Heal Your Gut To Reduce Inflammation & Restore Balance Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Background

Welcome to another wonderful interview for the Miss Autoimmune Summit. I'm Doctor Terry Walls, your host, and we'll be speaking with Doctor Wilco. Now. Doctor Cole is a leading functional medicine expert who consults with people all around the globe.

Starting one of the first functional medicine telehealth centers in the world. Then, that was over a decade ago. He's named one of the top 50 functional and integrative doctors in the nation.

Doctor will call provides a functional medicine approach for thyroid issues, autoimmune conditions, hormonal imbalances, digestive disorders, and neurologic problems.

He is also the host of the popular The Art Being World podcast and New York Times bestselling author of Intuitive Intuitive Fasting, Ki Rotarian and the Inflammation Spectrum and, Gut Feelings.

Will and I have known each other for many years. And so to be a really wonderful, interview. Okay. So Will and I have known each other for well over a decade.

And, we have collaborated. He's been, to my live events. So Will is very, very familiar with my approach to multiple sclerosis, and he has a very similar approach in how he manages people with an autoimmune, chronic condition.

So. Well, well, so let's get to that. In your clinical experience, what are some of the common, environmental factors that people with Ms.. And, systemic autoimmune conditions have?

Well, I mean, as you know, I see this when you look at the epidemic rise of autoimmune problems, it's the model or paradigm. I think, of understanding this is this epigenetic genetic mismatch, right, that we all kind of immerse ourselves in the research.

But that most of our genetics haven't changed in 10,000 plus years. But yeah, our world has changed dramatically in a very finite period of time, just a few generations.

So it's not just one thing, but we have to take lots of things that could have confluence of factors that are at play here, this evolutionary mismatch and our microbiomes, you know, this chasm between our microbiome.

So we're intimately connected to nature. And we have to kind of understand a lot of this has to do with the gut. Of course people know that, but really understand the full gravity of that.

Environmental Triggers and Autoimmunity

And we're made up of our microbiome, depending on the study that you cite is upwards of 100 trillion bacteria. There's we have 30 trillion human cells.

We're exponentially more bacteria than human. And understand the disturbance, of the the the destruction, if you will, of the human microbiome and its intimate connection to the soil microbiome and our environment.

It's it's very much connected, as I think of that hermetic phrase of as above, so below, as within, so without. And I think that kind of explains a lot of it because you think, okay, what's happening environmentally, it's herbicide, it's pesticides, microplastics forever chemicals.

And these are the things we're measuring in people, but it's also happening in our environment. So it is I think this is the environmental toxin piece is something that certainly is not talked enough about.

It's talked about more, but it certainly is implicated in why we're seeing the epidemic rise of autoimmune problems. Yeah. You know, absolutely. One of the things that, I try to keep putting out and, you know, people get upset when I, when I talk about this, that it's our choices, have a huge impact.

And of course, there there are a lot of environmental factors that I don't control. You know, the where I was born, the zip code I lived in, the financial realities, of my parents can't, can't control that.

But now, as an adult, I can control, a bunch of stuff. And it's really important for us to decide that the things that are under my control, I'll begin incrementally, step by step, trying to improve.

Yeah. So in your practice, what are some of the factors that people you have people begin working on? Yeah. And it can be overwhelming. Right. It's like I think it's a double edged sword information.

Right. It's it's a double edged sword. And knowing more, it's like that Maya Angelou quote when you know better, you do better, right? At least we. Yeah.

And and it's it's kind of hard to go, go back to sleep when your eyes have been opened. But, you know, but at the same time, it's how do we balance that double edged sword of equipping ourselves, being proactive and being taking measured steps, reasonable steps towards supporting your health, but checking ourselves and realizing that, well, more isn't always better, and knowing more isn't necessarily always better.

Because if people can get this sort of paralysis of analysis, they can get this like the information is just too much for them and it's creating a lot of anxiety.

It can create disordered eating. So orthorexia, which is disordered eating, healthy foods. You and I know this is like not the context in which we want things like functional medicine and nutrition to be utilized, but a good thing can be become a bad thing if the information is not cannot be contained by the vessel that's receiving that information.

So I think this is just I'm starting to answer this question or answering it in this way to realize that, okay, leaning in to whatever you need to do, if that leaning in is sustainable as a source of nourishment and not stress and anxiety is a good place.

So sometimes, like the pragmatic plan B ends up being more effective than the plan A, I ideal if it's sustainable for somebody. So I would say my advice for anybody is just to meet yourself where you're at, because I'd rather you do something that's sustainable and that's not a source of anxiety and obsession where, you know, so that would be my first step.

