Introduction to Evolutionary Medicine

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So it will always be on the side of caution and can create downstream issues which don't make you feel good, but essentially are prioritizing survival.

We've been trained in a particular type of way in modern medicine, to think of the body like a car, that something goes wrong with the tires, we fix the tire.

Something goes on with part of engine, and we fixed the engine. But as we know in the modern vehicles, the thing that tends to go wrong often is the electrical system.

So the electric system, you have to get to the brain of car and reset it, reprogram it so that all the other functions of a the car work correctly. You're listening to the Lifestyle Medicine Podcast with Dr.

Ivan Rusilko, brought to you by Access Lab, where we explore new perspectives at the forefront of personalized health care. All right, well, welcome back to the Lifestyle Medicine Podcast.

I'm Dr. Ivan Rosilko, your host, and we're powered by Access Labs. If your doctor's not checking your labs, they're not a doctor. Today, we've got Ashok Gupta, who is the founder of the Gupto program, which basically deals with everything neuroplasticity and programming.

So I've been super, super excited to learn all about that today. Like I was telling him before that I used to have a clinic called Plasticities. This is something near and dear to my heart.

Ashoke, thank you so much for stopping by today! Lovely to be here. So how did you get so in-depth with neuro retraining and neuroplasticity? I'm very curious because it's something not a lot of healthcare practitioners know or even actually practice.

Yes, so I actually suffered from a chronic health condition many, many years ago.

Ashok Gupta's Recovery Story

I suffered ME or chronic fatigue syndrome. This was in the late 90s when often these types of conditions weren't really recognized or really understood.

They were called yuppie flu in some quarters. And so I had my own experience of that illness where as a young man, I was studying as an undergrad at Cambridge, burning the candle at both ends, studying hard, partying hard.

And suddenly I got a virus and my body just got flattened and I literally couldn't read the words on a page. I would go from doctor to doctor and say, look, i've got fatigue, exhaustion.

sleep, I can't think I, can do anything. And they would say, we don't know what you have. We don' know, what to call it. No treat. In that moment where I was almost suicidal with this condition, it was awful.

I describe it like your worst day of flu times five in terms of just that, just being for years and years, and just feeling like that. Then I made a contract with the universe and I said, if I could just get myself well, i will dedicate the rest of my life to helping others with his condition.

I met many other people who I found were suffering from it. And I managed to do some medical research, get myself 100% healthy, and then in an ad hoc way, use neuroplasticity to train myself and got myself well within months.

Then obviously set up a clinic to treat others and to the point we are now. I love that. I always want to have guests on that have actually lived through something.

There's a lot of people who go into medicine but never really experienced the medical side of medicine. So you've been through hellfire and brimstone, so it's always good to sit there and see that you come out on the other end smelling like roses and now you're actually trying to help other people.

That's super good of you, by the way. Um, so I'm curious, can you explain the Gupta program to me? Yes. So essentially, uh, in a nutshell, we believe that a lot of the modern illnesses that people experience in life, maybe even fit up to 50% of illnesses, that you go to see a general practitioner, are not hardware problems, they're software problems.

It's an issue of function. And yet medicine is pretty much designed to treat hardware, problems with hardware. and it starts treating software, with software or biomedical interventions.

And it's this idea that actually if we could find the right key to the Right Log, if could unlock a lot of these chronic illnesses, it would make a big difference.

Our underlying hypothesis is that generally we are survival machines. So from an evolutionary biology perspective, we're here to survive, eat, adapt to our environment, survive and then pass on our genes to next generation.

But if there are threats that we face, so main threats are viruses, bacteria, rival tribes, let's say, and a toxin. If those are attacking us, our system is designed to be resilient to that.

So to adapt to the environment and then be able to defend ourselves against that and our two main defense systems are our nervous system and immune system.

What the Gupta Program Is

But if our systems, potentially what happens is those threats come, we deal with those But then our response becomes maladaptive. It's what we call a maladapive threat response, where we believe two brain structures start over triggering and over stimulating the nervous system and immune system.

And that's when an acute illness turns into a chronic illness. A one-off food poisoning incident or sensitivity issue turns to chronic gut issues. Exactly.

