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

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## Introduction to the show and guest

Even if you do take a five minute break to do a small meditation or breast work or let's put on some calming music, it has the potential to help you recover from hours of stress.

Welcome to Health Breakthroughs with Dr. Stengler. I'm Dr Mark Stegler and each episode we cut through the noise to bring you practical, science-backed insights for more energy, better health and a life that feels like yours again.

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

We've 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 have a healthy body and life if you have issues with your gut or not handling stress well.

A little bit more on our guest. Dr. Wilson is a naturopathic doctor. She's also a certified professional midwife, certified 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 herself 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 deal from her own migraine and has helped many other people from migrants 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 blog podcast called How Humans Heal and her programs at DrDonnie.com.

## Dr. Wilsonu2019s background and stress recovery journey

Now that's spelled DrD-O-C-T- O-R, Donnie D-o-N-I dot com. So great to have you Donny 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, 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 the fundamental reasons why people have health problems, have gut problems and There's a connection between the two.

It's 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 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 always think I 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 migraines constantly, which would make it impossible for me to keep up with, whether it was when I in medical school or then seeing my patients and then when had my daughter.

And so I'm 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 do during the day, just like so many people feel, you know, like when our health gets in the way of us being able do we need do, now it becomes a priority.

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

So I was like, how do I really solve this? And that's where I started digging into the research to understand what was going on. And it turns out that by understanding the way that stress affects 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 psychoneuroimmunology and And by understanding that interconnectedness in the body and solving for that, I was able to solve the migraines, but it ends up, was I able find out that I could help patients with all different health issues, including gut health issue, with that same protocol.

Absolutely. So as a naturopathic doctor, very much aware of that. Like you said, mind, body, gut connection. And of course, suppose the other way too, right, because of people's diets and the unhealthy foods they're eating, their gut is off and it throws off their brain.

So talk to us a bit more about that bidirectional axis, if you will, from the brain to the gut and also from gut to brain It's so important to recognize that.

And again, we don't see that in conventional medicine. A lot of times, you know, one doctor for our brain and a different doctor our gut. But as naturopathic doctors, yeah, there's, and the science exists to show this two-way communication between the two.

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

## How stress affects the gut-brain connection

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

So now we aren't even getting signals to digest our food or take care of absorbing nutrients. Our nervous systems just focus on how do I recover from the stress.

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

And so that's one of that 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 opposite of

that, where we actually get to rest and digest and the more we can learn to insert that into our daily routines so that our digestion actually gets 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 thing of things like a stomach ulcer, right?

We know stomach alters are associated with stress. We even if you think 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 leakey 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 disruptive system with lots of inflammation and stress signals from the gut that then communicates back to the brain.

So now the bring has another stress signal, not just from your daily life, but from you gut is sending more stress and it just perpetuates the pattern.

And tell the viewers, how did the adrenal glands tie in this? People have heard the term, they know your stress glands. They don't fully understand, but tell them how this ties into it, because that's one of your expertises.

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

And the adrenals glands, I think of them, they are down here above our kidneys, so it's down in our back, lower back. But I them as our bodyguards. Literally, we have these built-in bodyguards.

They're ready to protect us under stress, and they make our stress hormones. That's where the cortisol and adrenaline comes from. So when the brain says, hey, adrenal glands, Hey, body guards, We need more stress hormone.

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

The problem is that when were 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 a 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 adrenaline exhaustion.

It's essentially that the adrenal glands are now under or over producing cortisol and adrenaline and so that ends up throwing 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 is communicating to our digestion.

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

## Adrenal function, cortisol, and stress testing

So if cortisol is either to high to 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 im balances or menstrual cycle im balances 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 started from us having stress and adrenal dysfunction that isn't getting

addressed because it doesn't get addressed in standard medicine.

You've done everything you were told to do and something still feels off. Health Breakthroughs with Dr. Stengler, we go beyond symptom management to explore integrative, science-backed approaches to the issues that medicine too often overlooks.

Chronic fatigue, brain fog, gut dysfunction, inflammation, hormone imbalance, and healthy aging. If you're ready for real answers and practical tools to support your health naturally, follow Health breakthroughs of Dr Stegler on Doctor Talks or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Yes, and you and I have both tested thousands of patients throughout the years and testing 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 it very common? You see imbalances? Is that the case for most people with chronic health problems, digestion?

