



954: Hidden Stress Might Be Keeping You Sick +
How to Fix it With Dr. Tiffany Caplan

Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast!

This podcast is brought to you by BIOptimizers and in particular, their product that holds my heart, which is their Magnesium Breakthrough. My goal this year is to continue to focus on my wellness and to create more harmony and resonance, and we all know that the foundation of health is a good night's sleep.

I talk about that so much on this podcast. And magnesium is the one nutrient that helps my sleep so much as well as so many other aspects of my health because magnesium is vital for so many things within the body, and it is nearly impossible to get enough from food anymore. And Magnesium Breakthrough from BIOptimizers is in a category of its own.

They have seven different forms of magnesium in one supplement, and since magnesium is involved in over 600 different biochemical reactions in the body, no other supplement on the market offers all seven types of magnesium in one bottle. Pretty much every function of your body is upgraded when you take magnesium regularly from the quality of your sleep to your brain function, from metabolism to stress levels, and so much more.

This is one of the few supplements that lives on my nightstand and I'm a little odd, but I take every morning because I actually get energy from it though most people notice that it's better at night. Now studies point to a lot of benefits of magnesium, including that it may help improve sleep quality, especially by supporting healthy sleep onset and have more peaceful nights.

Magnesium is also involved in stress management support and it may help maintain energy levels and positive mood while also supporting mental clearness and relaxation.

Magnesium is also important for healthy and balanced muscle tone and providing the building blocks to strong bones, and it promotes a balanced stress response, supports relaxation.

And I feel much calmer when I'm regularly taking magnesium. So let's face it, even if your 2025 resolution is not all about focusing on your health like mine is, how are you going to be able to achieve your goals in any area without enough quality sleep and stress management? Check out Magnesium Breakthrough and make it part of your daily routine this year as well.

For better sleep, better stress response, and much more. They have a 365 day money back guarantee and you can find it at Bioptimizers.com/wellnessmama and use the code Wellnessmama for a discount.

This podcast is brought to you by LMNT, and this is a company you might've heard me talk about before, and I really love their products because proper hydration leads to better

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sleep. It sharpens focus, it improves energy, and so much more. But hydration is not about just drinking water because being optimally hydrated, a state called euhydration is about optimizing your body's fluid ratios. And this fluid balance depends on many factors, including the intake and excretion of electrolytes, which many people don't get the right amounts of. Electrolytes are charged minerals that conduct electricity to power your nervous system. I talk a lot about nervous system on this podcast.

They also regulate hydration status by balancing fluids inside and outside of our cells. LMNT was created with a science-backed electrolyte ratio of 100 milligrams of sodium, 200 milligrams of potassium, and 60 milligrams of magnesium with no sugar. Since electrolytes are a key component of hydration, here's what happens when we get our electrolytes dialed in.

We have more steady energy, improved cognitive function, suffer fewer headaches and muscle cramps, we can perform better for longer, and especially the support fasting or low carb diet because when we stop eating carbs like during a fast, the absence of insulin allows the kidneys to release sodium.

So replacing that lost sodium with electrolytes can help you feel good on a fast. Since LMNT is zero sugar, it also doesn't break up fast. Electrolytes are also important for maintaining blood pressure, regulating digestion and proper fluid balance. Keeping skin hydrated, which is a big one that I feel like often gets missed and so much more.

I feel like proper electrolytes is a missing piece for a lot of people and I love LMNTs new canned drinks, which are sparkling water with all the same ratios and minerals I just talked about, and they are delicious. You can check it out and learn more at drinklmnt.com/wellnessmama. And at that link you will receive a free sample pack with any order.

Katie: Hello and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and I am back with Dr. Tiffany Caplan to talk about hidden stressors that might be keeping you sick and how to address them. And she has extensive knowledge on this topic. We did a first episode together that is linked in the show notes very specific to autoimmunity.

So if you are experiencing that, I think you'll find her episode very helpful. And this episode goes deep on one of the factors that affects autoimmunity as well as many other chronic

conditions, which is the topic of stress, and especially hidden stressors that might be keeping you sick without you realizing it.

