

Gut Testing 101

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Rebekah Kelley: Welcome to the Humanized podcast, all about personalizing your health. I'm your host, Rebekah Kelley, and today our topic will be Gut Testing 101, with nurse practitioner Julie Davey. Before I introduce Julie, I want to remind everyone to subscribe and get all the other variety of casts in audio, video and transcription at HumanizedHealth.com. I'd also like to thank our lead sponsor, Village Green Apothecary, at MyVillageGreen.com.

A little bit about Julie Davey. She is a nurse practitioner with over 25 years of experience. She's passionate about educating others on the power of food and natural medicine to heal the body. Her clinical practice primarily focuses on GI health, where she utilizes specialty lab testing to help clients get to the root cause of their symptoms. She creates tailored protocols and empowers individuals with the necessary tools to live a healthy and vibrant life.

Julie, thanks for being with us.

Julie Davey: Thank you, Rebekah. I always enjoy these conversations. My favorite topic.

Rebekah Kelley: I love it. We love having you. So let's talk about why gut testing is so important. I know that a lot of us have our supplement routine. We've got our typical healthy diet that we're following, exercise, etc. We're getting enough sleep, but things are just not quite right. So, what do we do?

Julie Davey: Yeah, absolutely. You just really set up probably 95 or more percent of the patients that I see. They're doing all the right things. They tried all the things to "fix" the issues that are coming up and showing up. And this was actually, most of my clients are very in line with where I used to be, really look very healthy on the outside, doing all the right things, but intuitively knew that, gosh, there's just something not right. I know that I should feel better than this. I know that I shouldn't have bloating after almost every meal. I know that I should have regular daily bowel movements. I know I shouldn't have brain fog or fatigue or whatever the symptom may be.

So when you get to that point, certainly I would say, pay attention. You know your body better than anyone else and follow your intuition. And if you're at that point, it's time to really dig deeper and say, okay, well, what's really going on underneath the surface? What am I not seeing, so therefore I'm not able to target and work on healing?

And that's why I love testing. We're not guessing anymore. We're actually testing, we're getting hard data and it really gives not only the practitioner a lot of confidence in the plan that we create for patients, but honestly, it gives the patient a lot of confidence as well, because you probably know as well as I do, sometimes if you're seeking help and you're not getting answers, you start to feel a little crazy. You start to feel like, well, what is actually wrong with me? They can't find anything wrong with me. And once you really have some data showing, oh, well, I have a parasite. Oh, well, I have this bacteria, or I'm not making enough digestive enzymes, or

whatever the case may be, it's actually really freeing, especially mentally for patients. So that's just something that I notice and see a lot.

And just going back to kind of what you said of how important testing the gut is, I know we've mentioned this on a previous podcast, just the quote by Hippocrates, everything starts in the gut. All disease begins in the gut, is what he said. And we're finding out more and more and more through research that that is 100% true. We can trace kind of everything back at a root or foundational level to something being off in the gut.

So there's not one person that wouldn't benefit from testing their gut, from getting added information and things to rebalance, to know what needs to be rebalanced or tweaked or modified.

Rebekah Kelley: So can you give us an example? You mentioned maybe a parasite or something else going on, but can you give an example? Is there one that might pop to mind about someone who is doing everything right, but then you guys discovered something and you were able to address it and it shifted things?

Julie Davey: Yeah, absolutely. Well, probably the easiest, quickest example that I can give you is myself. So I'll just do that, because I know exactly what I had and all my symptoms. But again, my patients are so much like me in this process, which I think is one thing that makes it really great and fun for me to do. I mean, I say fun, but I understand where they're at and I can really relate to the whole process.

So, for me, it was about 5 years ago, I had been doing all the right [things] on the healthy diet, exercising, sleeping. One thing that I really needed to work on more was stress management, and that is a huge piece to healing. But otherwise, I was taking some good supplementation and doing all those things. And had gotten better. I had 20 years of gut issues, bloating, gas, constipation. I also had other things like joint pain, brain fog, and I knew that something was off. So... I found – we'll talk about the test in just a little bit – but I found a stool test. I did some research and found what seemed to be the best stool test on the market, took the test, found that I had two parasites, I had H. pylori, I had dysbiosis, a lot of opportunistic bacterial overgrowth, I wasn't digesting and absorbing fat properly. I also had C. diff. I didn't have enough digestive enzymes, a really weak immune system, and lots of inflammation.

And so, it was a bit overwhelming at first, when I saw this on paper. I was like, oh, my goodness. I seem really sick, was the first thought, but then it was like such a relief, like, oh my goodness, there actually is something going on that now we know what to target. And from there, I underwent a healing protocol and that fixed all of my symptoms. Yes, it was a process. It didn't happen overnight. It takes months to heal the gut, even up to a year sometimes. But 100% worth it to be rid of all those symptoms now for almost 5 years.

Rebekah Kelley: And also it took away a lot of the guesswork, right? You were probably trying to see whether it's different foods or different supplements or were you needing to do something a little bit differently. Was it stress? And you actually ended up, because you did the testing, you ended up having the actual findings. So you knew how to go after it, how to address it and fix it. So it seems like it empowered you.

