Conscious Life presents
TRAUMA
SUPER CONFERENCE

Balancing hormones for trauma healing

Guest: Dr Anu Arasu

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[00:00:09] Alex Howard

Welcome, everyone, to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Dr Anu Arasu.

And we're going to be exploring the role of hormones in trauma and how often what happens is when we experience trauma, of course, it's not just a psychoemotional impact, it's also a physiological impact and the direct impact is on our hormones.

So to give you a little bit of Dr Anu Arasu's background, Dr Anu Arasu is the founder of London Bioidentical Hormones, a clinic specializing in treating hormonal imbalances with individualized bioidentical hormones and a functional medicine approach. Anu suffered from postnatal anxiety and burnout after the birth of her first child, we'll talk about that in the interview, and healed, thanks to functional medicine and bioidentical hormones.

She has written a short ebook called *Bioidentical Hormones Explained*. London Bioidentical Hormones is passionate about finding what is right for that individual at that time and providing patients with tailor-made programs that optimize health and wellbeing. I should also offer a disclaimer that Anu also happens to be my doctor as well.

So firstly, Anu, welcome. Thank you so much for making the time to join me.

Dr Anu Arasu

Thank you so much for having me here.

Alex Howard

So I think this is going to be a really important conversation for a lot of people because within the context of these conferences, we obviously talk a lot about the mind body elements and particularly the impact of the mind on the body. But of course it goes the other way as well. And I think sometimes there are people that are doing a lot of trauma work and a lot of healing work and are working on those emotional impacts, but their nervous system and body is still dysregulated. So I think getting into that is going to be really important.

Before we do, I'd love you to share a bit about your own journey. So your journey from a mainstream doctor to becoming a specialist in this area. So how did that happen?

[00:02:17] Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, I was always interested in this area, even when I was a mainstream doctor, but I think the thing that really pushed me to discover it was when I went through my own experience. Shortly after giving birth to my first child, I experienced incredible anxiety. And I think a lot of women go through this because we go from having our hormones sky high in pregnancy to nothing. And in that way it can be a bit like perimenopause, it can be quite a shock to the body.

And as well as the hormone transition, I had a lot of stress going on in my life at that time, both at home, I was also working as a doctor. I was really struggling and so many things happened to me. The first thing that happened was my brain stopped working. I was forgetting things. I would lose my keys, I'd lose my phone. My brain was really not firing on all cylinders.

And the stress had also affected my gut. It had affected my digestion. I found that I just couldn't digest food in the same way. I started to get sugar cravings and I was on a bit of a blood sugar roller coaster. It was upsetting my sleep and I went to see my doctor. And as probably I was expecting, there wasn't much testing going on. It was more a focus on antidepressants or even talking about ADHD medication, but it was not bringing together all of these things that I knew were going on for me.

And I knew at that point that to get myself back on track and to actually calm down this nervous system, I was going to have to go much, much deeper. And it was through working with functional medicine practitioners and going on my own journey that I discovered so much. I did hormone tests that showed my cortisol was really high, it was throwing other hormones off that were anyway a bit low.

Gut test, the PH of the gut was disbalanced and there was a lot of Dysbiosis going on in my gut and I wasn't absorbing things. And I had some vitamin and mineral deficiencies. And it was actually piecing all of that together that got me back on track. And that's when I realized how key hormones are. They govern our lives. I mean, they really do pull the strings with everything. They control our mood, our metabolism, our interest in life and to do anything.

And they're fundamental, I think, for our physical wellbeing, our mental wellbeing and our spiritual wellbeing. And I think that's why I'm so passionate now about helping people in this way.

Alex Howard

Yes, and it's interesting you describe, I imagine it's somewhat different as a doctor going to see your doctor, there's a bit more empowerment in terms of understanding what's happening and being able to advocate for yourself, but it's interesting that you went with a kind of imbalances and dysregulation in your physical body and then the assumption is the pathway to intervention is either antidepressants or saying, well, it's just ADHD, for example, and therefore we're just going to treat that as what's happening.

And I think sometimes the challenging thing for people is knowing that something more is going on, but the very people that we're going to for wisdom and guidance are sort of dismissing that. And I imagine a lot of the people that you've worked with in your clinic over recent years have had similar journeys of struggling to not just get answers, but even to get the right questions.

