Tailored Health: Personalized Nutrition For Neurodiverse Children Transcript

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Introduction to Personalized Nutrition

Welcome back to ADHD, Autism and Chronic Disease Parenting Summit. I am here with the unbelievable Julie Matthews from nourishing Hope, and I'm really excited to chat with you today about personalized nutrition and nutrition for chronic conditions like autism, ADHD, anxiety.

So thank you so much for being here. Thanks for having me. So let's just start with, the basic discussion around chronic illness and chronic disease. So what are you seeing?

I mean, I'm seeing it skyrocketing in terms of the rates. We're seeing more and more. Are you seeing the same thing in your practice? Unfortunately, I would say yes.

I my my practice is very focused on kids with autism and ADHD. So but there are more and more kids unfortunately every year, I mean, the rates go up every year.

So, we see the CDC numbers just continuing to go up unfortunately. And you've done some research on this. Right. I'm very curious to hear, you know, about some of those studies and what you found.

So and we can talk about that first. Yeah I would love to do that. So a few years ago we published a randomized controlled trial looking at six diet and nutrition interventions.

So we did a comprehensive diet and nutrition intervention that lasted a year. And so we did a multivitamin mineral formula. And then we added like kind of each month we added a new thing.

And then we add an essential fatty acid fish oil formula.

Research on Diet Interventions

And then we did Epsom salt baths, carnitine in a healthy, gluten free and casein free diet, and digestive enzymes. Actually, the digestive enzymes came before the gluten free, encasing free diet.

But that's what we did. We'd, and we found almost a seven point IQ, nonverbal IQ improvement. We had almost four and a half times the developmental age improvement.

So, you know, if you take a neurotypical developing child, build about 12 months and 12 months, if you have a neuro developmentally delayed, it's going to be delayed.

And the control group was four months of development in that 12 month time. But the and the intervention group, the treatment group increased, that 18 months of development in that 12 month period of time.

So that was very significant. And then there were, reported improvements, in everything from language, sociability, focus and attention, cognition, also anxiety, digestive complaints, sleep.

I mean, the list kind of went on and on. So it was really, really amazing. And I think the cool thing about that study was it's how practitioners would do their approach in real life.

So it was based on kind of a real life approach. A lot of times people, you know, we think of research as let's do a research study on vitamin C and see how it improves this one thing or something.

Well, we don't have 18 years to do one thing at a time and spend a year following it. We parents, the way that, you know, people like you and I work is we try to help them with a whole approach, a holistic approach.

So and these interventions were work synergistically. So you want to get a variety of vitamins and minerals and fatty acids and a healthy diet and a diet that's going to remove things that are problem.

And you might not do them all in day one like we did them somewhat over time. But you're going to do them and see what they are capable of doing as a whole.

That's fantastic. And you know, you mentioned, you know, some of the limitations with research, which is tough. I mean, it's hard to follow people for 20 years.

And yes, you can do it, but that's like your whole career, you know, so it's it's hard and people do it. But that's what is the complication of research.

But I'm curious with these, with these subjects or, you know, in your practice in general, have you followed some of them longer and seen these trends continue and even show more improvement and may not be in a research study?

But did you look at those those patients and still follow up? But some of that data points later on too. Good question. So for the study itself, we the study itself did actually, as you can imagine, took quite a while just to do I'm not sure if they were followed up with beyond that.

A couple interesting things. Not quite to your point, but there were even we looked at children and adults, so there was even a 58 year old man in the study, and he had improvements during that one year.

So the exciting news is you can be any age and still have improvements. And I have clients of my own that have that worked on diet and nutrition over the course of several years and now no longer have an autism diagnosis.

So we do know that things can continue to improve over time. So that was the next question I was going to ask, because I think that that's such an important point to make, and something which I really am very passionate about discussing, discussing is that we're we're seeing this rise in autism, you know, specifically there are lots of other things, but we're talking about autism here.

And it was like 1 in 10,000 a few years ago, you know, decades ago. And then it's like one and two, 51 and 30 now, even 1 in 22 in some in California, where I am on some research and it's very frustrating for me as a practitioner who sees these kids, you know, day in and day out, that people say that it's just because we're better at diagnosis.

