The Hidden Impact of Mold, Toxins, and Nervous System Overload Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Introduction to mold and the guest

Oh, mold is in, you know, really old homes or like dirty homes and, or, like, people who just don't take care of their houses or things like that. But, I mean, we see stories about this every week on most celebrities dealing with mold.

Um, you know, million, multimillion dollar homes, brand new homes. I mean, lumber is oftentimes just like preloaded with it. There is mold, it can be anywhere and it's just a matter of how much mold is there, what type of mold it is and how sensitive are you to mold.

So those are kind of like the variable sliders, but it does not discriminate for sure. Hi, and welcome to The Balancing Point. I'm Dr. John Needers and I am here to make traditional Chinese medicine, functional medicine and integrative health simple, practical and fun.

So you can restore balance, boost vitality and enjoy a healthier life every single day. Hi there and welcome to The Balancing Point. I m Dr John and on the show today we ve got a very special guest, Dr Diana Stafford.

Dr. Stafford is a board certified physician with many years in practice. She completed her medical training at University of Virginia School of Medicine and did her residency in Washington, DC.

she's an integrative medicine physician who works with patients to achieve optimal health. One of the things that I found fascinating about her bio is she is mold literate practitioner.

Very few of those around. Dr. Diana treats mold-related illnesses and other health issues related to environmental exposure.

Why root causes get missed

Dr Stafford believes that analyzing the root cause of health problems, not just adding another prescription to briefly allay the symptoms, is the true path to health and wellness.

Doctor Diana, I'm very, very happy to have you on here today. And I was very fascinated by the title of your book that you gave me. You're not broken, you're overloaded by healing feels so hard.

And boy, do we run into that these days, right? Yes, absolutely. Thanks, Dr. John. It's great to be here. From looking at your bio and from other things on your site, it seems like you work with a lot of people who feel like they've tried everything, but still aren't getting better.

What's usually being missed in your experience? Yeah, that's so true. So most of the time when I see clients, they have tried a lot of things. Most of times it's not that they haven't tried enough different things, it is that the root causes or the route driving factors weren't addressed, weren' t uncovered, or that things were approached in the wrong order.

So a lot of times I see that toxin overload or mold exposure, that dysfunction, dysregulated nervous system, all these factors can be coming into play.

And these are things that, of course, are not addressed by conventional medical system. or tested for or talked about really, you know, sometimes the gut dysfunction, but a lot of things, in the conventional medical system, they do them more for the quick fix, right?

So with root causes that are so incredibly common, like toxin overload and gut dysbiosis and dysregulated nervous system. You know a, lot times a combination of those things.

If they're not addressed and with the right sequence, then you can do, sometimes people come see me on 30 supplements or things like that, or an intense exercise routine and they've tried every kind of elimination diet or thing like, that sound like a great idea and it's the next hot thing on social media to add to your regimen, but sometimes it's too many inputs and it is not going to stick.

If you're constantly being barraged by toxins, for example, if you have a mold exposure going on or other toxins in your indoor environment, or which can really affect every single body system, not just respiratory.

Or if you're in fight or flight state and then your supplements won't be working properly or anything you are doing is not really actually going to work as it's supposed to because your nervous system is actually blocking that.

All of these factors, I just love when these light bulb moments go off for people when I'm like describing what they're feeling and they were saying, yes, absolutely.

I feel like that I've tried everything and the regular mental system isn't cutting it for me. So we've got to get to root causes and approach things without throwing the kitchen sink at it either.

Yeah, no, as you're speaking, I'm thinking about one delightful patient. She suffers a little bit from too many cooks in the kitchen syndrome and our initial intake, the identifiable ICD-10 coded issues build an entire sheet and they're accurate.

And she's not making it up. I mean, it's really, we've got tests to prove it. Then she has an entirely page of supplements she is taking, not from me, but from someone else.

