Cortisol, Stress and Hormones: A Personalized Medicine Approach Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Background

Welcome to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr Amy Coopersmith, a doctorate prepared nurse practitioner, and this show is about empowering you to live a radiant, healthy and balanced life.

Iím very excited to introduce today's guest, Dr Alicia Newsome, functional medicine practitioner and owner of the Body Wellness Institute. She is the author of Worthy of Rest.

and the podcast host of the complete and I'm sorry, the whole and complete woman. So welcome, thank you so much for being here today. Thank you. so Much for having me.

I am really excited to talk with you about personalized medicine. And what inspired you to go into that line of practice? Well, it really started with my own journey as many as same with many other people.

So over 10 years ago, I was going through a divorce, leaving a very volatile marriage, and I. Was tired all the time. So Sunday afternoon, you could easily find me after church at a friend's house asleep on the couch and I had two little ones.

They would be running around and i was just asleep. I was tired all the time and it wasn't just on Sundays. It was Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. iI was trying to see patients and finish my day so that I could go to sleep.

But I'm so tired and had neck pain and back pain, and all these different health issues as well. And I ended up meeting a functional medicine doctor who really just taught me and ran lab tests on me, and helped me understand what was going on with my body.

I was doing lots of things like supplements and detoxes and things that, but we really got to the root cause of my issues. And from there, my energy went up, felt so much better in my, I used to have really bad periods as well, too.

Personal Health Journey Into Functional Medicine

So those regulate it. That's what really started me on my journey of personalized medicine. Oh, wonderful. I think having that experience just helps us be more passionate about it and, and you know what it feels like to be in that situation.

Yeah, I do. So when women come to me, um, very empathetic because I know. What it's like, to have things that you want to get done and your purpose and passion, but your health is holding you back from really being able to accomplish those things.

Yeah, so you were under some pretty extreme stress. Yeah. Do you think that that was a contributor to your symptoms? Stress is a big contributor, to symptoms.

And I really look at it under multiple ways, really. There's always the mental and emotional stress, So life is going to life, right? There is always going be things going on.

We may be dealing with things at work or relationships, all of that. But there's other stressors that go on as well underneath the surface. So you could be dealing with toxins.

Uh, so biotoxins, those are living things like mold, fungus, parasites, and there are external toxins and then there is deficiencies in your body, like not getting enough protein.

not getting enough sleep, gut issues, the body still interprets all of those as stress. So to answer your question,

yes, stress, but for me stress is a much wider area that I look at versus just the mental and emotional part, which is very important.

Oh, so finding that root cause. What does that process look like? So for me, when clients are working with me I do a very extensive intake. So my initial consultations with clients, they're 90 minutes.

We're really looking at their intake form and there are all types of questions where people are like, no doctors ever even asked me these questions. What was your birth process like?

Where did you grow up? what's going on in your life currently, like all these different facets that make us human beings, we're looking at those things.

And then I'm a big advocate of testing. So tests don't guess, there's a lot of advanced testing out there that we can really find out exactly what is going inside the body.

Between that, the actual lab test and then the assessments that I do during my intake process, that's how we get to the root cause of issues. long does it take to get all of that data and to figure it out and come up with a plan?

It can be rather quick. So really just completing your intake forms, doing that process, and then the labs really vary.

Stress, Root Causes, and Advanced Testing

Depending on what's going on with someone, I'll recommend different labs. Some labs come back very quick in just a week and we're able to give that information back.

And then some people, we may do something called cycle mapping when it comes to their menstrual cycles. So your periods, they change throughout the month, right?

So estrogen goes up and then comes back down. And then progesterone goes And if we just do one single blood test with that, then we know what those hormones were doing that day.

So with some people, we may opt to do something called cycle mapping, where we're looking at that throughout the month. We're gathering lots and lots of data, getting a full picture of what's going on, so that takes longer.

And then, wait for those results to come back, normally takes about two weeks. It varies depending on what the person's needs are. But once we have that information, we have a very clear pict with someone and then we So you mentioned some of the female hormones.

Do you check cortisol levels as well? Yes. Cortisol is actually my favorite. I look at progesterone and estrogen. Those are the popular ones everyone knows about, but they're really responding to other things that's going on inside of a body.

So cortisol is like the king hormone or the queen hormone that I look at, along with insulin. That's a very important one as well, too, that people often overlook.

But cortisol is your stress hormone. So we're able to look that throughout the day, see what's going on, how your body's responding to stress, to how you're body is metabolizing cortisol, and then use that information to make very precise treatment plans for people.

So you mentioned earlier that we have the emotional stress that people can relate to, but also the internal stress, is that affecting our cortisol as well?

