Introduction and Guest Background

Hi everyone. Welcome back to Doctor Talks. I'm your host, Doctor Kelly Halderman. And to continue our exciting discussion on the topic of thyroid, we have an incredible guest.

Doctor Laura LAX is here with us today to discuss the thyroid gut connection. Welcome, doctor lax, thank you so much for having me on. I'm super stoked to be here.

Yeah. Awesome. So we talked a little bit before we got going about your impressive background, but why don't you tell the, you know, the audience about it, tell us how you got into the space you're in, about your personal story and how you're known as the health detective, which I absolutely love.

I think we need more health practitioners who think of the mind of a health detective. So go for it 100%. Well, actually, I was a former broadcast news journalist, TV news, journalism, print journalist for that was my first career path.

And that really was a great segue when I started into functional health as well. I was going to be the next Katie Couric on the Today Show was my goal.

And then life had a different path for me, and that really came by the way of my own journey and health story. As a lot of practitioners, get into functional wellness in particular.

And I would say for most of my life I struggled with unsolved health issues. So like from the time I was six years old, I couldn't poop. So I got a little constipated IBS and I mean very much dietary related and, very much my birth story related to just kind of came into the world with the card stacked against my gut microbiome.

So like, I was a C-section baby, a lot of antibiotics as a kid, formula fed, processed foods like. And that that's just things that the research shows.

Unless we're like being mindful of the gut can lead to gut symptomology. And then fast forward to age ten and I'm standing on the playground at recess with a group of the most popular girls in school, and the Queen bee says, oh my gosh, you guys, I weighed myself last night.

I'm 69 pounds so fat. And then she turns to each of us, what do you weigh? And one by one, we had to go round the gossip circle and report to our drill sergeant.

And at a healthy 80 pounds I was by no means a fat kid, but when that circle got to me, I gulped and I lied and said, I don't know, and went home that day and decided I was going to go on a diet so I could lose 10 pounds and just be as pretty and healthy and, like this girl that I wanted to be like, popular.

And little did I know that that decision that I made that day standing in the pantry looking at my Dorito snack pack, would turn into a full blown eating disorder.

And just my life really dramatically changed from that point on. For the next 15 years of my life, where I lived in and out of hospitals and treatment centers and, the treatment for eating disorders at the time.

And it may still very much be the case. Do I'm trying to change it, but it really was the three peas and that was Pop Tarts, pizza and Prozac. And I would go I spent I accumulated four years of my life in hospitals and treatment like inpatient.

And then we'd go in, do what I needed to do to get out and then just really never learned.

Personal Health Journey and Functional Medicine

And in between. So I'd go right back to my old ways, and it wasn't really until I was 23, 20, almost 24 years old, that I stepped on the scale the morning before my second year of grad school, only to see a number I had not seen since I was that ten year old girl.

Like to 1 pound less than that. And only this time I was a full fledged adult, and it was the first time in that journey that it really just scared me.

It was it. My parents are doctors saying you're unhealthy. I was away from them living in Nashville, and I remember driving to the gym that morning and praying, God help me make a change today.

And I thought that meant help me eat a tablespoon of almond butter more and work out 30 minutes less on my StairMaster. And little did I know that when I got to that, parking lot at the YMCA, not one, but nine other gym goers would come up and just say, Lord, we've been talking you. We want to help you.

And, they spoke up and stepped in and took me to the hospital. Nothing imminent had happened yet. But within 48 hours, I was in the ICU at the heart rate in the near 20s.

And doctor saying I may not make it. And it was really in that moment, I made a decision that I did not know what life was going to look like on the other side, but I was not going to go back down that other path, and life was going to be different.

And so it's been another year in treatment, actually in Miami. And, it was very much the Pop Tarts pizza, Prozac model. But something inside me had changed.

And I, when I got out, is really when I began to find a new path and found my way into functional medicine to heal a lot of what I call post recovery.

Recovery. So what happens to your body just after years of chronic dieting? Even if you just think about chronic just eating processed foods, diets like is is whatever we've been through, just in our body prior to health.

