The Glove Was Hiding More Than You Think Transcript

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Michael Jackson, Stress, and Heart Health

Michael Jackson's skin was telling the world something for 30 years, but the word wasn't listening. I'm Dr. Columbus Batiste, interventional cardiologist.

And when I watched the new Michael movie this past weekend, I didn't see the moonwalk. Because what was happening on his skin may have been happening in his arteries.

Now, by the end of this, You know, the kind you can't see and the kinda your doctor often can measure may be quietly aging your heart right now. I wanna show you something.

Now, when I was a kid, I had one of these. Well, not exactly like this. Mine was probably a sock, but it was sort of glove-like because I remember sitting in my living room and when Billie Jean came on Motown 25, you could ask my oldest sister, she was there.

She was the witness. I got up off the couch, white socks, black church shoes, and moonwalking across the carpet. She watched. she laughed. Nah, I wasn't good.

But that wasn' t the point. The point was, for that moment, i was Michael Jackson. I was a superstar. For many of us, that was' nt a performance we watched on TV.

We lived it. It was cultural awakening that we lived through. the black jacket, the fedora, the white sock, glove, moon walk. but here's something most people may have forgotten.

Long before Motown 25, Michael was already a child star. He was performing on stages with Jackson 5 when he was five years old. Five. And by the time he became the man we watched on Motow 25 he had been performing for the world for almost 20 years.

From Performance Pressure to Artery Damage

So when I watch the moonwalk now, I don't just see brilliance, although I do see it. I see a man who never knew a life without pressure. A man whose nervous system had be performing since childhood.

And as a cardiologist, that matters because how long you've been carrying stress is part of what your arteries remember. Let me be clear. I'm not here to diagnose Michael Jackson from a distance.

They're not separate. Everything is connected. So what does any of this have to do with the white glove? Now let me tell you what I see in the cath lab.

When I look inside someone's arteries, at least during a heart attack, I'm not just seeing a blockage. I am seeing the results of years of silent injury, years pressure to perform, to provide, and to be perfect.

Years of inflammation that was never named. and the cholesterol the world wants to blame, it is part of the story, but it's not the whole story. So here's a fact most people don't know.

When researchers have looked at thousands of patients with cardiac imaging, the majority of heart attacks and vascular deaths, they happen in arteries that were less than 50% blocked, at least at baseline.

Let me say that again. Most heart attack don's happen the most clogged arteries of 70, 80, 90%. They happen at the inflamed ones. So if cholesterol alone isn't the answer, what is?

Okay, so here's what's actually going on. You have to understand what your blood vessels actually are. Your endothelium, the thin lining of your vessels, it's alive.

It covers every blood vessel in your body. Every artery, every vein, and capillary.

How Arteries Work and Why Inflammation Matters

And here is what most people don't understand. The endotherium is not wallpaper. It's not static, it's active. It is actually a pharmacy. it produces a molecule called nitric oxide.

And nitrate oxide, keeps your vessels relaxed. Keeps blood flowing smoothly. Tells platelets not to clot when they shouldn't. Is the molecular signature of a healthy heart.

I tell my patients all the time, your body is supposed to be making this medicine for itself. Now stress is what stops the prescription. Here's the thing about stress.

Chronic stress and inflammation, they reduce nitric oxide. And when nitrous oxide drops, Your vessels constrict. The lining gets damaged. LDL, what you know and heard of as bad cholesterol, it slips in the artery wall.

Then the immune system shows up. Macrophages, your body's cleanup cells, they try to eat the LDl, but they get stuck. They turn to foam cells. The foam cell pile up, platforms, and the body builds a cap over it.

Now here's something most people don't know. Not all caps are the same. A thick, old cap is like a callus, tough, stable, built up over years, improtective.

Thin, new cap, is a blister, fragile, angry, but still inflamed. The artery you should fear is not the one with the thickest callus. It's the on with a freshest blister.

Because if inflammation keeps coming, that blisters cap, it gets thinner. And when it ruptures, the body sees an open wound, blood clots, artery closes.

That's a heart attack, not a slow clog, a sudden rupture of an inflame artery. This is why I tell my patients, cholesterol is the culprit, for inflammation, its the accomplice.

Alright, now let's get back to the superstar Michael Jackson. In the early 1980s, he became more than a star. He was a global legend, thriller, Motown 25, bad, but this is also the era where changes in the skin were starting to be noticed.

Patches that didn't match, hands that looked different than the rest of him, and the glove.

The Glove, Vitiligo, and Hidden Illness

The glove, the world celebrated as style, was not what most of us thought it was. Now, years later, actress Cicely Tyson, who was friend of Michael's, she told CNN something most people had never heard.

She said she shared a fashion designer with Michael in the 1980s and she said, she was there when the glove was being designed. She says Michael was beginning to develop vitiligo.

It started on his hand and the gloves was made to cover it. So what looked like fashion was actually medicine. What the world called brilliant. was also a young man protecting himself from being seen.

And then there's the rest of the story. In 1984 during a Pepsi commercial, pyrotechnics set his hair on fire. He suffered serious burns that introduced him to chronic pain.

But the pain didn't end with the burns. For decades, Michael was performing as a dancer at the highest level in the

world. The footwork, the spins, that drops, The relentless tours.

the body that performs that hard for that long does not stop hurting when the show ends. Chronic pain, chronic stress, inflammation. These don't stay separate in a body.

They feed each other. And by 1993 on national television Michael publicly told the World he had vitiligo. He said it was a condition he could not control.

