Exploring the Stress-Gut Connection: Strategies for Inner Harmony Transcript

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Well. Hey everybody. I'm very excited to have Doctor Doni Wilson with me on this episode. And we've got a lot of exciting stuff, especially for the women.

We've got some exciting stuff on gut health related to women's health, but we're going to start off with gut health related to stress and adrenal function so critical you can't have healthy gut function.

You can't have a healthy body in life if you have issues with your gut or not handling stress well. So a little bit more on our guest. Doctor Wilson is a nature path doctor.

She's also a certified professional midwife, certified nutritionist, nutrition specialist, and bestselling author of Master Your Stress, Reset Your Health.

So here's a book that's right on the topic we're talking about. And for more than 23 years, she's helped thousands of patients overcome health challenges and achieve wellness by using specific strategies that address the whole body and ultimately resolve the underlying cause of distress.

Just what you want a doctor to do. And she suffered from migraines for over 20 years, and in understanding how to solve them, she developed this system called the Stress Recovery Protocol, which helped her heal from own migraines, has helped many other people from migraines and other health issues related to chronic stress.

So she brings awareness of stress to the media, the public, and as well as to doctors. She specializes in helping women to protect themselves from human papillomavirus and in doing so, preventing cervical cancer.

You can find her a blog podcast called How Humans Heal. Enter programs at Doctor doni.com. Now that's spelt doctor doctor Doni doni.com. So great to have you Doni with us on this edition here.

Thank you so much Mark. I'm so glad to be having this conversation with you. Well, I definitely thought of you when the topic of understanding the connection between gut health and stress and adrenal function, and you're one of the best people for it.

And of course, any of us who've been practicing for any amount of time, one of the fundamental reasons why people have health problems, have gut problems.

And, you know, there's a connection between the two is just the effects of stress in our world, how people handle stress psychologically, emotionally, physically and all this.

So anyways, tell us a bit more about how you came to really have an interest in this connection between stress and health, and then also get into gut health, if you would.

Absolutely. You know, it really became so such an interest for me and a passion actually to be because I think of myself as like a problem solver, a puzzle.

I love to solve puzzles, and I think I always have. And so back, even when I was getting my degree in nutrition and then naturopathic medicine, and at the same time dealing with my own health issues and realizing I was getting these, these migraines constantly, which would make it impossible for me to keep up with whether it was when I was in medical school or then seeing my patients, and then when I had my daughter.

And so I was constantly in this place of, I've got to figure out how to solve this, because I need to be able to do what I need to do during the day, just like so many people feel, you know, like when our house gets in the way of us being able to do what we need to do now, it becomes a priority.

I got to solve this. And because of the way that I think about things, I wanted to really get to the root cause of the migraines and not just take a pill for the pain, which I could do, but then it just kept recurring.

So it was like, how do I really solve this? And that's where I really started digging into the research to understand what was going on. And it turns out that by understanding the way that stress affects not only the nervous system making migraines or headaches more susceptible, but also the way that stress affects our digestion, making digestive symptoms more likely.

It's all interconnected in something that's called psycho immunology. And by understanding that interconnectedness in the body and solving for that, I was able to solve the migraines.

But it ends up I was able to find out that I could help patients with all different health issues, including gut health issues, with that same protocol.

Absolutely. So as a father doctor, very much aware of that, like you said, mind, body, gut connection. And of course, what was the other way to write because of people's diets and unhealthy foods, their eating their cat is off and it throws off their brain.

So talk to us a bit more about that, that bidirectional access, if you will, from the brain to the gut and also from the gut to the brain. It's so important to recognize that, again, we don't see that in conventional medicine.

A lot of times we go to one doctor for our brain in a different doctor for our gut. But as doctors, yeah, there's we see in the science exists to show this two way communication between the two.