Tell us a bit more about what your experiences. thousands of patients have measured their cortisol levels because we can measure cortisol. Yes, you can measuring cortisol in the blood in a single blood test, but what's really better is to measure a cortisol at four different times a day because cortisol naturally and optimally is a hormone that should be higher in morning and gradually decreasing through the day.

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

Are they overdoing it and they're overprotective or are worn out and underprotective, right? And same with adrenaline. We can measure adrenaline in urine and we can see how's their adrenaline doing.

And so I've measured thousands of levels over the past 23 years. I was joking with a patient yesterday, like, and I tested myself as well, I could do a whole profile of what are my levels, over that past couple of decades.

Because to me, this is essential information. It really, as you mentioned, 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 so many come to me and it ends up either they are taking the wrong product because they thought they had high cortisone and they're taking a product that raises it more or the complete opposite.

They have low cortisol and their taking in a products that lowers it. So it's like much better to know for sure so that you take the right because We hear about, like, let's say ashwagandha, and ashwhaganda is a beautiful herb, but it's really gonna be better for someone who has high cortisol to take ashwa ganda to help lower it.

And if someone has low cortisol, it is gonna better to choose something like holy basil or glyceriza. So we wanna choose the right herb that's gonna give, because it's actually when you take the write herb and nutrient, we can get the cortisol back to optimal.

And that what we want. We want to help the body get that cortisol and adrenal function back optimal, Because what 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, you know, a lot of people out there, they read books, take nutritional supplements, 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 bandaid on it. Now, don' get me wrong, it still helps people.

It's better than medications, but they're not going to get the results they could otherwise.

## Stress Recovery Protocol and daily self-care

So give us some of the gold nuggets of like your stress recovery protocol, maybe starting with the mental, emotional aspects and then get into some 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 re-optimize the cortisol and adrenaline, and we can also help emphasize this anti-stress nervous system signaling that we were talking.

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

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. There's an acronym of care, C for clean eating, A for adequate sleep, R for recovery activities and E for exercise.

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

How to we make sure we get enough rest? how do get these recovery activity that I can describe in more detail? The more we could do that in way, we're giving our nervous system signals of consistency and safety anti-stress so that 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 our bodies are getting that signaling that is needs.

Hey everybody, I want to take just a quick moment and invite you to my website, drstengler.com. Here we have the supplements that we've been using with our patients for many, many years.

High quality and high potency supplements, very pure. So if you're looking for high quality supplements where you can notice a difference, both in how you feel and on your lab tests, go to our website at dr.stegler dot com.

Yeah, so when you do that with patients, what do you see for the patients who have anxiety, who are burnout? Tell us maybe some of the kind of things you do, how long it takes.

I know you get very good results. Tell 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, 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 in 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 small meditation or breast work 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 use all of these tools to help you and really individualize it.

And the thing I find is that it's really important to individualized it based on your stress pattern. 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 low 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 way that matches where your body's starting from.

## Healing digestion to improve resilience

Like so many people come into you know wanting to improve their health right Mark and they might be hearing oh I'm gonna I'm going to exercise more, you know, I am going push myself and do some intense exercise or I will do extreme intermittent fasting.

But if your adrenal glands are depleted 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 bodies will guide us how to implement in a more gentle way.

How do implement it in way that really matches up with what our bodys 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, coaching patients on how to handle that stress and we need to do a better job with it.

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 a 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 that can help heal leaky gut, because leakey 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 their gut, the gut bacteria are able to make their neurotransmitters that they need for the nervous system, so they start feeling better from 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 could become a positive, exponentially positive influence when start addressing these factors.

When we start address the guts and we started addressing the adrenals, to me it is 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 be surprised because then they're like, wow, I came

in to work on my energy or my anxiety or in my gut health and now my whole body feels better.

It's because it's, we're all interconnected and we turn things around and then you have a positive effect working for you. That's great advice. Well, Dr.

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

Thank you. Thanks for listening to Health Breakthroughs with Dr. Stengler. If today's episode resonated with you, please follow the show, share with someone who needs it, and leave a review.

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