



Episode 12: Healing Leaky Gut and Autoimmunity

Katie: Christa, welcome back. Thanks for being here again.

Christa: Oh, it's my pleasure, Katie.

Katie: Awesome. What I love, we've covered so much in these last few episodes that we've done together starting with pregnancy and fertility and optimizing even before someone gets pregnant. Then understanding the micro-biome and how that contributes both to pregnancy and also to gut health and to so many conditions that often aren't even connected. Then we even deep-dove into gut infections. This episode is going to be one that's near and dear to my heart, which is the connection between gut health and autoimmune disease.

Thankfully this is a connection that is starting to be a lot more well-understood, but it's only more recent that we're really starting to understand why this connection is so strong and how deep that connection is and how many conditions can be effected by that, especially when it comes to autoimmune disease.

You mentioned in the second episode we did together that you really like Hippocrates and how he said that "All disease begins in the gut," which I love that too. When it comes to autoimmune disease, gut health is a huge factor, especially with leaky gut. Can you talk about what is leaky gut specifically and how does that effect autoimmune conditions?

Christa:

I'm happy to. It's such an important topic. I always love to use the analogy that if you think of the lining of your small intestine like a brick wall and the mortar is missing from that brick wall, in short, that's what leaky gut is. Starting in our mouth going all the way down our tract to the end of the pipe, we have a mucosal lining and that is really important.

We need to have enough. A thick, healthy, vibrant mucosal lining because that is where a lot of our immune system lies. For example, when you're sick and you have to blow your nose, your body is wrapping up pathogens and mucus and transporting them out of the body. What happens when we don't have enough of that mucosal lining, then the body loses the ability to protect us.

It can't wrap up pathogens. It can't transport them out of the body. When we're talking about the gut, a lot of people talk about the gut as the second skin. We want to keep things tightly inside that intestinal tract and then excrete waste so it never goes into any other parts of our body. Now when we consume our food, we have food in the small intestine, we also have bacteria, we also have toxins, and that's why we eat enough fiber to be able to bind those toxins to get them out of the system. This is where we do our nutrient absorption.

What happens with leaky gut is that mucosal lining that is nice and thick and it's there to protect you, starts to get tiny little tears and now what's happening is we have food particles and bacteria, and toxins escaping the wrong way. Whenever that happens. Whenever it gets out of the gut, it gets into the bloodstream and it goes directly to the brain first and foremost, but it's also going to put a huge burden on the rest of the body. Now when everybody is place and they're doing their job, we don't have autoimmune disease, but now the chips are down, the intestinal tract can no longer do the job that it's supposed to do.

Now the spleen has to work overtime. Spleen really helps to clear inappropriate matter out of the bloodstream. When you have leaky gut, now it's job just went from 40 hours a week to 80 hours a week. Now the liver has to refilter toxins. The liver has to metabolize all the toxins of life. We don't want to put an extra burden on it, but when it gets that extra burden, it's doing double time just to keep up with the burden it's dealing with.

It can't contribute to lasting health. This is the problem when we start to put this burden on the body. The immune system gets confused. The system gets overloaded. It gets backed up and this is the early part of autoimmunity. If we're not detoxing through the bowels, then we'll be detoxing through the skin. This is where we start to get skin rashes that won't go away. It's showing with eczema and psoriasis that there's something going on and that it begins in the gut.

It's showing where the Hashimoto's disease is connected. There's a lot of studies connecting it to protozoa. There's a lot of studies connecting it to H. pylori infections. If the body doesn't have the ability to deal with these infections effectively, there's going to be a domino effect to whatever might be our genetic weakest link. Whatever we have propensity for, and it will manifest in certain people as fibromyalgia. In others as lupus. In others as Hashimoto's disease. The list goes on.

This whole autoimmune epidemic that we're dealing with right now, I believe can be largely taken care of and reversed or at least first base to healing begins in the gut. By going in and healing, and sealing the gut. Reseeding the gut with the right types and good bacteria and turning the genetic directive over to the body to do the rest of it. I think that's the most holistic way to go about it.