Oh, yes. So our bodies were created to deal with stress short term. Stress in and of itself is not a bad thing. When you think about a bear coming after you, And what you would do is you eliminate that bear, all right?

You're either gonna run and get away, or you're gonna fight and kill the bear off, right. You gonna do something to save yourself. And then once that's done, then your stress levels go back down, you're no longer in this fight or flight mode.

You can move into what we call a parasympathetic state, which is rest and digest. But what goes on is that we stay in these stressed out states and it can be due to any of those things.

It can the mental, emotional, state and then also the toxins and deficiencies as well, too. And my goal with women is, of course, we're going to remove the source of stress, whether that's the toxins or you need to eat more, sleep, those types of things, and mental, emotional stress.

But the goal is really to widen your zone of stressed resiliency. Because like I said, life is still going life. You're still gonna be exposed to different toxins.

things in the environment that stress the body out at a physiological level. But what we want is to increase that zone. So I look at it as, let's say that you're going white river rafting, which I actually don't enjoy.

I went once, it was very scary for me.

Hormones, Cortisol, and Chronic Stress

Um, but think about you going down this river and then you like bumping up against these walls, right? like that stress and life's happening, what we wanna do is we want to widen your body's ability to adapt and handle stress so that when life is still happening and you're still exposed to different things that stressed your out at a physiological level, your bodies better able to respond to that.

So in our current state, let's say we haven't done that work yet and we have that chronic stress, What does that do to our other hormones? So there is your stress hormone, so cortisol, right?

And progesterone and estrogen are the ones we hear most often about, but they really get impacted when our body's under this great amount of stress. Because think about it, if a bear was coming after you, the last thing your body would say is, well, now's a good time to make a baby, it's not gonna do that.

it's going to say, okay, we've got to shunt glucose to her legs so she can run, all of these different things. It's focused on survival. So when your body is in this constant state of survival, it is going impact those downstream hormones, progesterone, estrogen, testosterone, And the body's gonna say, we don't need those right now.

We're focused on survival. So a lot of times women can have lower levels. They can deal with menstrual cycle issues like I did, infertility, all of these things, because the bodies like, nope, where we can't give you progesterone right.

Now we're trying to save you and you're in this fight or flight mode right Yeah, I had experienced that as a younger woman. I was an ICU nurse and we were trying to get pregnant and couldn't and they did all these tests and nothing's wrong.

We don't understand. And then it wasn't until later when I doing something a lot less stressful that my body did allow us to have a baby. Yes, congratulations.

Oh, that was a long time ago. She's not a Baby anymore. But yes, That was very interesting time. you do like when you experience it, you're like, oh, that stress, That's my body protecting me and not allowing this at this time.

Yep. Yeah, our bodies are very wise. They're smart. So you mentioned toxins as a source of stress. What kind of toxins are you seeing? So toxins are broken down into two different categories.

There's biotoxins. Those are living things like mold, fungus, parasites, bacteria, viruses. So even think candida

inside the, in the body. And then there's also external toxins.

So external, toxins are going to be things that could come from medications that have, you know, side effects. All, all are toxic to our body. They all have different uses.

Um, but there are things. That affect our bodies. There are pesticides that are sprayed into our foods, there is radiation, There's all types of other external.

Toxins that our. Body gets exposed to that stresses our, body out physiologically. Yeah, we've done a couple shows on that and just there's so much environmental stuff that we're exposed to that really is disrupting our health on so many levels.

I was reading recently that there was research done that the amount of microplastics that take in is equivalent to a credit card that were taking in. Yeah.

So it's really impactful on our Is that from packaging and foods and things like that?

Toxins, Gut Health, and Food Sensitivities

Yes, packaging in foods are, you know, water bottles. It's everywhere. Yeah, I think bottled water, of course, is very popular and people think because they're worried maybe about the water coming out of the tap that it has stuff in it, but then they are actually getting a different type of toxin.

Toxin, yep. Little exchange happening there. So you mentioned earlier, gut health. What are you seeing in terms of people's guts? What's going on? Well, a lot of times the women that I work with, they're not able to poop.

So there's issues going with constipation and the way that that impacts your hormones is that estrogen goes up and then it comes down, but it's got to be able leave the body.

There's different markers that we can look at in the gut. Beta-glucuronidase is one of them, but where it's estrogen gets reabsorbed in to the, in, the guy and goes back into the bloodstream, which can create estrogen dominant for some women.