And one of that one pathway is of course, our brain has a constant, what I call a stress response system, like a stress radar system. Our brain is constantly aware of what's going on in our environment and perceiving if there's a stress, even something like not getting enough sleep or not getting not getting enough food when we need it, and our, you know, our blood sugar fluctuates or or if there's an alarm going off in something, definitely a deadline at work.

All of these things stress trigger a stress response from our brain, first of all, to what's called the limbic system and the autonomic nervous system, which is eventually that's what we call the fight or flight system, right?

Where we we feel like we're in this fight or flight adrenaline response. And when we're in that fight or flight adrenaline response, it turns off our digestion.

So now we're not even getting signals to digest our food or take care of absorbing nutrients where our our nervous systems just focus on how to recover from the stress.

And it turns out that a lot of us are in this constant stress response a lot of the day and the night. And so we're not our digestion is hardly getting a chance to do its job.

And so that's one of the factors that affects our digestion is that we start having less digestive enzymes. Our intestinal cells are not recovering, our gut bacteria get thrown off track, all because we're in this constant fight or flight stress mode.

And what we need is the opposite. We need some time in anti stress, what I call anti stress, which is the opposite of that, where we actually get to rest and digest and we have.

And the more we can learn to insert that into our daily routines so that our digestion actually gets the, the focus of our nervous system, that it needs to be able to digest our food.

But this is why, like a lot of times when we think of symptoms that people experience when they're stressed, we think of things like a stomach ulcers, right?

We know stomach ulcers are associated with stress. We know even if you think of like irritable bowel syndrome, IBS, it's associated with stress. So it's this stress decreasing our digestive capacity.

But as you mentioned it becomes a vicious cycle because then once we're not digesting well and we develop something called leaky gut, where leaky gut is, where the intestinal cells are not as healthy as they could be because they're getting depleted by stress.

And then our gut bacteria are disrupted by stress. And so then it becomes this whole disrupted system with lots of inflammation and stress signals from the gut that then communicates back to the brain.

And so now the brain has another stress signal, not just from your daily life, but from your gut is sending more stress signals. And it it just perpetuates the pattern and tell the viewers, how did the adrenal glands time?

Those people have heard the term. They know their stress glands. They don't fully understand, but tell them how this ties into it, because that's one of your expertise.

Absolutely. So the other part of our stress signaling from our brain sends a signal from the hypothalamus and the pituitary and the brain to the adrenal glands and the adrenal glands, I think of them.

They are down here under our above our kidneys there. So it's down in our back, lower back. But I think of them as our bodyguards. They're literally we have these like built in bodyguards.

They're ready to protect us under stress and they make our stress hormones. That's where the correlation adrenaline comes from. So when the brain says, hey, adrenal glands, hey, bodyguards, we need more stress hormones.

It's going to make some cortisol, adrenaline and help us, which is a good thing. We want some cortisol adrenaline to help us if when we're under stress and we need it.

The problem is that when we're under constant stress now, the signaling gets thrown off balance and confused. And now we might be having high or low cortisol or high or low adrenaline when we don't need it or inappropriately.

And so we end up in this situation of what we call, I call adrenal distress. Sometimes people hear about it as burnout or adrenal fatigue or adrenal. And it's essentially that the adrenal glands are now under or over producing cortisol, adrenaline.

And so that ends up going off other parts of our body because cortisol also communicates to the digestion. So cortisol, if it's either too high or too low, it's communicating to the digestion.

It's also communicating to our other hormone producing glands like thyroid gland and insulin from the pancreas. It's also communicating with our nervous system and our immune system.

So if cortisol is either too high or too low, it's ending up sending mixed signals out to our whole body. And this is why when someone's under constant stress without enough stress recovery, they start to experience symptoms in their digestion, as well as hormone imbalances or blood sugar imbalances or menstrual cycle imbalances, and then also anxiety or depression and immune system or susceptibility to infections and autoimmunity.

And it becomes this whole complex of health issues. But it's started from us having stress and adrenal dysfunction that isn't getting addressed because it doesn't get addressed in standard medicine. Yes.

