Myth-Busting: Migraines And Blood Sugar Transcript

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Introduction and Dr. Barrettu2019s Background

Hi everyone. Welcome to this episode of the Reversing Type 2 Diabetes Summit 2.0. I'm your host, Dr. Beverly Yates, ND Right now I am so looking forward to this discussion with Dr.

Amelia Barrett. She has done so, so much work in the world of migraines and headaches and providing people with real solutions in real relief. So, Dr. Barrett, welcome to our summit.

Thank you so much. I'm glad to be here. All right. So let's dive in in particular, what is a key thing that you think would start our discussion here?

And as we start our discussion here, let me not jump over this part. You have a fabulous background. Would you give us a thumbnail overview of what your background is, your bio that you bring to this work?

Yeah, I would be happy to. So I actually believe that we are now more powerful than our pills. And what I mean by that is that we have so much capacity to get information about our bodies than ever before in all of human history.

And we can use that information to truly heal rather than just cover our symptoms up, we can now actually recover. And so that's why I think that we are more powerful than our pills.

Now, what brought me to this conclusion is spending 25 years in conventional medicine. I trained at Stanford, opened a private practice, so I spent a lot of years handing out medications and really came to realize the limitations of that approach.

We are so fortunate to be living in a time where the science of health and wellness is just exploding Being in areas like functional medicine and biohacking and wearable health devices.

I really think that this is an incredible time because there are so many new pieces of science and technology out there that can empower us to live the lives that we really want to live.

All right, great. I completely agree with you. I think we're in a wonderful era, and I'm hopeful that we'll get some actionable insights so that people will feel more empowered, inspired and encouraged.

A large part of the reason why we do these online summits, right, is to bring this information directly to people so they can pick and choose what's going to work for them.

Okay. So with that in mind, you know, having gotten us into the right mindset for this is going to be Dr. Barrett and what is a key thing that you really want our audience to understand about the relationship between blood sugar and migraines?

You know, I think the number one myth around blood sugar and migraines is that you need to eat carbs every couple of hours because your brain runs on glucose.

And if you get low blood sugar, then it's going to trigger a migraine.

Blood Sugar Myths and Migraine Triggers

And so there are so many pieces of that we can dive into. But I'll start with this one, this idea that you have to eat carbs every couple of hours. Now, I I'm familiar with your work.

I know a little bit about what you say, so I'm sure you're kind of cringing in your seat as you hear that piece of

advice for people. Because what we should really be doing is trying to eat more healthy meals that also have protein and fat and fiber.

And that's what we should really be eating. So when we eat just carbs, as conventional wisdom tells us to do when it comes to headaches and blood sugar, then what happens is our body releases insulin.

It often overshoots if it's a pure carb meal and then our blood sugar goes down, we feel shaky, we feel confused, we start to get headache. We immediately grab the carbs because we know that will fix the situation, raise our blood sugar quickly and relieve our symptoms.

But the thing is, the solution to this vicious cycle is not to just keep eating carbs every couple of hours. You want to eat a meal that keeps your blood sugar nice and steady for a long period of time.

And when you eat a meal that has not just carbs, but also a little protein, a little fat, a little bit of fiber, then you don't get that overshoot with the insulin and the crash.

A couple of hours later. All right. So it happens to be that you and I are pretty much in agreement on that. I don't think people need to eat carbs or anything.

Actually, every couple of hours. I'd much prefer that they eat three actual meals a day, perhaps two, depending on who they are and not snack unless it is really necessary.

Or they need it for medication or some other support or some other extraordinary life circumstance. But I think for most of us we are sadly overfed and undernourished.

And so if we're going to eat carbs, they need to be quality carbs, slow burning, resistant starch, complex carbs and avoid eating the things that are like what are almost guaranteed to put you on that blood sugar rollercoaster.

But honestly, in today's world, I feel like that's gotten complicated. I have taught people how to read labels, not to feel paranoid about it, and to understand that they have to be in charge of what they're putting in their mouth.

So with that in mind, let's take a little deeper dive on this, because there's a lot of people who feel like headaches, migraines, pain in the head in general is tied to their blood sugar.

They make assumptions about it. And I'd love for you to bust those assumptions because a lot of that is based in mythology. It's not based in fact. Mm hmm. Absolutely.

And I think that when we get a headache, what we do immediately is we think, okay, what did I just do in the past hour to cause that headache when what we should actually be doing is looking at the big picture?

It's probably more than what you did in just the past hour. And in fact, I think one of the most exciting areas of research is into these hidden causes of headaches that we're learning so much more about.