Then there's bloating, there is diarrhea. There is food sensitivities that people can have. So the guts should be nice and sealed, nice, and tight. But when there was issues there, then Whole food particles can seep into the bloodstream and the body says well, these aren't supposed to be here I'm not supposed see broccoli here or asparagus or raspberries anything like that So sometimes people are eating foods that are generally thought of to healthy but their body in that time is responding negatively to it Are you seeing a lot more food sensitivities these days?

I Would I can't say I've seen more I would say that most people have them and or have issues with them. Yeah. So I think that's a big part of the work up to is figuring out what you're like, like you mentioned broccoli, of course I should have broccoli.

Well, not you, Amy. You know? Yeah, yeah. All right. I'm going to have you hold that thought. We're going pause for a break from our sponsor. If you are listening to Energize and Revitalize with Dr.

Amy, don't go anywhere. Welcome back to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr Amy Cooper-Smith, and my guest today is Dr Alicia Newsome. Before the break, we were talking about all kinds of things that can cause stress in the body, whether emotional or physical.

And we're going to talk about that a little more, then we'll talk what to do about it. So during our break you and I were chatting about autoimmune conditions.

Are you seeing a lot of that among your clients? A lot of times clients can have things like Hashimoto's where the

body starts to attack itself. Really autoimmune is just different parts of the body where the is now seeing that organ or that part of body as an invader, like something where that immune system starts to attack it and is like, you're not supposed to be here.

So yeah, I do see them in my practice. Typically there's women dealing with Hashimoto's. I see a lot of women that come in. that have lupus as well too.

And then there's also Crohn's in the gut. That's, and there is rheumatoid. I mean, it's really just, It's so interesting too, to see like how the body starts attacking itself.

It is so different for different people, but there are some underlying themes that I do see between all the different autoimmune diseases. So, you know, to our listeners, autoimmune is auto, the body's attacking itself.

The immune system kind of gets confused and attacks the wrong things. So do you think that stress is a major cause of that or is it other things or everything we've been talking about so far?

A lot of what we've been talking about, and one of the underlying themes that I see with autoimmune disease is typically there's something that triggered it and set it off in a woman's life.

So it could be a major event. Anytime I always ask, whenever they get the diagnosis or the symptoms really began to come up, I'm like, was there anything going on in your life during this time?

Anything that's major, where there was a big transition in you life, a divorce, something going with your kids, and typically that situation was something that was the tipping point for that woman.

And I say tipping-point because usually she already had just some underlying symptoms, underlying stressors that her body had been dealing with.

Autoimmune Conditions and Stress Resilience

So maybe she was dealing parasites or mold that was just kind of lurking there below the surface, candida. Maybe she's had some gut issues going on. She's not sleeping well at night.

All of those different types of things that are already stressing the body out. And of course we know that stress it impacts the adrenals, it sends them into overdrive, but that impacts them immune system as well.

So typically what I see is basically this perfect storm that happens where now they've been dealing with toxins and then they'd been doing with sleep issues or gut, not eating enough protein, those different types of things.

And then there's a big stressor that comes and that just sends the body into over drive. That kind of leads us back to you had mentioned earlier about stress resilience and becoming better at that.

How do we do that? So I grew up in a home that my emotions were something that was just don't have them, you know, like be happy. And that's pretty much like, yes, that the only emotion.

My mom just didn't have the tools and she didn' understand how to deal with like any kind of pain or sadness or anger or anything that came up for me.

So I grew up very much stuffing all of those emotions as they would happen. A big part of my practice is working with women around their emotional regulation and what comes up to them.

Cause we can't, um, I think we've talked about before the body keeps score, right? Like we. Can't just ignore all the things that happen in life and just keep pushing through.

And I know oftentimes it's like high achieving ambitious women. We go. Yeah, we go and we're, good at like, no,

i'm going to push through things. Don't really knock me down.

I'm, going keep going and i'll achieve. iI'm gonna hit my goals. So one thing is to really. be able to be with what comes up. So I teach a practice of just when something happens, and it can be small things.

But our body is always talking to us, even inside our emotions as well. Things may happen. And inside, typically, we default to one of four ways of being, where we might feel like I'm not safe.

We might fill like, I don't belong, or I not want it. You might default I am not enough. But in order to get there, we have to first acknowledge, like, how are we feeling, right?

Like, I'm feeling sad, and really be with that emotion that we're feeling. So I teach that, first, let's stop and identify, what's coming up? How do you feel?

And be And then also just being able to reflect back, almost like mother ourselves. So when my daughter came to me right now and something happened at school where she felt rejected or she was fearful or nervous and she came me, I wouldn't just blow it off and be like, okay, you're fine, right?

I would want to be with what she's saying and like acknowledge, like I see that you are sad, and then I Also tell her the truth. I'd ask her, what are you feeling?

