

What is Immunity?

An essay from Lauren's forthcoming book, Restoring Your Immunity

Our immune system and its strength have everything to do with our body's ability to heal itself whether that be a cold or cancer. If we want to stay healthy naturally then the only path is to optimize the function of our immune system. But what really does the immune system do? Simply put, the work of the immune system is to distinguish between what serves as a benefit to your body and what does not. The question that our immune system constantly faces is whether it is more beneficial to negotiate, accept, and integrate an element to diversify and strengthen our microbiota OR to neutralize and eliminate the element because it is likely harmful. Needless to say, our immune system is at work 24/7.

What we experience from the hard work of this system is a thing called "immunity". This immunity is experienced in our physical, mental and emotional bodies. In order to take on the task of restoring immunity on all levels, we must first deepen our understanding of it.

Before my personal health journey began I had very little knowledge in this area and what I did have came from a middle school science lesson. In 7th-grade health class, when not crushing over the entirely gorgeous young Mr. Floyd, I learned that immunity is what keeps me healthy. I also learned that on the flip side it was to blame when I have long flu or a cold-filled winter. As it turns out, there is more to immunity than that. Most importantly is that the lifestyle we adopt can directly influence our immune response to a much greater degree than a packet or two of Emergen-C.

By the end of this essay, should you discover your immunity

could benefit from some fortification, then you will find a path to do just that.

Defining Immunity

Here is a sampling of what you may come across as definitions of immunity.

Webster's Dictionary describes immunity as

A condition of being able to resist a particular disease especially through preventing the development of a pathogenic microorganism.

Wikipedia states that

immunity is a balanced state of multicellular organisms having adequate biological defenses to fight infection, disease, or unwanted biological invasion.

Author and director of the 2018 Real Immunity DocuSeries, Cilla Whatcott Ph.D., shares this:

Your innate health and immunity are what keeps you healthy long-term and prevents chronic disease.

Martin J. Blaser, physician and author of the best-selling book *Missing Microbes*, breaks the definition down into the two types of immunity we possess:

We are born with an innate immunity, a collection of proteins, cells, detergents, and junctions that guard our surfaces based on recognition of structures that are widely shared among classes of microbes.

In contrast, we must develop an adaptive immunity that will clearly distinguish self from non-self. Our early life microbes are the first teachers in this process, instructing the developing immune system about what is dangerous and what is not.

Blaser goes on to explain how critical the early childhood years are in the development of immunity,

By age three each of us has acquired our own unique foundation of microbes. Those first three years, when the resident microbes are most dynamic, are when the baby is developing metabolically, immunologically and neurologically. This critical period lays the foundation for all the biological processes that unfold in our childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age—unless something comes along to disrupt it.

The Immune System at Work

Our immune system keeps itself busy with a host of continuous activity such as:

- Neutralizing pathogens like bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi that have entered the body, and removing them
- Recognizing and neutralizing harmful substances from the environment
- Fighting against the body's own cells that have changed due to an illness, for example, cancerous cells

I enjoy coaching parents to spot the signs of a healthy or weak immune system at work in their children. When parents learn what to observe in a child at the start of an acute illness they tend to become better observers of their own body and its responses. When a healthy immune system is at work it takes energy from less critical functions. Here are four that are easily identified as they slow or shut down during the healing process:

- One's capacity for problem-solving: mental function
- One's capacity for stress or criticism: emotional function
- One's desire for food: appetite
- One's desire for activity: physical energy

Through the appearance of these symptoms of slowing down non-essential functions the body is asking for our help with these mental, emotional and physical symptoms.

Just as these can be noted at the start of an illness the return to normal function serves as a sign that the work of the immune system was successful. As mental and emotional function restores and appetite and physical energy return, then you know you or your child is improving from whatever acute condition was experienced.

An indication of a weakened immunity in yourself or a child could be any of the following symptoms:

- Prolonged low-grade fever
- Continued loss of appetite
- Continued weakened physical state
- Continued sensitivity to stimulation and interactions with others

What do you recall about the last acute illness you experienced, perhaps a virus or flu?

Can you bring to mind the days preceding?

Can you remember experiencing a lack of mental stamina or feeling emotionally sensitive?

What about a loss of appetite or physical energy?

Have you ever been able to “catch” yourself and slow down at one of these first signs?

While the internal actions of your immune system are not visible, you can learn to become careful observers of the outward signs. Tapping into this awareness is one giant step forward on your personal path to restoring immunity. Choosing and making appropriate choices to support the work of the

immune system will take the courage, creativity, and commitment that I discussed in last week's post, What it takes. What actions you can take to specifically support your immunity will be the topic of upcoming posts.

