

THE AUTOIMMUNE ANSWER

The Natural, Comprehensive Treatment of
Autoimmune Disease

Stop living a limited life, and start feeling good again.

BY DR. TIM GERSTMAR
www.aspirenaturalhealth.com

phone: 425-202-7849
email: info@aspirenaturalhealth.com



 [AspireNaturalHealth](https://www.facebook.com/AspireNaturalHealth)
 [@DrTimGerstmarND](https://twitter.com/DrTimGerstmarND)

Table of Contents

Your Problem	2
Who I Am & Why I'm Writing This	2
What Is Autoimmunity	3
Why Does This Happen?	3
The Conventional Model and Treatment of Autoimmunity	3
The New Model Of Autoimmunity	4
Part 1: Genes (And More)	4
Understanding Epigenetics	4
Part 2: Environmental Triggers	5
Major Environmental Triggers	5
Leaky Gut	6
Molecular Mimicry	6
Part 3: Autoimmunity Itself	7
A Better Understanding of the Immune System	7
Using The New Model To Treat Autoimmunity	8
A Word On Drugs	8
A Word On Cure	8
Degrees Of Control	9
The Least Force Necessary	9
Where Most Practitioners Focus	9
My Goals for Treatment	10
Negatives - The "Bad News"	10
Contact Me to Get Help	11
And Before We End, Here Are Some Action Steps You Can Take Away	11
A Few Resources To Find Other Doctors Who May Embrace This Approach	13



Your Problem

1. You have an autoimmune disease which is interfering with your life.
2. Regular “conventional” treatment is sometimes effective but often has serious side effects.
3. The best outcome of conventional treatment is management. Cure is never a possibility.
4. You’re frustrated and looking for better options.

Is There A Better Way?

I believe there is, and in this booklet I’m going to detail the way, a natural, comprehensive way, I work with people who have autoimmune disease. But first, let’s start by making sure we’re both on the same page.

Who I Am & Why I’m Writing This



My name is Dr. Tim Gerstmar. I’m a Naturopathic doctor (ND) in private practice at Aspire Natural Health in Redmond, WA. I’m not an MD but an ND, which is a profession most people have never heard of before. I’ll give you the ultra-quick rundown. NDs go to medical school and we study all the same sciences as MDs, like anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, etc. Then when MDs are off learning surgery and prescription drug use, we study nutrition, herbal medicine, and to always view the body as connected systems rather than separate parts.

The state of Washington, where I live and practice, considers us “real doctors” with all the privileges and responsibilities, but unfortunately some people still consider us “quacks.” We view the body as an interconnected system, not just a bunch of bolted together parts and our goal is to trigger the body’s innate healing power. No crystals or shamanic rituals here, though if you’re into that kind of thing, I’m fine with that.

My focus over the years has evolved from primarily working on digestive issues towards autoimmunity, though I haven’t forgotten the gut because, as you’ll see, I think it’s critical to getting and dealing with autoimmunity. I came to focus on autoimmunity because of my own health journey dealing with Hashimoto’s thyroiditis over the past ten years, and because of my patients. They were suffer-

ing. The care they were receiving, focused on pounding their immune system into the ground, rarely worked well. I knew there had to be a better way. This paper lays out the framework of how I view and treat autoimmune disease. My hope is that it gets spread far and wide and helps people see a new direction for treating their autoimmunity.

Now that you’ve met me, let’s get back to talking about autoimmunity.

Autoimmunity Is A Big Deal!

On a personal level having an autoimmune disease is often painful and can severely impact your ability to live the life you want — doctor’s visits, hospitalizations, drugs, injections, pain — all result in missed opportunities and unfulfilled dreams.

And on a societal level, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) estimate that around 22.5 million Americans suffer from autoimmune diseases. However, it’s important to know that that figure is based on only 24 out of the estimated 80-150 autoimmune diseases that have been classified or are suspected. This has led some to suggest that the real number of Americans who are suffering from autoimmunity may be closer to 50 million. And worse, the number of people with autoimmune disease is rising. Most of us don’t realize that autoimmune diseases are one of the top 10 leading causes of death for women (up until 64 years of age).

So yeah, it’s a big deal.



What Is Autoimmunity?

Autoimmunity is typically classified based on what part of the body it affects - rheumatoid arthritis damages the joints, multiple sclerosis messes up the nervous system, etc. But what all these diseases, and what autoimmunity in general, share in common is the fact that the immune system is attacking the body.

Our immune system is our own personal “army” designed to protect us from bacteria, viruses, fungus, parasites, and any other “bad stuff” that could kill us. And our immune system has safeguards that are supposed to keep it from attacking our bodies, which, obviously, would be a bad thing. It’s when those protective mechanisms fail that we end up with autoimmunity. Our wonderful immune system starts training its “guns” on our own bodies, and we pay the price in pain and suffering.

