How Inflammation Fuels Addiction and What to Do Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Introduction to Neuroinflammation in Recovery

What if I told you that chronic inflammation could be hijacking your patient's recovery? I'm Dr. Armon Podesta. I am a functional integrative psychiatrist, triple boarded in psychiatry, addiction medicine, and forensic psychiaty.

i help addiction professionals improve patient engagement and recovery outcomes using integrate evidence-based strategies. In this video, I will be sharing tools that make that possible.

So let's talk about an often overlooked fire driving addiction relapse. Neuroinflammation. You know the patient I'm talking about. They've already gone through detox, they're sober, engaged in therapy, checking the right boxes, but still they just feel off.

Their thoughts are scattered, their sleep might be a mess, anxious for no reason, irritable at the smallest little things. Depression may linger, brain fog never fully lifts, even though they don't have substance in their system or they're on the right medications.

And then there's those low-level cravings that may creep in and just quietly derail progress. At first glance, it's tempting to chalk it all up to post-acute withdrawal, right?

Just do that all the time. Way more to the story because mood instability and cognitive fog, they're not just lingering symptoms. They're well-documented signs of inflammation in the brain, of neuroinflammation.

Here's what gets missed over and over again. These patients aren't just psychologically dysregulated.

How Inflammation Disrupts the Brain

they're psychologically inflamed. And we're talking about a brain kind of like on fire and that fire doesn't just burn quietly in the background, it actually actively interferes with their healing, with our wellness.

It heightens emotional reactivity, reduces resilience, primes that brain for relapse. And the most frustrating part, many standard treatments rarely touch it, because when we focus only on behavior or cognition or medications without addressing the underlying inflammation, we're leaving a major driver of addiction untreated.

If we are not treating it we aren't really supporting recovery, or at least not fully, and that's the problem we tackle today. Because once you start to recognize the signs of neuroinformation and know how to reduce it You'll start seeing breakthroughs in the very patients who've plateaued, or worse, who have dropped out.

So what's really going on in an inflamed brain? Let's zoom in. Psychiatric neuroinflammation, yes, trendy buzzword, but it's not just a buzz word. It's very real, truly measurable immune response happening inside the brain.

The brain's way of saying, I'm under attack. In addiction, that response can be cause and consequence. And here's how it works. When the body experiences chronic stress, substance exposure, trauma, gut dysregulation, or even just ongoing poor sleep and diet, it activates the immune system.

not just in the bloodstream, but in central nervous system. So let's dive into that nervous systems. Okay, remember what microglia are, right? So that's the brain's resident immune cells, and they kick into high gear.

Clinical Lens for Identifying Inflammation

They start releasing pro-inflammatory cytokines, chemical messengers, that create swelling, oxidative stress, create neural damage even sometimes in key brain regions.

Now think about those regions, where is this happening? The prefrontal cortex, The part responsible for executive functioning, judgment, impulse control, I call it the thinking part of the brain, and that region can become sluggish, off-line.

The limbic system, the emotional brain for the feeling part, that is the part that responds to threat and reward. And that can get louder and more reactive and easily triggered.

hence the irritability and such. So you have this double hit, the thinking brain goes quiet and the craving and limbic brain gets dialed up. And that's not a personality flaw, that not bad coping.

That's actually active neuroinflammation. It's why patients might relapse after a sober streak, even then we feel like they're doing everything right.

Because their brain isn't in a state that is supporting recovery. And until we address that fire, until actively cool that inflammatory response, true healing is going to be tough.

It's going stay out of reach. The good news is it's mostly reversible. We can calm that. Fire we can support their immune system and give our patients the physiological foundation they need to recover.

not just survive, but stabilize and thrive. Just a moment, I'm going to walk you through exactly how we're going do that in clinical practice. But before we dive in, if this is resonating with you, hit that like button and subscribe.

We're building a community of professionals integrating brain-based root cause tools for recovery. Now let's get back. So the big question, what can you actually do about it?

How do we move from understanding neuroinflammation seeing it happening to treating it. The good news is you don't need to overhaul your entire treatment model, but you do need start looking through a different lens.

That lens needs to include the body, not just the brain or the mind. That sees information not as background variables, but as a key lever in recovery.

Gut-Brain and Mind-Body Interventions

Here's how I approach it with my patients. Now just to note, I don't do this during my very first visit if someone is intoxicated in early withdrawal or not even medically stable.

But I will do once they have mental clarity to a degree. And that sometimes may take a few days or even longer until we can start having these conversations.

And sometimes it might even take weeks to months. But that's okay. We need to just use this idea, this lens. First, we want a screen for the silent sources of inflammation.

Things no one's really talking about in group or in intake because they're showing up in the body every day. Think about all the attention we've given to ultra-processed foods and general health.

You need do that here. blood sugar swings, poor sleep hygiene, mold exposure, leak gut, underlying infections. Even stressful home environments certainly can keep the immune system stuck in the hypervigilant state.

And no, you don't need a massive lab panel on day one. Just start asking a few different questions. When do the symptoms flare? What's the diet like? Are they waking up exhausted?

Do they feel puffy, foggy, wired, but tired? These clues actually matter. Next, we want to support the gut-brain connection. That's huge. The vagus nerve isn't just a buzzword.

It's a two-way superhighway between the got and the brain's immune system. So if this gut is inflamed, the brain

can be inflated. Period. So simple. And simple interventions here can go a long way.

You don't necessarily need nutritional counseling, but you can definitely improve the gut with some key factors, such as probiotics, polyphenol-rich foods like berries or greens or olive oil, omega-3s even.

This isn't about perfection. It's about creating enough of a shift to lower that inflammatory threshold. Then I often layer in mind-body strategies, things like breathwork, restorative movement, vagal toning practices.

These aren't just feel-good add-ons. They literally send a signal to the nervous system that the threat has passed and that healing can begin. And when appropriate, I bring targeted tools like low-data smaltrexone, neurofeedback, or functional medicine protocols that address the root cause of immune activation.

Because when inflammation quiets, something powerful happens. Cognition clears. Cravings reduce.

Restoring Stability and Closing Remarks

Moons stabilize. And suddenly, all those other interventions, therapy, community, and medications actually start working because the brain can finally receive them.

That's when we start seeing real progress, not just compliance, white-knuckling sobriety. but actually sustained healing. All right, let's bring this full circle.

When we ignore inflammation, neuroinflammation affecting the brain, we're asking that very organ, the train, to heal itself in a hostile environment. We're ask our patients to regulate, reflect, change, recover, while the neurobiology is still feeling and screaming out, danger, dangerous.

But when we shift that focus, when begin to calm the fire at the root of their symptoms, The entire landscape can shift, and we're no longer chasing that behavior.

We're actually restoring capacity. we are creating the conditions for stability, for brain balance, clarity, real lasting transformation. And that's the level of care our patients deserve, right?

So think about it. If this sparks some ideas, keep going. You're not alone in this shift and there's more to learn. More tools to integrate, more outcomes to improve.

if you found this helpful, I invite you to watch the next video. We'll keep building on this foundation step by step. Thanks so much for watching and thanks for the work you do.

I'm Dr. Arun Podesta. See you in the next one.