And it's like, oh, I don't know if you can even digest these. I mean, it, you know, and again, she's not really, hasn't been getting better. She's getting a little better now because we were trying to trim things back for a bit, but it is hard for her to give up her supplements, right?

She has really become wedded to them. So, yeah. It's so true. Yeah, I definitely hear that a lot.

Testing gut health and mold exposure

I was just talking with a client about that yesterday because she was to the point where she had to take things kind of like in batches, you know, with, um, this was from this, uh, provider and this is from the provider.

So you have like a handful here and a hand full there. And as you're saying, i'm thinking, can you even digest all of this? You know? This is, it's just too many inputs and everything may have a hypothetical purpose, but it is too much.

It's really too And especially if they've got gut problems, right, as either a co-problem or at the root, well, all those supplements are very difficult.

Like, I'm 75 and when I hit about 65, if I do take supplements, from capsules to tonics, and I take everything as a liquid now, then I am much better for it because I can actually absorb those.

And I noticed that you do some very interesting testing. I saw that, you did do a, I think it was a urine test for mycotoxins. And then you'd do, some stool testing and oats testing, and we do all of those.

But our experience, it's so nice that your an MD because my patients, for example, will take a really well done stool test, right? Really good companies.

to their GI doc and the GI Doc looks at and just throws in the waste can. It's like, I don't know what to do with this. And so it's nice that you as a medical doctor are doing that work.

So congratulations. Thanks. Yeah, no, gut testing. I love toxins testing, but gut I love it so much, probably my

favorite test, because it's so informative.

And you're right, I did not learn about these kind of gut tests in med school. You know, just your standard stool culture and of course, like the scopes, the endoscopy and colonoscopy and all of that.

and take three samples for an ova and parasites test. So it was so enlightening whenever I learned about gut testing, because I did gut before I even did mold, or I helped people with mold.

But now I do both. Those are like my two main specialties. The gut testing, I mean, it's pages and pages on your microbiome. It's the gut inflammation because inflammation, as we know, is the root of a lot of health issues and putting that down is so, so important and the intestinal permeability and Butyrate, one of my favorite supplements and favorite things to talk about the postbiotic, which is so often low because of so many factors, but it's made by the good gut bacteria and it, it just so easily low.

I love using butyrate and showing people the low butyrate on those tests is really powerful to really connect that with like, okay, you need this supplement because, and fiber to feed the good gut bacteria, but just you would never know that from regular stool tests.

30 years ago, I was dragged to a seminar by someone that I knew and it was on leaky gut, right? And I didn't want to go. And about an hour into it, I went, oh my God, this is crazy, right?

With a couple of traditional Chinese medicine with a functional medicine lab testing, it's like, wow, you know, and I was just totally blown away. So I did mostly gut things for about 10 years after that and just loved.

One of the things I loved, and I'm so old, when I started doing that, I think there were two companies that were really doing stool testing. And now there's a new company every few weeks, right?

And the testing gets better and better, easier to understand, for the patients. So that's neat. Yeah, that is so interesting you say about leaky gut 30 years ago.

That's amazing. Yeah, I feel like leaky gut is still such the term that, you know, it's not. It's not even like widely accepted, right?

Leaky gut, symptoms, and environmental clues

But it's such a good way to look at it, that increase in intestinal permeability, because then when you think about the fact that that means that your food particles and everything that's going to your gut is coming into contact with the innermost layer of your got lining, which is the immune system layer, then you can really see how the gut and theimmune system are interacting.

And if you have some degree of leaky gut, which is how I like to put it to people. Okay, well, your zonulin is, you know, 300. You have a very high zionulin which means you have significant leakey gut and those particles are getting through, not well-digested.

They're interfacing with the immune system and then things like your muscles are going up, getting random reactions, and you can really get all sorts of symptoms.

I mean, because the gut really does rule it all. Well, yeah. And of course, 30 years ago, I tried to use intestinal permeability, but what people remembered was leaky gut.

