



Six Top Causes of Autoimmune Illness

#1 Stress

When confronted with uncomfortable emotional or physical circumstances, our bodies react to these “threats.”. This is the classic “fight or flight” response. Your body communicates this message through a hormone called cortisol. This hormone then causes many adaptations in your body such as higher blood pressure, lower risk for blood clotting, elevated senses like vision, smell and touch. It also suppresses your immune system, raises your blood sugar, makes you more alert and shuts down your digestive processes. These types of adaptations are beneficial if you are being chased by a bear, but if the stress becomes chronic, it can lead to poor sleep, anxiety or depression, chronic illness, digestive symptoms, diabetes, and high blood pressure. It is when the stress becomes chronic that your immune system loses its usual regulation that helps it to determine self from non-self. When this regulation is lost, the risk of autoimmune illness becomes a threat. In Functional Medicine we make recommendations that can help to rewire your stress response, allowing improvements in your immune function, sleep, digestion and mental function.

#2 Toxins

In the world we are living in, it is impossible to avoid all chemical exposure. Even if you are very careful with your foods and home environments, some amount of toxins are inevitable. Some are naturally occurring, such as arsenic in the soil or particles in the air. However, many are man-made toxins that your body has no mechanism to clear. Food additives, herbicides, pesticides, heavy metals, plastics, cosmetics, household cleansers and cookware can all be sources of toxins that can accumulate. It is when your total body burden of all of the accumulated toxins exceeds your ability to eliminate them that symptoms begin to break through. This means that you may have tolerated some exposure for years before the symptoms occur. In some cases, testing is performed to identify specific toxins and prepare you for an effective detoxification plan.

#3 Allergy

By definition, an allergic response is created by your own immune system. If your immune system identifies a substance that you are allergic to entering your body, it mounts an all-out attack, trying to stop the invasion. In the worst-case scenario, this can mean an anaphylactic reaction with closing of your airway and even death. However, many allergic reactions are more subtle and can lead to a slow, smoldering activation of your immune system. Allergies to environmental triggers such as pollens and pet dander are common. Food allergies are also common and can be the source for the slower type of immune response. Some types of allergic reactions may take as much as 2-3 days to emerge after the food is consumed. This can make it difficult to pinpoint the food that is the culprit for your symptoms. When your immune system is chronically on alert, it then becomes more likely to begin interpreting you as a threat and your own tissues then become the enemy and an attack ensues. We often recommend lifestyle changes to reduce your exposure to potential allergy triggers with modifications to your diet and your environment so that your immune system can learn to rest.

#4 Infection

Chronic infections due to certain bacteria, viruses, fungi or parasites wreak havoc on your immune function. Some of these infections are easy to identify, but some create a confusing picture of symptoms that can show up anywhere in your body. The problem can be magnified when multiple courses of antibiotics have been prescribed to manage the short-term symptoms. Once your microbiome has been disrupted by the infection or the antimicrobial medications, it can become even more difficult to get your

immune system back in check. Some of these illness-causing germs look the same to your immune system as your own tissues, so now your immune system is primed to attack you in a case of mistaken identity (also called molecular mimicry). These chronic infections are often identified as you work to uncover your root cause of illness while working with a Functional Medicine provider.

#5 Nutrition

If your nutritional status is suboptimal, you lose the basic ingredients that are necessary for your immune system to properly recognize friends from foes. Once the damage exists, it may not turn around quickly, even when your nutrition is improved. To have optimal nutrition, it is important that you choose high-quality foods, but you also must be able to then absorb the proteins, fats, carbohydrates, phytonutrients, vitamins and minerals. Working to heal your gut so that absorption of the nutrients occurs easily is a primary target of a Functional Medicine treatment plan.

#6 Sleep

Research shows that even one night of disturbed sleep changes the balance of your body function. Poor sleep raises your cortisol levels, suppresses your immune response, alters your appetite and changes your metabolism. Imagine then what might happen to your body if you have not had restful sleep for days or weeks at a time. Many people then seek to improve their sleep with use of a sleep-inducing medication, either over-the-counter or via prescriptions. In the long term, these medications rob you of the restful type of sleep that your body is craving. It is difficult for your brain to provide you that rest when your immune system is on fire and your mind and body are being bombarded with symptoms of feeling unwell. Through working with a Functional Medicine provider, your sleep will improve and you will remember how it feels to wake in the morning feeling rested.

If you would like to reverse the symptoms of autoimmune illness and take the steps needed to empower your health, call Root Function Wellness at 605-753-0920 to request an appointment or send us an email at info@rootfunctionwellness.com. We would be happy to guide you on your journey.

To your best health,

Amy Wagoner MD, ABFM, IFMCP

Root Function Wellness