We're absolutely better at diagnosis. There's no question that makes a big difference, and that's part of it.

Long-Term Improvement and Diagnosis Changes

But it's not the whole story. And when you when you hear things like this, when you hear an amazing practitioner talking about how you take patients, you change up their lifestyle, change up their diet, they do some other things and they can lose their diagnosis or things get better.

That to me says that for at least a good portion or some of people with the diagnosis of autism, there is a huge environmental component. It's not a genetic, it's not genetic, at least in its entirety.

Maybe there's a portion of it that is, but you can make changes that have a profound difference that maybe even get rid of the diagnosis. So it's things that we're doing that matter.

Yes. And some of my colleagues will say, genetics don't create epidemics. Right. Something genetics are the long, slow game really. And they change. They do change over generations, but they don't just kind of change it that much that rapidly typically.

And it's usually a combination of what our genetics are mixed with environmental factors. And then what's interesting is that our environmental factors can then even influence our genetics and our gene expression.

Particularly. And that can have an effect. So yes, I think that all of those, you know, I think all those things are important. And we definitely should be looking at what's changed now than what it was back when it was 1 in 10,000.

And like you said, even, there is research out, saying that it's not just better diagnostics alone that that accounts different studies say different things.

Some studies say it accounts for a portion of it, which I would agree is probably true, but it does not account for all of it. And I think that research is fairly consistent as well.

And so then the question I think we should be asking is, well, what is contributing to it? And not so we can blame, but so we can figure out what we can do about it.

Right, exactly. And that's exactly what. But I think as well. And from what you found talking about that, what, what, what have you been doing about it?

What what has been helpful? I mean, you know, you you focus. I know a lot on nutrition, which is very important. I would imagine, especially with autism, that can be hard sometimes, especially in the first stages, because there might be oral aversions or certain things that they don't want to eat, what you would rather them eat, but they won't do it.

So what have you found to be helpful? Or what kind of strategies do you have for parents in terms of where they could begin with this? Well, I like to look at main what's underlying the condition to try to figure out what's going to help people.

Autism is a very what we call hetero genius condition. So it's a condition that presents itself very differently from person to person, has very different underlying factors and contributors from person to person.

And so therefore, like we were talking about research, you can't apply one thing to everybody and that one thing is going to work equally the same for everybody.

It's really what's going on for that person that we can help them with to help them improve. And so that is in part to me, one of the ways diets work.

And actually we can talk about the second study that I was part of in a second.

Autism Rates and Environmental Factors

But one of the ways I think diet works is that it addresses the underlying mechanisms like inflammation and, gut, pathogens or bacterial imbalances and, just gut dysfunction or, mitochondrial dysfunction, all those kinds of things that might be underlying the condition.

And I like to use food and nutrition as a way to give the body the good things that it needs, that maybe it's not making enough of or getting enough of and removing the things that are adding to the inflammation or the inability to digest foods properly and things like that.

And that's where good, healthy food comes in. Good quality supplementation, nutritional supplementation comes in. And then therapeutic diets, which looks at what might we need to take out of the diet.

That might be adding to some of the challenges? Definitely. I mean, all those are our great, great points. I'm just going back to something else that you said, which I think is very important that I always try to reiterate is, you know, there are certain things that are common and that everybody could probably do to improve their health or, you know, whether it's in autism or just us as adults in terms of, you know, eating more veggies and eating the rainbow and trying to get rid of the chemicals.

But when it comes to something like autism, personalized is the way to go. I mean, you certainly can try to do some things and it can be very helpful, but at the end of the day, everybody is different.

And autism, in my opinion, is probably a lot of different things and caused by many different things, for each individual. And so it's really that tailored plan that's going to get you from, from A to Z.

I mean, you can probably do some of the things on your own or, you know, watching a course or whatever it is. But but at the end of the day, it's not not a simple roadmap because I think there's a lot of different ways that people need to go to get improvement.

Absolutely. Sometimes there's things, like you said that we all could benefit from a healthier diet. But then when we get to some of the more specific therapeutic diets, it is very individual.

If you talk to practitioners that work with kids, whether it's autism or what it might be, you know, to some of them we call them, you know, some of them are gut kids or some of them are immune system, right?