Yeah. Then they would mention to their doctor, leakey gut, and the doctors say, don't ever go back and see that lunatic again. I know. It's like, it's…

I wish we could just make our own ICD for functional medicine, that's all right. Are there any specific symptom patterns that make you think something deeper is going on kind of in general?

You get a new patient rather than just stress, which is always an issue and basic gut issues, but what else triggers that for you? Absolutely. Yeah. And I just took a poll of people who.

who had been in my messages on social media and I'm asked, you know, what's the top thing you're working on? And people said, gut health, but multi-system symptoms, right?

So you got brain fog. That's a huge one. Just like feeling you in a fog all the time. Can't think straight. Fatigue is a really big one, and non-restorative sleep, sort of this wired but tired feeling, mental health, anxiety, depression, things like that, then gut symptoms, like you said.

Or symptoms that flare up or seem to start whenever there was a certain environment that someone either moved into or they started working somewhere and then they start with these symptoms because you can get a mold or other bacterial toxins or another toxin exposure, you know, at home, work, school, car, like any of those things, gym, any those places.

So trying to correlate it with environment, but You know, if it's toxin illness or mold illness, it is not going to be just one symptom. It's going be multi-system symptoms.

Great. And so for you, mold is a pretty big part of the picture then. Yeah, yeah. So I feel like environmental exposures, there's still so many layers behind why that's not addressed by regular medicine, but it's so, so important and really, really common because the data shows that depending which which study you look at there, it's anywhere between 20 something percent and 80 something of homes or buildings in general actually have had a water damage event and then mold can grow within 24 to 48 hours very easily.

And then, okay, so why does this matter? Because mold puts off a lot of invisible toxins that are microscopic. So not only do you not see them, but also when you breathe them in, they can go across the blood-brain barrier, and then they go all around the body to every single organ system.

Then what happens is inflammation and toxin overload. So your liver is backing up because of your livers. People say, okay, well, that's what we have livery for, to process out toxins, right?

Liver takes care of detox and it's fine, Well, it gets backed up, and a lot of these toxins like aflatoxin are the most common ones, for example. They jeopardize their own detoxification because they affect the liver.

So not only is it a toxin, but it's a toxins that affects the livers strongly. You've got liver issues, which means your liver can't process out the toxins.

then you can't get them out. So and then again, if you have gut issues, which 70% of people estimated have got dysbiosis or microbiome issues in the gut, so then, you cannot process them that out that way either.

you just got toxins, inflammation that can actually last long after you have left any mold exposure. So you can get chronic illness from it.

Mold toxicity, AI caveats, and nervous system regulation

And we did have a personal family mold experience, mold illness about 10 years ago, which is how I initially learned about this, Which pretty much blew my mind when I learned I had learned in med school that mold cause allergies, which it does, but I have not learned anything about mold toxicity or anything biotoxin illness.

So learning that, I decided that I wanted to help other people with it and as an MD, it's definitely You know, it's been great to be able to use kind of that general medical knowledge and apply it to then these environmental illnesses.

So I have a love-hate relationship with ChatGPT. I find it useful sometimes. It's like, oh, there's a quick summary. In fact, I did a summary of a book that I wanted to talk about.

But then, of course, we have so many people that try to do their own detoxes based on influencers online, or they plug something into AI. And boy, i've seen some disasters with that.

Yeah, I have too, especially because, and my husband works in AI, so I know kind of the ins and outs of it. So yeah, definitely major caveats there for sure, because AI at baseline is also gonna agree with you.

If you put something in, it's highly likely to agree and back you up, which is kinda scary. If you tell it to be skeptical, then it'll be sceptical. So it's not always going to give the same answer if two people put the question in.

it won't necessarily give the same answer based on your settings and a lot of other factors. So, I mean, so many layers to the fact that you don't want to just be plugging something into AI and getting a detox protocol.

I, mean yeah, definitely a great tool in general, but you really have to know how to use it. And I absolutely would advise anyone listening to work with a practitioner who understands this stuff because things can really backfire.