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A Simple Squash Stew

Just in time for Halloween is this take on Anna Jones' six-ingredient squash stew. There happen to be just a few more than six ingredients but they are all items you're likely to have on hand.

Ingredients

Olive oil, for frying

1 onion, peeled and finely chopped

1 fennel bulb, finely chopped (or a small celery root, peeled and chopped)

2 carrots, finely chopped

Salt and black pepper

1.5kg (3 lbs) kabocha squash chopped into bite sized pieces keeping the peel intact (or pumpkin, delicata, or butternut will do as well)

1 small bunch of fresh thyme leaves, discarding the stems or chopped fine

1 handful split red lentils

1 vegetable bouillon cube

1 can of chickpeas, rinsed and drained

Plant-based natural yogurt for topping (I like Forager's Cashewgurt)

To Prepare

1. Heat olive oil in a large heavy soup pot, add each of the chopped vegetables (except the squash) one at a time, giving each a few minutes to saute and soften before adding another.
2. Add the squash, thyme and the handful of lentils. Cover with water and bring to a boil.
3. Turn to medium heat, cover and cook until squash is tender, 20-30 minutes.
4. While soup cooks pan roast chickpeas in a small amount of oil on medium heat until outer skin is toasted
5. When all vegetables are tender in the stew add the boullion cube, stirring to dissolve well.
6. Serve with a dollop of yogurt and a sprinkling of roasted chickpeas

Enjoy!

What it Takes

An essay from Lauren's forthcoming book, Restoring Your Immunity

"Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue constantly.

~ Maya Angelou

There was a period of my life I lived out as a fearful, exhausted and overwhelmed woman. You can learn more about her in my post, Developing Purpose. When reflecting on what it

took for me to transform to the woman I am today, three qualities come to mind. Those qualities are courage, creativity, and commitment. Of course, I had good teachers and therapies to support this transformation, but without these qualities, the changes I set out to make would not have held.

You too will need to discover those qualities within yourself to be successful in restoring your immunity. There's a big noisy world out there that doesn't exactly encourage the lifestyle you will begin to adopt and you are going to have to get comfortable with that fact is critical. In my work as a family health coach, I have had the honor of observing clients engage with their own courage, creativity, and commitment as they began making changes. Let me share a few of their stories.

Courage

Courage is essential when the lifestyle changes you adopt bump up against the norm of your family, peers, or colleagues. To take those first steps forward requires being completely OK with being THAT person. Because truthfully, it will be you who needs to pass over Aunt Lou's dairy-laden scalloped potatoes as well as that slice of chocolate cream torte in the window of the Italian bakery on your romantic getaway.

You will more than likely have to be the one at your office lunch meeting who specifically orders their salad without cheese, only to find it coated in parmesan! You may also discover that you no longer embrace those weekly late night outs with the guys or gals on the town with the same zeal as before. In order for you to discover that courage within, you must become comfortable putting yourself and your needs first, accepting that is not selfish, but rather what self-care looks like.

Here's a recent example of courage I saw in my practice. Living in a small town in East Texas, Dee knew finding local

company or encouragement on her path to health would be a challenge, but she accepted that she would need to manage alone. It had become clear to her that the way she was taught to feed and care for her body was no longer serving her. She dealt with daily digestive symptoms and interrupted sleep. It was taking a toll on her emotionally, causing spikes of anxiety, and beginning to affect her work performance. Something had to change, and without an ally among her hometown friends or family members, she drew on the courage that she discovered years ago when she took on a career path that was out of her comfort zone. She chose to stop making excuses for the healthy choices she needed to make and accepted she was on the right personal path. As her physical symptoms improved, so did her confidence in what she was capable of. Whether Dee realized it or not, by her staying true to her body and her convictions she actually gave her peers permission to do the same. Being courageous is far from selfish – it actually allows us to serve others by our example.

Creativity

Creativity is what comes into play when we choose a path less traveled. This is particularly true when the path is one that leads to restored health and, ultimately, restored immunity. It will take a creative mind to step back and even consider there may be a different approach than those pursued in the past. Creativity is also needed in a very practical way every day as we navigate a world that doesn't eat like we chose to.

Creativity is needed to solve the following...

How do I still go out to lunch with friends?

How will I manage the string of upcoming holiday parties or family celebrations?

How do I create foods that I'm excited to be eating?

The answers to each of these questions involve stepping

outside of the box of how things have been done in the past. Start by locating small shifts that can be made. It takes a creative spirit to be willing to fail miserably and try again until we meet success.

