Ep 166: When Traditional Therapy Fails: How Primitive Reflexes Changed Everything for This Mom's Son Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Welcome

Hi, everybody. It's Dr. Laura with Connect My Brain, and we are in store for a wonderful podcast today. I have a very special guest with us. Her name is Grace Ashton.

She is the mother of Atlas Aschton, And they have come to see me now two times. They're from Texas. And they have done intensive programs. And if you remember or you recall from other podcasts, an intensive is when somebody comes for a period of time and they come five days at a time.

So I'm not even going to try to hog up the microphone this time, I am going turn it right over to Grace. Grace, thank you so much for joining us and sharing.

Yes, and sharing your story. And our hope is that we can reach more people, right? That's what we're hoping for. So go ahead, tell us all about your journey.

Where to start? So I was 28 whenever I became pregnant with Atlas, which was about four years ago during COVID times, Which was obviously a very special time for all of us.

My whole first trimester was during quarantine. I got pretty lucky, or I thought I did at that time, because I get to rest a lot.

Pregnancy and Labor Complications

Everything seemed normal during the pregnancy up until my anatomy scan is when they found, I think it was an episode of tachycardia or they're also calling it Pax, which is premature atrial contractions, which means the heart's upper chamber, it contracts earlier than it should.

And so from then on, I was monitored a lot more frequent and also upon finding I had a complex cyst on my ovary. So the plan was to, if I have a C-section, to get that removed as well.

Everything is going great. Was that atrial prematurity? Was it you or was that Atlas? That was Atlas. Atlas had that. Okay. So we were monitored a lot more during the pregnancy up until the end.

When I went into labor, It was traumatic. So I had to do a lot of reflecting recent just now to kind of get back into how that was for us. I was in labor for about 37 hours.

Um, I just wasn't dilating at all. Uh, they did start pitocin on me. They broke my water. So, once it got to the end, they said, you know, we could either do this for four more hours or we'll take it into a C-section.

I was so out of it, obviously, at that point, I wasn't ready to be done. As they were wheeling me back, the did mention to me, if there's a possibility that the cyst took over your ovary, are you okay with us just taking your ovarie?

I told them no, because I feel like that's something that should have been talked about way ahead of time, not when I've been laboring for 37 hours, you know?

Right, right. So, stick section goes well, as I thought. I remember the feeling of him coming out. Obviously you're numb, but I felt the feelings of coming him out and the last thing I remembered is he didn't make a sound.

And I looked at my husband and said he's not crying and then I blacked out, I don't remember anything from then on. I woke up in the recovery room with my mom.

Now, I should mention, we knew ahead of time that he was going to be in the NICU because of his packs. That wasn't a new thing. But he went straight to theNICu.

I didn't get to meet my baby until 12 hours later because I had a C-section and you have to beyond bed rest for 12-hours. So the first time I saw my Baby was through FaceTime.

Oh, wow. Yeah. My husband, he didn't want to hold them because he wanted me to be the first person to whole them. Atlas didn' get any skin-on-skin contact from either of his parents until 10 PM later that day.

I had him at 10.07. It was 10 30 PM is when we actually got to meet him physically. So he had already had formula, pacifier, everything, x-rays, so much done to him in that short span of time before I got to meet him.

I thought everything was good from that point. They did tell me kind of briefly, we didn't take the cyst because your ovary did. The cyst took over your ovarian.

And then a slight mention of, you just bled a lot. That's all I kind remember. So, just kind going in, okay, I will take care of that later I guess. Yeah, afterwards, you know, he's growing up, we did baby led weaning when he was about six months old, everything seemed normal besides him being very quiet.

Now I should mention he is the first baby in the family. I'm a first time, I don't know what to expect, obviously. So I think everything is fine. But he was very quiet.

And me looking back now, he wasn't so silent. He didn't make any sound. he didn' coo, didn"t babble. It was more just kind of like a, like, you know, that was it.

NICU Separation and Early Concerns

Screams and cries. Um, but that really came into effect more around when he turned two. Also, I should add that he didn't hardly answer to his name either.

You could say his names 50 times and maybe one time he would look at you. It was almost like he was in his own little world. Um, so that's kind of where my concerns started to come in, which is about one and a half to is when I thought, you know, maybe we should, uh, do some speech therapy or anything.

But obviously because of the pandemic babies, the wait lists were out the wazoo. We were not seeing with a, um. Texas Children's is who we were trying to get with, which is our big name in our medical field down here, medical system.

