Unpacking the Total Load: Protecting Our Children from Environmental Stressors Transcript

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Introduction to Total Load

Children have been going through their critical developmental timeline, like all the things that they do when they're going to learn how to talk and walk and how process sensory information and develop these complex human relationships.

As they are learning to do all of that, their body has too many stressors on it. Too many toxic stressers, emotional stressor. It could be chronic infections and inflammation that their dealing with, microbial imbalances in their bodies.

Like their little bodies have way too much going on. during a time when they need all that energy reserved for growth and development. So that's when we start seeing neurodevelopmental, neurobehavioral types of conditions like autism.

This is Dr. Talks. Welcome back to the Raising Healthier Kids Summit. I am here with the absolutely fantastic Beth Lambert, who is the founder of Documenting Hope and also the author of a couple books, but one of them is A Compromised Generation, the Epidemic of Chronic Illness in American Children.

That's from 2010. So you're kind of ahead of the game on this, talking about this over a decade ago, we're going to talk about total load and chronic illness.

Thank you for being here. Yeah, happy to be here So I'm interested just to start with what is total loads? This is kind of your concept on environmental stressors and some of the things that might be contributing to chronic disease.

And I completely agree with your theory and your philosophy. That's what I think as well. But I am curious if you can kind define total load for us to Yeah, well, it's definitely not my theory.

It's been around for a long time. And so that's just the concept of, you know, too many synergistic and cumulative types of environmental stressors, like compounding the impact of one another.

There were some people that put this into play talking about children's health more recently, one of which was Patricia Lemmer, who wrote a book called Outsmarting Autism, where she talked about how it's really the cumulative and synergistic load of modern living, like all the things that are going on in the modern world that creating what we call autism, you know, the syndrome of symptoms that we called autism.

Environmental Stressors and Chronic Disease

But what that really is just that, as children have been going through their critical developmental timeline, Like all the things that they do when they're going to learn how to talk and walk and how process sensory information and develop these complex human relationships, as they are learning to do all of that, their body has too many stressors on it.

Too many toxic stressers, emotional stressor, it could be chronic infections and inflammation that their dealing with. microbial imbalances in their body.

It's like their little bodies have way too much going on during a time when they need all that energy reserved for growth and development. So that's when we start seeing neurodevelopmental neurobehavioral types of conditions like autism.

Total load is really just the theory in short that there's you know, our kids start developing chronic health conditions and developmental conditions because they have too many health stressors and not enough health supports.

It's like that whole balance beam kind of thing where they just don't have enough of what they need to be resilient in an increasingly toxic world. Definitely.

That's exactly what I feel like is going on as well. And I think you really explained it very well and you mentioned about the stressor. So you kind of, you know, glance over a couple of them, but I thinking maybe we can go back to that for a second, because I that's, quite important for parents to really get an understanding.

You're working on many different projects, kind looking into these kinds of things. What are you finding are some of the biggest stressors, the bigger contributors to the chronic disease epidemic that we're seeing?

Yeah, so there's so many stressors. I mean, if you think about modern living, the way that we live today as compared to the ways that humans lived for thousands of years.

We evolved over thousands and thousands years to be outside in the natural sunlight, in completely natural environments. There was no synthetic petrochemical anything that had to deal with.

Their food came right out of the ground rather than this processed factory package type food that everybody eats. So if the stressors as things that are new to nature or that we didn't evolve with, that's kind of the easiest way to think about what could be a stressor on my child's body.

So that could like toxins, like fragrances that in shampoos and laundry detergents, or things like heavy metals. A lot of people don't know that there's almost that cheap jewelry that people get for children that is on the shelves.

comes from China oftentimes with heavy metals in them. You can have it switched to cadmium or lead or those kinds of things. It could be microbial stressors, like our microbiomes are all out of balance for a variety of reasons, and that can create all kinds metabolites or things that our bodies need to deal with, that can be a stressor on the body.

So stressors can really be anything. It could be an emotional stresser. We designed a study called the CHIRP study, which is the most comprehensive environmental health survey that parents complete to try and give a sense of what are children doing in the modern world.

that might be correlated with worse health outcomes or better health outcome. So a parent takes a survey, it takes several hours to complete. We ask these parents everything you can imagine from like what exposures might've been like preconception, prenatally, neonatally and during the first few years of life of their life.

And then we correlate that with health out comes. What we found in this study And we've been running that study since 2018 is that the first of all, total load has been validated.