[00:05:45] Dr Anu Arasu

That's exactly it. I think these links are not being made. I mean, mainstream medicine is just a bit slow about making these links. And actually, there's loads of research now. So we know, for example, that in over half of the cases of depression, there can be hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis dysfunction. So we know that there's lots of hormone dysregulation going on and we know that depression can be largely due to inflammation.

So that's all there in the research papers. But yet, when you're sitting opposite your doctor in clinic, no one's checking your inflammatory markers, no one's checking your hormones, no one's talking about what you can do to bring your inflammation down, how you can clean up your diet, how you can actually start to master your own cortisol levels. No one's really talking about that stuff. And I think we need to be.

Alex Howard

Also, part of what I really appreciate about your way of working is that I think sometimes what can happen is people can see the limitations of a mainstream approach and therefore there's a massive swing to a completely different perspective, which is a rejection of that. And what I really appreciate is the recognition and the valuing of all the incredible science that's happened in what one might call mainstream medicine, but also seeing the ways that that can evolve and bringing in those other pieces.

And maybe you just want to say a few words about how you see the fitting together of these different perspectives and frameworks.

Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, absolutely. These things go hand in hand and that's always how I'm practicing. Mainstream medicine is incredibly important and often it just depends on where someone is in their journey about what they need. I mean, someone might even be on an antidepressant at the same time as working on their cortisol, working on their lifestyle, working on their blood sugar imbalance, changing, really cleaning up their diet and healing their leaky gut to bring down their inflammatory markers. Someone might be doing all of these things at once.

So it really just depends on what is right for that individual at that time. And I think that's a great way to see it because also we can judge ourselves a lot. We can think, if I'm taking this, then I should be doing it myself, I should be doing it all naturally. Well, here's the thing. If you're not sleeping and you're waking up, you're exhausted, it's very difficult to get your blood sugars under control.

So sometimes we just need to find ways to break the cycle and then you can start spiraling upwards. And we've got to be softer on ourselves and just go with what we need at that time.

Alex Howard

Yeah, it's funny as well that I slightly facetiously sometimes make the point when people say, I want to do it natural and I'm saying, do you have the same attitude to going to the dentist? Do you do that naturally as well, go back 200 years? But there's many miracles and so much to offer and, of course, it's using things in a skillful way and we're going to come onto more to that in a bit.

[00:08:40]

Just to take a bit of a sidestep, I'd love to hear a bit of your thoughts about trauma. Trauma is a big word that's used in lots of different ways and I think as we're talking about the relationship between hormones and trauma, I'd be good just to give a little bit of context and definition around trauma.

Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, I like to think of trauma as anything that pushes the body into a state of overwhelm and that triggers a survival response. And that could really be quite a range of things. So I think it's nice to have quite a broad definition of trauma because what could be traumatic to somebody, it could be divorce, it could be death, it could be something they've suffered as a child, abuse, it could be an accident.

There are many things that can push someone into this state of overwhelm. And in fact, it's not even the level of the trigger, because I have people who say to me, you know, I've never experienced any trauma. And then you hear about their lives and there are things that they've experienced. But more to the point, because of their wiring, their neural pathways, their genetics, what their body can cope with, a very different event may push someone into a state of overwhelm.

And what we're really talking about is this fight, flight, freeze state, okay? And this is a hormonally driven state. Essentially what the body is saying is, here's a threat. And hormones are molecules that are messenger molecules, very powerful messenger molecules, that have the ability to cause a synchronized response all over the body at the same time.

So that's why we can get this amazing thing where we get these dilated pupils and sweaty palms, racing heart, blood pressure shooting all over the place, digestion on pause, reproduction on pause, all of these things can happen at once because of hormones. And hormones are going to be responsible for that survival state.

The thing is with trauma is that it can start to become a little bit out of keeping with what we really need, okay? And that's what we forget about with trauma because trauma can also lead us to have this survival response to triggers that we don't need to have. So what it ends up being is the trauma ends up being our way to respond to life events. It can actually shift the entire perspective with which we're responding to normal events.

