Introduction to Trauma and Nutrition

Welcome to this interview on the Biology of Trauma Summit 3.0. We're talking about the trauma disease connection and the path of freedom. And today this talk is going to blow your mind because we're talking about the link between trauma and nutrition and how the foods we eat can be causing a trauma response in our body.

But not only that, how the foods we eat could actually help dampen down our trauma response and help us be more alive, be more present, be more connected.

So how do the foods that we eat actually affect the trauma response in our body and either causing us more trauma? Yes, trauma is not just an event. It can be caused by the foods we eat.

And how can the foods that we eat actually be helping us on our healing journey? Amazing stuff. I'm so excited for this interview. Now we dove into some deep topics here, so there's a few things that I want to cover first that you can get the most out of this interview.

And one would be he talks about the fight or flight response, the adrenal glands, and then the trauma response or the overwhelm and the freeze. And let me show you that difference, because for you to understand what we're talking about in terms of the different foods, this will be important.

So we have three states of the autonomic nervous system parasympathetic or the ventral vagal. So this is your social engagement. And then we have the stress response up here, and this is where you have adrenaline being released.

You then have a wave of cortisol that follows that adrenaline. This is the very restless, activated danger or threat mode and this is the stress response.

This is not the trauma response, because down here at the very bottom is the trauma response. I put this at the bottom because this is the lowest energy level on a biochemical level in your cells, your metabolism will be shut down.

So it does not matter how much you try to lose weight, your metabolism is shut down because your nervous system is shutting it down. And so here you will feel the exhaustion, you will feel the heaviness, the depression, you will feel disconnected.

And so when he talks about the freeze or being overwhelmed or the trauma response, this is what he's talking about. When he's talking about the adrenal glands and the stress, the fight flight.

He's talking about this state up here, if you'd like more information on that. If that's not something that you are clear on, then you can go to my website trauma human accelerated dot com and there on the home page you will see my guide for the essential sequence and it maps out these three states.

And then of course what you need to do, the order of things, the essential, the essential sequence for then addressing if you find yourself experiencing this overwhelm and trauma response.

Now the next thing that he talked about, which I think is so cool, because this is again, something that shows me that that Luis and I, our work are so aligned.

Trauma States and Healing Framework

He talks about three different aspects for a healing journey, and that's exactly what we teach here in the biology of

Trauma. Those three aspects in case you missed it during the interview, those three aspects are these.

The body refers to somatic work in acting with our body in a physical way. Like not just in our head way, but we need to actually connect with our body and feel the different sensations in our body.

That's called somatic work. And then we talk about parts work. And in this interview we will talk about bypassing parts like using caffeine to bypass a part.

And so that is the thoughts and beliefs. That is parts work also known as internal family systems and that is one of the three essential elements to the healing journey.

Meaning if you want to have the most healing potential, you need to be incorporating all three of these elements and then the biology work. And in this interview, of course, we are bringing in nutrition as that biological piece.

And in the other interviews on this summit, you'll be hearing other aspects of the biology piece. Now, somatic work is where I start every one. There's a reason for that.

I'll be doing a masterclass at the end of this summit to teach you on that. But that somatic work is where I lead people through the 21 day journey because that is the starting place to lay the foundation for being able to do these other pieces and continue to do more somatic work.

But there are your three elements to healing. Now to join me for this conversation on trauma and nutrition is my good friend and colleague Luis Mojica He is a trained somatic therapist, a Whole Foods nutritionist and founder of Holistic Life Navigation.

He teaches people all over the world how to heal trauma by listening and relating to the body. Relationship is a big word for him. His teachings include the nutrition, self inquiry and somatic experiencing as tools to develop safety within the body.

And with that, let's jump in. Luis, I absolutely love talking to you about this topic, so let's jump right in and tell us what is the link between trauma and nutrition, because that is not a link that most people have in their minds.

No, it's not. It's also I love speaking with you about it. You're like the only person I know besides me talks about it. I think it's amazing with trauma.

Nutrition is to first understand that when we're talking about trauma, we're not talking about events. We're talking about what the body does with event and what the body responds to.

The event or the response to the event in the body is a biological response. It involves your hormones, it involves your glands, your stomach, inflammation, blood pressure, all that is affected within minutes when you're having a trauma response.

