You Could Have an Autoimmune Disease and Not Even Know

by Dr. Chad Larson  •  July 14, 2015

Do you suffer from any of the following symptoms on a regular basis: bloating, brain fog, headaches, joint or muscle pain, depression, or difficulty with digestion? If you do, you may just be one of the up to 50 million people in the United States with an autoimmune disorder. What is surprising is that of the 50 million people who have an autoimmune disease, 75 percent of them are women. According to Healthline, there may be as many as 80 autoimmune diseases, and some of the most common include lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, multiple sclerosis, type 1 diabetes, Grave's disease, and Hashimoto's disease.
Many autoimmune disorders have similar symptoms, which make them very difficult to diagnose. Having one autoimmune disorder makes it more likely that you will develop another. These diseases and disorders usually fluctuate between periods of remission (little/no symptoms) and flare-ups (worsening symptoms). There are no known cures for autoimmune diseases, so treatment focuses on relieving the symptoms. These symptoms usually affect joints, muscles, skin, red blood cells, blood vessels, connective tissues, and endocrine glands.

While no one can pinpoint the exact cause of autoimmune diseases and disorders, one thing is certain—autoimmune diseases are more common in developed countries and less common in undeveloped countries. Researchers are currently finding evidence that is leading some to believe that the Western diet may indeed be one of the underlying causes of autoimmune disorders. The Western diet tends to be high in refined carbohydrates, unhealthy fats, sugar, sodium—the kind of diet that could lead to food sensitivities and abnormal reactions by the immune system. Food sensitivities have the potential of producing an autoimmune response or acting as a trigger in some people.

Studies have shown that our bodies produce measurable immune reactions in response to a trigger (stress, dietary or environmental) up to nine years before we may begin showing symptoms like fatigue or depression. These predictive immune antibodies provide a clue that is key to managing and eliminating that trigger. Many healthcare providers fear majority of autoimmune diseases are not diagnosed until after a significant amount of damage to essential organs and tissues has already occurred. This does not need to happen. Predictive autoantibodies give us the opportunity to eliminate the trigger and possibly avoid being diagnosed with the disease all together. If you are having symptoms it’s time to enlist the help of your health care provider.

Talk to your doctor about your symptoms and discuss all possible reasons for your discomfort, including diet. If you have gastrointestinal issues, make note of what you have eaten and any patterns in your symptoms so you can discuss how your diet is affecting you. If you believe that a certain food is triggering any of your symptoms, talk to your doctor about getting a food sensitivity test. There are specialized labs like Cyrex Laboratories that focus on providing accurate testing for autoimmune responses and food sensitivities.

As devastating as a diagnosis of an autoimmune disorder can be, take comfort in knowing that testing can provide a way to shut down an autoimmune disease before it gets out of control. Take action and make an appointment to talk with your health care provider today. Not only can you be tested for food sensitivities, but you can also take the next step to find out the extent of possible dysregulation by your immune system.

If you have symptoms, contact your doctor and start asking questions. Finding out answers is the first step to taking control of your health. Test, don't guess.