Some of them have more weaknesses in certain areas. And some of that's genetic or, or whatever might be their combination of life experience. And so we there might be one diet that's particularly helpful, with one area.

And that diet is going to be particularly helpful for them. Where is somebody else, a different diet. And you're right, it's since it's such personalized nutrition and, it makes it my message, maybe a little more complicated.

It can't be said in five minutes, but it makes it more powerful as well, because now parents can help figure out what's going to be best for their child.

And I think everybody realizes their child is unique. They've observed that certain teaching methods work better for them. Certain, ways of parenting work better, certain, you know, all those kinds of things so that it the same thing applies to the foods that they eat as well.

I couldn't agree more. And that's why the book's called parenting or child space, right? It's not not specific to autism, but I mean, realistically, it's like that's the reality of where we are.

And for some reason, in modern medicine, modern society, it's like this is good for everybody. And that doesn't make any, any sense. There's no, like, magic pill for everybody.

Magic smoothie for everybody. There's no one way. I mean, that's why you work with practitioners like you. Because, you know, even for somebody who does this every day, it's extremely complicated.

It's not always very obvious.

Underlying Causes and Individualized Diets

It can take years to unravel something. Decades unravel, something that's taken decades to be created. And you may never figured, I mean, it might be something that you're not even thinking about. That's that's causing the issue.

But it's not simple. But it is doable. And we can certainly work with families to help improve things. And parents and families can do this as well and kind of engage and understand that they have some ownership in this and some ability to make a difference, which I don't think is the message right now in the grand, you know, media of, of of where we're going with, with things it's more like, well, it's just kind of genetics and things are getting worse, which is really sad to me as a doctor, because we're seeing that whether it's, you know, autism or obesity or other areas, that we have a lot of power to make a difference.

I think. Absolutely. And I think that, some messages I think we're learning that a little bit more so than others, you know, diabetes, I think we're probably pretty clear about, you know, the diet makes a difference or some of these

conditions that we know have more of a lifestyle factor.

I'm here to share that. That can be true for childhood conditions and even things like autism, because a lot of times, that is hasn't been the prevailing message in the past.

But, more and more research and just clinical experience is showing that it is possible to improve, and it's it's possible to improve even certain symptoms and the condition and improve it as a whole.

So I agree, and you were mentioned about the second study. So maybe we can talk about that. We'll finish up I for that. I would I would love to do that.

This is this is a study near and dear to my heart because it was just recently published. It's on 13 Therapeutic Diets for autism. It was published in the Journal of Personalized Medicine, and it looked at a survey that we did on over 800 families and the use of 13 different therapeutic diets.

Some of them were more kind of healthy. Get out the junk diets, like a low sugar diet and a healthy diet. Other diets really went more into the aspects of things to remove, like a gluten free and dairy free diet to a specific carbohydrate diet, a paleo diet, ketogenic diet, and a food diet based on, sensitivity and allergy testing, things like that.

So we looked at all of these, 13 different diets and found out a couple really interesting things. One, this survey also looked at farm farmland, pharmaceuticals, particularly psychiatric, psychiatric and seizure medications and NutraSweet also have nutrient supplementation and things.

So we have papers from the same study published on those as well. And it's all the same scale. So the great, really cool thing is that we could compare, for example, psychiatric and seizure medications to diets.

And first we found that diet had the highest as as an aggregate of all the diets had the highest overall benefit, higher than even nutritional supplements and medications.

These particular medications and with a significantly lower adverse effect score. So that was really exciting, is that not only are they very beneficial, but they have very little downside, and they performed very well compared to other tools that are available.

So that was exciting. It was then what else we did was we also looked at not only the overall benefit, but we looked at individual symptom improvements, and we looked at 24 symptom improvements.

And we found that different symptoms were were better or different diets were better at improving certain symptoms. So we concluded that it's possible to start to use some of these symptoms as ways of personalizing a dietary approach.

And it it was it was very exciting. And some of them, for example, I'll just give you a couple pieces. We had about 700 different data points. So sometimes I have to pull up the data points here.

So by the way, the overall benefit was it was a scale of 0 to 4 and all the diets pretty much they ranged on an average of 2.3. I think it was 2.36. So it was a moderate to good.

