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Autoimmune Disease

Overview of our Immune System—Our Great Protector

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) estimates that over 23.5 million Americans suffer from an autoimmune disease and the prevalence is rising. Researchers have identified 80 plus different autoimmune diseases and suspect at least 40 additional diseases of having an autoimmune basis. In this newsletter, I am going to discuss the general aspects of autoimmune disease rather than talk about any specific disease.

Our immune system is our great protector. It is constantly checking to be sure that no foreign invaders like bacteria or viruses are attacking our body. It is also making sure that there are no abnormally growing cells that could become a cancer. Therefore, our immune system is constantly checking for “self” or normal cells and tissue or “non-self”, which are those foreign invaders or abnormally growing cells. If it finds a virus, bacteria, foreign body, or abnormally growing cell, its job is to destroy it and rid it from the body. When it finds a normal cell, it is designed to leave it alone. Therefore, it

is critical that the immune system distinguish “self” from “non-self.”

When the immune system recognizes a foreign invader like bacteria, it quickly kicks into action and begins destroying the bacteria by producing free radicals and oxidative stress. This leads to the inflammatory response which everyone is familiar with when it comes to our immune system. Now I have shared a lot in previous newsletters about the dark-side of oxygen, which is the free radical production that causes oxidative stress and leads to almost all of our chronic degenerative diseases. However, the immune system uses free radicals to actually destroy bacteria, viruses, and foreign bodies. We actually even have T4 Helper cells as part of our immune system that is able to detect and destroy abnormally growing cells like early cancer cells by using these free radicals it can create. This is one situation where oxidative stress is very good and needed to protect our bodies.

The Immune System and Autoimmune Diseases

When an autoimmune disease occurs, the body is actually attacking “self.” When the immune system begins to attack “self”, it literally destroys normal tissue like it would destroy a foreign body—“non-self.” It produces an inflammatory response via oxidative stress that actually destroys normal cells and tissue. In other words, if it begins to attack and destroy the normal

myelin sheath of the nerve, you develop multiple sclerosis. If the immune system begins to attack the joints, you develop rheumatoid arthritis. If it begins attacking the normal lining of the bowel, you develop either Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. If it attacks the connective tissue of the body, you can end up with lupus or scleroderma. The list goes on and on; however, in any autoimmune disease the immune system is actually attacking normal cells or tissue, instead of a foreign body or abnormally growing cell.

Why does this happen? Well, this is a major question that has really never been answered. Yes, there are many theories; however, no one really knows for sure what sets this off in the beginning. There was a two part series on autoimmune disease reported in the New England Journal of Medicine a few years ago and their conclusion was that we still don't really know what sets off the immune system so that it begins attacking "self."

I was taught in medical school that autoimmune diseases were the result of an over active immune system since the body was essentially attacking itself. Consistent with my training, almost all of the medical therapies that physicians offer patients with an autoimmune disease are based on this premise. This is why most of our patients suffering from an autoimmune disease are placed on chemotherapeutic medications, which primarily suppress the immune system. Medications like Methotrexate, Plaquinil, and Immuran are just a few of the potent medications that are used. Corticosteroids like Prednisone are also used not only because of their strong anti-inflammatory qualities but also because they suppress the immune system. This is modern medicine's approach to these diseases.

Since specializing in Nutritional Medicine, I have seen amazing results in my patients with autoimmune diseases who are using the aggressive nutritional supplementation program I recommend. My only explanation for such unbelievable results in my patients with an autoimmune disease is the fact that we are not dealing with an over active immune system, but rather, a confused immune system. The immune system needs to be able to recognize "self" and only attack "non-self."

As I have detailed earlier in this newsletter, the immune system is intended to be our great protector. It is always checking for self (one's own body) while it is looking for non-self (any foreign substance or abnormal cell). When the immune system finds a virus, bacteria, abnormally growing cell or foreign body it destroys and eliminates it from the body. However, in any autoimmune disease the immune system actually attacks itself rather than a foreign substance. In the case of any autoimmune disease, I believe one's immune system is no longer able to distinguish "self" from "non-self." Being confused, the body is essentially destroying itself. This immune response creates the oxidative stress and inflammation that destroys normal tissue.

My Clinical Approach

When you study any autoimmune disease, the medical literature shows that the underlying or root cause is oxidative stress. This makes sense when you realize that this is how the immune system actually protects us by creating excessive free radicals. However; in this case, as I mentioned above, the immune system is attacking self. The two main findings that are reported in any autoimmune disease are significant inflammation and a

significantly depleted antioxidant defense system. For example, in Crohn's disease, the lining of the bowel has been shown to be significantly inflamed and depleted in antioxidants and their supporting nutrients. In rheumatoid arthritis, the joint space is loaded with free radicals, inflammation, and depletion in antioxidants. This makes sense since a patient with an autoimmune disease is constantly under attack by their own immune system. This inflammatory response creates excessive free radicals, which uses up all the antioxidants and supporting nutrients trying to neutralize them and protect the body's normal cells.