Katie:

Yeah, absolutely. I wish I could remember, it was a specialist that I talked to one time that explained to me this really neat thing that blew my mind at first which is that the gut is not actually internal. We think that it's inside our body so it's an internal system, but really it's like a tube and food's meant to pass through it in a very controlled environment and then be excreted and we have all these awesome systems in place to take what we need from food but to protect the body.

It's not like particles of food are supposed to enter our bloodstream, but that's what happens with leaky gut. These particles are getting into our body and when you think about that and how things that aren't supposed to be there are now interacting with our immune system and with our endocrine system and with all these other systems that truly are internal to the body.

It makes so much sense how it really disrupts that process and how other systems, like I mentioned the endocrine system, and the hormone balance and all that. That truly has internal that's the body and our blood stream, and our glands, whereas the digestive system is designed to keep those things somewhat separate and to isolate them. I think that's a really cool analogy with the bricks and the mortar because it makes sense. Without that mortar, not only is the wall not very strong, but you can see right through it. That's exactly what happens.

I love that analogy. You mentioned reseeded, which is a cool word, but also a really cool idea for both healing the gut and fixing autoimmune disease. You mentioned in the last episode that when you're going through this process with someone, you don't even start that until after all the pathogens are out. You don't recommend probiotics until they've dealt with that. Can you deep dive more into reseeded and what that actually means and what that process looks like?

Christa:

Absolutely. That's the thing. A lot of people think, "Oh, take some probiotics and it'll be fine," but how do you know which strains are in there? How do you know what they're feeding on and what's happening and so it's very systematic to where I always say, "You can't plant flowers in a junkyard." We have to do the weeding and then we get ready to do the reseeded and we talked about the genetic perspective of this whole gut thrive and five and the five steps to gut healing strategy.

When we talked about interrupting the way pathogens communicate and how we work genetically there and determine, "What are somebody's herbs that work best for them genetically?" Well, we also work on the genetic component when we get to step three, which is the reseeded, but the strategy shifts and I have a clinical guest who I love and have learned a ton from over the years is that thirty years of micro-biome experience Jack, and he always says, "If you build it, they will come."

This is really where genetics come into play because we have anywhere from a hundred and fifty all the way up to two thousand strains of bacteria that are native and unique to our genetic makeup based upon where we're originally from. Whether that be Asia, or Europe, or Africa. Science and natural health can never recreate all of these strains of bacteria. What we want to do is we want to now build on the existing good bacteria now that the wires aren't so crossed because we've done the weeding. Now we know who's left and we know who's strong, and then we add new ones in the right amount and we start to nourish and feed those new ones.

It's almost like using a starter log and then give the direction over to the body to start to make all those extra hundreds of strains of probiotics that you could never buy in a health food store or even eat and then your body starts to make those. That's where the genetics comes in because that way you and I Katie could eat the same meal and we're going to make totally different bacteria from that meal.

It's the same thing where your body will start to learn how to attract those strains of bacteria unique to your genetic makeup based upon the water that you're drinking. The air that you're breathing and the environment that you're in. It's just so fascinating when you give this directive over. The other thing is people think, "Oh, now that I'm not taking the anti-pathogenics anymore, if I stop my pathogen purge, what if I have more bad guys to get out?" Well of course we do, but we're turning over and the strategy is shifting.

We're letting the good bacteria take over and make its own decisions as to what it should do with the rest of the pathogenic activity within the body, which is really cool. When you add in these right strains and you do this very holistic to someone's genetic makeup, then they can convert the neutral bacteria that's taking up space. They can put a positive influence on them and make them become from neutral to good. It's like raising a child and then it's off in the world doing really good things.

We went from ... probiotics at this point based upon once people come in to our program and they fill out assessment and we know which plan they fall into, we can direct their probiotics. The three probiotics that everybody should know about and be taking when they take probiotics there's three different families. That's lactobacillus, bacillus, and bifidobacterium. I would like to ... Can I go a little bit into each one of those? Is that okay?

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. That would be awesome.

Christa: Okay. Jack always says it's like open warfare in the micro-biome. In a lot of cases, he's right and so we use five to six different strains of the lactobacillus and what these guys are is they're transient bacteria. Going with that military analogy, they're like the Marines. The lactobacts are the Marines. They're responsible for the first assault. They're going to be your soldiers with their boots on the ground and this is where they're going to identify the rest of the bad guys that don't belong because remember, we need to leave some to challenge the immune system and they're going to escort them out of the body.