And that's, I think, a really, really useful framework. And I think it's one of these things that's very difficult to get our head around because the world around us is changing so rapidly. We have technology that's moving so fast. We have AI. Things change before our eyes so rapidly. But our limbic system, our own physiology basically hasn't evolved for 10,000 years.

So now we're not being chased by wooly mammoths, we're not being chased by tigers. We may be opening our emails and suddenly getting these micro-stressors and having a response to that. And I think that's a really helpful way to think of things.

[00:11:46] Alex Howard

I also want to really amplify something you say because I think it's particularly important, which is that the very trauma response that we've talked about a lot in different conversations in this conference is ultimately a hormonal response. And I think that's really important to amplify because that adrenaline cortisol, those stress hormones, the very state of being in that stress response means that our hormones are being dysregulated.

So I think often what people think is that if we just deal with the external stresses or the internal learnt patterns that the body is going to be able to self correct itself. And, of course, in some instances it can. But maybe you want to say a few words about when that stress becomes really chronic and when that goes on for years and in some cases decades, about the physiological impact of one's own capacity to keep their hormones in balance.

Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, well, there's some great research on this, the ACE research, the Adverse Childhood Episodes research, shows us that what trauma can do is it can actually reset our baseline. So we have a hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis and the aim is that if we have a stress, the hypothalamus tells the pituitary to tell the adrenals to shoot off adrenaline and cortisol and produce that fight or flight response.

If that happens recurrently, if that happens from very young, the actual axis can stop going back to baseline. Now, this is so interesting because now our entire normal shifts, we may be now running in high gear all the time and this is linked with widespread all cause mortality and morbidity. So as soon as we have a dysregulated HPA axis, we are starting from a new place and we actually have to work on ourselves physiologically to bring that back, to try to bring that back to its normal point.

And this is what I think so many books are not talking about enough, the HPA axis dysregulation and what we can do about that.

Alex Howard

And then I suppose one of the things that often happens is that people, not just on a physiological level there's a shift in that homeostasis, but also people normalize to how they feel, right? And so people can have quite dysregulated hormones and just think that that's the way that they are, that they're someone that is, for example, easily agitated or low in energy or doesn't have the resilience that they used to have.

But because that's a gradual shift that happens and then we normalize, one may not realize that the physiology that they've become used to is nowhere near what their actual normal could or should be.

Dr Anu Arasu

Completely. This is the really sad thing because it's very insidious. And also you just lose that baseline, you lose how good you could feel and people just put up with it. They put up with all kinds of things and it really is a downward spiral because what happens when we're in that chronic stress state, if we actually look at what happens to the physiology, it's quite full on.

[00:15:12]

It's the cortisol that's the problem. The cortisol is supposed to signal to the brain, OK, now I can calm down on the cortisol production. If that's signaling, if that negative feedback doesn't happen because you're always in high gear, a bit like the boy that cries wolf, the body stops listening. Okay? And rather than that cortisol dropping back down, it stays persistently high.

And what does that do to the body? It does a number of things. First of all, it really, really messes with our blood sugars. So cortisol will push our glucose up. It will actually break down protein. It will steal from muscles to push our glucose up. So we're going to be walking around in a perpetually high glucose state. But the stupid thing is that our cells can't even get that glucose because it needs other hormones to utilize that glucose.

So although we have high blood sugars, we actually feel hungry. We want to binge on sugar, we want to eat fatty foods and eat all the time. And we're feeling hyperglycemic or tired and wired because we're not even using that glucose. That's one of the things the cortisol does.

Another thing that it can do is it can mess with our inflammation, it can mess with our entire immune system. And this is where we really start to see a whole host of other problems happening. And again, why is it that you have friends who say, oh, I went through stress, I got my divorce and then guess what happened? I got this autoimmune disease. Aren't I unlucky?

Well, it's probably not just that they're unlucky. There's a link actually between why someone gets stressed and then they end up with an autoimmune disease or possibly even cancer or something else because there's a whole host of processes happening. If our immune system has been disrupted by persistently high cortisol, what's going to happen?

It's going to hit our gut. And the gut, I don't know how much you know about this Alex, but the gut, it's got a barrier...

Alex Howard

I know more than I would like to.

