Unpacking The Total Load: Protecting Our Children From Environmental Stressors Transcript

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Introduction to Total Load

Welcome back to ADHD, Autism and Chronic Disease Parenting Summit. I am here with the absolutely fantastic Beth Lambert, who is the founder of documenting Hope and also the author, a couple of 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 over a decade ago.

But we're going to talk about total load and chronic illness. So thank you for being here. Yeah. Happy to be here with you. So I'm interested just to start with with what is total loads.

This is kind of your concept on on environmental stressors. And you know, some of the things that might be contributing to chronic disease. And I completely agree with your your theory and your philosophy.

That's what I think as well. But I'm curious if you can you can kind of define total load for us to start. Yeah. Well it's definitely not my theory. It's been around for a long time.

It's, something that environmental medicine doctors have been talking about a long time. Even conventional medical medical doctors use the term allostatic load.

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.

So, there were some people that put this into play talking about children's health more recently, one of which was Patricia Klemmer, 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 are creating what we call autism, you know, the syndrome of symptoms that we call autism.

But what that really is, is just that, you know, as children have been going through their critical developmental timeline, like all the things that they do when they when they're going to learn how to talk and walk and how to process sensory information and develop these complex, human relationships as they're learning to do all of that.

Their body has too many stressors on it, too many toxic stressors, emotional stressors. It could be in the chronic infections and inflammation that they're 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 reserve for growth and development. So that's when we start seeing neurodevelopmental, neurobehavioral types of conditions like autism.

So 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 support.

So 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.

Key Environmental Stressors

Definitely, that 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 at, glance over a couple of them, but I think maybe we can go back to that for a second because I think that's, you know, quite important for parents to really get to understanding.

And you're working on, you know, many different projects kind of looking into these kinds of things. What are you finding are some of the the biggest stressors, the biggest contributors to the 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 way that humans lived for thousands of years, I mean, we evolved over thousands and thousands of years to be outside and then natural sunlight in completely natural environments.

There was no synthetic petrochemical, anything that we had to deal with. Their food came right out of the ground. Rather than this processed factory packaged type food that everybody eat.

So if you think about, you know, 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, like what could be a stressor on my child's body.

So that could be like toxins, like, you know, fragrances that are in shampoos and laundry detergents or that could be, you know, things like heavy metals, like people.

A lot of people don't know that there's, almost like that cheap jewelry that people get for children that, you know, is on the shelves comes from China, oftentimes with, heavy metals, in them, you can get have you can have exposure to cadmium or lead or those kinds of things.

It could be microbial stressors like our microbiomes are all out of balance. A balance for a variety of reasons. And, that can create all kinds of excess, metabolites or things that our bodies need to deal with.

That can be a stress around the body. So the stressor can really be anything. It could be an emotional stressor. We 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 our children are doing in the modern world that might be, correlated with worse health outcomes or better health outcomes.

So a parent takes a survey, it takes several hours to complete. We ask these parents everything you can imagine from like what what was what exposures might have been like preconception prenatally, neonatal.

And, you know, during the first few years of life, of their life. And then we correlate that with health outcomes. And 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 been validated by our research.

So our research has demonstrated that the more health stressors a child has, the worse health outcome they usually have, or the more complex conditions or severe conditions they have.

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

So antibiotics are really the strongest signal in our entire database. And again we're looking at food. We're looking at 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 popcorn. Pop tarts are not literally everything in the US 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's 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 that does make sense. I mean, for many reasons.

Antibiotics and Chronic Disease Risk

But I also think it highlights, you know, 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 and then not to mention, if you're asking parents and they don't know what they don't know, and so you don't even know if there are other things that that parents with, you know, there could be some other factor. Totally.

That is, is something that's really, really important that we don't even know. Because, you know, a lot of this information comes from from asking parents, and it's the best way to do it.

I mean, it'd be nearly impossible to follow people for 100 years. I mean, I guess you could do it. And even then, they might not necessarily know that they're exposed to things unless you're testing for everything.

So it's it's quite the 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 the things that parents are saying that they're exposed to. And then at least if you can call it out, okay, well, if we have more antibiotics, that's not necessarily a good thing for our health.