And so I think that, you know, while we may think that our blood sugar or the food that we ate is what caused our headache, Actually, that's just the thing that happened right before the headache.

And that's all it may not be any more than that, but we're so, you know, when we're in so much pain, we really want an answer as to why. And, you know, I think it's just human nature to think, oh, it must be the thing I just did.

And we blame ourselves. And, you know, that might not be true at all. It's probably more related to big picture issues brewing under the surface. And you know, what you ate at your last meal may not have anything to do with it.

Yeah, that's a great point that you raised. And I think in part, certainly at least here in the U. S., I'm not sure about how medications and drugs are marketed in other parts of the world.

But certainly here, much of the messaging is about do this, get that, take this, get that right. And so in that kind of 1 to 1, you know, this for that mentality, people think, oh, it's my fault.

And what I just did recently is having an impact. Now versus the course of things I've done over the last several days, weeks, months, years, perhaps decades within now led to this problem.

And since migraines can be chronic and many people consider them to be intractable, having that bigger picture, that more holistic view is really, really important.

So what are some of the missed opportunities that patients have when they're looking for help and relief, real relief, and perhaps completely putting it in the rearview mirror when it comes to migraines.

You know, some of the exciting things that we are discovering about these hidden causes of headaches have to do with nutrition, leaky gut toxins and the impact of chronic stress on the nervous system.

So I'll just break each of these down. So nutrient deficiencies, it turns out that the brain has different nutrient needs than other organs in the body.

It needs a lot more omega 3s.

Hidden Causes: Nutrition, Gut Health, and Toxins

And so, for example, there was a study published in the British Medical Journal in May of 2021, and what they did is they had people eat more omega 3s in the form of fish and olive oil, and they had people eat less.

Omega six is mainly processed oils, vegetable, canola oil, those sorts of things. And what they found is with that one simple dietary intervention, people had half as many headaches in three months.

I mean, that works better than some of our prescription medications. The data was just amazing. So this really rocked the headache world to realize that a dietary intervention could be so impactful and that it wasn't part of this conventional wisdom of avoid red wine cheeses, cured meats.

You know, those are sort of the that's the conventional wisdom about what we tell people with food. We tell them what not to eat. This was a study about what to eat to get your brain super healthy, make it work better and relieve your pain.

Yeah, I think messaging around what to eat rather than exclusionary lists that usually for people feels so depriving so miserable about what not to eat.

I think it's really important to focus on what to eat and then why? And I'm sitting here smiling because I'm thinking about how for hundreds of years naturopathic doctors, naturopaths, traditional naturopaths, you know, and naturopathic physicians, whatever their labeling may be, have been saying that your food, be your medicine.

Let your medicine be your food. I'm so glad that functional medicine is rooted in that. And I'm so glad that you, someone trained as conventional medical doctor come over to join us.

So that is great. You know what? Not only do patients love it, it actually works for people of all walks of life, right? You know, if you think about what people eat around the world, for people who are in healthy areas, there's some real clues about this.

All right. So give us some more myths to bust. Go right ahead. All righty. Well, one of the other hidden causes of headaches that is has to do with leaky gut and toxins.

And they're related. So leaky gut, of course, refers to damage to the inside of the intestines and the leakage of those microscopic food particles into the bloodstream, triggering the immune system to react and release pain,

chemicals.

Those pain chemicals travel up to the brain and they activate a nerve called the trigeminal, which then sort of sets off a reflex arc that leads to headaches and migraine.

And so I think what's really new is understanding how common that is for people with headaches. There was a study published recently, recently that showed that 40% of people with chronic headaches have GI symptoms as well.

There's got to be a link, Right. And that is what the data is really showing, that when we increase those implement inflammatory systems in the body, that it can cause a number of different problems, headaches just being one of them.

So I think that is another another area of myth busting where we've got some work to do. Yeah, definitely. And here on this particular summit, we haven't had a lot of speakers talking about gastrointestinal, so I just wanted to back us up a little bit.

For those who aren't familiar, the idea of leaky gut syndrome or permeability for the intestines, the intestinal permeability means that in this case, the small intestine, the lining is supposed to have these take on things like this.

Those cells literally come together like teeth and when they are compromised, they're breached like that. And that means then that these other molecules that aren't supposed to go through go through when the immune system sees it, on the other side of the barrier goes, what's that?

And here goes that whole inflammatory cascade that Dr. Barrett is teaching us about. And from there on, all sorts of things can happen that migraine pains, lack of blood, sugar control, pain in the joints.