Dr Anu Arasu

Well, exactly. So this is it. The gut lining is supposed to be permeable. It's supposed to let small molecules in, keep large molecules out. But if we're in this constant state of high cortisol, the body's trying to help us, it's trying to say, hey, make that gut lining permeable so that you can get nutrients quickly if you need them. But over a long time, what happens?

Too much gets into the body. Large molecules come into the bloodstream and the body starts to form an immune response against those larger molecules. And suddenly we're in a state of low grade inflammation. So we're walking around toxic and inflamed and that's our new normal. You know, that's the thing.

Alex Howard

And I think, what we'll come to in a little bit, that working with hormones, what you're really introducing here, is not just working with hormones, but I also just want to make the point around

when cortisol becomes dysregulated, the cascade effect that can have on other hormones in the body as well.

[00:18:10] Dr Anu Arasu

Yes. Now, this is really powerful. There's a theory, and I think it's quite a useful framework, which is that if we think of pregnenolone as the mother hormone, we use pregnenolone to make cortisol, amongst other hormones. And essentially cortisol is a key player, right? There's a hierarchy with hormones, and we really need cortisol. So cortisol is the God.

We're going to steal from pregnenolone to make cortisol because we need to be able to fight or flight. That's the basic thing we need for survival. Now, that's a bit of an oversimplification, but basically the framework is true that if we are shunting lots of energy into cortisol production, there is a mechanism in the body that steals from our reproductive hormones.

And actually the body wants to do this because what it's saying is you're not in a state to fall pregnant. You can't even look after yourself right now. The last thing you want is another one to look after. So what we can see is that people who've been traumatized, women who've been traumatized, classically, they may start skipping periods, they may lose their periods altogether.

And people whose bodies are under stress, I mean, athletes, people who push themselves to the max with over exercise, with undereating, with being high achievers, type A, where does it show up? Often in the reproductive hormones. It might just be insidious. First of all, maybe their periods will change. Maybe the gap between the periods becomes longer. They ignore it. They miss one period, they miss two periods, they push on. Periods become even less frequent. The periods can stop altogether.

And that is because ovulation is not happening. We can be stealing from hormones like progesterone, and we can be really losing our ability to reproduce.

Alex Howard

And so then, just to come back to what you were saying a few minutes ago, when our hormones become dysregulated, it's not just that we're hormonally dysregulated, that then there are ripples and impacts. And you mentioned, for example, autoimmunity, so impacts on the immune system, but also impacts on the digestive system as well.

And it strikes me that sometimes people can be very fixated on trying to address those symptoms and so trying to, for example, use things to deal with the inflammatory markers or to deal with other pieces without realizing that perhaps the core of what's happening is actually a hormonal imbalance.

But also there's, I think, an interesting point here, that one gets in these interconnected loops, that once hormone goes out of balance, then digestion goes out of balance. But then if our digestion is out of balance, our capacity to make hormones goes further out of balance.

Dr Anu Arasu

Exactly. This is exactly it. Because imagine, your digestion is out of balance, so what's going to happen? Maybe the PH of the gut isn't happy. Digestive enzymes are PH dependent. They're not

going to do their job. You're not going to digest your food. If you don't digest your food, you're essentially in a state of malabsorption. If you're in a state of malabsorption, you're going to have vitamin and mineral and fatty acid deficiencies.

[00:21:20]

Now, what do we need to make our hormones? We need all of those basic building blocks. So now what's happening is that not only are you not digesting, you're not even able to make the hormones that you need. This is going to perpetuate the system. And digestion, rest and digest is the opposite of fight and flight. So if you imagine, like we said, that the fight and flight response is a hormonal response, so is rest and digest.

So that's the parasympathetic. That's what we need to be. We need to be lovely and calm for that to happen. If we are already in a state of high cortisol and then our bodies are not getting the nutrients, so they're under stress, that is going to continue, that is going to worsen.

And the peristalsis is not even going to work properly. So you can see how we can get caught in these negative spirals. And I see this happen to so many of our patients. And this is where people start to feel really, really hopeless because it can be the kind of thing where they start saying to me, look, whatever I do doesn't work. There's no point in me eating well because it doesn't make a difference.