Like, well, I'm scared, you know? I am scared to give my presentation at school, right? And I can acknowledge that and be with that. Like I see that you're scared.

Right? So, and that may be like you are powerful and you know, you're so gifted, whatever it is that she might be needing in the moment, I give that to her, but then we have to come back and give it to ourselves too when things come up for us.

So I really teach that and they say that if you just with an emotion for I think 60 seconds, it might 90. Don't quote me on that. But if we just allow ourselves to be with that, whether it's sadness or anger that it tends to dissipate.

And they say emotions, like their energy in motion, right? We just have to acknowledge what's happening there. So that's a big part of the work that I do with women.

Consequently, that allows us to move more powerfully through life and to regulate our emotions, not stuff them, and not have us explode on our spouses later because we've allowed all these things to build up, which then impacts our relationships and our work and how we show up everywhere else too, decreasing our stress.

And it takes a lot of work to get out of the habit of suppressing, because we do it. But suppressed emotions do have a way of rearing their ugly little heads when you don't want them to.

So you're absolutely right in doing the work now so that you can have healthier tomorrow. So that's really important. So you address the emotions, which I think we're learning that that is probably the most important thing because so much else is controlled by that or affected by it.

But earlier in the show, you had mentioned testing and supplements.

Personalized Wellness Routines and Upcoming Book

Oh, yes. Are you able to take all the data you've gathered and personalize someone's regimen? Oh, yes. Yes, so really with the data that we get back there, we really customize and personalize things from what supplements you need to be taking to how you to eating with your food, what kind of exercises you uh, routines you need to implement.

And you're right with the, it takes a lot of work to do like deal with emotions, but there's very practical things that I

do with my clients on just even with what's going on with their cortisol and what they may need do morning and evening routines.

to reset their circadian rhythms or to bring down their stress levels that are very simple tools. One thing that's huge is brain dumping in the evening.

Literally, and I know it sounds sometimes like a chore, like journaling or things like that. It's very simply, even if you say, I'm going to write for one minute and just put everything that is in my brain onto a piece of paper so that I can go to bed tonight.

and not have that kind of running through my mind, right? So I always recommend brain dumping five minutes before bed. You can start with one. Sometimes our brain needs a simpler thing like, okay, I can go to the gym for two minutes, knowing once I get there, then I'll do more, so brain-dumping at night is a big one, Uh, that I recommend this very practical and like can really, uh, help decrease stress as well.

But all of that is personalized based on what's going on with someone's cortisol and what they need as their other lab testing. What do you do in the morning?

So in the morning, I'm a big advocate of gratitude and not just like writing down, like I am thankful for my husband, which I Am, or my children. I believe in really feeling what that feels like.

So when I think about my son, he's two, and I just think how grateful he is, well he Is grateful, He's a very happy kid, but how Grateful I AM, And I literally allow myself to feel that emotion.

So I'm so thankful for his hugs and cuddles and I allow my self to fill that. And sometimes it may be hard to find something and it might just be like, I am thankful to the sun hitting my skin right now.

Really allowing myself feel like the rays of sunshine just Thank you. So I allow myself to do five of those in the morning. And that really sets the intention for my day, along with I set a goal for myself, one for work and then one my family as well, too.

That really reminds me and keeps me focused. changes the trajectory of my day. Cause I can tell the difference on the days that I don't do it. And I get up and I go, uh, versus when I implement this very important practice.

Yeah. Those things don' take a lot of time. So those are things that people can do starting today. We can go ahead and start taking care of ourselves or even in the car, you know, like not even saying, well, let me start tomorrow.

Like I just start right now, in this moment, say, what am I grateful for?

Closing Remarks and Show Outro

So we're running out of time, but you have some exciting things coming up. I do. So, we have the All Things Women Summit that's coming book in May. It is called Worthy of Rest and it's a book for the woman who's tired of being the strong one.

We live in a culture that worships exhaustion. And this book is written specifically for women that need some rest. Oh, I love that. So we'll watch for that and we will put the link to your summit on our show notes and hopefully people will join and just start taking care of themselves.

Absolutely. Well, thank you again for being here. Thank you so much for having me today. I appreciate it. And it's been a good conversation. Yes. Thanks to our listeners for tuning in to Energize and Revitalize with Dr.

Amy. Are there topics you would like to hear about? Please send an email to radiantpodcasts2025 at gmail.com. Check out past episodes on our YouTube channel.

We're also featured on Apple Podcasts. I'll be back next Saturday morning at 7.30 with more expert insights and practical strategies to help you live a healthy and radiant life.

Until then, here's to your best life!