Autoimmune conditions confound the large majority of doctors and are often a catch-all term when physicians don’t have a clue as to what’s causing the problem. The patient presents with a list of symptoms, and when lab results show an overactive immune system but no particular pathogen associated with the symptoms, it gets labeled as an autoimmune disease. The specific label is determined by where the symptoms are found. No tissue or organ is exempt from autoimmune disease. It’s the opinion of modern medicine that autoimmune diseases cannot be cured, only treated. Standard therapies include steroids or immune-suppressant drugs, which provide temporary relief. But the effects are short lived and can lead to some rather annoying side effects such as bruising, acne, weakness, insomnia, allergic reactions, bleeding, mood fluctuations, fluid retention, weight gain, and cataracts, not to mention an elevated risk of cancer and the development of serious infections. Immune system suppression is yet another example of mainstream medicine’s tendency to treat the symptom (inflammation) and not the underlying cause.

Genes play a role in autoimmune diseases, and the risk is higher if you have a close family member with one. Relatively speaking, though, the odds are still reasonably low. And since our genome changes or evolves rather slowly, genetics can’t explain the dramatic increases in autoimmune conditions that we’re currently seeing.

While our individual genetic makeup will often make us more susceptible to developing a particular disease, our environment typically plays the triggering role. This understanding is crucial since we can’t change our genetic makeup, but we can control our environment. (It reminds me of the saying we had as kids: “You can pick your nose and your friends, but you can’t pick your family.”)

An Immune System Malfunction

No one disputes that autoimmune diseases are chronic inflammatory disorders. They occur when the immune system begins the inflammatory process of attacking and destroying its own cells and tissues.

Normally, when a pathogen or toxic compound enters the body, cells are injured. These damaged cells attract other immune cells, whose job is to clean up debris from the injury. The injured cells are labeled “antigens” because...
they trigger the production of corresponding "antibodies." Specific antibodies are created to bind and destroy specific antigens. This process is called immune reactivity, and it is how our immune system is supposed to work.

However, when the immune system reacts to its own body cells and not those of an invader, it is called autoimmune reactivity. Unchecked, autoimmune diseases begin to destroy not only damaged cells but also the tissues and organs from which they came. The process can become a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle of destruction.

**Natural Approach to Treatment...and Cure**

Certain lifestyle changes are helpful in preventing and treating autoimmune disorders, primarily by reducing inflammation. We know that smoking is highly inflammatory and worsens practically every autoimmune disease. Alcohol can also be a problem, and obesity is an accentuating factor because fat cells produce pro-inflammatory immune cells called cytokines.

A diet that includes refined carbohydrates results in high blood sugar, which is inflammatory and adds to problem. That is one reason why diets that lower inflammation are so beneficial. For example, the Mediterranean diet reduces inflammatory markers and has been shown to improve joint pain, range of motion, and stiffness associated with rheumatoid arthritis. I’ve talked extensively about the need to include more of the anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids and less of the pro-inflammatory omega-6 fatty acids in our diet. This is why foods and supplements rich in omega-3s, such as fish, fish oil, flax and chia seed, and nuts, can help with these problems.

Almost every natural approach to the treatment of autoimmune diseases will include these lifestyle suggestions. And while I recommend they be implemented, rarely will they fully resolve the problem. There are two other critical areas that must be addressed if there’s any hope of actually curing an autoimmune disease. Both of these are almost universally overlooked because most everyone has been brainwashed into thinking that autoimmune diseases aren’t curable.

First, you must block any stream of toxins and pathogens that might be entering the body. Second, you must condition the body’s immune system to not exacerbate an immune response to body cells.

**Blocking Toxins**

In this day and age, it is difficult, if not impossible, to completely avoid exposure to environmental toxins. They are everywhere, and research continues to directly link more and more of them to autoimmune disorders.

Scleroderma, also called systemic sclerosis, literally means hard skin. It is characterized by the accumulation of collagen and thickening of the skin, but it can also affect organs such as the kidneys, lungs, heart, and gastrointestinal tract. It can be triggered by either direct skin contact with, or the inhalation of, various solvents including benzene, n-Butyl acetate, and xylene. Many of these solvents are used in paints and cleaners, and exposure may be more common in industrial settings.