This is why you would eat your fermented foods when you do start to do through food, this is why they're transient. They don't stay and that's why you have to eat fermented foods consistently to keep your good gut health going. The coolest thing too about these lactobacts is they're smart enough to identify as these soldiers that are leaving the body, I look at it like a prisoner of war that's been turned and becomes an informant to the other side and these lactobacts can say, "Okay, this guy can be turned, and it can show it to the immune system and say, "Hey, look at the genetic code. It shares its genetic code and the immune system can say, "Okay, now I'm getting reeducated. I can remember this for next time and I know it doesn't belong." To me that's the coolest thing in the world.

That's lactobacts and then we have the bifidobacterium and their job is pillars of the community where if we're going with the military analogy, their job is like the Army corps of engineers. They're responsible to colonize and stay. They're going to do the infrastructure. They're going to come in and we need the bifidobacterium to heal and seal the leaky gut. Think of them as the actually mortar and they're putting the mortar on the walls. You need to have between two and four strains of the bifidobacts to really start to heal and seal leaky gut in a lasting way. Then we have to safeguard you for the future.

That's where bacillus comes in. They're like the Navy SEAL or the Army Rangers where it's almost like another species. They are built to withstand volatile conditions, harsh environments. They do not seek to be comfortable ever. That's what makes bacillus the special forces arm of your good bacteria peacekeeping units.

They can live with or without it. They can withstand the harsh environment of stomach acid and they can be your front line defense for pathogens. Food-borne pathogens or anything like that to come back in. That's really the three of those in different strains really make up I call it the good bacteria peacekeeping unit.

Katie: That's probably the best analogy I've ever heard for it. Explaining the three different types and how they act in the body. That's really cool. If someone is struggling with leaky gut, I would definitely encourage them if they even suspect it to at least check out your gut thrive program because it is I think one of the best resources I've ever seen for a leaky gut.

If they're also just starting out and maybe they are saving up for a debt right program where they can't do it because of their state in life at this point. What are some of the best foods and supplements and just lifestyle things that someone can do to support the gut and help reverse leaky gut right now. What would some steps they could start taking."

Christa: The number one thing that anyone can do is to eliminate gluten from their diet because we know that gluten forces the release of something called zonulin, which opens up those tight junctions or basically is going to make the gut leakier and more susceptible to that. I would say, "Start to swap out your diet. Eliminate gluten and cross-reactive foods so you would eliminate dairy. Try to go both gluten and dairy free and sugar free and add in foods that work." We have a turmeric ginger lemonade.

It's on our website, On the Fold [inaudible 14:39].com and that's a key part of slashing inflammation where we're having people do a turmeric ginger drink daily to slash inflammation, and to support the liver and get the liver producing more of its own antioxidants so that it can start to recover from all that extra material in the bloodstream. Then add in your foods.

Bone broth, I'm always going to be a huge fan of that. Bone broth is a magical leaky gut healer as is collagen, the nopal cactus if you can find it in your area in health food stores it's proliferate in the southwest, but that's going to be something that's really helpful for healing and sealing leaky gut as is marshmallow root and slippery elm. Glutamine can go in and help with tight junctions and then the probiotics that I just mentioned, after you do a little bit of cleansing. Use food as your medicine. Really work in the herbs and the spices. They're such nature's medicine.

Katie: Yeah, it's awesome that we have those. That nature provides them and they can make such a big difference. I think in today's world, it's easy to want to turn to either pharmaceuticals or just pills all the time and nature makes so many fresh foods that are just amazing for that as well. We talked about diet quite a bit in the last few episodes, but what about specifically for leaky gut and autoimmunity? Are there any special dietary concerns during this process?

Christa: Well yeah. I'd say definitely the things that I've mentioned there for the dietary concerns or the things to get out and the things to add in. When you're talking about leaky gut and autoimmune, you probably also want to temporarily eliminate nightshade vegetables. I'm sure a lot of you who are listeners have heard of the autoimmune protocol. We tweak it a little bit for the autoimmune and paleo protocol where we have to add more starches so we can support thyroid and the adrenals as we go.