I mean, I've definitely had a lot of clients come to me with like, oh, well, AI told me to do this. And, you know, they're super smart people, that they are using AI like in their businesses and stuff.

They're like well I can just use AI for this too. Great. Easy. You know. Done. Right. Then they buy the supplements, no questions asked, and then they started and they don't feel better or they feel worse.

You know, can work, but it's kind of a toss up. Yeah, right. So you mentioned early on kind of about the nervous system, right? And that's such a critical piece of healing.

And so even, I'm assuming you find that even when the symptoms seem more directly physical, the nerve system there is a physical aspect, but do you think that that is really a big issue for you, dealing with the nerves system?

I do. And so nervous system determines whether the body's in a state, whether it can actually heal or if you're stuck in fight or flight, wired but tired state.

If you are in chronic stress response state then it will actually block things like healthy digestion, your detox pathways, even your immune system can get compromised and you can sick more frequently.

So if you're doing a lot of great things and you are seeing no effects and no improvement, the nervous system is one of the first places to look. Because there's actually multiple states of that vagus nerve, which is that cranial nerve as you know, but just for listeners, that is the cranio nerve that runs from the base of brain all the way down to the gut and innervates a little things in between.

It can be in a parasympathetic state, which is your rest digest state or it can in be a fight or flight state. So I use a lot of vagus nerve exercises and breathing exercises.

These are science backed, you know, some Some vagus nerve and breathing exercises, you know, have more data than others because it's like one of those realms where it seems harder to study.

And one reason why people say, Oh, that's just, I can kind of skip that part. You know? It's not, not really. mandatory for healing. But a lot of times it actually is.

And to flip the script on that, it's great, I think, because a little of time it is free, right? And you can do it, you know, wherever you are. It's fast.

I just tell people to bake that part of your routine, kind of like, okay, well, take your supplements, do your nervous system exercise, and it just kind like it part the routine.

Yeah. And with a lot of the vagus nerve exercises, you look at, ancient healing practices, Egyptians, Ayurveda, traditional Chinese medicine, and they had all that stuff built in.

It was just kind of, here, do these breathing exercises and do them at this count, at you know, this time of day, et cetera. So things like that don't stick around if there isn't value, right?

People just discard them. There've been so many ideas that people have tried and only a few of them have stuck. But now, like you said, there's good science behind it.

So that's wonderful. You were emphasizing that healing has to happen in the right order. What does that really look like and what happens when people get it backwards?

Yeah, so as you were just saying, we have to stabilize the system first. If someone's been taking a ton of supplements or been in a really toxic environment, then we Remove the exposures that are causing them to be sick, support the nervous system, and make sure that we have the detox pathways or drainage pathways, whatever term you want to use.

Healing in the right order

Basically, you're having good bowel movements. There's no lymphatic backup or things like that. you know, bile flow issues, things like that, because a lot of times if people jump say, okay, I want to take a detox protocol.

So people, the first thing that might be thought of or come up on a search for that would be binders. And if you start with bindars, a lots of time they can backfire because they make you constipated.

They can deplete your neurotransmitters and your nutrients. And so then, you know, I find people just feel like drained, right? If you start with binders and you're not using them properly.

So a lot of times people will assume that, they're too sensitive or like they can't handle these supplements or they are just, not going to feel better, but really It's just wasn't done in the right order because I can't emphasize enough that we can out supplement our way out of a dysregulated nervous system or out a toxic environment.

Gotcha. Often I find it, now people are looking for you, but I found with patients that come in to see me, often it's difficult to convince them that it might be a mold problem.

I'm thinking of one very bright woman. And she came to see us, brought her two sons in who were having ADHD type symptoms. And we treated her and it wasn't, we weren't getting much success.

I said, you know, I think you should do a mold test. Well, can't have any mold exposure. Let's just do an urine test and see. Sure enough, boy, it was a mess.

