



Ep. 45 Tips to Overcoming Lupus Exhaustion with Margaret Romero, NP and Evan H. Hirsch, MD

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 0:00

Hello and welcome to the FIX YOUR FATIGUE podcast. Whether you can't get out of bed in the morning, your energy crashes throughout the day, or you're a biohacker looking to optimize your energy, productivity and focus. This podcast is for you. I am Dr. Evan Hirsch. And I will be your host on your journey to resolving fatigue and optimizing your energy. And we'll be interviewing some of the top leaders in the world on fatigue resolution. Welcome Hey everybody, welcome back to the FIX YOUR FATIGUE Podcast. I'm so glad that you're here with me today. Because today we're going to be talking about lupus and exhaustion or lupus and fatigue with my good friend Margaret Romero. So let's learn a little bit about Margaret. So Margaret Romero nurse practitioner is a Columbia University trained is a Columbia University trainers practitioner. She utilizes functional medicine to treat chronic illness autoimmunity, and women's health issues. She has been a clinical instructor and has taught functional Integrative Medicine at Columbia University. She is the host of the sacred medicine podcast and author of From flair to fabulous 25 things you must do to avoid your next lupus flare. If you got lupus, I would definitely be checking that out because that sounds like it would be really helpful. So we're going to dive in and talk about tips to overcoming lupus exhaustion. Margaret, thanks so much for joining me today.

Margaret Romero, NP 1:31

Thank you so much for having me.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 1:33

Yeah, I'm excited to dive into this topic. Let's let's start off with your, your lupus journey. Please take us through that.

Margaret Romero, NP 1:43

Alright, this was in 2007 I was diagnosed with lupus after having extreme muscle and joint pain. And I ended up having severe anemia. And I had also kidney involvement. But I at the end of it all I had multi organ involvement and which meant which means my liver was affected. So my liver functions were through the roof I had pleurisy I enlarged tar it was just I was a hot mess back then. And hair was falling out I had gained like 30 pounds of water weight from all of the steroids they were pumping into me at the time. And it was just the one

of the hardest times in my life. And you know, after going actually I was in such bad shape that I had to see the doctor like twice a week I had to go see the rheumatologist and the nephrologist. And they had to get Bloods and make sure that it was stable and okay. And I mean, at one point I was med flighted, actually from one hospital to another. It was I mean, it was yeah, it was a very, I was in crisis for sure. So at the time, I started to notice that every time I ate my joints, especially my knees would get so red and so swollen. And I was like what the hell is going on? So I went to my rheumatologist that week, I said, Look, I want to be tested for celiac. I want the DNA test because something's going on. I'm getting inflamed after I eat. I mean, it just makes sense. She said, save your money. You don't need the test. Just take your medications. And that's it. And at the time, I was taking 12 I mean, sorry, 20 pills per day, and still feeling like utter crap. I could barely walk at this point. Like, despite the meds, like I was just, uh, I could do nothing. I was sitting there. I wasn't working. My parents were taking care of me. They were cooking my food I was in so much pain and so that that's how it all began.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 4:07

Thank you for sharing that with us. That sounds really challenging. Can you define for us what lupus is.

Margaret Romero, NP 4:14

So Lupus is an autoimmune condition. What a lot of practitioners say like your body's attacking itself, your body's attacking particular organs, tissues. And the biggest the most common actually symptoms are joint pain, muscle pain, hair loss, also a butterfly rash, which I did have as well. Super, super sensitive to the sun. Anytime I would be in the sun, I would get a rash wherever the sun would hit. And that's really, really common. So and that sort of that typical presentation and then of course with the lab work with a positive and high titers and all of that. So Lupus is an autoimmune condition and there's many there show grands and Ms. So basically, you're just trying to find the there is just an overwhelming inflammation that's in the body. And so that's how it presents and so the body is inflamed and it shows it in your joints. It shows it in muscles, at least for me, that was the biggest presentation. Not everyone with lupus has as severe symptoms that I had. But it largely is pain and fatigue. Those are like the two biggest ones. And then of course, the butterfly rash, of course, like I mentioned, and in the hair involvement and hair loss.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 5:45

Yeah, that makes sense that, you know, fatigue would be part of that, because what we found is that these causes of fatigue that we're going to talk about today are also the causes of autoimmunity, you know, they're triggering the immune system to become dysfunctional and start to attack different parts of the body. Has that been your experience as well?

