When Your House Makes You Sick: Mold and CIRS with Heather Sunderland Transcript

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Introduction and Heather's Background

So if your toxic bucket's overflowing, if you're living in mold and you don't know it, say you're under a lot of stress, you have really poor sleep or circadian rhythms, right?

Everybody, it's a little different with that perfect storm as that leads to that label or illness that they're dealing with. But looking back, the fact that I was in mold all those years and didn't know it, And I had the genetics where I struggle to detox mycotoxins.

And we don't really know if that gene is turned on or off. Right. We see that every client I see has that gene propensity. So we assume when they're sick, the gene is sort of turned on.

We could teach the body to detox. That's not an issue. But if you don't know that and you're being exposed, it's accumulating your body at a quicker rate than you can usually get rid of it.

This is Dr. Talks. Hello, everyone. Welcome back to Take Back My Brain. I'm your host, Laurie Hammer. Today I have with me Heather Sunderland, and she is a board certified functional health coach and owner of coaching by Heather LLC.

She has navigated mold, SIRS, and a whole host of other things. over the past 28 years. So I am so excited to dive into her health journey and how she helps clients today and just kind of dispel some of those myths around Lyme and mold and chronic disease.

So Heather, welcome to the podcast. Thank you, Laurie. I'm excited to be here. I'm excited to have you. So of course, I want to know your story so that we can kind of dive into why you weren't getting well and then what actually got you well.

I have a little spiel that's short, because I was sick a long time. So, chronically ill much of my life, but became dysfunctional around the age of 30, had chronic pain, was labeled with fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome.

And I was a dietician at the time, had a private practice, and at 35 I closed that private practice because I just had so much pain, so much neuropathy, symptoms kept getting worse, and the labels just kept getting added on.

Yeah, interstitial cystitis and asthma and just lots of labels, severe neuropathy. And it wasn't until I was 52 that I was actually diagnosed with chronic Lyme disease, which was really a big part of the route.

of what was going on and I treated herbally holistically. I got better, but I didn't get fully well and moved across the country to a one-story home. I was having trouble walking and standing.

Moved to the desert in Arizona from Pennsylvania. And I entered health coaching school and I was struggling to walk and to stand.

Chronic Illness, Lyme, and Early Misdiagnoses

I had a lot of ligament laxity where my vertebrae did not stay in place. Just opening a door or whacking. And I went to school in a zero-gravity chair because if I was sitting upright at a desk, my vertebrae would go out and I would lose feeling in my limbs.

So it was really crazy symptoms. And in health coaching school, during COVID, I developed the Lyme Reactivated

and I developed active mono and active Graves disease all the same month.

So it was a very dark season, a lot of pain, and I did not sleep for about three days at a time due to the Graves disease. And I blamed everything on the Lyme, absolutely everything.

I thought it was the Lyme that caused the Graves. And it was a friend and health coach in school, another coach, who said to me, Heather, I'm wondering if you've thought about mold or if you've thought about chronic inflammatory response syndrome.

And I'm like, I'm in the desert. There's not mold in the desert. I knew nothing about mold. But because of what she said, I found a doctor locally who could do testing to see if I had mold toxicity or chronic inflammatory response syndrome.

And I did. chronic inflammatory response syndrome is when the toxic bucket of the body overflows and it causes systemic inflammation. And so people can present with like a whole long list of labels, but usually they're toxic.

Mold can tip the bucket. Lime can tip the bucket. It doesn't even have to come. from either, but then you're dealing with systemic issues, nervous system dysregulation.

You know, everybody's a little different how they present. And I started treating with a local naturopath and nothing shifted. Yeah. And I had SIBO and I was down to 10 foods and having been a dietician that really frustrated me that I would pretend that I could eat.

And then I met some other coaches who had this regenerative approach to nourishing the body and using food as medicine to detox. And I started on that approach December 10th, 2020. And within three days, I started to see shifts.