We talk about physical stressors that you may not register as mental or emotional stress, but that your body might feel an extreme amount of stress from, as well as how to address it. We also delve into the mental and emotional side as well. And she gives some really practical strategies for addressing this root cause.

Dr. Tiffany is an expert in autoimmune disease remission. Specifically her work focuses on helping people uncover why they are experiencing autoimmune diseases so they can work to recovery. And she is the co-founder of the Caplan Health Institute, which is a virtual practice that helps people worldwide, as well as the author of the Lupus Solution. All of those are linked in the show notes. Let's jump in.

Dr. Tiffany, welcome back. Thank you for being here again.

Tiffany: Oh, I'm excited for this topic. It's a really good one today.

Katie: Me too. And that topic is stress and especially hidden stress and how it might be keeping you sick as well as more importantly, how to fix it. And I'll say before we even jump in, this was my big factor. So I'm really excited that we're going to get to talk about this in depth today because I was on paper doing all of the things “right”.

I had the spreadsheets of supplements. I was working out all the time. I was trying to eat as healthy as possible. And it wasn't until I addressed this stress piece that things started changing for me and so I feel like it's such a big one. Because even if you have all the other things dialed in, I learned the hard way that if you are still in fight or flight, To start, can you define what is stress? Because I feel there are some misconceptions.

Tiffany: Yeah, stress is a huge topic because it really encompasses everything. We think of typically the mental emotional stress, right? We have responsibilities, we have work, we

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have maybe families, we have social things, we have like all the things we can, we can think about mentally that might affect us on a day-to-day basis.

But essentially what stress is, is a chemical in our body. It's a way that our body is reacting to things. We think about cortisol as the main stress hormone and our body produces cortisol in response to other things that are causing stress. Like if you have a nutrient deficiency, for example, that is actually a form of a physical or a chemical stress on the system.

So stress comes in different ways and our body just tries to adapt to it to keep us alive, right? So it kind of puts us in that fight or flight state. But as we're in fight or flight, we can't be in rest, digest, heal. So we have to be able to turn on and off that switch. We need stress. I think that's one thing that people think of with stress is that it's just a bad thing and there's just, it's only negative, but we need stress. Stress actually helps us grow and repair just like we actually need inflammation. It's a good thing. But when there's excess amounts or chronic amounts of stress, that's when it becomes harmful or detrimental.

So stress in a short term, a form of good stress could be an example of like exercise as we exercise our body. We're actually breaking down some tissue to be able to build new healthier tissue, right? So stress actually can be a good thing in the short term, but when it becomes chronic and it doesn't go away and it just, there's too many forms of it all at once, our body can't handle it. And that's where things start to fall apart.

Katie: Yeah, that makes sense. And I loved in our first episode, how you talked about, you know, cortisol and balance is actually anti inflammatory. And I think that's important for this episode and to realize, like, our goal is not to get rid of all cortisol. Our goal is not to get rid of all stress. That wouldn't even be possible in the modern world if we wanted to, but this idea of balance, because it seems like if without that important piece, we can even, the idea of de stressing can become a stressor because now we're focused on trying to get rid of something that's physiological and natural. And so I think that, yeah that idea of balance is a really important building point for this conversation, and I'd love to talk about, since we talked about autoimmunity in our first episode, the specific role stress plays in people who are experiencing autoimmunity and then in that case, addressing it becomes so important.

Tiffany: Yeah, so I love, you know, looking at stress as it's something that we need. We can't get rid of all of it, right? Like, as we think about a lot of mental, emotional stress, even we can't completely avoid. certain circumstances or people. We can't control other things like that, right? So there's like going to be some forms of stress that we can't do anything about.

But the things that we focus on with people that have health issues and like autoimmune disease in particular are the stressors that we can change, that we can modify, we can address. Our stress affects our immune system in a number of ways. One of them is that fight or flight response. And when we have chronic amounts of stress or excessive amounts of stress, it just keeps our nervous system in this like heightened alerts state, a kind of a survival state. And it also then causes our immune system to do that because our immune system's job is to protect us from anything that could be harmful. And so when our nervous system is on high alert, our immune system goes on high alert.

