

Are Autoimmune Diseases Linked to Gut Issues?

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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, Are Autoimmune Diseases Linked to Gut Issues, 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.

Now, Julie Davey 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.

Thanks for being with us, Julie.

Julie Davey: Thank you for having me, Rebekah.

Rebekah Kelley: It's always a pleasure, and I'm always looking forward to learning something new. And so, let's just dive right in. What is an autoimmune disease? We certainly hear it talked about a lot in health, actually a lot on the news. What is it?

Julie Davey: Yeah. You are absolutely right. It is so very common these days. We hear it more and more often. So, autoimmune has the word "immune" in it, right? So first, let's talk about the immune system and what a healthy immune system should look like.

So, when you have a healthy immune system, it is there to defend the body against disease, against infection. But if your immune system sort of malfunctions and mistakes things like your cells, healthy cells, healthy tissue, healthy organs, and starts to attack those, then it turns into an autoimmune disorder.

So it's basically like your body is attacking itself. And there are actually over a hundred known autoimmune disorders. So, some that people may be, your listeners may be familiar with are thyroid issues, things like Graves and Hashimoto's. Celiac disease. Type 1 diabetes. Multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, scleroderma, psoriasis, all of those are considered autoimmune diseases or disorders.

We don't really know for sure why this happens. Now, if you look at some of the studies, they do indicate that these are likely due to genetic and environmental factors. So basically, gender, race, ethnicity – those characteristics are linked to the likelihood of developing an autoimmune disease. And then again, environmental factors.

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So we don't know 100 percent why our immune system turns on us, so to speak. There are, again, factors that play into it, but we don't know 100 percent why that happens. And it's like the immune system just suddenly can't tell the difference between what's healthy and what's not.

Rebekah Kelley: Hmm. That makes a lot of sense, and we certainly do hear autoimmune so frequently with so many different descriptors, right? So what underlying gut issues could cause an autoimmune disease?

Julie Davey: Yeah, that's a great question. So, we talk a lot about gut health and gut issues. You have been gracious and had me on the podcast several times and we're talking about how the gut is really foundational to overall wellness. Everything kind of points back, leads back, to the gut at a foundational level.

So, about 80 percent of our immune cells are located in our GI tract. And there is another common term that we hear called leaky gut that we know is a very common factor in autoimmune disorders. So, leaky gut is also known as intestinal permeability. So, our intestinal wall or lining in the gut should be somewhat permeable because that is how we extract nutrients from our food. That's what we want, right? We want vitamins and minerals and nutrients to move into the bloodstream and to the cells in our body. That's a good, healthy thing.

But when those, they're really like little holes in the gut lining, when those holes, so to speak, get bigger, which means that it's more permeable than it should be, that's where you have issues. So basically, then you have things like food particles and maybe pathogens that are in the gut, bacteria, parasites, candida, things like that that are leaking out into the bloodstream. And when that happens, our body says, oh my goodness, what's going on, and starts to create this massive inflammation, and then also can start to attack itself. And so we know that leaky gut is very much linked to autoimmune diseases.

Now, this is really interesting and always very kind of neat for me when I'm seeing clients. I do a lot of GI Map testing because that's how we really see what is going on under the surface. We're looking at many different factors in the microbiome and there are a few different bacteria that, if those are present, we know that those are linked to specific autoimmune disorders.

So, for instance, on the GI Map, we test for Klebsiella, two different strains, a Klebsiella species, which is sort of a broad umbrella class for different Klebsiella, and then a Klebsiella pneumoniae. And when those levels are picked up and elevated in a patient, we know that that is linked to rheumatoid arthritis, to psoriatic arthritis, to Crohn's, to ulcerative colitis, to all of those autoimmune disorders.

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There's another one called Citrobacter and it is highly linked to rheumatoid arthritis. So yes, gut issues are definitely linked to autoimmune disorders, and there are even things like those bacteria that we can pick up on testing that, what I always tell people is, maybe I'm seeing someone and they have high Klebsiella, but they don't have any signs or symptoms right now of any of those autoimmune disorders. What that means is that they are at high risk for that. So, it's even more important that we bring those levels down and eradicate that bacteria, so that decreases their risk for developing an autoimmune disorder.

So, that's really one way that we can sort of prevent autoimmune disorders is by working on our gut health.

Rebekah Kelley: So is there, I mean, you brought up that maybe there's a way to prevent. I mean, is there a way to cure? Let's say for some reason it looks like you've accumulated, like you said, maybe you have lupus or maybe you've had something else. Can you actually go through and deal with those issues through your gut and maybe cure yourself, not just prevention?