However, there are many other solvents the general population is exposed to pretty regularly, such as acetone (found in nail polish remover), toluene (a component of nail polish), mineral spirits (used as paint thinner or a stripping agent), perchloroethylene (a dry cleaning chemical), and gasoline.

Another autoimmune condition, lupus, may be triggered by silicone implants, as well as anti-seizure medications, blood pressure drugs, and antibiotics. Statin drugs have also been linked to lupus and other autoimmune diseases. (*J Eur Acad Dermatol Venereol* 2007 Jan;21(1):17–24)

In the past, I’ve discussed the many serious long-term effects...
of estrogen dominance—and one of those is lupus. Estrogen dominance explains the disparity between the incidence of autoimmune diseases in women and men. (Women with estrogen dominance also experience an overall higher rate of autoimmune diseases such as lupus, thyroiditis, and Sjögren’s syndrome, compared to women with normal hormone levels.)

An imbalance of another hormone, cortisol, is also involved in autoimmune conditions. Cortisol is the “stress hormone” produced in the adrenal glands that primes the body for “fight or flight,” and in the process, it shuts down the immune system and suppresses thyroid function. This fluctuation of cortisol levels is one of the very reasons we see flare-ups mixed with periods of calm in many autoimmune disorders. Cortisol levels need to be stabilized by reducing stress, exercising regularly, getting adequate rest, and, most importantly, stabilizing blood sugar levels by eating regularly and avoiding refined carbohydrates.

Furthermore, pesticides, herbicides, and heavy metals have all been directly linked to autoimmune diseases. This trigger effect is becoming particularly strong in neurological diseases such as Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, and ALS.

For decades, I’ve warned about the dangers of pesticides. During this time, I’ve also received dozens of letters from pesticide manufacturers proclaiming the safety of their products and threats of lawsuits for exaggerating their dangers. If you have any doubt that common household pesticides are linked to neurological disease, try the following experiment. It’s about as close as you can get to visualizing the progression of Parkinson’s disease in a highly accelerated manner.

As you may know, the main symptoms of Parkinson’s include uncontrollable trembling and shaking; slowed movement (bradykinesia); balance difficulties, problems walking straight; rigidity and stiffness in the limbs; and the inability to stand or function.

While these symptoms may take years to develop in humans, you can watch the progression in a matter of minutes by lightly misting a cockroach or other insect with bug spray. It’s not a pretty sight—but one you’ll definitely remember next time you consider using pesticide in or around your home.

Avoidance of toxins whenever possible is the obvious goal. But completely escaping them is next to impossible. So unless you live in a part of the world that has been untouched by man and remains uncontaminated (if so, I’d like to know where that is), you have a food and water supply that is totally toxin free, you eat the perfect diet, and you have a balanced hormone system, you should be taking a high-quality daily multivitamin/mineral supplement.

A good multi will contain not only antioxidants but also detoxifying minerals such as magnesium, silica, and zinc. A product that contains detoxifying herbs such as turmeric and ginger is even more advanced. You should also take N-acetyl-L-cysteine if it’s not included in your multi. It is a precursor to one of the most powerful antioxidants, glutathione, and has been shown to enhance immune function, protect neuronal cells, act as a chemopreventive and tumor-fighting agent, and inhibit viral replication.

I also highly recommend spirulina, the blue-green algae, for its high nutritional content.

Dr. David Williams
Alternatives

freshwater algae organism. Spirulina is rich in chlorophyll, protein, and numerous antioxidants and can aid the liver in detoxification, particularly of heavy metals. It offers so many additional health benefits that I have used it as the primary base component of the multivitamin/mineral I formulated.

Blocking Oral Pathogens

Research has shown that one of the most common causes of chronic inflammation in the body stems from periodontal (or gum) disease.

Common sense would lead you to believe that chronic gum disease is one of the major reasons we’re experiencing such high rates of autoimmune conditions in our society. Unfortunately, common sense no longer rules the day.