But by then, years of speculation had already happened. Here is one of the most important lessons in medicine. Sometimes people suffer twice. First from the disease, then from misunderstanding of disease.

We tracked the performance, but we didn't track the physiology. So why does a cardiologist care about a skin condition? Let me explain. Vitligo is, well, it's what we call an autoimmune disease.

And auto-immune simply means the body's immune system, which is supposed to protect you from outside threats, starts attacking parts of you instead. Now in vitligos, the immune systems attacks melanocytes.

Autoimmune Disease and Cardiovascular Risk

These are the cells that produce pigment, Which is why patches of skin, they lose their color. But here's the deeper lesson. The immune system doesn't only attack the skin.

That same immune dysregulation that takes away pigment can quietly create inflammation in other places, including your arteries. In 2024, researchers published a study of nearly 100,000 vitiligo patients in the U. S.

And get this, people with vitilligo had a 28% higher risk of major cardiovascular events. a 21% higher risk of stroke, a 27% high risk dangerous blood clots.

Even after researchers matched patients by age, sex, and other risk factors, what this tells us is this. Bitligo Michael disclosed to the world may have placed him in the same category.

Researchers are now studying in tens of thousands of other people. And it lined up with another study that same exact year. Researchers in Denmark looked at 85,000 patients undergoing cardiac imaging, people with autoimmune diseases.

Fideligo was among them. They had a 46% higher risk of heart attack, stroke, and cardiovascular death, even after accounting for cholesterol, for blood pressure, in accounting of smoking.

Listen, here's the line that should stop every one of us. In that Danish study, even patients with a calcium score of zero, patients whose heart looked clean on imaging, still had nearly double the risk of heart event if they had autoimmune disease.

Why? Because the calcium's score doesn't measure inflammation. A separate German study of nearly 4,000 patients showed exactly that. Even people with the Calcium score zero had a higher risk for heart attack if the had elevated inflammation in their blood, measured by a simple test called high-sensitivity C-reactor protein.

So the autoimmune finding suddenly makes sense. A clean scan tells you about calcium, it doesn't tell you inflammation. I've had patients sit across from me and ask, but my calcium score was zero doc, how am I here?

This is how. what's happening in the artery wall before calcium ever showed up. That's why I keep saying it.

Stress, Daily Life, and What You Can Do

Genes may load the gun, but the environment, food, stress, inflammation, they pull the trigger. that's not just true for vitiligo, that is true of heart disease too.

So where do you fit in this story? I want you to pause for a second, because of course you're not Michael Jackson. You're no performing in stadiums, you are not being photographed every day, But think about what he carried.

A child star at five, a teenager famous around the world, an adult who had to keep reinventing, A new album that had be better than the last one, and a new tour that has to be more spectacular.

A body that was scrutinized every time it appeared in public. a man who never had a moment when the World wasn't watching. That is the stress of always having to be more.

Now look at your own life, you may not be on stage, but you are the one everyone calls. You're the rock of your family. Your the leader at work. And you're one taking care of the kids and the ones taking of care your aging parents at the same time.

you have been performing for years and being the Rock is heavy. The pressure to provide, the grief you haven't fully grieved. the version of yourself you perform when you even exhausted.

The conversations you never had because you didn't want to be a burden. The strong face you wear at work, at church, and in front of the kids. Your arteries?

They're listening to all of it. And here's what most people don't understand. You can be sitting at a desk, quietly drinking your coffee, looking calm to the outside world, And your body can still be in fight or flight mode.

That's not a feeling, that's biology. Chronic stress, it activates cortisol. Cortisol drives insulin resistance, raises blood pressure, tells your vessels to stay tight when they need to relax, and it lowers nitric oxide, the protective medicine we just talked about.

So here's what I want you to understand. Stress, is not just emotional, stress is vascular. Every time you swallow your stress instead of speaking it, every time push through instead pausing, your endothelium feels it.

Your heart feels your arteries, they remember. So here's what I want you to do. Not next month, not next year, tonight, today. Pick one thing, just one.

Okay, number one, stop the I'm fine reflex. When someone asks you how you're doing and you are drowning, Stop saying I am fine. Stress that stays secret stays in your cells.

Tell one person you trust one true thing about what you actually carrying. Number two, add one anti-inflammatory food to your plate this week. Now I don't want to add all of them, but at least one Leafy greens, berries, walnuts, flaxseed, beans.

You don't have to be perfect, but you do have begin the process. you have get your body moving in the right direction. And you give your bodies something to work with.

Okay, number three, I want you to protect your sleep. No phone in bed, no news before sleep, let your nervous system rest. Now these are small things, the small thing compound.

Small things become arteries that age slowly instead of quickly. Small thing become a heart that lasts. What was hidden beneath the glove may not be different from what's hidden inside of many of us.

Stress that nobody sees. Inflammation that no body is naming. A body that has been performing for too long without rest. The glove was styled, the gloves was covered, but for all of the us, glove is also a question.

Where are you covering? What is your body trying to tell you that you haven't slowed down enough to hear? You don't have to be Michael Jackson to deserve to cared for.

You dont have be famous for your body to care for something. And you don have wait until something breaks to

start healing. Now if this video meant something to you at all, send it to someone who needs to hear it.

A son, a sister, friend, colleague. The person you love who never slows down. Because someone in your life is performing right now while they're hurting.

They need to know, being the rock is not the same as being well. Alright, remember, if you want to go fast, go alone. If you wanna go far, together. Let's go far together by building healthier hearts and stronger communities.

So like it, share it send it. Save a life.