The Autoimmune Personality: How to Work With Your Autoimmune Personality Traits to Heal and Thrive Transcript

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Introduction to the Summit and Guest

Welcome to the bio optimized summit where we are exploring the next level of physical and mental health you can achieve through intentional and targeted optimization.

I'm your host dr amy and today I have with me, someone who I am blessed to consider a friend now she is doctor keisha Ewers and she is an integrative medicine expert, doctor of sexology, family practice, registered nurse, psychotherapist, herbalist and board certified in functional medicine and she lives has her home base in Washington state and of course I grew up in Washington state, so I love that we have that in common and then she recently moved to Portland and I've lived in Portland where I was there for general surgery residency and she loves to hike, she loves to get out with her dogs with her family.

And so I feel like keisha and I have become like uh these sisters in the world because we have so much in common, including what we're talking about today, which is auto immunity and then a little bit into the trauma and adverse childhood experiences And this is something that I have been challenged with in my life and it was a big shock to me when I had my health crisis as I call it back in 2014, And really the only thing that the labs showed conventional labs showed were an elevation in my autoimmune markers And so this is kind of what started my pathway and actually what brought me to functional medicine then was trying to figure out what solutions there were for me since I wasn't finding any in conventional medicine.

So Dr Keisha though has been in the medical field for over 30 years, so she's much smarter than me, especially in this area. And she has conducted their hurt study, she conducted this in 2013 which is a healing unresolved trauma study and she developed that in order to help understand how past childhood trauma impacts adult health. And so this led to the creation of the u unbroken online program for patients to heal their own trauma.

And then the mystic medicine, deep immersion, healing retreats, retreats. She leads at her home on SAn juan island in Washington. She has been very, very helpful in bringing a lot of information to people across many different platforms and I am very excited to have her with us today. Dr keisha, thank you so much for taking the time. Thanks for having me and for during this summit So people can actually get this information.

Yes. So what brought you into the auto immune space? Well like you, you know, and everyone else that I interviewed for my summit, we all have very compelling stories that bring us here, you know, necessity is the mother of invention. Right?

Dr. Keisha Ewers' Autoimmunity Journey

So I was an RN in the intensive care unit for a number of years, about 10 years and ran marathons was raising for small Children with my husband. I was really happy and then I always, you know like my patients, they all of a sudden I got sick one day I'm training for a marathon the next day I wake up and I've gained £10 of just puffiness all over my joints.

They're red, they're inflamed. And it was like someone had taken the battery of the energizer bunny, which is what my friends used to call me and I just was flattened. And I got in to see somebody.

And in the course of the history taking, she asked me if I had auto immunity in my family history. And I said, well, yeah, I think my grandfather had rheumatoid arthritis and she said, well, so do you.

And this is genetic and here are two prescriptions once for methotrexate and once for a nonsteroidal anti inflammatory drug take them. And then when you get worse, come back will change your mitts, right? And I just

remember going, well, hang on, just a second, you know, as I'm being shuffled out of the office and my 10 minutes.

And, and you know, it was just really interesting because I said, I make my own food and very, very disciplined, you know, what else can I do, right? And of course the answer was this is genetic, so close the books on the shelf and move on and on my way home.

I remember thinking, you know, there has to be a different way, I know the side effect profile of these drugs, I really don't want to take them and I'd like to figure this out. So I got home and I went straight to the internet, which in those days was uh dial up modem, ask jeeves what else I could do, You know, got into bed where we keep our medical research in medicine and started looking and I found an article on efficacy for yoga and auto immunity. So the next day I was in my first yoga class and I called my friends that were my running partners that that day.

And I told him what was going on. And I said, I've never hung out with people that chance. I'm really worried about this yoga class tomorrow. I mean, I was so conservative.

It's just crazy how conservative I was. And of course, you know, during the course of the yoga class, my yoga teacher said the word ira vedic medicine. And he said just enough that I was intrigued that I went home again and ask jeeves about at your beta.

And what I read was so fascinating because it was nothing that I have been drained in in school and that was that we're all individual. Imagine that was part of the angels saying where I went, oh, I could filter through all these patients that have been in.