It was really the recovery from those things. And I ended up being diagnosed with ten different chronic conditions. Doctors did not know what was going on, but including Hashimoto's, hypothyroidism, and then a ton of autoimmunity, Lyme disease, mold illness, it was just one after another and mass activation syndrome really driving a lot of that.

And that's where I had to become a health detective and really just became not only a patient, a functional medicine, but became a student and became a healer.

And I say, now heal to heal others and just really feel like I can relate to a lot of what my patients experience. And just my mind just goes right there to what is the mechanism driving the symptom or the disease, even if it's like, you know, I've been hypothyroid forever, I've been on hypothyroid medication forever.

I like to understand what is the mechanism that led to this for the patient to help them just kind of unwind or really sutured that fix the foundations.

Because a lot of times with that, the body's innately wired to heal. Just kind of if you break a bone and you slap a cast on it, that your bones are going to heal in 6 to 8 weeks, even if you're eating McDonald's.

And I'm not an advocate for that. But, that helping people just get back to that optimal state of health that they were, they're wired for, the world just has its way working against us in some capacity.

Well, that was a beautiful story. And I, share a lot of similarity with you in that I went back and no earned my MD, got sick, didn't have the tools in my toolkit to fix myself.

So I went to be a student of functional medicine, and I was a patient. I was my own patient. And I also was was learning. So, I really know what that's like.

I know that I would have never, ever left my allopathic career if my health didn't fail. And it was a blessing. But it was the hardest thing I've ever been through my entire life.

Couldn't get out of bed, couldn't figure out like somebody would say, their phone number. And I was like, what's a seven like? I could I mean, my brain was so on fire.

My gut was a mess. I was, you know, C-section. You know, really had a lot of antibiotics. Just really the cards were stacked against me, and I. And I bet you'll agree with me, doctor Lauren, that really all those, all those that allopathic load of of the antibiotics and all that changed our gut really probably set us up for not the best outcome moving forward if we if no one ever did anything about it.

Now, you know, with my kids right now, I've tried to do everything right. And with the people who, I see and I know they have these risk factors. We correct them before they're ever expressing. Right.

We're like, okay, we got we have to fix this. But, you know, tell us, tell us, tell us more about, again, the connection between your gut symptoms with sounds like you've had had for a really long time.

And then connect that with the thyroid and talk to us about maybe, some of the clients that you see, patients that you see and how they think that they just have thyroid disorder and that's it, I'm sure.

You see, that's just there. But their gut sense, 100%. And yeah, and sometimes the thyroid symptoms are just also a marker of the gut being a mess without always people having gut symptoms.

Although I would say constipation is quite common, like in the classic hypothyroidism space. As is bloating, that's going to go hand in hand with that.

The reason why the thyroid, I mean, the gut is the gateway to health is what I often times will say. And just because there is and access pretty much to every organism, the body and tissue.

So we've got the gut like immune access. You've got the gut brain says you've got the gut. And like hypothalamus, pituitary, adrenal and direct access and just thyroid overtly, your gut is actually your largest endocrine organ in your body.

And so it's responsible for synthesize and activating hormones and clearing them too. So like your liver gallbladder, which are organs that are part of your digestive system, are going to help with just hormone balance in general.

Active T3 hormone, a vast amount of it is actually also activated in the gut. So T3 would be what helps us be in an optimal homeostatic state. And we don't always test it in allopathic medicine either.

Like I'm sure you've probably addressed that some just when you've talked about thyroid on the summit, but it really is, the active thyroid hormone. So if your gut is out of whack, you can imagine, like your hormones are going to be somewhat suppressed.

I think it's so interesting to like the thyroid. Oftentimes we relate. We call it the like the metabolic home where my metabolism is not working. It must be the thyroid.

And like just kind of like go into like, well, we're going to work up the thyroid, we're going to treat the thyroid.

How Gut Health Affects Thyroid Function

Interestingly. And the research, the metabolism, like the mechanism at play is oftentimes the gut though. So one of my favorite studies is where they take two mice or a group of mice.

Rather, they take two twins and they take the bacteria from these twins. So one twin is overweight and one twin is lean. And they give them to germ free mice.

So germ free would be like they have no microbiome whatsoever. So there's not like any they have overgrowth already or they don't have they just don't have anything.