So getting to what tests are available, what's out there that can help us understand?

Julie Davey: Yeah, sure. So, there is a test called the Organic Acids Test. Sometimes you'll hear that abbreviated as OAT test. And what this looks at is, it looks at over 70 urinary metabolites. So this is a urine test. And these are basically byproducts of yeast and bacteria. And by measuring these levels, we can help identify the metabolic process that is blocked or compromised. It is a very comprehensive test and gives you a lot of data. So that's one urine test.

The rest of the tests that we're really talking about, gut specific, are stool tests, as you would imagine. So there are three main stool tests on the market now. There's one by Genova called GI Effects. There's one by Vibrant Wellness called GutZoomer. And then there's one by Diagnostic Solutions called the GI Map Test. And that's the test that I utilize in my practice and that I took that I was mentioning 5 years ago. And at that time, again, I was searching for answers and did some research on the different gut tests, and this one seemed to be the most sensitive and specific and give the most and best data. And so that's what I utilize.

So I can go into a little bit more detail about the GI Map and what we can measure. So this test was really designed to look at microbes that may be kind of disturbing the normal microbial balance in the gut, contributing to illness. We also can look at indicators of digestion, absorption, inflammation, immune function, all of these things. So the thing that really, I think, sets this apart from other tests is they use a type of technology called qPCR technology, and that just stands for quantitative polymerase chain reaction technology. Now, why is that important? It's because this type of technology tests the specific DNA of the different organisms. So we're getting a much higher sensitivity and specificity by looking at the DNA of the specific organisms that are tested for.

So the things that we can really glean from the test, we get a whole list of bacterial pathogens, parasitic pathogens, viruses, yeast and fungi like candida, we also can look at the commensal or good bacteria and we want to have a healthy balance of those. Sometimes I'll see people who, their good bacteria is really overgrown or really high and they'll say, oh, isn't that good? I'm like, no, we want to balance. We don't want things too high or too low. And then we can look at a lot of intestinal markers. So things like a steatocrit level, which is a marker of fat in the stool and tells us if you're digesting and absorbing fat properly. We can look at elastase-1, which is a pancreatic enzyme. It's actually the only pancreatic enzyme that survives transit through the digestive system that you can actually measure in the stool. We look at a level called beta-glucuronidase, which is really sort of a marker of liver detoxification, and if that level's elevated,

will give us a good idea that the patient probably has too much circulating estrogen in the body and is not detoxing out estrogen. We look for blood, occult blood, of course we want to make sure there's no bleeding in there. Then we look at a level called the secretory IgA, which is a marker of immune function. We look at an anti-gliadin IGA, which is a marker of gluten sensitivity. We look at eosinophil activation protein, which is really more of an allergic type marker. We look for inflammation in the calprotectin level. And then we can also look at a level called zonulin that tests for leaky gut. And so you can see, I mean, that was an exhaustive list, right? That's everything.

Rebekah Kelley: That's a lot to learn, actually.

Julie Davey: A lot. Right?

Rebekah Kelley: About what's going in your gut. Yeah.

Julie Davey: Right. It's tons of information. And then what you want is you want to take that information, you want to work with a provider that can create an effective protocol for you that would ideally include some supplementation and then also some dietary and lifestyle changes. And doing that as a whole and working with someone that you trust, that you have confidence in, really will get you to where you want to be. I really believe that. That's the path to healing. Yes, you have to put in the work, but you've got to have the answers first. And you've got to have an effective plan to correct whatever's off-balance.

Rebekah Kelley: Wow. So, you mentioned that going to someone like you – and of course we're going to give people an opportunity to know where they can find you at the end of the podcast, so they of course can reach out to you – but where else would they go? Like typically who provides these kinds of tests? I believe actually Village Green Apothecary does some of this testing also, but where else might someone look for it? Is it a doctor thing? Is it a nutritionist? Where does someone go to find out what's happening with their GI tract?

Julie Davey: Yeah, that's a great question because if you are taking more of a conventional medical route, you're not going to be offered this test. This is not a test that is done in conventional or traditional medicine. This is more of a functional medicine approach where we're looking at root cause. So you need to work with a functional provider. Now that could be an MD, it could be a nurse practitioner, a physician assistant, it could be a chiropractor, it could be a dietician. All of those disciplines are able to order this test for you, create a protocol for you, and walk you through that process. But yeah, it's a functional approach to wellness.

Rebekah Kelley: Well, Julie, thanks so much. And let's just let them know where to find you [laughing]...

Julie Davey: Yeah, absolutely!

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Rebekah Kelley: ...if they want to do this testing with you. Go to [www. JulieAnnWellness.com](http://www.JulieAnnWellness.com) that's J U L I E A N N W E L L N E S S. com. And let me remind you to subscribe and get access to all Humanized videos, podcasts, and transcriptions from all of our thought leaders on personalized health on HumanizedHealth.com. Please come back and share more insights with us, Julie.

Julie Davey: Absolutely. Thank you for having me.