Why Your Digestion Sucks Even When You’re Eating Clean – With Hannah Aylward Transcript

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Introduction and guest background

Hi, welcome. It's Dr. Isabella Wen, so I'm so excited to have you here with us today. We're going to be focusing on why your digestion sucks, even if you're eating clean, causes of bloating, including non-food-related causes, and what you can do about food sensitivities.

I am really excited about having Hannah Aylward here. Hannah is a certified holistic health coach, functional gut health practitioner, Han. After struggling with her own chronic digestive issues for years, she dove headfirst into the latest in gut health research, seeking answers to her bloating and food sensitivities.

With her science-backed formula, She's overcome her on digestive issue and has helped thousands of other women around the world do the same. She leads a team of functional practitioners that help clients transform their gut help and overcome their never-ending digestive targeted supplementation, and advanced lab work.

So welcome, Hannah. It's so great to have you here. Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here and to dive in. One of the questions that I always like to ask people is, why do they do the things that they?

So I'd love to know your origin story. What got you into this work? Yes, absolutely. I think many of us that lean start to lean more the functional route, we've dealt with our own chronic health issues for a long time.

So I was the girl that was doing everything right, but I still looking six months pregnant with bloating. Had so much gas, was burping, dealt constipation, all of the really, really fun stuff that we just love to discuss and open up about.

But It never really made any sense. So I was like eating really healthy. I following elimination diets, I didn't eat gluten, and I did need dairy. And I would have like one glass of organic wine a month, you know, exercise all the time, went to yoga, meditated and would still find myself reacting to basically everything that I ate.

It didn t really matter if it was organic carrots or if it was a French fry, right? And I knew that something else had to be going on, but I couldn't really find that information anywhere.

I was like reading all the things and taking the trainings. And it wasn't until I started to dig a bit deeper into the, the the real science behind the gut microbiome and how digestion actually even works and understood that there's more to the story than just the food that you eat.

And of course, the foods that we eat plays a massive role in our overall health. I mean, it influences and informs ourselves, and it will directly impact your gut micro biome.

So I'm not here to knock it. We use a lot of targeted nutrition with our clients, but I just knew there had to be something else going on and I was being told that I'm just stressed.

I needed to relax. You just need to stop worrying. But if you've ever, if anyone listening has experienced the painful abdominal bloating where you want to almost stick a pin in your abdomen and deflate it, you feel like you're just going to pop.

Being told to just relax is not helpful in that situation. So that's how I got into all of this. It was years and years of struggle and no answers. And then I started really coaching other women as I was honestly still figuring out my own stuff.

I heard, I starting to hear the same story over and over again. Like I went to the doctor, they told me I just stressed.

They wanted to put me on an anxiety medication.

Um, um, walked out crying. As soon as the doctors heard I planning a wedding, he just laughed at me. And I was like, I'm like what? So, and everyone, all these women were dealing with bloating and it was, they're putting in so much effort.

They're eating clean, They are doing all of this stuff. The clients that we see, like they are educated. really informed themselves, but something is still not clicking and they know that they could feel better than they do.

So I started to hear this story and I was like, someone has to do something. And I just wasn't ready to wait, you know, the 17, 18 years for like medical research to make its way into practice.

I'm going to jump into some of this education now. That's kind of how I sort of putting the pieces of my own health puzzle together and then helping others.

Hannah's gut health origin story

I love that. It's like a pain to purpose story. So you went through your own challenges and you were like, you must've felt so discouraged doing everything right.

Eating all the right foods, probably eating organic, eating clean, exercising, doing stress reduction strategies and still struggling, right? And it's, I feel like that's very relatable for a lot of my clients and a of the people that listen to this show because I know I know it's like you're trying, you are really, really trying but there are things that are discouraging and they're not.

They're not moving. Like, nothing is seeming to move the needle. Bloating, I know, is one of those things that's super frustrating. I've been there before. I was working in public health and there was a physician that we worked with and she was like, oh, congratulations, you're pregnant.

And I was, like no, that was just my lunch baby, right? Like that, was the taco that I had or a burrito or whatever. Um, and you know there are a lot of reasons why we can bloat.

Not just one reason. Can you go through what some of these reasons might be? Yes, absolutely. Like you mentioned, there's many, right? So deeper investigation, I would say, is really helpful, depending on your case.

But some of the more common reasons why we see women dealing with chronic bloating, one is going to be low stomach acid. So we need stomach to actually break down our food, to digest proteins.

And I also like to say it acts as kind of this first chemical barrier to the outside world. putting it into our bodies through the food that we're eating.

And your stomach acid should be nice and strong enough to the point where it can protect you from any of these bacteria or pathogens that are going to ride into your body through food you're um, my cup that I've been drinking from, you know, for all morning, it's like, there's bacteria on these things and yes, we can try to wash them and all of that, but your stomach acid is really there to protect you from infections, parasitic infections other bacterial infections.

Um, so, when we see low stomach, acid, not only will we have trouble digesting our food, that will also be a higher risk for You know, weird bacterial infections and other pathogens coming inside, which will then cause a lot of bloating as well.

So low stomach acid, I would say is one big reason it's very common. As you know. It's more common than not, say years of chronic stress will do it to you.

PPI use. Um, you know, different nutrient deficiencies will kind of lead to that. So that's, that number one. The other

one I would like to point out is bile flow.

And honestly, this is not something that we focus on very early on when I got started. You know about 10 years ago at this point, um, This wasn't as big of a deal as I'm seeing it being clients.

Now this like subpar bile, bio flow, so bile is really this, and you can think of it as like a soapy substance that gets pushed into the small intestine to help keep things relatively sterile.

It also helps you to break down your food. It helps to digest fats and absorb fat-soluble nutrients, so vitamins D, A, E, K. So if you have low levels of these vitamins, we want to take a deeper look to see what's going on.

If you're someone who's supplementing with vitamin D levels aren't going up, there could be a deep root cause issue at play. But subpar bile flow can cause a lot of bloating.

I see it cause like nausea, bloat, hormonal imbalance. like symptoms. So like painful periods, heavy clotting, things like that. And it also helps, you know, bile.

It's really produced by the liver and pushed out by gallbladder, right? It helps to remove toxins from the body. Many people talk about detox. We have to cleanse, we have detox, but it's like, what does that really mean and how does it happen?