I didn't get into them until about Two and a half, two and half is when we finally got in with them. So we did private speech therapy, which God bless them, they tried, but they just had never met a kid like Atlas yet.

The goals that we were set for him just got smaller and smaller. But once we did get with Texas Children's, the same thing also happened. The goals got smaller and smaller.

At one point, one of the goals was just to sit in a chair because how am I supposed to interact with him if he can't even sit. And that would just throw him into a tizzy.

So, you know, it was almost very traumatic for him too, because he, he I could only imagine being so frustrated, not being able to get your wants and your needs communicated.

It's valid for him to have those feelings. Other than that, milestone wise, he sat up when he was about nine to 10 months old, finally, on his own. He stood up about 11 months, and then he started walking around 14 months.

not on time, but also not that late in comparison to other people around me and their children. The limited diet started to come in around two, because when we were doing baby lead weaning, he ate everything.

He ate, everything had no issues to it. But when two came around, It just started getting more into breads and crackers and stuff like that, soft foods, basically.

Two is when he also started Montessori school. So then he started to get ear infections, so much so that he had to tubes and his adenoids removed, which was two and a half is he got that done.

Two to three is when the eloping started to happen. I just could not control anything that he was doing. Everything had to be in his control, which it makes sense now because he did not have control of being able to communicate or have a conversation.

At that point, he did start the special education in the public school as well. They don't start that until they're three. So he got about six months because his birthday is in November.

That he was supposed to get speech therapy once a week there. And they kind of have it on a form of when he gets seen. you know, what time. He only got one session of speech therapy in the six months that he was there.

And that's pretty much like your government assistance of therapy, in a sense. So I just was so frustrated that I did not put him back. I'd rather find other avenues than go that route.

Then also he started picking up more bad behaviors because He was the only nonverbal child in his classroom of five. There was only five including him, but everyone else was a little bit more on the behavioral side.

And so he started picking up that if I start hitting, then I can get the attention that I need. So, you know, it just wasn't the best fit for us at that time.

During that, time is when I started to lose hope and started this is just going to be our life now. I guess I just have to take in this autism diagnosis and figure out how to, you know, maybe I need to get with social security, put, whatever I got to do to kind of help him.

And out of that desperation came a recommendation to go see Dr. Zielinski at Mind Eye Institute. I was obviously very hesitant because the only way that this process works is if he wears glasses.

Speech Delays and Early Interventions

At this time, Atlas could not even wear a hat. He could now wear sunglasses. And he was very sensory overload. So how am I supposed to get glasses on a little three year old?

that, you know, I just didn't see how that could be possible. And I also was a little bit ignorant in the sense that I thought it was little woo woo, like I don't know how it's supposed to work.

You know? I'm used to the traditional methods. That's all I've been exposed to. Right. So we went and it was the only way that we want was because I got financial help.

And it wasn't me on my line hoping that, you know, I'm just hoping for the best at this point, obviously. Sure. Once we went, the first thing she said to us was, have you heard of primitive reflexes?

Obviously, no, I have never heard a primitive refluxes. And she gave me Dr. Hansen's card and said, you need to go see her. The week we came home from Chicago, we booked a flight the following week to see Dr Hanson for an intensive.

And that was the first time in this whole journey that I felt like we were finally getting answers for how he was acting or what was causes of him coming to life, of what, you know, the reasons for what he is going through.

Let me come in and kind of piece a couple of things. First of all, all these babies that were born during COVID, they came out within six months of of the pandemic and what they were already noticing and how these children were, their language was delayed and they very emotionally dysregulated.

And we're talking about new babies, we are talking toddlers. Then just the trauma of what you went through during your labor and delivery and then him being separated and him going through the trauma.

That's when these primitive reflexes are completely in control of that baby. And if a mom is going though a trauma, she's going to kind of go back and forth between her own brain stem and her brain because it's a Trauma.

We're going get to a little bit more meat and potatoes about that part. in just a minute, but just to kind of highlight that trauma is such a big part of how it impacted both of them and the father, too.

So then when they came, one of the very first things that, you know, I had to observe and watch him. But one the first thing that I really wanted is I wanted to know What happened in the hospital?

What did you two actually go through? Now, Grace has already told us, you know, they identified the cyst and on her way back after laboring for 30 plus hours, hey, is it okay if we just go ahead and take your ovary?

Could you imagine the state of mind that you're in going into the delivery room with somebody talking to you like that? And then you black out. You don't know what's going on.

