

# AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES ON THE RISE

Autoimmune Disease (AI disease) is practically an epidemic in our society, affecting close to 50 million Americans. It is actually the leading cause of disability in female children and women in all age groups. Genetic predisposition accounts for 1/3 of our risk of developing an autoimmune disease, the other 2/3 comes from environment and your diet/lifestyle (both of which dictate our immune regulation). Many experts now recognize that certain dietary factors are key triggers for AI disease, which places them in the same category of diet and lifestyle related diseases as type 2 diabetes, CVD and obesity. The good news is that we now know how to manage and reverse AI disease by changing how we eat and by making better choices about sleep, exercise and stress. There are now more than 100 confirmed AI diseases and many more that are suspected to have AI origins. What are some of the most common AI diseases? Celiac, Crohn's, Hashimoto's Thyroiditis, Ulcerative Colitis, Premature Ovarian Failure, Interstitial Cystitis, Sjogren's, RA, Asthma, Myasthenia Gravis and many more.

The root cause of all AI disease is the same. Our immune systems, which are designed to protect us from invading microorganisms, turn against us and attack our proteins, cells and tissues. How does this happen? Let me introduce one of my favorite topics, the "gut". The gut or the intestines actually provide an interface between the external environment and the host (immune system). In fact, 80% of your immune system is located in your gut. Without a healthy gut, you definitely cannot have a healthy immune system. Without a healthy immune system, we leave ourselves open to infections, inflammation and AI disease. Increased intestinal permeability or "leaky gut" caused by toxic foods, chronic stress, medications and chemicals allow bacteria, toxins, proteins and partially digested food particles to pass into our bloodstream. The most common food triggers for leaky gut are gluten, dairy, grains, nightshades, sugar, alcohol and GMOs. The most common infectious causes are Candida overgrowth, intestinal parasites and SIBO. The most common environmental causes are mercury, pesticides and BPAs. Toxins can also

come in the form of medications, these can include Motrin/Advil, steroids, antibiotics, birth control and acid-reducing drugs.

When you've established that increased intestinal permeability or "leaky gut" and bacteria, toxins and food particles get into the bloodstream, the immune system marks them as dangerous invaders and creates inflammation and antibodies to get rid of them. Many of these foreign invaders look very similar to our own body's cells, so the immune system gets confused and accidentally attacks your own tissues. If the tissues in the joints are being attacked, then RA develops, if the thyroid tissue is being attacked then Hashimoto's Thyroiditis or Grave's Disease is the result. Sadly, once you are diagnosed with an AI disease, you are now at higher risk to develop a second AI disease unless you repair your leaky gut.

So, now that we understand how autoimmunity can develop, how do we repair the leaky gut and possibly reverse the AI condition? The Functional Medicine approach is known as the "4R" approach. It requires a lot of persistence, commitment and guidance from a nutritionist.

**\*Remove:** Remove the bad. Remove the pathogenic microflora (fungi, parasites, bacteria) and inflammatory foods. This may require serum or stool testing to identify.

**\*Restore:** Restore the good. This could mean the addition of digestive enzymes and fiber.

**\*Repair:** Repair and support regeneration of the gut mucosa. This may include collagen and L-glutamine.

**\*Re-inoculate:** Re-introduce beneficial bacteria to help re-establish a healthy balance of good bacteria. Remember, it's not just about how many billion count in your probiotic but also the right variety of species.

Autoimmunity is a frustrating and tiring road to travel alone. Conventional medicine usually just treats the symptoms of the AI condition. Functional medicine docs get to the root cause of the condition - your "leaky gut".



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