Margaret Romero, NP 6:04

Yes, definitely. Definitely.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 6:08

And so is there you talked about how it's kind of global where the immune system is attacking, all sorts of different parts of the body talked about a number of different organ systems, is there a particular component of those organs that that the body is attacking? You know, with rheumatoid arthritis, we get auto immunity to the joints for the most part, right? If we get MS, it's auto immunity to the myelin sheaths, right? So with lupus is there a particular component or particular cell that it's reacting against?

Margaret Romero, NP 6:42

Well, we wouldn't you know, lupus nephritis, which is when it attacks the kidneys is also a really huge it's the one of the most common presentations but there's also cutaneous so it it's affecting the skin. And so there's discoid as well. And so there's it can attack different body parts, different organ systems, kidneys are one of the most common.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 7:10

Okay, thank you for that explanation. So let's talk about fatigue and lupus. So why does so many people who have lupus also have fatigue?

Margaret Romero, NP 7:21

Wow. So there's so many reasons for fatigue. And I think that you know, lupus doesn't come about overnight. autoimmunity happens, it takes years and it starts out really subtle, and sort of the body whispers very small symptoms. For me, it was severe constipation. In the beginning, it was mild and then became very severe. And so for me, it started in my gut at the time, I wasn't really into functional medicine, autoimmunity was not what I was teaching or helping people with. So I just thought it was constipation. And so I would have to get colonics and all of that. So for, for me, it started in the gut, but it can affect any, the fatigue can come from so many things. And I think that starting if we started the gut, which for me, that's what happened. And for every single one of my patients, when I do a stool test, I am checking for everything. So we check for pathogens and Candida. And if you know if gluten is causing an issue, there's just so many things, so many valuable things that we can learn from a soil test. And so for me, what I've seen clinically is that it starts there. And then most people have leaky gut because their symptoms began like years ago and years ago. And so as the body starts to have these, you know, chronic inflammatory processes happening. Leaky Gut happens due to pathogens secondary to parasites, or worms, or H. Pylori, or Candida. Unknowingly, so the person doesn't know that they have all of this going on. Leaky Gut happens. And then we'll see vitamin deficiencies, then it'll affect hormones and hormones, it'll affect the thyroid, and then if gluten is an issue, it's affecting your thyroid and so it's so complex, the reasons why people have fatigue because there's so many things involved. And there's just a cascade of things that continue to happen. One is triggering another trigger another thing causing deficiency here and there. And so, you know, aside from like, B 12, and iron deficiencies, you know, that will cause fatigue will but also when you have a chronic illness, you know, your mitochondria is also being affected, and those are the powerhouses within each of your cells. And so when those are affected You know, your body cannot it just does it you just have no vitality you cannot get through the day when your mitochondria is being affected

when it's overwhelmed with inflammation and your body is caught in constant like, sympathetic. It's constantly in fight or flight like your your body, there's no relaxation at night you're, you're stressed, you can't sleep your adrenals aren't we being replenished when you're sleeping? So there's so many factors, the I don't even know where to begin, I just kind of like threw out a bunch of things. But what what were you? Does that kind of explain things? Or did I just go off in a tangent?

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 10:46

No, you did. Great. So So then in terms of the the other symptoms of lupus, so I guess I'm curious, if when you start to heal the fatigue, did the other symptoms of lupus also get better? Or can you isolate it, where it's like, Okay, we're gonna boost your, your, your energy over here by taking these supplements or doing these things. And then over here is addressing your autoimmunity and your other symptoms? Or is it more global, you address certain things and everything gets better? What do you find?