And you and I have both tested thousands of patients throughout the years and testing, you know, their stress hormones. In part, it does help us to address them a little more specifically, but it's always good for people to see what's going on and motivates them.

Tell the viewers your experience and what you see on these tests is a very common. You see imbalances. Is that

the case for most people with chronic health problems?

Digestion? Tell tell us a bit more about what your experiences at thousands of patients. I've measured their cortisol levels because we can measure cortisol.

Yes, you can measure cortisol in the blood in a single blood test. But what's really better is to measure cortisol at four different times a day, because cortisol naturally and optimally is a hormone that should be higher in the morning and gradually decreasing through the day.

So we need to measure it morning, midday, evening and bedtime. And we can do that easily with saliva or urine. And so we measure cortisol. And we can see then I can see where, where is this person's bodyguards.

How are they holding up. Are they overdoing it in their overprotective or are they worn out and not and under protective. Right. And same with adrenaline.

We can measure adrenaline in urine and we can see how they were doing. And so I've measured thousands of levels over the past 23 years. I was joking with a patient yesterday like, and I've tested myself as well, I could do a whole profile of what are my levels over the past couple of decades, because to me this is essential information.

It really, as you mentioned it, it changes the protocol. A lot of people guess I can't tell you how many people just go, oh, I assume I have high cortisol, I'm going to take this product.

And I so many people come to me and ends up either they or take they're taking the wrong product because they thought they had high cortisol. And they're taking a product that raises it more or the complete opposite there.

They they have low cortisol in their taking in a product that lowers it more. So it's like much better to know for sure so that you take the right. Because we hear about like let's say and ashwagandha is a beautiful herb, but it's really going to be better for someone who has high cortisol to take ashwagandha to help lower it.

And if someone has low cortisol, it's going to be better to choose something like holy basil or glycerin. So we want to choose the writer that's going to give, because it's actually when you take the right herb and nutrient, we can get the cortisol back to optimal.

And that's what we want. We want to help the body get that cortisol and adrenal function back to optimal. Because what we know from studies is that when humans have optimal cortisol and adrenaline, it improves our longevity.

Why does it improve our longevity? Because it prevents health issues. Well, a lot of people out there, they read books, they take nutritional supplements, they follow diets, and that's all good.

But if they don't address the stresses in their life, then they are, in a way, putting a natural Band-Aid on it. Now, don't get me wrong, it still helps people.

It's better than medications, but they're not going to get the results they could otherwise. So give us some new gold nuggets of like your stress recovery protocol, maybe starting with the mental emotional aspects, and then get into some of the diets and supplements that you commonly use with people too.

Well, one way I think about it is it's one thing, as we're talking about to use herbs and nutrients to the cortisol and adrenaline, and then we can also help emphasize this anti stress nervous system signaling that we were talking about.

And so we can do all of that. But if if your daily life is still your body your your remember you have this dress radar system constantly. So if it's still picking up on constant stress it's going to work against you.

You're you're in a constant. You're constantly trying to correct what you're throwing off. And so what works better is if we can integrate in what I call care, you know, there's an acronym of care see for clean eating a for adequately

for recovery activities and for exercise.

And if we can help our patients and help people to implement care in their daily lives. Right. It's we could also think about it as self-care. How do we feed ourselves in a way?

How do we make sure we get enough rest? How do we get these recovery activities? And I can I can just drive in more detail. The more we can do that, in a way, we're giving our nervous system signals of consistency and safety, anti stress so that it's it's not just getting only stress signals.

It's also getting healing anti stress signals. So now we're able to maintain optimal cortisol adrenaline and digestive function and all of it because we're getting there.

Our bodies are getting that that that signaling that it needs. Yeah. So when you do that with patients what do you see for the patients who have anxiety, who have burnout.

Tell us maybe some of the kind of the things you do, how long it takes. I know you get very good results. Tell us just a bit about that. Well, that's the thing is this stress recovery protocol, which is a three phase, first we get out of stress mode, then we rebalance what's out of balance, and then we work on maintenance.