Now, this isn't true, but they're right in the sense that they're so lost about what they can do. And it's true that some people's guts, even fiber, something like fiber, can disrupt them. So at that point they really need some specialist intervention to test, to treat specifically, to get very specific advice about what's right for them at that time, just so that they can break out of the negative spiral and start doing things and maybe slowly introduce the things that are going to help them long term, that right now they can't tolerate, but they will be able to tolerate in two months' time.

Alex Howard

Well, I think you make a really important point there that just like we can get in these vicious circles where one thing makes something else worse and something else worse, we can also, as you say, we can break that cycle and then we can get in a virtuous loop where once you approve something else and then suddenly these cases where they can be particularly stuck because nothing seems to move it, if you can break that cycle, then suddenly a whole different path can open up.

Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, and I think we have to respect the wisdom of the body because there's no one, right place to start. And I am always about doing things in tandem because the body is the most complex machine we have on Earth and we have to bow down to that. I think respecting the body's own intelligence, it's just phenomenal. And in some ways I tell people often the secret weapons for health are sleep and meditation, because these are two things that can reset all these homeostatic parameters at once.

Because what else is going to reset your respiration and your heart rate and your blood pressure and your vagus nerve all at the same time? Likewise, when we're thinking about what we can do to improve our physical symptoms, it's so far from the one drug for one disease model. It's pretty much the inverse. It's really multiple changes.

[00:24:23] Alex Howard

It's funny what you say about the brilliance of the human body. So my wife at Christmas gave me, I think it's called Oculus, which is the Meta, or Facebook, virtual reality goggles that you can then sort of do games and sort of things in there. It was amazing. And of course it's still very limited in terms of what it can do and what it can't do.

For example, one of the real challenges, apparently, is trying to create the movement and experience of legs in virtual reality. And so apparently the avatars within the Meta system, or Facebook system, don't have legs because they haven't figured out how to do that.

So you sort of realize that with literally hundreds of billions of dollars of investment and some of the smartest minds in the world and thousands of people working on this technology, it's still incredibly basic compared to the human body. I think sometimes we, with all the amazing things that technology can do, we forget, actually, how much brilliance there is.

And again, to amplify a point that you made, as much as a conversation like this is talking about things being out of balance or things needing external help and support, how much wisdom there often is in these responses. And I know that part of your way of working, which I think is really important, is that it's not a process of doing things to the body, it's about listening to the feedback loops and understanding and being in a collaboration with that physical and emotional wisdom.

Dr Anu Arasu

Absolutely, that's exactly what it is. Yeah. And it's really coming back here because even with virtual reality, what's happening with the AI world, quite funny, it's taking us away from our bodies in some ways. I mean, even if we have an avatar and we're moving our arms, what we're seeing on the screen is visuospatially different to the movement that we are carrying out.

There's no substitute for just coming back in and checking into what I am feeling right now. What am I experiencing? Where is it in my body? And I feel this a lot, particularly with things like food intolerances, yes, tests have a benefit, but one of the greatest benefits can actually be trying, checking in with yourself, watching what happens to your blood sugars 2 hours later. Because all of us have unique responses to a carbohydrate load. Why?

Because of our genes, because of our microbiome. Now, each microbiome is so unique and the microbiome, that coral reef within our gut, contains bacterial genes. So these genes are all going to control how we process sugar. So, for example, if you and I eat a banana, our blood sugar responses are going to be different. And I think that is why no science, no one else from the outside, can tell you better than your own symptoms. And that is half of the jigsaw.

So matching your experience with the tests, with the science, that marriage, is where the magic happens. And that's what I try to explain to people. It might be one day that we do get closer to, for sure, I think we will get closer to understanding all the genes in the microbiome and how that influences blood sugars, for example, but for now, and perhaps always, there is no substitute for just bringing your own wisdom and then matching it with the numbers.

[00:27:57] Alex Howard

Yeah, well, let's come a little bit to some of the intervention pieces around hormones. And so someone comes to your clinic and it's become clear that their hormones have become dysregulated and maybe they've already made some sensible lifestyle changes, but the body is not yet coming back into balance. So what are some of the next steps from that point?

Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, great one. I think cortisol is a great place to start because I do think it's the king. I think there is a hierarchy with hormones and I think that getting your cortisol back in balance is fundamental. So let's start with the first thing when you wake up, because cortisol has a rhythm. That's actually when we need our cortisol to be high. We need a good cortisol awakening response. We want it to be doubling in that first half an hour of waking.

