

Interview Video Transcript
DR. WHITNEY BOWE

KERI GLASSMAN: Hello, everyone. I am So, excited about this interview today. Today we are chatting with Dr. Whitney Bowe. Whitney is one of my favorite people. She is also, my personal dermatologist. And you are So, lucky to be hearing directly from her today because she is such an incredible wealth of knowledge, one of the smartest people I know.

Whitney went to Yale undergrad and then Penn Medical School. You probably know her, by the way, from seeing her on Rachael Ray or Good Morning America. And if you don't follow her on Instagram, you absolutely need to do that. And that information will all be in the attachment. And definitely read the attachment to this video because I want you to read her entire bio because you will be So, uber impressed and also, lots of other good info there. So, without further ado, Dr. Whitney!

WHITNEY BOWE: Aw, thank you So, much for having me. I'm blushing.

KERI GLASSMAN: I'm So, happy that you're here today, such a treat to chat with you. I mean, we can always chat forever and forever. And I love talking with you. But I cannot wait for you to be able to share some of your incredible knowledge with our incredible Nutritious Life studio community, because I know they're going to soak it all up. And so, I'm super excited to chat with you today.

WHITNEY BOWE: Amazing. I'm So, excited to be here.

KERI GLASSMAN: All right. Awesome! So, let's just dive into it-- right into it. Oh, you know what else? I just want to mention your book, which is behind you right now. The Beauty of Dirty Skin is also, something if you haven't checked that out, you all should definitely check out. So, anyway, I just wanted to mention that. As I'm about to ask you your first question, I'm like, wait a minute, I got to point out that book I'm seeing right behind you.

So, let's get started. Our skin and our gut play a big role in immune health, as any of us know. How do you explain this link?

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WHITNEY BOWE: So, I love that you're bringing up immune health because I think it's so relevant, especially during the pandemic, right? It's coming up so often these days. People are thinking more and more about their overall immune health. And the gut and the skin, the way I like to think of them is they both are interfaces with the outside world, right? They are the primary way that we encounter the outside world.

So, our gut barrier, our gut lining, our skin barriers are absolutely critical in maintaining our health. And if our gut barrier is compromised, if our skin barrier is compromised, then what happens is that the ingredients and substances and molecules that are supposed to not come through are all of a sudden coming through, so, leaky gut, leaky skin. Those terms may not seem technical.

I remember when I first heard the term leaky gut, I was incredibly skeptical. But the more that the information is mounting, the more that we understand that leaky gut really is a thing. When you have a compromised intestinal lining and you have increased permeability and you have LPS and endotoxins actually going through what used to be sealed tight junctions, and now they're going into the bloodstream-- they're circulating throughout our body. They are stimulating and tickling our immune system, triggering inflammation that's resulting in system-wide inflammation and also, inflammation that you see in your skin.

So, when you spoke about the immune system, what's so important about the immune system, in terms of our gut lining, our gut barrier, and our skin barrier, is that we have-- because those are two of our interfaces with the outside world, our immune cells are lining those barriers. And the immune cell function is critical in those areas. So, in our gut, about 70% to 80% of our immune system resides in our gut. As you know, it's called the GALT, the Gut Associated Lymphoid Tissue.

And actually, our skin has its own immune system. And it's called the SALT, the Skin Associated Lymphoid Tissue. And it's—

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KERI GLASSMAN: It's so fascinating.

WHITNEY BOWE: Right. And it's not surprising that the immune system plays such an important role in the gut and in the skin. Because if you think about how every second of every day, our gut is making decisions. Is this something we want? Is this an important nutrient that we need? Is this something we want to take in? or is this something you want to keep housed in the lumen of the gut and we want to excrete it?

And our skin is making the decision, like, OK, wait, it's moisture. It's water. Oh, that I want to trap in. Oh, wait, it's allergens. It's irritants. It's pollutants. It's pathogens. I want to block that out. I'm a healthy skin barrier. I'm a smart skin barrier. I want to block that out. So, because of the very similar role of our gut lining and our skin lining, it's not surprising that the immune system is So, deliberately positioned in both of those areas.

KERI GLASSMAN: Yeah. And it's So, fascinating because we know that clean beauty is now such a big thing that didn't exist a decade ago, maybe, even. It didn't-- just in the recent history, it didn't even really exist.