The current thinking is that there is a strong association between gum disease and a number of other health problems, but not in a way you’d think. Strangely, the medical establishment reports that leukemia, heart disease, and autoimmune disorders such as Crohn’s, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and lupus increase the risk of periodontal disease. But for some reason they seem reluctant to say that periodontal disease raises the risk of autoimmune problems.

The official position of the American Heart Association is that “there is currently not enough evidence to prove that periodontal disease increases the risk for heart disease or stroke.” From what I can tell, the American Dental Association feels the same way.

Based on the effects of chronic inflammation, it only makes sense that chronic gum disease would be one of the major triggers for autoimmune disease. As researchers start to profile and compare the oral microflora composition in rheumatoid arthritis patients with gum disease to healthy patients without gum disease, I think the connection will become clear. (Arthritis Rheum 2012 Oct;64(10):3083–94) (Curr Opin Rheumatol 2013 May;25(3):345–53)

As for the connection between periodontal and heart disease, many studies link the two. The American Academy of Periodontology says people with periodontal disease are almost twice as likely to have coronary artery disease. And many of these studies have been published in the American Heart Association’s own journal. One such study found that people with higher blood levels of certain disease-causing bacteria in the mouth were more likely to have clogging in the carotid artery in the neck, which can lead to stroke. (J Am Heart Assoc 2013 Oct;2(6):e000254)

When it comes to preventing autoimmune disorders (and cardiovascular disease), I can’t overstress the importance of getting rid of gum disease. Hopefully one day, proper dental care will be recognized as one of the essential components of overall disease prevention.

If you have sore, swollen, receding, or bleeding gums, make a serious effort to correct the problem. It may be that you only need to improve your brushing habits, floss daily, and take an oral probiotic. Sometimes it’s as simple as getting your teeth cleaned on a regular basis and letting your dentist deal with any pockets that have formed.

Do whatever it takes, because living with chronic gum disease is the equivalent of having a constant intravenous drip of toxins entering your body.

Blocking GI Pathogens

The other primary area where pathogens need to be stopped from entering the body is through the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, particularly the lower bowel. If you’ve followed my research for any length of time, you know I talk extensively about the need for beneficial bacteria in the intestines. I’ve done so for more than 30 years, and now its importance is becoming more mainstream.

However, few people understand the crucial role your gut microflora play in autoimmune diseases. Scientists are just starting to make the connection, but like most research, it takes years or decades for it to ever become accepted and acted on by the conventional medical community.

Recently, researchers at NYU School of Medicine examined DNA in 114 stool samples from both healthy individuals and those who had either rheumatoid or psoriatic arthritis. They found that 75 percent of the people with new-onset, untreated rheumatoid arthritis had the bacterium Prevotella copri in their intestinal microbiome. It was also present in 12 percent of the participants with chronic, treated rheumatoid arthritis, 38 percent of those with psoriatic arthritis, and 21 percent of those in the control group. (It is suspected that the P. copri were lower in treated patients
because the anti-inflammatory drugs were working to a degree.) Increased levels of *P. copri* correlated with significant reductions in numerous groups of beneficial bacteria, including *Bacteroides*, *Lachnospiraceae*, and *Clostridia*.

The researchers then administered *P. copri* into healthy mice, along with a chemical that induces colitis. When compared to other mice that received just the chemical and not the *P. copri*, those with the *P. copri* developed far more severe symptoms. (*Elife 2013 Nov 5;2:e01202)*

The fact that *P. copri* was present in the intestinal tract is especially interesting because, until this study, the strain has mainly been associated with periodontal disease.

There are two other intriguing aspects about this study. First, it was amazing that, within only two weeks of being introduced, this bacterium dominated the bacterial flora of the mice. And second, the researchers found very high levels of C-reactive protein in the *P. copri*-dominated animals. C-reactive protein, as you probably recall, is a telltale sign of inflammation and a recognized risk factor for heart disease. Elevated levels have also been linked to chronic fatigue syndrome.