Margaret Romero, NP 11:17

So great question. I have some patients that like want to heal everything all at once, and one at fast one, it now need to be healed tomorrow, and the body just doesn't heal that way. And so where I see nutritional deficiencies, those are replenished with supplements, right. And then we'll do we'll remove all of the foods that are also causing issues with fatigue, too, I mean, going to food sensitivities, I also check for that in case that can cause people to be tired and feel fatigue, not feel good have reactions have rashes. And so I do sort of a step by step process. But eventually, all organ systems and like everything is is eventually being fully evaluated, sort of like from head to toe. And then we're doing it in sort of a stepwise because I have patients who want to like detox, or they come to me on a detox. And I'm like, no, no, no, no, no, no, I know, you cannot be on a detox right now. Because you've been chronically ill for so long, your body cannot go through a detox safely. It just can't. So we have to do things like really, step by step replenishing one thing, yes, it'll give them energy, you know, some of the supplements, they'll start to feel better, while the gut is healing while we're giving also supplements to heal the gut, or getting rid of the pathogens or getting rid of the Candida or they're also on a Candida diet, things like that. So we're sort of doing things at the same time, but we're doing it really slowly. I don't do anything. Aggressive.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 13:06

Amen. I always say slow and steady wins the race, the body like small changes. So then, what would you say are kind of like the the top three? You've mentioned a number of them, but we're like, what are the top three causes of fatigue with lupus?

Margaret Romero, NP 13:27

So one would be pathogens in the gut? That's definitely a major issue. It is also what causes inflammation. Next would be vitamin deficiencies, severe. I've seen severe ones. And then the third one would be, you know, so if the first one was nutritional deficiencies, you know, obviously, we're looking at iron, and all, you know, B 12. Right, then I'm looking at your gut. And let's get rid of those pathogens is a really dragging down. And then

the other one would look be looking at the hormones as well, especially the thyroid. Thyroid antibodies seem to be for some reason, like the test that nobody ever runs. I don't know why thyroid antibodies, like a TSH is drawn. And if that looks fine, then sort of investigation stops there in conventional medicine, but I'm really looking at the hormones and it also depends on a woman's age where their female hormones are as well.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 14:29

So what are the thyroid antibodies give you what are you looking for with those?

Margaret Romero, NP 14:34

So I'm looking to see if they are also have an autoimmune issue with the thyroid. And there's a couple of different ones like thyroid peroxidase. And and what's the doctor sorry,

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 14:50

for the thyroid globulin?

Margaret Romero, NP 14:52

Thyroid globulin? Yeah, thyroid globulin. So those two are the three very first things that I check and if we have an issue there. They're getting off gluten, like, right now, like yesterday, you're getting off gluten. Anyone with autoimmune for me, they got off gluten for at least six to nine months. If they have a thyroid issue, they have Hashimotos, those are uncovered, I don't find Hashimotos to be very difficult to reverse. It's pretty easy once you get them on some good supplements and a really good diet and also helping out with their stress. That's another huge one.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 15:33

So when you say when you say reverse? Oh, go ahead. No, no, go ahead. I was gonna say when you're when you say you don't find it that hard to reverse hicimos, you're talking about seeing the the auto immunity, the auto immune markers go away, are you talking about like being able to take people off of the thyroid medication,

Margaret Romero, NP 15:50

I'm definitely thyroid antibodies Go away Go down, like every three months. Um, and also to the point where they may not need thyroid medication, it depends it on the scenario. Also, if they have, if their thyroid is low, do secondary to their adrenal function, then sometimes it takes a little bit longer for those adrenals to sort of come back. Especially if they've been given like tons and tons of prednisone. For years and years, you know,

it's sometimes a little bit just takes the adrenals a little longer to come back. And they may need that thyroid support. You know, I don't need the thyroid support, you need thyroid support, sometimes I put them on compounded thyroid meds. Or sometimes they need a little depends what the numbers look like, they may need a little T three. And while we're still healing and diet is changing.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 16:51

That makes sense. And so I would guess that the number of people who have lupus I mean, we know, we know that if you have one autoimmune condition, you're a lot more likely to have another autoimmune, right? So I would imagine that there's a high number of people who have lupus who also have Hashimotos. Is that true?

Margaret Romero, NP 17:13

Who have passare, who have a large number both

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 17:16

you've got lupus, you're you know, so many more times likely to have Hashimotos.

Margaret Romero, NP 17:22

I would say no, that that's not I don't necessarily see the correlation of lupus and then you have Hashimotos I see the correlation of it started off as celiac, then became lupus, and then becomes sjogrens, or I see sjogrens and lupus as like the two double headers that come together. I see those really popular. Interesting. And the third one could be celiac. I see those are the three that usually are the three the trio.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 17:58

So when you take people off of gluten, what do you see in in people who have lupus

Margaret Romero, NP 18:07

I see oh my gosh, a reduction in their pain. That's number one. They used to get a lot of gas and bloating after eating and so there'd be a huge reduction in in those GI symptoms. They would stop becoming, you know, or stop having constipation, maybe their diarrhea has lessened as well. And so gluten also causes a lot of brain fog. Gluten brain is a thing it's real. And so brain fog memory issues will a lot of it you know will start to subside.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 18:50

Do you have any favorite tricks for getting rid of brain fog?