This is where anxiety turns in to burnout. where a virus turns into chronic fatigue and of course mold and Lyme being a big one. So now a short-term threat like mold exposure can turn into a chronic long- term mold illness and so on and we believe we've found the brain structures that are responsible for this conditioning effect which then keep the body in this hyper state of arousal.

The immune system and the nervous system causing the symptoms which double back and become proxies for the original threat creating the symptoms and we get vicious cycles.

And that is the unique thing. So brain retraining, what we do at the Gupta program is to say, these are physiological responses in the unconscious brain, but we believe we've managed to find ways in which we could influence those unconscious circuits, retrain the brain and be able to heal a whole bunch of chronic inflammatory, autoimmune, autonomic pain and gut issues by using these mechanisms.

That's basically what you do with the gupta. Oh, I find that fascinating. Again, you definitely hit the nail on the head. It's first identifying what is actually causing the initial insult, if you will.

You mentioned mold, which is a big one, heavy metals, all types of food sensitivities, hormone imbalances, and all these different things that you can't really treat any type of disease without understanding what the problem initially is.

From what I gather, the actual Gupta program, figures that out and then it works to basically work backwards, correct? You fix the one problem and you bring your brain back in, back out of that situation and no more anxiety, no depression, and now you've retrained your bane just like you can retrain yourself to walk after a broken leg or something like that, right?

Exactly right. The brain learns illness when it goes through a chronic, almost traumatic experience of which illnesses are traumatic as far as the brain is concerned.

It learns illness and it can unlearn it. And normally this is, as I said, unconscious, but there are ways of influencing those systems and those processes using neuroplasticity.

Neuroplaticity, essentially as we're talking about here, is like learning a new musical instrument. or learning how to drive. It's something that your brain does through repetition and the second principle is emotional intensity.

So through reputation and emotional intensities and specialized tools, we can train these physiological responses to be able to get back to homeostasis, get that to balance.

And I think for me, this is the new exciting area of medicine and is really the future. No, no, for sure. I think neuroplasticity, like I said, is probably one of the most important things of humanity.

And I love that you bring structure into it. Me, I'm in an osteopathic position and structure governs function. If the structure is broken, the function is inevitably not going to be very good at all.

Uh, so the aspect there, I think it's, it, really, unique. And I, think a lot of, a, lot, of physicians can miss out on that. Do you find like a bunch of colleagues in the healthcare, uh, practitioners or nurses, wherever it could be.

Did you, do you see a of people skip over that and just say, ah, we're just going to treat one thing. You have mercury toxicity. you found that on, on some type of lab tests.

and then all of a sudden you treat the mercury toxic, toxicity, but then your brain's still thinking in a way that it is, you have to back that out or its mold or, or basically anything that, that you'd find that's causing dysfunction.

I think our modern healthcare system is designed in a reductionist fashion. So it's okay, whatever the health issue is, we need to go down to the smallest aspects, the biomedical aspects.

And if we fix this biomedical aspect, then magically that will cascade to whole person healing.

Brain Retraining and Chronic Illness

true in some cases, but in most, in a lot of cases it's not true. And therefore we're often just treating the symptoms rather than the root cause. I think we are all involved in these arenas because we want to get to the roots cause medicine.

For us, the idea that from an evolutionary biology perspective, most of our modern maladies now make sense from that perspective where the system doesn't care about your wellbeing, it cares about survival.

So it will always err on the side of caution and can create downstream issues, which don't make you feel good, but essentially are prioritizing survival from following these kind of events.

So I think that what I've found with my colleagues is that we've been trained in a particular type of way in modern medicine to think of the body like a car, right?

That something goes wrong with the tires, we fix the tire. Something goes on with a part of engine, and we fixed the engine. But as we know in the modern vehicles, the thing that tends to go wrong often is the electrical system, so the electric system we have to get to the brain of car and reset it, reprogram it so that all the other functions of a the car work correctly.

And that's analogous to the brain and the body. It's like, rather than just getting the mechanic to fix the reductionist level, the physical things wrong with the car, we need to reset the electrical system and then the call will work perfectly well.

And I think that area of medicine is so new and so unique because, you know, that brain was a black box. We didn't understand the frame. we didn' really know the brand.

and even now we probably only know 10% of what the Brain actually does and how it does it and we're still learning. And now that we've opened that up, I think, uh, hope that the medical profession takes note of this and says, actually we'd been doing medicine in a very different way to some of the root causes involved in.