The writing is on the wall. To help prevent or treat autoimmune diseases, you have to address the health of your colon and the bacterial flora in your body. While conventional medicine is finally beginning to accept that intestinal bacteria can affect not just the severity but also the susceptibility of autoimmune disorders of the gut, they haven’t embraced the fact that bacteria can influence autoimmune diseases elsewhere in the body. This will eventually happen. There is already research linking bowel bacteria to type 1 diabetes and allergic encephalomyelitis. (*Proc Natl Acad Sci USA 2011 Jul;108(28):11548–53*) (*Proc Natl Acad Sci 2011 Mar;108 Suppl 1:4615–22*)

Cesarean sections may also play a role here. The rates of allergies and asthma, as well as rheumatoid arthritis, type 1 diabetes, lupus, and many other autoimmune conditions exploded over the last four or five decades—while at the same time, the rate of C-sections has reached an all-time high, with 1/3 of all babies born this way.

As I’ve explained before, babies born via C-section aren’t “inoculated” with their mother’s beneficial bacterial flora present in the birth canal. As their lips, nose, and skin pass through the birth canal, vaginally delivered infants acquire bacterial communities resembling their own mother’s vaginal microbiota. These bacteria quickly multiply, find their way to the intestinal tract, and colonize.

C-section babies harbor bacterial communities similar to those found on the skin surface. Their skin is much like freshly tilled soil ready to receive seeds for planting. Whoever or whatever first touches baby’s skin begins to “seed” and start his or her first bacterial colonies. (*Proc Natl Acad Sci USA 2010 Jun;107(26):11971–5*) (*J Nutr 2008 Sep;138(9):1796S–1800S*)

Research has shown that babies born vaginally are less likely to develop allergies, asthma, and other immune-related troubles. (*Clin Perinatol 2011 Jun;38(2):321–31*)

C-section babies are also more likely to become obese, even after accounting for the mother’s weight, the length of time the baby was breastfed, and the baby’s size. (*Arch Dis Child 2012 Jul;97(7):610–6*)

And then there’s the mental health implications. Keep in mind that 90 percent of the immune system is in the gut, and gut bacteria are responsible for producing many of the neurotransmitters found in the brain. An astonishing 95 percent of the body’s serotonin is produced by bacteria in the gut. Lower levels of serotonin contribute to depression, anxiety, and panic attacks and have been associated with the development of ADHD, autism, bipolar disorder, tinnitus, weight gain, brain fog, chronic fatigue, sleep disorders, gastrointestinal pain, carbohydrate cravings, low self-esteem, crying spells, headaches, and obsessive-compulsive disorder later in life. Serotonin certainly isn’t a compound you want a baby to be low on, but C-sections can increase the chance of that happening.

When you add the fact that most babies are given multiple vaccinations before they have even had the chance to establish any protective gut bacteria, it can become a recipe for disaster. (*Vaccine 2012 Jun;30(29):4336–40*)

If a C-section is required for medical reasons, I strongly suggest using a “seeding” technique to help plant and nurture beneficial bacterial colonies in the newborn. This can be done by “incubating” gauze in the mother’s vagina for about an hour prior to the surgery. Remove
the gauze prior to surgery, and use it to wipe the baby, starting with the mouth and nose and then the rest of the body. (The gauze should probably be done prior to any birth just in case an emergency C-section is required.)

This technique is not as effective as a vaginal delivery in inoculating a baby, but it’s far better than nothing. Researchers estimate that gauze seeding doubles the number of bacteria on the baby from a mother, but with vaginal delivery, a baby can have six times as much.

**Strengthening the Gut Wall**

Back in 2000, researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine discovered that a protein molecule called zonulin acts like a gatekeeper between the cells of the intestinal lining. Nutrients and various molecules move in and out of the intestines, and zonulin allows this to happen—it’s something that normally occurs. However, when zonulin levels become abnormally high, the passageways or spaces between the intestinal cells open up and allow all sorts of particles to pass through. This has often been referred to as leaky gut syndrome.