Margaret Romero, NP 18:55

That's a good one. So it for me it also depends on okay. Is it gluten? Is it heavy metals? Is it you know leaky gut leaky brain like what what's actually going on? So I kind of do some investigation but I love PQQ I love PQQ for brain. There's a combination. There's this Dr. Ayman has his he's got these great brain supplements and so he's got a great powder that's got so many things so amazing. I have you ever used any of his football? So I started giving it to my parents because we've got some cognitive issues. And I've definitely seen some nice changes. And so if I haven't, you know severe I would consider that but sometimes just removing the gluten will help us Then while we're healing the gut that it all helps.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 20:05

Excellent. And what is PQQ? For listeners out there?

Margaret Romero, NP 20:11

Oh, gosh, I don't even know what that stands for? Well, you don't have to anyone, it's so long. I actually use that in combination also with CoQ10. Have you seen those combinations with the it really helps with mitochondria to is, for me, it has been one of the number one like brain enhancers along with also I have to admit, balancing hormones and women. You know, sometimes it's been a puzzle. And we, you know, with very low estrogen levels. And so depending on the age, if a woman has just getting hurt, you know, normal periods every month clockwork, everything is good. I don't typically need to check their hormones. But if I've got someone perimenopause and going into menopause, then I do check. And depending on their symptoms, you know, I used to do a lot of hormone replacement therapy, but I do see a lot of brain fog and women who are period and going into menopause.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 21:24

Yeah, and I think it's really interesting that you said, you know, PQQ, and mitochondrial support really helps with balancing out those hormones. And that's what I've seen as well, you know, there's so much that we've learned about mitochondrial function over the last, you know, two decades. And, and, you know, the fact that it improves absorption of hormones at the cellular level, function, its relationship to some of these other hormones. Yeah, I could see why the the PQQ would would also be really helpful. I think that DQ increases the number of mitochondria.

Margaret Romero, NP 22:03

Yes. Yeah. So yeah, it's one of the things that I also have my parents taking, and it's also in that powder.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 22:13

Excellent. Yeah, we like to use it in our mitochondrial support as well. Yeah. Okay, great. So then, when you're looking at fatigue in lupus, what sort of you talked a little bit about some of the tests, but what sort of tests do you like to run?

Margaret Romero, NP 22:31

Wow, there's so many. I mean, aside from like, stool tests, you talking more like blood work?

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 22:39

Sure. Yeah. Whatever you can share with our audience stool test, you mentioned

Margaret Romero, NP 22:44

stool test is number one with auto immunity. And then I do a very comprehensive lab work. That checks for vitamin deficiencies. There's also I mean, there's just so many functional tests to be that could be run. I mean, there's cellular nutritional testing, and there's, you know, but most people want to utilize their insurance. So we'll, we'll do it that route for to see what we can uncover after so then there, I will also, depending on if they've had exposure, or they don't know, if they've had exposure to heavy metals, there's an option to do it with bloodwork, there's also an option to do hair analysis as well. And then sometimes we've got mold. And mold will cause fatigue, mold makes autoimmune conditions worse. And I love doing this urine Mold Test. And I mean, it. There's no other test for me that compares out there. And then so mold testing is also something I will check a C for a in the blood work to see what that number looks like. And if I get a high number we move on into the urine test.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 24:00

Nice, yeah. Nice. So then, what is your you talked about? Like going through a step by step process with your lupus patients? What does that look like?

