



## Preventing and Reversing Autoimmune Disease

“... *One in five Americans has an autoimmune related disease and some estimates say that 75% of those affected—some 30 million people—are women.*”

— American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (aarda.org)

Autoimmune disease is increasing at a rapid rate — there has been up to a 3-fold increase over the past few decades. Autoimmune disease is complex, not easily diagnosed and more problematic for women than men. In particular The National Institutes of Health (NIH) considers autoimmune disease as a major women’s health issue, affecting more women than heart disease and breast cancer combined<sup>1</sup>. According to the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (AARDA), about 75% of autoimmune diseases occur in women<sup>2</sup> and autoimmune disease is a leading cause of death among young and middle-aged women<sup>3</sup>. But we have good news...the latest research show that not only is autoimmune disease reversible, it can be tracked and prevented for up to 10-15 years before any symptoms actually appear.

### What is Autoimmune Disease?

Your immune system is a highly intelligent body system whose job it is to keep the body safe from potential harmful "unknowns". If your immune system identifies suspect substances, it will produce antibodies and go on the defensive. What happens with autoimmune conditions is that the signals in the immune system get confused and it is unable to distinguish between a potential harmful substance and the "good" parts of the body that it is supposed to protect. Overtime, if antibodies keep attacking tissue you’ll start to lose functionality, possibly even permanently, if the problem is not halted or reversed.

Surprisingly, autoimmune disease isn’t just one condition. There are more than 80 serious chronic illnesses of the hundreds that makeup the autoimmune disease family, which is collectively *the number one disease condition in the U.S.* The most common of these affecting women are: Hashimoto’s disease, Lupus, Type-1 & 2 Diabetes, Graves disease, and Rheumatoid Arthritis. Although women are at higher risk for an autoimmune disease, millions of American men suffer from these diseases too. Some of these diseases that men are more likely to develop are: Type 1 & 2 Diabetes, Psoriasis, Wegener's granulomatosis and Ankylosing spondylitis.<sup>2</sup>

### Diagnosing Autoimmune Disease

“... *Collectively only 1 out of 3 with Autoimmune Diseases are diagnosed. Our system waits until the signs and symptoms are severe enough with organ failure and irreversible damage before we identify it.*”

— Gastroenterology 2015;149:596-603

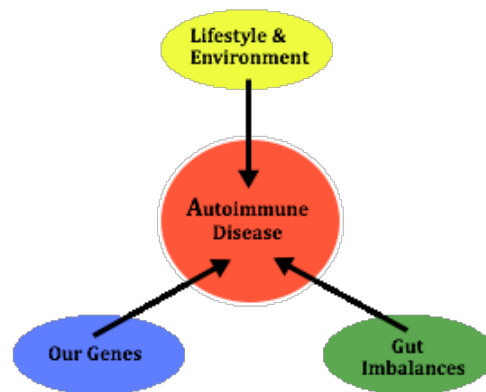


Autoimmunity IS a condition inherently of the immune system. Unfortunately, the standard model of health care does not see it this way and despite alarming statistics and the availability of new research data, autoimmune diseases *still* remain among the most misunderstood. Because autoimmune diseases are seen by most in the medical profession as issues of particular organs systems in the body e.g., pancreas, thyroid, gut, blood, brain etc., where you can have recurring symptoms such as rashes, weight gain, hair loss, abdominal bloating and numbness or tingling in the hands or feet, there aren't standardized treatment protocols or solutions getting at root causes. This is why Functional Medicine is so important for addressing autoimmunity — it looks at the body as an interconnected holistic system and seeks to identify where dysfunction in the body lives, how it got there and how to restore the imbalances. Getting diagnosed with an autoimmune condition is NOT a life sentence!

Another alarming concern we have is that often women who suffer from autoimmune diseases are not taken seriously when they first begin to have symptoms and consult their doctors. Unfortunately women are usually shuttled between specialists and forced to take a battery of inconclusive tests before a diagnosis is made. Even if a diagnosis is made, the data is showing that many women are likely to have been misdiagnosed, which means — their symptoms never go away. All too often, they are prescribed medications that do harm more often than good, such as anti-inflammatory drugs, steroids, or immunosuppressants. While these drugs can sometimes help people feel better and get their lives back, they are by no means a healthy long-term solution. We think of these drug therapies as a temporary bridge (if they must be used at all) to begin to dampen the fire of inflammation. Meanwhile, you need to be focusing on the more important issue: *where the inflammation is coming from*.

## Causes of Autoimmune Disease

Scientists and doctors are still figuring out exactly what causes the body to attack itself, but expert working with autoimmune conditions believe there are three factors that lead to early development of autoimmune disease: 1) genetic vulnerability, 2) environmental triggers (foods you eat especially gluten, toxins, stress, poor sleep, etc.), and 3) intestinal permeability (also known as leaky gut syndrome). Scientists do know that you can't catch an autoimmune disease like you can the common cold or flu. Research shows that there tends to be more reported cases of autoimmune diseases within families, meaning there is a high genetic tendency<sup>6</sup>. One important factor about autoimmune diseases that is surprising is that they tend to remain inactive in the body until some "trigger" activates them; what we refer to as *the weak link in your body's chain*. These triggers include: infections, traumas, bacteria overgrowth (Candida), medications, toxins (from heavy metals and molds), unusually high levels of stress, over exercise, poor sleep, blood sugar imbalances and hormonal changes.