And we basically excrete toxins through our stool, our urine, and our sweat. So bile is one of these digestive juices that helps to bind to these toxins so they can be removed from the body along with excess estrogen.

All of this stuff is really connected, which I find one the reasons why I love this work, because we can connect the dots in so many underlying cases when someone presents with painful periods and bloating and hormonal acne.

These have basically the same root cause going on here. Let's dig a little deeper and dive into that. But I would say liver, gallbladder issues, and poor bile flow is a big one.

And these are really important because they're going to impact the rest of your digestive tract. So digestion is really a north to south process. When we're talking about something like Probiotics can be supportive, but you take them and you're kind of hoping that they make their way into the large intestine for the most part, or the colon.

That's where the majority of your microbiome of these different trillions microorganisms reside. But we have to look up the chain, right? So before we throw in more bacteria, we want to ask, How's your nervous system doing?

And also, how are these digestive juices? Are these being produced at adequate levels so you can actually break down and digest the food that you're eating?

Or else we are going to set the environment for a bacterial overgrowth to take place, a fungal over growth to takes place. And that is also what will cause a lot of bloating for people.

we run a ton of functional stool testing. We run it with every client. I know you like functional testing too. It really helps us get to the bottom of what's going on.

And there are other labs that we can run too, if we need a clearer picture. But when we ran these labs, there's always some gut dysbiosis, which is basically a fancy term for just saying, we've got an imbalance of our gut bacteria.

We can have insufficiency dysbiosis, we can low levels of good gut bugs, more opportunistic dysbiotic kind of dysiosis meaning we got overgrowth of these more unsupportive bacteria, sometimes they're leading to histamine overload, certain strains like Morganella or Pseudomonas.

So we see different patterns here. in the bacterial composition and these, we have overgrowth of these bacteria will

be very, very bloated. You can think of that kind of SIBO case where we had that over growth in a small intestine.

One of the biggest complaints is like I'm so bloating. I eat anything and I look for six months pregnant with belly bloat and my bloatin gets worse and worse as the day goes on.

This is a really big issue because not only is it uncomfortable, but it's going to lead to damage of their gut barrier, It can lead to skin issues, it can need to nutrient deficiencies because we can't absorb things efficiently.

So there's so much that we want to look at there, but at kind of the top of chain are those digestive juices. If we aren't producing adequate levels of those, we're setting up a subpar environment in our gut microbiome because when we cant break things down efficiently, were going to support the overgrowth of other microorganisms.

I like to use the example you can think of it as like a river or a pond. And when you go to see a pawn, you know, if you Go over to the pond, You'll see that bacterial film on it because the water is still and it's not moving and It's going to grow that biofilm on top of a bacteria is going To start to form.

Now, when you go to a rushing river or a stream or something where the water is moving, you'll see a little bit of overgrowth on the rocks maybe, but that water's pretty clean.

It's clear. We don't have that bacterial film covering thewater because it's moving. Our digestive juices help to keep things moving through the GI tract as well, so it helps to decrease the risk for over growth in the gut microbiome.

It's fascinating, you know, all disease, they say all diseases starts in the gut. And what does that actually mean? And it means that our digestion is where it all starts.

So if we don't have enough stomach acid, then we're not going to be breaking down our foods properly. We're going not to clearing the infections from our food.

And I know for me, low stomach acid was a really big aha moment on my healing journey where I realized that potentially a big reason of my fatigue was because I wasn't breaking down my protein containing foods properly.

And so, one, my body was using up a lot of energy and resources to properly break down the food. Two, I was not really actually properly breaking it down, so I depleted in a lots of nutrients.

I A lot of times we might see deficiencies in like B12 and deficancies in iron or ferritin when women don't have enough stomach acid on board. Now, one of the things that I used that i thought was incredibly helpful on my healing journey or at least early on was betaine with pepsin to support my stomach.

And I'm curious, is that one the tools that you use with your clients and do you have additional tools they might want to consider? Yeah, I love that.

Um, we will use Bay teenage CL. Sometimes I typically like to check for a helicobacter pylori infection first before I recommend something like that, um, just to avoid any damage.

I, there's like various opinions on that and how kind of. Um, how kind of, you know, what's the word I'm looking for sensitive? We need to be with that or how much of an issue it could cause.

You know? I think people have varying opinions on that, but for me, I like to check for a helicobacter pylori infection first before I recommend something like that.

Um I would say, But it's a great tool. I mean, especially if someone really needs it, You can start to feel the difference and less bloating and gas like, pretty quickly after using it.

So definitely a tool to have in the toolbox. I just like to check for that H. pylori infection first, because if we have something that's really irritating the stomach line, causing inflammation of the sun, like lining, and then we add in

more acid, you know, we may run into some issues there.

And then sometimes I'll also see people coming in to work with us from other functional medicine doctors and they may be taking like six capsules of HCL with a meal.

No, we're not. We're definitely not targeting the root cause if we need to take that much of it. I'd be interested to hear your opinion on that too. But because it's like something else is going on if you really need take much the supplement.

So I like to kind of take a deeper root-cause approach. What we do recommend a lot is something like a digestive bitters. Like we are really big fans of digestive they're very gentle.

You always want to talk to your provider before starting new supplements, but I would say they are very safe. They're gentle, they non-habit forming, mild but effective.

So I feel comfortable with most people trialing those, whether we have testing or not. If anyone listening has been struggling and you're looking for a tool, that could be really helpful.

Digestive bitters are just a combination of different bitter herbs that help to support the production of stomach acid and then also to help support bile flow and pancreatic enzyme secretion as well.

And once again, mild, effective, and non-habit forming, so we do love those. I like to also kind of In my opinion, they can really help the body learn how to produce more digestive juices on its own again.

So sometimes like that additional HCL is so needed and so helpful because people are just struggling with it and they, you know, need that extra boost.

And then, more long-term, I really want to work to train the to secrete these digestive juice on it's own. We'll use digestive bitters a lot in that case.

Yeah, I love that. When I first started using butane with pepsin, and I didn't know everything that I know now. And one of the things that can happen if you have an H.

pylori infection, there is a school of thought that believes you can essentially push the infection further down into the stomach. There's also, if have a history of ulcers, that can be aggravating.

