Introduction to Limbic Retraining

Welcome back to our Reversing Mast Cell Activation Syndrome and Histamine Intolerance Summit. I'm your host, Dr. Meg Mill. And today I'm joined by my esteemed colleague Ashok Gupta.

Ashok is an internationally renowned Speaker, Filmmaker & Health Practitioner who has dedicated his life to supporting people through chronic illness and achieving their potential.

He's founded the Gupta Program, which is a neuroplasticity “limbic retraining” recovery program and app. And I'm so excited to share this with you today because I've said over and over again how limbic retraining, nervous system rewiring are both very important parts of our healing journey.

They need to be done concurrently with the testing and the supplements and the lifestyle and all of those other things. While we're working on those, really making sure that you are also feeling safe, that you're able to bring yourself back into the parasympathetic nervous system.

All of those things are also another key component to healing. So I'm so excited to get into this with Ashok today. Thank you so much for being here. Yes, thank you so much, Meg.

I'm delighted to be here with you. Well, we are going to get into all things limbic system and nervous system rewiring. This is just such a huge piece of the puzzle for really getting the mast cells to calm down.

And it's something that we need to work on really with everyone in this boat. So I can't wait to dive into this information with you today. Before we get into the good stuff, can you just give us a little bit about your personal journey and how you really got to where you are today?

Yes. And, you know, many of us have come into this arena because we've been through our own challenges, our own journey. So my journey started in the mid-nineties, when a lot of these diseases weren't even necessarily recognized or understood.

And I was a young man. I was studying as an undergrad at Cambridge University, and I had a virus as my second the end of my second year, I was 20, 21 and didn't think much of it.

Ashok Guptau2019s Personal Healing Journey

The virus went, but it left a legacy which was continued exhaustion, continued fatigue, and I was diagnosed with this thing called chronic fatigue syndrome, or ME myalgic encephalomyelitis.

I can never say it, but yes, ME and, you know, I was like, what is this thing? And doctors would tell me, we don't know what causes it. We don't have any treatments for it.

There's nothing we can do for you. Maybe we'll have it for the rest of your life. And for me, as a young man, that was almost like a death sentence. And what are you saying? What are you telling me?

And that started my lifelong quest to try and understand these types of diseases. And in that time, I also had a lot of sensitivity, these analogies which I just couldn't understand.

And so that started a journey. And I met, you know, hundreds of people with these conditions. And I made a contract with universal. I said, if I can just get myself a little better, maybe moderately better, maybe fully better, I will dedicate the rest of my life to helping others with this disease, because there are so many millions around the world who are suffering and, they don't have many courses of action.

And so I researched brain neurology, physiology, and I should retrain my brain and my own kind of ad hoc way, got myself 100% better and then opened a clinic to help treat others.

And, as you know, published medical trials on this as well. So yeah, that's been my journey. Well, that I that's a wonderful story. And I think so many of us have those personal stories that really develop that passion for healing and why we do what we do.

So I'd love to start with really an explanation of what the limbic system is. Yeah. So the limbic system of our brain is what they call the mammalian brain.

So most mammals, if not all mammals, have this limbic system. And the limbic system incorporates a number of different brain structures. It's kind of in the center of our brain.

And the most important are the ones in relation to emotional responses. And there's a brain structure within the limbic system called the amygdala. And we've got two of them.

I think there is actually the Latin word for almond. And they sit behind our eyes, and they're essentially the parts of our brain that deal with our fight or flight response or our threat detection, fear response, but also lots of emotions of shame, anger, guilt.

They're all often processed in time inside of the amygdala. And there are other structures like the hippocampus. So the hippocampus is our short term memory or short term memory retrieval systems.

And there's also the thalamus. The thalamus is the part of the brain that, gathers all the sensory data from all our senses and gathers it together for our brain to process.

So these are a few structures of the limbic system and the limbic system. Originally used to be related very much to emotional reactions like PTSD or various fight or flight responses.

And that's because medicine splits everything up into separate arenas. So it says, okay, this is the psychology department.

What the Limbic System Does

Go over there in the hospital. This is the emergency department. Go over to the hip there. They're completely separate. Those guys don't talk to each other, but the brain doesn't function like that.

The brain essentially says, what do I need to do in that limbic system to ensure survival? Because survival is my number one priority. So whether it's an emotional threat, a biological threat, a toxic threat, the brain treats it an exactly the same way and uses the limbic system, part of the brain to create appropriate responses.