WHITNEY BOWE: Even a couple of years ago, quite honestly, it wasn't something that was accepted by the mainstream as something desirable. Like maybe a few people. Environmentalists were talking about it. Certain researchers were talking about these potential carcinogens and hormone disruptors. But it wasn't part of our vernacular.

KERI GLASSMAN: Right. And when you think about it—

WHITNEY BOWE: The consumer wasn't looking for it.

KERI GLASSMAN: Right. Exactly. And when you think about it, the way you describe the gut and your skin health, when you think about it, it's like looking back years ago when no one

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knew-- people didn't think of these packaged processed foods as being unhealthy for them. They were like, oh, they're fine, whatever foods they are. Like, people didn't realize how bad some of these highly processed, packaged foods were and how unhealthy these added unhealthy ingredients were for us, right? And now we know, of course.

And when we ingest them, we know what happens. But it's So, interesting how it's really completely analogous to putting things on your skin. And many of us have bought into clean beauty and do have an understanding of that. But I love the way that you just simplify that. And also, I really do. I think we're going to look back and say, I can't believe we used to put those things on our skin. I can't believe we used to do that.

WHITNEY BOWE: I think there's So, much behind the clean beauty movement. I'm So, attracted to So, many aspects of it. But it is definitely something that is evolving.

KERI GLASSMAN: Oh, absolutely.

WHITNEY BOWE: I think we started with this concept of clean eating, and I think that we have learned So, much about the gut and which ingredients and when you comb through that ingredient list, what to look for, what not to look for. We have a much more concrete understanding of that. I think we're still learning. And there is still some confusion. The clean beauty world is still a bit messy.

KERI GLASSMAN: Oh, absolutely.

WHITNEY BOWE: Yeah. One of the classic examples there is when you think about a healthy skin barrier, a healthy skin barrier traps, moisture traps water, So, it keeps the skin hydrated. But it keeps out those irritants that trigger chronic inflammation. It keeps out the pathogens. It keeps out the pollutants.

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And interestingly, a lot of the clean beauty brands took out synthetic fragrance for a good reason-- for a good reason. Synthetic fragrance can contain ingredients like phthalates, which is a hard word to spell. It's P-H-T-H-A-L-A-T-E-S. So, it took out phthalates, took out the synthetic musks. Those are potential hormone disruptors.

And I think it's a wonderful thing that a lot of these brands are formulated without those synthetic fragrances. But what did they then do? They then added a lot of essential oils, sometimes in high concentrations. And what a lot of people don't realize is that a lot of the essential oils and certain botanical ingredients are actually irritants and can actually basically do damage to the skin barrier.

So, things like cinnamon, clove, oregano, lemongrass, jasmine, peppermint are known irritants on the skin. And then our citrus essential oils, So, things like lemon, lime, bergamot, orange, grapefruit, those can be phototoxic, meaning if they're on the skin and you go outside, it can actually react with your skin and make it more sensitive to the sun. Meanwhile, we're all preaching sunscreen and a hat.

And so, I think we're learning. I'm not saying all essential oils are bad in skincare. I'm just saying it's one of those things that sometimes when you take out what's not a clean ingredient, you sort of replace it with something that you just assume is going to be inherently safe. And when it comes to the skin, it's a little bit more complicated than that. So, I think clean beauty is great, and I love the concept. But I feel like it's going to go through some more changes in the next couple of years.

KERI GLASSMAN: I am So, happy you brought that up because it isn't as simple as, oh, make it all natural. And just because something is an added chemical-- I mean an added ingredient to something doesn't innately make it unhealthy for you, either, right?

WHITNEY BOWE: Hyaluronic acid isn't natural. It's not like we're going out in the fields and harvesting and extracting hyaluronic acid. It's actually through a process of fermentation in a

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laboratory setting. And then we purify the molecule, and we add it to the serum. And it's one of the most amazing ingredients in skincare.

Retinol-- I can't even go through the list of these, what I call, safe synthetics, the ingredients that are made in a laboratory setting. I think there's the misconception that if something is natural, it's inherently safe. And there's also, a misconception that just because it's natural, it may be sustainable and sustainably sourced and better for the environment. And it's actually not always the case.

So, I love natural ingredients. But when they're sustainably sourced, when they're safe for the skin, it's like a win-win. Then it's like, oh, my gosh, I'd rather have something natural than not. But I think those nuances, we have to keep those in mind, yeah.