And of course, there's the question of like, why are you not producing acid on your own? I found thiamine to be something strangely very helpful with producing your stomach acid.

I love herbal bitters because in contrast to like supplementing with enzymes where you're externally giving your body what it's missing, they actually support your production of enzymes.

That's just beautiful when you can support your natural process. So I'm really glad that you brought those up. Do you have a specific brand bitters that enjoy using?

Yeah, there's so many. One of my goals is to design my own one of these days because we love them so much and I think it'd be so fun to formulate. But Um, herb farm has a good one, um, it has, a, good, one that's like effective and very, very cost effective.

So we love that. Um I, we do love Dr. Shades Bitters. I believe it's Dr Shade's Bitter X. That's going to be a bit pricier, but really, It's really effective, so we recommend that a lot.

um Vitanica has one too that is called Bitter's Extra that we'll use a lots and it actually has combination of bitter herbs and enzymes in it. Because sometimes we will put people on both to support digestion if they are really struggling.

So those are all options that you could look for. But there's honestly so many great brands out there. Urban Moonshine has a great one, too. And they, to my knowledge, if their still carrying it, have one that doesn't contain alcohol.

If that's a concern for you, then you can consider that one too Yeah. And that's just, again, such a great point because you could be eating the perfect diet, but if you're not digesting your foods, then you are going to have struggles, right?

Exactly. Yeah, and you can even use some foods too. I will say, I do think like an herbal tincture is going be a little bit stronger and more supportive, radishes, arugula, dandelion root tea, lemon, a little lemon juice, and a bit of water before your meal.

These can all help to stimulate those digestive juices. We love to use targeted nutrition where we can here as well, but I'm a huge fan of dandalion tea.

It really helps the gallbladder secrete that bile and push it out. If you have a history of gall bladder issues, it might cause some cramping. So, you know, take it with caution, but for your average person that's just looking to support digestion, they'll be fine with something like that.

Traditional Medicinals is a great brand there. You can also buy it loose leaf. So I love me some dandelion root tea. Sometimes people like hate the taste of it, So I'm a big fan of that.

Common causes of bloating

You can get a box of tea for like $5. So very simple ways that you can support your body at home as well. And then little ACV in some water before a meal, a little bit of lemon juice and some more before meal.

Not too much water because we don't want to support the dilution of the juices, but like a quarter cup or something like that, 10, 15 minutes before. All of those can be supportive too.

I love all of these suggestions with the disclaimer that I hate arugula like so good for me. I wish I liked it and I can't I just can do it. Um, I do love dandy blend tea too.

So I have found people who are trying to like kick their coffee habit. They really enjoy drinking dandelion. It just kind of has a nice black, um, like it looks like coffee, right?

And then it's got a really nice taste and it can help support liver and gallbladder function. This has been like a big staple for me for what I do with people is supporting their liver in gall bladder and just fascinating how many different things are connected.

I, for example, used to have seasonal allergies all the time and I just thought like I you know it's just the pollens or whatever that were causing my symptoms and it turned out that supporting my liver and gallbladder, like no more seasonal allergies.

And then heavy menses, so many women are walking around with heavy menstrual cycles, estrogen dominance, and they're depleting themselves of iron every single month with their heavy menses.

That's causing a whole bunch of symptoms. We think, okay, you're low in iron. You should be supplementing iron, but it's not always that. Sometimes it is like, actually, let's figure out what's going on with your system and potentially supporting your liver and gallbladder.

Maybe that's not the answer for everybody, but sometimes that is the one missing piece for a person. You mentioned you look at women with hormonal issues.

That's a big red flag for you, right? Yes. Yeah, absolutely. And that liver gallbladder support is, I mean, game

changing, you know? So whenever we're looking at someone, my first recommendations for someone that's dealing with heavy menses or lots of pain, clotting, cramping, tender breasts, even fibroids, we always want to look at the gut and the liver.

Because when we were looking estrogen detoxification, phase one and phase two are really occurring in the lever. Then that phase three is happening in that gut.

So there's a whole section of your gut microbiome called the astroblome, which You can just think of the word estrogen and the words microbiome put together, and you have the astroblome.

This is the portion of your microbiomes that helps to regulate circulating estrogen levels. Your liver is basically packaging this all up for removal, then your gut has to actually move it out of system through your stool.

That's how we're getting rid of this stuff. Whenever you're dealing with a painful periods. We want to kind of take a look at liver, gallbladder and gut.

And then of course, too, I would say supporting healthy progesterone production through like blood sugar regulation and stress management and B vitamins and vitamin C and magnesium.

that's kind of a could probably be a whole other podcasts, but there's so much that we can do there. So we like to take a look from at it from both areas.

I do think we're kind in a epidemic of low progesterone because people are so stressed and so, you know, always on and hyper vigilant and go, go go. And it's like, this, this free time and boredom and time to actually rest and relax and recover is just like gone for so many of us with our phones, especially.

Um, so yeah, that's kind of me getting on my soap box. I think it's so important, but these things are connected, right? Cause sometimes estrogen looks high in comparison to progesterone because pro gesterones just so low after poor sleep and, um, you know, poor absorption of nutrients and chronic stress and under eating and overexercising and things like that.

Yeah, it's all connected. Always want to take a look at liver, gallbladder, and gut when it comes to many different hormone issues, including thyroid.

As you know, a lot of that thyroid hormone conversion is in the liver and then the gut plays a big role there too. So all these hormones are really responding to other things in body.

Whether it is thyroid or estrogen, I want look liver or gall bladder, blood sugar, stress, nutrient absorption, that's those deeper roots that I talk about.

That's what I'm talking about there whenever we're looking at various different types of hormonal issues. A lot of really great information there to unpack.

I am with you on all of these things. My first three books were on Hashimoto's and thyroid disorders. Most recent book was on irritable bowel syndrome and really diving deep into gut health.

And my fourth book on stress. um, how that really can impact our hormones and our overall wellbeing. It turns out that stress is like really not good for anything, right?

Um, to your point, there is something with like a pregnant alone steel there. There is a school of thought that believes when you have this hormone cascade and you're producing, let's say your hormones, When you are under a significant amount of stress, the body will shunt production to more of the stress hormones rather than our beautiful reproductive calming hormones just because it's like, okay, this is an emergency situation.