I see events in the past 10 years who had had what we call idiopathic illnesses, you know, which I always said, we're idiots and we don't know the answer, but it turns out I agreed I had the answer that, you know, they're all very different. And you know, it was like I could push a nap.

I mean I leave for somebody that was nauseated and for that one person would make them tired and another person may be bouncing off the walls. So what was this paradoxical effect we got with certain medications and certain people like all that started to make sense? And it was in that moment, it was really interesting, like oh that's why right, the 35 year old in the bed and the cardiac intensive care unit last week, he would have an M.

I. But was a runner, didn't smoke, didn't have any of the Jama risk factors at all. But it was there with an M. I. At 35 you know, and and so I thought, okay now I understand so much more. And the other thing that I read, I Arvida was not only about my own bio individuality, but also the autoimmune disease is undigested anger. And I just remember being kind of busy with that information. I'm not an angry person, you know, kind of thinking about that and and staring at the screen and kind of going, oh maybe that's a problem. Like maybe maybe the fact that I think being told that this could be undigested anger is a bad thing is part of my problem. And so through the course of the, you know, the ensuing 25 years within six months, I was able to reverse my autoimmune disease.

I never did take those medications, it's never been back. And I've done a lot of work on really understanding my own self, from the way I innovative medicine talks about from the five layers of me, which is like my physical body, my energetic body, my emotional mental and spiritual cells.

And that when there's toxicity in any of those layers, then you actually don't get to that place that carl young and one of the fathers of Western psychology called collective unconscious, right? Where all wisdom is contained, like everything is there, but we don't get to get to that place and all of us have been there.

It's those moments when we feel like we're in flow and epiphanies come in while we're in the shower out hiking, you know, and we get inspired. That's the place we really want to hang out all the time.

And but one of the things that your data points to is if you have toxicity in the layers before that, preceding that spiritual space, then you're not going to have it in a really great, you know, consistent and I thought, you know what I want that once I said right now and what we understand now is is that really creates the biology that's playing out in ourselves on that level. And so then that's what fuels some of these diseases that for us feel like they can pop

out of nowhere and all of a sudden and yet it's actually been something that's an imbalance for many years and we just never never noticed it.

Yeah, a breadcrumb trail.

Trauma, ACEs, and Nervous System Patterns

And now I can point to, but the way that we are not taught to read our bodies to actually inquire, you know, like, hey, how you doing, you know, and being this collaborative relationship where we're not taught that we're taught, you know, as we're standing in the grocery store line and we're looking at magazine covers that were supposed to look like that and that, you know, as I was driving down the street of my new city, you know, on one side of the street, there's a like a body sculpting plastic surgery center, right? And on the other side is a strip club and I'm like, yeah, there it is, right. The objectification of the body in two different ways. Right, pornography and the drive to make sure that you look like the person on this screen and so that you'll torture your body into anything, right? And spend as much money as possible and makeup and hair care and all those things in order to look like that.

And I, and I, you know, I just kind of shook my head at how we, it's such a cultural background noise that we're so unaware of it, you know, And, and we're not really asking the body what it wants to look like and what it wants to be fed and you know how to generate optimal energy so that it can do its job for us.

I always say the body has the most thankless job of anything on the entire planet because we don't witness it and just sit and go, I've never considered you, you know the fact that you can do this right? We're told that this is what separates us from all other animals that have. I actually really had a deep appreciation for this movement. Right?

Well once you have swollen joints and you can't move this movement is amazing, right? Painless movement. Oh right. And so it's fascinating that we're so achievement and productivity oriented in our culture that it's not until we are unable to achieve and produce that we start going well, hang on, Is there something you want, you know, is there something you need here?

And that was definitely true of me as I think of so many people that I have seen who have autoimmune conditions, it really is often this person who has driven themselves quite a bit in life and and is a nice and nice person, right? Like there are four pe people pleasing perfectionism, the poison from past pain and then the body type and medicine, the fire type a personalities, right? Um those are the most common people that show up with autoimmune disease and I love how that is so predictable, right? And that's really where for me, as as someone who's been trained in conventional medicine, really the clear pattern that we have there of that association because that's obviously influencing the biology, the cells for the development of this attack against ourselves.

And another one of my little mind, body spirit and the heart with one another, there is no winner, Right? So you definitely want to get out of any of the mind speak.