How do we create resilience over time. And if some people can go through those three phases even in three months, and for other people it may take longer.

It kind of depends on how many factors need to be addressed and how much they can implement that into their lives. And so some of the things we do is everything from based on understanding their test results, integrating in nutrients and herbs that match for their body, and then bringing in also in terms of care and the recovery activities, teaching them how can we use things like mindfulness, meditation, time and nature journaling, music?

There's so many tools that research shows us, helps us reset from stress. And sometimes people realize, oh my gosh, I've been doing that on my own. I just didn't realize that it was helping.

And so we can start to integrate these tools and to help us have a constant amount of stress reset. Because the cool thing is, even if you do take a five minute break to do a small meditation or breastwork or let's put on some calming music, it has the potential to help you recover from hours of stress, right?

So it doesn't. You don't have to even do that much stress recovery to have a big influence on and counterbalance to the amount of stress. And so we can use all of these tools to help you and really individualize it.

And the thing I find is that it's really important to individualize it based on your stress patterns. So if you have high cortisol, high adrenaline, we want to implement these recovery tools based on having high cortisol high adrenaline.

Whereas a person who has little cortisol low adrenaline, we might then be implementing your stress recovery and your exercise and even your diet in a different way, because we want to do it in a way that matches where your body's starting from.

So many people come into wanting to improve their health, right, Mark? And they they might be hearing, oh, I'm going to go, I'm going to exercise more.

I'm going to push myself and do some intense exercise, or I'm going to do some extreme intermittent fasting. But if you're adrenal glands are depleted and your, your or your cortisol is too high, if we push ourselves too much, we can actually make it worse.

So a lot of what I do is helping people to listen to their bodies, right? Like, how do we actually realize that the symptoms our body is giving us are really signals?

And if we pay attention to those signals, our body will guide us how to implement in a more gentle way. How do we

implement in a way that really matches up with what our bodies need, instead of just pushing harder and making things worse?

Absolutely. So that's critical. The holistic doctors, all doctors should be focusing on that, you know, patients and how to handle that stress and need.

We need to do a better job with it. And you've been doing that maybe in the last part. Just tell us what you notice when you address people's digestion.

I know you use enzymes and things which assist digestion and probiotics. Do you find then over time, people become more resilient to stress as well? Absolutely.

Because as we talked about, the stress causes, the digestive issues, and then the digestion becomes the stress of its own. And so the more we can help the digestion heal and recover, first of all, we're already eliminating stress signals.

And then the more the digestion heals, whether that's from even just some of these stress recovery activities, let alone if we use digestive enzymes to help you digest your food and herbs and nutrients, they can help heal leaky gut.

Because leaky gut can heal, those intestinal cells can recover when we stop bombarding them, and we start giving them the fuels, the nutrients to heal.

And we can also recover the gut bacteria. So all of those things can heal. And as they do now. Not only does your digestion feel better, but you're absorbing your nutrients better because oftentimes people are depleted in their nutrients and then they're got them, got bacteria are able to make their neurotransmitters that they need for the nervous system.

So they start feeling better for that. And then the immune system starts working better. So it's like just as much as it can be a negative, vicious cycle when we aren't recovering from stress, it can become a positive, exponentially positive influence when we start addressing these factors, when we start addressing the gut and we started running the adrenals, to me, it's like the best form of multitasking because we can have the greatest positive ripple effect throughout the body, and people really then start to see so much healing.

They start to be surprised because then they're like, wow, I came in to work on my energy or my anxiety or my gut health, and now my whole body feels better.

And it's because it's we're all interconnected and we can turn things around. And then you have a positive ripple effect working for you. That's great advice.

Well, Doctor Doni Wilson, thank you so much. And for the viewers, look for another segment with her on women's health. We're going to talk about cervical dysplasia, PMS, other things related to in some degree gut health.

So Doctor Wilson, thank you so much for your time. Thank you.