I always say temporarily avoid tomatoes, and potatoes, eggplant, and peppers while your system is healing just to not confuse any of the wires. When you've had leaky gut, raw food is not your friend, so don't eat more than 20% raw and you're going to want warming cooked foods. Healing broths. Healing teas. Things like that. Our cumin, coriander, and fennel tea that I mentioned in our second podcast that we did was going to be really helpful.

Katie: Yeah, that actually sounds really good and nourishing and tasty just for myself. We talked about diet and supplements. When it comes to autoimmune disease, is there more that someone needs to do long-term besides just heal leaky gut to promote a long-term solution to autoimmunity?

Christa: Yeah. You have to optimize hydrochloric acid. That's just such an important part and so what happens is if you listen to the first podcast, you see that we want to give the parietal cells in the stomach a break and the parietal cells are the cells in the stomach that secrete hydrochloric acid and also something called intrinsic factor which helps us absorb and use our Vitamin B-12.

Hydrochloric acid, there's a saying, "Good fences make good neighbors," and that's where hydrochloric acid comes in. It provides the fence between you and other pathogens in the outside world so it can protect you. This is the step. This is point in the program where people's brain fog starts to go away and you're safeguarding yourself for the future.

That's really important to walk in your healing process and then something called terraforming is going to be important because it's almost like if you were to relate this to a sick person or someone who's broken both of their legs. If you relate leaky gut and they go through it and they're healing the lining of their gut. I'm assuming they're healing their legs and they're on crutches, and then you get to that step where you don't need the crutches anymore, but you have to walk before you can run.

This is where terraforming comes in for four months when we're going through the Gut Thrive process and after the gut thrive program, this is when we add in non-starch pre-biotics, which feed that newly establishing gut flora. It's going to feed it and fermented foods and this is where you continue that process for three or four months of creating this new operating system within the gut that's consistently attracting all of these different strains of bacteria from the air, and the water, and the food.

This is the point where you're going to retest for food sensitivities and a lot of them may be gone as you start manufacturing a lot of your own vitamins and getting the most bang for your buck is this long-term healing process that happens over time. You out into the garden, right? You plant the seeds, it's going to take a little while to produce those beautiful flowers.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. As an encouragement to anybody with food sensitivities because I had had those in the past as well, and I still do avoid gluten and dairy that's not raw, but originally when I first had my food sensitivity tests since I had a reaction to all kinds of things. Across the board. Even duck eggs. Some of the eggs some people are okay with, they all showed up for me.

After about a year and a half of this process and just focusing on my gut specifically and working with Doctor Christensen for my thyroid because he's a mutual friend of ours, I was able to test without a reaction to eggs on the sensitivities tests which is amazing and also just very freeing because eggs are such a great source of protein and I think it created a breakfast there for a while until I got that sorted out.

I still have to encourage it with anyone with food sensitivities is that the body is so smart. Like you just said, just because you have that doesn't mean it's set in stone forever. I love that you call it terraforming too. That makes so much sense. You're turning it into a hospitable environment for the good bacteria. It's just fascinating, all this research that's coming up about that.

Christa: Totally. I'm glad with what you're saying to how you got rid of your egg sensitivity. I just don't think we give the human body nearly the credit that it deserves. Its ability to heal and its power to heal is we are hard wired as human beings to adapt and survive and we are meant to live and eat a full and varied diet.

When you can do this healing process, that's when you can really start to expand your diet. Especially those who have been sick for a long time who are painted into a corner with all these food sensitivities. Of things that they can't eat. Their whole diet world starts to open up.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I can agree with that firsthand. Christa, you are such a wealth of knowledge. I love all four of these episodes that we've done together and I want to make sure that I have all of the links and the shoutouts to different blogs posts that I know you've written a lot of these topics as well as to gut thrive and to your resources because they've been helpful to my husband and I think that they're amazing.

They're going to be really awesome for a lot of people. I really want to tell you, I appreciate your time so much. I know that you're a very busy person and I appreciate you taking the time to come and share this information with all of us.

Christa: I love being here, Katie. I love talking with you always. Thank you so much for having me.

Katie: Thanks so much, Christa.