## Autoimmune Disease and the Gut

The gut is our largest immune organ therefore it would make perfect sense that a person suffering from autoimmune disease invariably has underlying gut issues<sup>4</sup>. The more severe the autoimmune disease the more severe the gut issues, and vice versa<sup>5</sup>. By calming inflammation in the gut, a person is better able to reduce inflammation throughout the entire body, including autoimmune flare-ups. Because of this, we advise a stricter diet, one that eliminates food sensitivities, processed foods, and known allergens (like gluten and dairy). We also believe it is beneficial for a person living with an immune-related disorder to pay close attention to blood sugar and foods that trigger symptoms or cause flare ups in their immune system. Our primary goals are to calm down the inflammation in gut and other parts of the body and halt the autoimmune cascade.

“ *Celiac Disease, an autoimmune condition, is one of the most common life-long disorders in both Europe and the United States*

— New England Journal of Medicine 348;June 19,2003

Not surprisingly, non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS) can be a trigger in over 300 autoimmune disorders. There is a burgeoning amount of new research coming out that is showing that there *is a connection* between food sensitivities and autoimmune conditions, including studies linking gluten sensitivity to the autoimmune spectrum of diseases. All of the research is putting a spotlight on the fact that our diet can impact a greater number of health issues where a problem with the immune system is seen as root cause<sup>7</sup>. This is why a gluten-free and anti-inflammatory diet is an integral part of all our wellness programs.

## A Holistic Approach to Autoimmune Disease

The first job is always to address the fire of inflammation in the body. Once that is done, you begin to "peel away at the layers of the onion" and begin to work on the deeper healing of



damaged tissues and organs. You don't go from healthy to an autoimmune disease overnight; therefore time and patience are two powerful healing ingredients necessary in reversing chronic health conditions like autoimmune disease.

Here's how we typically work with autoimmune conditions:

- Review current health concerns and history
- Take preliminary tests that include: inflammatory markers, organic acids and metabolism, gluten sensitivity, blood workup, infections, endocrine health, glucose and vitamins and minerals
- Evaluate the body systems as a whole, not just individual symptoms
- Focus on 3 key functional areas: brain/hormones (stress impacts), gut/inflammation (leaky gut, infections, bacteria overgrowth) and detoxification (liver pathways)
- Identify and eliminate root cause(s)
- Introduce a gluten-free and anti-inflammatory diet and step-by-step transition plan
- Balance blood sugar (goes hand-in-hand with systemic gut issues)
- Recommend appropriate supplements and nutritional therapies
- Put in place a plan of action for lifestyle modifications such as: reducing stress, adding daily movement, ensuring at least 8 hours of sleep each night, and cultivating the right healthy attitude
- Evaluate symptoms and progress after 90 days; do more advanced testing (infections, genetics) and diagnostics if needed to evaluate more complex conditions

## **If You Think You May Have an Autoimmune Disease**

If you have been suffering with symptoms and suspect you may have an autoimmune disease or are "somewhere on the autoimmune spectrum", the first step is to identify the root cause(s). This could be a food sensitivity like gluten, an infection, a toxin like mold, too much stress in your life, poor or not enough sleep, etc. Then you want to take the steps to eliminate the root cause(s) through dietary, nutritional and lifestyle changes. We suggest you work with a health practitioner that knows from experience how to halt and reverse autoimmune conditions. Sign up for one of our [Wellness Foundations 1&3](#) programs where we will discuss your health goals and current challenges you are experiencing.



## References

<sup>1</sup>National Institutes of Health at [www.niaid.nih](http://www.niaid.nih)

<sup>2</sup>American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association at <http://www.aarda.org>

<sup>3</sup>Walsh, SJ, LM. Autoimmune Diseases: A Leading Cause of Death among Young and Middle-Aged Women in the United States. American Journal of Public Health. 2000;90:1463-1465.

<sup>4</sup>American Journal of Managed Care at <http://www.ajmc.com/>

<sup>5</sup>Kharrazian, D. (2010). *Why do I still have thyroid symptoms? A revolutionary breakthrough in understanding Hashimoto's disease and hypothyroidism*. Garden City, NY: Morgan James Publishing.

<sup>6</sup>Amur, S., Parekh, A., & Mummaneni, P. (January 01, 2012). Sex differences and genomics in autoimmune diseases. *Journal of Autoimmunity*, 38, 2-3.

<sup>7</sup>Ventura A., Magazzu G., Greco, L. For The Sigep Study Group For Autoimmune Disorders In Celiac Disease. "Duration of exposure to gluten and risk for autoimmune disorders in patients with Celiac disease." *Gastroenterology* 1999;117:297-303.

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