And then the mouse that gets the bacteria from the overweight twin gains weight, the mouse gets the bacteria from the lean twin, like, leans out that without any change in diet or exercise at all.

And so like, why is that and how is that working in a mechanism. Could be it the gut is impacting like the thyroid hormone, as is just like, you know what a good healthy microbiome is going to harvest your calories and your energy, that you consume a lot better.

So if we have dysbiosis and gut imbalance, things are going to move more slowly through the digestive system. Or we're going to maybe have leaky gut. We're not fully absorbing, our food.

And so that would be some connection. Also, interestingly, you know, 90% of cases of hypothyroidism are actually like Hashimoto's in nature. So Hashimoto's would be the autoimmune condition of the thyroid.

So the body self attacking the tissue of the thyroid under stress and like where it's just coming from. Question mark. Well, the majority like all immunity, are autoimmune disorders.

There's going to be a leaky gut, happening. And the 80%, 70 to 80% of your immune system is in your gut as well. And so if we have autoimmunity going on of the thyroid, but it's not traditionally always worked up in allopathic medicine as well to be checking for antibodies.

And sometimes antibodies can be missed like antibodies do this kind of like cortisol does that. And so one day you can go and and maybe have elevated and maybe it's just more suppressed on the antibody panels as well.

But just to kind of know notate that. So health is an inside job a lot of times in clinical practice, I have a total gut reset process that I'll take my patients through.

But when we focus on just like the foundations, like downstream versus upstream approach, I've had patients that like, have to go to their doctor, like their prescribing physician that prescribed them their thyroid meds, and either lower the dose or talk about getting off that dose because the thyroid is working again.

And it's and it hasn't been working for years. And as not to say like all the cases like sometimes it's it's also a progress stage of hypothyroidism or it's been going on for so long and there's definitely merit to, I think medication as well for the thyroid.

It just depends on the patient's presentation. But it's been it's really cool to just see that cleanup happen for them. And the gut and then like energy, improve cognition, improve constipation, improve all the things that like are oftentimes thyroid symptoms.

And last thing I'll say on that is just like a lot of times I will get patients that have been on thyroid medication for years and it's just like seemingly not working.

Like their numbers are still that that changing. They maybe felt better at first, but not like much better. And a lot of times it's just because that mechanism again, we were focusing on the upstream versus the downstream, which is kind of what was triggering the thyroid numbers to be off or this divergent hormone in the system.

And know numbers didn't isn't really your problem. Your problem didn't start from a lack of synthroid. Exactly right. It's more of those root causes like the gut being one of them.

So, yes, I totally agree with you. And then, you know, inflammation in of itself in the body will lower TSH. Yeah. So

it's really hard to, to chase and decipher when you're looking that upstream instead of downstream.

So, doctor, like you talked about your gut reset program, can you kind of walk us through the pillars of that or where you start with patients? Yeah. So I have three phases on that.

And so every patient begins with a kick start. And I really, liken that to having a car that has like pretend you have a Jeep and it has mud on it, and you go, get a speck of dirt on that jeep.

Can you see the speck of dirt? No, because you already have dirt on it. But if you go through the car wash, get a speck of dirt on that car, you can see the dirt or not.

And so I go through a Kickstarter. A lot of my patient population is already kind of like doing all the things that are so like eating healthy. They've been on maybe like diets to an extreme or completely eliminated certain food groups.

So a kickstart doesn't necessarily mean like a total elimination. Sometimes we're actually just focusing on bringing food back in and building an abundance, diet, because a healthy microbiome thrives off an abundant diet and diversity.

And in the diet it's going to help rebuild the biome. So I actually have a philosophy I call the okay diet and that it's okay to eat food and, kind of wherever the patient is coming from, if they've been like carb avoidant or complete meat free and, just really helping them find like, what are the pillars of like nutrients that they need and what very customized way and that way.

But resetting the, the gut if there have if things have been off out of balance in their lives, a lot of times there's an imbalance somewhere. Lifestyle, nutrition wise, areas that we can improve.

I think my story is a great example of that. Queen of the diets under the sun. And, just all all of the rebuilding kind of approach was really helpful in my own healing.