Why Does This Happen?

The Conventional Model and Treatment of Autoimmunity

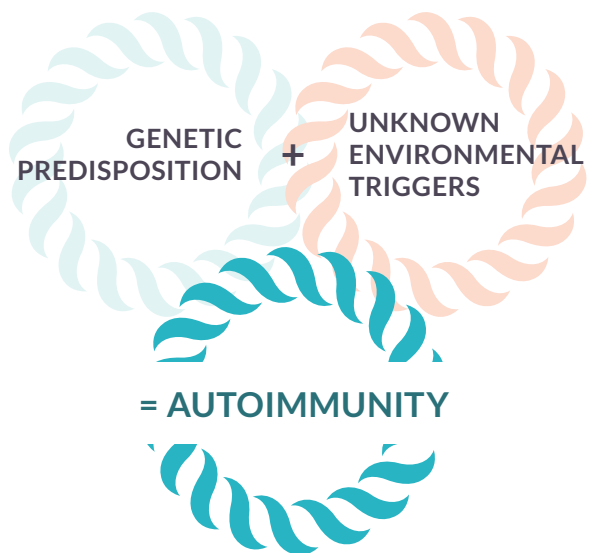
The conventional medical understanding of why autoimmunity happens is that we have a genetic predisposition, that is genes that we got from our parents, that remove or weaken some of the safeguards that protect us; or genes that make our immune systems more aggressive and more likely to go out of control; or genes that make certain tissues of our bodies more vulnerable to attack. But just having the genes isn’t enough, otherwise everyone with those genes would have autoimmunity, and they don’t. Genes are simply the “loaded gun.” Triggers in our environment, that is things in our world, ignite autoimmunity. The conventional community (that is “standard medicine”) believes that these triggers are mostly unknown, with a handful of diseases linked to infections such as Crohn’s disease and Ankylosing spondylitis which are thought to be triggered by the bacteria Klebsiella.

So our genetics plus unknown environmental triggers create autoimmunity. And once that process has begun, what can we do about it?



Well since we can’t yet change our genes (though with advanced technology that might happen in the coming years), and (from a conventional standpoint) we really don’t know what environmental triggers start autoimmunity, that leaves the only target left to focus on is the autoimmunity itself. Since the immune system is attacking and injuring the body, conventional medicine treats this by using a variety of drugs to hinder and disable the immune system, thereby slowing or stopping the damage it is doing. These drugs are immunosuppressants.

THE CONVENTIONAL MODEL OF AUTOIMMUNITY:



The first immunosuppressant discovered was prednisone around 1950, and it proved tremendously effective at suppressing immunity, but with devastating long-term effects. Prednisone continues to be very useful in suppressing dangerous flares of autoimmunity, but any reasonable doctor considers it a drug of last resort to keep people on for extended periods of time. Some side effects of prednisone include high blood sugars, fluid retention, depression and/or anxiety, and insomnia. When used long-term it can also cause weight gain, memory and attention problems, osteoporosis, glaucoma, diabetes, and immunosuppression which makes a person more vulnerable to infections and possibly cancer.

The next broad class of immunosuppressants were repurposed from chemotherapy, such as methotrexate and 6MP. These drugs prevent cancer cells, and all other cells including immune cells, from effectively reproducing. They also interfere with some other aspects of the immune systems. Together that means less immune cells and impaired functioning of the immune cells, which reduces autoimmune damage and symptoms. Some side effects of methotrexate and 6MP include: nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, fatigue, fever, dizziness, hair loss, liver damage, and immunosuppression which makes a person more vulnerable to infections and possibly cancer. Methotrexate is also toxic to a fetus and cannot be taken if a woman wishes to get pregnant. There is debate about whether 6MP is safe during pregnancy, but most practitioners would prefer to avoid it whenever possible.

The most recent class of drugs are known as 'biologics' and include such drugs as Remicade & Humira, among others. These are more targeted drugs which specifically block certain parts of the immune system to reduce or impair immune system activity which reduces damage and symptoms. Some of the side effects of Remicade and similar drugs include: immunosuppression which makes a person more vulnerable to infections, and in this case to cancer as well. Remicade has also been shown to cause other autoimmune conditions like psoriasis and vitiligo.

All of these drugs can be helpful in reducing autoimmunity by interfering with the immune system, but all must be continued for the rest of a person's life to be effective (and occasionally some do stop working) and all have potentially serious side effects.

The New Model Of Autoimmunity

Our new model of autoimmunity starts with the same concept of why autoimmunity occurs as the old standard model. But with some different conclusions.