You know, it's just interesting about where we're vulnerable or sensitive. For some people, it's got to be migraines. All right. Go ahead. Some more myths because we have plenty. Go right ahead.

I love it. And so related to leaky gut is this issue of toxins, because, of course, if our intestines aren't sealed up, we can't get rid of toxins naturally.

Very well. Our body does have perfectly adequate mechanisms to get rid of toxins. But if we have leaky gut, it's not able to do that as well. If we have genetic problems of our detox pathways, then we're not able to do that as well.

And so for a lot of people, me included, that can lead to accumulation of toxins that cause headaches. And so for me, those issues were related to mold and mercury and helping my body get rid of those substances made a huge difference, not only in headaches but also brain fog.

I got to tell you guys, like I was really brain foggy. I was kind of worried about me. So thank goodness that was a fixable problem. I was really relieved.

Yeah, it's scary when that happens. You know, mold is what got me into this work to leave MIT electrical engineering work in Silicon Valley to become a licensed doctor.

Naturopathic medicine. It was a problem with mold. When we moved to the Pacific Northwest, as my fiance and I becoming husband and wife, that transition, that mold that is if northwest at least when it used to rain up there, I don't know what's going on now.

It really changed. And so for anybody listening to this, you know, please take notes because those background or maybe foreground toxins that your body is having an adverse reaction to and mold is a problem.

Oh, boy. Mercury's from food. From your dental amalgams gone awry, any number of sources of mercury can

come. You know, please pay attention if you've been warned about that.

And but I push past. It doesn't apply to me. Sit up and take notice because, yeah, it does apply to you. It turns out those things don't belong inside us.

All right, Go ahead, Dr. Barrett. Yeah. And then I think really the last issue is something that impacts our blood sugar as well as and also our appetite, the effect of chronic stress on the nervous system.

And I really feel like this is an interesting new area because we have so many devices that help us monitor our our bodies so we can really start seeing those effects now in ways that we never could before.

We can check labs to measure the impact of chronic stress on our bodies. And so we're starting to come to a place of recognizing, okay, hey, maybe if we treat the stress itself, then we can we can start to improve all of the symptoms that are caused by stress.

I know appetite changes can be one. I know you've talked about that. Certainly headaches. We all anybody who's ever had a headache knows that stress can cosmetics.

But and so I guess I feel like it's not stress that's new but it's our it's how we're able to help people manage it. The devices that we have to allow you to peek inside your body and help you to choose the right path, to get your body to a place where it can start healing.

Yeah, definitely. The devices and gizmos are pretty, pretty amazing these days. And there's more coming and it's it's it's one of those things where there's a lot of data, a lot of information.

And I think it's useful where people can have actionable insights. So I would encourage anyone listening, please not just take notes, but think about what's your lived experience and are you able to make sense of the info?

I always tell people look for trends. Don't get obsessed about actual single point values in time. Like if you're wearing a CGM and you find that, you know, it's showing a spike by Dr. Barrett.

Okay. And our discussion with, well, what did you do that led before that? Or maybe you didn't do maybe something that happened to you, Like we're not always 100% in charge.

You're in control of our universe. I think that there is a missed opportunity when we're telling people otherwise, right? I think that's part of the mythology.

And like when it goes for headaches, the assumption is, well, what did you do to cause your headache? It's rarely that simple. Yeah, exactly. There could be any one of these other factors going on under the surface there.

You know, there. And I think a lot of these are hidden. You know, these are things that we don't often look for in mainstream medicine. What are your thoughts about in terms of hidden sources of headaches?

The idea that particularly for women who are in their reproductive years, that their hormonal fluctuations can contribute to the incidence of migraines?

Yeah, absolutely. Known fact, you know, that estrogen drop off before your cycle can definitely trigger headaches for people. But I think that what I like to think about isn't so much, okay, so how do I take birth control pills or whatever to regulate my body?

What fascinates me is, is what we're learning about how chronic stress actually depletes the chemicals that make your hormones. And so that's why you're getting those hormonal headaches in the first place.

It's a wake up call. It's telling you, hey, take a deeper look at your world. Where can you become more resilient? Because I feel like for you know, I've talked to women and men, but I you know, more women have headaches, so

it ends up being more women.

I've talked to people for so many years who are like, well, I can't do anything about any of the causes of stress in my life. I can't change my physical world.

And I get that. I really, really do. But you can't change your resilience. You can change the activities that you do that shift your nervous system over into recovery mode rather than fight or flight mode that you can change no matter what's going on in your world.