We're under. A lot of. And reproduction right now is not super important. Like, I don't. you being calm and, and

having beautiful hormones, like, let's just survive, right?

And so this can be a common issue in a lot of women's health. Can you talk about perhaps what you're seeing with the impact of stress on gut health? Like, how do the two intertwine?

Oh my gosh, directly connected. And oh my goodness, it's such a big topic. So let's see, really digestion at its core is a nervous system regulated process.

It starts with the nervous, system it starts in the brain. I mentioned previously how it goes north to south, then that nervous is really step one. The brain is going to and the system are going let us know.

are we in fight or flight? Are we fighting for survival where we're not supporting hormone production and we are not digestion is an afterthought? Or are in that more parasympathetic response where the nickname for it is rest and digest, like the word digest is right there.

So we have to really be in this parisympathy nervous system state that rest and digest relaxed state in order to actually break down and digests the food that we're eating.

The body is so resilient. I mean, you can be stressed and it's not like you will literally not be able to digest your food, but it is going to be suboptimal.

So stress is when we are in that sympathetic dominant state, we will automatically produce less stomach acid. We are going produce fewer enzymes, less bile flow.

our gut motility is going to be impacted. Digestion really just becomes an afterthought in this state and blood flow is gonna go away from the GI organs and we're not prioritizing digestion.

So it's, I mean, directly connected and I really like to emphasize nervous system work with our clients. Because of how important it really is when we want to optimize digestive health, but also stay feeling better.

So we do a lot of the like intensive work and protocols and testing and all of that. And the nervous system piece we always include, But especially after, like if you're someone who's done a lotta this deeper work, and you are feeling a bit better, you wanna kind of keep those results.

We've got to work on regulating the nervous system to maintain those results more long-term. We can't really ask the body to go through this intensive process and then come out of it and go right back into this super stressed out state and expect it to stay feeling really good.

You know, we want to support nervous-system regulation to optimize digestive function overall. Of course, as well, when we are chronically stressed and we're in that sympathetic dominant state will produce more cortisol.

Um, going back to what you said, that pregnant alone steel, right? It'll, it'll decrease progesterone, um, which can then lead estrogen. It lead to more estrogen dominance.

And it will also wear away at the mucosal barrier of the gut lining too. So it's, it'll all kind of cause this dysbiotic picture in the gut. So one of the things I say, I feel like I said nonstop to my clients is like, stress doesn't stay stress, you know, these mental and emotional stressors don't say stress.

They become physical imbalances. It's a matter of time before chronic mental, emotional, and stress becomes chronic digestive issues and hormonal imbalanced is because of how the nervous system directly impacts our digestive function.

So, you know, when we're kind of working through a client's history and looking back, it's like, if you've been through really stressful state, If you had kids and raised multiple children and built a business, right?

Like that will do it. That will put you in that stressed out state. Um, and so your body will need extra support in the state and if been living your life for years where you're like burning the candle at both ends or you are undernourishing or over exercising, um, It's kind of a matter of time before the gut issues show up, before potentially the autoimmunity shows up before, the hormonal imbalances show and that's not to scare anyone.

We can do so much to support ourselves, but the the, gut brain connection is very, very strong, right? So your, your vagus nerve is going to impact these digestive organs along with your heart rate and other things too.

But if we're, if were chronically in that fight or flight state, Digestions just really not priority. So it's going to lead to an environment where bacteria will overgrow or dealing with low stomach acid.

Maybe we have suppressed intestinal cell regeneration because your gut barrier is always healing itself. But if you're chronically stressed and won't be able to do that as much.

I always like to pull up When I'm teaching, there's this diagram by Dr. Detice Karazian and he really created this. Diagram where it shows stressors and then what it causes in the gut directly.

And I teach this in like all of my classes because it helps to kind of put a picture to it. I think cause it's like, oh, we can talk about stress and stress is bad for us.

We know that what do we do about it? I am always stressed. You know, and we kind don't always prioritize it, but it will set up an environment for bacterial overgrowth, SIBO, fungal over growth.

and increase intestinal permeability, subpar digestion, and then down the line, potentially even more serious things. Thank you so much for sharing that and explaining that so well to us.

I do want to rewind a little bit. You talked about nervous system regulation. And I feel like this is a really hot topic these days. Everybody's saying, hey, it wasn't candida.

It wasn' parasites. it Wasn't this. That was my nervous systems, right? And, I want just kind of unpack that. Like, what are your thoughts on that statement, that it all boils down to the nervous system.

And two, what the heck is nervous-system regulation? Like, how do we regulate, right? Yes. Yes, I have very strong feelings on this topic. I think these posts, are I don't know if they're well-intentioned or not.

I don't think it's the full story because of what I kind of just shared. It's like, if we've been dealing with nervous system dysregulation for a few years, we're not just looking at managing our stress anymore.

We are going to be looking impaired immunity. we are gonna be look at subpar digestion, microbial overgrowth in the gut as a result of this. I think the best approach is holistic.

Stomach acid, bile flow, and digestive support

The best is looking at regulating the nervous system and doing the more physical work on the gut barrier and the microbiome and digestive capacity and maybe hormone work and liver, as you mentioned, liver gallbladder work, like all of these things because of the impact that it's going to have on these organs.

So I don't think, the last thing I want is for women to feel like I just need to relax. That's the last thing I want. I think we're told that enough. Just relax, just stop worrying about it.

Stop stressing. And, um, while I don't think a lot of those posts are trying to say that exactly, I'm like, it's a slippery slope for women to just feel like.

Okay. It's really just my stress. Like I need to manage stress better. So when we go into sessions with clients and I am able to show them like hey, you have a ton of dysbiosis.

You have poor fat, maldigestion. you know, lower secretory IGA. And then the light bulb gets to go off and they get to, go, finally, I knew something else was going on.

You know? It's not just in my head. So it's just not in your head, with that being said, yeah, of course we want to support stress reduction and nervous system regulation.

I think there's a big misnomer here because A lot of people think having a regular regulated nervous system is just never feeling stress or always feeling calm.