Part 1: Genes (and More)

Can we change our genes? No. But we can change the way our genes express themselves, and this is very important.

Let's talk for a moment about why we might have these genes in the first place. It would seem that having genes that predispose a person to autoimmunity would be a bad thing to have lying around. There are two explanations for why each of us might have these 'autoimmune genes.' The first is that in our ancestral environment we so rarely came upon the environmental triggers that 'caused' autoimmunity that it didn't matter if we had those genes or not. And that's certainly a possibility. The other is that those 'autoimmune genes' were more helpful in the past than they are now, and we have some evidence to suggest this is true.

Let's travel to the island of Sardinia for a moment. Sardinia is an island off the coast of Italy that has for thousands of years been plagued by severe malaria, a devastating infectious disease that has killed and harmed countless people in the past and continues to be a serious problem today. Before World War 2 the dictator Mussolini drained the swamps on Sardinia and effectively wiped out the mosquito population, bringing an end to malaria on Sardinia. And the result? In the years since World War 2, Sardinia has become a hotspot for multiple sclerosis. What we see is that the malaria drove the genetics of the Sardinians towards a more aggressive, less inhibited immune system in an effort to protect them from a malaria infection. Which was good and helpful when malaria was all around them. But once malaria was wiped out, the Sardinian's aggressive immune systems found a new target: their own bodies.

So why do those of us with autoimmunity have a genetic predisposition towards it when others don't? Likely because our ancestors faced infectious diseases that our more aggressive immune systems did a better job protecting them from. Far from being a curse, a predisposition to autoimmunity would be protective if we lived in a different time and place.

But we need to talk about more than just genetics...



Understanding Epigenetics

It's easier to think of your genetic code as the 'encyclopedia' filled with the instructions to make every part of you. Every cell in your body (except your red blood cells) has the entire encyclopedia of you contained in its nucleus. But not every cell of your body is the same. Your skin is very different from your bones, your eyeballs from your liver. Each cell has the same potential instructions but each cell reads a different part of that encyclopedia. How is that possible? Epigenetics. If we imagine our genes as a book, then epigenetics are the 'sticky notes' (read here) and paper clips (don't read these pages) attached to our book. So a liver cell has the section of the code that it needs to be an effective liver cell 'sticky noted' and the section that would turn it into an eyeball cell 'paper clipped' closed.

But epigenetic goes further. Part of epigenetics doesn't change. A liver cell is not going to spontaneously change its epigenetics and turn into an eyeball cell. But other parts of our epigenome are constantly changing as the body reacts to what's going on outside of it. Take exercise for example. If you've been a couch potato and start to exercise, the epigenome that controls the genes responsible for your muscles repairing themselves and getting stronger will change, so that those genes begin to express themselves much more vigorously and exercising doesn't kill you.

So while we can't change our genes, we can change they way they're expressed. And this is our first new way to affect our autoimmunity, by affecting our epigenome to modify our genetics and begin to reign in our immune systems.

Part 2: Environmental Triggers

Are the environmental triggers of autoimmunity really unknown? I don't think so. Though I don't claim to know all the triggers, I believe we know what many of them are.



Major Environmental Triggers

5. DIET & LIFESTYLE

Our body responds to our environment by changing the way our genes express. And the way we move our bodies, how much chronic stress we suffer under, and how much sleep we get are all factors that push our body towards an inflammatory state or an anti-inflammatory state. Unfortunately the modern lifestyle is full of processed, low-quality foods, very little physical activity, high chronic stress, and little sleep, which all work to push our bodies towards a profoundly inflammatory state, making autoimmunity significantly worse. The good news is by changing our lifestyles we can change the way our genes are expressing.

6. TOXICITY

As human beings we have done a wonderful job of polluting our world. Our soil, water, and air are now filled with somewhere between 80,000-150,000 brand new chemicals we've put out there in the past 100 years. And most of these chemicals have had little real testing to prove their safety. Many are now being implicated in hormone disruption and immune dysfunction. For example, PCBs and DDE (a breakdown product of the pesticide DDT) have been strongly implicated in Hashimoto's thyroiditis. Mercury is thought to be a factor in MS.

7. INFECTIONS

Infections seem to be triggers that can set off autoimmunity. Lyme disease can trigger inflammatory arthritis, Epstein-Barr virus ("mono") is thought to be a factor in MS, and Klebsiella is a bacteria thought to be a trigger in Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS) and Crohn's disease.

8. GUT HEALTH

Most people don't connect gut health to autoimmunity unless they're dealing with an autoimmune disease like Ulcerative Colitis or Crohn's. But, depending on who you quote, 50-80% of our immune system is in our guts. This makes sense when you realize that under normal conditions the gut is the primary place "bad stuff" can get into the body. Every day we eat, drink, and swallow a lot of stuff, giving viruses, bacteria, fungus, parasites, and other toxins a ride into our guts. And if it weren't for a vigilant immune system, those invaders could make their way into our bodies and kill us. So the gut is our primary interface with our immune system.



