Hashimoto’s, Autoimmunity & Healing at the Root: A Nurse’s Holistic Approach Transcript

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Gratitude Journaling and Brain Rewiring

One of the things that I love the most is a gratitude journal. And I will confess that I don't do it every day, but I know when you do it, it actually changes your brain.

It makes you look for more gratitude in the world. When you go throughout your day, your reticular activating system, which is about the size of your pinky at the base of your brain, it filters everything coming in to let your brain like, is this important?

Do I need to notice it or do I not need to notice it? Well, using a gratitude journal tells that reticular activating system, okay, please notice everything good around me so that I can write it down tonight when I do my gratitude journaling.

So your brain, your mind is going to be constantly scanning for the good things. If you want to lower your stress level, let's teach your brain to look for the good things instead of the bad.

And immediately, that's immediately as relative. Within a week or two, you're going to have a noticeable change. People say it actually changes your happiness score by two on a 10-point scale.

Welcome to Take Back My Brain with Laurie Hammer, where real healing starts in the brain. I'm Laurie, a functional nutritionist and mom who's walked the path from anxiety and burnout to clarity and calm.

Each week we're going to dive into brain-based tools like amino acid therapy, gut health, fasting, and faith to help you reclaim your energy, emotions, and sense of self.

Hello, everyone. Welcome back to the Take Back My Brain podcast. I'm your host, Laurie Hammer, and I have a really fun guest with me today. Her name is Esther Youngkin.

She is a registered nurse with over, get this, 25 years of experience in emergency medicine and holistic health. So 17 years in the ER, this is a phenomenal woman.

Podcast Intro and Guest Introduction

I admire her a whole lot. She now helps exhausted women with Hashimoto's. So any of you who have Hashimoto's or know somebody with Hashimoto's, I really want you to pay attention to this interview.

It's going to be amazing. She's helping women with Hashimoto's regain their energy and feel like themselves again. She has the Heal with Hashimoto's podcast, so make sure you check that out.

I was on her podcast not too long ago. And she's the creator of the holistic Hashimoto's program. Plus she lives in rural Minnesota, so a fellow Midwestern with me.

She is married, she has four boys, they homeschool, they garden, and they raise a flock of chickens. So Esther, welcome to the podcast. Thank you. I'm so excited to be here.

I love it. So to put your chickens in your bio, you must really love your chickens. You know, when I sit here in my office, which is also our homeschool room, there's a window that looks outside our yard and our driveway.

And so I watch the chickens. Well, not today. It's like snowy. I won't see the chickens out my window for a while.

But often when I am working, especially during the spring, summer and fall, I'll have a view of just chickens just wandering because they free range.

So yeah, I kind of like having them. Yeah, they're just peaceful. They're fun to watch. Oh my goodness. Chickens are hilarious. They are. And my husband came home one day, you know, from shopping and he's like, I got you a surprise.

And you never know exactly what to expect. And they had like the last bunch of some baby chicks for sale and he just bought them all. So he came home with two dozen chicks and they had been, you know, fleet farm chicks.

So they were all really handled. They were so friendly. I love them. And then we switched, added them to our flock. of course this is so cute well good job hubby yes yes yeah i see all those memes all the time on you know social media you know you buy a woman a chicken then all of a sudden you're you know you have two goats you're in a farmyard you know you know this whole list goes on and on and like it is so true like the chicken does lead to lots of other things I'm watching this with my son and my daughter-in-law.

They got some chickens and he built this really super cute coop and now they just bought an acreage. Now my dad put pigs on the farm and then they're thinking about cows and she wants a highland calf.

The list goes on and on. It does. It is pretty funny. Anyway, well, you've had quite a career, 17 years as an ER nurse. I bet you saw some crazy stuff.

I really did. And some of those years were at a level two trauma center. And then other years I was in Alaska, rural area where you had to call in the helicopter and the plane.

Yeah, I had some fun times. Can you tell us like one super crazy story? I think one of them was just kind of fun because it was so out of the ordinary.

A man came in and I can't even remember if he had a history of needing dialysis, but he was like dying every two minutes. And we had to push meds to keep his blood stable while we called dialysis in from, I don't know if they were on call, they had to get there, they had to set things up.