Therefore, it only made logical sense that these individuals needed to be placed on an aggressive nutritional supplement program that would be capable of building up their body's natural antioxidant defense system. Especially in the organ or tissues that were under constant attack from their immune system. This is why I have always recommended that my patients with an autoimmune disease supplement a healthy diet with what I refer to as cellular nutrition. This is providing the body with a variety of antioxidants along with their supporting nutrients at optimal or advanced levels or those levels that have been shown to provide a health benefit in our medical literature. This allowed my patients to begin to replenish their depleted antioxidant levels and better protect their cells from this inflammatory response.

Now I realized early on in my career in nutritional medicine that cellular nutrition was not going to be enough to bring the oxidative stress back under control in anyone with an autoimmune disease. Therefore, I began to add what I refer to as enhancers to their cellular nutrition. The enhancer I would recommend most frequently was grape seed extract. This is

an ideal enhancer with patients who are suffering from and autoimmune disease because it is not only one of the most potent antioxidants known, but also, has a significant anti-inflammatory quality. It is also able to penetrate into most of the tissues of the body. Along with grape seed extract I will always add CoQ10 because it is not only a potent antioxidant, but also one of the most potent boosters of the immune system. Why would I want to boost the immune system when it is already attacking the body? Doesn't this go against the conventional wisdom and treatment of all autoimmune diseases?

I strongly believe that we are NOT dealing with an over active immune, but instead, a confused immune system. A normally functioning immune system actually recognizes "self" and leaves it alone. However, in an autoimmune disease we literally are attacking ourselves. The immune system is no longer able to differentiate between "self" and "non-self." This means we are dealing with a confused immune system, instead of an over active one. Therefore, building up the immune system over time will allow it to begin to recognize "self" again as it becomes less confused. My approach to these particular problems allows me to attack this disease from both sides. Over time the immune system will begin attacking itself less and when it does, the antioxidant defense system is build up to better protect the body against such an attack. Now I have also learned that it takes a minimum of six months for this to happen. This is also the length of time it takes to begin to actually build up our immune system and allow it to be less confused.

My approach is really not that far from mainstream medicine when you look at the treatment of multiple sclerosis. When I first

started my medical practice, we treated MS much like we did all the other autoimmune diseases. We used drugs that would suppress the immune system like chemotherapeutic drugs and prednisone. However, in MS this approach did not prove to be very effective. In recent years, they have found that drugs like Betaserone, Avonex, and Copaxone actually slow the progression of MS much better. These drugs are interferon like drugs, which actually build up the body's immune system. So this is basically what I am accomplishing naturally by building up the body's immune system, antioxidant defense system, and repair system with an aggressive nutritional supplement program.

Receiving My Specific Nutritional Recommendations

Everyone wants to know exactly which nutritional supplement products I recommend and the amount I recommend for a particular autoimmune disease like MS, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, or a host of other diseases. Members of my online medical practice located at www.raystrand.com have the privilege to send my specific nutritional product recommendations for most of the autoimmune diseases to themselves, family, or friends. All they have to do is to click onto the link from their homepage entitled "Specific Recommendations." If you want to see these recommendations in Spanish or French, you would click on the French or Spanish flags that appear below this link. Then you simply click on the disease that you are interested in finding out my specific recommendations, which are listed in alphabetical order. Then my generic recommendations for this particular disease will be displayed. You will see in the right upper hand corner of this page another link that allows you to send or receive the

specific nutritional products I recommend and the amount I recommend for this particular disease. All you have to do after you click on this link is to put in the name of the individual you would like to receive these recommendations along with their email address. You even have an area you can attach a note or memo. Then just click on "send" and they will receive a personal consult on this disease detailing all of my recommendations.

The one thing that I must emphasize is the fact that it takes a minimum of 6 months to build up my patient's immune system and antioxidant defense system. This is the main difference between traditional medicine and nutritional medicine. It just takes this long to build up one's natural defenses that have been under attack like in my patients who suffer from an autoimmune disease. This is why I carefully explain to my patients that they must give my recommendations a minimum of a six month trial to see if they are going to have a positive response or not. There have been several times when my patients suffering with an autoimmune disease did not improve at all until the sixth or seventh month. It is critical that anyone who is going to begin the aggressive nutritional supplement program I recommend for their particular disease to give these recommendations a minimum of a six month trial to see if they are going to have a positive response or not. To my amazement, the majority of my patients who suffer from an autoimmune disease will see a significant positive response. Obviously, the earlier they begin this aggressive nutritional support in the course of their disease, the better their chance of having a positive response.