So after that hour, during that, I'll also talk about five gut love habits that I'll teach them, throughout that process. So really, one of my favorite questions to ask my patients at the end of our work together is what helped you the most in your healing journey, and very rarely is an elimination diet.

Or is it a long list of supplements? It usually has to do with lifestyle and like lack of stress, like losing stress, in some capacity. So this I've got live habits are what that's all about.

And really also helping then by the end of that kickstart then begin to also build their own personal five gut love habits. I call them your five baselines that just really when you notice, like I feel constipated, like what was off in my day yesterday.

Well, maybe they slept by like six hours instead of my usual seven. And that's going to actually impact motility for for many people. Or maybe I just like I'm under hydrated.

I've been drinking out a plastic water bottles every time I visit my family in Arkansas. They just drink out a plastic water bottle. So I love it. I just noticed gut inflammation from that.

So helping patients get just more aware of what are their trigger ers? They won't even do a phase two, which is customized, and it really is. If we've done any lab work, usually lab work is back by that time, so we'll fine tune and hit the nail on the head a little bit more.

And I create that customized blueprint for them. So maybe we're going into a gentle cleanse type of protocol.

Three-Phase Gut Reset Program

Or may be we've worked up there, figured out they're living and mold. And that's a big like elephant in the room. So we're addressing that sometimes a lot.

And most of my patients are going through a gut brain work that will be doing coaching wise through that, process as well. So rewiring the gut brain axis to de-stress, the brain, the limbic system to be okay with healing.

So sometimes we just need that in order for diet and supplements to actually work. And then lastly moving into optimize. So phase three is just really like now that this weight has been lifted off of your like your body and your health, like your capacity to like what is possible is just so much wider and brighter.

So this is where like a patient may have a fitness goal at this season, or maybe they have a career goal now. Or I say like healed to heal others. That's kind of the phase where I started to really want to start to help others.

So optimize looks really unique. I do some work within human design for folks to, to really understand, like what is your persona? What are your strengths and, and help them really navigate that.

And I think that really comes from a lot of my occupational therapy background as well. Lifestyle redesign kind of work that I'll do with patients in conjunction, but I see people as a whole.

But through that process, it's just really cool to see, folks go from throwing spaghetti at the walls and thinking like it's the protocols and the diets that are going to like that they need to do, and those can be adjunctive.

I call them the bumper lanes, though. It's kind of like if you're bowling, bowling and, you know, bumper lanes, they help keep you in balance and stay in the lanes.

But they're not the panaceas that I think were sometimes like the green popping. We kind of can fall into that trap as well. It's really like the holistic and especially with de-stressing, and lifestyle factors.

So that was great. So I want to circle back to something that you said, about, patients. And, you know, when they come in and they can only tolerate three foods, you know, that's about sort of you alluded to that where it's like, I'm only down to these foods and they're just scared to death of other foods.

And I see that as a twofold problem. I see that as a problem with the tolerance of the immune system. And, you know, everything that we can do to help reset the gut can help that.

But I also see that and you alluded to this as a brain issue, right? Limbic system issue where we're in this cell danger response and everything is going straight to our limbic system and it's being on high alert.

Talk to us about some tools that you use to bring the limbic system down back to a reasonable level and to say, like, you know, you can tolerate more than your three foods.

Oh, yeah, 100%. I'm glad you mentioned that, because that definitely is a trap I fell into. Like, I mean, not only through the eating disorder, but on the post and the post recovery.

It was like I was eating 5 to 10 foods at the most and reacting to everything. Low histamine diet. A lot of times that is related to like loss of oral tolerance is what we'd call that.

So and really the diversity of the gut is pretty low, at that point. So we just don't have enough that bugs to actually digest a variety of foods. So rebuilding it there and the leaky gut, as well as symptomology or metabolic endotoxin, which should be a toxic, leaky gut.

Just a second progress. But yes, gut brain huge for intolerances. And it's really fascinating to me. Like, you know, the number two intolerance is probably in the US, like gluten and dairy, quite common.

Like we already know that. And then then we get question marks like, well, why does a person react to like broccoli

and almonds or like whatever. Just like health benefits as well. Exactly.