So that's the limbic part. But there's another brain structure called the insula, which sits between the limbic system and the cortex. And in the modern day, you know, so this into the past, the brain is known to gather data from our body, discover what we are reacting to, what the state of the body is, and create the appropriate responses.

So that's immune responses and autonomic responses. And although this area has been called limbic retraining, actually the incident doesn't sit in the limbic system.

So it's it's unfortunate that limbic retraining has become the kind of colloquialism around this. But actually, I believe we are retraining our amygdala and also the insula part of the brain.

So I call it amygdala and insula retraining. Okay. So that but so that's really neat. So I like all of the dynamics and the fit the a structure of it.

So can we talk a little bit about how our immune system gets dysregulated. The connection there where we start to

see this this regulated immune system with that brain connection.

Yeah, absolutely. So I think, what I'd love to do is kind of give you this overall hypothesis about, well, what causes all these types of conditions, what causes mast cell activation and the similar crossover conditions that people experience.

So the way I look at this is when we first get some kind of exposure, and let's say this is an exposure to mold. Yeah. Because many people get mast cell activation after mold exposure, a toxic exposure or it just seems to just creep up on people.

your body is always designed to find the route to survival and homeostasis because we want to procreate, pass on our genes the next generation. That is our priority.

And suddenly when we have an insult. So we call these things insults, essentially mold or a virus or a bacterial infection. The brain thinks that any of these could be life threatening and could threaten survival.

So it creates a nervous system response and a immunological response. So our immune system gets activated. And what happens is when our system gets activated, it is to fight off that threat.

Once it's fought off, our system goes back to balance and switches off. But imagine if our bodies are weaker than normal. If they're weaker, then that survival strategy starts over.

Responding and it thinks, well, the system's weak. We need to over respond to that virus or bacteria or mold or Lyme or whatever it is, in order to make sure that we fought this off.

And the analogy I'd like to give you, Meg, is, I don't know. Are you a fan of Game of Thrones, by any chance? Now? Yes, I am they. You are a fan. Okay. Good.

That beautiful, sculpture behind you looks like it has something from Game of Thrones. Yeah. That's true. and if you're not, if people aren't, they can imagine a fairy tale.

So imagine you are Queen Meg. It's got a nice ring to it. So you're Queen Meg, and you're queen of your castle. And your kingdom. So that represents your body.

So the kingdom is your body, and you have an army, which is your nervous system, and you have a navy, which is your immune system.

How Immune Dysregulation and Mast Cell Activation Begin

And they defend the kingdom against threats. And imagine an incoming army comes over the hill. Your army and navy are activated. They fight off this incoming invader and the kingdom is safe.

But now imagine that there's a drought in the kingdom. Yeah. Now that means the kingdom is weaker, the army is weaker. The navy is weaker. In comes an incoming threat.

The virus, the mold, the bacterial infection. Now, the Army and Navy have to work really hard because they are weak. So they are fighting off this invader and they just about managed to fight off the invader.

But they come to you, Queen Meg, and they say, Queen Meg. We only just managed to fight them off. We need all the resources of the kingdom because we don't know if another invade is going to come tomorrow.

Or maybe the current invaders are still here. So then you think, well, that's logical. So you give them all the wheat and the corn and the metal. Everything gets funneled to the army and Navy so they can fight valiantly and protect your kingdom.

So now the kingdom is getting weaker because all the scarce resources are going to the army and navy, and the army and Navy are now trigger happy. So before if a army came over, the hill will have to fight off their will, fire off their weapons of war.

But now, even if one man on a horse comes over the hill, they think, oh, that could be dangerous. Quick, fire off the weapons! And that gives us a clue to mast cell activation, which is those mast cells start becoming trigger happy.

They start firing off, in what we call, differential activation as a complicated neurological way. But essentially what it basically means is before 100% exposure created 100% reaction, but now 5% exposure creates 100% reaction because the brain is now conditioned and trained to respond.

So now your system is dysregulated because any little thing that comes over the hill, your mass cells start activating. You start getting those reactions, you start feeling fatigue and some of those arrows start falling back into the kingdom.

So we start creating internal inflammation, which affects our own bodies and our own cells, which creates even more exhaustion. And all the other symptoms that come with these types of chronic illnesses.

And that also allows opportunistic infections to flourish. So the analogy there is normally you have a secret service that gets rid of any spies inside the kingdom, but that's underfunded now.