And it's not, I mean, you're, we're designed to feel all of these emotions. We will feel anger. Stress is not always bad. It can really like get you moving, right?

Cortisol is now all bad, it can, get alert, help you jump back from the curb when something's starting to cross the road. Like these things are protective mechanisms.

They really play a very important role. we want to dig deeper if they are lasting too long, if we're living our life in that state, so we are not just in the fight or flight state when, whoa, we almost slipped and fell, but when we were just scrolling our phone or checking our email inbox or rushing our kids to the appointment or to school or whatever it might be, and then it's all day long we in in I like to talk about nervous system regulation as learning how to access safety in your body kind of like, regardless of what's going on around you, because life is kind whatever it might be.

I mean, we're all managing a lot. If you're raising children, if you are working a job, in this current modern day, there's a whole lot that we are holding.

So that may be my own self-limiting belief, but I think life is beautiful. And I also think, unless you can quit everything and go live out in the forest and talk to no one, you've got to be managing lots of stuff.

It's more so how can we build resilience in the body, how can we build stress resilience and how we can learn how to access safety in body and come out of this fight or flight state a little bit quicker.

So if we have a situation that's going to really tick us off, say we're running late for the appointment and we are like, oh my gosh, I'm always running for this appointment.

My son is waiting for his appointment for three months and it's like you're just rushing to get there. Instead of letting that impact your next three hours, can you take a couple deep breaths while you're driving the car, access safety in the body, and know it's going to be OK.

We're going get there. This isn't ideal. But in a grand scheme of things, everything's gonna be okay. So it kind of like not never accessing that stress or falling into that stressful state, but having the tools to come back to center.

and in the grant and kind of widen the lens. That's a term I use a lot from Dr. Tara Brock. She's incredible, like widening the lense and understanding.

You know, this is going to be OK. It feels like the end of the world right now. And that's not to diminish anyone's feelings either, but it feels a really, really important big thing right, now like life or death.

But it's, not and it is gonna be okay. So there's many tools that we can utilize to support regulating the nervous system. I love breath work. i'm like a huge fan of breathwork.

Um, I did it this morning. I do it all the time because it so accessible and simple and for someone like me that definitely runs like go, go go. I mean, if anyone's into astrology, like I'm a Capricorn and I, it's like being in this brain is a lot.

It's a whole lot to hold. There's lot of drive and forward movement in the screen. Um, so for me, meditation sometimes can feel a little tricky, which I know means that I need it even more.

But it can, feel like there's, a barrier there because slowing all the way down feels challenging for. So with breath work, I can allow my mind to kind of like latch on to one.

two, three, like counting or breathing in and breathing out. So my brain has something to focus on. It's still very regulating for me, but that feels a bit more supportive than like, yeah, just trying to observe my thoughts when my, my thought are nuts.

Um, so breath work, I think is a really, really beautiful tool. I'm like happy to give more, um, exercises specifically, if you want to get into that, meditation, of course, being in nature is like incredibly regulating.

just getting out into nature more, putting the phone down, like put your phone. Down. We are so inundated with information today. And oftentimes like now the way that the algorithm algorithms work, it's not even stuff we signed up to see.

It's all suggested. So it's like, we are just being bombarded with this stuff that we maybe didn't even opt in to seeing in the first place. Put the phone down, put on the chill music, turn the lights down like cook dinner in peace, in quiet, and just get away from that constant stimulation that so many of us are dealing with today.

I love those strategies that you shared. going out into the wilderness or sitting on the beach, that to be like the best medicine or going hiking next to a creek, like I just love, love love that.

I have meditated before there was a season in my life where that was really regulating for me. i've done yoga. Let's see, I found neurofeedback to very helpful, especially for people with those crazy, crazy brains when you have a hard time sitting down and meditating, that can be a really big helpful thing.

And I know a lot of my friends and colleagues have been really excited about vagus nerve-stimulating devices. That's something that I find can very helpful for so many different things.

What are your favorite tools that you like to use beyond breathwork? Do you have any additional ones if somebody's like, I don't know about all this weird stuff.

Yeah, I'm curious to see the impact of the vagal nerve like stimulating devices. We've a couple companies have reached out to me and I am like, hmm, I'm, curious about this.

I feel like I need to learn a little bit more about it. You know, With everything, it could kind of trigger the person that's not ready for it. It could be really supportive for someone else.

So I'm still interested to learn a bit more there. But simple exercises that we'll have clients do to help support vagal nerve stimulation, the stimulating of that vagus nerve would be like gargling, so simple, right?

So after you brush your teeth, filling up your mouth with water, rinse it out, fill it up, and then gargle pretty ferociously, I will say. You really got to get it going to that good stimulation.

very simple, you know, one minute, 60 seconds, we're looking at totally free. So I love these really small things that people can very easily implement into their lives because I think that's It's all just education and noise if we can't actually implement it.

We can have the best science out there, but if you don't have tools to actually put it into our lives, it's just more noise for us to take in. So that can be really helpful.

One of the breathwork exercises that I personally really love, and it has to be my favorite, would be the VU breath. You just inhale through the nose and on the exhale you literally make the sound.

So it's like, and that will help to stimulate that vagal, that Vegas nerve. You can put one hand on the heart, one-hand on lower belly. Um, I will find that that is one of the more helpful ones to get me out of that.

Like I am freaking out stage or like my to-do list is never ending and I'm go, go-go and running behind on this X, Y, Z. because we all deal with it. So that is really supportive for me doing like 10 rounds of that and just 10 Rounds.

I mean, that's like three minutes, you know, so very accessible. You can do this in between meetings. you can Do this while you're driving to work. These are the types of tools that I really love, You know.

so that one's really great. And then I actually also really loved movement. Um, like walking in nature, absolutely. Like every weekend I'm like, I need to, to get at least an hour out in and move my body.

Um that's my goal at. But I also think moving the body, shaking, kind of honestly jumping around. just jumping around and shaking your body. For someone like me that has a lot of this, I just have a lots of energy inside of me.

It's like I have to almost move the energy out before I can center the brain and center focus. So for me, i'll just turn a song on. It's not glamorous or fancy, but I'll literally just like swing my arms and shake my hands out as if I'm flicking water off of my fingers, kind of move my arm side to side, maybe even jump up and down, do a few hops, get that lymphatic system going.