That whole concept, that whole theory has be validated by our research. So our researchers has demonstrated that. The more health stressors a child has the worst health outcome they usually have or the more complex.

conditions or severe conditions they have.

Antibiotics as a Major Risk Factor

The other thing that's really interesting that has come out is that regardless of the diagnosis, so whether the child has an ADHD diagnosis or an autism or autoimmune, it doesn't matter what the diagnoses, the single most important stressor in terms of predictor of that health outcome is antibiotic exposure.

So antibiotics are really the strongest signal in our entire database. And again, we're looking at food, air, water, mold. synthetic toxins, we're looking at everything in this child's life, like right down to what kind of toothpaste they

use and whether they eat poptarts or not, literally everything that's in their life.

And antibiotics are without a doubt, one of the biggest indicators of a chronic health condition developing in a child. So that is something to be concerned about because, you know, they're overprescribed and it's something that has real world consequences.

For sure, and it's such an interesting thing. I mean, I wouldn't think that antibiotics would be the strongest correlator, but that does make sense, for many reasons.

But I also think it highlights, just doing this research in the way that you're doing it, highlights how difficult this issue is, because there's so many things to consider, not to mention if you are asking parents and they don't know what they do not know.

And so you don't even know if there are other things that parents, you know, there could be some other factor totally that is something that's really, really important that we don' even because a lot of this information comes from asking parents and it's the best way to do it.

I mean, it'd be nearly impossible to follow people for a hundred years. And even then they might not necessarily know that they're exposed to things unless you're testing for everything.

So it is quite a complex issue. But from our perspective, from a parent's perspective at least, What we can change are the things that we know. And so it's very valid and useful, I think, in the real world, because these are things parents are saying that they're exposed to.

Then at least if you can call it out, oh, okay, well, if we have more antibiotics, that's not necessarily a good thing for our health. We can consider that and maybe push back on doctors a little bit.

When they prescribe it, sometimes you need it. That's fine. But I find that for those kids that get ear infections all the time or get mild infections where you kind of give to them like candy or they go to urgent care, it would make people think twice or ask more questions about, do I really need this?

Is this really severe? Can I wait another day? Because most of the time you can. And I think if most parents knew that of things that they could control, how many antibiotics they're giving their kids is extremely correlated with their long-term health, that would raise some eyebrows, I Yeah, and also, you know, there's other ways to get an ear infection or a sore throat or whatever they might be being prescribed for.

I mean, in Germany, homeopathy is actually used as a first-line therapy for ear infections often. So, I'm not saying people should never use antibiotics, but I think that sometimes people are too quick to go to them without sort of evaluating what other choices there might, what natural choices might there be.

And other things too, like doing the best we can to keep our children's resilience up so they don't develop those infections. That's like another thing we don' really do a lot of that kind of preventative work.

So like things like reducing the amount of sugar in the diet, because that sugar sort of tamps down the immune system, right? Or keeping the toxic load down, cause that also weakens your capacity to handle infections and getting outside in this sunlight, getting natural sunlight vitamin D that will enhance your ability to or those infections.

So those are the kinds of things that it's like, we want to avoid antibiotics if we can, have to use them if have do, but what can we do to put ourselves in a position so we don't have From what you have seen over the years, do you feel like some of these conditions are reversible?

Can These Conditions Be Reversed?

And I ask that question because I think, you know, it's mildly controversial, especially in the autism world where many individuals who, and I post about things or whoever talks about it, they really feel it just that we're diagnosing

it more, which I thing is true and that's great.

I we are more aware of it so we certainly are diagnoses it. But to me it seems very unreasonable to conclude that the reason the rates are going up so quickly are because we're just better at diagnosing.

I think it's both and it is mostly our environment. And if we can reverse it, then it means that it not genetics, that is not just that we are better diagnoses and we actually doing something.

Our environment is doing some things, the things that were doing matter. and I thing that's important because it gives you industry and what you can do and you work towards it and think about making a change.

So I'm curious what do you have seen and if you've seen things go I guess backwards or you know, in a more positive direction from where they were based on this model and this theory.

Yeah, so I've been documenting stories of kids reversing all kinds of conditions for 15 years. And that's actually part of how I got into this work is because I met some parents who had fully reversed autism in particular in their children.

15 Years ago when I sort of was waking up to understanding children's health from a more holistic kind of perspective, I didn't know that was possible.

So I started digging and talking to the doctors who were doing the work and the parents that had done this and documenting it. We have a YouTube channel, a Documenting Hope YouTube Channel where we have all these stories that we're sharing now, videos of kids who have fully reversed not just autism but autoimmune diseases and life-threatening food allergies and asthma and all of these kinds of things that people typically say, well, you'll probably always have it and it's genetic and there's not much we can do.