And that's to like where this gut brain like just being really, curious about what is happening there. So I'll give an example just from, a gluten perspective and then move into those.

So say little Johnny loves to eat PB and J. He eats it every single day. He's been eating it since he was like three years old. Now is eight years old.

Then all of a sudden and out of the blue, he starts to develop these weird intolerances to it. So he gets itchy skin. Maybe his stomach starts hurting.

So the parents take him to the doctor and sure enough, he's got some gluten sensitivity and, peanut sensitivity. Peanut allergy would be one as well. It's quite common.

Well, when we do the work and understand in his timeline. Well, when he became intolerant to these foods, turns out little Johnny was eating his PB and J sandwich was.

He witnessed his parents having an all out fight that led to his dad walking out and eventually filing for a divorce. Now the way that the brain works is it says game, set, match, and it begins to correlate stress with what was happening.

I've seen this with bacon intolerance. Becky as well became intolerant to bacon. What was happening around the time? Well, turns out she was cooking bacon when she found out her husband was having an affair on her.

And again, game set match. And that just kind of. So I'll I'll fast forward to you. Well, what about with healthy foods and I'll use me as an example.

So when I was going through my post recovery years, and through the mold, illness actually at that time and became intolerant to almonds, I became intolerant to broccoli.

I mentioned a lot of cruciferous vegetables. Actually, salads bothered me. Sweet potatoes, which make my blood sugar go from like 80 to 1, 80 to 80, in like 20 minutes, which is like, you're riding a roller coaster inside.

So for whatever reason, my body was saying, Mayday, mayday, I can't tolerate these foods. Well, later on, I didn't really understand what was going on at the time, but when I did that understanding of the limbic system, those are foods I really abused in my eating disorder.

Like I ate a lot of those, those are my safe foods are also carefully counted. My almonds, for example. Very just strict around those. But my body, my limbic brain, the part that hold on to memories just really remembered and correlated stress.

Limbic System, Food Intolerances, and Stress

So when I'm living in more than made a stress going on in my life, the brain attaches and looks to attach. And so that's where that those intolerances really, I believe, stemmed from on it's on top of it's like that parallel, there's the physical and then there's the, the subconscious or what it's like going on internal.

We have 126 million bytes of information every second our brain is processing and the body doesn't or the brain doesn't know the difference. And running from a bear versus, oh my gosh, I'm ten grams of carbs over my limit.

It sees all sources of stress the same. Even if we're sitting on a beach in Tahiti, we think we don't have a care in the world. The brain can be processing and intercepting, like an email that we're reading on that beach.

Similarly to again, running from that barrier. And so same thing can happen with food. It's really fascinating to me to how many like, I guess just like upper middle class folks tend to be sicker, it seems sometimes like with these, all

these intolerances, and whereas like those maybe living in a food desert where there's like just daily survival and there's just different problems that they're having.

No, no recognition of intolerances that they're having to foods at all. And it's kind of like, well, what stressors like, I mean, are we stressed about our diet?

I absolutely love the milkshake study, too. I don't know if you've ever heard of that study. But where they gave two groups a milkshake that was 300 calories.

But and they told the groups they were getting different amounts. So one group got 140, the center shake when they got a 600 calorie indulgent milkshake.

Well, at the end of the study, they wanted to just see what happened to their metabolism, digestion, their cortisol levels, those that thought they were eating that, since the shake the diet shake, their cortisol was much higher.

They were three times hungrier, meaning like their metabolism, like they were not absorbing and digesting these nutrients. And they were just in that diet mentality mode.

They wanted the next thing to eat. Whereas those that got the 600 calorie milkshake, their metabolism, it was just a super leveled off. So their leptin levels were just like their fullness hormones were normal.

Their cortisol, they just like enjoyed it. They were like, okay, this is a one off study. We're going to just enjoy that. And, that just goes to show how belief can change physiology without, again, anything, physical, different in there.

So yeah, the biology of belief for I, Bruce Lipton is one of my favorite quotes that's like game changer for me and our mindset. So yes, our mindset in our stress level, our perceived stress, it can it could trump every good thing that we can do for our body.