I had symptoms, the whole process of healing. People don't realize healing can be quite uncomfortable, especially if you've been sick. Yeah, 28 years.

So I'm pretty upfront with that, with people. But I went from like major brain fog where I could not do things on my computer and at three months I could do things on my computer and now I'm running to business.

So I just blew my mind to start to see the chef six months. I went from walking with assistive devices to not needing assistive devices and it just got better and better.

Not needing a chiropractor. I was at the chiropractor three times a week for eight years because they didn't understand why I had ligament laxity. A lot of times when people have ligament laxity, illo-stanlose, if it's not really illo-stanlose syndrome, it's toxicity, inflammation, it's mold exposure.

Yeah. Yeah. So it's just been sort of crazy, all the things that got missed along the way. But at 23 months, my doctor said, you don't have Lyme, you don't have mold, you don't have SIRS, you don't have Bartonella, like you don't have Graves, like the lung.

I had a list of like 20 illnesses. Still another two and a half years of my body letting go of all the drugs that had been put on. I'm in this last season of cellular waste is leaving.

My body didn't have a chance to clean up cellularly because I was so sick for so long. Toxic bucket, pathogen bucket's really almost super, super low, but the cells are cleaning up for the last time, and it's been a little intense.

Anytime things leave, for me, it's intense, but it's all good, because most people don't even get to that place where their cells are healing.

Mold Exposure and Toxic Bucket Overload

They may have less symptoms, and maybe their toxic bucket's 50% lower, but my toxic bucket's like 98% lower. So what I'm doing with clients is really helping them regenerate and repair and address the root, but not everybody is willing to do that work.

Yeah, it does take a lot. How do you feel like you got to that place where that toxicity bucket was just completely overflowing? No, that's a good question.

My childhood home, my bedroom had stachybotrys in the wall. And my parents just told me this when I was diagnosed four and a half years ago. Really? So I was asthmatic as a three-year-old.

And they knew it, Heather? Well, they did not know it until like years into my teenage years. They took out a window and the whole wall where that window wasn't whatever, right, had stachybotus when they tested it.

So they told me this and they're telling me this four and a half years ago. And I'm like, oh, I had digestive issues. I had asthma. You know, no wonder when I got biotech that my body, you know, couldn't respond properly and fight.

Let's stop right there and expand on that because you just said, when I got bit by that tick, my body couldn't, right? And so there is a point in time where you can get bit by a tick and if your body is able to handle that tick bite, you're not going to develop Lyme disease, correct?

Your brain runs the show, so don't let toxins run it ragged. God designed our bodies to heal when we remove the interference, and ZeoCharge from Zeolite Labs helps me do just that.

This detox magnet targets heavy metals, mold, and other toxins. while sparing your essential minerals. It is clean, third-party tested, and so easy to use.

So I want you to take back your brain today with ZeoCharge. Get it now at zeolitelabs.com. That is Z-E-O-L-I-T-E labs.com. That's my belief, right? Our immune system was designed to fight these things.

Yes. And so if your toxic bucket's overflowing, if you're living in mold and you don't know it, Say you're under a lot of stress, you know, you have really poor sleep or circadian rhythms, right?

Everybody, it's a little different with that perfect storm as that leads to that label or illness that they're dealing with. But looking back, the fact that I was in mold all those years and didn't know it, And I had the genetics where I struggle to detox mycotoxins, and we don't really know if that gene is turned on or off.

Right. We see that every client I see has that gene propensity. So we assume when they're sick, the gene is sort of turned on. We can teach the body to detox.

That's not an issue. But if you don't know that and you're being exposed, it's accumulating in your body at a quicker rate than you can usually get rid of it.

Right, right. So let's go back to your Lyme diagnosis and kind of tell me the accumulation from there. Accumulation of toxins or? Toxins and how you got to the place where you could barely even function.

Yeah. I mean, I, I just looking back, I was, I was holistically minded, but I didn't know there were options to get to the roots. So before I even had the label at 52, my doctors were putting me on medications for, I was on fentanyl, I was on Vicodin, I was on Valium, yeah, and Cymbalta, like all these medications for pain, right?