Um you know, I'm always, my patients will say something like this is killing me, you know, and I'm like, well, you know, they're not pointing to their disease, they're talking about their job or covid or the fact that they're quarantined or whatever it is and they're using Burbage, You know, that's war Burbage.

And I, you know, I'm always trying to say watch that because that's exactly what's going on in your system here, right? That's what we want to stop and call a truce between all these parts, including your perceptual field and how you perceive yourself in the world and your place in it. Because anything where there's any kind of war happening that is autoimmune disease. Exactly.

And I love how both of us kind of came from a very intense medical space where there was no room for any of this. And then we've we've changed so drastically because of how much we've seen in terms of the solutions that are possible and the healing that is possible. And really the the amount of science that's there. And I remember when I was sitting in that doctor's office and they were reviewing my labs and I asked a very similar question that you did, which was, well, they had told me that when you wake up with the joint swollen or you have the butterfly rash come back in and then we'll officially diagnosed you with lupus and then we'll talk about your options at that point.

And I Right, right, right. Exactly. As if that diagnosis is something that's that's a value. Um, and but they couldn't tell me why. They couldn't tell me why the markers were high and nor could they give me anything for how to prevent that progression. What if I don't want to wake up with my joints swollen? What if I don't want to wake up with that butterfly rash? And I had already started to have some muscle aches and joint aches. So I could tell that my body was definitely on that pathway. And another thing that had happened recently that concerned me was I had started some training with my with my eyesight and we were about two months into the program and I go in and they say, oh, today you're gonna meet with the head director.

And I thought, well that's weird. I've never even knew that there was a head director and he comes in and he sits down and he says what we're seeing in your eyesight is something that we've really only seen in patients with multiple sclerosis.

Have you been diagnosed with that before? And it was just like this another way that hit me of, oh my goodness, like my body is on this auto immune pathway and I need to find the exit because you know, that's what's so fascinating is it feels like your car is about to go over a cliff and what people don't understand is you actually turn it around and drive the other direction, just as far back the other direction as you want to go.

What's required is that you have the willingness to do that self inquiry. And the question isn't, how do I get out of my suffering as fast as possible, but why am I here in the first place? What have I not been listening to?

You know, what am I missing in my own patterns, not what's out here, but what's in here? You know? And so you and I both had that, you know, that willingness like mine was why am I killing myself? You know that like Ottawa man means I'm killing me. So why am I doing that?

And when's the first time I wanted that to happen? Right? Because in the moment that I was in, I didn't want to die, I thought there must have been some place where I informed myself and it turns out that when I started learning to meditate and I asked that question and went backwards, I found a 10 year old little girl version of myself that was being sexually abused by the vice principal of my elementary school. And I remember looking at her and my mind's eye going, oh, she wanted to die so bad. She wanted off this planet, you know, nobody was listening. She couldn't say the words correctly to make people understand. She didn't feel like anyone felt like she was worth keeping safe. You know?

And so when I saw her, I went, oh, this has to be connected.

Healing Through Body Awareness and Functional Medicine

And it turns out there's enough science to sink a ship that says it is, it is all of the adverse childhood experience studies pointed at. And I had just come out of, you know, six years of raising a son that I had adopted.

So I was very familiar with all of that research. So when I was hit with this, hey, you've got an autoimmune condition or your head in that pathway. I knew immediately like wait a second.

This is one of those things that's connected to my childhood. And yet I did not resonate with having had that bad of a childhood. But it's that self inquiry that you're talking about, where it's like, well, why would my body be going through this? Why would it be trying to give me these messages? So it's a really interesting point that I hear from a lot of my patients to is I didn't have a bad childhood.

Neither did I had a great childhood, right? But there are these places where and this is where the hurt study that I did in 2013 explained why the aces study came up with it did what it did and that is that it doesn't even matter if it's capital t trauma or lower case t trauma.