Therapeutic Diet Study Findings

We had a moderate to good benefit from diet in general. And then when we looked at, different symptom improvements, for example, I'm just going to give you, you know, just a few things.

It doesn't mean that this is the diet you should do for this particular symptom. But I think it's interesting. So the finagle diet, which I didn't mention, is a diet that removes artificial additives, and also a compound called salicylates that's naturally occurring.

45% of the individuals that did that diet improved hyperactivity. So that's a huge a number of individuals improving hyperactivity, 38% improved irritability, 37% improved attention, large improvements in aggression, anxiety.

So that's to give you a couple kind of examples. The ketogenic diet also did quite well with some of the things like attention and cognition. The GFC diet also did really well with attention and cognition, language also digestive things like diarrhea.

So you know, again this is just a small snapshot since we could spend probably probably hours going through the 700 different data points that we got from the paper.

But I think that those are a couple fun statistics. Also, what I thought was really interesting was the diet that was best for improving health and health was measured by a reduced frequency of, you know, illnesses and things like that.

The top diet for health was a healthy diet. And it makes sense, doesn't it? But like. Yeah, but I just thought it was really interesting. And then the, the low sugar diet was really, one of the top diets for hyperactivity and aggression and irritability.

So that makes I feel like parents have been, you know, saying that for many years, that sugar and hyperactivity. But when you look at the research there, it's surprising for a surprising controversy on whether that's true or not.

So, yeah, most of us know that there is a role in sugar and behavior and hyperactivity, but it's nice to see it. So those are some of the highlights. There's like I said, more, but it just showed that diet beneficial overall it can improve even autism symptoms.

So we didn't go into all of them. But we looked at some of the more core autism symptoms like language and communication. Sociability. You know, some of the things around more, you know, some of their behaviors around, let's say, stimming or separating or desire for sameness, some of those types of things.

And so we looked at some of those more classic symptoms and then some of the more physical things sleep, digestion and then just other areas as well. Some of the ones I've mentioned.

How long were they on the diet for for that. So we didn't that would have been a really interesting thing. We didn't so much, ask that. So we just asked, have you used this diet and was it overall, an overall benefit?

And which symptoms didn't improve? We also asked, did you get advice on the diet? Did you? Yeah. How much advice did you get on the diet? How strictly did you follow the diet and those kinds of things.

And we did find some interesting correlations with the more advice they got, the more strictly they followed it, the more benefit they got. But we didn't specifically ask how long they were on that particular diet because it was kind of an ongoing study, and it was just.

That that makes sense. So, I mean, the the reality is that this is super duper helpful, super interesting, and it's so basic that it's ridiculous that we don't have more research on this.

Right? But there's nobody funding that research unless you do it yourself because you're passionate about it. Right. Which is so sad because, you know, let's just say, for example, in the worst case scenario here, you get some improvement of like 10% or something on a symptom just from changing your diet.

Like that's you wouldn't get anything like that with the medication and there's so many side effects. So it's like this is the kind of thing where we should know this very obviously, because the problem is that going, you know, so much in the upwards trajectory, it's like, well, if we can just know what diet to put kids on that are autistic that have symptoms of X, Y or Z.

And the parents are like, well, these symptoms are concerning to me and I would like to work on those if I can.

What's what's the best things? What should I be avoiding? Like these are basic, very basic questions that we should have answers to that are very unfortunate that we don't have it.

So I'm like, I really appreciate that you you're doing your part, I guess, to to push the narrative forward. I don't think this is like rocket science.

It's pretty obvious to me that that would be true. I don't know what what diet would work best for what, but yeah, I think that, you know, this is very, very basic, foundational stuff, which is probably why a lot of a lot of this is happening in the first place, that we don't have these diets.

And it leads to these issues. So I, I agree and you, I know you you might not be surprised, but, many of my families are often surprised that they get sort of discouraged from diet or told that it's not going to really help, or there's no real science behind it or, you know, don't get your hopes up, you know, and those kinds of things.

And and that's where I think that it's really detrimental because like you said, isn't isn't it pretty obvious?

Whole-Body Approach and Gut-Brain Connection

Like all of us, you could take the average adult and you could say a better diet is going to be better for you. I mean, I don't think anybody really dismisses.