KERI GLASSMAN: Well, that's like-- I mean, just skin care, the same thing as food, right? It's more complicated than just-- you know what actually this kind of reminds me? What we're talking about reminds me a little bit or it could be analogous to way back, when the fat free era was going on, and people and all these manufacturers took fat out because we thought fat was bad for us. And they added sugar. Oh, sugars just calories. It's fat free.

And obviously we knew that has blown up in everyone's face and was absolutely the absolute wrong thing to do and that we need some fat. And anyway, we don't need to go down that road. But it's kind of analogous to it.

WHITNEY BOWE: It's a beautiful analogy. And another classic example there is that people were concerned about parabens. Parabens are potential hormone disruptors. They have been found in breast cancer tissue. And yes, that's correlation, not causation, right? So, we have-- but at the same time, there's concerning data. There's concerning data.

So, a lot of companies took out parabens because the consumers don't want parabens. And they replaced it with other preservatives like methylchloroisothiazolinone-- and I hope I'm saying

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that right-- but other preservatives that are actually known irritants, known allergens, problematic. So, exactly what you're saying is that just because it's free of or made without, I think that the concept of taking something out is only important if you know what's being added back in. So, it's what's in the product, not just what it's made without that matters.

KERI GLASSMAN: Right. There's a bigger picture to look at. So, actually I'm going to stick with the sugar for a moment now that we got on to sugar a little bit in that example. I want to ask you about sugar and inflammation and acne because I know we get that question. Many of us working with clients get that question a lot. How does sugar-- well, we know sugar affects inflammation in our body. But how does that then affect acne, and what's the role?

WHITNEY BOWE: Yeah, I think intuitively, people know sugar's bad, right? But they don't know exactly what are the stats.

KERI GLASSMAN: Exactly.

WHITNEY BOWE: So, sugar affects the skin in two negative ways. So, one is through a process called glycation. So, when you have highly refined processed foods, whether they're a refined carbohydrate like a bagel or a white bagel-- not all bagels are bad but-- or you're having pretzels and dried fruit and cupcakes, things like that, then it's going to release a lot of those sugars rapidly into the bloodstream. And the actual sugar molecule can bind to proteins in the skin, So, things like collagen, elastic fibers.

And that process of glycation then tells the body to target those molecules for destruction. So, it actually breaks them down faster than our body's able to replace them. So, you can imagine that's going to accelerate the aging process.

And we see that in some diabetics. If their blood sugar levels are not as controlled over the years, they will have a much more accelerated aging process in the face with fine lines and crazy texture around their eyes, especially around on their neck area, et cetera. So, the other

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mechanism by which sugars and refined carbohydrates are detrimental for the skin is actually through more of a hormonal cascade.

So, if you eat high glycemic index foods, refined carbohydrates, and sugars, it leads to a spike in the blood sugar, a spike in the blood insulin. And that leads to an increase in insulin-like growth factor 1, which triggers a cascade of events that actually makes acne and inflammation in the skin worse. And we have beautiful randomized controlled-- placebo-controlled trials in humans, living, breathing humans, who went from eating a high glycemic index diet to a low glycemic index diet. And their acne cleared up. And it's statistically significant.

And this type of study has been repeated. So, we know that these sugary and refined carbs are directly linked with inflammatory acne. And you can actually see a statistical reduction in lesion count and inflammation in the skin if you switch to a lower glycemic load diet.

KERI GLASSMAN: And we know there's So, many reasons we shouldn't be eating sugar, anyway, right? Or we should be eating a very minimal amount of added sugar. So, I think when people understand the connection to skin and understand a little bit more of that science that you just explained and the research there, it's a big motivating factor for people, another motivating factor for people to reduce their intake. So, that's super helpful.

WHITNEY BOWE: There is one more thing I can't not say because it's very new and very cutting edge, and I feel like your Nutritious Life audience has to hear it first. So, I was just asked to be the chairperson of a conference for dermatologists, educating dermatologists on the gut-skin connection because the science is massively confusing.

KERI GLASSMAN: I told you, people. She's a wealth of knowledge.