And that movement almost really like it helps me get back into my body as someone who can be very in her head. It helps really ground me in my. Body. Then it's like from there, I can almost access the meditation easier.

I could access that breath work easier, I have to like shake it out and dance it a little bit. So when in doubt, put on your favorite song and just like literally jump up and down and around and sing at the top of your lungs.

And I can guarantee you in five minutes, you'll feel tremendously better. I love this. And I think getting the wiggles out is something that I surely appreciate with an eight-year-old son.

When he was like three or four years old, I remember he would just be like running around in circles and just had a really hard time to like sit down and relax.

I was just like, what is going on with you? It was my skeletons going crazy. And I feel like all of us can get to that point where we're just like working, trying to do the things.

And it's like, yes, we are human. We're meant to move. Like our skeleton's gonna go crazy if we don't actually get out and do that movement, right? Yes, I love that getting the wiggles out.

I'm gonna take that. That's me on a daily basis. So I need to get the wiggle sound out of my system.

Stress, nervous system regulation, and digestion

But yes. Especially if you do a lot of computer work. You know, like I am on the computer a little bit. Calls a bit, things like that, and it is like My body was not, I don't think any of our bodies were, but my body personally, the movement and the sitting all day, it really starts to impact my physical body, stiffness, of course, lymphatic drainage, and then also my mental body too.

Movement is such medicine to me. Of course the workout classes and all of that are great, even just five minutes of intuitive movement. Maybe it's a little walk, maybe it is a shake, or maybe a dance.

Very incredibly supportive. Yeah, I definitely agree with you. I think it can help a lot of things. Wanted to switch gears here a little bit and start maybe diving back into some of the food sensitivity stuff.

We do know that histamine issues, they've kind of been making the rounds as something that's trendy since around the pandemic. we speak to the connection between the guts and histamine?

Oh my gosh, yes. So yes, we're seeing a lot of this more than ever before. We started working more intensively with people, I don't know, maybe it was 2019 or something, but there was a big change from I would say 2021,

2022 to now.

Well, the cases have changed. So I always like to ask practitioners, I'm like, have you seen this too? Where the histamine issues are really, they seem to be more rampant.

The gut plays a massive role in histamines overload. I like call it histamin overload versus intolerance. As long as you get the point, it doesn't really matter, but we're talking about histimine issues.

We want to come, it basically comes down to, are we overproducing histamine or are unable to clear it efficiently? So you can think of it as like a bucket that's going to overflow.

Are you filling up the bucket too quickly and it can't drain efficiently. Well, then it's gonna overflow and then you're gonna, you going be very symptomatic.

So that can look like bloating. It can. lots of different food reactions and sensitivities. It can look like migraines, headaches, pain around ovulation, will definitely impact your cycle health as well.

So it can exacerbate that period pain, deep luteal phase as we're entering menstrual phases, diarrhea. If you're running to the bathroom after eating certain foods, these are some of the common things that I'm looking for, those allergies that you mentioned.

Those are all some signs that we look for in clients. When we were talking about the gut, You know, we can have bacterial overgrowth in the gut. So the Gut Microbiome piece can play a role because we have these histamine producing bacteria, these mast cell activating or mast cells liberating bacteria that can increase the histamines burden in gut microbiome.

You know, um, Allegra or whatever it might be. We can, we can even take the natural supports like quercetin, but if we are dealing with deeper gut microbiome imbalances, We're overproducing and we cant clear it enough.

Like you're trying to, you know. Put, put water on a fire and it keeps growing and keeps going and keep growing bigger. So the gut microbiome plays a massive role in that and not just bacteria too.

Like we'll see something like helicobacter pylori, as we talked about, we will see fungal issues like candida overgrowth. I mean, this can impact histamine burden as well.

And then we also have the fact that the main enzyme that breaks down histamines, that DAO enzyme, is produced in the guy. Then we have that HMNT enzyme produced on the liver.

which gets me thinking what you said previously. You're like my allergies once I started supporting my liver. And I'm like, yes, of course. So, um, you know, the, that mean enzyme in the gut that DAO enzyme is produced in a gut barrier.

If we're looking at someone's gut health and we see, okay, they have bacterial overgrowth, maybe they had infections, and then that's also impairing that gut-barrier function.

Well, then we are not going to be producing adequate DAOs enzyme. The gut plays a huge role in this. Like many histamine issues come down to, in my opinion, Um, gut, liver, environmental, toxin exposure, nervous system.

I would say that's like at the core and then some nutrient deficiencies as well. Like things like copper, um, and vitamin C can help too. So the gut is playing a huge role in this from the got microbiome piece and the gap barrier piece there too, Yeah, it's really fascinating because I find in my experience that a lot of times there are reasons why somebody isn't breaking down the histamines well enough.

It's usually because they're overloaded with them, like you said. So it like, are they mold exposed? Do they have a protozoal infection? Is it some kind of a dysbiosis?

is it SIBO? And it is very interesting because histamine can actually produce some anxiety-like symptoms too, which I wasn't really aware of as much, but it can act as a neurotransmitter.

So very, very fascinating where, you know, our gut microbiome can impact our mood in so many different ways. Absolutely. Yeah, we also have those endotoxin lipopolysaccharide producing bacteria that can really travel and cross that blood-brain barrier and contribute to anxiety massively.

So like you said earlier, I mean, the gut, it all starts in the guy, really. It's just so fascinating. Now, I know that when I used to work with people initially and on my own healing journey, a big part of that was doing an elimination diet.

And the intention behind an Elimination Diet is to figure out what foods you're sensitive to, and then hopefully eventually reintroduce most of them back once you've healed the gut.

But unfortunately, i've seen people who have been on intensive elimination diets for years on end, and they're still having gut related symptoms, autoimmune related, symptoms thyroid related and I'm like, wow, they are eating like much cleaner than I am.

And you're so struggling. Can we unpack a little bit of what is behind food sensitivities in from your experience? And what are some things we can do to potentially reverse them?

So we could add more foods into our routine. Yes, absolutely. So I think the terms food sensitivities and food intolerances, people put them together.

And so whether it's an intolerance or a sensitivity, I honestly see very, very similar deeper root causes here. Typically, we're looking at the inability to actually break down those foods.

