Is Your Nervous System Making You Sick? How To Reset with Dr. Nancy Waiganjo Transcript

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Podcast Introduction and Guest Welcome

Health is not something that resides in the doctor's office. Health resides within the thousands of moments that happen in your day, that unfold in you day.

Recently, my work has shifted to focus on a less addressed topic, and that is really the role of the nervous system and the mind. in our health and success.

And I had to find answers because I couldn't go back to that patient who is in pain and tell them, hey, we did this test, with this blood test. We did a CT scan or a chest x-ray and everything looks normal.

They look at me like, then what is going on? So I started to dig deeper and I noticed that a pattern was emerging with my patients. Welcome to Dive into Health MD, the podcast where we explore how everyday habits shape your physical, cognitive and financial well-being.

Through conversations with physicians, scientists and farmers, we explored how daily choices like food, movement, sleep and mindset shape the health and life we experience with special episodes on sourcing high quality food ingredients.

We do our best to stay up to date and we're always open to refining our thinking as new knowledge emerges. I'm your host, Dr. Akshita Mehta. Let's dive in.

Welcome to Dive into Health MD, Dr. Nancy Wiganjo. It is so nice to have you on today. We've had a brief conversation before and you're doing so many interesting things and I'm so excited for people to learn from your experiences.

So if you want to just start off and tell us a little bit about yourself, that would be amazing. All right. Yeah. Thank you so much for having me. I think it's good that you have this, you know, this platform where we can talk to reach our patients in different ways, not only when we see them in the hospital, and this is a very good way of just creating awareness and helping people stay healthy.

So like you said, my name is Dr. Nancy Weigar. I'm an internal medicine physician. And I've been in practice for about 20 years, but recently my work has shifted to focus on a less addressed topic.

That is really the role of the nervous system and the rule of mind. in our health and success. So I've been focusing on really training people on using their nervous system and using the brain to reduce stress and to improve their well-being and at the same time to create resilience so that they can create a life that's they desire despite of everything that is happening around.

Amazing. Yeah. Can we backtrack and talk a little bit about your background and where this work came from or where the interest in talking about the nervous system came?

Yes. Now, my focus on the Nervous System actually started with my own health struggles. Yeah. You see, as a doctor, I was taught that if a patient presents with a particular physical symptom, then I address that system.

If somebody comes with chest pain, You know, I started looking for heart issues. If somebody presents with headache, they started to keep on neurological issues, and then it happened to me.

I had all these symptoms. I had dizziness that I could not explain. l had insomnia.l I cannot sleep very well. L had

recurrent infections.

Nancy Wiganjou2019s Background and Shift to Nervous System Health

And then what was fascinating is that I would have all this test done and all the results were coming back normal. And I was frustrated. Eventually, then I started paying attention to my patients as well, and I noticed there was something there.

There was a pattern. It was frustrating having these patients who are struggling, who were suffering with real symptoms, but we would do a lot of tests on them.

and then everything comes back normal. And I had to find answers because I couldn't go back to that patient who is in pain and tell them, hey, we did this test.

We did these blood tests. we do the CT scan or a chest x-ray and everything looks normal and they look at me like, then what is going on? So I started to dig deeper and I noticed that a pattern was emerging with my patients.

And what I noticed is that after talking with these patients, digging deeper into their lives, they started opening up and sharing about their life. And many of them would mention events, significant life events that had happened to them.

The timeline was varying, different timelines. Somebody would mentioned that I lost my job two weeks ago. There was loss of a loved one about a month ago, My relationship is not going well.

I'm having relationship struggles. And so we started trying to tie up things. While we could not clearly say that there was a direct causal relationship, there were correlations with the events that were happening in their lives and how they were showing up in the hospital.

So, I dug deeper and started to see that maybe we don't give the influence of stress on our health the due focus that it deserves, and also the inference of our mind and how we see, how deal with our life, really.

We dont, as doctors, we are not trained to that effect of how our lives events, of So, you know, I've just been paying a lot of attention and working more in that.

And we noticed that the mind and body are deeply connected. When we get stressed, it's not happening in our minds only. It is really influencing how our bodies function.

Yeah, incredible. Really just a focus on something that you said. big part of this podcast is helping people understand how their life choices affect their health and how life habits make a big impact on our lives today, our health in the future.

And we're talking about these stressful life moments that inevitably happen in everyone's lives, right? Is that loss of a loved one, if that's getting laid off from a job or even a career change?

some big event that we all go through at some point and how there seemed to be a time correlation with patients ending up in the hospital. And I think a really interesting message there is when these things inevitably come up, and usually they're out of our control, usually it's not in an expected manner, It's a really good time to take care of ourselves and to extra focus on our own self-care and pay attention to how we're feeling, make sure we are getting plenty of rest because if you're saying that we see this correlation with people ending up in the hospital with much more severe illness around these timeframes, then I think that's in and of itself just a good thing to be aware of and understand.

It's definitely very important to raise this awareness because for somebody to adapt in the hospital means that they are very sick. It is not the same as going to see your primary care doctor or going into the emergency room and where you are treated and then, you know, sent home with some prescription.

When you get admitted to the house, it means you're under a doctor's care 24-7. That means there is a serious illness involved. And yet, in my experience, I have seen that More than half of the patients that get admitted to the hospital, they have had a live event happen to them in the previous maybe two weeks, in a previous one month, six months or even a year.

The timeline varies for everyone. So it's very important to raise this awareness so that people can start to notice how things affect them. And what I tell my patients is that when you start to notice symptoms, do not get scared.

These symptoms are real. We know that you're suffering. You have chronic pain, the tests are normal. Yes, we know your pain is real, you are not disregarding it.

But let's look around our lives and see what has changed in your life recently. And not only what's changed, how do you view that event? How did it affect you?