This is where our immune system starts to react to things that it shouldn't be reacting to, whether it's things like foods that we're eating, things we're not exposed to air in our environment. Even like allergies is a good example of that. I mean, system reacting to things that it shouldn't be from, like dust and pollen and things that aren't actually harmful to us.

So our, our immune system is highly affected by cortisol and too much stress. And we have to kind of figure out for the person, what are the stressors that we can control and do something about and what are the stressors that we can't do anything about? And kind of, you know, be able to be okay with the things that we can't get rid of, but let's focus on all the things that we can do something about. And that's how we're going to make the biggest impact in their health overall.

Katie: So I'd love to kind of even like delve into some of these different categories of stress that you've talked about. I'm definitely getting to the mental and emotional side, because I know that one can be the most tricky, or at least for me it was. But we talked a little in our first episode about even just physical stressors, and you mentioned some of those. Now, and the difference between like exercise being a good stress, whereas, um, like environmental things or things we're exposed to can be kind of a constant low level stress

that we may not even realize. And I think those are important because often we, if we don't feel the mental emotional stress, we might not register those things as stress.

And one example I'll give is like, if you are using, for instance, a really chemically laden laundry detergent, you're actually kind of getting a multifaceted ping of stress in that, if it's on your skin, your skin is experiencing that interaction and might be, things can be passing through the skin into the blood brain barrier and you may be experiencing that, you're also potentially inhaling those VOCs from the sense in your laundry detergent. And that's actually another thing your body could register as a source of stress. I would love to just talk about some of the physical aspects of stress that I feel like sometimes get overlooked when we get reductionist and consider stress only mental and emotional.

Tiffany: Yeah, so all the physical chemical things, those are the ones that we focus a lot with people because they don't recognize them. And they're the ones that we can control the most. So making the changes in like our household products, our personal care products, right? To be able to be cleaner and have less of those harmful chemicals.

Because like you said, like we could have things coming through our, our skin, our barriers of our body. We think a lot about leaky gut when it comes to chronic disease and autoimmune disease, but there's also other barriers. Like our skin is a barrier. Our sinuses are a barrier. Our lungs are a barrier.

We have those places that as we're getting exposed to things from our outside world, whether they're touching us, we're breathing them, we're ingesting them, that's where a lot of our immune system lives in those places of the body. And that's where the toxins and chemicals and stuff can get in. So stress can be in the form of literally like a toxin or a chemical, but it also can be other physiological things that are creating stress for us.

So like the example of exercise, a little bit of cortisol from exercise or the right amount is helpful and beneficial. But if we do too much, we over exercise that actually creates another form of stress. That's that causes more harm than good. Right. So there's about. balance too with a lot of these things.

Having nutrient deficiencies can be a form of stress because if we think about what does everything in our body need to be able to function, we need our cells to be able to work. If our cells are missing key nutrients, they can't do their jobs. How is anything else made up of your cells going to do anything?

So we have to have good nutrient levels. Hormonal imbalances can cause stress on the body. We think about things like insulin resistance. Insulin resistance affects how well our cells can make energy. Insulin is a hormone that you know, should let blood sugar into our cells, so our cells can use it as an energy source.

But if you have insulin resistance, that doesn't happen very good. So now our cells can't make energy and our cells can't work. Well, if our cells can't work, nothing else is going to work very good. That's a form of stress. Food reactions, eating the wrong foods that are either heavy with chemicals or heavy metals or pesticides or that type of stuff, or just lacking nutrients or eating foods that your body doesn't like, food sensitivities, food intolerances, food allergies, allergens. Having dysfunctional barriers of your body, having leaky gut, having sinus issues, having lung issues, skin problems, like those are also allowing your immune system to like overreact and if your immune system is overreacting that feeds stress that causes more inflammation.