But then like more practically, I think going upstream to the gut health is certainly you get more, you know, bang for your buck, if you will. You get more needle moving, trajectories as far as health outcomes and decreasing severities and frequency symptoms, when you have a sort of gut centric approach and there's lots of ways to do that.

But I think if you are if you are disillusioned on all these things you're hearing, well, okay, what's kind of one of the more core upstream issues? And you talk about environmental toxins and detoxing, you need a healthy gut to have a proper detox pathway.

So, I think that's a that's a good piece of advice to start with. Yeah. You know, people know that I'm a huge champion of a paleo diet and aquatic diet, which can be challenging to adopt.

But I when I'm talking to my patients, I'll ask them, is that too hard? If you want those diets, we can certainly help you. But if you need something easier, we can focus on what to be adding and maybe what we're going to start with is getting greens in every day, whether it's a green smoothie or, a big green salad or, a learning how to make cooked greens actually be quite delicious.

And so it's so important to have a step that you can do.

And sometimes it's a big, big step, but more often it is a small achievable next step. Yeah. Well consistency is key right. And like eating foods that love you back is good for your health.

But stressing about those foods is not. So sometimes it's like, all right, maybe it's just too much too soon. And meet yourself where you're at. Not just meet your body where your body's at, but meet your mind and body and soul.

Where it's at and when you start feeling better, even if you like, lean into it and start off low and slow and kind of when you when people feel better, they're less inflamed, they're have more resilience and they don't get overwhelmed as much.

Then you'll be able to lean into more and more and more. So I'm not using it as a cop out to say, well, just do like 8020 and like don't really progress it.

I want you to be progressive in your health. I want you to really take this seriously, but as long as you're progressing, leading in is completely fine.

And I think that, you know, focusing on soups and stews is one tool that I love practically, which can be, you know, some people are used to making these things that our ancestors were made all the time.

But I having that sort of proverbial custard for your gut and lots of raw things, we know. I mean, that can be wonderful source of nutrients. But some people, their digestion, their gut health isn't even there yet.

So you kind of have to have that sort of more gentler, easier to assimilate, ways of bringing foods and so I find that practically, if you take the sort of the nutrition aspect of it and make this sort of hearty calorically dense, like, not like light soups, but like very heart hearty, nourishing, yummy, soups and stews can be okay.

So, okay, can you give us a quick sort of recipe for one of these nourishing soups and stews? Yeah. So really, I mean, I'm not fancy about this Doctor Wahls, but I would say that you could get any vegetable that you want.

And if you have extra sensitive digestion, meet your gut where it's at. I think that pureeing vegetables can be helpful. You really can get any vegetable that you want.

And I love carrots. I love Japanese sweet potato. Those little get celery in there. A little blurry here. I love Japanese sweet potatoes. Did my camera. Sorry, doctor.

Well, there you go. You're you're back in focus. So starting over again. So maybe some carrots, some celery, some onions, garlic, Japanese sweet potatoes and, again, if you have extra sensitive digestion, you could puree those down.

Not needed for most people. But if you're really in a flare digestive that can be helpful. I getting your favorite protein in there could be grass fed beef, organic chicken.

Do bison, something like that or you? I think soups and stews are another great way to get organ meats into, right? Yeah, yeah. Mask it in there. I, I'm a fan of these ancestral blends with which regenerative farming companies like Force of Nature has or they're.

Yeah, yeah. Sing in the organ meats with the regular meats. If someone has an aversion, even if it's just mental aversion towards organ meats, this is a way to psychologically do it and and taste right.

And so I think that that's when we do. And then I would do a bone broth based. Right. You know, you know, or you know, buy it already made and just use it as the base and then just having it soft and cooked, easy to digest, you know, that sort of cliche of when somebody's having to pick a noodle soup, it's not the noodles that are the restorative part.

So it's really just these ancient or, you know, these things that our, our grandparents and our ancestors, no matter where you or your ancestors are from, our, our ancestors knew that the gut was a significant part to our immune system and, also the seed of the soul.

Right. There's something to the spiritual about this, too. So I, those are those are some food medicines if I do that. Okay. So summarizing for the audience, takes vegetables that you enjoy.

Chop them up, put them in in your slow cooker. Yeah. Add, a meat of some type that you enjoy, and just let it cook all day long. It's. What I like to do is I put it put it all together.