And so I was standing by the bed and like every two minutes I'd like push some drugs, otherwise he would die. And, you know, when he wasn't dying, we could have a conversation.

But that's like the fun stuff, the traumas where you save a life or where you're standing next to the bed saving a life every two minutes.

ER Nursing Stories and Career Shift

That's the fun stuff. That's what the ER is designed for. It really makes for a good day. Like one of my kids used to say, not a good day for the community, but a good day for you.

Yes. Yes. Yes. So yeah, because we've gone from that type of medicine to chronic disease management is what we've gone to. And so you got out of that emergency medical system into holistic health.

Where did that flip happen for you? It kind of was always there. Even since high school, I always looked at the body as or the health as body, mind and spirit.

I remember reading a book. I remember it was green and small. I don't remember the name of it, but I was in high school. Small green book, everybody. You can find it.

Something about like Christianity and health or prayer or something. But it was about body, mind and spirit and how they all go together. So even from, you know, the 90s, And that is the perspective that I brought into nursing school.

It is just who I was as a nurse. And as the years went on and as I just saw more and more how the Western medical system is broken, Ash was like, I'm done.

Just morally burnt out, I think, because you can't force somebody to get healthy. And when you keep doing things and telling them things and it's not making an impact and then they come back in.

I wasn't doing anything that I didn't believe was ethical. That's not what I mean when I say morally burned out. I was just so exhausted from doing things that didn't really matter.

I went back to school. Well, that's good. Well, I'm glad because people are getting a lot of help from you. And then you have your Hashimoto's diagnosis, correct?

Yes. That was an unwelcome gift from God. I went through school for holistic health education for nurses, and then I decided to start my own practice online.

Coming from the ER, I knew everybody needed help, so I was open for everybody. And that's not how the world of business works. No, it doesn't. No. So after struggling for probably two years, I went in for some of my own health challenges and my chiropractors like, I think you have thyroid problems.

And I remember praying as the labs were supposed to come back. I'm like, God, it cannot be my thyroid because you can stop me on the street and you could ask me anything about any disease process.

And I could probably tell you body, mind, spirit, diet, environment, but not thyroid. It always confused me, always. So I was like, God, it cannot be my thyroid.

It just can't. And it was. It was because he's funny. Yeah, God is funny. He's like, okay, here you go. Warm this now too, please. Yeah, well, and I kind of heard him say, Esther, you with all of your education and your experience, your Western medicine, your holistic, if you still don't understand thyroid, what do you think the average person is going through?

You need to figure this out and you need to help people. And I felt that so clearly and I was like, oh, okay, God, I guess that's my new mission. That's what I'm doing.

Thank you. Yeah, that's awesome. That's awesome. So what were some of the things that surprised you as you were learning about the thyroid? Oh, that's a good question.

I honestly did not know that it controlled every single cell in the body. I thought that it was still kind of siloed in my thinking that it was just energy metabolism.

Hashimoto's Diagnosis and Thyroid Basics

That's really all I knew at that time because that's all you have to learn even when I went back for holistic education. I learned to look at TSH and some things, but I didn't truly understand that it impacted every single cell in the body.

And then cells make up organs, organs make up tissues, or tissues make up organs. They make up your whole health. And so if those cells are impacted, it impacts everything.

And I think if I would have learned that back in school, if somebody would have said the thyroid impacts everything, And that's why this might be confusing because the two people with the exact same labs and the exact same diagnosis can have completely opposite symptoms because they're bio individual.

I think maybe that would help people understand. Yeah, because you can, well, yeah, I mean, you have five people in the room, everybody has a thyroid problem and all five people look completely different.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, totally. So, I mean, that's why it's hard to figure all of this stuff out because we try to put all of these things in a box, especially in conventional medicine.

You're like, in this box, you fit this box, you get this med, you get this treatment, you move on. And I'm sorry if that doesn't help because this is just what you have to deal with.

But even in holistic health, a lot of things are still in a box. Like if you don't fit the parameters, you know, we have to really start digging outside the box, you know, thinking outside.

of what we've been taught and putting all of those pieces together because you can get very compartmentalized. And so when you're dealing with a thyroid, you're not compartmentalized.