We said this is probably from your house. But we had our house remodeled X number of years ago. So I recommended you get a Mold Inspector. And he went under the house and he said, you have a lake under there.

You have broken pipe that's probably been draining sewage under your house for five to 10 years. And it's just filled with mold. So she was shocked. Right.

They did good mold remediation and then everybody started getting much better. The two boys are off in college now and she's doing great, but she just didn't want to hear it.

It's like, I can't be more. Absolutely. Yeah, it has a sigma surrounding it, like, oh, mold is in, you know, really old homes or like dirty homes and, or, people who just don't take care of their houses or things like that.

But, I mean, we see stories about this every week almost, celebrities dealing with mold, million, multimillion dollar homes, brand new homes. I oftentimes just like preloaded with it.

I mean, there is mold, you know, it can be anywhere. And it's just a matter of how much mold is there, what type of mold it is, and how sensitive are you to mold.

So those are kind of like the variable sliders, but it does not discriminate for sure. Marc Thiessen I first got turned on to a mold many decades ago.

And I can't tell you how many times I would tear off the stucco underneath an old wooden window from the thirties and it was just nothing but mold holding the house up practically.

And it's very difficult to get people to realize, you know, this is really a problem.

Recognizing hidden mold exposures

One of my staff is very, very sensitive to mold, ended up being hospitalized for something that the mold triggered. And moved into a house, you know, not a nice house and started having mold symptoms again.

So she got the nose patrol. Nose patrol, she had bagel, the beagle come out and he sniffs for mold and boy just lit up at several places in the house.

And then she's got a mold inspector and sure enough. They found a fair amount of mold, which you would never know. Cause the house looks like it's very well maintained, right?

And so it can be tricky. Yeah. It has hidden so many times and those mold dogs can really useful for sure as part of the team. I just thought it was great.

Bagel the Beagle. Can you take us through a case, any case you want, where someone came in and was really stuck and then what shifted when you changed the approach?

So I love sharing about my one client who was in her lower thirties, like healthy lady. So she, you know, has her own or had her business still does. And she.

You know, she came to me because she had been experiencing about two years of worsening fatigue such that she was trying to take care of her two young kids, but she really couldn't even take of care her kids or do her business, do work anymore at the time because it was just too much, you know.

Sort of debilitating fatigue and then brain fog as well. Just feeling like she wasn't functioning. And she had done some research, so she started some supplements and she was starting to react to pretty much everything she took in sort of random ways.

Like she would get rashes or she will get gut symptoms or if she get worsening symptoms. And so she came to see me and in talking to her, I quickly realized that she was in fight or flight.

You know, her nervous system was just traumatized from this whole experience. And she had researched mold and it turns out that, she has been exposed to mold at her.

I think it was her work and her home actually in this case, but sometimes it can be really anywhere. In this case, the first thing that we had to do was address the nervous system.

So because it was really blocking all the things she was trying to, and then causing issues with the mast cells too. Calming nervous systems, calming mast cell.

Doing that stabilization phase was what she had been missing and removing any ongoing exposure. With her, we had a deadline because she was going to be bridesmaid in a wedding, or she wanted to, and she would have to fly and travel and function for a whole weekend and all of these things.

So that was the goal. So at first it was a bit, you know, like, are we going to make it? Is she going be able to do it. But then once, she messaged me one day, I still remember this.

She's like I felt a shift in my body. And she finally felt like she relaxed. for the first time in a really long time. And I knew then that once her nervous system kind of shifted, that things were going to start to work better.

They did. So she was able to go, she's able be a bridesmaid in this wedding, and she is able travel, which travel is definitely difficult a lot of times for people who are sensitive to mold and who were sick and You know, so many things.

It's usually the last thing to come back. So it was a huge victory. And, you know she's doing so well now, but I feel like You know, it's just taking over people's lives, right?

Like this fatigue and these other symptoms because a lot of times, like you say, are very, a lotta people don't understand that it could be the environment and it can be nervous system when it says, oh, well, you look fine.