Did you feel helpless? Or did you fell like you could handle this event? Do you felt like, you had hell around you because what matters is not really what is happening in us because these events, like we said, they are inevitable.

But it is what do we do when they happen so that we don't end up in the hospital? And this is why this story has to be told, because there's so much we can do to regulate our health, to regular our nervous system, so when life happens, Our health stats remains good so that we can create resilience that allows us to stay healthy despite going through rough patches in life, despite go through lifetalities.

Yeah. And as you're saying, this is such an incredible thing to talk about and incredible story because stress in relation to health, I think people are somewhat aware of, but what's challenging in medicine is it's not measurable.

Right, we can measure someone's kidney function, and we measure someones white count. We can also measure a lot of things that we could act on. I could measure somebody's A1C, right?

And then these are tangible things we talk about, these tangible thing that can be measured. And we even measure them over time chronologically and look at the impact of whatever intervention we've chosen.

Stress is different. We have an understanding that there's an effect on health, probably much more so than we realize. But how do we even go about thinking of stress or identifying stress, right?

How Stress Shows Up as Physical Symptoms

Because stress especially in the chronic sense, people can live their day-to-day lives and still have a good amount of underlying stress that has health implications.

How do you even talk about this or identify it? Yeah, this is a very important question because we are not helpless when it comes to stress. And stress is not something that happens in the mind.

It is no a mental event, it's actually a biological event. What is happening in our mind changes our physiology. And it has measurable changes. So it's not just a feeling of nervousness or a feelings of agitation.

And we see this many times. People see their doctors and the doctor may mention that they are stressed and people will deny it because they don't feel it.

Because the changes that are happening when we are stress happen beyond our awareness. So let's talk about the nervous system. The nervous is really the command center of our lives.

It is the operating system of all lives, it governs how we see ourselves, how see life, It govern our performance, our relationships, Our health and definitely our success.

Now what stress is, is happens within the system And stress response is what happens within our bodies when we

face a challenging life event. Now the key here is to say, to notice that a challenge life events is sometimes how we think about it.

It's not so much what is happening, it is not the events that affect us, It is our view and our interpretation of those events. So whenever we view an event as challenging or too much for us or overwhelming, a message is sent to the brain.

We have a system that responds. It's like having a smoke alarm in your head. The role of the nervous system is to keep you safe. one language, am I safe or am i in danger?

So every moment, every millisecond, the nervous system is scanning the environment, assessing whether you are in data or whether or you're safe. Sometimes this is not coming from your environment.

It is your thinking. So when you think you not safe, The nervous system reacts the same way as if you are facing a lion. So what happens? The smoke alarm goes off.

This happens in different parts of the brain. We have structures called the amygdala. And this is the fear center, or the emotional center that really is fast to respond when we feel stress, when our mind interprets an event as stressful.

And this releases chemicals that then activate other parts of the brain, the part of that brain called the hypothalamus. And here we start to produce what we call hormones and neurotransmitters.

Then these travel throughout the body, activating our organs, our cells and our tissues, and then the amygdala then shuts off the thinking part the of brain.

So it shuts of prefrontal cortex, which is really our reasoning and a problem-solving part And so these chemicals have been released, they're traveling throughout the body, and they are affecting how our organs function.

The part of the nervous system that controls stress is called the autonomic nervous that maintains the normal functioning of all our organs. It maintains how our heart beats, how we breathe, and how much energy we have.

How well relaxed we are. And how the digestion happens. The same system is what gets activated when we get stressed. This is how changes start to happen in the body.

So the autonomic nervous system kicks in when we get stressed, blood pressure rises, heart rate goes faster, our breathing changes. We start, we develop tension because our muscles go into what we call fight or fight more.

we have tension to either run away from the threat all fight the threat. So these changes are there and they are measurable but they're happening beyond our awareness because most of us live without awareness.

We live on autopilot. we'll do things like automatons so we don't even feel when things change in our bodies. Now this is okay if it's happening for just a short period of time.

Maybe when you're facing a lion or a threat or somebody's yelling at you, your brain perceives danger and it activates your body to save you. What we call the fight or flight response is either to run away from this danger or to fight the danger, or sometimes play posion, freeze so that the data can overlook you and you can survive.

Or what we called phoning, we place the dangerous so it can spare us. So all these things are happening spontaneously beyond our awareness. The way our organs function will change.

It's okay if you're facing a yelling boss, but then the problem is that we keep imagining and replaying these scenarios over and over again. So our system is activated all the time, every minute.

It is like your car running on turbo, right? So your blood pressure is always higher than it should be. Your liver

produces glucose, so your sugar goes up.

You'll notice for most people who have diabetes, that when they are stressed, the blood sugar runs high. So yes, we have changes that you can see in the body, but these are also the same changes, that happen when we get sick.

The differentiation has to be there. Are you sick or are you just stressed? That is why we see the doctor and the doctors can then rule out serious illnesses.

When those are ruled out, they come back to your nervous system is dysregulated and it may be causing these symptoms and we can't see these changes. So for that patient that comes in and we say, Hey, I think there may be an underlying component of stress.

We've ruled out these other things listening to your story. I wonder if this is a part of what's going on. And they respond and they say I don't, feel it.

then we start doing to identify it within ourselves. So regardless of whether, like I said, people may not be aware that they are stressed, right? But the changes are there.

The changes the doctor can see, we've seen these changes in the way your biology is functioning. Now, what we need to do is to learn how to bring our system back to balance.

Because if your tests are normal, the doctor has reassured you and they have ruled out all the serious illnesses. This is very critical. You first need to see a doctor to rule out the all serious illness before we can then conclude that this is from stress or this from an activated dysregulated nervous system.

So it's a diagnosis of exclusion. Now when we conclude this this a dysregulated nervous system, what do we need to do? We just need return this system back to balance.