Every dietary intervention supplement exercise. I mean, we really have to to really tackle that. And I'm a big proponent of emotional work, and making sure that we we do we manage that, that stress, stress isn't going away.

Right. We're really not going to get out of that. But when it starts to really wreak havoc on our bodies, that's when we have to really pay attention to it because that the body keeps score right 100%.

And I can I can share one tip if you athletes do that for for helping with overcoming food intolerances, because I just like gave information of like how they stemmed from.

But, if you can imagine like standing in a beach and like you're in the ocean and your back is to the wave, what happens when you're the wave hits you when you're standing with your back to it?

Move forward. Yeah. Typically you move forward so you just don't see it. You just keep going. But if you turn around and you face that wave, what happens?

It just hits you. Yeah. You're able to like, brace yourself better. So a lot of the work with the gut brain a lot of times just stems from initially awareness like understanding.

Where did this intolerance stem from. So if little Johnny is understanding of like what was going on in my life prior, because I've always eaten a Stephen J.

And he recognizes and with food and torches overtly, a lot of times it's related to an indigestible conflict. So something we cannot swallow or digest and it manifest.

Same thing with gut issues and the gut. So like if you develop all of a sudden these like intolerances at a season in your life, what was preceding that that was hard to swallow or digest in a figurative sense.

And the way the psyche and process is, that is completely different for every person. So like in my mold journey, like what I could not digest was like a walking away from everything as if a fire had happened twice.

Like getting rid of all my stuff and just really being stripped, of that and then being feeling like doctors can also figure it out. I had a doctor tell me to my face, Lauren, there's times conventional medicine will fail you.

This is one of them. And this is when I'm in the air having a mast cell activation syndrome, issue during that time. And there's a lot of indigestible stresses going on.

And so just adding that fuel to the fire, like, therefore, my gut, the body, the body does keep the score. And a lot of times our symptoms or our reaction are just metaphors.

The body's saying not not listen, I'm trying to tell you something. This is what's going on. And we take back that power by just doing some of that awareness work to start.

And then is where we can get creative. So if it's like I now see where that stressor is coming from, it's like, what can I say to myself mentally when I am going to sit down and like, have a smoothie with some almond butter in it?

And that was something I had to coach myself through, was like, I'm just in a different place right now. This is nourishing to my body and they begin to see it as nourishing, kind of like our milkshake study subjects, dead as well.

And that belief can change physiology, right? I words of wisdom there from from Doctor Laura that that was beautiful. Really? Opened my eyes to something I actually never heard of, but it makes complete sense of of the the trigger and then what was going on and then facing it and then talking yourself through it.

I mean, we we can be such powerful advocates for ourselves. We need direction, right? We need someone to come in like yourself and say, you know, tell us about the that connection for ourselves.

But does does does make a lot of sense, you know, to to really move your patients through that and to help eliminate the, the the food intolerances are huge and they're getting worse.

And we're running out of options. And, you know, even the the food allergy testing is, is not the best.

Daily Wellness Practice and Closing Remarks

It's not really, you know, I mean, you can get a good picture of sort of what's going on. But then, you know, like they can also be reacting to something that doesn't even look like that on food allergy testing.

So, you did mention the elimination diet, but then again, it's like, well, now what? You know, now now what do we do with this? So you just gave us an extra tool for addressing that.

So, I'm so thankful that you, were so generous with your time today, Doctor Loren. You know, I always like to ask the guests, if there's one powerful thing that you do other than everything we just talked about, yourself on a daily basis, that you could share that with us as our parting thoughts.

Yeah. Just for my health and, you know, just. Yeah. What do you do? I mean, my secret to feeling energetic, just throughout the day. I have so much energy, but I do shavasana sometimes twice a day, which would be like through yoga, and just kind of finding a mind body practice.

Like, I was very powerful on yoga for so long. Just because I am a, like, high performer. And I didn't have time to to do that. But I found like power yoga, I love of good power flow and then rest of asana is just like regenerating to me, my brain.

And so that would be I guess that's a hack I have from an energy perspective. Nice. Yeah. Getting in touch with the

body is very, very important. Yes. Well, thank you so much, doctor.

And I really appreciate your time. And take care and have a great weekend. Thank you so much. For.