So why don' you highlight what were some of the things that we actually found out by looking at your past medical record? Do you remember that. Absolutely.

He had his first bowel movement while he was still inside of me. So in my amniotic fluid, there was meconium. Another thing is after reading the document, that was muconium inside the umbilical cord as well.

He required resuscitation, which included PPV and CPAP, so CPAT. And it took about 15 minutes before he was able to breathe the air. I also had a postpartum hemorrhage due to uterine atony.

I had to look up what that was because I have no idea. But now it makes sense because at the time I thought I'd gotten pushed with some drugs and that's why I passed out.

I didn't know that it's because of hemorrhage. No one told me anything like that besides that little blip. Nobody discussed any of this with you, right?

Nothing. right? And so, okay, so let's talk about meconium. So, meconeum is the first bowel movement and when it is either aspirated in the amniotic fluid so the baby could aspirate it in, the umbilical cord, it's a toxin.

It's the waste of pregnancy. Now, Moro is one of our first primitive reflexes. And the three things that it activates is arousal of the central nervous system, CO2O2, so carbon dioxide and oxygen, and the sympathetic nervous Now, when a baby is born, Moro actually quiets everything down.

So your sympathetic, so that fight or flight, it never acts that way again, except during the birth process. But let's connect the dots.

Primitive Reflexes and Functional Therapy

He had to be resuscitated, CO2O2 reflexes. He was always quiet under arouse. So right there, we've got red flags as to what happened to baby Atlas. And so that's where we launched from, correct?

Correct. We did reflexes, we did a cleanse, and we start, And we a lot of neurofeedback with him too. We do, We a did lot a vestibular input too, because he couldn't jump before we saw Dr.

Hanson. He didn't even attempt to really do the typical things at his age that he should be doing. It's almost as if he felt not confident in himself, so he didn' want to attempt it at all.

Yeah, it's kind of like, especially with the vestibular system. So your vesticular system is three little canals inside of your ear. It's always thought of as just the balance mechanism, but it is the first system in the womb that they believe is actually maturated by the time we are born.

women that have to have a lot of bed rest, that tells you that that child isn't getting that vestibular input with mom walking around and things of that nature.

But if I have go into this trauma state, I'm going to lock into not only the primitives like Moro, but also the withdrawal reflexes, and I've done podcasts on that.

So go back and listen to another one. But that's where we started. We started with the reconnecting of that foundation. And we starting with a gut cleanse because we had to get whatever was locked inside and he's four now, but last year he was three and it's like you can't do a ton of lab tests on little kids like that.

So you have to work like Sherlock Holmes. You have be like a detective to get this stuff to really know the next step of where you need to go. We did mechanical, we did chemical, and we the brain.

Now, I'm going to speak about mom for a second, and you chime in whenever you want. When mom was here the first time, she was really, i'm gonna say she, was frightened.

This was a whole new world. you were telling her a lot of things she had no idea what you're talking about and she was gonna have to take this on because and i really want her throughout our conversation i want to really tell you and and encourage you that some of these cases, they are going to be a marathon, not a sprint.

And she has really done an incredible job. So they came back. This is August 14th that we're doing the podcast right now. Last week, was it last week?

Last Week. Doesn't it just seem like an eon ago already? She was just here last Week for another five days. And I'm going to tell you, I walked out on the floor so excited to see her and her mother and Atlas, of course.

But the very first thing that Mama Ashton did is she came up to me with such confidence and said, this is the way we have to run this this time. And I was like, yes ma'am, what are we doing?

And she had confidence. She has been working on this so diligently, but she's got fruit to her labor. Okay. So you take it from there. What have you been doing over the last year before you came here again?

We've been a consistent brushing, which again, it's something that you don't see right away, such a subtle progression that he has just been able to calm himself in a sense.

I don't know if that makes sense, but. Sure, because the brushing relates to the withdrawal reflexes, which is our primitive defense system. So absolutely, it would cause calming.

Absolutely. especially I call it the before time now. Before time Atlas, everything would just set him off. It could be just a touch on the cheek and it would set them off and you never knew what was going to set it off so after just being consistent with the vestibular input, starting to build the muscle tone in his legs because he had the low muscle tones in the legs which is By the second day we were there for the first week with you, he was jumping.

He had never jumped before. So his jumping has gotten so good now that he's trying to jump off curbs. It's so great to see how much progress and how more confident he feels in himself.

And I really think that's what it comes down to is he is getting so much confident in him that it's making me confident because it is becoming easier for us to exist.