You might specialize in helping people with that, but it's a whole body experience. I know when people come to to work with you for sure. Hey friend, just a quick break to remind you if calming your brain is the missing piece in your practice or in your home, my Mind Thrive certification course teaches you exactly how to do that with targeted amino acid therapy.

So it's real science, real results, no band-aids. Enrollment is now open. Link is in the show notes. So back to the show. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. So how do you go about identifying those root causes of, well, first of all, let's take a step back.

So can you kind of define what goes wrong in the thyroid and kind of give us some of the main diagnoses that people come to you with? Because people just don't understand the thyroid.

Right. So the thyroid is a butterfly-shaped organ gland at the base of your neck, at the front of your throat. And it produces a hormone that is like the key, the ignition key for every single cell in your body.

So if the key is missing, the cell can't turn on, cell doesn't have energy. And so people will present typically with a decrease in energy of different things.

So a decrease of energy in the brain, you know, brain is slowing down. that looks like depression or brain fog. If the gut is slowing down, that can look like constipation or a lot of bloating.

If your skin, hair, and nails are slowing down, that's going to look like hair loss. It's going to look like brittle nails. It's going to look like patchy nasty stuff on your skin.

There's so many different things, but if you think of hypothyroidism, so your thyroid not producing enough, if you think of that as slowing down, it describes a lot of the different symptoms that people come in with.

And then you can also have hyper-symptoms because as the immune system is destroying a thyroid, then that little parts will release too much hormone as it's destroyed.

So then you have this weird thing where you can have hyposymptoms and hyper-symptoms in the same person at the same time. That doesn't make any sense.

It's so confusing. So hyper-symptoms would be opposite. A lot of people feel palpitations of their heart, like their heart is beating so hard or anxiety, excessive sweating, because people with hypothyroid get cold really easy, feel cold all the time.

And so hyper would be the opposite. It's just kind of very confusing. So that's thyroid stuff and everybody has their own story. If there's one commonality, it's everybody has their own story.

Right. So what triggers the autoimmune response specifically to the thyroid? There are some theories. One theory is that the thyroid is where some toxic, you know, just environmental toxins, I guess, can congregate in the thyroid.

And so the immune system actually being smart and attacking. That is one theory I have heard. There's a lot of different theories. We know that there's some sort of estrogen component to it because more women have it than men.

But nobody is exactly identified like this is why the thyroid. Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Okay. So there's hyperthyroidism, hypothyroidism. Where does Hashimoto's fit in there?

So Hashimoto's, the result of the body's attack is the hypothyroidism or the hyperthyroidism. Hashimoto's is the attack itself, your immune system attacking your thyroid.

So it's actually an immune thing. And we just, you know, like to give everything it's a different name. All autoimmune conditions are pretty much an autoimmune condition.

Right. Yeah. And then we name them after what part of the body they're attacking. That is what Hashimoto's is and unfortunately, and you've probably shared this with your audience or somebody probably has, if you have one autoimmune condition within five to seven years, you typically have at least one more because it's an autoimmune condition, not a thyroid condition.

Right. It just takes a while to get that next diagnosis. Can you have a hypothyroid and not have Hashimoto's? Yes. Yep, it's not as common. They say about 90% of people with hypothyroid do have Hashimoto's.

They just haven't all been tested. So it takes the average woman four years and four different practitioners to get a diagnosis. And often that diagnosis is hypothyroidism.

And the doctor's like, oh, you have hypothyroidism, here's some synthroid or some levothyroxine, come back and see me in the three months and we'll do your labs and adjust your dose.

But they don't do that extra lab to see, why do you have hypothyroidism? Do you have the antibodies? Is your body, is your immune system attacking your thyroid?

And so most women don't know what's causing the hypothyroidism. They don't understand that there are things they can do. Their doctor just said, hey, congratulations, you're a pharmaceutical patient for life.

Maybe not in those words. Right, but basically that's what they're saying because, you know, most people are like, you know, I never can get off my thyroid mud.

I've been on my thyroid med for 30 years. How are you feeling? Not very good. Okay. So is your thyroid med working really well for you? I mean, you know, and if you have an autoimmune condition, you know, the medication is like a mute point.

So yeah. Why is it so difficult? to get your full thyroid panel done. Like, I have so many clients that are like, my doc just won't run it. Why is that so difficult?