Julie Davey: Yeah. So that is definitely possible. Now that's going to be very individualized, patient to patient. I have seen, I've had patients with Hashimoto's who have reversed and cured their Hashimoto's by healing their gut. But then I've also had patients who have had other autoimmune disorders, whether it's celiac or Crohn's or something like that, who we can get them to a point where maybe it's not completely gone, but they are almost like in remission. They're not having symptoms. They're living a normal life. They're not having side effects and feeling bad and things like that.

So really, what you want to think about is, when we work on our gut health, that really helps with our overall wellness. It's not only helping with prevention, but it can also help to really, sometimes cure certain disorders, but then sometimes just really put them into remission, so to speak. So that it's almost like you don't even know you have it, which would be the goal – either to get rid of it or to not have any symptoms.

So really, healing your gut is the very first step in reversing autoimmune disorders. I mean, you always want to go, again, to the root or foundational level when we're talking about healing anything, right?

Rebekah Kelley: So what would be the process that might get someone down this path or road for looking at what their issues are and how they might start to address it? What would that initial thing be that you would just recommend that they do?

Julie Davey: So I would highly recommend that they test, because we're getting good hard data and we're not guessing as to what's going on. And there are things that we can be doing without testing, certainly. I mean, we can be looking at our diet, of course, eating a whole foods

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diet, an anti-inflammatory diet, cutting out processed oils and refined sugars and things like that, of course. Hydrating, making sure we're drinking plenty of water. And there are other things that are really helpful to anyone. Things like probiotics and prebiotics and fiber, and diversity in the diet, not just eating... vegetables are great, but maybe not just eating the same vegetables all the time, sort of diversifying. Our gut really loves that. So those are things that, at a foundational level... also, of course, working on our sleep and our stress. I mean, all of that is so important to overall wellness, but also to our gut health.

So working on those things. A lot of patients that I see, they, for the most part, have those things kind of down. They've been working on these things, but then they're like, something is still not right. This was actually the exact same thing that happened to me. I was doing seemingly all the right things, still had issues, and I think you've kind of shared that too, Rebekah. It's kind of a little bit of your story as well. And so then you start to go, okay, what am I missing here? And that's really where testing really comes into play, for sure. You want to get, again, that good, deep look into the microbiome. And then, I also see people who want to test just for preventative wellness, which is wonderful. And I recommend testing every 1 to 2 years because we're constantly exposed to toxins and things in the environment, we're always under stress. No one's ever perfect with those foundational habits. So we know that things are going to get off track over time, most likely. And so if we can head things off early on and detect anything that's getting out of balance early on, then we're not going to go too far down that path and then have to really work to reverse it. We can kind of head things off early.

So that would be what I would suggest. If you're not already working on those foundational habits, certainly you want to start there. But testing, really there is not one person that would not benefit from testing their microbiome.

Rebekah Kelley: I really do believe in testing. I think you're exactly right on the nose about that. I know that sometimes we can be hesitant to take those steps because they are expensive at times, but it certainly does help then hone in on what might be going on. And I know for me, a lot of my habits were so ingrained. I wasn't actually observing my actual habits, right? I was like, oh, no, I've been doing that forever. I don't need to look at that. And actually, I needed to go back kind of just to square zero and even start with like a food diary and start to track things, because they become so automatic. You don't always notice. And you know, mine was dairy, which I love. And so sometimes it's hard to go back and look at it. And I just, I can't process, but it's really interesting to take that opportunity. And of course, I know people can reach out to you to get some information. So then we'll give that at the end of the podcast, but just want to give you an opportunity.

Is there anything else that you think would be important that maybe I didn't ask you about as it relates to autoimmune and gut that you want to leave with our listeners before we wrap this up?

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Julie Davey: Yeah. I mean, I think we really covered the basics, but what I would just say, just to kind of wrap things up is, anyone who's listening to this, who, if you don't feel like your health is where you want it to be, if you don't have energy, if you don't feel great every day, then there's something wrong. There's something off. I think a lot of people fall into the trap sometimes of, we go maybe to a doctor and we get lab work done and, oh, all our labs look normal, everything's good, I can't find anything wrong. So then you start to really accept the way that you feel as normal because you were told, I can't find anything wrong. So I would just say, use your intuition, you know your body better than anyone else, and if you don't feel that you are at your highest state of wellness, then investigate further. Find somebody to work with that will help you get to the root and underlying cause of the symptoms that you're having.

Rebekah Kelley: Thanks, Julie. As always, very valuable insights. Julie Davey can be found at www.JulieAnnWellness.com. Let me remind you to subscribe and get access to all Humanized videos, podcasts, and transcriptions from all of our thought leaders like Julie on personalized health at HumanizeHealth.com. Thanks so much for being with us. I look forward to having you back.

Julie Davey: Thank you.