I might chop my vegetables up the night before, put everything in my slow cooker in the morning, then go off to my work and come back. And if you want a creamy version of that, I'll add a can of, coconut milk.

And, you know, it's a lovely meal. And then I can, bring it up to a boil again, put my leftovers in a quart jar, seal that up. So I have a second meal. And you could alter the spices.

So I grow lots of spices in my yard. So sometimes I put in lots of rosemary. Sometimes I put in more oregano and basil. Make it a little more Italian flavor.

Sometimes, I'll put it in a curry to make it more of a curry to, So very, very healing. Now, I have another question for you. Well, so we've got people using these soups and stews.

It's going well. What do you think? Another practice that I like to do. So I have fermented kimchi and sauerkraut, always on hand, and other fermented vegetables.

So I have the soup. It's in my bowl. Then I take a big, spoon of either sauerkraut or kimchi and stir that in just before I eat it. And what do you think?

Would that be helpful? Or is that going to be a little stressful on the on the go? I love it.

Healing Soups, Stews, and Fermented Foods

So that's, you know, going back to that sort of principle that I use clinically is meeting your gut where it's at and meeting your mind, body and soul where it's at, like, I'll eat your spirit or I stress, you know, I don't want people to stress about things.

I love them back. So I, I when I mentioned the onions and garlic in the soups and stews, you all know, like, you know, I mean, some people have Sibo and those higher Fodmap things aren't going to work for them.

It doesn't make the onions and garlic bad. It just means like you aren't meeting your gut where it's at. So you may have to modify and do a lower Fodmap, soup and stew, which is completely fine. You would just modify some of those, the suggestions that Doctor Wells and I made.

The same goes with the fermented foods. So, They're wonderful, I love them, I love kimchi and sauerkraut in the butchering class and kefir. I love all of these things.

But we all know there's some people out there. Their gut isn't going to be able to tolerate as much. So start off low and slow. Because they are some of these fermented vegetables can be higher in Fodmap when I look, they're nightshades.

And some of these things like, kimchi and but you I have some patients will even just take the sauerkraut juice where it's like, not even the full vegetable yet if their gut is prone to being, you know, irritable by these probiotic rich foods that also have prebiotics.

Yeah. With some, some pro tips. But not everybody needs to do that. And if they were having trouble with, either

the FODMAPs foods. Well, actually first why don't we define FODMAPs?

Because our listeners may not know that. So it's an acronym. We love acronyms in health anyway. So fermentable oligosaccharide, disaccharide monosaccharide and polyols, they're just fermentable sugars.

There's nothing wrong with them. I've made them. But it's just the bacteria that can be overgrowing in the gut. Really, really love them. So they can be over consumed.

And they they're fermentable sugars so they can cause a lot of bloating. Irritable bowel syndrome, IBS, they are one of the leading causes of IBS. Is is, Sibo.

I, Fodmap intolerance is driven by the Sibo, which stands for Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth, another acronym. But it's bacteria growing into the small intestine away from the large intestine where it shouldn't be.

So Sibo causes the following map intolerances. And a lot of people and someone can have cf0 too small intestinal fungal overgrowth. So these things like onions and garlic and cruciferous vegetables and apples and otherwise healthy foods that doctor walls in I love some people that die is just not at the place where they're really seeing a lot of they're getting a lot of digestive distress from these otherwise healthy foods.

It doesn't make the foods bad. It just means we have to deal with the Sibo and improve GI motility. And vagus nerve toning is part of that. And pruning some of these opportunistic and pathogenic bacteria is another part of that.

So yeah, that's what Fodmap means. So you would just modify II and look, if someone has Fodmap intolerance and Sibo, they're not all the same. So some people have mild to moderate versions of this and they can do fine with mild to moderate high Fodmap food.

High Fodmap foods are no problem. So I don't want to necessarily be unnecessarily restrictive if we don't need to go back to that sort of concept of meeting your gut where it's at and not necessarily following these black and white rules, but like, what's an everyday is going to be different too, right?

Because we know that stress influences the sleep influences. This is a lot of variables. So maybe someday you can tolerate a decent amount of higher Fodmap foods in the next day you can.

So it's a bit of an art to meeting your body where it's, even on a day to day basis and having things less some days. And maybe you can have more the other days.

And that's why managing that mind body control is so important. The more you can put the body into these parasympathetic states, dealing with stress, dealing with unresolved trauma, for example, the more these food intolerances and sensitivities will decrease or go away.

But yeah, sorry that the Fodmap piece that's that's what we're talking about. I think the, the big message that well, just gave us is listen to your body.