There is no finer example of embodying this kind of creativity than my niece, who is also my client. Raising five children and living with the symptoms of Crohn's takes a creativity all its own. When she decided to turn the tables and embrace a plant-based lifestyle in the middle of Montana, she would need to be highly resourceful.

Determined to change her health story, Molly not only flipped her diet but the diet of her children who at the time were ages 1-10 years. They became breakfast smoothie drinking champs! Molly's creativity is certainly an inspiration for others, just as your creative solutions will inspire those whose lives you touch. Molly's way of eating and feeding her children is challenged on a daily basis by time constraints and also by extended family and peers. Yet Molly has persevered by enlisting her children in daily meal prep and carving out time on the weekends between soccer matches and 4-H events for batch cooking. What Molly soon realized was that the better she felt physically, the more creative energy she had to explore new ways of feeding herself and her family.

Commitment

Commitment is a quality that must be developed internally and cannot spring from someone else's opinion of a good idea. Commitment to a lifestyle must resonate with your belief system. If you're unsure of your own belief system regarding your health and healing have a look at my post titled An Invitation.

To be committed you must believe in what you are doing. A commitment is strengthened when it aligns with our truth and we begin to appreciate the way we feel. Just take a look at

other commitments you've made in your life. Whether it's been to a particular relationship, to raising their children, finishing an advanced degree, or learning a language, you have drawn on your own inner strength to see it through.

Can you draw on the same motivation and apply it now to the pursuit of restored health and immunity? It is commitment that truly holds all of this together. You can have all of the courage and creativity in the world, but without commitment, it's all for naught.

My client Lydia had tried it all, and while she had some success, she still had a few nagging symptoms. She wanted to feel strong and vibrant and knew a "diet" wouldn't deliver the results that lifestyle changes could. Lydia knew the only way to make progress was to stay on track. As a working mom of two young children, Lydia knew all about courage and creativity but now she needed to commit to a new lifestyle. Her desire to be healthy and strong for her family provided the motivation she needed to get started. However, it was the pleasure she felt as her symptoms began to resolve that kept her committed. The better Lydia felt the deeper her commitment became to the changes she was making.

These are just three short examples of what I see unfold in my practice week after week. Normal people like you, ready to feel better and willing to put to use their own courage, creativity, and commitment.

Reflection

To gain some clarity in where you stand, take a moment to reflect and write your answers to the following three questions:

What obstacles will you face that will require you to be courageous?

What situations will you encounter that would benefit from

creative solutions?

What are some examples of successful commitments you've made in the past?

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Loaded Miso

This soup is so nutrient dense yet simple it certainly belongs in your weekly lineup through the cold months ahead. I was introduced to miso soup by my German homeopath one long winter when, after a bout of bronchitis, I could not regain my strength. I clearly remember my search for miso in Germany brought me to a back alley herbalist shop in Heidelberg. The scoop of paste I purchased provided many nourishing bowls of soup, aiding my recovery.

While there is a suggested list of veggies below, please feel free to sub in whatever you have on hand. Bittman's recipe called for turnips but, as they aren't a favorite at my house, I tend to use broccoli or cauliflower in bite-sized florets. Chop the vegetables while the kombu soaks and you will have a meal ready in minutes.

Ingredients

(makes 2 meal-sized servings)

- * 1 strip kombu (dried kelp)
- * 1 handful sliced shiitake mushrooms
- * Coconut oil
- * $\frac{1}{2}$ Cup miso (I prefer the chickpea version)

- * Carrots, grated
- * Broccoli or Cauliflower cut or broken into bite-sized florets (steamed)
- * 1 TBSP Ginger root, grated
- * 1 bunch of leafy greens (bok choy, Dino Kale, or Collards)
- * 1 handful cooked edamame
- * Scallions

To Prepare

1. Bring 6 cups of water to simmer and add one strip kombu; let it soak 10 minutes, then remove it and chop; set aside.
2. Meanwhile, saute a handful of sliced shiitakes in coconut oil until crisp.
3. Whisk a cup of the water with 1/2 cup miso in a bowl until smooth.
4. Pour the miso mix into the remaining water and add veggies and ginger, the chopped kombu.
5. Let stand long enough to heat through, about a minute. Add some chopped scallions and the crisp shiitakes and serve and enjoy!

Adapted from Mark Bittman's Loaded Miso.

Developing Purpose

An essay from Lauren's forthcoming book, Restoring Your Immunity

If we wish to live well in the world, not just amble along through life without any examination of our being, then we must engage in the effort to find meaning in our lives.