So the kind of things that you can be doing to help that, you might be getting out, getting natural light, which are going to suppress your melatonin and get you feeling more awake, you're going to be wanting to start your day with foods that are going to not push you into a blood sugar roller coaster. Blood sugar roller coasters are disasters for cortisol.

Remember what we said earlier about cortisol pushing your glucose up? You want to be avoiding this pathway if you can. So protein, good fats, loads of veggies, this is what's going to help with cortisol. So cortisol should be high in the morning. And it should, I mean, kind of gradually, as the day goes on, it will start to decline. So in the afternoon, you might be feeling a bit more tired than you were in the morning.

So, again, it's about watching out for that. How bad are your symptoms? How can you sustain your energy throughout the day? I think the blood sugars are really important. I think that, for example, natural light is key. Finding the right amount of exercise, you don't want to be doing too much or too little, because the right amount of exercise will modulate your cortisol.

Too much exercise is actually going to put stress on your system. And if you do exercise late at night, that could actually stop you sleeping. So you don't want to be overdoing it. As the evening goes on, that's one time when we want our cortisol to be nice and low. This might be the time to make space for cuddling pets, for being around the people you love, for doing relaxing things, and having a hot bath in the evening.

All of these things are going to be really, really calming to our nervous systems. And it's really important also to be aware of when your sleep cycle is. When is the time that you naturally feel sleepy? Because actually we all have a time and if we miss that window, we just sleep worse. Some people don't want to listen to their time because it might be 9:30 at night and it's not very sociable, they think, or it's not cool, they want to stay up and watch TV.

But actually that light from the screen until 11:00, it just may not be what your particular system needs. And I think if you are, particularly if you are, having some symptoms, you've got to start listening. When your sleep cycle calms, that would be the time to go to bed with a book, not on any kind of screen and just try to fall asleep. I do believe that getting sleep before the time of 11:00 is worth more than after for the adrenals to recharge, that's really, really important. Those would be the basic things for the daily rhythm.

[00:31:31]

Then, of course, there'll be more specific things food wise. Are you inflamed? Do you have intolerances? I think I mentioned before a bit about how high cortisol can make our guts leaky. And so many people find that then if they have things like bone broths, which contain amino acids like L-Glutamine, this helps heal the gut lining. They find that really cleaning up the diet, so going really low wheat, dairy, no sugar, no caffeine, no alcohol, does make a big difference.

Grains, depending on the person, may or may not suit them, but certainly whole grains cooked in a pot can be better for a lot of people. All of these things can really help lower your inflammation as well as things like meditation, 20 minutes a day or 20 minutes twice a day. In so many studies it shows that it lowers inflammatory parameters across the board. So these would be some of the basic tips that I would say.

Alex Howard

That's fantastic. I think we should say a few words as well about testing because, of course, people will go to, maybe, their mainstream general practitioner and say I'm worried about my cortisol levels and they'll then maybe do some blood work and come back and say everything's fine. What they mean is you haven't got Addison's, you haven't got Cushing's, therefore everything's fine.

So maybe say a few words about functional testing and how people can get an accurate picture of what's happening.

Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, I think this might still be true for a lot of places in the world, actually, this might be quite universally applicable, which is that the lens, certainly in Western medicine, the lens at which we're looking at problems is not as a symphony. We are not thinking about hormones and nutrition and the symphony that they play together. So we're still focused on a disease model. And that's not that helpful for optimal health.

So when a lot of people go to their mainstream physicians and what essentially they're meeting is a ruling out of a problem, they're being told you don't have this disease. That doesn't necessarily mean that everything's fine. And I think the onus is more and more on us to take personal responsibility to say, well, okay, but I'm puffy in the face, I'm bloated all the time, I'm exhausted, I'm tired, I'm wired, I'm irritable, I can't go 3 hours without getting hangry and shouting at someone.

That is a sign that all is not well. And this is where functional testing can be great. So it might be a case of finding a functional medicine practitioner. The Institute for Functional Medicine is a great place to check out. They have lists of people, nutritionists or holistic doctors would also usually be the people to offer these tests.

