

SUMMIT

Naturopathic News

INFLAMMATION AND AUTOIMMUNITY

Autoimmune disease is now one of the leading causes of mortality and morbidity in the US, affecting approximately 8 percent of the population, or about 24 million Americans. Since many people have never heard of autoimmunity, it's not surprising that it is also one of the most undiagnosed diseases. Since only 1/3 of autoimmune conditions are diagnosed, as many as 72 million Americans may suffer.

What is autoimmunity?

Scientists have identified at least 15 diseases that are the direct result of autoimmune processes, including Type I Diabetes, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Celiac's Disease, and Autoimmune Thyroiditis. Many people who suffer from hypo or hyperthyroidism have an autoimmune form of the disease, and hypothyroidism is the most common form of autoimmune disease. There is growing evidence to suggest that common conditions such as osteoporosis (bone loss), infertility, pernicious anemia and hair loss may also have autoimmune components. If a person is diagnosed with one form of autoimmunity, it is highly likely that they have another.

Why is it under diagnosed?

In medicine very little has been offered in the form of treatment, other than shutting down the immune system with steroids or other strong medications. Doctors sometimes feel that, since there is no treatment, there is no point in diagnosing the condition. However, research science is providing more answers to the mysteries of autoimmunity, and offering more solutions.

What causes autoimmunity?

Autoimmune disease is a chronic disease that results from environmental factors, such as poor nutrition, stress, high blood sugar, smoking or alcohol abuse, creating an impact on cellular health. Genetic predisposition determines the level to which we are susceptible to these cellular changes.

Research shows us that autoimmunity begins with some sort of trigger that "sets off" the immune system. The majority of the time this trigger comes from the digestive system. Because we put so many

different things into our mouth, the immune system must be alert in the digestive tract. In fact, 57-80% of our immunity resides in the gut. If an invader, such as a bacteria, virus, yeast or food allergen, attacks the gut, the lining of the digestive tract becomes damaged. As the immune system attacks the invader, the intestines become a "war zone" of sorts. This leads to destruction of the cells that line the intestines, and can create a "leaky gut". A leaky gut allows food and/or pathogens to enter the blood stream. When this happens, the immune system jumps into high gear, and can sometimes get stuck there, in an inflammatory state. In this case, the immune system may then start attacking the cells of its own body in an "autoimmune reaction". Virtually any cell in the body can be a victim of this process.

How do we treat autoimmunity?

In order to reverse autoimmune disease, two main steps are important. The first is to identify and eliminate the trigger. The second is to decrease the inflammatory and autoimmune processes.

Naturopathic and holistic doctors offer testing options to identify the initial trigger, as well as the specific autoimmune reactions that may be progressing.

Every bite of food that we consume is either inflammatory or anti-inflammatory, so it is important to optimize the diet. Addressing the liver and supporting the detoxification pathways is also an important factor in reducing inflammation.

A Naturopathic doctor can also recommend specific nutritional changes. Reducing the inflammatory reactions involves a multilevel approach, including nutrition, supplementation and lifestyle optimization. Responding to inflammation and autoimmunity with a comprehensive approach can help normalize physiology and prevent, and even reverse, physical damage.

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