We know genes are important, of course, right? And if you talk to anybody who works a lot with children who have autism who know the genetic piece, who are looking for the single nucleotide polymorphisms that will help you sort of navigate that healing journey a little bit.

They'll tell you there are some vulnerabilities, there's some genetic mutations that make a child more or less vulnerable to toxic insults in the environment.

So that's a piece, but it is not the whole piece. And the fact that so many children are able to reverse their diagnosis, to lose their diagnoses through changing their diet, changing the environments, doing all kinds of therapies that help rewire the brain in a way that it might need to be rewired.

That is evidence right there. And there's some evidence in the medical literature. There's case studies. We're actually about to publish a case study about two twins who were diagnosed with severe autism.

Their parents did all those things I mentioned, the diet, environment, therapies. These children have lost their diagnosis, and we're publishing and putting that into peer review for publication as a So there's not a lot of it out there that's been because people haven't taken the time to document these stories and publish and peer review.

But we're doing that. And we are also trying to capture the anecdotes because we believe that the stories are sacred and the answers to how the healing happens are in those stories.

So that is a really important part of what we do in our work is listen to the parents and what did they do and try and learn from them. not just the parents, of course, the practitioners that are working with them too, it's a partnership, but learn from them so that we can extract the nuggets of insight and share that with other people and hopefully replicate an approach that people can take, like a process to follow so they can do this for their own child.

Yeah, and that's one of the main reasons I wanted to talk to you, amongst many reasons, you have to have the correct premise before we can make a change.

And it's like, you know, acknowledge the problem before you can find a solution. I don't think in society in general, we've even acknowledged that the problems is real.

It's almost like well, obesity is just happening. Autism is happening, it is normal. For some people it can be like some get a genetic condition of whatever.

You have cystic fibrosis, there's nothing that you did, that's just your genetics and it happens. But that is not what's happening with autism, I think.

I think that, you know, in some cases, I'd think autism is many things. So probably for some kids, yes, it is completely genetic, but for the most part, It's not.

And when you hear the stories and you see the story and talk to people who have reversed it, that tells me very clearly and tells you, and have been doing this for over a decade that there is things that we can do.

And if that is true, and if a parent is watching this and saying, hey, like my kid has ADHD, my kids has allergies, well, maybe there are things I can, do maybe they're stuff in my home, in life, what we're eating, doing.

If I'm conscious of that, then maybe I could give them a different path. Maybe not, but probably you can improve things at least some degree for any child.

No matter, even if it's completely genetic, it doesn't mean there aren't things we could do to improve.

Parent Ownership and the Role of Diet

That puts the ownership back on us and I think it kind of been taken away from the parent, been taking away form the family and people are kind of like, ah, it's just, the way things are, you know, kids just have autism now.

It's normal. Kids just had allergies. And it was really frustrating as a pediatrician, because even in my fairly short career, I've seen things skyrocket.

I don't remember when we were little, allergies and asthma and eczema and autism was around, but it wasn't common. Now it is like every other kid has that.

Right. Right. No, it's true. And I feel like one of the things that pediatricians and, you know, the physicians that do this kind of work, helping support the parents on that healing journey, one are the thing that they really need is for the parent to take ownership over it.

The ones who have the greatest success or the best outcomes for their kids in terms of returning them to health is the ones, first of all, believe that it is possible.

Right? Like that is like the cornerstone of the whole thing. That parent has to know in their mind and see it that their child is going to transform their health.

They have to that. And then they take ownership for the things that are in and around their children's body. You know, from food to things go on their skin to the thing that's in the home.

The parent takes that very seriously. I've never met a family who reversed their kid's autism that did not do a drastic diet change. Like that's a foundation of the whole thing.

And if you think about how important the microbiome is in autism, for example, the micro biome, is dependent upon what kinds of foods going in. Right.

So it's all this whole metabolic piece that no one's looking at, because like you said, everyone just assumes that autism is autism and it has been here and is genetic and there's nothing that you can do about it.

But that's not true. That's the piece that I feel like nobody's taking seriously is how important and foundational diet is and how transformational it can be for somebody who has an autism diagnosis or any diagnosis for that matter, any kind of autoimmune condition, because autism really is an auto immune condition in many, many ways.

So that where people oftentimes need to start, but that a really hard place for a lot of people. I think so because I feel like it goes to like blame, right?