It does not take much. These events are unfolding in our body. They're not unfolding out there. So we use our bodies then to regulate the brain. The body and the brains are in constant communication.

and the communication is both ways. So now the brain has sent a message to the body that we are fighting a threat and so let us deploy all our resources to fight this threat.

But there's no threat, the threat is your partner at home, your boss, traffic. The threat is imagining that you'll have a presentation coming up next week and you're not ready.

Or you have deadline that's coming out and they are not really. So we don't need to react to it like you are facing a lion. What you can do are simple practices.

And this is something we can practice here. We could take our listeners through a simple practice. that we can, yeah. So this is something that everybody can do.

You can try it anywhere, anytime. If you're driving, keep your eyes open. Keep your eye on the road. Now, but if you are in a safe space where you can afford to close your if it feels comfortable, just close you eyes and we're just going to do a breathing exercise that can help reset your nervous system.

Before we start the breathing exercises, I would like you to just notice how you feel in your body. Just check in with your and see how you feel. You can do a quick scan, maybe on your head, what do you do there?

On your face, do feel tense? Your shoulders? How do your feel in your chest and your belly? Just quickly create awareness of how your body feels right now.

Now, I would want you to take a deep breath through your nose, all and long, deep and then add a second top-up

inhale on top of the first one. And then breathe out slowly through your mouth and make the sound sigh.

Just sigh out the breath slowly, long and slow through the mouth. Again, take a deep breath through nose, Then add a quick top-up inhale. Then sigh out slowly and long through your mouth.

Understanding the Nervous System and Stress Response

Produce the south sigh. And do a third one. Just a quit, slow and lung. Inhale through the nose. The second top up inhale, then breathe out through slowly through you mouth and produce the South sigh Now do one more on your own.

And as you do this one, just let your whole body relax, drop your shoulders away from your ears and just letting everything go. Feel a wave of relaxation throughout your body.

And now please slowly open your eyes and again, check in with your buddy and see how you feel. See if anything has changed at all. Maybe your shoulders feel less tense.

Maybe you feel calmer in your mind. maybe your breath has slowed down a little bit. Or maybe nothing has changed. That is okay still. So you realize that this is a practice that we've done for less than a minute.

And some people can report a real change. I don't know whether Dr. Mehta you felt something. I feel more relaxed. I tend to carry a lot of tension in my neck and so yeah even just that being awareness just even the awareness to drop shoulders helps and feel feel relaxed there too.

Yes yeah these are the things that people can do even when you don't feel stressed. You can approach this like the way you approach your dental hygiene Because a lot of people take time to take care of their teeth, but we've never been told that you can take of your nervous system the same way.

You can practice such breathing practices every day, maybe morning and evening, and it resets your system. Just the slow, on-breath, sadder message. They said a different message to the brain, to their amygdala, that, hey, it's okay, I have time relax and breathe slowly, so there cannot be danger if you're closing your eyes.

So that is the key here. So the amygdala does not understand talk therapy. Remember, we say that when we get stressed, the Amygdale takes over the thinking part of the brain, problem-solving part.

If you start to talk to somebody and tell them, hey, stop being scared. It doesn't always work. But if you use your body, it clearly sends messages to that part that's beyond talk-therapy.

and it can come down and you will notice a difference in your body. So you don't have to wait to feel stressed. I no longer seek ways to reduce stress because it's happening, there's a lot of things that are stressing us.

But instead I've scheduled time in my day where I just stop, I check in with myself, and notice how I'm feeling. And then just a few moments of stillness and quiet can reset your nervous system.

Think of it like a nervous-system hygiene. Like dental hygiene, or like the way you take care of your physical fitness by going to the gym. You can take of you nervous system in that way and that can prevent a lot of health issues from arising.

Yeah, that's a really good way to think about it. The prevention piece, right? What can we do proactively? Yes. And you don't have to wait until it turns into health problems or becomes so overwhelming.

That's so tangible, right? So you were talking about experiencing burnout. I feel like I've seen some health problems with myself with some bloating and GI issues and insomnia and probably all stress-related and a lot of training.

A lot physicians have similar experiences. There is significant stress and burnout and lots of overwhelm. So something tangible that a lotta people can incorporate now.

But also an easy way in the office when you do see that patient, they have these symptoms. We think it may be a nervous system related or stress related, something that we can teach them tangibly in a minute or so to walk away with and to hopefully start mitigating some of these systems kind of in But something else that you mentioned is that the amygdala doesn't understand the talk.

And I think, at least me, but I other physicians as well, run into these scenarios where we feel overwhelmed or we fill burned out and we try and talk ourselves out of it.

We try to reason our way through it, and it's sometimes not as effective. How does that work? Yes. I mean, after years of trying to understand what's happening and reason my way And I think the physiologic effects of just stopping in moments of overwhelm, as opposed to making lists and trying to find the right answer and solving the problem.

Because I, think what you've alluded to is the, problem isn't really the. It's usually not the circumstance, but it's our reaction to it. That's right.

And so I think after years of trying one approach and realizing that that doesn't quite work, this is why, right? It's our reactivity that despite the circumstance, even if I change the circumstances, if even I reason through the circumstance, it's still my inherent reactivty that is creating some of these symptoms.

And leading to the overwhelm and burnout and stress. And so changing the physiology almost makes the problem disappear. The problem's not really the problems.

And yes, just pausing. You stop and do nothing. Actually, instead of trying to rush through and and so many other things, you just stop doing nothing and notice.

Notice your state, notice your internal state. notice what story is going through your mind and then notice how your body feels because the stories in your minds really are not happening in the minds.

They play out in So when you come to terms with their body sensations and you learn to regulate yourself using your body sensation, this is what we call interceptive awareness.

It's just awareness of your internal states and the body's sensation that you're experiencing, instead of running away from them, avoiding them by engaging in so many things that we do, like you said, making lists, maybe going shopping, planning this and that, you don't need to do extra planning.