Yeah. I, think that's great. I'm sorry serotonin and then and the melatonin says now let's go this phytochemical because we don't feed a bacteria or helps it in taking all the iron out of your system just because you know people don'r realize our evolutionary aspects back when we were being chased by cavemen or getting infected in the swamp by some weird pathogen, it's set up as a default mode to make sure that our life is preserved, not our actual wellbeing.

So kudos on that one. A lot of physicians don't really see that. They think the human species has been living in this comfortable lifestyle for its entire existence, which it hasn't.

Yeah, absolutely. And I think this principle is very interesting because if we can understand, like, what is the reason that the brain gets stuck with an autoimmune disease?

What is that reason the brains get stuck, let's say, with a sensitivity reaction? For instance, right now in the modern world, we're seeing so many different people with food sensitivities.

Everyone has a food sensitivity right or an environmental sensitivity. That's because the system's getting attacked more regularly than it ever used to because of the toxins in our environment, in food and in water.

So with that barrage of attacks, It's now learning to be hypersensitive to things it wouldn't normally be sensitive to. And I think that's really interesting so that we can understand that these sensitivities are over-defensive systems, overreactive systems and we could potentially tone them down through reprogramming, retraining the brain.

certainly food sensitivities, environmental sensitives is a new priority for us. And on the mold, we've just done a randomized control trial on mold which is now being submitted for publication.

We found that with mold we were able to, after three months, reduce mold symptoms by 33% and after six months half mold. Pretty much half-mold symptomatology and big increases in functional capacity, etc.

So this is the first time a neuroplasticity intervention has been shown to be powerful for environmental Oh, I love that. That's fantastic. And again, it's nice that you have studies to back it up because not many people do.

So, you know, kudos on that one. Um, so you mentioned food sensitivities, environment sensitivites, mold, then you things like hormones, heavy metals, basic things, like anemias.

What would you say is probably one of the most important contributing factors to a condition where your body will actually need to retrain its brain? I think that the most important contributing factor is what is the state of your mind and your being when you have exposure to that trigger.

Okay.

Stress, Sensitivities, and Root Causes

So many people, and I'm sure you've seen this in your practice, when they talk about a chronic illness, in the one or two years in a run up to the chronic, they've often had some chronic stress or they have been overdoing it at work or not looking after their health or a bereavement or something that's been emotionally or physically challenging in run-up to it.

So when our system is vulnerable, then we know from psychoneuroimmunology that the effectiveness of the immune system goes down when we are stressed. And that isn't just emotional stress, because people might think we're talking about psychological responses, but it's physical stress.

Overdoing it could be even athletes overtraining syndrome is something where people can have a vulnerable immune systems because they've actually overtrained.

their system, they push too hard. And so in those environments, when we get a trigger, the system then is vulnerable to learning these conditioning effects or these over-defensive effects in the brain.

So I think that that is probably the most, so the aspect which is most likely to trigger this conditioned response. and allied with that, you mentioned heavy metals and all these different things.

If our detoxification systems are not functioning correctly, They can lead to buildups. which can support this conditioning response. And when the conditioning responds occurs, then detoxification systems become even more compromised and therefore we get buildups.

So then from a functional medicine perspective, we might test for heavy metals, different micro toxins and find actually the body's riddled with viruses, toxins, opportunistic bacteria, and then we see, aha, that's the reason.

I would humbly argue that those are signposts of a dysregulated nervous and immune system. that is then not detoxifying correctly and not allowing the system to come back to balance.

No, I love that, so say you found it, you've treated it. How do you actually reprogram a brain? Is it something like cognitive behavioral therapy? It's something they do?

Lifestyle, sleep, breathing? How you approach that? And is it the same for every person or is a different? Men versus women, old versus young, sex, this, that or the other.

Like how do approach your brain retraining? Well, our brain training involves no brain stimulation. that's the first thing that people assume with brain training is stimulating the brain.

It's all completely natural and essentially it's giving people exercises to recognize when their brain is about to go into a threat response and then signal safety.

Now safety we normally associate with psychological safety but this is actually physiological safety which is a different type of response. And so the 1st part of the call for us is what we call the three R's of of recovery.