If there is a food that seems to cause you more distress, reduce or eliminate that food, for a while, knowing that you may be able to come back to it.

You also mentioned the parasympathetic state. What do you explain that in? Do you have any tips to help people get into that parasympathetic state, before they have their meals?

Yeah. So when we're talking about gut health, the vagus nerve is the largest cranial nerve in the body. It's response vagus. It gets its origin of the word.

It translates from the the wanderer, the wandering nerve. And it's the largest cranial nerve. It's responsible for the parasympathetic aspect of the autonomic nervous system.

So that's the resting digesting the grounded, healthy gut health, but also anti-anxiety, safe, regulated state. Most people with autoimmunity, whether it's M. S or any other autoimmune problem, most people have a dysregulated neuro immuno endocrine axis.

And that's sort of that intersection between your nervous system, your immune system i.e inflammation, which is a product of the immune system and your endocrine system.

That can be the downstream hormonal, implications to all of this. So if you go to the upstream, the neuro part of that, which the gut brain acts as is a significant component of that.

So that's the vagus nerve is the sort of communication line, one of the main communication lines between your gut and your brain, your second brain, your gut and your actual brain.

So a lot of neuro inflammatory problems have this sort of connection there. And when your sympathetic aspect of the nervous system that fight or flight or freeze or bond response is overactive, the parasympathetic is underactive.

So that's what we're talking about. A dysregulated nervous system or even neuroinflammation has that component too, because the body's stuck in that hypervigilant state.

And a lot of what, why, why people are seeing such benefits in what we're doing in our space is because we're recalibrating that system. We're strengthening the areas that are weak, and we're calming down the areas that are overactive and hypervigilant.

And, on a practical level, look, I mean, improving gut health with food is improving vagal tone. Like the healthier you can get your gut, the more of that crosstalk between your gut and brain are going to improve.

So being in an inflammatory state is going to be contributing to vagal tone problem. Or like poor vagal tone is what they call it.

FODMAPs, SIBO, and Vagus Nerve Support

How we strengthen the vagal tone beyond food, would be what I would call like, metaphysical meals, like treating these things like you would your breakfast, lunch and dinner.

But they're not food, but they're things that influence your biochemistry. And it could be things like breathwork and meditation, somatic practices and somatic practice.

People may not know what that is. Yeah. So somatic soma, it's body. It's like body medicine or body practices and things that involve body movement or touch or some sort of tactile aspect of, of healing.

So it's things some examples could be it's, I mean, you may think not even think of this as medicine, but the research is really exciting that something like dancing, drumming, massage, Reiki, yoga, tai chi, qigong, these are medicines that instead of talking things out, like, traditional therapy, you know, you are using your body to cathartic metabolize stored stress and stored trauma in the body.

So, and there's like, I've seen great success with eMDR, which I would classify as some sort of somatic practice. So it's eye movement desensitization and reprocessing.

So it involves past memories and using eye movement to reprogram the nervous system to not be in a hypervigilant state. So yeah. So these are all tools to bring in a, more with supporting that vagal tone, supporting that resting digesting which we need for gut health and we need for a lowered inflammatory state. And, but I don't want to sleep on breathwork because breath some of these things.

You need a therapist or practitioner for some of these things you can do on your own. But getting out in nature and breathing in the biome of of nature can be a wonderful tool.

Until you look at the research out of Japan and South Korea of Shenron yoku, the Japanese phrase is translates to English as forest bathing. I think it's a beautiful way of putting it, like using nature as a medicine and using nature as a meditation and taking aim with all of your senses.

We know I've seen some good studies. I know that you have seen it do like that small studies, but people that did forest bathing practices, one of the mechanisms of action is as their breathing in the biome of nature.

One of the benefits is it's modulating the gut microbiome because they're breathing in the biome in nature, and it's impacting serotonin levels because the bacteria are growing that produce serotonin, which works on GI motility, which stimulates thereof.

So, you know, and also having your hands and soil. Yes. Which I think your garden videos inspire me. Every time I see you in your garden, I'm like, yeah, I need to get a garden.

And you're calling me out again because I am reminded how important that is, you know? Oh, sterilize them. It's such a wonderful family activity. Yeah.

And, you know, I tell my tribe, just start however tiny a little part of herbs on your deck, and, you know, that's fine. Bigger pot. You don't have to water it quite as often.

Then you can figure out how to gradually increase your garden. It's fun. And then I, I mulch heavily so I don't have to weed so much. I love that that's a great, great to be a gardening.