Sometimes when someone is like, you know, can't eat dairy, for example, well, are we producing adequate levels of the enzyme that we need to break that could be something to dig deeper into.

So it's kind of coming back to that low stomach acid, enzyme secretion, bile flow conversation. Someone may feel like they're really sensitive to avocados.

When I hear that, I go, why? Is it a fat maldigestion issue or is it an histamine issue? So Histamine and having that histamine overload picture will also cause loads of sensitivity.

And gosh, was it just last year? I traveled and my gut got totally wrecked after the travel. I was noticing that I like so reactive to a lot of foods for the first time again in many, many years.

Then of course I ran some functional soil testing. Like I had all these histamines producing foods or these bacteria. So I was way more reactive to a lot of the things that I Was eating.

Once I cleared that up, it's like, I mean, they're gone, you know, so everyone's case is a little different. Absolutely. And timeline is all different, but we have to kind of dig deeper into those, those roots and looking under the hood, what's actually contributing to the sensitivities that we are experiencing.

So, like give the avocado example, if someone's really sensitive to, foods richer in fat. So coconut milk, olive oil, nuts and seeds, that to me, I'm like, well, there's a fat maldigestion issue going on.

Let's support fat breakdown and bile flow and things like that. Someone feels more sensitive to those foods higher in histamine. Sour kraut, kimchi, bone broth, collagen, all of these really gut healthy foods, that you'll read about, you know, that will be recommended to you.

If you feel more nauseous, bloated, running to the bathroom, anxious, flushing of the face when you eat these kinds of foods, well, it's actually a histamine issue.

It's not really the food's fault. So like, I'm like don't blame the Food for what the foods didn't do is something I say a lot. We always want to dig deeper so that histamines piece plays a really massive role there as well.

And then when we're looking at people that feel we see a It's like I need to eat more fiber for my gut health because that's everything that you read.

Then if I eat fiber, I'm so bloated and I am gassy, and then that turns into constipation, then it turns to diarrhea a couple of days later, it's this nightmare of digestive issues.

Well, we have to ask, why can't you break down the fiber in the first place? Oftentimes, when we see issues digesting fiber-rich foods or prebiotic- rich foods, or things like garlic, onions, apples, watermelon, this was me very early on in my personal journey too.

I was like, I'm eating all these healthy foods. What's going on? I can't even eat an apple. I would eat half an Apple and I'd look four months pregnant with bloating.

And it's just cause it higher in FODMAPs. At the core of that is really a bacterial issue. So it not really the apples fall. Can eat apples just fine today.

Eat them all the time and it no problem. They are so good for your gut. You know, they have pectin and they're, have all this prebiotics. Um, but we have to dig deeper and understand what's causing the response to the food.

In most cases, we're looking at digestive capacity or digestive function. So stomach acid, bile flow, enzyme secretion. Then we want to put in that microbiome piece.

Are we looking bacterial overgrowth? Are looking fungal overgrowths? So if you feel really sensitive to sugar or alcohol, if people feel, and not that alcohol is ever good for us, but if feel responsive to alcohol.

If you're like, I have one glass of wine, like I had a client say to me, I can't even drink one glass of wine. I'm like, my gut is a mess for three days after my face is flushing.

Well, that is either or, and or both a histamine or Anna Candida issue. And then of course we run the labs and she had candida overgrowth and that's why she was like so reactive.

Yeah. She was like, I can't even have half a glass. And that's a pretty big response, so like I said, we always want to kind of dial it back and peel those layers of the orange apart and away and dig deeper to those underlying root causes.

So digestive function, microbiome imbalances, the histamine piece plays a big role. Um, gut barrier function is really important too. I mean, if you're dealing with increased intestinal permeability or that leaky gut picture, you are going to feel reactive to all kinds of things.

And this is where people get so bogged down and overwhelmed and confused because they're like, I'm doing it. Like I am eating the salads and I m eating chicken and eating these healthy whole foods and don't touch fast food and all of this kind of stuff and trying to put collagen in my smoothie and why am I so reactive?

Why am i so bloated? When we have that increase in intestinal permeability, that will be very reactive and sensitive to many different foods. It kind of doesn't matter what we're eating at that point.

I often say it's not really a food issue, it is a gut environment issue. Once we rebalance and repair the gut and environment, we will see that your ability to tolerate more foods goes way up and we've had people be able to reintroduce.

Dairy is a huge one. We can get people, of course, I don't like to make blanket statements because everyone's a little different, but we see people. I mean, women that have not eaten dairy for 10 years and then they're eating

dairy again and they are okay.

Fermented foods like pickles, sauerkraut, tomatoes, Apples, onions, garlic, all of these things we've seen people be able to reintroduce successfully without bloating and pain after repairing digestive function in the gut microbiome.

That's so encouraging because I know so many people have been stuck on these restrictive diets and still having symptoms.

Histamine issues and food sensitivities

Dairy was one of the foods that was really, really triggering for me. And I had to avoid it for like 10 plus years, maybe 10 years. It was a long time.

And one time I accidentally reversed the dairy sensitivity and it was like fascinating. Like it just went away within just a few days. I'm curious, do you have a specific protocol or do have things that you associated with dairy sensitivities?

Yeah, it's a great question. I would say like poor enzyme secretion and parasites. Like a lot of the times when there's parasitic infection, we can see that dairy sensitivity increase.

And then we also want to kind of check the dairy. If people are eating full fat dairy, It might be a fat problem, not really a dairy issue. So if you're eating, dairy is rich in fat.

if You're not purchasing low fat or non-fat dairy products. So working on the liver and gallbladder and that bile flow can also be really supportive when we're looking to be able to tolerate dairy again.

So I would say those are probably some of the most consistent that we see. The fungal piece too. I mean, oftentimes people will be pretty reactive to dairy if they have a fungual overgrowth in the small or large intestine.

Those are the probably the more consistent deeper roots. Every case is a little different, but those were the patterns that were picked up. Fascinating.

In my experience, Just personally, and with some of my clients, I have found that, you know, digestive enzymes were a big part of it, but also carnitine goes to perhaps maybe fat transport or some fat malabsorption issues.

So it's been really interesting to kind of piece these things together. Cause I used to think that once you had a food sensitivity, You had it forever.