Which were adding to my toxic bucket and not helping me address the underlying root cause. So it wasn't until I had the diagnosis of Lyme and chose to treat, you know, herbally and I experienced herxing and die off of the Lyme bacteria, which was awful.

Especially because nobody prepared my body properly and I was living in mold at the time and I didn't know it. So like I look back and wonder, would it have been a little bit better if I had known these things?

Most likely, Heather, yes. But I look back so much of my journey, I just had so much in that bucket and people don't realize that toxic bucket, we don't often see exposure to water damage and mold.

And those of us who've had mold toxicity now when I go into a place, I react. But most of the time people don't react and it may be accumulating in your bucket, depends on your ability to detox.

and your genetics and all of that. So all these things were being exposed to that we don't see. And then I had all those drugs in my system, 20 drugs for over 20 years, not including haircare, skincare, like all the things that I didn't know about that I didn't really start working on until my 50s of shifting, right, to eating healthier.

Regenerative Healing Approach and Detox Support

I mean, it wasn't like I was a poor eater as a dietician. but what I had to do to heal and how I shifted my eating, my skin, like all of that, stop dyeing my hair, just, and everybody makes different choices of what we're willing to let go of.

And it was a process of just detoxifying my life and products in my home. And once in a blue moon, I find something like, oh my gosh, like what's it still doing in my house?

I don't even use it, but you know, I'll find a product that's sort of like- Right. It's kind of hidden under the sink. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I mean, I think most of us are toxic buckets accumulate and nobody is thinking about it.

And I mean, your podcast is about brain health and those toxins inflame the brain, whether it's molds, mycotoxins or other toxins, they're inflammatory.

And so people can have symptoms like Alzheimer's, dementia, I have people Parkinson's, I mean, just all kinds of symptoms, but The brain is impacted by these toxins and heavy metals and pathogens, and it can look different for different.

My husband's son and I all had chronic inflammatory response syndrome, all had mold toxicity. I had the Lyme piece. They didn't. We all presented totally differently, totally differently.

Right, right. So you went through the lime and you weren't completely well, right? And then you went into the mold treatment, correct? So what was the difference?

What I want to say, like addressing the lime and then finding out about mold. I was reading on your website, you were talking about the difference between people like doing like detoxes with just a bunch of binders as opposed to you're doing regenerative nutrition and stuff.

Can you differentiate that for people? Sometimes in the world of Lyme or mold, like in the world of Lyme, they're killing, right? It's all about killing.

It's all about killing, yes. Right? And so to get well, and this is just my opinion, to get well, we have to change the internal terrain of the body. Amen.

And make it a place where it's not hospitable to pathogens that don't belong there. And I personally experienced that. It took me longer than some people because I was just using food at the time and nothing else.

But in changing how I ate and eating to starve pathogens, I started to see pathogens. I felt them leaving, but I saw them depending on if they were visible, right, parasites that were visible.

I was seeing them in the toilet and I wasn't taking herbs to kill. And that was pretty like, oh my gosh, my body's letting go and it feels safe. And it did that for a real, it did it for forever because I was sick for a long time.

So I was constantly like releasing things. A lot of people in the mold world or the toxin world are focused on just

binding toxins, but they're not focused on both scenarios, preparing the body to do the work.

You don't want to kill and you don't want to bind if your drainage pathways aren't ready to handle it. Most people who are sick, right, our drainage pathways are sluggish, they're congested, maybe not all of them, but we have to look at bowels, the lymph, the kidneys, the liver, the gallbladder.

I mean, there are other pathways, but those are the biggies that I have to assess if they need support in clients. And I don't understand why doctors treat Lyme and they will not prepare the body first.

Like I've talked to great naturopaths, gotten to know and gotten close with some in a way. Why are you doing this? It's so critical because patients will feel better.