Stress, Hormones, and Hydration

So I view that as a much more and empowering way to look at those hormonal headaches than simply, gosh, maybe I should take a different pill or, you know, modifying the hormones that way because it's related to true healing, which is I think what we really all want in our hearts.

Definitely. I think most people will say, yes, please do more healing. Yeah. What is the role of hydration in headaches? Are there a fair number of migraines perhaps, that may have their roots in people who simply don't drink enough liquids?

Absolutely. I do feel like mainstream medicine has done a good job of getting that message out. And so I feel like most people know, you know, you need to stay hydrated.

They're drinking water all day long. Maybe they don't put electrolytes in it ever, but that peace might be new. You know that A little electrolytes every day might go a long way, even if it's just a shake, a salt and a little lime juice in your water, you know, whatever it is.

Are you saying happy hour? It could be part of an. You'd have to add that tequila, right? We're getting guys. But yeah, yeah. Oh, okay. Yeah, Yeah. So I feel like a lot of people know that.

I think that the area that a lot of people where a lot of people don't get the full benefit of it is in a lot of the symptoms that go along with the headaches.

So for example, a lot of people, probably a quarter of people with chronic headaches also have dizziness. Well, for a lot of people that can be related to dehydration, they feel like they're drinking enough, but they're not or they're not adding electrolyte.

So their body isn't holding on to that fluid. So I think that that can really be an area where people are surprised. I took care of somebody once in one of my courses who came in with 24 seven, what had been called vestibular migraine, meaning he was dizzy all the time and the only thing we had to do was fix hydration and simple nutrients, boom, headaches gone.

I mean, it was just a home run, you know, But it took, you know, getting all the labs tested to look at all those obscure nutrient levels that we don't typically do in mainstream medicine.

You know, he needed to see those values being low in order to say, all right, well, I need to up my game in terms of food, in terms of supplements, in terms of hydration to fix all these problems.

And then like new. It was great. That's a lovely story to share. Thank you for that. That whole concept of test don't guess to uncover. Like you said, what are hidden causes sometimes it really is seemingly simple, but it might not be easy because without that assessment, how would you know?

Yeah, exactly. Okay. So for migraines, what would your advice be? If someone's listening to this and they want to work with someone and they were wrestling with their current health team to get them to understand that yet more pills is not necessarily yielding the result.

Right. Because there is there does come this place where people, in my experience with chronic illness are like, you know, where's the results? Like show me the proof. I'm not feeling better.

I'm doing all the things you asked me to do and I can looking for help, you know. Now what? Yeah. I think a good place to start is, you know, obviously, anybody on this call is interested in blood sugar issues.

So I wrote an e-book completely free to give people a few more myth busting tips, practical hands on strategies that you can start with today. So that's a place to get information.

I really think it's about us empowering ourselves. You know, we're not going to change mainstream medicine, but we can change ourselves. We can become empowered with the information that we need to move our own health forward.

And I think that that's where that's where the the benefit really is. Definitely. Definitely. So before we sign off, I have a few more questions for you.

One of them is you mentioned before about intestinal permeability, leaky gut syndrome. Right. What is the overlap between that and using common methods for pain relief for migraines?

There are certain classes of medications perhaps that people should be aware of that could contribute to the leaky gut syndrome that got them in trouble in the first place. Maybe.

Yeah. Unfortunately, you know, the most common medications, anti-inflammatory medications, are big triggers for leaky gut. And so many of us out there have the idea, Oh, I had a headache, but I took something for it.

It went away. I'm fine. And they're not fine. Pain is your body's way of communicating with you, right? I mean, it only has so many ways it can talk to you.

And pain is one of those ways. Pain means something's going on. It means you should pay attention. Because what we know is that if you're having more than 2 to 3 headache days a week, it starts to physically change your brain.

I actually did a TED talk about this concept, which is called quantification, because I feel like people should know that just because you take a pill and it goes away, it doesn't mean everything's okay.

There's still can be changes happening in your brain that make you even more prone to headaches and they end up making your medications not work as well.

And then where are you right then?

Medications, Intermittent Fasting, and Light Sensitivity

Yeah, much bigger problem to solve. So I would encourage people don't reach for those 80 inflammatory medications off the bat. It's fine every now and then.

But if it's becoming a habit, you know you're going to do a number on your gut and you're also just masking what your body is trying to tell you. Your body is really trying to talk to you and your job is to listen.