It's just a lab. Part of it is doctors don't understand thyroid. The doctors have been trained that the only thing that matters is TSH. And so if that's all you know, and if that's all you know how to interpret, then why would you do other labs?

Another part is insurance companies, they don't want to cover it because all they want is the TSH.

Root Causes, Stress, and Gluten-Free Strategies

And so if you have the doctor who doesn't know and then the insurance company who says no, then you're probably not going to get that lab ordered at your clinic.

I have heard, but I have not confirmed that in some states, this is told to me by a client, she said in California, they

won't even run one of the tests.

So you might come and that might be misinformation that was told to her, but it was told to her by her doctor or by her clinic, by somebody who should be helping her get that lab.

So it's just, it's a broken system. Yeah, it is. I went to an endocrinologist with my father-in-law when he was still alive and they told me he had thyroid problems.

Almost 80 years old, he'd been smoking forever. Like we didn't really have a thyroid issue. He had a whole, like a whole reason. Like they just picked it, you know, like, oh, your number is off.

And so I went to the endocrinologist with them and I'm like, can we run, you know, some extra labs to check a few other things before we put them on a med that he probably doesn't need in the first place?

You know, he just had chemotherapy. I don't think his thyroid is the issue. Oh, she just got really, really mad at me. And I wasn't sarcastic or anything.

I was just super nice. And I explained why I was wondering about this. And she's like, all you people just Google too much. Oh my goodness. She had no idea I was a practitioner or anything like that.

And she just is like… And then I went to the doctor with my mom one time. And I like this doc. He was trying to be more holistically minded and he was trying to run a few more labs and stuff, but he didn't understand the whole process.

And he said something about when T3 converts into T4. And I said, oh, you mean when T4 converts into T3? He goes, no. I totally offended him and I didn't mean to, but he was adjusting my mom's medication based on the wrong understanding of conversion.

And so I'm like, oh dear Lord. Like why it can't be this difficult. It really can't be this difficult. But it was, you know, it's just… That's scary.

I know it is scary, but because if you have a doc that thinks that T3 converts to T4 and he's adjusting your meds for that, I mean, that makes a big difference.

That makes me wonder though, if he only really looked at TSH and was just spouting other words. Yeah, he may, I mean, he was, like I said, he was trying to be more holistic and anyway, I was just like, oh man, this is a challenge, but nonetheless.

Nonetheless. So diagnosing Hashimoto's is running the antibody tests, right? Yes. Okay. And then does the antibody have to be a certain level or doesn't it matter?

Because some people are like, oh, if it's less than 30, it's fine, but should you really have any antibodies against your thyroid? Why do we create this is what I'm wondering.

Right. The endocrine society has a whole flow chart of how to diagnose somebody. In my opinion, I'm not a doctor. I am a nurse. I have trained in holistic education.

I think if you have antibodies, you need to address those antibodies because the antibodies are clearly telling you that something's going on in your body.

And I think the diagnoses themselves can be helpful, but it's just a name. We need to treat the person and what we see is going on. So we know that antibodies can be elevated 10 to 15 years before somebody is really symptomatic.

Let's use those 10 to 15 years to address what's going on. not just wait for the antibodies to keep going up, keep

going up, cause more damage until finally, oh, now you're symptomatic.

Now we can help you. Like, no, that's just backwards. Let's start being active and proactive as soon as you have antibodies. Yeah. So what are you doing for people with antibodies?

So if somebody gets, you know, they have their blood work, like, oh, goodness, I just listened to Esther on Laurie's podcast and I have antibodies, what do I do next?

I go common sense. If you had your antibodies, hopefully you had other labs tested too. But we're going to look for what are your most common, what are the most common root causes and do they apply to you?

So if you had your labs tested, maybe you had your vitamin D tested. Like is it in the, you know, single digits or teens? You have low vitamin D. That's a classic thing in autoimmune.

So let's get that up. Like that's just so simple. And anybody can do that. You're listening to the podcast right now. If you know your vitamin D level, you can go get vitamin D over the counter.

Just make sure it's a D3 with a K2 and be aware that you can overdose on vitamin D because your body stores it. But personally, when I'm getting mine, I want my levels to be between 80 and 100. I just had my labs done last week and it was 96 and I was like, yes.