So that immediately correlates or instantly correlates to nutrition because nutrition is also a biological event. So the food that we eat, either nurses, the adrenal glands, nurses, the nervous system calms down the body.

So I like to call it like a balancing or a nourishing food that can downregulate through through nourishment, essentially through balancing blood sugar levels.

So the the connection is purely biochemical and biological. They literally both affect the body in different ways. They're both relational experiences, in my opinion.

And when we've when we've talked about trauma and the trauma response with other talks on the summit, it really has come down to what is happening on a cellular level.

So what is happening on a biochemical level? Yes, we experience it on an emotional level or sometimes we can

notice it on a behavioral level where we are overreacting or under reacting to a present day circumstance.

But all of that is really just a reflection of what's happening on a biochemical level, on a cellular level, and whether that cell is closing in, shutting down or attacking or if it's in an open and receptive and healthy state.

So I love that you are tying in that nutrition is the same thing. Nutrition and trauma are both a biological process within the body. I'm curious, how did you come to this realization?

Luisu2019s Personal Discovery

What happened in your life that you were realizing, oh, wait a second, the foods that I'm eating are are changing my biological and emotional responses. Hmm.

It was first by accident, so it started in my own personal experience. A trauma actually started it. So my fiancee, I was 16. I had a fiancee that just told you also where I was, wasn't.

But my fiance at the time, who was also my best friend, her mother and her were watching television. Her mother just died in front of her, just passed out and had a heart attack.

And it was a huge rupture. And all of our lives, we were all surprised. We were shocked. We didn't know why or what or how to deal with this. And the experience inspired my mother to start changing her lifestyle.

And she bought a juicer and I started drinking green juices and I was 16 and vegetable juices. And the acne I had on my skin just started going away. Like, that's weird.

And so I started getting interested in how can food again? I see it as a relationship. How does food connect to my body, how's my body relate to the food I put into it?

And as I was doing that initially, what was interesting, I was looking back, I was going through a detox, I was actually experiencing more anxiety than I ever had.

So I already had PTSD and anxiety, insomnia. And then when I was eating more, quote, like cleaner and detoxing, I was having more anxiety. And I'm like, why?

I'm healthier, my blood is better than it's ever been. Why am I so anxious? And then I got into macrobiotics and I learned about balancing foods, specifically being based foods, and I started noticing I was a cigaret smoker.

I started noticing I didn't crave cigarets. I was sleeping really well. My insomnia had gone away. My anxiety was like completely dissipated. I had never gone to therapy.

This just food like what? Why is this happening? So I studied nutrition. I started practicing as a nutritionist for many years in private practice, just learning really how food affects the adrenal glands and how different types of foods especially affect the blood sugar levels and how that affects the adrenal glands.

And the more I would learn this, the more I discovered every time there's like a sudden shift, some metabolic process or some shift in the body, adrenal glands light up, they go to work.

And so the body is having this literally like a trauma response to the foods you're eating or are not eating to your blood sugar crashing. It was it blew my mind.

And then I just happened to start studying trauma because again, I had another PTSD experience. And then all these memories have flooded. I had forgotten about. I didn't know how to work with them.

So I got into the field of somatic by working with the somatic therapist and getting so much healing. And I put two and two together and realized, well, if trauma is in the body and nutrition affects the adrenals, which are the seat of

your trauma response, we can literally turn trauma responses down based on what you're eating or not.

Eating might drop right there. You can actually turn down the trauma response happening in your body with your diet, with what you're eating. Precisely. That's right.

And I think the main thing that inspired me to understand that was one week I was in my private practice and so many people when I was in practice and I was so burnt out, but I couldn't stop helping people.

And this one day in the same day at three separate clients who didn't know each other, all stop eating chocolate for a week. And they all came back and said, I couldn't I couldn't stop being the chocolate Louise.

I said, Why? And they said, If I stop eating the chocolate, I'll have to leave my husband. These are three different people on the same day. And I was like, What?

And so I started getting really curious, like, what's this correlation between how the food, not just we say comfort food cognitively, but what's the biology like in these foods that would help you bypass your boundary of not wanting to be with this person anymore?

And that really led me on to this discovery of these like, activating, balancing depressing foods. Yeah. That's huge. Louis Huge. Because they were using chocolate in order to physically stay in a place, a relationship in which their body did not feel safe.