A lot people look find maybe on the outside, but then they're really not.

A case study of recovery

I just love helping people get their lives back and get these healthy years back so they can actually take care of their families and things like that and actually do their jobs.

That's a wonderful story. Thank you. In Chinese medicine, I remember when I was back in school and there were a few illnesses that would cause what they termed spirit possession disorder.

And everybody thought it was shamanic or something, right? And then I remembered the first time a patient sitting across from me, she said, thank you so much, I've got my spirit back.

It was like, oh, that's what mean. They finally got back into themselves, and so it wasn't, who knows what that meant 2,000 years ago. People do say, thank you, I got my spirit back, you know, that's awesome.

You were talking about different exposures. I actually had a family member who kept getting ill, just everything seemed like it should be okay, but finally suspected some mold.

She had fairly new cars, a couple of years old, But when they took off the liner, The entire car was full of mold. She had a leak. And it was leaking around the roof rack.

We found out when she took it in that that was very common for that model. So we replaced everything. About a week later, she went out. Got in, and it was a little puddle of water on the floor.

She took the car in and traded it in. Yeah. No, I totally. Oh my goodness. I had a client once and he's a really athletic guy. And he was getting so frustrated because he had ruled out like almost everything else.

His home was fine and this, it turned out to be his car. Once he got rid of that car, he started feeling better. And, you know, he was able to go back to his, getting his games at the gym and everything else, but it's like, it was the car that he did not want to get rid of.

Yeah. You know sometimes. I appreciate that you're doing the testing for it, right? So that, that can show people. you have an exposure somewhere. We just have to track it down.

So if someone's listening and they're starting to wonder if they fall into one of these categories, something deeper going on, what would you suggest as a first simple step?

Yeah. So I would take a little inventory of sort of your environmental history. Do you feel worse in certain spaces? Have your system, have your symptoms started or been persistent since you moved to a certain place or since he started working somewhere, since got a car or, or there was some kind of leak or water damage.

And, and then just start, start to kind connect those dots in your head. But also, you know, I do have a lot of. free resources for people on that, you know, on my social media and things like that.

As far as like a mold symptoms quiz, I have one of those that people can just go through. It's a two minute online quiz and because there are, mold can do pretty much anything, but there some symptoms that are more common than others.

So we talked about the brain fog and fatigue and there's some others, But kind of can tell, give you an idea whether, yeah, probably check for environmental factors or maybe it's something else.

And so going back to the title of our talk, you're not broken, your overloaded.

First steps and encouragement

And that's often part of the battle is getting them to not give up. So what would you want people to basically understand about their body and about the ability to heal?

Absolutely. So that your body's not broken, it's overwhelmed, its overloaded with toxins and your buddy keeps the score on this. When we start removing what's burdening the body and support it in a way that's aligned with how it supposed to heal, things can shift.

Healing is possible. I am ever the optimist and definitely always a cheerleader for people because it so powerful what these interventions can do whenever we figure out the root causes.

Dr. Diana Stafford, I want to thank you immensely. I really hope people tune into this because we're talking about what we did. We started doing a new test on people.

And so we got an interview with a specialist from the company and we said, well, could this item be for mold exposure? And the person said, well, where do you live?

I said in San Francisco Bay. And she just started laughing. She said are you kidding? Of course it's a mold exposure, right? So again, it can be quite ubiquitous and certainly we see a lot of symptoms of these things.

So I know you've got to get off and see patient. I just want to thank you very, very much. Really learned from you and I certainly appreciate your coming on the show.

Thanks so much, Dr. John. Okay, you take care. You too. Thank you for joining me on The Balancing Point. If you enjoyed today's episode, please follow the show, share it with a friend, and leave a review.

Feeling out of balance? Most approaches just manage symptoms. Here we get to the root. So real healing real clarity and balance can begin. Visit AlamedaAcupuncture.com to learn more, explore our supplements, or book a call.

We'd love to hear from you.