But if I went to an endocrinologist, they might say, whoa, you're way too high. No, actually, this is where I want it. But that is just a simple look at one root cause, vitamin D, do it on a lab.

But then let's look at the other root causes. We know that everybody with an autoimmune condition has at least three things. They have genetic component.

You can't change who you came from. You can change how your genes express. So there's that. There is a gut component. So let's talk about leaky gut and are you pooping every day?

How are you eating? What's your microbiome? And then there's one or more triggers Vitamin D is one. Up and down, more down, blood sugars is another. So again, going back to how's your diet and we're not even talking gluten yet.

We're just talking blood sugar and stability. Gluten is another trigger, but another one is stress. So I start out the first week of my holistic Hashimoto's program talking about stress and different ways that we can like a deep breathe and lower our stress, incorporate other things like laughter or singing into our life because those automatically shift you into rest and digest instead of fight and flight.

So what small things can we do to address the stress because that is a huge trigger for all autoimmune conditions, including Hashimoto's. Yeah. Stress is a killer.

I mean, literally. Literally. Yeah. Yeah, for sure. So you mentioned gluten. Gluten in autoimmune diseases is a no. We don't want to be eating gluten.

And I know that's hard for a lot of people, but it's so necessary. So necessary to get out those food sensitivities. And really a lot of the gluten, a lot of the reasons we're sensitive is because of everything that the gluten is sprayed with.

So the corn is sprayed with, the oats are sprayed with. I mean, it has a lot to do with the chemicals and the way the food is processed in our country.

So how do you help people navigate that? It's not my first step because I find that going gluten-free can be really, really stressful. So the first thing we want to do is talk about stress and how can you lower that?

Because if I tell you, okay, you're already overwhelmed, you already have brain fog, and now we're going to cut out gluten, like you just might shut down.

Like, okay, I'm not going to do anything. So when somebody is ready, then I have them prepare a menu so they know exactly what they're going to eat. So you don't want to get three days in.

Either I eat gluten or I eat nothing. You need to be well prepared. So yes, it needs to happen at least a trial so they can see if it does impact them.

But we don't have to do that trial tomorrow. You'll have time to go through your pantry. Let's look at how much gluten are you eating? How much processed food are you eating?

Let's do a diary and a log and then figure out, okay, I like these kinds of foods. I like these fruits and vegetables. I like these proteins. Let's figure out the basics.

And then you can make that meal plan of how to cut out gluten. And one of the things that I told my clients and that I shared in my community, I'm like, use ChachiPT or use Grok and say, I need like 20 easy gluten-free meals.

Yes, these are my favorite foods and make me up some recipes and boom, it's theirs. Yeah, I just posted on my personal Facebook page, how to use chat GPT to make your meal plans.

Like, you know, here's the prompt, just go copy my prompt. You know, if you're following me on Facebook, I didn't put it on Instagram. So just do it on Facebook and grab my prompt.

It's So simple. Yeah. Yeah. So let's use, I mean, people are like, don't use chadgbt or grog because it's evil. No, like just use it for the good stuff.

It's totally fine. Like it's not going to ruin your food. Yeah. It's, it's a tool and tools can be used for good and they can be used for bad. And I prefer to use them for good.

Yeah. Yeah. So let's go back to stress, Esther. What are some things people can do? You mentioned singing and, and, uh, some other things that people can do just to like lower their stress.

Yep. One of the things that I love the most is a gratitude journal.

Simple Daily Habits for Healing

And I will confess that I don't do it every day, but I know when you do it, it actually changes your brain. It makes you look for more gratitude in the world.

When you go throughout your day, your reticular activating system, which is about the size of your pinky at the base of your brain, it filters everything coming in to let your brain like, is this important?

Do I need to notice it or do I not need to notice it? Well, using a gratitude journal tells that reticular activating system, okay, please notice everything good around me so that I can write it down tonight when I do my gratitude journaling.

So your brain, your mind is going to be constantly scanning for the good things. If you want to lower your stress level, let's teach your brain to look for the good things instead of the bad.

And immediately, that's immediately as relative. Within a week or two, you're going to have a noticeable change. People say it actually changes your happiness score by two on a 10-point scale.

Wow. Yeah. So it's something simple. It takes about five minutes a day to write down at least three things you're grateful for, and it's going to lower your stress.