That's right. That's right. And specifically, chocolate, the way the way we would use coffee to get through a work day work that we don't want to do it all energy to do.

Right. It helps us bypass our capacity for something and in this case, these marriages weren't working for them anymore and their body knew that. But to stop the the substances that was activating them, brought them into their bodies so much more and they couldn't handle what was sitting in there.

Food as a Trauma Response

And that's what led me to trauma work, because I noticed while people are releasing their comfort foods, they're going to be experiencing the sensations of their unprocessed trauma.

And I have to learn how to teach people how to walk through that without relying on foods to suppress it. So is this the same thing that happens if people go on a diet where they're starting to eat less just because they're watching their calories or maybe they're on a ketogenic diet and so they're eating less volume of foods.

Is that the same sort of thing that can happen where all of a sudden they're feeling more of their body? And it's the anxiety, it's the emotions that can really trip them up.

Oh, my goodness. There's so much to that question. And. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. I, I can think of so many situations where a certain diet will cause someone to rapidly lose weight.

And in that increase of metabolic rate, there's an increase in adrenaline production. And so every time you're increasing your adrenals or your adrenaline production, you're like I said earlier, you're turning on fight or flight.

Now, if you're already living in a state of of storage, trauma and PTSD and chronic stress, as you know, your fighter flights already on your adrenals are already working overtime.

So a little nudge is like a scream at that point. So it just keeps the person essentially over their boiling point, right, when it comes to anxiety and stress management.

But I've also seen I remember when clients would start losing weight. I remember this one particular client. Every time a pound would come off, a memory was resurfaced and it was so sophisticated to watch this body really

methodically cover itself so it could have something between it and the world around it.

And as they were losing that these felt senses of pain emerged and they had to work with those before they could even handle losing anymore. So there's so there's the nutritional level about how it affects your blood sugar, adrenals.

Then there's like the physical and metaphysical level. What happens when our bodies start changing? I can see why you learned somatic therapy. That's right. That's right.

You needed tools to help them with what was surfacing. I really did. I felt very alone. I didn't know what to do. Besides tell them what to eat. But hello only gets you so far we have trauma in your body and doesn't feel safe.

Well, in just of what we know of the body's survival responses, whether it's the fight or flight or it's that freeze in dorsal, it's more powerful than our logical brain.

And so we can tell ourselves, okay, I'm never going to eat this again. I'm never going to eat this chocolate again. I'm never going to do this. I'm never going to do that.

But then when those emotions hit, it feels like a survival thing. And there's nothing that you're really going to be able to do, sort of chaining yourself up to something, perhaps, but even then, like your body might just break free because it it feels like it needs that in order to survive.

So that's how I have to highlight the word survive, because that's that's what's so important here. Like you're saying, when, when you are stressed emotionally, your body doesn't care if stress is a threat response and overwhelm and irritation.

It doesn't care. It doesn't really decipher. It's the same hormonal response like that actual real time threat or trauma would be. And this is why food is so interesting.

If we think about the inherent traumatic experience of birth, right? That good or bad, just inherently traumatic, overwhelming, lots of energy, that baby's body being squeezed and pressured and pushed and going from this warm, dark place where you're breathing underwater to this bright air filled place and you're breathing into your lungs a kind of sharp, imagined, sharp air.

The first thing that tells you you're survived is milk or formula. It's immediately we are we are gifted this sensational experience of food upon arrival.

So survival is the over coupling there. It's not just on an emotional level, it's on a biological level where the cells actually say, I can live another day because I have glucose.

So it's down to a biochemistry in our in our even our ancient nature. In addition to the emotional management the food gives to. You know, when I was last with Dr.

Steve Porges, he was talking about how fatty foods seemed to help people calm down. So I asked him, I'm like, what's what's the mechanism behind that, do you think?

And he thought it had something to do with the effect on the Chris and it closing down. And so it just hitting our system slower than that fast shift in our blood sugar levels, for example, that you were talking about with other foods, what are the foods that you've noticed that have that effect of calming down and what might be the mechanism behind that?

So there's two places here. So there's nutrition. And when I hear fat, I think nutrient dense, right? There's like nutrient dense fats. So we could see like really high quality salmon or we could say like amazing almond butter, you know, like there's these high quality fats.