-Eido Frances Carney

What I have learned personally and in my work as a family health coach is that change requires motivation, and motivation must be supported by a purpose. In the post, *Restoring Immunity from the Inside Out*, I shared a bit about the personal purpose behind restoring my own immunity. However, please indulge me with a few more minutes of your time. I believe it's important to have a sense of just how weak I was, both emotionally and physically, seventeen years ago when my own journey began.

Imagine me then, a 41-year old breastfeeding mother of a 3-month old. Although this was my first child, I was fearful and exhausted as I sat in the Heidelberg, Germany, practice of my MD homeopath. I was still trying to regain my strength post-C-section and suffering under a dark veil of postpartum depression. It had been just 7 months from surgery to remove melanoma cancer, and I had faced two back to back staph infections in the past twelve weeks. As if all that weren't enough, I had a sinus infection and was barely managing 2-3 hours of solid sleep a night. I was teaching high school full time and juggling the emotional highs and lows that two teenage daughters can offer.

My practitioner looked at me from across the room and saw a woman headed full speed toward a physical, mental, and emotional crash. When I looked in the mirror I don't even know if I saw someone looking back. I had become that disconnected with myself, emotionally and physically.

While logically I knew the conventional treatment methods used over my lifetime were no longer successful, I simply did not possess the bandwidth to imagine a different way of caring for my health. But that's exactly what my homeopath proposed to me: a radical change that would require self-awareness (at least enough to be able to report my experiences back to her)

and to eventually discover a purpose for healing.

I stared across the room at her, thinking that she must be out of her mind. Could she really be asking me to do one more thing than I was already juggling? Impossible. And yet I had no better alternative. Here I was, a complete mess. Going back to conventional treatment didn't make sense as that had contributed to my current state. Doing nothing wasn't working either. My options weren't looking good.

In truth I just wanted all this to go away. I knew so little about my body and how it worked, and what I did know was just enough to scare me. From my perspective, I had a body that had betrayed me, and I lacked any trust in what it might do next. My hope was for the magic pill, which she wryly stated did not exist. On quite the contrary my practitioner expected me to learn how my body worked and to make lifestyle changes that would support my health rather than undermine it.

Oh dear heavens!. Now I was certain she was crazy.

She later shared with me, that (at the very same time I was sure she should be committed for insanity) she was considering whether she could get through to me in time because she knew my clock was ticking.

With small practices and protocols, my work with my practitioner allowed me to reconnect with my true self and discover the joy of everyday living. Once my self-awareness kicked in I began to realize that I always have choices – even in very limited situations. I could choose thoughts and actions to support my health or just as easily I can choose those that damage it. When I was exhausted, stressed, and overwhelmed I couldn't see the choices, and I felt condemned to continue along the path I was on.

Making positive choices is liberating, and one step toward liberation leads to more.

Once there was enough distance from my emotional and physical

suffering my purpose for healing began to emerge. While I was born with a family tendency for cancer and addiction it did not have to be my story. For myself and my three children, my daily purpose would be to change my own narrative about my health (and that of my family's).

It didn't happen overnight. It happened by being mindful of the choices I was presented with one at a time. These choices are there for you as well in every waking moment. They provide an opportunity to open the door to living your life at its fullest – the life you were born to live.

Ready to take the first step together?

Take some time to reflect and write down your answer to these questions. Through this simple exercise, your purpose may just emerge.

What would you like for your health today?

How will your life be different when you have that?

What are you willing to do to make it happen?

Complete this statement:

I aspire to a life that _____ and I am willing to do _____ to achieve that life for myself.

Add this to your belief statement you wrote keeping them both as visible reminders of where you want this path to lead you.

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White Bean Chili

I have been obsessing over the creation of this recipe all week. To be honest, I'm not sure I've ever had white bean chili, but somehow the concept worked its way into my imagination. Could it have been the unusual streak of grey, watery skies in Austin, the cans of cannellini beans stacked in my pantry or my anticipation of a loosely planned Saturday with plenty of time for play in the kitchen? Not really sure – but whatever the reason it led to this delicious new soup recipe that we can now all add to our fall lineup.

Ingredients

Olive oil
2 poblano chilis, seeded and chopped
1 medium onion, chopped
1/2 jalapeño, seeded and chopped
6 firm tomatillos, husks removed and chopped
3/4 lb white mushrooms, chopped fine
2-3 Yukon Gold potatoes, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ inch cubes
2 vegetable bouillon cubes
2 15-ounce cans of white beans, drained and rinsed
1 bag of frozen corn
3 tbsp of arrowroot
1 cup of plant-based milk (almond or cashew are good choices)
1 1/2 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. dried oregano
salt and pepper to taste

To Make

Heat enough olive oil to cover the bottom of a heavy-lidded soup pot.

