Patient-Friendly Explanation of Trauma Physiology Transcript

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Introduction to Trauma, Addiction, and Recovery

I'm going to talk to you about trauma, addiction, and the nervous system. You know, if the body feels like it's always in danger, healing can feel impossible, but it is not.

I am Dr. Arun Podesta. A triple board certified psychiatrist, I specialize in addiction and trauma and integrative medicine and functional medicine. In this video I want to help you understand why recovery can just feel so overwhelming and what can help.

When we talk about addiction, most people really just see it as a series of bad decisions or more of failing or a character flaw. But what if it's not about willpower at all?

What if its about the nervous system that's been stuck in overdrive for years and maybe even decades? I want to reframe how we think about addiction. Not to remove accountability at all, but to introduce compassion.

Addiction as Nervous System Survival

Because most people living with addiction, they're not trying to feel high. They're honestly they are trying feel normal. And when the central nervous system is on constant alert, always scanning for danger, triggered by past trauma or chronic stress.

People reach for whatever calms that inner storm. Sometimes that looks like alcohol or a pill or other drugs. sometimes it's a behavior that might be short-term relief but long- term pain.

From the outside it looks irrational but from the inside it is actually the brain in survival mode. And the more we understand what your loved one or your patient is going through, the More we can create space for healing that actually works.

So I want to take a closer look at what happens inside the body and brain when it's stuck in that state. Before we dive in. If you have a loved one struggling with addiction or if you're trying to make sense of your own recovery journey, go ahead and subscribe to this channel.

These videos are here to support you with clear compassionate tools that actually help. Now let's get back. So if the nervous system is at the heart of addiction, what does that actually look like?

Fight, Flight, and Freeze Responses

Okay, let me walk you through it. Not in medical terms, but in real life experiences. When someone is in what we call a fight state, that may feel constantly irritated or angry.

They might just snap easily, act impulsively, or seem aggressive even when they don't want to be. And then in the flight state The runaway state, people feel restless, they're worried, their panicking, a constant sense that something's out to go wrong, even when everything looks fine from the outside.

Then there's the freeze state and this is the one that people often miss. This is a kind of numbness. It can look like laziness or apathy, but really, it's just a mental shutdown.

It's the nervous system actually protecting itself by going quiet. These aren't personality traits. these are sympathetic nervous systems survival responses.

Here's the hardest part. Most people experiencing these states don't even realize it's happening. They just know

they feel overwhelmed or unsafe or disconnected, and they'll do anything to feel better.

How Trauma and Chronic Stress Dysregulate the Body

And that's where substances often come in. Not necessarily to your party, but to escape, to self-regulate. Let's bring the trauma piece into the picture.

Trauma is real. It plays a major role for many people. But it is not the only factor. Think of the Traumas as one form of overwhelming stress. What really causes this kind of dysregulation is often a combination of long-term stress, disrupted relationships, lack of feeling safe, and yes, unprocessed trauma.

The nervous system doesn't care whether the stress is emotional, the stresses physical, financial, or relational. It just knows when it's had enough and when that overload becomes chronic.

the brain actually starts rewiring itself. Stress hormones surge more easily. Emotional regulation becomes harder and harder. Even sleep is disrupted.

Digestion is disruptive. Immune function can be affected. Addiction often begins as an attempt to cope with that, a way to calm the storm. But the very thing that soothes in the short term can actually create more chaos in long run.

Understanding this is truly powerful because it replaces shame with clarity and clarity can open the door to healing. So now that you understand what's happening inside the body and brain, what can help?

Calming the Nervous System in Recovery

How do you begin to calm the nervous system that's been on high alert for so long? Well, here's the good news. Healing doesn't always start in the mind.

In fact, for many people, especially in early recovery, the mine takes a while to catch up. And that's why the physical health is such an important entry point.

If someone you love is feeling overwhelmed, anxious, shut down, or just off, try starting with simple things. Ask them to plant their feet on the ground.

Notice where they are in their space. Feel the chair beneath them. Take one slow, deep breath. Then another. These small physical acts just help send a simple teeny signal to the brain that says, we're safe right now.

And that signal over time begins to shift everything. Physical movement can help too, stretching or walking outside, even just swaying. You don't need a gym necessarily, you need rhythm, You need breath and gravity.

Then there's connection. Sometimes the most regulating thing is a safe person who isn't trying to fix you or judge you. Just being with someone calm and grounded.

can help the nervous system co-regulate. And there's absolutely a role for medication, for supplementation, nutrition and for sleep these aren't shortcuts by any means these are support beams together they all help the system stabilize so the deeper work as in the therapy the reflection the growth can actually stick recovery doesn't begin when everything is under control it begins the moment the body starts finding itself feeling a little bit safer.

Safety, Recalibration, and Closing Message

And that's not a leap. It's just a series of simple small steps. Steps that can be taken starting right now. Before we wrap up, I want to offer you something that might surprise you.

If you or someone you care about is struggling with addiction and it feels chaotic or unpredictable or even

hopeless, That might actually be a sign that the nervous system is trying to come back online.

I know that might sound a little strange, but when someone has been numbing, avoiding, or surviving for a long time, feeling everything all at once isn't a failure.

It's a start at recalibration. it's the system learning how to feel again without going into the overwhelmed feelings. Yeah, the process is messy sometimes, but it's also deeply human.

So if you're in it or walking beside someone who is, just remember the body and the brain are trying to heal. That's their job. And safety, not shame is what allows that to happen.

I'm Dr. Arun Podesta, and this is the work I care deeply about, helping people find their way back to calm, clarity and connection. If this resonates with you, there's another video waiting for you next.