That's one thing because it's so nutrient dense. It's, like you said, very slow.

Processed Foods, Bingeing, and Exhaustion

The release is very slow. That stabilizes blood sugar. And if blood sugar is stabilized, the adrenals don't have to get gone. The pancreas doesn't have to work overtime with insulin.

The thyroid is balanced. The systems that are really in place to keep us alive are like, Oh, I can relax. Everything's going good. When we talk about processed foods, foods that are, we think like rich, like fried foods like that kind of fat.

Those are what I call the depressants because they take so much energy for the liver to process these foods that they exhaust the body and they simulate this this feeling, this felt sense of being relaxed when really the body is being repressed.

So you have this, okay, let's think of the biochemistry of adrenaline for a moment. It's a vasoconstrictor, right? So it constricts the blood vessels to push blood pressure up.

And that's why you feel that rising feeling when you have an adrenal response. So when you start taking in really rich, overwhelmingly rich foods, fried foods, processed foods, even excess sugars and baked goods and such.

Your liver will get so exhausted having to process them that that rise starts coming down because you're burning out your body, essentially. So there's this temporary relief from that.

Adrenal has stayed until it's metabolized. And then you go right back to the adrenal state. And this is the mechanism of binge eating, which as well I was in for 15 years.

You overeat, it temporarily soothes and exhausts you. You have this felt sense of what we think of peace or comfort. And then once it metabolizes, you're right back there again.

That was my story as well. And this is making so much sense because I'm going going back into what I was doing at that time, I noticed that I would eat the highly processed foods that you're talking about, and I would do that in order to even be able to fall asleep.

That's right. Because otherwise my body just wasn't able to calm itself down. I was still wired from my day and everything that I needed to get done. And so here I was during the day doing things like caffeine or stress in order to keep me going.

And then in the evening, I would need to eat these highly processed foods to calm down, to just be able to fall asleep. But then I'd wake up in the middle and I guess what?

Feeling anxious. That's right. That's right. Because the anxiety, never the stress hormones never metabolized. They were just temporarily suppressed. And the picture you painted is exactly what I refer to as salt regulation, where there's this alchemy and it's highly unconscious.

By the way, our cravings, you know, they dictate it, but we're not consciously, biochemically understanding what's happening. So it helps us to even de-stigmatize the guilt and the shame that comes with overeating under eating, caffeinated or whatever it is, it's biochemical, it's implicit is something you don't have to think about it.

The body's just doing it. And part of it is you wake up, like you said, more anxiety, or you wake up in the morning exhausted from all the process you had to do was sleeping because you had to overeat to fall asleep.

So then you have to stimulate. So that's the skipping of meals that's having excess sugar, especially liquid sugars, caffeinated drinks, caffeinated foods that's amping up your adrenals just to get you through the day so that again, you get home, you're still and any need some to depress you to come back down.

So there's not really a balance. There's like a simulation that feels like homeostasis, but you're not really getting that nourishment to your to your nervous system.

You're burning it out and unconsciously. And what is the toll of that on our body when we do that for years? Oh, my goodness. I mean, I truly, truly believe that is in itself a traumatic experience.

Right? Like especially with the way you teach and understand trauma, you are traumatizing. And I don't even say you are because it's so unconscious. But that nervous system is becoming traumatized from constantly amping up, then constantly being exhausted, depressed.

And to me the real traumatic experience, which it gets kind of existential and philosophical, the relationship to self is getting further and further away because I don't know how to be with that anxiety at night.

I have to eat something. I don't know how to be with the exhaustion or the tenderness in the day. I have to drink caffeine or eat sugar so these foods become addictive substances that really help us feel a sense of safety because we don't know how to feel it with ourselves.

And that's the more pervasive situation, because once people do this work and they understand, okay, it's not my fault, my body's actually really intelligent.

It's putting all these things together for me. And they start getting in a collaborative relationship. They they don't just lose the shame or the guilt, but they notice on having that coffee to amp up when I go home, I'm going to relate to the part I bypassed with the copy.

So to me, even more than the foods itself, it's a loss of self relationship from from managing with foods for decades. That's, that's even more traumatic than the biology from the foods, which is also traumatic.