You just need stop and let those sensations just flow out because they go away when we stop fighting them and they flow and you relax and engage in a regulation practice like what we did and the message goes right to the amygdala through the vagus nerve.

The vagal nerve is the longest nerve in the body and it carries messages from most of our organs in our chest and our abdomen. So it goes, it is mostly a sensory nerve, meaning that it carries messages from the body to the brain more than it brings messages to from brain to body.

This is our regulatory nerve. So you activate it with these practices, body-based practices and you feel the deepness. and you realize that you can even do much more than what you already have.

Because now when their meter comes down, your prefrontal cortex now can function. You can solve problems better, you recall better. don't remember where you place your things, you know?

So your hippocampal gyrus gets suppressed too by the emotions. So yeah, body-based practices are easy. And look, You don' even need to go anywhere. You do not need wait to take a vacation like we do.

you do need not wait go to the gym, wherever you are, in the middle of chaos, even in a middle running a code blue. This is something I do, I run code blues in hospital.

I'm in charge of the team that is resuscitating a patient and everybody is looking up to me to make decisions and solve problems. And it is stressful.

But even in the middle of that, you can just calm your body because you're doing your breathing, and you are still working. This works very well. So you able to see solutions.

You're able see opportunities where initially you could not see it. At the same time, it's good to mention that We have body-based practices, but they are also brain- based practices like talking to yourself and trying to maybe change your thoughts.

We call them cognitive diffusion. You change you thoughts, if you notice your thought and notice that these thoughts are keeping you in a spiral of negative body sensations or they're not helpful at all.

They're sabotaging thoughts you can create a different thoughts altogether. And so this is not working with your prefrontal cortex. and that also can work.

It has its place as well. So we cannot demonize talk therapy, but when you combine talk, therapy and body-based practices, it works very well, so people who are going through therapy therapy is important.

Of course, sometimes you need somebody to guide you through it, But when we combine it with body based practices you have better outcomes. Yeah, and so interesting to talk about and I think important to talked about because for a lot of people, I thing it's not as intuitive as maybe it should be.

You know, especially for the really type A personality, you know we, think that I'm smart and think I can figure it out and there's this problem going on and let me reason through it and…

I could solve things when I see a problem I have mastered solving problems, right? Yeah.

Breathing Practice to Reset the Nervous System

And this is different and we can't always talk ourselves out of these things, but really just taking that second to let the body relax and then have the problem dissipate, we'll see much longer strides.

And what you're talking about is so interesting. There's been some research that, as a neuroradiologist, I think it's interesting to look at morphological changes in the brain.

And in relation to meditation, there's been studies out there that showing even after short interventions, we're talking six to eight weeks, something along those lines, will see decrease in amygdala volumes, increase in hippocampal volumes and we'll see increase and cortical thickness.

Yes. So all very interesting to understand that there are structural changes in the brain which relates to the behavioral changes. That's true. And it goes both ways.

Those structural stages happen too when we are chronically stressed. The issue is not the acute stress that happens for a short period of time. It's the chronic stress happens most of the day, most days of a week, and most weeks of month and times of year.

The structure changes, like you mentioned, changes and sort of reduction in the cortical thickness and the amygdala hypertrophies, it becomes bigger. So you become more reactive to your environment.

Things that did not stress you before now start stressing you. You become hypersensitive and some of this contributes to chronic symptoms. But yes, when you start engaging in meditation and other body-based practices,

what we call somatic practices really, it can reverse those changes and it gives beneficial structural changes to the brain too.

It slows aging as well. you know and reverses aging so these have been validated by science so whatever and these are things that we are now starting to talk with our patients and like you say it's teaching our patience even at bedside that try this practice just a few seconds a, few minutes of breathing focusing on your breath can give you a Few seconds of peace and then when you feel it when You experience that that I can come myself in minutes Then you want to keep doing more and that can make the difference between being well and being safe Yeah, it's an interesting concept, retraining the nervous system and we kind of understand it from a pain perspective when we see we have instances of pain, especially acute pain can desensitize that area and the sensation goes away.

If we are even injecting lidocaine or something, we can sensitize the skin and some people think that that works and people don't. But either way, you know, if you hold on to a piece of tissue or something in it, it's a little bit uncomfortable.

If you keep holding the pressure there, the sensation goes away. We desensitize that area. That's right. And it similar just thinking about it in a different way.

trained our nervous system sort of to be reactive, to live in these moments of stress and overwhelm and to think about things in a certain way, it's almost an auto loop where we don't think of it and we just react.

And so breaking that cycle is possible but requires intention. It does. The chronic pain, I think the issue of chronic has led to a lot of research into what exactly is happening.

And now we know that chronic, pain that persists more than six months beyond the injury time is not necessarily coming from the injuries. Many times it's hypersensitive nervous system and the nervous feels senseless stimuli You know more than it did before so the sensations become amplified so you feel if somebody touches you may feel like somebody hit you with a hammer and some of the changes like you said is that there are multiple parts of their brain that are being activated.

We have seen that's the same. parts of the brain that get activated in chronic pain and the same ones activated when we are emotional. So emotional centers get active at the at same time.

There is an effect on emotional issues going on around our daily life. there's also chronic inflammation and sometimes chronic information may result from stress.

We know that the immune system is one of those systems that suffers greatly from chronic stress and it leads to chronic and inflammatory markers are released and they are circulating in the body.

So we have high inflammatory macros. These macras sensitize the nerve endings and the nerves become now hypersensitive and we become like a bag of nerves.

You feel more things that don't affect other people or things other other don t feel, you feel them. And there is a biological process going on in That is, the inflammation plays a big role in that.

So, and then the practices that we just talked about also do help in dealing with the chronic pain because it's not a major issue. It's a biological process, yes.