So now opportunistic viruses, opportunistic infections, excessive mold, excessive toxicity, excessive metals, they can all flourish in the kingdom because there's not enough resources to fight them off, because everything's been funneled to the Army and Navy to defend the body.

And you can see how the whole system becomes massively dysregulated. And the purpose of our brain retraining is to say when those, generals come to that weekly meeting with Queen Meg, they say, look, we need all the resources to keep firing off our weapons.

Queen Meg says, thank you for the great work you've done, but the war is over. You can stand down. You're defending the body of the kingdom unnecessarily.

The threat is over. You become traumatized. I get it, and but we are safe. And in doing so, the whole activation calms down. The system come back to balance the energy returns the body because we are no longer excessively fighting a war that no longer exists.

I love that analogy, especially because of the Queen Meg part right? That was great. It's always yeah, but yeah, that's a great way to describe it because we can see all of those things happening.

But that was a very easy picture to to show of all the things going on. And that is, you know, it's it's this revolving door, these over sensitized, you know, to anything in your environment.

And then you have these really exaggerated reactions. And so we need to be doing that calming of the brain. At the same time, while we're trying to treat all the invaders.

So I love the way you describe that. So where let's just talk then a little bit about where we start. Yeah. Well we always start with this point of it's complementary to what people are already doing.

So people often are saying you know great practitioners like yourself. They're saying nutritionist naturopaths, integrative functional medicine doctors who are often prescribing medications or supplements or even lifestyle changes.

And all of those things are great and beneficial. And we find that additionally, what's really powerful is to do this brain retraining. And so people want to start in the path of brain retraining.

The first important thing is, do people feel that they understand this explanation and they are ready for this? Because sometimes if we get fixed in the pure medical model of how things are occurring, we don't open ourselves up to new possibilities and the way I look at it is with all of these different diseases, you know, they've been around for 20, 30, 40 years, and yet there hasn't been any consistent treatment that's been shown to be to work for everybody or every inconsistent diagnostic criteria.

Say, okay, this is definitely what you know, this is. And that's because each patient is unique and their collection of symptoms is unique. But ultimately we bring the root causes upstream.

Right. So most of us are trying to treat this downstream. And that's fine and that's good. But it's also useful to get to what is the root cause. Why is my body responding and reacting like this.

Why Brain Retraining Must Be Complementary

And as we say, this is an evolutionary, biological, advantageous protective mechanism. Yeah. The problem is it doesn't make us feel good. Right. And then becomes a problem in and of itself, because the brain cares more about your survival than it does your wellness.

That's the that's the key here. So really people have to kind of not have to feel that they understand this kind of way of looking at things and to let go of just purely looking at it from a medical model.

So actually my brain could be involved. This could be a software problem rather than a hardware. And once people acknowledge that, then they can come to our program and work side by side with other treatments that we're having and then really go for the brain retraining aspect.

And it's delivered is online because we know lots of patients can't travel and they're often, you know, immuno compromised. And therefore it's delivered as videos and audios, online, weekly webinars.

And then something that's been a game changer is we have daily retraining sessions on zoom with our practitioners. We have about 2 to 300 people a day coming online.

And that gives people a sense of community, a sense of accountability for retraining. And it's been a game changer for so many of our patients. Yeah. And you said that so many good things there.

But one of the things you said is people have to be ready. You have to be ready to acknowledge this. And so I find even that sometimes when I'm working with people and you're we're talking about, you know, doing all the testing and all the supplements and the lifestyle and all of that, sometimes we actually, I always like to do this kind of work alongside of all of that, because I think that that is a key to really getting, like you're saying, the lasting healing.

And sometimes we even have to do it first because you need to be able to change that mindset, change that. Even the belief of being able. We could talk a little bit about that.

The belief of being able to heal because you feel like your body's against you. You feel like there's nothing you can do. You've been having this for so long.

You have to believe that it's possible. Yes. And that belief comes from understanding the difference between the downstream and the upstream. Because so many patients they'll say a medical doctor and the medical doctor will point out look we've got this abnormality, this abnormality.

Then I might get to an exam a natural path nutritionist. And they'll say, we've done these tests and these are the abnormalities that we got. And it can then create a conditioning in someone's brain that, oh, no, until I fix all of these markers, I can't get well.

Right. And the way I described to patients is, imagine you're standing on a bridge and you're looking down on the river and suddenly see someone drowning in the river.