Then we can consider that and maybe push back on doctors a little bit, you know, when they're at when they're prescribing it, sometimes you need it. That's fine.

But but I think that for those kids that they, you know, get ear infections all the time or get mild infections where they kind of give it 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 the things that they could control, how many antibiotics they're giving their kids is extremely correlated with their long term health, that would that would raise some eyebrows, I think.

Yeah. And also, you know, there's other there's other ways to get at any 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, you know, I'm not saying people should never use antibiotics, but I think that, you know, sometimes people are too quick to go to them without sort of evaluating what other choices there might be and what other natural choices there might be.

You know, in 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't 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 tamped down the immune system. Right.

Or keeping the toxic load down, because that also weakens your capacity to handle infections and getting outside in the sunlight, you know, getting natural sunlight, vitamin D that will, you know, enhance your ability to handle those toxins.

So are those, those infections. So those are the kinds of things that it's like we want to avoid antibiotics if we can has to use them if we have to. But what can we do to put ourselves in a position so we don't have to use them?

And, and from what you have seen over the years, do you feel like some of these conditions are reversible? And I asked that question because I think, you know, it's mildly controversial, especially in the autism world, where many individuals who, you know, and I post about things or whoever talks about it, they they really feel like it's just that we're diagnosing it more, which I think is true.

And that's great. I think we are more aware of it. So we certainly are diagnosing it more. But 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 it.

I think it's both. And it's mostly all right. Environment and if we can reverse it, then it means that it's not genetics, that it's not just that we're better, at diagnosing it.

And we are actually doing something. Our environment is doing something. The things that we're doing matter. And I think that's important because it gives you industry of what you can do, and we can work towards it and think about making a change.

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

Yeah. So I've been documenting stories of kids reversing all kinds of conditions for 15 years.

Can Chronic Conditions Be Reversed?

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

And so I started digging and, you know, talking to the doctors who were doing the work and talking to the parents who had done this and documenting it.

Now I've, you know, we have a YouTube channel, a documentary, Hope YouTube channel, where we have all these stories that we're sharing now, videos of, of kids who have fully reversed not just autism, but autoimmune diseases and life threatening, food allergies and asthma and all these kinds of things that, you know, people typically say, well, you'll probably I'll 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 the genetic polymorphisms, single nucleotide polymorphisms that will help you sort of navigate that healing journey a little bit.

They'll tell you there's some vulnerabilities. There are some genetic mutations that make a child more or less vulnerable to the 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 diagnosis through changing their diet, changing the environment, doing all kinds of therapies that help rewire the brain in the 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.

And, their parents did all those things. I mentioned the diet, the environment, the therapies. And these children have lost their diagnosis. And we're publishing and putting that into peer review for publication as a case study.

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 in peer review. But we're doing that and we're 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's a really important part of what, 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 that 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, but I think you have to have the correct premise before we can make a change.

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

It's almost like, well, it's just, you know, obesity is just happening. Autism is just happening. It's just normal. And it's not normal for some people.

It, you know, it can be like some people get a genetic condition of whatever you have cystic fibrosis. Like there's nothing that you did. That's just your genetics. And it happens.

But that is not what's happening with autism. I don't think, I think that, you know, in some cases, I 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 stories and you talk to people who have reversed it, that tells me very clearly. And you know, it tells you.

And you've been doing this for 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 kid has allergies, my kid has eczema.

Well, maybe there are things that I can do. Maybe there is stuff in my home, my life, what we're eating, what we're doing. And if I'm conscious of that, then maybe I can give them a different path.

Maybe not. But probably you can improve things, at least to some degree. For any child. No matter. No matter even if it's completely genetic, it doesn't mean there aren't things that we can do to improve things, and that puts the ownership back on us.

And I think it's kind of been taken away from the parent and taken away from the family. And people are kind of like, oh, it's just it's just the way things are.

You know, kids just have autism now. It's just normal. Kids just have allergies. And it's really frustrating as a pediatrician, you know, because even in my fairly short career, I've seen things skyrocket.

I mean, I don't remember when we were little, you know, allergies and asthma and eczema, not just me. It was around, but it wasn't common. And now it's like every other kid.