It's going to improve everything. It literally changes your cell communication. It does. Yeah. It is amazing because your mind is totally shifted and as a man thinks, you know, the Bible says as a man thinks, so is he, right?

And then you start thinking differently. Your heart starts understanding things differently and now the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. And life and death is in the power of the tongue, right?

So all of these things are so interconnected. God made us that way. And it's beautiful. And when we don't follow those very specific rhythms that he created for us, that's when disease sets in.

And I love the fact that you start with stress first because You know, and I start with amino acids first and amino acids and we're dealing with stress and all those kinds of things.

Cause it helps calm the brain so that you can do a lot of the stuff that you're talking about too. Cause some people just have a hard time. Well, I can't even think of anything grateful.

So if we nourish the brain, then it's easier to think of, you know, things to be grateful for. But starting with the stress and your mindset first, like when we're, we're shifting our brain and if people say, oh, we ought to work on the gut first, brain first, it doesn't really matter.

What really matters is what you're thinking up here affects everything else, right? So it affects everything else. Even your Hashimoto's, even your celiac disease, even whatever you've been diagnosed with, if you shift to what Esther is talking about, the gratitude journal, calming the nervous system, so whatever you can do to bring that down, then life looks totally different.

The greens are greener, the blues are bluer. Well, the sun is brighter and you just like have a skip in your step that you didn't have before and that in and of itself is healing.

That can do more than any medication, than any, you know, liver detox that you might want to do. It literally, our body is designed to heal if we remove the interference and stress is interference.

Yep. Yep. But sometimes people feel like it's not doing enough because it's so simple. It's so simple. Yeah. Yeah. It doesn't. We're like stuck uncomplicated.

I don't know why. Why are we stuck uncomplicated, Esther? We're like, oh, we really are. Yeah. It has to be like 17 steps. And I'm going to stop at step six because the other 11 are really overwhelming.

And so I'm never going to finish it then. But like, it's just too simple to be that healthy. But we got to go back to basics. Go back to basics, keep it simple, keep it sustainable.

I was a guest on somebody's podcast just the other day and they're like, I don't think you shared anything like new. And they weren't insulting me. They were just commenting like you're talking about the basics because the basics work.

All the time. Yeah. All foundational. I have a course called Food Fundamentals. Just about food, about the fundamentals of food. That's it. Right. Yeah.

I mean, you have to go back to that. It really, really matters and incorporate fasting, incorporate gratitude journaling, incorporate, you know, basic supplementation.

I mean, Yeah. You can get a long ways with that. Some people have a lot of deeper issues or whatever it might be, but if you don't address those foundations first, like Esther's talking about, then you can't go down the rabbit trails and expect to get well.

Yeah. Yeah. What do you want to leave the audience with? There's always something you can do. I feel like we can get stuck thinking there's nothing I can do or thinking I have to do everything.

But there's always something you can do. You don't have to do everything. You just take that next step, whether that is some deep belly breathing, some diaphragmatic breathing to give yourself a reset in the middle of a stressful day, or whether it's deciding to make a gluten-free menu and going gluten-free for the next 90 days.

There's always something you can do. Only you know what is going to fit at this time in this season for you and your family, for your household. So pick that thing.

There's always something you can do and it will make a difference. Absolutely. I love that, Esther. My goodness. Thank you so much for being here. Where can my listeners find you?

Well, they're already listening to this podcast so they can just scroll in their podcast player and listen to the Health with Hashimoto's podcast. And I also have healthwithhashimoto's.com and I'm on Instagram at the same place.

Perfect. Oh my goodness. I love this conversation. Thank you so much, Esther. Thank you everyone for listening. I know you know somebody who needs to hear this, so make sure you like, subscribe, and share.

And if you have a little extra time, I would love for you to leave me a review. That would mean the world to me. God bless each and every one of you. I'll see you in the next episode.

Thanks for listening to Take Back My Brain. If today's episode helped you connect with hope or direction, I want you to follow the show, leave us a review and share it with someone who needs it.

And if you're ready to start your own healing journey, explore our courses and our coaching programs at lorihammer.com backslash store. So until next time, remember you cannot medicate away a nutrient deficiency and healing your brain isn't just possible, it's powerful.

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