Add onion and peppers, saute on medium heat until soft.

Mix in chopped tomatillo and spices and mushrooms. Saute vegetables until all are tender.

Cover with water, dropping in 2 veggie bouillon cubes, and cubed potatoes.

Bring soup to a boil over medium heat, cover, reduce heat and simmer until potatoes are tender. Add beans and corn, stirring well, and continue cooking on low for flavors to meld.

Mix arrowroot into milk a bit at a time, blending until smooth. Add to the simmering soup, stirring as it thickens. Add more arrowroot dissolved in water or milk if you prefer a thicker consistency.

Serve the follow as toppings for the chili

- corn tortilla chips
- lime wedges
- green salsa
- Vegan Sour Cream

Enjoy!

Restoring Immunity from the Inside Out

An essay from Lauren's forthcoming book, Restoring Your Immunity

Wisdom isn't something you can "do" or "make happen"—it's there in all of us. By becoming more familiar with that space within ourselves and trusting our own instincts more fully,

we can learn to apply this quality of discriminating wisdom in everyday life.

–Andy Puddicombe

Those who find my work have been on a quest, most have tried literally everything out there with the hope of resolving their symptoms. Upon arrival they are generally in one of two states:

1. certain that THIS is the Holy Grail of Healing, or
2. wise to that fact that there is no magic solution and are ready to work on themselves from the inside out.

Those who still believe there is a Holy Grail of Healing will dive in with great enthusiasm and yet completely miss these crucial check-in questions:

How does this fit with my own belief system on healing?

Or even more fundamental...

What is my belief system for healing, and what is my role in this process?

If you struggle with answers to these questions you might want to read my post, [An Invitation](#).

If you happen to fall in the Holy Grail seeker category, even marginally, you might want to hang in here a bit for this next part.

It is both easy and appealing to get caught up in the enchanting chase for a magic solution. I spent far too many years doing just that myself. The draw to explore the next latest and greatest solution, whether it be a practitioner or product, all actually led me further from the self-discovery that was needed. What was happening? Now, in retrospect, I can see the energy I was pouring into **avoidance**. That's a pretty

powerful word to describe a pattern that can become as comfortable as an old friend. Especially so when the pull from a glossy, attractive therapy was stronger than the daunting task of unpacking fear programmed into my DNA. I mean seriously, who wants to open Pandora's box? Certainly not me back then. My family health story was one of fear and denial, and as an adult I knew I wanted to avoid the fates of my mother and grandmother.

How Family History Influenced Healthcare Beliefs

Like most women of their era, my grandmother and mother were frightened of their bodies and the mysteries of disease. In the late 1950's, my elegant, Stanford-educated grandmother suffered tremendous emotional symptoms related to her hormonal cycles. In hopelessness she turned to the experimental medical work of the time. Her "treatment" ended up being shock therapy, and eventually a lobotomy – the results of which she endured the rest of her life. Her daughter (my mother) witnessed her mother's struggles as she came of age, and her fears created a disconnect from her own health and wellbeing. Heartbreakingly, this led her to ignore a developing melanoma which tragically took her life at the young age of 25. Their fears became my legacy.

It turns out that I was the fortunate one in the fact that I was given the gift of two wakeup calls. The first melanoma, while pregnant with my son Sebastian, put me into a tailspin of denial, but the second, more minor, recurrence did the trick. I was able to accept the fact that I needed to begin some serious internal housekeeping if I wanted to change the legacy for my children and future grandchildren.

As the novel concept of active participation in my own healing began to surface, I came across Gemmotherapy extracts. What drew me so deeply into my work with these extracts was their

subtle but powerful action: supporting restoration of the immune system step by step. The changes that occur are not instantaneous by any means but are a gentle unfolding just as in nature. To note these changes and to keep a protocol on track one must cultivate self-awareness and an attention to detail that is not always embraced in our culture. Wow. That's a lot. Self-awareness and attention to detail can be life-changing and certainly big steps in the right direction.

This is where the healing from the inside out begins.

Reflection

If I haven't scared you off here are some questions to reflect upon that will serve as a gentle guide to begin healing from the inside out.

Where do I currently place my attention when it comes to my physical body?

What symptoms do I notice changing from day to day?

Is there a symptom or physical experience that frightens or worries me?

What about it brings up fear or worry?

Is that fear or worry related to any past experiences, in my history or my family members' history, in stories I've heard or read?

Am I exploring that fear or worry or am I avoiding it?

What would be most helpful for me right now, in this moment?

You. Yes, you are full of wisdom. By slowing down that external search and making space for time with yourself on a regular basis you will discover the treasures you hold within.

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