. And I think that's really important to say that because a lot of people get caught up in their anxious thoughts and they worry or they watch the news, and then that just makes you feel unsafe and starts this cascade of of negative thoughts.

Managing Stress, Anxiety, and the Fight-or-Flight Response

And it's really hard for some people to get out of this. So I love that you said that that you recognize like it almost like a danger sign. Like, you know, it's kind of like when you hear something, you know, like when my husband's out of town, I hear a noise and I'm like, what was that?

And I'm like, it was just the cats. I'm fine, I'm safe. So I definitely think, you know, this happens to people all day, all day long. But we just don't realize how to how to manage it, basically.

Yeah. And when you have anxiety or you have a bit of a stress disorder, you feel more susceptible to stress. You feel it. It becomes much harder to make that cognitive assessment and say, it's okay, I'm safe because your body is feeling like it's unsafe.

You know, your body screaming at you because you're feeling the tension and the fear. And it's kind of like anxiety is a broken alarm. So imagine you lived in an apartment building and the alarm bell went off, the fire bell went off.

You'd run to the street and you be like, Oh my God, there's a fire. Next day fire bell goes off. You run to the street. You know, you feel all the feelings by the 12th day when the fire bell is going off, you're like, Hold on a second.

Maybe there actually isn't anything wrong here. Maybe it's just a broken alarm. Monday 20. The fire alarm goes off and you're like, Screw that, you're making eggs.

You know, you're watching Oprah, you're just getting on with life. And the sound is annoying, but, you know, it doesn't mean danger. And so when you have a distress regulated stress system or something, someone is under constant stress.

The feeling is like there's always it's always on. And so it becomes very hard to tell when things are not in danger because your body screaming, danger, danger, danger all the time.

And so that's again, why practice meditation can become incredibly helpful because it helps you actually stop, look at your thoughts, look at your feelings and say, Is this really something I need to be freaked out about?

Probably not. And as you breathe deeply, which triggers your vagus nerve to calm down your body and bring in your rest and digest, and it brings down your stress levels and your body is stopping to scream.

It's dangerous. It's dangerous. Your body's more like it. Maybe it's something that then you can actually accurately assess what's going on and start to unwind the stress cycle.

Since it's so important. And I love that about the fire alarm. It's it's so true. And it's it's really hard to see patients that are living in that fight or flight state all the time.

I mean, it makes me sad. And they can heal, they can get better and get out of that. But it does take a little work. So let's go into how do people that are listening and, you know, clients, all of that, how do they know if they're doing this right?

Because a lot of times you're not sure if you're doing it right, this meditation thing. Yeah. So the first thing is, you know, don't fall into the trap of thinking your mind needs to be blank.

Your mind's always going to have thoughts and that's okay. So you sit there, you focus your attention on your breath, your mind wanders on to a thought, you notice the thought and you come on back.

That's that's the exercise. Now, this can often be a little bit difficult because you're like, what am I supposed to be doing? And honestly, if you just follow these instructions, you are doing it right.

If you want any more training or guidance, there are tools and technologies that can actually help you with your meditation practice. So we make a device called Muse.

It's a brain sensing headband that helps you meditate and it actually tracks your brain while you meditate and gives you guiding sound to let you know when your mind is wandering and when you're focused, and to let you know when you're doing it right.

It's kind of like having a little coach or a guru inside your head telling you like, Yep, that's the meditation state. That's good. Stay there. Oh, mind is wandering, come on back.

And it does that just with a beautiful audio soundscape. So it has lots of guidance, it has different forms of meditations for brain, heart, breath and body.

And it really effectively teaches you the meditation practice. A lot of it helps you start it if you've never meditated before or keep going on it and go deeper.

If you ever have an experience, practice that. That's really cool. So it's tracking your brain waves. Can you talk about what brainwaves are good and what are bad for meditation?

What state we want to be in? Sure. So brainwaves run all the way from very, very slow waves when you're asleep in Delta all the way up to faster brain waves in beta.