Right, exactly. But but we don't but we don't think about it. And then, you know, the messaging is kind of moved away from personal responsibility or the things that we're doing that that matter.

And it's like, no, it matters. I mean, you could you could be the most healthy person and get cancer. Sure. But but you're much more likely to get a chronic condition if you're not living in a healthy lifestyle.

And I think that, you know, as practitioners like you that are pushing it back and saying, like, look, you know, here, here are some things that we're we're looking into.

Here are some common conditions or, or common diets that we're using for these conditions. And look at what we're seeing. Look how much of an improvement we're seeing just with this.

Like hello everybody. Look at this. Yeah. Yes, yes. I think if we start to and if parents are listening and they think, well, what is causing this? We often think, well, it's just not just but it's autism or, you know, or their behaviors or things are just because they have autism.

But if we don't, if we if we take that out and we just say, well, why, what is it? That's what's it that's contributing to this? And if we think, you know, we, Doctor Martha Herbert, who's an, neurologist, pediatric neurologist, she often talks about autism as a whole body disorder rather than just a specifically a brain disorder.

They can be very confusing. Nebulous, maybe to have just be a brain condition. What do we do about the brain? It's, you know, how do we get to the brain?

But if we think that, everything going on in the body, affects the brain because it's attached to it. So we have inflammation in the body, we can get inflammation in the brain if we've got, our microbiome in our gut is not healthy.

It gives off compounds that go to the brain. In fact, there's more crosstalk from the gut to the brain than there is, even from the brain to the gut. So we know that the health of the gut, the health of the microbiome, the inflammation in our body all affects our brain.

And we know that the food we eat, what does it have to do? It has to go through the gut. So just right there, it's literally having physical contact with the gut.

And there are many ways that it can either help or harm the gut and the microbiome. And there's so many things

that can be done. So I think that's the exciting thing.

And as people start to think about it a little bit more of like, well, what's underlying it? How can I help that and how can I help on this more whole body level?

Then it really starts to help individuals and parents and people try to figure out, well, what can they do. And I think there's some simple things everybody can start with.

And then if they get to that point that they want to dive into some of the more nuanced, you know, complex diets and things, then those are always available as well.

Yeah, I love that. That's a great, great place to end because I think, you know, I always like to end with some positive and what we can do. And you can kind of just, you know, ran through that.

I mean, just even just recognize that there aren't there is something that we can do. We can start with the foundations. I think that's so helpful. And especially when we're talking about things like, like conditions like autism, that's not the messaging that we have these days.

I think in general. And just changing that messaging and thinking about where we can make some simple changes can go a long way. And then once we start the ball rolling in a positive direction, then who knows?

You know where it's going to go for, for your family and your child. So I really appreciate your sharing your wisdom and everything that you you have done.

I mean, taking on and doing clinical trials. Most people don't have any idea how unbelievably complicated and expensive that is to do. So it's really, you know, congratulations on doing that.

Doing two studies. And I have a master's in epidemiology. So I did research way back in the day. I haven't done it a long time. But like, you know, those things take a long time and not easy.

So, Wow, it's really impressive that you did that.

Resources and Closing Remarks

Maybe we can just finish off by telling, people where they can find you a little bit more about you and all the amazing stuff that you're working on now.

Absolutely. I would love that. So, I my organization is called nourishing Hope so they can find me at nourishing hope.com. I help parents figure out a personalized approach for their child.

We have a step by step program to help them. I also have a book coming out, in the future that's going to go through the step by step program, and I and so there's tons of free resources and guides and information on my website that they can get.

And also I even trained practitioners so practitioners can learn my bio individual nutrition approach with their, and patients and clients, whether they work with kids or even they just work with adults with chronic conditions.

Since we're addressing the underlying key factors it will get can be applied to any kind of, particular age or condition. But there is, of course, a special, pediatric intensive for those who do what I do and love to do what I do.

And they can find that at bio individual nutrition.com. Thank you again for everything that you do. If you have a child who has any of these chronic conditions, there's no better place to turn or and in my opinion is a petition.

That's where everybody should be starting, you know, not with medication. If you need a medication, that's fine. But in general, you know, we need to start with diet.

First. Let's work on a personalized plan and see where that gets us. So again, thank you for being here. And thank you everyone for for listening. Thank you so much.