There are psychological factors involved, there are biological factors and practices like meditation and awareness and intention, breathing practices, movement as well.

They all play a role. in resetting your nervous system that is hypersensitive. It sets it back to balance or back-to-baseline. Yeah. So we talked about immune system effects, we talk about general feelings of overwhelm and, you know, anxiety that can play a role.

We talked a lot about hypertension, right? Increased blood pressure, and we've talked hyperglycemia and physiologic effects there. What else are we seeing in patients when we have these levels of chronic stress.

Yes, we see pretty much every system in the body is affected. Cardiovascular health seems to suffer the most, and we've already mentioned that. So, what we're seeing in these cases is that patients present like like they're having a heart attack, but then we do all the necessary tests, they come back normal.

But then, we look at the structure of the heart. This is one where the structures of heart changes. The heart balloons out. So instead of looking like a beautiful heart shaped like triangle, it looks like the bottom of their heart looks a pot.

And this was first discovered in Japan because they noticed that people who had this stress-induced cardiomyopathy, their hearts resembled a part that is used to catch octopus.

So that is where the Takosubo name came from. But when we talked to this patient, then we realized that there are things happening in their lives, mostly just severe emotional distress, severe, emotional challenges, like loss of a loved one, all catastrophic events that have happened in our lives.

So what happens is that hormones, catecholamines are produced, neurochemicals are produce when through these severe life events, and they stand the heart.

So the amount is so much that it is turns the hurt such that the shape of the hat changes. It's very important to notice that this is what we can see macroscopically, like looking at the image of a hat, it has changed its shape.

What we cannot see is even much, much more. That is a cardiovascular system, because it tends to be very, very vulnerable. The nervous system as well.

We see sometimes people may present with what we call functional neurological disorders. They may have weakness. And then an MRI of the brain is done or MRI over the part of their body is then, and they all come back normal.

We'll see it in the gut as well. The gut especially also suffers heavily. we see irritable bowel syndrome. receive what you call function of dyspepsia.

It's just chronic pain that cannot be explained because what happens is that when we get stressed, the autonomic nervous system, gets activated, part of it, the branch of that gets activity is called the sympathetic nervous system.

Now, this is call the fight-or-flight system, now the second branch or the autonomic nervous is the parasympathetic nervous.

Body-Based Regulation, Chronic Pain, and Inflammation

Guess what, it's called rest and digest system so when the sympathetic system takes over, parasympathy, rest-and-digest system you know, stops functioning normally.

And that is why gut problems are very, very common in chronic stress. Many people will report gut symptoms. Then immunity is affected. You know we have autoimmune diseases, we show up.

We have chronic inflammation. But we've seen studies that suggest that progression of cancer for people who have been diagnosed with cancer chronic stress, which of course sometimes is expected when you have such a diagnosis, may lead to progression of the cancer.

And what they discovered was that inflammatory cells were seen around the tissues that were taken for biopsies from people who were diagnosed with cancer, so there was the role of chronic inflammation from stress leading to cancer And then we see a musculoskeletal system.

We see chronic pain and we also see Chronic fatigue. we find dizziness. It's a very common symptom. So any system can be affected. And if you notice that you've been diagnosed with maybe a condition involving one system, like a headache, and then after two weeks, you'll notice you have symptoms in your guts.

You have type of bowel syndrome. Maybe after a month, notice the immunity, there's something coming up that is autoimmune. It's very likely, and still your tests are normal, it's really likely that you're dealing with a hypersensitive or a dysregulated central nervous system.

Do we see reversal of these symptoms and disease processes when we use practices? That's a good news. Yes, these conditions can be reversed. Let's talk about the tachosupercardiomyopathy or the stress-induced cardiomyopathy.

So what happens here is that the heart stops functioning normally. So people go into stress-induced cardiomyopathy, which means that there's some aspect of congestive heart failure.

And we have to treat them with medications, with conventional medicine, yet we know that it came from stress. That is still needed. The conventional medicines is required even in situations that are stress induced.

So patients get treated with these medicines or medications, and then we also recommend other modalities of treatment like what we are mentioning here.

Just creating resilience, reducing stress in your life, improving sleep, talking to a therapist or talking a somatic body worker that can help you work with your body and your nervous system to reset it back to balance.

And people recover fully. People do recover full. Patients who come with stress-induced cardiomyopathy they do recover. With time and with, you know, interventions discussed, they recover, so that's a good news that all is not lost.

So again, experiencing these symptoms, there is hope, and that is why we need to put this awareness and talk about it, because there's something we can do that people don't have to suffer forever.

We can reverse these conditions. Yeah. Talk to us about cardiomyopathy is such interesting pathophysiology. I saw two cases as an intern, both in female patients, with deceased spouses, either one was the day prior and the other one two days prior.

So severe catastrophic life events, truly broken heart syndrome, but it's so fascinating the morphological changes that you can see in a structure. And just as you're saying, they're presenting with heart attack symptoms, right?

They're coming in. acute symptoms, there is true pathophysiology there. And very interesting to see the reversal over time. And these patients go home.

They do. But this acute stress event has these physiological factors, which is very, very Interesting. The other thing that you mentioned was there's a release of inflammatory markers.

We were talking about pain and chronic pain. Is that something that clinicians can be measuring and looking for? Yes. These are markers that can measure for sure.

Because… Is this like a HSCRP or something more specific than that? So this is like interleukin 6, tumor necrosis factor. These are not routine tests that we do, but yes, they can be measured maybe by immunologists and it has been noted that they tend to be high in these patients.

Yeah, and what? At what point is it worth it to start looking at some of these markers with patients? I think it is worth because you really need to know for sure what is happening in your body.

And many people are always looking for answers. When you find that, yes, there are real true physiological

changes that you know, that are happening in your body, then you understand and you can, you are likely to take action more than when it is just a hypothetical idea.