When I first got on this journey and it was just very encouraging that They can be reversed if you and you know, and I always say, like, there's more than one way to peel a potato.

Like, There's so many different ways to help a person heal. So I'm really excited that you've been able to share. Your expertise with us today. I know one more question I wanted to ask you was.

There's a lot of gut healing protocols out there, right? And sometimes people can get on a gut-healing protocol and it's like, here's your parasite protocol or drink a bunch of bone broth or take probiotics and so on and forth.

There are detoxes, gut protocols, all this stuff out on the internet. What is missing in these gut repairing protocols? Oh my goodness, so much. I would say the biggest thing is customization, personalization and customization.

Had I known that earlier on in my journey, I mean, would have saved years of throwing stuff at the wall, throwing spaghetti at wall and seeing what sticks.

Because I was doing a lot of the right things, like no gluten, no dairy, I mean, I was taking digestive enzymes, berberine, all of this stuff, but I didn't really have the testing.

I would read about these protocols and I'd implement these things. It would help me a little bit, nothing was truly going away. Um, so I think that the customization and working with someone through this, I mean, of course, like I'm biased, take it with a grain of salt, but this is what changed my life.

This is why I do this. You know, because if I, if could sell people a packet of like four supplements that I honestly think would repair their gut, then I would, my job would be much easier.

So, you know, it'd be a lot less one-on-one work. But of course, like for some people it can be very helpful, but the personalization and the testing and understanding why we want to target what we need to targeted and what's going on inside of your unique gut microbiome is going to fast track your timeline to getting better.

It was like night and day. I mean, I was struggling, struggling struggling doing a law, the right stuff. Early on, I did all of these things, taking the slippery almond L-glutamine and the berberine and this and that.

Once again, it would get me a little better, but it wouldn't fully move the needle. Then once I tested and actually addressed what was going on in my body, It was three, four months and I was like, "I can't believe this.

I feel tremendously better." I also had a mold piece in situation. So that goes way overlooked so often. I mean, we'll see people who have seen three functional medicine doctors and no one's caught it.

So I go looking for it very early. Like a mold dog myself, I think because I went through it, it'll be really hard to get your gut feeling better if you're in a really moldy environment.

So, yeah, it's like we have to run the right testing and then we to customize to what you need versus just saying fiber is good for you, eat fiber or, you know, sauerkraut is great and full of probiotics, so eat that.

Well, for the wrong person, or someone with SIBO or fungal overgrowth or histamine issues, that's going to make you feel much worse. So there's a bit of nuance to the process and I think that can be, can just shorten someone's healing timeline if we want to call it that tremendously.

Yeah, I agree. And I feel like there's people out there that are like easy cases, right? We just had to remove one food and just take one supplement or I don't know, change up their routine a little bit and then all other problems went away.

That's wonderful. I'm so happy for them. But there are also people who have tried all the things and that's when it really is important to work with somebody that can customize things for you, Hannah, it's been so wonderful to have you here.

Can you tell us a little bit more about where we can learn about you and your work and what's going on that you have coming up that your excited about?

Yes, absolutely. You can connect with me just on my website. It's just hannahailward.com. I also started a podcast last year. Our timelines were very similar with the podcast launch.

So it is called the Nutrient Dense Podcast. If you're interested in learning more and like deep diving into these topics. I mean, on whether it's SIBO or Candida or histamine or painful periods or whatever, I do a lot of like, deep solo trainings on the podcast.

So come on over and have a listen to that. You'll learn a Um, and then you can find me on Instagram as well at Hannah Elward, HHC. And then we do have an upcoming, um, gut repairing master class coming up too.

So if you, if, you want to share that, or you guys want jump in on that. If you wanna learn more about our process, the testing, customization and the protocols and all of that I would love to have you.

It's a totally free masterclass. And I love walk you through our process, but also gut health education, and then also

client case studies. I find my audience loves a good case study to really see what does this look like?

Customizing gut healing protocols and closing remarks

How does it work? So we'll walk and kind of workshop some client cases. So I'd love have to you there for that if you're interested as well. Thank you so much for sharing that.

And before I let you go, I just want to ask you a couple of rapid fire questions to put you on the spot a little bit. Okay. We'll see how I do. If supplement police came to your house and said, we're going to confiscate every single one of your supplements except one, which one would you keep?

Oh, magnesium. Yeah. That's a good one. It works on so many different ways and so much different benefits for everything and all of us are deficient. Yes, Magnesium Glycinate.

I think it's the supplement that I've taken consistently, the most consistently for most amount of years. Love it. What was the strangest thing that you've ever done for your health?

Oh my gosh, so many things. The strangest thing. I mean, what is strange? At one point, I think I drank some solution of like salt water and olive oil or something.

This was before I knew what I know now. So that was probably the strangests. But if you can name a diet, a restricted diet I have done it. Um, so there's that definitely done some parasite cleansing, definitely have done coffee enemas.

Someone may put that in a bucket of strange things. I don't know if it's, that's strange, but we could probably put it over in that category. But the weirdest things that didn't work is I'm pretty sure at one point I drank like olive oil and salt and water to do some sort of flush.

What would not recommend, would recommend didn, didn support me, um, at all, But two, those early on, I love it. We all have our strange that we've tried, right?

To flip that, is there a health hack that you just refuse to participate in? Oh my gosh, these are good questions. A health that I refuse participate.

At this point in my life, I really can't do another ultra restrictive diet. My body just rejects it. I've done so many of them on my journey to try to heal my gut that at this and weigh things and monitor things.

My, my whole system is just like rejection, um, to, that. So I really can't participate in that anymore. I don't know what it is. It doesn't even feel like a willpower thing.

it just feels like we have lived this journey for too many years and we're not going, going back to that ever. Um, so that is probably one, but I'm sure I could think of many, many others.

The celery juice thing was a whole that had a home movement. That was never really for me. There are a lot of things out there. They're trendy. And sometimes it's like everybody should do this.

Then at the end of the day, it is like, well, we're all individuals and this might be fine for some people, helpful for others and harmful for another type of person.

It's good to have some discernment with that. Awesome, Hannah. Thank you so much for being here and everybody listening. I hope this has been helpful on your healing journey.