But yeah, so the result is a lot, a lot of trauma, stress response, adrenal fatigue, insomnia, illness, because you're getting so much inflammation from this excessive drink adrenaline, especially in the GI tract, so much inflammation.

Now there's an over coupling that you talk about between food and security. Does this have anything to do with that? Everything. So so there's these two parts.

So like I was saying earlier, there's that biological survival experience which literally says, if I eat, I get to survive another day that's real, has nothing to do with our emotion.

That's the biology that's present, though. That's part of it. The second is when we're children, we're experiencing chronic stress or trauma. We lack agency to change that.

Most kids don't go into fight or flight response. It goes in. They're going to freeze, they're going to falling. And in that freeze and falling, we usually manage with food.

Food is the one tool you have as a child as you're especially when your nervous system is developing and you're experiencing developmental stress or trauma.

Food, Security, and Predictability

Food is like this accessible tool to help quiet that down or effect change so we can quiet it down or we can activate it up and associate. But either way, it's an amazing tool to change the biology I find in myself and the people I've worked with that latter experience of again, subconsciously using foods to affect the biology.

That's really where the over coupling around security comes in because you learn, I eat that, I feel this, it's predictable. I know what I'm getting into.

And anyone that's been through trauma wants predictable even more than comfortable. We want predictable

because something you can orient to and trust.

And so I find that over coupling develops from years most of us decades of relying on the predictable response of a certain food or a habit from foods.

Oh, that is so true, because that predictability gives us a sense of safety, which is weird to think of. But if you know, and we see this in many other areas of life where someone will stay in a relationship that is very toxic, and yet because it's predictable for them, it is safer than the big unknown of leaving and actually having to be with themselves.

Yes, alone. Does everything you just said about relationship. We can replace that with food and it's the exact same. It's exact same. We can be in a toxic relationship with food because we don't know how to be with ourselves.

Now, you started this conversation around talking about the relationship that our body has with food and that it really is both ways where it's the the food can connect with my body and my body can connect with the food.

Tell us about that body being able to connect. There's so much there. So I'll pluck one, one piece of many as my friend right now. You know, when I say relationship to food, I really want to first put food in the category of a being, not a thing, because we know food is alive.

You know, food, whether it's dead on our plate or live like a salad or something, it's alive. It once had life. It has survival mechanisms. It gives birth, it creates babies.

You know, it's it's a being. And so the body relates to that being very intimately. I mean, it's the most intimate relationship I can think of where you take something into your body and you become it, it builds you.

I mean, it's incredible. So when I look at the land or you imagine looking at a farm, you know, or you imagine looking at fish swimming in a creek, you know, wherever you are, whatever you eat, that relationship to the land, especially the one you live by, it informs your actual body's processes.

I mean, down to the amount of vitamin D you can take in because the amount of sun took it. I mean, it's that intimate. So body for me and food are highly relational in terms of body being to the food being and then the digestion.

The eating is like the dance of the relationship and the body making sense of all this information that we call nutrients and enzymes and such. It's making sense of all this information of where do I put it, how is it going to benefit me?

I eat a carrots and the beat and the beta carotene goes to my gut and starts repairing my epithelial cells. I mean, it's incredible the amount of things the body does with food without us even knowing or understanding.

It's these two beings connecting. So I see them and I really it's a very spiritual way, but it's also truly biological as well. Wow. So then as we look at where would a person or where could a person start with changing anything about the toxic relationship that they've had with food so far?

They're listening to this. They're realizing, oh, yeah, that this is me. The relationship that I've had with food has not been one that's nurturing has not been one that is that I would want to have in terms of building my cellular processes.

But I don't even know where to start. I hear Louise talking makes sense, but my goodness, where do where would I even start? Well, I'm having the same conundrum as you ask me.

So much information, you know, one of the best places to start and this is going to be somatic and Hattie, I'm going to try to keep it like balance so we can all make sense of it together to start learning the felt experience, like the sensational experience, is the food connecting me to myself, or is it helping to disconnect me from an experience if

we can, and most people listening to this will even know it without even feeling it.

Some will feel what I'm saying, some will just kind of know it. But we just kind of if everyone could try this, you just think of a food right now that you love.

Think of a food you're craving right now. It could be anything. And just notice how your body feels when you think of the craving. Some people will notice attention.

Some people notice a softening. People will notice like, Oh, I can relax now.