I mean people either start to blame themselves or you're shaming parents or saying that I did this, I can't believe I didn't do this. It's not about that, it's about not knowing and then knowing more information and trying to get kids to a better place for whatever reason.

Even if there is something that we did, okay, we didn' know. And now we do, and we know there are things that we can do differently and try to help them the best that can.

But we're going to have to get past that kind of blame and that hard conversation to like, there were things contributed to this. Maybe it was some things we did, maybe it has nothing to do with that, who knows.

We do know what can help reverse it or make a change. And we certainly know, what are the things you can think about to hopefully prevent this for kids so they never have to have that diagnosis.

So I think that just an important place to start from. And the more that we talk about this, the that's going to be possible, I thing. Right. The thing that people need to remember is that there is so much shame and guilt in parenting, no matter what, but especially in parents who have children with special needs.

Like, what did I do? What could I have done differently? And you can get stuck there. That's a horrible place This epidemic, this autism epidemic this epidemic of chronic health conditions in children, it is cultural.

It is a function of how we are living. Like I only know how to feed my children food because my mom taught me how feed, you know, me and her mom thought her like you learn these things in a context and a culture.

I use the, the products that I used because I saw them on TV and my friend is using them and that's what's normal. What's in the CBS. You know what I mean?

It is completely cultural. So like if we understand that piece that we as parents came to be parents in a culture that is toxic. That is the normal is, toxic the like baseline normal thing to do is.

And, and in our food and our water and air and, our products, all of it. so you have to absolve yourself as a parent and say, like, I didn't know it wasn't my fault.

I'm just an American. It's really the modern industrial world. It isn't limited to the United States, obviously. We're the best at destroying health. I think we get the gold medal for destroying our health because of our culture, but it's a really modern Western industrial culture.

And I always like to finish off on a positive and finish up on actionable steps.

Community Support and Resources

So, what would be your suggestions for some first things that parents can do if they're like, oh, you know what, like I really do want to change the way that I'm doing some things.

I want my child to be more resilient. And, I wanna focus on their health. What are your big tips or takeaways or things they should do or think about this week if you wanna start that journey?

The number one thing I tell parents to do if they want to embark on this healing journey is find a friend, find family member, somebody find community because it is very hard to navigate it on your own.

You feel isolated. Remember when I said this is about culture? So like what you have to to heal your child is like live in a way that is counter culture to like remove yourself from the birthday parties with the blue frosting and the, you know, all the toxic things that are part of modern American childhood culture.

So find a friend, find the family member that is interested in doing this. And if you can't find your friend or family members, we created resources for parents.

We created an online community. It's called healing together. we meet twice a month by a live zoom call with other parents who are doing the same work.

tons of resources for parents. And we also created a conference that so people can get together and like meet and hug and support each other and high five each and learn about the healing process as part of a community.

Because I think the key takeaway is if you want to embark on this healing work that requires shifting how you live and shifting your culture, you wanna do it in a Community where there's another culture.

It's a counterculture or a parallel culture that supports healing. So that feels to me like the most important piece. I love that. You know, most people say food.

So I would say that's like a really, really good answer and a little bit different, but super important. And I think, you know maybe even more foundational than a true answer of like, food or sleep or exercise or whatever, because it's, like if you don't have your support, if don' have you're community, then I can send you all the PDFs you want on what food to eat, But you are maybe not going to do it.

so having that community and that feedback loop and the accountability can be really helpful. A really great tip and a great way to end and can you tell people before we go just a little bit more about where to find you and the links and websites and all that stuff if they do want to join that and I'll just say it's a fantastic community.

All the work that you do is amazing and beautiful and super helpful and you're one of the few people that really is or your work and your group of people you work with really are changing the paradigm of what people think.

Thanks. Thank you. All of our resources are available at epidemicanswers.org. And from there, you can access our research project, which is called documenting hope.

So that's documentinghope.com and you access are healing membership community and access information about our conference. You just go to epidemic answers.

org or documenting Hope. com and get all the information. And that's what we're here for. We created all kinds of resources, webinars, articles, the conference, and the membership community.

we train health coaches, but we do this because we know parents cannot do it alone. So we are meant to be there as like a soft resting place, a landing place when people decide that they want to embark on this journey.

I love it. Well, again, thank you for being here and thank everyone for listening and we'll see you in the next session. Thank you for tuning in to Doctor Talks.

We hope today's episode has enlightened and inspired you on your path to optimal health. Each day is a new opportunity to make choices that empower your well-being.

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