Leaky Gut

If you've been looking around the internet you may have run into the term "leaky gut" or, when dressed up in medical speak, "increased intestinal permeability." But what is it?

Normally the gut is very careful about what it lets cross into the body. Food is digested down into its component pieces before being allowed across. Bacteria, viruses, and other "bad stuff" are prevented from crossing over. When, because of inflammation from a variety of causes, this system begins to break down, the gut becomes "leaky" or much less careful about what it lets cross over. Bits of incompletely digested food, bacteria, and other "bad" stuff is allowed to get across the gut and into the body where it runs into the immune cells patrolling the area. Now these immune cells are programmed to let nutrients - that is, food that has been completely broken down - pass by. But immune cells aren't designed to run into food. So that delicious steak you ate, when broken down into amino acids = no reaction. But bits of incompletely digested steak = alarm bells = a reaction. So a leaky gut allows a stream of "stuff" that's not supposed to cross over into the body to do so and then the immune system encounters it and reacts. Creating inflammation and changing our epigenetics to a more inflammatory state. But, unfortunately, it can get worse.

Molecular Mimicry

Molecular mimicry is when one molecule looks like another. A classic example of this is rheumatic fever, and is the reason kids are pumped full of antibiotics when they have strep throat. True strep throat, as opposed to a sore throat, is caused by the Streptococcus bacteria. When the immune system moves in, it begins to form reactions against that Strep bacteria. And a piece of that Strep bacteria looks an awful lot like the valves of the heart. And sometimes, when that immune response isn't properly controlled it can turn from fighting the Strep bacteria to attacking the valves of the heart and even the heart itself, leading to heart damage. This is molecular mimicry, where one molecule looks close enough to another, that an immune reaction against one molecule can spread and affect other similar looking molecules.

Normally the gut is very careful about what it lets cross into the body.

Leaky Gut + Molecular Mimicry = Autoimmunity

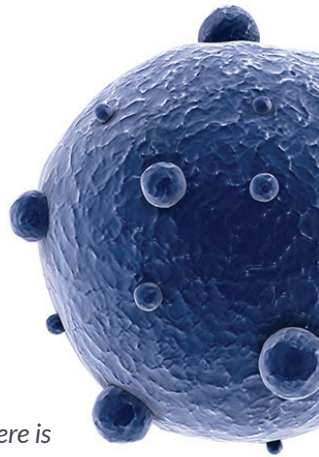
So someone has a leaky gut which allows incompletely digested food fragments, bacteria, and other "bad" stuff to enter the body. This stuff runs into the patrolling immune cells which create an inflammatory reaction against these "invaders." In a poorly controlled immune system that reaction can spread and affect our molecules, and in this case, the tissues of our body. For example, it's been theorized that pieces of gluten (in wheat, rye, and barley) can resemble the thyroid gland, acting as a trigger for Hashimoto's thyroiditis (autoimmunity of the thyroid).

MICROBIOTA

The microbiota are the bacteria that live in and on us. Science in this area is progressing at an explosive pace and we are just beginning to get a glimpse into the fantastic world of our bacteria. It was once thought they did very little for us, but we are now recognizing that they have a profound influence on our health. One way they affect us is by adjusting our immune system. While there is still a lot to learn here, we do know that certain types of bacteria have soothing, anti-inflammatory effects on our immune system, preventing or reducing allergies and autoimmunity. Other types have the opposite action, increasing the aggressiveness of our immune system. We need both to have a healthy immune system, but, as in so many other areas, we need balance between the two.

A neat experiment was done in mice recently that shows how important these anti-inflammatory bacteria can be. Mice were sensitized to peanuts so they would have severe peanut allergies. Some were then given a non-toxic kind of Clostridia bacteria which prevented them from having reactions to peanuts. That's huge! If we can replicate those findings in humans we might have a "cure" for severe allergies.

I believe one of the major reasons we have an epidemic of autoimmunity is because we've lost much of our anti-inflammatory bacteria and parasites. Modern life with its antibiotics, antibiotic residues in our food, C-sections, bottle instead of breast feeding, isolation from the natural world, and high levels of hygiene all work



to damage our gut flora and prevent us from reacquiring these protective species that help keep our immune system in check.

There are undoubtedly other factors that we don't yet know or understand that contribute to autoimmunity. But the reality is, unlike the conventional community, we do know many factors that affect our immune system. And by knowing and understanding these environmental triggers, we can affect autoimmunity by removing the triggers and wherever possible reversing them to better control, or hopefully erase, autoimmunity.