The first R is regulating the nervous system. So when our nervous systems stressed and busy, it's not neuroplastic, right? It's open to learning new things.

You get fixed in its predictive processing or ways of doing things and so the first thing is to regulate the system and calm it down. There we use breath work, meditation, relaxation techniques, whatever works for people and that's what we call preparing the soil.

neuroplasticity like imagine there's a river going through a field and that river has always gone through that field, right? And that's the stimulus interpretation response.

So it's that the way the brain is reacting to its environment. Now we want to retrain the river so that we redirect the River in a different direction.

Okay. The soil is frozen, the ground is Frozen and therefore there's no way that we're going to redirect the river. So regulating the nervous system is like loosening up the soil, unfreezing, thawing the Soil so that now we can start digging a new river channel and the water starts going down the new River channel.

And the second step is then the brain retraining. How are we going to get the river to go down the right hand path? We keep having to dig the channel.

So if you, if people have got children or we use the beach and you can see kids with their spades, they'll be digging channels and then seawater will come in or go done that channel, but then when the sea water comes in, it will erase the channels.

You have to take the challenge deeper and deeper. I see. And that's what very plasticity is like. It's digging that channel again and again, and it becomes so powerful that now the water doesn't want to go down the other path, it wants to down a different path.

And, that is how we learn something new, like learning a musical instrument or learning the song. We are creating literally new neural pathways that get reinforced again.

The second principle is emotional intensity. So the more emotionally intense that second pathway is, the stronger the pathway becomes. So that's the second R of the program is retraining the brain.

And the third R is what we call re-engaging with joy. A person has to recognize their stress triggers, because there's no point in doing all of this great work, healing from a chronic illness and then getting stressed again and having the whole thing happen.

So it's looking at what were the lessons of that condition? What did I learn about myself that, not that it was anyone's fault, but that supported this chronic stress state?

So we look at people's personality traits, their reactivity to their environments and people. and how they can begin to calm those patterns down so that they stay healthy for the rest of their life.

So that's the three principles. And it's delivered through an app. It's something where people can go onto an ad.

How Brain Retraining Works

We have weekly webinars, videos, and audios. There's a structured recovery program. But Ivan, the game changer in recovery has been something called what we call Daily Guptasize, which is a cheesy name, but essentially…

What was it called again? Daily guptase. Okay, cool. I like it. Go on. Daily exercise, daily good exercise. And what this is, is daily live events on Zoom run by our health practitioners, which take people through nervous system regulation and brain retraining exercises.

What this does is it reduces inertia, increases the motivation to do the techniques and accountability, a sense of community. When you meditate in a group, the depth and power of that regulation is even more deep.

So I always say, we're not in the healthcare industry. We're in The Habit Formation Industry. You can do all the great healthcare. I said a good habit.

Hopefully good habits. We can do all the great healthcare, but if somebody's not engaging in good health habits, whether it's taking their supplements, diet, exercise, sleep, all those good things, healthcare is just an emergency service.

It's a short-term thing. So good, healthy habits very important and brain retraining requires that habitual response. Like learning to drive a car, it's different to CBT.

So CBTs or traditional psychological interventions would be sitting on the first day of your driving lesson and saying, right, if I'm really positive, let go of negative thoughts, align myself, I'll learn to driving this car.

Neuroplasticity is saying you can't just learn drive that car through shifting the thoughts and behaviors. You actually have to train the nervous system through training.

Moving the gear shift, steering wheel. And we do that as if it was the first time we've done it. But after about 10, 15 lessons, we can be eating a sandwich, listening to the radio, and it's all automated unconsciously.

That's what the brain retraining actually involves. Oh, I love that. Now, does that differ with your program? So say I'm a 13 year old girl or I am a 50 year-old man.

Is it a different approach to each of them on the app or is it the same one size fits all because it's such a good formula? We spent 12 years in one-on-one practice finding out what worked for most people most of the time.

So generally it is a model that people use no matter their age or no matters their condition. And we also encourage them to personalize it to themselves.

So they will actually take this menu of tools and pick the tools that they find work the best for them. So there's an element of personalization as well.

Okay, great. And is there anything when it comes to supplementation? What's your view when It comes at people taking neurotropics and various peptides like dihexer, cerebralizer, things like that, that help with actual either the production of BDNF, which then helps with neuroplasticity and digging those deeper ditches.