And these tests might be hormone tests in the blood or the urine. They might be a stool test to look at what's going on in the gut. And they might do vitamin and mineral testing. These are the kinds of tests that we're talking about that help you just really take a magnifying glass and see what's going on in your own body.

[00:34:38] Alex Howard

And so let's say someone does that testing and then it becomes clear there are imbalances in terms of hormones. And I think things like, for example, HRT, when women are going through menopause, can sometimes get a bit of a bad rap because of some of the side effects and some of the issues that can go around that.

So I'd love you just to break down some of the differences between bioidentical hormones and some of the, again, more mainstream approaches that can be used.

Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, well, bioidentical hormones, I mean, firstly, again, it's a lens because mainstream medicine is not even talking about hormone imbalances, quite frankly, you're either in menopause or you're not. If you're not in menopause, it's antidepressants and sleeping tablets. And if you're in menopause, it's some random hormone replacement therapy without making a distinction between what type of hormone replacement therapy or what root or, really, what doses you individually need.

Okay, so, first of all, for a lot of people, maybe in their twenties, thirties, forties, if they're suffering from a hormone imbalance, chances are they're going to need a lens that is going to be thinking about hormones as working in a symphony. What's the relationship between cortisol and how's that affecting your sex hormones? How's that affecting your thyroid? That's the kind of lens you need, which you're probably not going to get from your mainstream physician.

Then, even at the time of menopause, there is a difference between bioidentical hormones, which are identical and structured to the body's own, and synthetic hormone-like drugs, which aren't identical and structured to the body's own. So it's a bit like opening a padlock with a hairpin. The synthetic hormone-like drugs, they will kind of do the trick. They will get rid of symptoms, but they also go and bind to other hormone receptors and cause unwanted side effects.

And often, the distinction just isn't being made. We're being told that hormone replacement therapy is all the same thing, when it's not. It's an umbrella term for a number of different things. So, choose bioidentical. That would be what I would say at menopause. And if you think you're suffering from a hormone imbalance at another time, see a bioidentical hormone specialist who's going to look at it with a wider lens.

Alex Howard

And maybe we just say a few words around the importance of working with a medical professional. Obviously, in the UK, hormones are regulated. In the US, you can pretty much go to a supermarket and buy hormones, and that's obviously something we're not advocating.

So maybe just say a few words about why it's important to make sure that this is being led by real data and that there's medical oversight.

Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, it's a really finely tuned system. It's a very delicate system. And actually, the whole thing that we want to do is be kind to our bodies. We want to start from a place of tenderness and that

means not going with a sledgehammer approach. It doesn't mean that because you're tired, you go and take loads of something that you find in the supermarket to push through.

[00:37:43]

That is precisely what gets people in the problem in the first place. That is the attitude that causes the problem. And what we're really trying to do is bring everything back into balance. This is also a really key point because our bodies are helping us. So we have to make big changes, we have to make big decisions, we have to change our lives.

If we don't remove the micro-stressors, if we don't find a new way to say, you know what, I'm going to bunch my emails, I'm only going to check them twice a day, I'm going to stop hanging around with toxic people, I'm going to actually start going to bed on time, I'm going to cut out the alcohol, I'm going to have healthy boundaries, if we're not making those changes, whatever we take, we're going to be back in hormone dysregulation again in no time. Because that's an appropriate response to a dysfunctional lifestyle, potentially a dysfunctional society.

So the real work is a path. It is a long path, potentially, and it's a hard path. You've got to be committed. That's a far cry from just going to the supermarket and buying a jar of something. So I would say that the beauty of testing and just taking what you need, first of all, it's the only safe way to do it and it really brings things back into harmony. It gets the whole symphony working again.

Alex Howard

And maybe we can sort of track back to what we were saying a bit earlier about how we normalize to our body being a certain way. And as you know, I started taking some testosterone about six or eight weeks ago and had a fairly immediate and significant positive impact in terms of my body.

And I liken it a little bit to being in a UK winter and then going on holiday somewhere hot and that feeling where you come off a plane somewhere like, I don't know, Thailand or the Maldives or something, and there's that suddenly, oh my God, that's heat. This is warmth. And you forget you've been sort of cold and damp for the last however many months.