Exactly right. You just sound seeing the symptom and you're not addressing the root cause. Well said. Thank you for making that clear. I know that people are often not aware of what are some of the root causes around leaky gut syndrome, and they're shocked when they come to understand that their chronic use of anti-inflammatory medication has really messed up their gut lining, therefore fueling a whole number of other now downstream health processes.

Maybe they got the pain relief, but seven other things broke in the process. MM Yeah. And so they might actually

start getting heartburn or reflux and then they take a pie and then the stomach doesn't have enough acid to digest your food and then you get more leaky gut and it's just a whole, a whole vicious cycle.

Yeah. And it's just unfortunate, right. Because we want to feel better. I mean that's completely reasonable human desire. Completely rational. Yeah. Okay.

All right. Are there any final myths you'd like to share with us? And based on while we're here? You know, I think one interesting thing to talk about might be intermittent fasting.

Yeah, that really flies in the face of this conventional wisdom about eating carbs every couple of hours. So I you know, people say the brain likes glucose better, and really it's more accurate to say the brain uses glucose first, and when your glucose levels start to drop, it will trigger your liver to start burning fat, your own stores of fat, which is awesome.

We all of that, right? Start burning your fat stores and making ketones. Your brain loves to work on ketones loves it. If any of you have ever tried a little bit of intermittent fasting or being in ketosis, it makes you feel smart and it actually turns out it's a much cleaner fuel for the brain than glucose is.

If you imagine it, it's kind of like ketones are an electric car and they don't make exhaust and glucose is a gas car and it does make exhaust. And then just think of that exhaust as inflammation for your body.

Right? And we're all becoming more aware of the impact of inflammation on chronic diseases, including diabetes and also headaches. So, you know, I think that's another good myth to debunk that, that the brain has to have glucose in it.

It's fine with ketones, it likes ketones in so many ways. So yeah, I think that's a good one to note too. Okay. And then another one comes to mind. I'm just thinking of the things that have come up in my clinic over the years, issues with light and sensitivity to light and perhaps maybe pro drones or precursors to migraines of light auras or feeling sensitive to it.

Like what? What are your thoughts about that? We think that it is probably part of the initial stages of the migraine itself, so sometimes it's hard to tell.

Did the light cause the migraine or did the migraine make you light sensitive? These days? We're kind of in the camp of the migraine made you light sensitive is kind of how we're viewing it, that there are changes already happening in the brain that cause you to have that symptom as well as food cravings.

By the way, there was a super interesting study that looked at headache triggers from a headache app called Curelator and they analyzed data from 14,000 people about what was actually a migraine trigger versus what was actually protective against developing a headache.

And it was amazing source of information because some of the things that we think of as being headache triggers are probably actually part of the craving.

That's part of the migraine itself. So, for example, chocolate chocolate has such a bad rap in the migraine world as as being a migraine trigger, right.

So what they found, though, is that it was actually protective against getting a headache. So it turns out it's probably actually more part of the migraine itself as opposed to being a trigger.

And I was so psyched about that because I have a chocolate problem. I just I'm just going to admit right here, I was very glad to know. Okay, well, that's probably not going to give me a migraine.

Resources and Closing Remarks

Chocolate's back. I was happy. So that's cool. That's good to know, because I have to say, that's one of the ones. If it comes back, I go a food intolerance test or something.

People are in tears. They're like, No, don't take away my chocolate. I love chocolate, you know? I know. Yeah, it's a bad day. Yeah, totally. Totally.

That's so interesting, you know? Yeah, that's interesting. Yeah. Because the light and the proteome. Yeah, I know that people in the world of headache care and migraine here have been battling about that.

And I understand it because some of it is kind of confusing. But you think about people's lived experiences, it's like they just want the result. Yeah, exactly.

Yeah. All right, cool. So, Dr. Barrett, this has been a lovely, amazing conversation. Thank you so much for myth busting and bringing your insights, your stories and your wisdom to this and just your joie de vivre.

I can tell how much you love this topic and care about it passionately. If people want to connect with you directly, where can they find more information?

They can go to my website, ameliascottbarrettmd.com or download the e-book at migrainereliefcode.com/thefoodcode I love that. All right. Thank you so much for being a part of our summit.

Wish you continued success with all the people that you serve, friends, everybody you know what to do. If you know others who care about their health.

They've got diabetes, they've got blood sugar issues, maybe they're migraines, whatever their situation may be. Kindly, if you would share via social media, email, whatever works with the people in your network.

What we're doing here at the summit, we surely would appreciate it. Let's all link arms together and continue on that mission to help 3 million people or more reverse Type 2 diabetes and live high energy, healthy, joyful lives.

Thank you.