Are you a fan of that? Or do you think it should be more of just lifestyle only and everything else is bandaid on a hemorrhoid? What we tend to do is we're not dogmatic.

We just want to get people well. So we say to people, find what works for you. In our program, we do emphasize supplementation, especially anti-inflammatory supplementations.

And we also talk about things that can support mitochondria, things can that support our general health and immunity. But what we tell people is, don't become obsessed by the supplements.

because they are just additional things. They're not the things that are going to heal you and fully get you well necessarily. If they were, we would already have the evidence that particular supplements can heal these chronic health conditions.

So we do encourage supplementation. We encourage good, healthy anti-inflammatory diets. And generally in healthcare, you know, right, so more fruits and vegetables, more things to support your immunity, things like inflammation, less ultra-processed foods, sugar, et cetera, etc.

All of the good things we know are generally good for the population. Do you emphasize that? And of course, sleep. I believe sleep is the big key. Number one, I think.

Hell yeah. But when people's nervous systems are dysregulated, of, course their brain is in threat mode. So the body doesn't want you to go to sleep, it says, come on, we have this issue, sort this out, and therefore the depth of sleep lowers.

And we find as people do the brain retraining, et cetera. Gradually the sleep starts improving, the seat starts getting deeper, that deep meal, rest and digest, a parasympathetic nervous system begins to come back online.

And then naturally the body can help itself recover once we're able to retrain these sympathetic over responses. Oh, for sure. How important is hydration to this entire thing?

I'm curious. Very, very important. So we know that when the sympathetic nervous is hyper aroused, generally we are losing more water from our body. We are sweating more.

It can be very subtle. And secondly, water is just being used as a detoxification agent. So if our bodies are not detoxifying effectively, more water's being use up to try and affect that.

And so therefore we know that people get dry mouth, they start feeling dehydrated. Hydration and regular hydration is obviously super important. We encourage that every day.

between meals so that we're not diluting our enzymes. Between meals, drinking lots of water and keeping hydrated is a piece of the puzzle. For sure, for sure.

What I've gathered throughout this is, number one, first identifying the problem. If you're in a house full of mold, you can't fix any problem, can train anything until you actually remove the stimulating stimulus.

How much of this environmental versus emotional? If somebody is in an emotional situation where a divorce, a death in the family, something like that, Do you see that the body processes those types of stress the exact same as somebody has a mold toxicity, food sensitivities, heavy metals, whatever it could be?

Supplements, Sleep, and Hydration

Does the brain learn the same way from a biophysical versus an emotional type stressor? Yes, this is the unique thing in medicine. You go to hospital, you have an immune problem, You have to go the immunology department.

If you a whole vein problem you go endocrinology. if you had a psychological problem go psychology department, but the brains and body don't work like that.

The brain structures that are involved in emotional systems and emotional reactions are the same brain structure that is involved with physiological responses as well.

And so therefore, yes, the systems can get intertwined. What a lot of our clients notice is if they are having a mold sensitivity, or they have chronic fatigue, they also are more emotionally reactive to the people and situations around them.

Because the same brain structures have become hyper aroused and therefore becoming hypersensitive to our environment. And I think that is one of the even more challenging aspects of having a chronic health condition is the emotional negativity that often comes.

People will say, I'm not a negative person, but this illness has just made me stressed, tired, anxious in a way that I never was. I think the two come hand in hand.

No, no, for sure, sure. So I always like to ask my guests two questions when we come to or near the end. First and foremost, and again, I'm going to make it more specific for you.

For somebody in the healthcare industry, whether I get it could be a nurse practitioner, chiropractor, doctor, whoever, if you're looking to sit there and be like, maybe I should add this into my practice.

What's the best step to first and for most understand the science and then jump into the program? Or is it like, you don't really need a science because it's going to be a formula and you just go through and be like this is how you do it.

What's the best way for somebody to, to start incorporating brain training into it? Well, what we do is we offer, first

of all, complimentary access to any health practitioner.

So if you're in the health world, your seeing clients, we give completely free access. And the reason we that is because we want people to have a personal experience.

Like we all want to change something in life, whether it's emotionally or physically. There's always something that change is inevitable. Change is something we will need in our lives in some shape or form.