That's the best way I can explain it really, honestly. Before we were both surviving. Now we're able to exist and just keep moving that needle and keep going as far as we can.

I'm so proud of him. I'm proud of myself as well. She also worked with an OT in Texas who really helped her figure out the way to talk with Atlas and the before Atlas There was nothing but screaming going on, even when he came here.

And it was like, OK, what do we got to do to try to calm that down? And any time this past trip that he would get upset, it is beautiful how you really just kneel down right in front of us and say, hey, Alice, we don't scream, right?

and Atlas would respond. and he's been saying thank you. And he is using some sign language in that and it's fine because it is a way to drive the need to talk so that we can build the work of talk.

This is one of the things because everybody gets very concerned when a child is delayed in language, but you had red flags from the beginning. He wasn't cooing, which is your vowel sounds.

He was not responding. So that was a very under aroused baby from the get go. We got to rebuild all this stuff. The need to talk is on the right, the work of talk on is the left.

You have to be able to bring that together through timing. One of the things that I thought was so fantastic last week We couldn't get him off of interactive metronome.

He loved clapping. And that's that timing game where you hear a bell and you're trying to bring your hands together in that right timing.

Progress After Intensive Treatment

But really what you are doing is you bringing both sides of your brain together. What a great therapy to be able to work with children and play games and make it fun.

This child was seen two times a day and for five days. And he did this every single session. He had a really good time with it, didn't he? He did not get tired of it at all.

It was almost like he was playing a video game. In his mind, that's what he Yeah, and having a good time with it. So is there anything else about your story in particular before we kind of shift and try to speak to some moms out there that sometimes I feel like they don't think there is anything that they can do about the situation.

And being able to have that stamina to be able walk this kind of a journey, because it's tough. But is there any other part of your story that you think would be really helpful to pull back into our conversation?

I mean, ultimately, what kept me going was, if anything ever happened to me or my husband, I want to know that my son is able to thrive in life. I wanted him to be able do the typical things or even not typical thing.

So I just want him able be his own person. And to know that there's something else out there like this, I wish everyone knew about it. Every person that I can possibly talk to in my vicinity, I've never heard of that.

Yeah, me neither. I didn't know either. And now you need to know there is other options. Especially in our case, we've done all the traditional methods that you could possibly think of and it just wasn't working for him.

It put him more into fight or flight every single time because maybe it would work for some other children that are having I don't want to say minor issues in comparison to him.

But in a sense, you know, it's a little bit more minor, but it probably works for them. It's not going to work for my child. In his case, from what has happened to them in his life, It is much more deeper than, oh, he can't say his Rs.

There is another option. I wish this was the traditional method. To be perfectly honest, I do not understand why it is not. Me too. It's profitable for them, to be honest.

I know the reason why, and we don't need to get into that. But just know that there is another option. If something's not working for you or you're not getting the progress that you are needing to or hoping to, there are other options out there.

Whether you have to travel to it, you will make it happen for your child. Well, and that's a big thing because the first time was really difficult for you to try to get this together.

And then the second time, you've been saving up going, we're going back to see Dr. Hanson connect my brain because we are moving forward. Yes, We are.

Well once you get a glimpse of it, You can't go back. You get that glimpse and hope and you cannot go Like, my husband, he wasn't 100% in the beginning, but as soon as he came home and saw all the progress Atlas has made, He's like, go.

Go as much as you need. That's great. And see, that's another thing she has to deal with. Her husband works, is he in state, away or do you have to go out of Texas?

It depends on the job that he's at. Right now he is in Texas. He's about three and a half hours away, but over the last year he has been out-of-state.

Yeah, so she's been really shouldering this by herself and she had to… I mean, the first time she was here, I did a brain map on her. I made her do neurofeedback as well because the age of this child, he's still building his subconscious mind.

And she and her dad are both very instrumental in making that happen. And if mom is not okay, there is no way that baby will be okay. We just had a mom and a son graduate from the program here at Connect My Brain.

Mom first started her son and then she said I just have to do this too Or it's just you know He's gonna be better than me and Then he's going to have deal with me again, and they went through the program together And so wow what a benefit when when we're working on this, but she did she has been consistent and She has stayed in contact with me, she has worked this process, and she should get the fruits of her labor because she's done an outstanding job.

You know, when she was here last week, She was also very observant of other people in the office and struggles that they were going through. And she is so open to go and talk to them in order for them to realize, hey, I was there in that position last year, and I want you to see I'm in this position this year.