And then having other like metabolic issues. So if your thyroid levels are off, right, and that's another thing that every cell in the body needs is thyroid hormone and you could even be taken a thyroid medication every day and your body may not be actually able to use, you know, the actual thyroid hormone. There may be some other problems causing conversion issues or something.

And so if your cells aren't getting thyroid hormone, then they're not going to be able to work. And then just the fact that a lot of chronic disease is rooted in chronic inflammation and chronic inflammation causes more stress. So a lot of those things are related back to just our physiology that we can make changes with.

If we change our diet, if we change our lifestyle, if we change our exposures, our environment, we can control most of those things. And then with the mental emotional

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piece, there's still a lot that you can do, even if you can't completely avoid a form of mental emotional stress. Like it's your work or it's a relationship or something.

There's still ways that you can have outlets for that stress. You can do some mental, like exercises, gratitude, practices, mindfulness practices. You can work with a therapist. You can get, you know, external help. You can have a support system. There's a lot of tools that are available to help you with the stress that you can't get away from completely. And we don't want to, like I said, everything kind of comes down to balance. We need a little inflammation. We need a little stress to be able to help keep things healing and repairing and working well. But too much of those things is what causes the problem. So we want to minimize the ones that we can control and do something about.

Katie: Yeah, that's, that was such a great explanation of all the things that come into play when it comes to stress and I think the message of hope here that I also love to mention is that just as all of those factors can build up in a negative way and kind of create that like idea of a negative flywheel where your body's got more than it can handle, the good news is the body's always working toward your best interests and toward a state of health. So when you even just start dialing in some of these, it creates a positive flywheel and then over time that compounds and becomes more and more beneficial. And so like those little changes really can add up. And I saw that firsthand and realizing that there's also hope in that even if you need to take a very, like, nuanced and hands on approach and be very specific with a lot of things while you're healing, what I found was that over time, the body becomes more resilient when you are able to address these things.

But the beauty is the body is so resilient that once we give the body what it needs and start communicating with it, it like creates this very beneficial flywheel and we can feel better and better over time with less restriction.

And I'm curious if you see that in your practice as well, as like, as people address these causes and start giving their body what it needs, they like the body can adapt to a wider range of inputs without feeling as much stress.

Tiffany: Exactly. That is one of the biggest things I like, goal-wise help people with, is like getting resilience, right? Finding a place that they have the tools available. If they need them, they know what works good for them, but they're not relying on a diet that excludes everything and a million supplements a day and all of these, you know, time consuming things.

They really just have dialed down like these are the main things I do every day in my habits and routines that help me. And here's a bunch of other things that I can use as needed when life happens. Right. But that's the, that's the biggest thing is resilience with whether we're talking about like an autoimmune disease, essentially what remission with the immune system is, is resilience, the immune system, being able to tolerate things and not overreact to them and just have normal reactions.

And the same thing with like stress is our body being able to handle normal daily stress, right? We all go through it and there's so many different causes of it that we can't avoid it completely. So we have to be able to have some resilience to be able to handle it without it causing problems. So I think that's like, that's the goal of everything is the resilience and that's what we help people get to.

So maybe they start out with needing to do like a strict elimination diet to figure out what their body doesn't like. But the end goal is always, let's add as much into your diet as possible and much as much diversity as possible and make it a sustainable approach. Same thing with you might need these supplements to begin with.

But if you do them the right way at the right order, then you won't need to take them forever. Right. And the lifestyle things are just things that people can accumulate over time and figure out what are the best things that work good for them and their lifestyle.

Katie: I love that because it's a necessary point of hope. To address that a little bit more elusive component of stress, which is that mental and emotional stress because to your point we can't always remove those factors. We wouldn't want to remove certain people from our lives, even if we could. And we still have the responsibility of addressing that stress and supporting our body through that experience Even if we can't change the

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external factors. So are there any particularly impactful tools or ways to combat stress on a daily basis? As an example, like I know feel a massive difference when I just take a centering grounding practice in the morning, get morning sunlight before I touch screens or coffee and hydrate. And get protein before I get coffee that seems to tell my body things are safe. There's nutrients, things are okay. Along with things like just simply breath work, which I know they call the master switch of the nervous system and gratitude practice. I feel like these again, kind of often are dismissed as being so simple. But do you have list of tools that people can start with and implement to find a little bit more resilience and a little less stress.