It what matters is what the undeveloped brain of the child which is not fully developed until 26 years old. You make up meanings about why things are happening in your world and they're going to be self centered because you are supposed to be self centered in those developmental stages. And so when I'm having this trauma with a vice principal with my childhood was great right that I have this one isolated trauma which is a capital T trauma, it's the

meaning I attached to that it is the most important piece to remember which for me was I have to like really he told me it was my fault, so I must be doing something wrong. So then the behavior that I used as an adaptive behavior strategy to I'm clearly not safe in this world is I need to actually be perfect to survive because if this is my fault, I'm doing something wrong, its authority figure, perfectionism is born right?

But if it's a lower case T trauma like this guy did therapy with many years later, he couldn't get up in front of Microsoft to give his presentations without having hyperhidrosis right? He came to see me because he'd done everything else right with Botox injections in his arm, you know, in his armpits to beta blockers, you know, all the Western medical things and it still wasn't working. And when I started talking to him, it turns out when he was in middle school, he had tripped and spilled his lunch tray in front of all the students in the cafeteria, including the cute girl he had a crush on that was just laughing her head off. And so the meaning that he made up about that was I clearly can't be trusted in front of anybody on the clumsy oaf.

The behavior that he used as an adaptive behavior strategy for that incident was I need to hide and he never went into another cafeteria, doesn't, you know at the time that he came to see me, didn't even eat in the Microsoft cafeteria, like no cafeterias ever. You know, and here's this guy's decades later and he doesn't realize that the adaptive behaviors that were right for a child in that moment, you know, and the meanings they created, we're still running the show and so he would break out in a sweat when forced to get up in front of people.

This is not anything he would have identified as having a bad childhood. That's the point, right? But his nervous system when placed in a in a, in a situation, right? Where all the old alarm bells are gonna go off and he's in fight flight freeze mode and Children always freeze because you don't have any power. So he gets frozen in front of a group and just start sweating profusely by dart if he didn't stop sweating once we healed that little kid, that belief system and gave him a different adaptive behavior that came from an adult brain with the prefrontal cortex that had executive function abilities that his child self didn't have. Right?

So it doesn't even matter that you don't have a bad childhood. In fact good. I'm so glad, right that it's like whether these moments in time and we have many of them childhood is a jungle and you know, it's like it can be the, I messed up a word in front of the class, in the spelling bee or I couldn't make it to the top of the rope in the presidential challenge in front of everybody or I didn't get picked for the ball team.

I wanted to get picked for, I failed the test or didn't get an A plus for me whether I'm not getting an A plus, right? And so a beat is traumatizing to someone who sat in the fifth grade classroom and said if I'm going to survive, I have to be perfect. Right. Right. And so then college becomes insufferable if there's anything less than an A plus, right? Constant.

I do I do remember my first a minus and how traumatic that was for me and other people see us and listen to us and go, poor baby boo hoo. You know, But no, it was trauma for me, right? Meaning attach the nervous system, triggers that. So all this work that's being done with like vagal nerve, um processing and stuff like that. I'm like, yeah, that's great. What you've got to figure out first, what's triggering it in the first place. And it doesn't mean you have to go dive into old painful things. That's not at all.

It's really coming up with the meaning you attached to whatever that was, right. And then you retrain and reconnect and you? Re attached and you find that secure space for that little kid part that's like I'm dying and this is what I love about like both of our our, you know, career path and how they've changed that.

Closing Thoughts and Resources

We've both landed in this place where it's like the body is really that source of information for us. We don't need to analyze. We don't need to stay in our heads. In fact, that's a little counterproductive when we're trying to work with the nervous system and understand why are these patterns there. The story.

The actual story may not actually be as important. The memory you may not need to have an exact memory because it's all right there in your body and when we actually start listening to the body working directly with the nervous system, it's all right there for us to understand and it is understandable.

And then that's really when we can have these major shifts in our health and you're back out on the trails. I'm back out on my bike and on the trails like we're living these lives that would otherwise not be possible given the other solutions that we were told at the time. But like this is possible.

These are things that we can change when we work with the nervous system and this, this dress that's still been stored in our nervous system. Good. Well, thank you Doctor keisha for joining us today. For those of you who would like to learn more information about her story, her work. Please find her at www dot doctor keisha dot com. And I strongly encourage you to it.

As you know, and can tell, I love her to death. Love her work. So, thank you Doctor keisha. Thank you everybody and thank you for joining us today together. Let's find that next level of health and aliveness