Part 3: Autoimmunity Itself

So far we've seen that we can affect both our genetics through our epigenome and our environmental triggers by understanding them and taking corrective action. But what can we do about the autoimmune reaction itself? Are immunosuppressive drugs our only option?

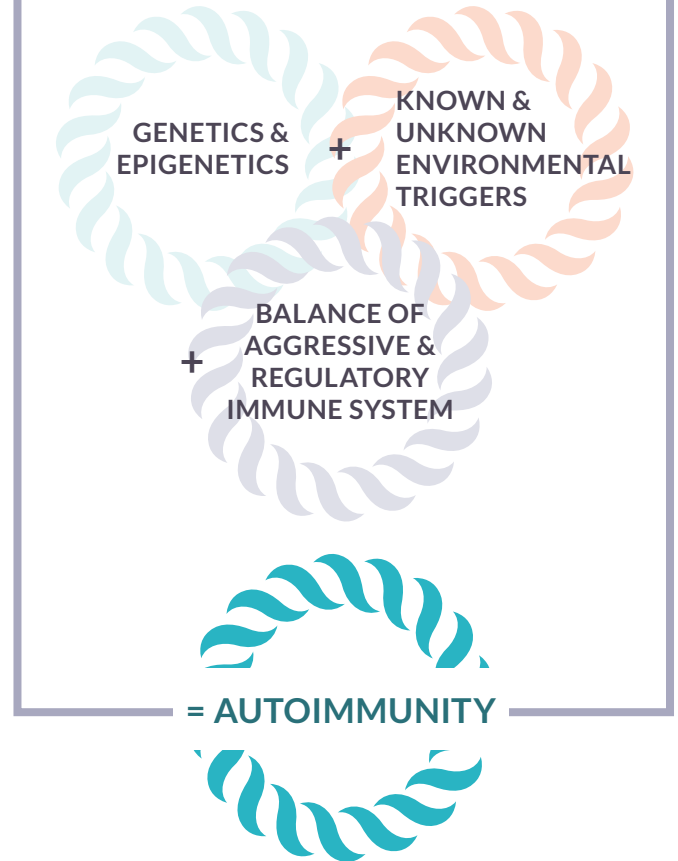
Thankfully no! First we look to herbal medicines and nutrients that can help modulate the autoimmunity. This reduces symptoms and makes people more functional and comfortable. These compounds are generally much weaker than the immunosuppressive drugs, which is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Because they are gentler and have a wider scope of effect (affecting many things instead of just one target) we can use them without the big side effects of the prescriptions. The bad news is that because they are weaker, they may not be enough to control the autoimmunity. But we're getting ahead of ourselves and we'll talk more about treatment in a minute.

A Better Understanding of the Immune System

We can divide our immune system into roughly three parts.

1. The part that turns on the immune reactions (broadly composed of B & T helper cells)
2. The bulk of the immune system that fights off "bad stuff" (such as macrophages, neutrophils and plasma cells), and
3. The part that then turns off the immune system (known as B & T regulatory cells).

FIG. 1: NEW COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF AUTOIMMUNITY:



Conventional treatment focuses on the part that turns on the immune reactions and the fighting part of the immune system with immunosuppressive drugs. The part that is completely ignored is the part of the immune system that turns off immune reactions, and this is the handle that I think gives us great leverage into controlling or even extinguishing autoimmunity. Because it's these regulatory cells that are supposed to shut down autoimmunity in the first place.

This provides us with two areas we can focus on when dealing directly with autoimmunity:

1. Using therapies to modulate the immune system, to tone down the fighting part
2. Enhancing the regulatory part to get the immune system to shut itself down

See **Figure 1** above for our more comprehensive model of autoimmunity.



Using The New Model To Treat Autoimmunity

Our Treatment Objectives:

1. Modify the epigenome to reduce genetic predisposition
2. Remove/reverse environmental triggers driving autoimmunity
3. Modulate the immune system

A Word on Drugs

When I ask most people who come to see me what their goals are, almost always near the top of that list is “avoid going on drugs” or “get off drugs,” and this is understandable. Many of the drugs are very expensive (Remicade has a list price of approximately \$20,000 a year) and have serious side effects. It is one of my goals to try and get people off of drugs as well. But a person’s primary focus on getting off of drugs, is, in my opinion, misplaced.

My primary goal is NOT to get people off of drugs. Which many people think is a weird thing for a Naturopathic doctor to say. When I graduated from medical school I was very opposed to the use of drugs. “Anything you can do (with drugs), I can do better (with natural medicine),” I thought. Thankfully over the years my thinking has evolved. Drugs are not THE answer, but they are a very useful tool. And to throw them out because of a dogma that says “drugs are bad” is a disservice to people. Drugs, like herbs, nutrients, diet & lifestyle changes, and all the other therapies, are simply a tool. There are reasons and situations to use them and reasons not to use them.