Tiffany: Yes, I think a lot of it starts with, you know, setting the tone for the day when you get up in the morning. There's a, it's called a five minute journal. Highly recommend you check that out or get one in it. It's a simple gratitude practice that you can start your day with listing out a few things that you are grateful for, things that you look forward to for the day, what your affirmation that the positive focus of your day is going to be, and it just kind of primes your mind to start the day off on the right foot. And you do that, you know, a couple of minutes in the morning and you do like a recap of all the positive things before you go to bed at night. And so it's literally a five minute journal. It takes five minutes or less. And you can just do that as a regular part of your day.

And that will help start to actually get your subconscious to be on the lookout for all the things that can help you in your day. And so I think that's a really powerful tool that a lot of people miss, and it's been really helpful for me. I think the other thing is because it can seem a little overwhelming with like, all the possible things that you can do and all the things that maybe you want to do.

Pick a handful of things that you love to do things that you would look forward to doing. For me, a couple things. I love hot yoga. It is my favorite exercise. It might be too intense for some people, but that is the thing that helps me the most kind of reset. And so I'll do that every week.

And it's just once a week, I'll typically get to go. But, just having that as like part of my routine, I know I look forward to it. I enjoy it and it helps me feel good. So I just pick like certain things like that. I love Epsom salts soaks.

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Magnesium is one thing that I think a lot of people are deficient in. And I see a lot of times people are deficient in or need more of magnesium is used by hundreds of different processes in the body. So if there were, you know, two key nutrients, I would suggest to pretty much everybody listening, it would be magnesium and vitamin D. Because most people are deficient in those things, even if they're getting a lot of sun, sunlight and stuff.

So that can be helpful for the body handling stress But you just pick things that you enjoy doing because if you say oh, I'm gonna start this Mindfulness meditation practice and you don't like it and you dread it, you're gonna put it off and you're never gonna do it and it's not gonna help you. So you have to find things that you enjoy things that get your body into a relaxed state is that's kind of the key to is, you want it to get that resilience.

And so maybe finding things that do feel peaceful for you. And it doesn't always it's not, you know, going to be the same person to person. So just finding like your, your toolbox.

Katie: Those are great suggestions. And yeah, again, just echoing those like small practices. And I love, especially the focus on ones that bring you pleasure or joy or that make you happy because that's going to make adherence better. And maybe that creates that little bit of bandwidth you need so that the next baby step feels easier and feels better and more happy. And again, just to echo that idea that these little tiny things really do add up so much. I was looking for like the big answer when it came to health and it really was the little things that actually changed my stress levels that changed my health. I also love again that you touched on nutrient deficiencies. I feel like that is a massively overlooked stressor, especially for women. And I know, especially with diet culture and or if you've had any weight issues, like it's very easy to under eat and under nourish, especially. So I love that you brought that up.

For anyone listening, they want to find specific answers, where can people find you online and keep learning from you?

Tiffany: Yeah, you can find us online at Caplan Health Institute. It's Caplan with a C, on social and, caplanhealthinstitute.com. And we have lots of resources and blogs and more information even about stress that you can check out on there.

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Katie: And I will of course link to all of those in the show notes, but Dr. Tiffany, these have been such fun conversations we've gotten to have. You are an absolute joy and I'm so grateful for your time and for everything that you've shared. Thank you so much for being here.

Tiffany: Well, thank you. I love being able to share this information. I think it's so important for people to know. So I'm glad that you're, you're doing this and we got to have this conversation today.

Katie: And thank you as always for listening and for sharing your most valuable resources, your time, your energy, and especially your attention with us today. We're both so grateful that you did. And I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the Wellness Mama Podcast.