And like you said, if you don't live in the country like Doctor Walden, I do, then just to have an urban garden or it's having a small, even this pot of something, getting your hands dirty is a good thing.

And growing your own food is a good thing, too. Yeah, absolutely. So, parasympathetic, I, a tradition that, you know, we started during the pandem, and we're all, you know, incredibly stressed.

We would take a moment before we started a meal to come up with one thing that we were grateful for. Love that, and, you know, that that act of, taking a moment, to pray or to, have a positive affirmation, or a gratitude is, I think, a very helpful way for us to get a little more parasympathetic activity going before we start eating.

Kind of reflect it's gratitude. Practice is a significant tool. And now research is substantiating that right. People that have a gratitude practice and self-compassion is part of that.

I think when you look at gratitude and as you have gratitude, you tend to cultivate more self-compassion. They are separate, but there's like overlap on the sort of Venn diagram of these practices that when we cultivate either thankfulness and gratitude and or self-compassion, we have a lower interleukin levels, we have lower inflammatory markers.

Parasympathetic Practices, Gratitude, and Journaling

And there's studies that have quantified this, that this isn't just we will feel good stuff. It feels good because you're in a more regulated, less inflamed state.

And furthermore, these studies show that if you adopt a gratitude practice, there are fewer emergency room visits, fewer physician visits, in the subsequent year.

Super, super interesting. Yeah. I mean, like, what we feed our body matters, but what we what are we feeding our head in our heart on a daily basis? And this is more nebulous because it's more prescriptive and easier for doctor walls.

And I to say, like these foods have been shown to do x, Y, and Z. These like have less of these have more of that. It's a lot more complex and nonlinear linear to quote unquote prescribe things like chronic stress, ruminating

thoughts, unresolved trauma, like negative self-talk.

But it's so important for us to start to talk about these things and unpack it, and cultivating practices that are going to start to remedy these cycles, because their cycles, for sure, in people's body, as far as neural pathways is concerned and cycles within families.

Right. When you look at intergenerational trauma, transgender, these are things that are learned, you know, in utero for some of us. Yeah, absolutely.

You know, a a technique that I personally found very helpful because like many people, I have ups and downs and a few traumas in my life, when I took the time to free right.

Yeah. About that trauma, whatever. But I had to just free. Right? No description. That I would do it at least five minutes every day. And over time, I developed some new insights into what had happened, what my role was, what my options were to learn from, that event and go forward in a positive way.

And, that's a technique, again, to everyone who's listening, this is a very powerful technique. You can just a little timer that you'll write even one sentence or 5 minutes or 10 minutes.

And, I predict that you'll have really profound, learning that would come from that. Yeah. For sure. Journaling is a yeah, a part of that sort of freeform writing.

It is it's a practice that is a way to get it out of your body and, and onto a piece of paper or, you know, out there and you can, you know, I've seen people do kind of a ceremony of burning that paper afterwards is simply.

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Like just releasing that out. Okay. Well, well, we could talk for hours. But we should probably wrap this up. Why don't you tell our listeners how they could find you and also how they could work with you?

Thank you so much. I appreciate your years of being my friend and just a just a sweet person in my life. And I want to say this because I, I'm in between consulting patients right now, and I look over my schedule, and I knew I was talking to you today.

And I like when I the books that I've written, like, I go back to those early days and I don't know if I would have written a book if it wasn't for you.

Oh, look at from an idea of like, oh, could I ever do that to know, you say, well, this is what you do, this, this and this. And it was your advice and mentorship that took it from a dream to something reality.

And I wanted to publicly thank you for that. Well, bless you. I honestly got that. So I mean, anybody can work with me. My day job is seeing patients around the world.

I started the first telehealth functional medicine clinic, so I, still do that ten hours a day and at tell that doctor will Qualcomm so they can learn there.

I have a podcast that you've been on. I can't wait to have you back. It's called the Art of Being. Well, and my latest book is called Gut Feelings, which we kind of talked a lot about today is sort of the the crosstalk between our gut and our feelings and our physical health impacts mental, emotional, spiritual health.

And then how do these mental, emotional, spiritual things impact our physical health, which is just borne out of my telehealth experiences? Yeah, yeah, it's a wonderful book.

I, like a great deal one more time. How did people find your website again? Yeah, doctor. Well, Qualcomm Dawe LLC. Polycom. Okay. That is wonderful. Thank you, my friend.

And I look forward to the next time we get to see each other. And share a meal.