So I think it's good to pursue testing and finding out what changes are there that causing symptoms. Okay. Yeah. And then do you ever do repeat testing or do we just follow treatment and then symptomatology?

So normally as you in medicine, when we do tests, we like to do test when know that we're looking for something specific. And osteo tests are driven by having something that is not functioning normally, having symptoms or having science or I examine you and if I do something wrong, so I want to do more tests.

So when people recover, then sometimes it removes the need to the test. It's just like when somebody comes in with pneumonia and we do a test x-ray and confirm, yes, there is an infection there.

And we treat it with antibiotics and then the symptoms, they feel better. The symptoms go away. Maybe a cough disappears, fevers go way. We don't go back to do the test actually because when we get sick, the body communicates to us.

And it tells us that something is wrong. When we no longer have those symptoms then we know and we trust that the issue has resolved. Yeah. And so what timeframe are we looking at?

And I'm sure this is incredibly variable per patient, but if we have someone presenting to us and they have, you know, maybe multi-organ symptoms or something where we ruled out something more serious and we think that there may be a stress component to it, we talk about some of these practices, mindfulness, breathing practices just pausing.

Where do we start seeing change? So that depends on multiple factors. So to check the nervous system, it takes repetition, because for us to form these symptoms, the chronic symptoms especially, we have lived in a certain way for a long duration of time.

It's not something that happens, like we said, after you've had chronic stress for long durations of times. So what keeps these symptoms going is neuroplasticity.

So we have reacted, the reactivity you talked about, we've reacted to situations in a certain way that it becomes the nervous system learns that is our go-to mechanism to react to that situation, that we react unconsciously.

We have done it for so long, it become effortless. So it's happening beyond our awareness. There's a neural pathway that drives that reaction. Now to change that action takes repetition.

And it has been shown that an average of 40 days, it takes anywhere between 30 to 60 days. But an hour of about 42 days is when we form new neural pathways that now help you live your life in a different way.

This typically corresponds to when research to see changes. So it takes that repetition. It takes willingness on the side of the patient. Many people sometimes don't like the idea that stress is what is making me sick.

So there is denial. We encounter denial a lot. Right? So if somebody is not really willing to try and work with their body and practice this, then change may not happen or it may take long.

So it takes willingness. It takes that awareness. If it's intention and if it is repetition, so that can create new neural pathways that now allow us to reverse those symptoms.

But this is the typical timeline. So if you practice something for about a month to two months, notice the changes. Yeah. It also, I think, takes a little bit of just rewriting the story for yourself.

I, think a big part of this as it gets so normalized. You know, if, you're a physician practicing and you are stressed, it's almost like, of course, we all are, right?

Almost like the power of the course. But I also think it takes some understanding, or I guess, willingness, as you were saying, to just rewrite it for ourselves.

And to say it doesn't have to be this way. Yes, we have to take it upon ourselves. It is really our own responsibility. Our well-being, our health is our responsibility, so if we focus on it, surely, you know, it happened to me.

Like I said, I started with medical issues and I had these chronic issues, and was able to reverse it. I was about to device my health issues. to rule out cancer, and yet everything was coming back normal.

But with time, we're just engaging in these practices and changing how I view my life, how view myself, the self-talk, changing my thinking patterns. We all have a way we think.

This neural pathway drives our thinking pattern. The way that we respond to emotions, they way the habits that you engage in. These are the things that are making us sick.

It is the way of living in terms of our thinking and how we feel things and we do things. So when you change those, you'll change your body, your life.

A lot changes. And I'm a testament. Like you said, yes, people need that willingness and you need to have an open mind. to know that there are other ways of dealing with health issues, that the other modalities of healing, not just taking pills.

People don't just need to take another pill or get another intervention.

Stress-Related Disease Across Body Systems

You can work with your mind and body and reverse what is going on in your body. And it doesn't take anything besides your mind and body, which you have with you everywhere, anytime, anywhere, you can do it.

Yes. Tangible, free, available to anyone. It's a simple, harmless, no side effects. Yeah. And I think just that really interesting conversation, right?

There are times for interventions, there are time for pills, There're times where medication is life-saving and beneficial, and it's just making sure that we're doing the right intervention at the And if it's a stress-related condition, which as we're saying, it appears to be so ubiquitous nowadays that utilizing this specific intervention for the right thing.

And so we have to aware and identify in order to make sure that we are doing the thing for right person. Amazing. What have I not asked you about the nervous system or about rewiring the system more stress that you want to share?

want to share is that health is not something that resides in the doctor's office. Health resides within the thousands of moments that happen in your day, that unfold in a day.

And it just takes a moment to pause, to check in with yourself, the way you breathe, And this is where you make changes in your, and this how you change your nervous system.

And when you take another system, being the command center of your life, the operating system of life. You change everything about your like, you don't need to wait for anything.

Don't wait, wait vacation or to go anywhere. Wherever you are, You can start with simple practices that have been proven by science to work and you experience changes instantly.

You may, you'll notice that you can wake up feeling less tense without that sinking feeling in the stomach. You can experience spontaneous joy for no reason at all. You can feel calm, you can develop clarity and you will be able to

handle situations and see the options in solving problems easily.

It's amazing. Yeah, I think that's a really good message for all those physicians out there or really anyone. Anyone who's going through periods of feeling overwhelmed, feeling stressed, or feeling like they have some kind of maybe even low-grade chronic condition.

Maybe you haven't even seen a doctor about it, but there's something that is bothering you. something that doesn't feel easily explained and worth turning to, right?

Worth trying, worth practicing to see how you feel after. That's a really powerful message. And that's really good segue to the walk me through your day segment that I like to do with everyone.