So you jump into the river and you save that person, and you look in the river and there's another person in the river. So you jump in the river and you save them, and there's another person.

There's another person. So you set up a rescue center to save people from drowning in the river, which is all well and good. Let's do that. But nobody's asking the question, who's throwing these people in the river in the first place?

Upstream, we've got to walk up the river and get to the source of what is going on. Otherwise, we're just constantly trying to save people, and that's the difference.

So it's saying, of course we need to save people who are already in the river. But at the same time, let's go upstream and save them. And when people understand that, then they can be more committed to saying, I want to treat the root cause of this as well as, you know, the symptoms.

And of course, lots of great work can actually just work on the downstream symptoms and heal and cure people. And that's great. But many people tell me and many practitioners tell me, that their patients, as soon as they have a really difficult time in their life or something really stressful, when all the symptoms come back again, and then you have to work piecemeal, we're trying to once again work through that and and try to change things.

And so important part of our program is actually encouraging people to be able to get well but stay well. They actually understand their stresses and their triggers and be able to get a handle on those.

Otherwise, we're just riding this roller coaster, you know, through our lives. And the stressors can actually exacerbate the stressors and triggers exacerbate the health issues.

So without that knowledge of the stressors and triggers, we aren't even able to, like you're saying, man, and some of the other things, that we can calm all of that down, then we can be able to treat some of the other things better too.

Building a Daily Retraining Practice

Oh yes. And that's the thing they can work for in a complimentary way. And we have some people or practitioners who recommend the program in the middle or at the end of their current treatments, but we have many who say look I won't even treat you until you've done primary training first.

In fact, yeah. Doctor Neal, Nathan is a very famous name in this area with mild illness and line. You know, he often will say to certain patients, look, I think before I can even treat you, you're too sensitive to things I'm going to give you.

You need to regulate your nervous system first before I give you the binders and supplements and various things so it can happen anywhere along that patient journey.

So you said something to me, you know, as we were going through this, that the people that people often feel uncomfortable first sometimes. So can we talk a little bit about that. That's interesting.

Yes. so so when you say uncomfortable, you mean. Like when you're starting the journey, when you're realizing that you need this and is there like facing it is actually facing the fact that you need the the neuro retraining?

you know, just what what does it bring out for a lot of people? Yeah. So for some people, they can feel a little distress about that because what they feel is, oh, I thought I could just pop a certain pills and then, you know, I'll be fine.

And so they realize I'm going to have to put more effort into this. And this is now down to my own responsibility. And for some people, they are wired like that and they're okay with that.

For others, that's a very different medical model to what they are used to. And therefore we really want to hold people's hands through that. So we don't say, right, just watch these videos and do it yourself step by step.

We train people to understand what tools they can put into practice, how often they do it, where they do it. And all we ask people is to say, your health is so important is paramount.

Like if you lose your health, right, you can't do anything else in life. Therefore, make the time to prioritize these tools and techniques and create regularity with it.

And that's what really works. And when we've done clinical audits, we found that people who engage with our program at least 5 to 6 times a week have far better results than those people who are just dipping in once or twice a week.

So, as you can imagine, with brain retraining, it's the regularity of it. So it break the training. It's like, imagine learning a musical instrument, right?

If you pick up an instrument once a week and then learn it, you'll do okay, right? But you haven't got the muscle memory. Your brain is not being trained.

Now you practice that instrument 3 or 4 times a week or every day. Guess what? It's going to be much deeper, much quicker to actually learn all of these different things.

Yeah, that that is a good point. And there are actually tools that you can always come back to too. So, you know, life is a there's a journey. It's a bumpy road sometimes.

And so I see sometimes people want a great path. Something comes up where you have a stressor or you have another virus, something that comes up that like puts a turn and a bend in the road and then you, you have the tools to kind of come back to and know how to do it.

And I think that's really important, too, because you're building your own toolbox to be able to handle that, to handle life. Really? Yes. And that's the empowerment that I want to give people is with these conditions, there's software problems, not hardware problems.

And traditional medicine is brilliant at treating hardware problems, but not very good at treating software problems. And so yes, the medical model is great for certain types of conditions.

But these ones we have to take responsibility. We have to take this on board ourselves and look at ways that we can really tap into this toolkit to heal ourselves.

And yes, that is really our core message, is that you can heal and it doesn't have to take a massive amount of investment. It's just some time each day.