My primary goal is NOT to get people off of drugs, my primary goal is to make people’s lives better.

One example I often use is of a chainsaw. A chainsaw is a very powerful and very useful tool for specific occasions. If you need to chop down a big tree because it’s going to fall on your house, a chainsaw is a great tool to use. Could you chop down that tree with a hammer? Probably, but it would take forever and be an incredibly frustrating experience. Many drugs are like that chainsaw - a very powerful, potentially very dangerous tool, and really indicated only in specific situations. Many

herbs and nutrients are like that hammer - much less powerful, but with many uses and generally very safe. Could you pound in a nail with the chainsaw? Probably, but it would be a potentially very dangerous and incredibly frustrating experience. You need the right tool for the job.

My primary goal is NOT to get people off of drugs, my primary goal is to make people’s lives better. And we do that by getting their autoimmunity under control. With that goal in mind we use the tools that are necessary. If you’re in an aggressive flare of autoimmunity, prednisone may be the right tool for the job. If you’re already on immunosuppressants, the goal isn’t to get off of them as quickly as you can. The goal is to get your autoimmunity well controlled, so well controlled that you no longer need the immunosuppressant and can safely go off of it.

A Word on Cure

Can we cure autoimmunity? We’ve gotten to know each other a little by now, so let me be candid with you: I don’t know.

Let’s first talk about what cure is, because it means different things to different people. If you mean an absolute cure, with all traces of the autoimmunity completely gone, and you can go back to your old life exactly as it was before your autoimmunity started, the answer is, probably not.



Degrees Of Control

4. UNCONTROLLED

The disease process is uncontrolled. Symptoms are significant with disability and pain.

5. MANAGED

Symptoms are under control but only so long as you continue active, aggressive therapy, whether natural or prescription or both. Inflammation and antibodies are still present but held at acceptable levels and symptoms are nonexistent, mild, or only occasionally troublesome.

6. REMISSION

Both symptoms and inflammatory markers are gone. You feel well in your day to day life. But the autoimmune predisposition remains and you need to be careful about triggering the disease back into appearance. You likely will need to continue some immune modulating therapies (natural or prescription or both).

7. CURE

While absolute cure — meaning the disease is gone and never to return under any circumstances — is probably not possible, what I call a relative cure in my opinion is. This means that you understand your body and your triggers. You've made a proper health-promoting (for you) lifestyle second nature and you do what is necessary to maintain your health on a day by day basis. Some baseline therapies probably need to continue.

The Least Force Necessary

With that in mind, our first goal is always to move someone from uncontrolled or poorly controlled to managed. From there we work towards remission, and hopefully “cure.” Is it always possible to get to remission or cure? Truthfully, no. While we always work towards cure and believe it's possible for anyone, it doesn't always happen. So we hope for cure, but our primary focus is on quality of life. Why is this important? Because if your sole focus is cure and you don't get there, you are disappointed, frustrated, upset, angry. You feel like the treatment has failed. If you work towards the best quality of life possible with a hope for cure, you can achieve quality of life, whether that is a good quality of life with management, with remission, or with cure. And if cure happens, great. If not, you can still go out and live the life you want to. And that, to me, is success.

To get to that goal of quality of life, I use a pyramid of therapies, always aiming for the least force necessary for good

control. I start wherever possible with diet & lifestyle. For some people, and these are usually the amazing testimonials you read about on the internet, changes in diet & lifestyle can be enough to completely control autoimmunity. But let's be real, for many people this isn't enough. So we add herbs and nutrients in that to balance the immune system, and that may be enough. But sometimes it isn't, so then we layer drugs on top, trying to use the least toxic drugs at the lowest dose. Sometimes, despite all our best efforts, that still isn't enough and surgery or other therapies are necessary. But isn't it nice to know we didn't jump to the top of the pyramid until we really needed it?

If someone is flaring or in a very bad place, we may jump up to high doses of herbs or drugs right away to stabilize them. Then work back down and begin addressing diet & lifestyle. This is still using the least force necessary.

Now that we've gotten all the background out of the way and introduced a new way of looking at autoimmune disease, the million dollar question is: what do we do with it? How do I formulate our treatment? We start...



Where Most Practitioners Focus

1. Immune dysfunctions
2. Chronic inflammation

These two factors are classically the entire focus of autoimmune treatment. If you see a conventional provider, these factors are addressed through the use of drugs. If you see a more naturally oriented provider they would use diet & lifestyle, herbs, and nutrients to address these areas. An integrated provider would use natural and drug therapies as necessary to address these factors.