Rebuilding Relationship with Food

This is the part of you that's reaching out to this food. And so it's less about eat this, eat this, eat this. Even though I go into a lot specific things you can eat that will greatly change your adrenaline levels and your neurotransmitter is in your gut and everything, your liver and everything.

But the first step is really just the inquiry around the thing I'm sitting down to eat right now is that nourishing my me is a nursing my ability to connect with myself or is it disconnecting me from some kind of pain in myself or my environment?

If you start there, you just get to know your food more and the intention behind it, and then you can start identifying which foods leave you feeling more connected and which leaves you feeling more numb or dissociate it.

And then you kind of just you can intuitively move from there. So those years that I would have a food coma after I binged, that wasn't that wasn't helpful to the connection.

That's right. That's right. It's funny you said that because I was speaking to somebody about this through the day, the semiotics of bingeing. And when you become more embodied, the more sensational you can binge.

It doesn't feel good. You have to dissociate about bingeing to be able to do it. So yeah, the food coma comes from the dissociative overeating to binge and then the subsequent exhaustion, fatigue, numbness, brain fog, everything that comes from the amount of energy thwarted from everything else to digest that food.

That's the mechanism, the body once when it can't handle what is feeling. So those listening, if you identify with that, that's a perfect example, something that's not connecting you to yourself, soothing you.

Whereas if it's done, you have a bowl of beans, a piece of salmon, steamed broccoli, and you eat that. You're going to feel this feeling of, well, I'm here, I'm so here.

I'm not and I'm not far away. I'm not numb, I'm present, and that connects you to yourself. That's two examples of foods. There is a specific moment in time.

Louise When I was shifting out of this binge eating pattern that I had had for decades, I was have been since childhood, I didn't know anything different.

Then I started doing somatic work and just like you said, I lost my ability. That's right. It started to become more uncomfortable to binge eat. And I was fascinated by this.

And then one day it happened. I got you know, I had emotions, feelings, and it felt too big. And I wanted to go right back to where I had always predictably been able to go to feel better, meaning to feel numb.

And so I did. I went back to my binge eating and I ate the foods that I'd always been able to predictably eat in order to have that numb feeling. And like, it just it wasn't there.

Like, it felt so uncomfortable to be in that place of feeling numb and disconnected. And I had this thought that also

was a body sensation at that time, which was like I felt like I was losing a friend.

Mm hmm. Like I felt like this. This thing, this place that had always been there for me. No longer existed. It was no longer there. I didn't have that as my security blanket, that when things got too hard, I could I could just run back there.

It's like now, like you've crossed that bridge and that that is no longer there for you. So that for me opened up this like, well, I guess I can only move forward now.

I can go back and really help me make tremendous forward movement in my somatic work. But does that happen for other people that you've worked with. All the time?

I will always say to people and I say the same thing the people that work with me who have addictions, it's not about willpower. It's about becoming obsolete and the mechanism becomes obsolete, just like you said, because you can feel, you can feel again.

And when you can feel this is what's so amazing about Somatic. When I can feel my body and my conscious mind, my witness can connect to that feeling that is inherently coagulating.

It's like I'm co-writing them with myself. We call it self regulation. So what the food or the drug or whatever would simulate doing actually happens in me.

Something shifts and metabolize and transform PMS when that state is occurring, even while bingeing, like unconsciously with my body while bingeing, I don't need the bingeing because I don't have to affect as much change because my biochemistry is much more balanced, because I'm with my body.

And that's why relationship is such an important word to me. It's relationship to the self and body relationship from body to food, relationship from food to lands.

All these relationships and how we connect with them, dominate them, dissociated from them is everything and navigating, you know, this connection between trauma, healing and nutrition.

Oh, my goodness. What an interview I got. So much out of that conversation. I know that you did. And so I just want to be encouraging you that there is so much that you can do.

Right? These tools are meant to share the hope and inspire you of what is possible. There is so much that is possible no matter how many other things you have tried in the past, there is more that is possible for you to try and to experience a greater degree of healing in your life.

If you would like to have all of these recordings that you can revisit them at any time and however many times you want to remember that you can purchase them and have that peace of mind that you are resourced with everything that you need.

And with that, I am your host for this summit on the biology of trauma, the trauma disease connection. And I look forward to seeing you on the next interview.