

Module 6 Lesson 1

Transcript

Autoimmune diseases are really prevalent and they can be super complicated. My goal here is to help you wrap your head around what they are and what's going on in the body, but I couldn't possibly list and go into detail on every single one. So, we're going to cover the basics of what you absolutely need to know about autoimmune diseases. Also, if you have a client with an autoimmune disease, especially a more rare disease that we don't cover here, keep in mind that you're probably going to need to do some research and always work with recommendations made by your client's medical provider. Unfortunately, many of these diseases aren't widely studied, so you might have your homework cut out for you there.

Today's lesson is Autoimmune 101. We're going to learn what autoimmune diseases are and set the foundation for the next few lessons. Specifically, we're going to talk about what an autoimmune disease is, a few examples of autoimmune disease, some statistics on the prevalence of autoimmune disease, what you should keep in mind when you're working with someone who is living with an autoimmune disease, and of course, how you can support these clients.

So, first things first, what are autoimmune diseases? An autoimmune disease is a condition in which your immune system mistakenly attacks your body. Basically, the immune system, which usually does a great job fighting and attacking bacteria, germs and viruses, can't tell the difference between foreign cells and your own cells. With an autoimmune disease, the immune system mistakes part of your body, like your joints or skin, as foreign. It releases proteins, called autoantibodies, that attack healthy cells. A famous autoimmune disease that you may be familiar with, but maybe never thought of as an autoimmune, is Type 1 diabetes, where the pancreas is attacked by the immune system and the cells that make insulin are destroyed.

Lupus is another autoimmune disease, where the whole body gets attacked. We see that women of childbearing age are the most sensitive to developing an autoimmune disease, and women are two times more likely than men to come down with one. Almost six and a half percent of women and just shy of three percent of men suffer in the U.S. On top of that, certain autoimmune diseases are more common in certain ethnic groups than others. We don't know the how, who are the whys of people developing autoimmune diseases, but researchers suspect a high fat Western diet may be causal. Also, chemical exposure, vaccinations decreased or increased exposure to certain infections and a complicated mix of things just may be to blame.

There are even tons of obscure autoimmune diseases. So I had a client, Marlow, who has an IgA antibody disease. His kidney cells are under attack and he's got to keep his protein intake below 60 grams a day. Even with that restriction, he's likely going to require a transplant and dialysis as he ages, at some point in the future, he's going to need that. This disease is so rare and research is so limited that we're really grasping at straws to just figure out his best path. Honestly, I spent a lot of time researching his disease and recommend you do the same, if you have a client with a lesser known autoimmune disease. Again, I mentioned that many of these diseases are obscure.

Go ahead and refer to your handout for more specifics. I'm just going to mention some of the biggies here. These are the ones that you're most likely to come across. So first up, Type 1 diabetes, which I already mentioned. This is when the body attacks the pancreas, which affects insulin producing cells and may lead to cellular damage and affects the heart, kidneys, nerves, and eyes. Rheumatoid arthritis, also called RA, is another common autoimmune disease that affects the joints and causes swelling, pain and stiffness. Psoriasis, I'm sure many of you have come across people with psoriasis, comes from the skin attacking itself. There are tons more, including irritable bowel disease, Graves' disease, celiac disease, Addison's disease. There are more than 80 autoimmune diseases out there and you're going to find a lot more listed in your handout.

Most of the autoimmune diseases we see have similar symptoms. They include fatigue, achy muscles, swelling and redness, low grade fever, trouble concentrating, numbness and tingling in the hands and feet, hair loss and skin rashes. The complicated thing about these symptoms is that they may not be chronic, they may come and they may go. You may see different symptoms in different people with the same autoimmune disease, so they can be really hard to figure out and pin down. There also isn't one lab test that can tell us if you have an autoimmune disease, but often, the first test is an anti-nuclear antibody test, or ANA, that screens to see if antibodies are present. If a client is experiencing autoimmune-like symptoms and you can't quite put your finger on what's going on, absolutely suggest they see their doctor, who will look at different lab values and tests. This can also be a pretty frustrating experience because it's just not black and white. On top of that, there's not an autoimmune disease doctor who you may go to. You may see a dermatologist for psoriasis and a GI doc for IBD. It's confusing and time consuming to figure out. You really have to be supportive of these clients. Each disease has its own medical intervention and may include immune suppressing medications or steroids or nonsteroidal medications, which we'll discuss in a later lesson.

So what about diet and lifestyle here? We have another lesson completely dedicated to nutrition, but I want to touch on a few key points now, just to set the stage. So we do know that a healthy anti-inflammatory diet and exercise are really helpful, proactive tools to the management of

all autoimmune related diseases and disorders. There's a large body of research showing the connection between a typical Western diet, think fast and processed foods, and autoimmune disease. There's also research showing that exercise can be a therapeutic tool to counteract inflammation and clinical symptoms in autoimmune diseases.

It's really important to prioritize anti-inflammatory foods like whole fruits and vegetables, minimally processed foods and lots and lots of water. There's a great handout from TNS level one, all about anti-inflammatory foods and the foods you're also going to want to avoid. So definitely refer back to that to refresh your memory. We're keeping our eye on something out there called the Autoimmune Protocol Diet, which is basically an anti-inflammatory diet similar to the paleo diet. There's some research showing this can work with IBD, but since it's fairly new, as a protocol, the evidence isn't huge yet. That said, it may be worth trying with clients who are really struggling.

All right, let's review the key points from today. An autoimmune disease is a condition in which your immune system mistakenly attacks your body. Symptoms vary among different diseases and individuals, but in general, you're going to see things like fatigue, achy muscles, swelling and redness, fever, trouble concentrating, hair loss and rashes. An anti-inflammatory diet and exercise has been shown to improve symptoms of autoimmune diseases. You're going to want to work with clients on eliminating inflammatory foods like processed and packaged foods, and focusing on anti-inflammatory foods, like fresh vegetables and fruits. I am so looking forward to diving deeper into all of this in the next few lessons. I'll see you there.