These are key factors that need to be addressed and are part of our treatment, but we want to move beyond just treating the effects of autoimmunity to some of its causes.

To do that I would undertake a more complete treatment of autoimmunity which would also address:

3. Environmental toxicity
4. Chronic infections
5. Gut health / dysfunctions
6. Sleep disorders
7. Allergies & reactivities



As we discussed earlier, these are some of the environmental triggers that we have identified that drive the autoimmune reactions. Through medical sleuthing my job is to figure out which of them are important for a person, and then address each of them to reduce or possibly extinguish the autoimmunity.

Truly comprehensive treatment goes further and we can go beyond just the immune system to the rest of the body.

But why stop there? Truly comprehensive treatment goes further and we can go beyond just the immune system to the rest of the body.

8. Lifestyle mismatches: diet, sleep, stress, movement – deconditioning or overtraining
9. Nutritional excesses, deficiencies, and imbalances
10. Mitochondrial dysfunction
11. Hormonal abnormalities
12. Neurodegeneration
13. Neuropsychiatric (mood and brain function) disorders
14. Autonomic nervous system dysfunction
15. Liver dysfunction
16. Pain and Addiction
17. Mental, Emotional and spiritual issues
18. Medication side-effects

Everything is connected to everything else, and while not everyone may have all of these systems affected, many people have problems in at least some of those systems. Is balancing someone's hormones or brain function 100% related to their autoimmunity? No, not necessarily. But it is related to giving people the best quality of life possible.

So when someone sees me for the treatment of autoimmunity, of course we tackle factors 1 and 2. Then we test and assess to see which of factors 3-16 are problem areas for that person and design a treatment plan accordingly. I use the least force necessary, but as much force as needed to help bring the person under control and get them on the path to well-managed autoimmunity, and toward remission and hopefully cure.

My Goals for Treatment

1. Cure where possible
2. Always work toward proper management with the aim of a great quality of life
3. Use the least force necessary but as much as is needed. Use as few drugs or other harsh therapies as necessary

Negatives - The "Bad News"

There are some negatives to this approach which might make it a poor fit for you.

NEGATIVE 1 - It Takes Time

Real healing takes time. If you come to see me, I'll ask you for a minimum commitment of six months, which often shocks people! Does that mean it'll be six months before you feel better? No. But you need to prepare yourself to invest some time in your healing. If you jump ship at the first stumbling block and go searching for a "magic cure," I can guarantee you're not going to get anywhere. So if you embark on a plan like this, prepare yourself to stick with it for at least six months and maybe longer. Still here? Okay, let's move on to...

NEGATIVE 2 - It Takes Effort

In all sales training materials they tell you to talk about how your thing is easy, effortless, and makes other people's lives instantly better. That's why I'm such a lousy salesman. The process of healing is only half of one of those things. Working on your health will make your life better, but it takes a lot of effort to do so. Changing your diet and lifestyle are hard to do. Taking a comprehensive approach to autoimmunity is hard to do. But what are your options?

NEGATIVE 3 - It Takes Money

This hurts my soul to say this, but a comprehensive approach with real health care can be expensive. I wish it weren't so, but it is. You need testing to determine what is going on, and parts of it no health insurance plan will pay for. You will need to use some herbal and nutritional medicines, and they are often not covered either. And most importantly, you need time and attention from your doctor. This comprehensive approach can't be done in a 10 – 15 minute office visit and by a prescription pad, and the conventional system and health insurance companies just haven't realized the importance of that yet and therefore they won't pay for it. It's a serious bummer!

Some people, and you may be one of them, aren't interested in or ready for this approach, and that's okay. Thanks for reading this far, and best of luck to you.





Next Step: Contact Me to Get Help



If you like the idea of a comprehensive approach to autoimmunity and the three negatives above haven't scared you off, I'd be happy to help you implement this plan. If you're interested in an appointment you can contact us (give us a call or send us an email) to either set up an appointment (in-person or virtual) or to set up a free virtual "meet & greet" to see if I'm a good match for you. Please feel welcome to contact us:

Dr. Tim Gerstmar • *Aspire Natural Health*

www.aspirenaturalhealth.com

Phone: 425-202-7849

info@aspirenaturalhealth.com

 **AspireNaturalHealth**
 **@DrTimGerstmarND**

And Before We End, Here Are Some Action Steps You Can Take Away

The foundation of health is diet and lifestyle. Sometimes addressing diet and lifestyle alone are enough to put people into remission. Worst case, even if it doesn't put you into remission, you will be a healthier person overall, making any other treatment you do more effective.