Right? Is that. And it's it's insane right now. 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 of the things that they really need is for the parents to take ownership over it, and the ones who have the greatest success or the best outcomes with their kids in terms of returning them to health, is, the ones who, first of all believe that it's possible, right?

Like that is like the 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 know that. And then they take ownership for the things that are in and around their child's body, you know, from food to things that go on their skin to things that are in the home.

Parent Ownership and Cultural Change

And the parent takes that very seriously. I've never met a family who reverse their child'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 microbiome 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's been here and it's genetic and there's nothing that you can do about it. But that's not true like that, you know? So that's 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 autoimmune. It's an autoimmune condition in many, many ways. So, that's, you know, that's where people often times need to start.

But that's the heart. That's a really hard place for a lot of people. I think so because I think it it goes to the like blame. Right? I think people either start to blame themselves or, you know, you're shaming parents or you're saying that I did this, I can't believe I did this, I can't, and it's not about that.

It's about not knowing and then knowing more information and trying to get kids to better place for whatever reason. I mean, even if there is something that we did okay, we didn't know now, and now we do, and we know there are things that we can do differently to try to help them the best that we can, but we're going to have to get past that, that kind of blame.

And, the hard, that hard conversation to have of like, there are things that contributed to this. You know, maybe it was some things that we did. Maybe it has nothing to do with that.

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

So I think that just an important place to to start from. And the more that we talk about this, the more that's going to be possible, I think. Right. And, you know, the thing that people need to remember is that there is so much shame and guilt and 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 like, you can get stuck there. That's a horrible place to be. Well, you have to remember is that 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 to feed. You know, me and her mom taught her like you learn these things in a context.

In a culture, I use the, you know, the products that I use because I saw them on TV and my friend is using them, and that's what's normal. But in the CVS, you know, I mean, like 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 toxic.

And in our food and our water and our air, in 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. Like, it's really it's the really the modern industrial world. It isn't limited to the United States, obviously. Like that. We're like industry health.

I think we get like the gold, the gold medal for destroying health because of our culture. But it's really modern Western industrial culture. And I always like to to finish off on a positive and finish off on, you know, actionable steps.

So what would be your suggestions for some first things that parents can do if they're, 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. I want to focus on their health. What are your your big tips or takeaways or things that they should do or think about this week if they want to 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 a family member, find somebody, find community because it is very hard to navigate it on your own.

You feel isolated. Remember what I said this is about culture. So like what you have to do to heal your child is like live in a way that is 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 a family member that is interested in doing this. And if you can't find a friend or family member we created resources for parents.

We created an online community. It's called Healing Together. We meet twice a month. Buy a line, zoom live zoom, call with other parents who are doing the same work.

We have a whole like, step by step roadmap for how you do this kind of work. And it's, 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 fives each other and learn about the healing process as part of a community.

Community Support and Resources

Because I think, you know, the key takeaway is if you want to embark on this healing work that requires shifting how you live and shifting your culture.

You want to do it in a community where there's another culture. It's a counterculture or parallel culture that supports healing. So that feels to me like the most important piece.

I love that, you know, because it's, most people say food. So I would say that's like a really, really, really good answer. And a little bit, a little bit different, but super important.

And I think, you know, maybe even more foundational than, than a true answer of like, you know, food or sleep or exercise or whatever, because it's like, if you don't have your support, if you don't have your community, then I can send you all the, PDFs you want on, on what food to eat, but you're maybe not going to do it.

So having that community and that that feedback loop, and that accountability can be, can be really helpful. So I think that's 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, all that stuff, if they do want to join that and I'll just say it's, you know, Fendt tastic community.

All the work that you do is amazing and beautiful and super helpful, and you're one of the the few people that it

really is or, you know, your your work and the group of people that you work with really are changing the paradigm of what people think.

So thanks. Oh, thank you, thank you. All of our resources are available at Epidemic Answers dawg. And from there you can access our research project, which is called documenting Hope. So that's documenting hope.com.

And you can access our, healing membership community. And you can access information about our conference. So you just go to Epidemic answers.org or documentary hope.com and you can get all the information.

And that's what that's what we're here for. We we created all kinds of resources webinars, articles, the conference, the membership community. We train health coaches.

But we do this because we know parents cannot do this 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 you everyone for listening and we'll see you in the next the next session.