Otherwise, toxins and whatever's dying that the bacteria is releasing, right, can just recirculate. Yeah. So then when it recirculates, you get sicker.

I mean, you have very unwanted side effects from all of that. Yeah. So I mean, healing is uncomfortable, but it's much more uncomfortable when you're not setting up the stage and preparing the body first and giving people at least two weeks minimum to get their power at least, at least.

Yeah. I mean, like I have people like, they just want to get started and I'm like, We got to do this first, you'll thank me later. But there's so many people who are just binding, binding, binding sometimes and they don't know they're living in mold and they're feeling miserable because it's so hard to detox if you're being exposed to toxins you don't know about in your house.

Right. How do you check for mold? Because people, you know, I ask people all the time and then, you know, a lot of them will end up doing a test for their home.

But most people are like, I've never seen mold. I don't smell mold or had water damage that I'm aware of. And most of the time you don't see it or smell it.

If you see water stains, if you smell it, not good, but you can have mold and it's the micro toxins from the mold that are toxic to our body and our brain, not the mold itself, but the micro toxins, the molds give off.

So there's a lot of different tests for water damage and every test has a pro and a con. So basic test is an Ermi dust cloth test that tests for 36 different Molds, 29 are toxic and seven are outdoor molds.

Mold spores tend to be heavy. It was not meant to really be a test to test houses. For mold, it was more a comparison, but it is sort of like a standard to assess if somebody is really sick and symptomatic.

If somebody gets this test back and their numbers are really high, then they can investigate further, where is this water damage coming from? But that being said, I've had people do Hermes that are okay, and you can have other aspects of water damage like mycotoxins, endotoxins, like tinose, VOCs.

So there's tests for all of that, but usually I will start with an Hermi or an Emma, and Emma does the mold and the mycotoxins.

Testing for Mold and Hidden Water Damage

It's a dust cloth test. But there's so many options. So it's really about listening to the person. What's their budget? Do they if they don't see water damage and it's a great place to start with an army or an emma Yeah, and it's a do-it-yourself test because inspectors do not They do not typically do them or if they I had a client tell me oh, yeah My inspector is doing an army and I'm paying him a thousand dollars.

The test is 240, right? You don't need to you don't need to know know And an inspector, I mean, they'll do lots of different things. They'll come in and do an outside air test and an inside air test, but 95% of the time, air testing will

miss mold spores in the air because they're heavy.

And if the mold is in like a wall near a window and you're testing the air in the middle of the room, you're going to have a negative air test. So yes, I have people who have had a positive air test, which is not a good sign, but that's 5% of the time.

Yeah, this is a good place to start for people. Well, we had mold in our home and I knew it. I couldn't figure out what was wrong with me because I was having like all this lung stuff and just, you know, my health was kind of going down again.

And I had a friend of mine run a biofeedback on me and she's like, you've got mold in your house. And I'm like, whoa, I can't find it anywhere. Because I was thinking that I did.

And we did testing. I had the air tests. I did like three different air tests. And all of them came back negative. Like, I couldn't find it anywhere. And I'm thinking, well, we do live in Iowa.

You know, it is humid. We have basements. So it just could be things that I'm not seeing. I took a wall in the bathroom downstairs, much to my husband's dismay.

We didn't find any mold behind that. You know, so we were looking, looking, looking. And I- You're playing detective. It's not always easy. Yeah. Yeah.

But I was cleaning out my husband's side of the closet. I forget why. But I was just going to wash the walls and stuff. I was just going to do anything.

I take his clothes out of the closet. Now, mind you, this is not a place where you would expect water damage. So it was in the back corner of his closet.

We have a very large overhang in that corner. So water never hits the house. And so I take his clothes out. straight down that corner was black mold. Never showed up on any of the testing.

I even did a dust test, and it never came up. Yeah, I mean, that's what I say. There's pros and cons. There's a new test. I'm getting it to my house in a few days.

I don't know if I'm going to do it on my house or a friend who I know is in water damage. I don't know if they want to see it. But it's called Respir Air, has an air mycotoxin test.