We're talking about chronic habits and chronic life experiences and how that plays a role into our over life health. It's the life we experience today, the like we experienced down the line.

all of these life choices play into that. And so I like to sort of ask our guests, you know, to walk me through your day and walk my through, sleep or your morning or anything that you'd like share.

All right. So my day, that's a very good question actually. It's interesting because we never really stopped to think about how our day unfolds, but my days starts by checking in with myself.

It doesn't start by thinking about what I'm going to do or by checking my phone. I just take a moment of quiet and I sit and listen to how I am feeling.

Listen to what i'm thinking, listen any sensations in my body and then I take few moments of just breathing, just noticing my breath and create an intention.

Before I create intention for the day, I practice gratitude for just waking up, for a gift of life that I was able to wake up. There are many people that did not wake up this morning.

There're many who didn't see this day today. But I did. And it's not that I do anything special to see these days. So just creating, having that mindset of gratitude helps me a lot.

It sets the pace for the day. After that, I create an intention for that day and mostly my intention looks like, because I cannot predict what's going to happen in my day, this will be a great day!

And I'll be able to have everything that comes along my way. And so I don't wait to react to what is happening in the day. I lead the days. I decide how my day is going to unfold within the tools that I can control.

And that is how I think about situations, how i feel about situation and what I do in those situations. The situations are beyond my control. Let them come, but I'm ready for them.

So I don't wait to react. I respond, and I create a plan for that. And throughout the day, I am very much in touch with my feelings, with internal state, really.

so I check to see, am I anxious? Am I rushing? am i stopping to live fully? And when I notice that I was rushing, because it happens. Or maybe my nervous system is activated, or I may feel tension.

Like you said, for me, i also carry tension in my shoulders a lot. So sometimes I'm rolling my shoulders just to relax them. So I am noticing how I feel if tension is building up, if stress is build up and I do a regulation in real time and feel better.

I can do this in between my patients when I walk from one room to another because I have my body and mind with me. Right? I could clearly do it just with awareness.

I can work with my body. I notice how I'm feeling before I see my patients. And I want to start with a clear mind. So I treat the patients, I give them all the attention that they deserve.

So at the same time, I'm not, so you notice I am not really looking for, not waiting for stress to come up. I m not looking to manage stress. m looking avoid it.

And when I notice it, i regulate in real time. So I look more to regulate than to, to manag it and then at end of the day, Again, take a moment deliberately.

I deem any stimulations, I sit down quietly. And then again, check in with my state. Reflect on the day and again gratitude. Then sleep comes easy to me.

Previously, i suffered insomnia and I was taking sleeping pills. i was on military and i wasn't on Benadryl and. But nowadays I don't need anything. Okay, I need to fall asleep.

Boom! I'm out. So, and because the nervous system carries everything that we go through the day, the thoughts that you've had through that day. The emotions that do not process in a stressful situation that they encountered.

It gets recorded. That nervous is clear, it's listening all the time, looking out for that danger and it keeps a record of it. in our bodies. So when you check in with your body, you are really checking in to see what has been stored because it's happening beyond our awareness.

And then you regulate and you restore your balance.

Rewiring the Nervous System Through Repetition

Sleep for me is something that really starts at the beginning of the day. Throughout the I'm walking towards the end of a day, so I begin with the ending mind and I sleep very well.

Yeah, incredible. I think I talk about these three different pillars that I came up with to look at health in general. and to help people just live the vibrant life that they want to.

And the first pillar is physical health, and it talks about sleep and move. For sleep, I start there for everyone. Sleep starts with the night before, sleep starts the whole day leading to a good night's sleep.

It's challenging to just crawl into bed. Yeah, hope for good sleep. Everything that happened that day before from when you woke up and how you wake up, and what your habits were in the morning and then that also leads to cravings and a glycemic effect right close to bed and that leads all of these other physiologic factors.

It all culminates right before you fall asleep. So that's probably a practice that could be so helpful for so many people that I don't think a lot of people are utilizing checking in with yourself throughout the day.

Or just that one goal of getting a good night's sleep. I can go a long way. How do you incorporate movement into your life? Yeah, movement is very important and I try to move, of course, I'm moving every day and thank God for that.

So movement it's important too because besides fitness, because we mostly associate movement with fitness with managing weight, losing weight and just keeping fit in general.

But it has another role of communicating to our brain and also regulating our nervous system. When people get stressed, and for example in depression, when people are depressed, they don't want to move.

They don' have the energy to walk. they just want crawl up in bed and stay there. So movement becomes a very important tool to help regulate our emotional states.

And I advise everybody that I come across my patients that by all means keep moving, run if you can, walk if, or crawl if need to. So when you feel depressed and you just want to stay in bed, please crawl out of that bed.

Just that movement alone helps a lot. to tell your nervous system that, yes, we can handle things. We can do this. And I try to engage in certain movements every morning.

The movement that I do every day is not so much for fitness, but it's really to wake up my body. Because I've been sleeping all night and take, for example, the joints.

I need to activate my joints, I have to active my muscles. Sometimes there's stiffness, sometimes the synovium fluid settles according to gravity. So you need to redistribute that synovian fluid around your joints.

So I start with movements that is gentle movement that I combine with breath. And this in itself in that nervous system regulating movement, not so much for fitness, but really to wake up my body, wake the nervous and send those messages to the normal system that yes, we are safe because this is the language of the system.

Am I safe or am I in danger? I am safe, I can do slow movements and breathe deep as I move and that really sets my day. So movement is very important in so many ways.

Beyond just fitness. Yeah. And what about food? How does food play a role in your life or your thoughts about health? Yeah, food is of course is what is the building blocks of our body.

So it's very important the kind of food you eat. Whatever you're eating right now will become a part of you. You're building your body actively and literally actually.

you need a piece of chicken and then next time it becomes your hair. It becomes a peace of your intestines. Becomes a pieces of the skin. it is very imporant to eat healthy.