When you're thinking and actively engaged in meditation, you typically want to be in an alpha brainwave state, which is 8 to 12 hertz, and that's the brainwave state that you're in just before you fall asleep.

So you're calm and relaxed. It's also the brainwave state associated with internal focus. So when you're focusing on your breath with your eyes closed in your relaxed, you're at your peak alpha. So alpha waves are a hallmark of meditation.

How to Know Youu2019re Meditating Correctly

And we've spent probably 15 years by now working with the brainwaves associated with meditation and creating tools and technology. So it's more than alpha.

It also has to do with a little bit of theta and by now we've had several million sessions of meditating with Muse. So we've created a very specific way to understand what's going on in your brain during meditation and be able to help and guide your brain specifically.

It's quite cool. And is really cool. So for Muse, it's being worn like during the day, during a session, the night time, how, how do people use it? So they actually have uses right behind me here.

So this is Muse. It slips on just like a pair of glasses and there are sensors on the forehead. And then years we also have another one muse s, which is soft and you can wear it for sleep.

So you simply slip it on during the day and you can do a short meditation practice. There's lots of studies done with Muse that demonstrate that even a three or five minute practice of benefit Mayo Clinic use Muse with breast cancer patients awaiting surgery.

And they said, Just meditate for 3 minutes. And they saw a decrease in stress, decrease in fatigue and decrease in quality of life. And then the muse, as you can also use while you're falling asleep and through the night to help improve your sleep.

According to a study by Dr. Adrian Owen, sleep quality is improved by 20%. Wow. 20% is amazing. So it's like having your little own little coach right there. Yes.

You're on the coach, your guru in your pocket. Yeah. So how long have you personally been been meditating and using your device? So I'm 43 right now. I started meditating in my twenties and I was a terrible meditator.

I mean, as you heard, you know, my story at the beginning, I loved to do everything. I had this business and this job and worked in research labs and it end.

And I sucked at meditating because I didn't want my mind to go blank. I was resistant to it. And it was really through the process of building music through sort of 2010, 2011, when we were really building it as a meditation tool and using it that I finally figured out how to meditate and it was like, Oh, this is what meditations like.

All right? And then, you know, all of the readings and all the meditation classes I did all of a sudden made sense. You know, kind of. My practice started then, and since then it's something I do daily.

Oh, that's amazing. And you can juggle it all and and be calm and more resilient to the stress, right? Yes.

Muse Device, Brainwaves, and Sleep Benefits

And to be fair, you know, I don't recommend trying to do it all. Sometimes you just can't help ourselves. And having tools that help you manage everything that life throws your way is really helpful.

Yes, absolutely. Awesome. Well, Ariel, can you please tell everyone how to find you, your company, social media, all of that? Goodness. Sure. You can find out more about me and muse at choosemuse.com.

choosemuse.com. We're on all the socials at at choose muse and and then if anybody's interested in trying a muse I think for the summit we have a special gift of 20% off and you just go to the link choose news.com slash thyroid so choose news.com slash thyroid for 20% off.

I mean, awesome, generous. And also, I forgot to mention you have a podcast also. Yes. So I host a podcast called Untangle where we talk to experts in the brain and meditation and healthy living and give you practical and actionable tips.

And so that is the untangle podcast because we're helping you untangle your mind and untangle your life. Oh, I love it. That's so cool. Well, thank you so much for being here today and sharing everything.

And while doing it while your your little one just is so cute and just plays on the ground, so fun. Such a sweet age. Thank you. Yeah, she's wonderful here.

You can get a. Quick. A quick hello. There we go to say hi I hope people is. Oh. Yes, it's a microphone. I'm sure many of the women listening to this can identify.

Yes, absolutely. Well, thank you for sharing.

Arielu2019s Meditation Practice and Closing Details

That's okay. I tell you, we'll just edit that out to or not. Right or not, this is life. And I think we need to get better at showing the reality of life rather than that, you know, zoom like versions of it.

So happy to share your life with real people and the things that really want to help. There you go. Thank you so much. Have a great day. You, too. Bye bye.