So why don't you speak a few words of encouragement to the moms out there? Why should they come to Connect My Brain? What is it going to do for them? And are you glad you did this journey and are on this?

So first, absolutely. I'm glad to have met you and to be part of Connect My Brain. So internally grateful for the knowledge that you've given us and the hope that If anyone is feeling like how I did in the beginning before meeting Dr.

Hansen, I had never met anybody in my position or a child like mine in by vicinity.

Encouragement for Parents and Closing Remarks

I could see it on social media, but they were states away. And they we're also preaching about the same thing of just feeling alone and not knowing what to do.

Because every child is so different in their own way, obviously. If you're feeling that same way about your child, but also want them to, again, thrive in life, this is the way you need to be.

This is and should be the traditional method. It should what is taught through the doctors and to talk about gut microbiome and neuroplasticity, everything.

Should be talked about more often in reflexes, because again it's not profitable. We'll go into that. If any of this is what you're wanting, then you definitely need to go to Connect My Brain.

that she has been the best coach for us. She tells it likes it is, she doesn't coddle, which sometimes, you know, I like to be coddled because I'm from an Italian family, but that's not what I need.

It's no what needed. I needed to told the truth and I wanted to tell you have this amount of time to get him in the place possible and to do it as quickly as possible.

Again, not a race but a marathon. You do have to put in some work. But you will find a way to make it happen within your busy schedule because I'm sure all of us moms have so many things.

I live an hour away from where I work, but we make It happen. We're in the car a lot, But we do our sound system while we're In the Car, which by the way he's loving.

He tells me. Oh, that's wonderful. Birds. He goes, birds, mama. That's so great. Good, good, Good. And you know, the other piece I would like to add into that, what I feel like should be going on in our traditional health care system.

They don't have to take it on, but they should be communicating to mothers, first of all, what their bodies went through when they blacked out, What their babies went though, not just writing it in a note.

Somebody should have gone to her and said, listen, your child has been exposed to meconium. and we're really going to encourage you that you get with some functional people that really know how to get in there and clean the belly.

And so he ate well up until two and that's the maturation time for building your belly and then that window closed and he became a very picky eater and only will eat certain things.

So in order to change that, you've got to get to the root of what is needed to heal it so that the palate, that taste buds are more open to other things.

Kids can get very restrictive, especially if they've ever had belly aches, gas, constipation, diarrhea, they will begin to associate I eat, I don't feel good.

So they really limit what it is that they're going to eat. They find things that there they feel confident that this won't hurt my belly, but it won t always stay the same thing.

So this is why I think it is so important that our health care system bridge together. They don't have to do everything. I don' have do do anything. But if we were communicating and really finding the best things for the patient, that's truly what matters.

Don't you think? Absolutely. So, thank you so much. This has been wonderful. I want to spend a few minutes talking to the audience. We have launched our new website.

So make sure you go over to connectmybrain.com. we have organized our membership called the CMB membership. This is a way you could dip your toe in for a very modest price and you can get access to private podcasts, our Facebook private group called Mom's Corner.

You would get deep dives into things like ear infections, what strep could do to the brain. And you can start to get to know how we look at things and see if this is the right connection for you.

So this the first time I get do this, I'm so excited. We have a code. If you do hear this and you put in the code, AUG

25 CMB member. It's a pretty long code, isn't it?

We'll make sure we put it in the show notes. But it's August, so it is AU G, capital AU 25 for the year 2025. And then the initial CM B member, you'll get $5 off and your monthly membership will be $14.99.

So that's a very modest price, okay? You get a lot for that. You also get membership discounts. So check it out. It's on the website, connectmybrain.com.

Now, if this has sparked something in you and you have a question, Go to the website and send me your question. Make sure you put your contact information in there so that I can get back to you.

And I will be the one that connects back you personally so we can discuss your journey and we figure out if we're a good fit. So, Grace, what's the last thing you'd like to tell our audience?

I am so appreciative of you and all the knowledge you've poured into us and continue to do. And I just only hope that anyone else in the same situation or just feeling lost like I did could know that there is other options like Dr.

Hansen who could help guide you, and coach you. and give you that same knowledge so that you feel confident in yourself and the way that your child is going to develop.

Thank you so much, so thank you for being on our podcast and I feel really inspired that we are going to touch many people and we're gonna be able to help these kids get their childhood back.

So thanks for joining, have a wonderful day and be blessed.