And I have a friend who's a mold. someone who's healing from mold and just really dug deep into this company. And that was the company that found where her mold was because she knew she was reacting and they were able to properly remediate.

But it is, it's like there's all these different choices and and there's no you have to look at the situation and see what's best for people and Sometimes you have to retest after clean things up, but people are still you know reacting Just it can be tough I do kinesiology or muscle testing so often people will take me around their house and And I have building material mold in my house in the desert and it was low levels, but there was stacky and nobody likes to see stacky on an army.

I felt like, hey, I healed here, like my body can handle this. Everybody's different what their body can handle exposure to based on. previous levels of exposure.

I don't know my levels of previous exposure. I'm thinking it was like low levels constantly where some people are really high levels. And if they're re-exposed, they're super sensitive.

I'm only sensitive when I'm exposed to moderate or high levels, not low. But I've been able to narrow down the area, probably where the building material mold is.

And when people come and stay with me, if they're mold sensitive, that's where they react, is that one particular room. I'm in my house, but I'm not going to rip out a wall if I'm not reacting and it's not a room I'm ever actually in.

Yeah, absolutely. Well, and that's the thing. When you were growing up, your parents didn't know it until they took out a window. You're not going to find it between the wall.

That's where it's so tricky because you don't know what's been leaking in between those walls or behind the shower in the basement, whatever it might be.

Well, and even today how we build, I'm in Arizona, so I mean, we're coming into rainy season where doesn't mean a lot of rain, but if they're framing a house, then it rains, right?

I mean, and a lot of wood can be infected with mold on it ahead of time. So people don't realize that there are people who get second new builds. I have a client who's building a home in Oklahoma and she said it's been raining the whole time and the wood that's being delivered with the building biologist checking it has had mold on it and they're freaking out because you know they they left mold and getting really upset because they want to have a place that's safe because they were exposed at very high levels and so they're super super sensitive to any exposure so people don't even realize the whole how we build a house and all of that is just crazy, but it's those of us who tend to have the poor genetics that are going to be the ones who react, you know, more than it doesn't mean other people aren't affected.

Cause my husband, he was functional and working, but he was sick. Yeah. But he wasn't like I was. Yeah. He wasn't disabled by it, but he still had to go through everything.

I had to, you know, different process, same process, but different symptoms for him. in the process of healing because he didn't have Lyme. But not everybody is willing to do that.

Listening to the Body and Personalized Nutrition

My son, I know he has small toxicity and sores. He's never adjusted. And he's sick. He's got ulcerative colitis and blood work that shows Crohn's and it's quite severe.

And he's an adult. So I'm like, hey, I'm here if you change your mind. Right. Yeah. So, and he's heard, he's heard and he knows, he just has to decide when, right?

And I think that's the hard part, you know, especially for us as parents or spouses, like, if somebody's not willing to dive into, you know, those types of things, it just makes it harder to have that relationship even.

Well, I've learned, right, as a mom, especially if it's an adult child, to keep my mouth shut. My son just bought a house and he said, what's your advice?

And I said, well, you know, I'm going to say have it inspected and test it for mold. Yeah. Because of the way the marketplace was, he's like, he didn't, if he wanted a house, he couldn't do that.

So now he's bought the house and then he was telling me. there's some water issue in the basement, and he's having somebody come in to test. And I'm hoping, because he's been in mold his whole life, that he'll have the funds to address it after just spending a lot of money on his first house as a young man.

Right. Yeah, it is crazy. So what do you think helped you the most in your healing process? I think The first thing I'll say, and I didn't realize I was doing it, but I was doing nervous system work before I realized I was doing nervous system work.

And that was really, really key for me. My nervous system work is not what all my clients do, but I was in biblical counseling and going through scripture.

And it was reframing how I was viewing that I had active Lyme and that I had Graves' disease and I wasn't so much pain. And just, so it was a biblical brain retraining in a way without going to like brain retraining.