Yes. And so can you give us a little an example of an exercise or kind of what, what people would be working on. Yeah. So we have several different brain retraining techniques.

But everything comes under the three hours of the Gupta program. Yeah. The first hour is well it's like a dove. So imagine a dove has to fly. Like, how can a dove like a dove needs to have two wings, and it needs to have a tail feather to give it direction.

So one of those wings is relaxing the nervous system or nervous system regulation. And what that does is that helps our brain to become more neuro plastic and rewiring.

So let's take the analogy of a river running through a field.

Tools, Joy, and Where to Find the Gupta Program

Yeah. So that river is running through the field, and that river represents our brains automated reaction to pathogens. Right. So that's not a mast cell activating our immune systems, getting over activated becomes, trigger happy response.

So that's the river. And when it rains, the water automatically goes along that path. But we want to reroute the river down a different path. And so what that involves is digging a new pathway.

So the water goes down the new pathway and then filling in the old pathway. So we put in soil into our pathway. And the grass grows over. So we've got a new pathway.

And that new pathway is just because we experienced that pathogen doesn't mean that we overly, trigger our immune responses and our inflammation. Now, of course, the throat, the ground is frozen because our brains are often stressed.

So the ground is frozen. So we can't dig the new channel. So the first out of the gate program, relaxing nervous system enables us to loosen the soil, defrost the soil so that it's easier to dig a new river bed.

Yeah. So that's what we're doing with that first, and correspondingly the other wing of the dove is retreading up. Right. And that's the core of the program.

And within that there's a few different techniques. So one of them is somatic retraining. So we incorporate the idea of semantics into what we the work we do to train the brain that we're safe.

There's a seven step brain retraining, process which helps us recognize these danger signals that come up from the unconscious and how we can retrain them.

There's another technique called the accelerator, which is a fast paced kind of retraining that enables us to find those repetitive patterns of danger and retrain them very quickly.

So that's the kind of toolkit for that. And the third are the guts part of the tail feathers of a dove is reengaging with joy. And this is often a neglected area of medicine.

But it's hugely important, which is that if we don't, enable ourselves to handle stress for the rest of our lives, it's very easy to have dips and relapses.

So reengaging with joy is all about managing our stress and engaging with the small joys of life that uplift the spirits that actually can rebalance our immune system and nervous system.

Because if we're engaging with joy, then the brain thinks, well, we must be safe, otherwise how can we be joyful? And therefore we can tone down those defensive responses that focus.

And I, like you, had health issues that brought me to where I am today. So I had the journey to and I remember years ago when I was really suffering and someone asking me that question, and I had to stop and think about it.

And when you're at that place where you can't think about what's bringing you joy and, you know, you can say the the basics that you know, you have in your life.

But when you're really thinking about that deep down as to what are the things, really just that simple shift of focusing on those things, feeling safe, feeling good.

So all of those things that you're saying are so important in all of our health journey. And I really do agree that should be a component of the healing process.

So I thank you so much for all the great information that you're sharing with us today. Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's the important thing. When we're unwell, we think that we don't deserve to be joyful.

We don't deserve to be happy, or we come to right. And we think we're enjoying things, but really we're just consuming entertainment versus actually feeling.

Enjoy. And we encourage people to, find things that bring them joy, that could be gardening, that could be walking in nature, that could be playing a musical instrument, that could be singing karaoke.

Whatever brings you that joy and happiness and upliftment is very important at retraining the brain and supporting the neural rewiring. Yes. Well thank you. You've provided such helpful information.

I think it's such an important, like I said, part of our health journey. So where can our summit watchers find you if they want more information about the Gupta Program.

So they can come to our website and engage in the free trial? So it's guptaprogram.com. And once they sign up for that they'll get lots of free videos and audios and lots of things they can do without even entering their credit course.

There's lots of great resources for people. And we also have an app. So our app is exactly the same as our member area on website. So you can just go to App Store or Play Store, search Gupta Program, download the app and you can start retraining your brain on on day one.

And on top of that we have lots of free sessions. So the daily Gupta size that I talked about, the first part of it, the nervous system regulation is free to anyone.

So you can come on the app and you can join those zoom calls and get some really powerful, treatments straight away. Well that's great. That's a great way to start.

So you can go check it out. And thank you so much for joining us today. Yeah. Thank you so much. So much Meg. Thank you. Have a great day.