With a permeable gut, pathogens, undigested large food particles, and waste material enter the body and into the immune system. Your immune system detects these substances as foreign invaders and tries to destroy them. In many cases, a leaky gut is the underlying cause of allergic reactions to certain foods. It is definitely a primary causative factor in autoimmune diseases. (Clin Rev Allergy Immunol 2012 Feb;42(1):71–8)

This immune activation leads to inflammation in the area, damage to the surrounding intestinal cells, and increased permeability. A leaky gut very often becomes a self-perpetuating cycle of intestinal destruction. It also results in yet another steady stream of pathogens and toxins entering your body that increase the workload of your immune system and can overload your liver’s and kidneys’ ability to filter and remove this excess garbage.

Zonulin levels rise for several reasons, but primarily from an imbalance and disruption of the normal intestinal flora (due to harmful bacterial overgrowth in the large or small intestine, *Candida* or other fungal overgrowth, parasitic infection, etc.). In some individuals, elevated zonulin levels are triggered by the protein gliadin, a component of gluten. (Scand J Gastroenterol 2006 Apr;41(4):408–19)

Healing a leaky gut requires reestablishing the proper balance of beneficial bacteria. This is accomplished by including more live, fermented foods in the diet and through the use of probiotic supplements. Everyone should be taking a quality probiotic supplement every day. And adding a cold, unpasteurized beer or some live yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, or other fermented food to the diet makes things even better. (It appears to be somewhat of a misquote, but the following is always attributed to Ben Franklin: “Beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy.” It’s a very old saying, dating back to when beer wasn’t pasteurized as it is nowadays. Maybe whoever said it was aware of the benefits of fermented foods.)

In chronic or severe cases where the gut has been extensively damaged, ingesting a few tablespoons to half a cup of aloe vera daily can speed up the healing process.

Additionally, I have found that increasing levels of the short-chain fatty acid butyrate (also called butyric acid) can produce amazing results. Intestinal bacteria produce butyrate from fermented insoluble fiber in the diet. Butyrate is the primary energy source of intestinal cells, as well as an anti-inflammatory compound that works throughout the entire body. Specifically, butyrate has been shown to decrease intestinal permeability or leaky gut when taken either orally or through enemas. (Br J Nutr 2008 Aug;100(2):297–305) (J Gastroenterol Hepatol 1999 Sep;14(9):880–8) (Aliment Pharmacol Ther 2005 Nov;22(9):789–94)

**Quieting the Immune Response**

Once you address the continual onslaught of toxins and pathogens entering your body, the next step is to help tone down the immune system so it doesn’t overreact to its own body tissues.

A couple of effective techniques for achieving this include oral tolerance therapy and protomorphogen therapy. I guess you could describe these as “hair of the dog” therapies. This expression refers to an old belief that if a rabid dog bit you, you could be cured by placing some of that dog’s hair in the wound. The full expression is “hair of the dog that bit me” and, by the way, it doesn’t cure rabies. We typically
use the phrase these days in relation to curing hangovers. The idea is, if you drink a smaller portion of alcohol, it will relieve the hangover. Unfortunately, that doesn’t work either. However, the hair of the dog technique can help cure autoimmune diseases.

Protomorphogens are salt extracts of mammalian glands and/or tissues. One of the oldest and most respected companies making protomorphogens (erroneously called glandulars by some) is Standard Process Laboratories. I’ve successfully used and recommended their products, including Drenamin and Thytrophin, for many years.

As I explained earlier, when the cells of an organ are damaged, cellular debris is released into circulation. Your immune system reacts to this debris as a foreign substance and creates antibodies to destroy it. On occasion, the antibodies not only attack the cellular debris, they also attack the original organ. When this happens, it can be the beginning of an autoimmune issue where the body continues to destroy its own tissues.

Since ancient times, the Chinese felt that, to cure a disease of a particular organ, you should eat that same organ from a healthy animal. For example, someone with liver disease would be fed animal liver. It was believed that the specific nutrients, vitamins, minerals, and other components needed by an ailing liver would be contained in an animal’s healthy liver. Many other cultures adapted and utilized this therapy, including the American Indians.

Throughout history, this practice has been shown to work. It led early health pioneers, such as Dr. Royal Lee of Standard Process, to develop concentrated and stabilized glandular-based products such as protomorphogens.