And there's lots of other options, but for me, that was huge, but I didn't realize that was my first piece that I was doing in the very beginning. The other piece was nutrition.

For me, 75, 80% of my healing, I would say, was nutrition and learning to eat to alkalize my body, which was increasing fruits and vegetables. Since my gut was such a mess, I was using liquid superfood shakes that were organic and regeneratively farmed.

And that protocol, like that's what started to give me my health back. It was working on my gut. It was the food was opening my detox pathways and the shakes and it was gently detoxing and it was binding at the same time.

And it was sort of doing so much that I didn't realize that at the time where everybody was using supplements and pills, even if they were whole food or cell core, it was just too strong for my body and I was depleted.

So for me, that food piece was used. I see it missed all the time. And everybody does have to figure out what works for them because I think we're all unique.

I was 95% alkaline once my gut was healed enough because I was eating meat and a handful of vegetables because that's all I could tolerate. But once my gut started healing about two months out, I was 95% alkaline and I did all fruit.

for three months, and I went from not walking to walking when I did 100% fruit, but I was craving the fruit. So with clients, I'm really careful, like, hey, you don't have to get to where I got to.

You have to listen to your body. And at the end of the healing journey, I went through a season not too long ago where my body was needing protein for rebuilding and repair.

I hadn't eaten meat in five years. And I never wanted to eat meat again. My body was like screaming for it. And I was like, oh my gosh. And I was muscle testing.

I needed it. And I was eating eggs for breakfast and tuna for lunch and then a healthy meal. But it was like so opposite of how I was eating. So it's taught me to really listen to clients and what they're telling me and let them hone in on.

Right. Because there isn't one diet fits all. And even when you're speaking about cancer and Lyme and mold and those kinds of things, we kind of tend towards that vegan-vegetarian route.

But some people, it's not a good fit for them. And so you really have to learn to navigate that with all of your clients for sure. I love that you're open to that and that you're really listening to your body.

I try to teach clients to do that, to really listen to what their bodies, because I have a gal I just met with her yesterday and she was eating carnivore because some doctor told her eat carnivore and she's so toxic in mold, just got out, she's 82, so it's not going to be a pleasant journey.

Hope, Recovery, and Final Advice

And I'm just like, are you open to shifting? And she was like, oh, I don't like eating meat. And I'm like, well, that to me was telling, right? So let's just start adding in some fruits, things that you tolerate and see how you do, and just gradually increase that list into your body.

If you want meat, have meat. If we can get it cleanly sourced, if that's in your budget. But when I first got started, I was very strict in my thinking.

But I've worked with about 850 clients. And then my own journey has just taught me It shifts. It dies. You have to listen to that. Your body's telling you what it needs.

And if you're in tune enough to listen to it. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Any final words for our listeners today? But just anybody who's listening, if they're dealing with brain fog, brain issues, dementia, Alzheimer's, any of the things that you talk about on your podcast, if they haven't, and if they have a long list of labels, you know, three feeder labels, like look at you've been through the rabbit hole of dealing with mold in your home, rule out that in your environment because it's missed all the time and you're not going to get better with what you're doing if you're missing that piece, if you're being exposed.

And if you're not feeling well, have hope that if you're willing to do the work, you can address underlying root causes. And I mean, I feel like I'm proof of that if I could be sick and disabled for 28 years.

Right. And look at you now. Yeah. There's hope that it is work. And the older you are, be prepared. Be prepared that it is work. And that there will be discomfort in the process.

Right. That's awesome. Well, Heather, everyone know that Heather's information will be in the show notes down below so you can contact her. Do you want us to drop your website in here right now and tell people where they can best find you?

Yeah, it's healthcoachingbyheather.com. Awesome. Heather, thank you so much. I appreciate everything you're doing. I admire your mission and your passion to help people in this area.

So thank you for being on. Well, thank you, Lori. Thanks for letting me share my story. I hope it brings some of your listeners' hope. I'm sure it does.

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