WHITNEY BOWE: So, just this concept that when you think about sugar and sugary foods, especially when you're thinking about the sugary foods and the refined foods, they're lower in your prebiotics and your prebiotic fiber, right? So, you're basically starving the good bugs in

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your microbiome in the gut. And when you create that dysbiosis and you sort of disrupt the balance and you lose that beautiful diversity in the gut microbiome because you're eating sugary processed foods, that by itself has tremendous impacts on your overall health, your ability to maintain a healthy weight, your metabolism. But it also, impacts the skin.

So, having that dysbiosis in the gut, we're seeing that that's linked with things like acne-- rosacea is a really big one there-- perioral dermatitis, eczema, and atopic dermatitis, psoriasis. So, I'm literally asking these speakers and going through all their slides. And the mountain of data showing that our gut health-- which is almost inextricably linked to our microbial health within our gut and that beautiful ecosystem within our gut. If our microbiome in our gut is healthy and robust and diverse, we are much more likely to be able to dial down the levels of inflammation in the skin and get a lot of these chronic skin conditions under control, which can also, slow down signs of aging as well.

KERI GLASSMAN: I mean, it's So, incredible. And it's So, incredible, again, how everything is linked, right? And I say that often. What's good for your brain health is going to be good for your heart health is going to be good for your immune health. So, really, I love how you just connect all of these dots.

WHITNEY BOWE: Well, the skin is really a window into our overall health. It is all connected. And I say that I take an integrative approach or a holistic approach, which there are more and more derms who are starting to understand that the skin is very much connected to the gut, the brain, the mind, the stress levels, our sleep habits, our exercise habits. And it was not something that we were trained in.

I had wonderful training. I trained under the person who developed Retin-A and patented it. I mean, I couldn't have had better training. And yet I can tell you that this concept of-- how long did we spend on diet and nutrition in my dermatology residency? Carey, it's embarrassing. I don't even want to admit to how little. And we really didn't talk about exercise. And we didn't

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talk about stress and the stress-skin connection and cortisol and how it actually inhibits production of collagen and hyaluronic acid and ceramides in the skin.

But we have this data now. And if you ignore it, and you just treat the skin from the outside in with skin care products, which believe me are important-- I'm not saying the skin care's not important. But if you just take that very sort of two-dimensional approach to the skin, you're never going to have truly beautiful, radiant skin that glows with health.

KERI GLASSMAN: Right. And that is why I love you.

WHITNEY BOWE: And I love you.

KERI GLASSMAN: That is why I love you because that is So, brilliant. But by the way, though, your experience, I think, in med school was similar to my experience when I became a registered dietician, where when even when I started my practice-- we've had this conversation that I used to ask people, again, not just about their diet and their exercise, but about their sleep and their stress and their relationships. And they would look at me like I was crazy.

And I would explain to them how physiologically it's all connected. So, this is, again, one of the many reasons why I love you. But this was So, incredibly helpful and really just so-- I'm So, grateful for your time. Thank you So, much for everything you just shared. And I hope that our community gets to hear from you again. We'll do more fun stuff together. But I am So, appreciative of having you here.

So, also, I want you to tell everybody where-- first of all, you've got to go by the book *The Beauty of Dirty Skin*. And then-- or right now, before you even do that, first go follow Whitney at-- what is your Instagram handle again?

WHITNEY BOWE: @drwhitneybowe, at Dr. Whitney Bowe. I'm having So, much fun on Instagram and TikTok. And I even started focusing on YouTube lately.

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KERI GLASSMAN: Your videos have been amazing.

WHITNEY BOWE: It's been a lot of fun.

KERI GLASSMAN: Your videos have been amazing.

WHITNEY BOWE: They're really fun. The [INAUDIBLE] short sound byte thing is just like-- it's just a pleasure. And I feel like people are-- it's like short, digestible information. Who has time to sit and listen to these long detailed-- or read these long blogs? I am a dork. I'll do it. I'll make the time for it.

But most people don't. They're on the toilet, and they're scrolling through. You want something quick that you can digest.

So, I've been having a lot of fun with that. But Carey, thank you So, much for having me. I have worked with your students and alums before, and they always ask the best questions. So, it really ups the threshold and the ante for me to make sure that I'm delivering. So, I really hope that they got something out of this, and I would love to come back.

KERI GLASSMAN: Amazing. Well, thank you So, much. Mwah!

WHITNEY BOWE: Mwah! [LAUGHS]