Like many other mysteries of the body, we don’t fully understand how this works. On the one hand, our immune system has to defend us against all types of pathogens found in the food we eat. Yet, at the same time, it has to avoid mounting too vigorous of an immune response to food antigens. Part of the key lies in the intestines, where the largest amount of lymphoid tissue resides (90 percent of our total immune system).

Having a strategic part of our immune system there allows us to ingest and digest all kinds of food without our body initiating a full-scale immunological attack against what might be considered foreign invaders. If these exact same foods were injected into the body, our immune system would have to marshal every resource available to eliminate them in order to survive. This helps explain why protomorphogens and glandular extracts used in oral tolerance therapy are generally more effective when they are ingested.

Even though we may not know exactly how they work, they definitely work. They’re so effective, in fact, that their success almost did them in. Drug companies and the FDA quickly tried to ban most of them in the mid-1900s. Basically, they had four things going against them. They worked. They were inexpensive. They had few, if any, side effects. And they were non-patentable.

Standard Process Laboratories is one of the very few companies left standing. Fortunately for us, they continue to produce many of the same products since 1929.

(For a list of Standard Process protomorphogen products, you can download a copy of their product guide from their website and look for the items with PMG next to their names.)

For decades, there was a stigma attached to protomorphogen therapies. This was in part due to the condemnation by the pharmaceutical industry and the FDA. It also didn’t help that there were a lot of unscrupulous individuals promoting these treatments as the fountain of youth.

Once all the hoopla calmed down and the idea was rebranded as “oral tolerance therapy,” we began to see more and more research being done. However, this therapy still has the four strikes against it that I mentioned earlier. And, as effective as it is, the fact that it is not patentable continues to keep it from being used to its full potential. It’s certainly not from a lack of valid research.

The following are just a few of the comments Dr. Weiner has made about oral tolerance:

- “It’s a form of vaccination via the gut.”
- “It stimulates the immune system in a way that helps the host suppress autoimmune disease.”
- It is “so simple and apparently so safe that it seems too good to be true.”

There have been numerous studies where children at risk for type 1 diabetes have been given oral doses of insulin as a preventive measure. The results have been very positive and it appears they may finally be releasing this “oral vaccine” for babies to prevent type 1 diabetes. (Insulin injections don’t prevent the disease. It only appears to work when the insulin is taken orally. Some response happens in the mouth because oral insulin is broken down by the time it reaches the stomach, and it has no effect on blood sugar.)

You’d have to be hiding under a rock if you don’t know about oral chondroitin sulfate and/or glucosamine (two compounds naturally found in joint cartilage) for treating arthritic joints. Rheumatoid arthritis patients fed joint collagen often experience significant improvement. These are examples of both oral tolerance and “hair of the dog” type research, and explains why bone broth can work miracles. It’s the ultimate “poor man’s vaccine” when it comes to arthritis.

In other studies, patients with multiple sclerosis are being given specific proteins from the myelin sheath that surrounds and protects the nerves of the spinal cord and brain. In many of these studies, patients are able to stop taking steroids and other immunosuppressant drugs. Instead of shutting down the entire immune system, oral tolerance therapy somehow only shuts down the specific immune response that is causing the disease.

Probably the primary limiting factor with oral tolerance therapy is the inability of drug companies to patent these natural compounds. No one wants to spend millions of dollars on the research to prove they work when they can’t patent the product, have exclusivity to sell the product, and recoup their money. Their research funds will instead be channeled into expensive prescription drugs that will treat the symptoms instead of fix the underlying problem. And while that’s extremely unfortunate for anyone suffering from an autoimmune disease, it’s not a situation that will likely change.

Take the steps I’ve outlined in this newsletter to keep from becoming one of the many who fall prey to the ever-increasing surge of autoimmune diseases.

And remember, my recommendations aren’t just effective for prevention. They can result in miraculous health changes if you currently suffer from an autoimmune disorder, too. It is possible to at least slow the progression, and even reverse/cure these problems if they haven’t progressed too far.

Until next month,