We don't realize that we've normalized to something until we experience something that's different. And, as you know, I had quite a lot of caution around it. I think I spent about two years constantly testing my testosterone levels to really persuade myself that that was something that I wanted to do.

But also, interestingly, tracking back to the point you were making earlier around the impact on other bodily systems and this thinking that I don't want to take something because my body's not, you know, my body should do it by itself or I should do it in a natural way, to taking something that impacts one system, but then the positive ripple impacts across other systems as well.

So maybe you can say a few words around some of the, obviously not specifics of people's cases where it's not appropriate, but just the positive impact of when you have the right intervention and actually you're targeting these imbalances, of how that can actually really transform people's lives.

[00:40:50] Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, we have to drop so many preconceptions because people here taking testosterone and things jump into our minds like, oh, I'm not a gym guy and I don't need to take testosterone or I don't need this or I don't need that, or my body should do it myself. And all these preconceptions we have and what we lose sight of, I think, so often, is the innate wisdom of the body, which is always what I come back to.

Which is if someone has tested and, repeatedly, they have low testosterone and they have a number of dysfunctions and imbalances going on, that low testosterone is going to be having impacts. It's going to be having impacts on causing osteoporosis. It's going to be having impacts on the brain. It's going to be impacting other bodily systems as we go on.

And also hormones can have an anti-inflammatory effect. They can actually heal the gut. They can help reduce other markers that could be keeping someone in a downward spiral. So this idea that we know it all, you know, that these opinions that we have, when we hear words, and I think so many of us do, it's almost subconscious, we hear a word and thought waves will come in.

And I think we need to sort of take a step back from that before we believe those thoughts and just pause and look at the science in front of us and piece together the jigsaw, because many things work in synergy. And I would say that the hormones and the anti-inflammatory effect that they have can be very, very powerful for a number of conditions. And we're seeing this more and more in our world today with autoimmunity and inflammation and allergies on the rise because of our increasingly toxic world.

We need to start questioning, how are we going to break that cycle? Because it's okay just to say I'm going to do it naturally, but we're living in an increasingly toxic world. These things are on the rise. We need to be understanding and actually taking positive steps to make a difference because if we just do nothing, nothing might get better.

Alex Howard

Fantastic. Anu, there's so much more we could say, but maybe you just want to say a few words around the importance, and you've made a point, I think I just want to track back to a point that you made, around that this is not any one thing in tandem. So I think the tendency sometimes, and I'm always trying to kind of moderate different perspectives, where someone goes, great, hormone is out of balance, I'm just going to take the hormones and that will fix it.

And you made, I think, a really important point a little bit earlier around looking at lifestyle and looking at the micro-stressors and those other pieces. And so I guess what I'm really saying is that a final point around why working in that integrative way is important and it's never one piece in isolation.

Dr Anu Arasu

Yeah, the best way I could say this is that our bodies, minds and spirits, they want to be aligned, they want to be vibrating at the same level. And often we are doing things, or we're not, let's say, we feel scattered, we feel fragmented, all of that is not happening in conjunction. And if we continue to have the same inputs, and those inputs are unhealthy, our hormones are going to get

dysregulated. That is kind of what they're supposed to do. That's an appropriate response to an inappropriate input.

[00:44:21]

That's the best way I can say it. In a sense, we've got to make friends with our bodies. And I think the best thing I can say is this stopping the pushing through.

Alex Howard

Yeah.

Dr Anu Arasu

I'm not sure if there's a... I think a lot of people will understand what I mean by that and it's just a hard lesson. Just got to keep slowing down.

Alex Howard

And, of course, that pushing through is often, in of itself, part of a trauma response. And there's some really good conversations about that in this conference.

For people that want to find out more about you and your work and want to explore next steps, where's the best place to go and some of what they can find?

Dr Anu Arasu

Great. So the clinic website is www.londonbioidenticalhormones.com. We're currently in the process of writing a book, so I will keep you posted on that. And yeah, on the clinic website there are also links to the Facebook and Instagram, and a short ebook that I've written. But hopefully the next book will be a bit more detailed about all of this stuff because it's just so important, just what everyone needs to know.

Alex Howard

Yes. Fantastic. Dr Anu Arasu, I really appreciate your time. Thank you so much.

Dr Anu Arasu

Thank you.