Eat a balanced diet. eat natural foods. At the same time The way I approach my meal times, it's sacred, right? So I notice I'm building my body at this time.

So, I want to bring the correct emotions to it. And I wanna bring that correct attention to eat. I sit down without distraction, and I don't have any gadgets with me.

In fact, sometimes I ask my family to have quiet meal time so that we all sit at the table and we sit quietly so we can focus on the food. How I give total attention to the food is using my senses because this is how we experience our life.

So I look at that food and take in the colors, the textures, and the shapes and how the different ingredients mix together in that fruit. Then I even listen to it.

I listen my chewing. And I smell the fruit and I take the aromas and deliciousness of that. It gives me full attention. What I've noticed is that this makes digestion more effective.

So food time becomes also another time to regulate my nervous system. So you notice that you can really work with your nervous at every turn of your day.

You know, there are numerous opportunities to just heal your body because literally what we are doing is to heal the body.

Daily Habits: Sleep, Movement, Food, and Relationships

Yeah, moving into the cognitive pillar. So we talked a lot about stress, obviously. What about social connection? How does that play a role into your health or how you view your help?

Yeah, social connections are very important because naturally, as humans, we are social animals, so to speak. Keeping those connections is very difficult because we cannot survive alone.

Social connections and healthy relationships are a part of your well-being, a path of health that does not get addressed often. We really need healthy relationship.

other people help us regulate ourselves. They help regulate our nervous system. And people around us have an effect on us. For example, you can walk into a room and you notice that if there are people who are aggressive in that room, your body reacts.

Even without saying a word, it notices that you feel uncomfortable, right? That is danger right there. Or you may walk in to a home where people are calm and it may feel unsettling, like you just feel at ease.

So healthy relationships are very important in our families or the people around us. And that social connection is very in your health and wellbeing. Yeah.

Amazing. So the last pillar is financial health. I like to bring this to the conversation. But we make stressful decisions based off of financial reasons many times.

You know, health decisions, whether that's movement decisions or lack of movement, decisions are food decisions based off of financial decisions. So is there anything in relation to finances or financial health that you have a message for that?

You think would be helpful to think about? Yes, financial health is important because, you know, it's just part of your life. That financial help is a pillar that is also important for your well-being, like so many other things, right?

But how I view finances for me has changed over time. You know when I was a bit younger or some years back, I used to see financial But that has shifted to more of, you know, are my finances giving me the freedom that I need in my life?

You know? Am I, do I have the time that i need to spend with my family? to spend with my family and the time that I need to take care of myself. And at the same time, can I hold on to what I have?

More than wanting to just gain more, get more. You know, wait for another accomplishment and this and that. Can I focus and be aware of my needs versus my wants?

The needs are the important things that they cannot do without. The wants are mostly influenced by other people, by comparing myself with others. So I want to take that out of the equation and be very pragmatic about my finances.

But mostly, even when we look for financial health, we are looking for freedom. Freedom to do as we please. freedom to have more time in our hands, freedom, to enjoy our lives and to, have good health because we may have the numbers, but not have, good help.

So if my financial, health is contributing to that in a freedom that I'm looking, for then it's doing its job. Yeah. Yeah, you're designing the concept of designing your life, right?

And just being really intentional with what you want that life to look like. Definitely. And then you can use all of these choices and options to design that, that ultimately lead to the life that you want, and to lead happiness.

And then this race to an endless talk, right? An endless idea of more and more, without really understanding why, kind of can fall to wayside. I think we can become a little bit more just in tuned and relaxed.

when it comes to those decisions in particular. That's true. Awareness is key. Because we all have different needs and our situations are all different.

So, you know, we just need to pay attention to our specific needs. Yeah. Thank you so much. This has been so fun, so enlightening. You have also created an app.

Do you want to talk about that a little bit? Yes. Yes, yeah. I created this app, Mind is Medicine, because I noticed that People understand the effect of stress, the effects of trauma on their health, they know that trauma is bad for you.

They know stress is good for your health. So we don't need another, I don´t need to keep repeating the same talk to people. Instead, people need practical tools to handle this stress.

To reduce the stress and to recover and regain their healthy. And that is why I created this platform called MyDismedicine. It is a doctor-created, science-backed platform that acts like a gym for your mind and body.

Like we go to the gym to train our muscles, we can go the the Gym for our mind, and Mind as Medicine app does exactly that.

Financial Health, the Mind Is Medicine App, and Closing Remarks

It offers practices that range from 5 minutes, even 3 minutes 10 minutes 15 minutes that you can fit into your day to take control of your life and create that freedom.

Freedom from being affected by the life challenges that will inevitably come our way, freedom to feel empowered and to utilize the power that is within you.

to handle life and create the life that you want for yourself and to create success that is needed to increase your performance and improve your well-being.

So Midas Medicine is available in the App Store and the Play Store, and it helps you track Any stress levels, any anxiety, it attracts your sleep. And any reactivity, It trains you to respond more with awareness than to react blindly.

Many people have reported very good results. By using it for about even two weeks, people reported 50% reduction in stress, 50 percent reduction anxiety.

Because we have scientific tools to measure these levels in your body. So you can track your progress and see that the app is really helping you and you could try it anytime, anywhere.

Use your mind and body to recover from illnesses and to prevent illnesses too. Amazing. We'll definitely make sure to link that in the show notes so that people can find it easily.

Yes. Thank you so much. This was such a fun conversation. And this was so enlightening and so many things that, that that can think about and incorporate now and even talk to their patients about now.

Yeah. That'd be helpful. Thank you for having me. I really appreciate that. These are important topics that we need to keep creating awareness about so that people can feel empowered.

Absolutely. absolutely. thank you so much. Our goal is to empower you with knowledge to better understand how your daily choices influence your health.

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