Margaret Romero, NP 24:13

So the first things that I do is I start with urine. I mean, sorry, bloodwork and the stool. So we start there, because I even if they even if I did, like five or six tests and a million things came back, like we have to really like the gut comes first. Like we have to heal that and get rid of those pathogens like that's the immune system is sort of like housed in the gut. So when the gut is destroyed by pathogens and what have you, so that's normally where I'll start. Let's get your replenish. Let's get those supplement levels. Let's get those vitamin levels up. Let's do the stool. Testing, let's get rid of whatever we find in there and really build up. So you're,

you've got some good reserves to move on to like the next thing. And so then we could potentially move into mold testing we move into, I already would have checked hormones and knowing what's going on there. Maybe the next step would be like adrenals. And then working on the adrenals. Like, we can't do everything all at once, it just becomes overwhelming. Because with each thing, there's like a different a little bit of a different diet, you know, with adrenals, there's a different way of living and being if you have very low adrenal function, or if your adrenal number is through the roof to then there's a certain way to be and to live. And some people, you can't have five cups of coffee anymore. And so we do it in Does that make sense? Like we were doing step by step, a new test, like every month or two, two months, and then uncovering that and healing that.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 26:07

And what, what is the natural progression of improvement in lupus and in the lupus symptoms in your programs? So somebody joins your program now? Where would you like them to be in six months? Where would you like them to be in a year? Like, what does that timeline look like with all this?

Margaret Romero, NP 26:29

Yes. Okay. I love this question. So if they start, like in January, and we even with just those the Bloods and the stool, I would suspect that by the time like, even less than three months, like to between two and month two and three, I should see some resolution, like you should not be in so much anymore. And if you are, there's some, there's, we need to definitely dig deeper. But I'd say 85% of my patients have already a reduction in their pain, and they're feeling a lot better. Then, by the time month, six hits, you know, even even more like their sinus infections are gone. They're their allergy symptoms have lessened, they just, they're just feeling more vital and more like themselves. So they start to start to forget, like, what all of the symptoms they had when they first came in, because I'm always checking on those, like, every three to six months, like, Okay, you first told me you were getting like headaches, like every single day, how are those going and those headaches are gone, or they only have like, one a month rather than four times a week. And so I start to see the reduction in, in so many other symptoms.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 27:54

Excellent. And it sounds like you're using lifestyle changes, dietary changes, supplements, anything else?

Margaret Romero, NP 28:07

Um, and well would lifestyle mean also like the stress levels, and how to also reduce stress, more self care. And so we talked about that they tell me their deepest, darkest secrets, and if they've been through trauma, and so we talk about all of that. Yeah.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 28:29

That's such important work. Is such a big part of all this those negative emotional patterns.

Margaret Romero, NP 28:35

Yes. And, you know, it's vital in order to help fully heal. And I will tell you, that is one of the things that people do not want to deal or face with, they really, they really don't. And it's in it. So there's that, that vital component that's left out and sort of ignored even though I'm there and I'm, you know, though I'm not a therapist, and if I have them, you know, go to work with someone else. Some women are very against it, they just don't want to face the demons. You know, it's hard. Yeah, it is. It's,

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 29:18

it's uncomfortable. It's unknown. But in the right hands, you know, it's, it's, I think it's the most important work that we can do.

Margaret Romero, NP 29:27

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 29:30

Excellent. So where can people go to learn more about you, Margaret?

Margaret Romero, NP 29:36

Let's see. Um, so I've got a podcast called The sacred medicine podcast. You mentioned by book. I also I'm on Instagram every single day, so I love Instagram. It's Margaret Romero, on Instagram. Not really on Facebook. And my website is Margaret romero.com

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 29:58

wonderful and you have a free thing. For our audience, which is Margo romero.com/challenge. Can you tell us about that?

Margaret Romero, NP 30:06

Yeah, so it's a seven day lupus challenge. And every single day, I give you one thing that you can change in your life, maybe removing a particular food or implementing something into your daily life. And so the challenge is, is can you do all seven of them? And I love it. I think it really helps people just to kind of like, oh, really, I should. I never thought about this or I never thought about doing that or while removing gluten, you know, it's not an

overnight thing. But how about just removing like one thing that you're always eating? Like if it's pasta, like just replace it with gluten free pasta? So I, you know, it's a it's been a challenge. It's been around for a while, but I feel like people get a lot out of it.

Evan H. Hirsch, MD 30:58

Excellent. Yeah. If you've got lupus. Go ahead, dive into that challenge. Get started today. Well, Margaret, thank you so much for joining me here today. I really appreciate the value that you brought in. If you're watching this on YouTube. Go ahead, give it a thumbs up and subscribe so that you don't miss any more episodes. Thanks so much for having me. You bet.

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