And so when people have a personal experience, then they find it a lot easier to understand what is going on. So on our websites, there are videos for practitioners, There are diagrams, there are all our medical papers on there, our website, and that enables people to get a good understanding of it.

Then they can go through their own experience with the program and then they see, right, are there clients for whom this type of approach may be very useful?

And I think what's also important for health practitioners is to know that we're evidence-based. So there's lots and lots of things out there that people claim can help others, but we rely on the science.

We now have seven published clinical studies and five randomized control trials, we've now got four more randomized controls trials. coming out as well.

So I think this really appeals to the medical. Oh, I love that. To come back to that point, if you're a patient, you know, wow, this sounds like me, like in a nutshell, what's the best way or the most immediate thing to try out when it comes to retraining your brain immediately?

Is it is that changing your life or is it focusing on sleep? is increasing your hydration? What are the top three things you can give as just advice for anybody to go out and start just to trying to begin retrained in your break?

I think the first port of call is to really notice how dysregulated you are. Because often we're dissociated from our body. We're not feeling anymore.

The first thing is noticing actually, yes, I am dys-regulating. Yes, what we call wired but tired. And noticing that constant stimulation in the brain.

Then I thing the second step, and we have lots of free resources on our website and our app as well. is to start beginning to see how can I regulate my nervous system more?

What is it that can actually help me calm down? And some people do, you know, the odd thing for a few minutes here or there and say, oh, that didn't work.

Environmental and Emotional Triggers

When we've got a dysregulated nervous, it does require at least 10, 20 minutes of something that is going to really, really get to the core of it. Otherwise we're just transactional.

I'll do a bit of this, do that, or that work, but really looking at what can help regulate your nervous. We've also got lots of free breath work and meditation exercises in our app as well.

And I think thirdly, it's now understanding the science behind it. That, okay, if my system is dysregulated, I can keep believing that perhaps there's something that's gone wrong with the mitochondria.

Perhaps there is some endocrine issue. The virus is still lurking in my body. But recognizing that now, more and more, we're finding that our hypothesis is being accepted more and more by modern medicine.

And that hypothesis, when people read it and they understand it, they think, oh, I see, this now explains everything

that I've been going through. This explains my illness and my condition.

It's such a moment of relief that there's an obvious explanation, and not only an obviously explanation but a whole program of recovery from these chronic illnesses.

So that's what I mean, you can identify it then as a solution. That's why we, especially in my practice, testing is the most important thing. And that what you're saying, there's so many different things that can throw off an immune system, throw up a neurological system.

You just need to really understand what it could be and it can be something as simple as mold. People don't understand that people don' test for it. I really don"t know any other practitioners really across the country that really go after mold even though that's a very important thing.

Or heavy metals or food sensitivities are a huge one as well. So I think it is correct. Number one, the patient understand that there is a problem. number two is the physician finding out what the problem is.

And I thing number three, using something such as your programs and lifestyle factors to really, really go after and solve the problems, not just put a band-aid on.

I gotta say, yeah. Yeah. And I just like to add it's working in compliments. So we were, we're now with seven functional medicine doctors, nutritionists, naturopaths, where they take care of the supplements, the diet, medications, lifestyle things.

and we come in and do the brain retraining piece. It's worth in compliment with the fantastic work that people like yourselves do. We found that when we work in complement, We can actually get better outcomes.

when there's a cumulative effect.

For Practitioners and Patients

So often medicine is like, well, let's do a bit of this. Oh, that didn't work. Let's, do, a, bit, of, this, but it's bringing all of these pieces together at the same time.

That helps us see the jigsaw puzzle. I think that's great. Please tell everybody where they can find you, website, social, where, they, can maybe start the program, the app, so where can we get ahold of you at?

So we'd love for people to take our free trial. There's no credit card. People can just come in, sample what we're doing and get a feel for it. And they can come to our website, which is GuptaProgram.com.

So G-U-P-T-A-Pro-gram-dot-com and there, there's lots of free information once you sign up and then also the app. You can go to the App Store or Play Store, just type in Guptaprogram brain retraining, and you can download the free app and start retraining your brain straight away.

I love that. So thank you so much for stopping by my man. Again, this has been a lifestyle medicine podcast. Thanks for joining us today on the Lifestyle Medicine Podcast.

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