Things To Focus On

1. FOOD

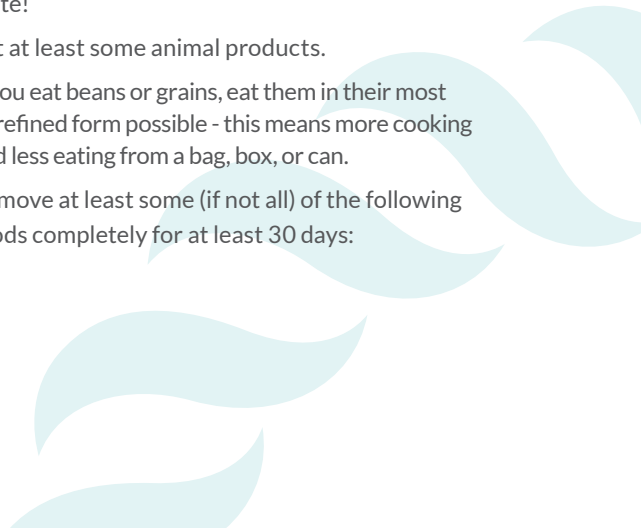
We talked a lot in this paper about the importance of a healthy digestive tract and gut flora. What we put in our mouth profoundly influences us. One of the simplest (but by no means easy) things you can do is to change the way you eat. You have many options here, but a few to explore are:

- **THE PALEO DIET** - Many resources here which you can do an Internet search for, but two solid books are "The Paleo Solution" by Robb Wolf and "It Starts with Food" by Dallas & Melissa Hartwig.
- **AUTOIMMUNE PALEO PROTOCOL** - Start with the website thepaleomom.com and her book "The Paleo Approach" by Sarah Ballantyne.
- **SPECIFIC CARBOHYDRATE DIET** - start with the excellent website SCDlifestyle.com or the book *Specific Carbohydrate Diet* by Elaine Gotschall.

- **GAPS DIET** - Start with the website Gapsdiet.com or the book, "The Gut and Psychology Syndrome" available by Natasha Campbell-McBride.

Or, if none of those appeal to you, simply cutting out refined foods and focusing on more whole, "real," unprocessed foods will be helpful too.

- Remove at least 90% of the sugar and flour (baked goods) from your diet.
- Eat more vegetables and fruit. Pile them on that plate!
- Eat at least some animal products.
- If you eat beans or grains, eat them in their most unrefined form possible - this means more cooking and less eating from a bag, box, or can.
- Remove at least some (if not all) of the following foods completely for at least 30 days:



These are the most common problematic foods for people. Many people with autoimmunity find benefit from identifying if these foods are a problem for them. After 30 days, begin slowly introducing, one at a time, these foods back into your diet to see if you notice any change in your overall health and/or your symptoms. You may find one or more of them is an issue for you and should be avoided.

2. STRESS

Stress flares autoimmunity, so you must get your stress under control. This is easier said than done, and there's no magic cure here. Unless you're able to move away to a tropical island (take me with you!), you can't get away from stress, but you need to make sure you have good stress management tools in place to help you cope with it.

Consider:

- Reducing your obligations where possible. Drop out. Say no. Pass. Consider downsizing or changing jobs if you find your life isn't where you want it to be.
- Purge toxic people from your life wherever you can.
- Light to moderate exercise (see below) is a stress reducer. Heavy, intense exercise is a stress and should probably be avoided.
- Consider creating a meditation habit (10 minutes a day).
- Surround yourself with supportive people - family & friends.
- Ask for help when and where you need it.
- Take stress supporting herbs & nutrients.

Once you have food & stress under your belt, move on to the next two important areas, sleep and movement.

3. SLEEP

Your body heals when you sleep. The American idea that sleep means you're weak and lazy is completely wrong. You're hurting your health by not sleeping enough. Most people need 7-9 hours of sleep a night. And if you're sick you may need even more. Make a commitment to sleep 8.5-9 hours a night for 30 days and see what it does to your mood, energy, sense of well-being, health, and autoimmunity. Most people are amazed by the change. Yes I understand it's not easy and you have way too much to do every day to sleep more. You still need to do it.

4. MOVEMENT

Unless you are crippled by pain you need to make an effort to move your body every day. This does not mean you have to "exercise" every day, but you need to move more. As we discussed earlier, being sedentary causes epigenetic changes to make your body more inflammatory. This is the opposite of what we need when dealing with autoimmunity.

- Consider walking every day, at least 15 minutes and preferably up to 60 mins.
- If that's too painful, consider swimming or any other light activity.
- Do some strength training at least 1-2x weekly. If you don't know how, consider hiring a trainer for a couple of sessions to help you get the hang of things.

And Lastly...

Find a good practitioner to work with.

Take this document or at least the highlights from it and show it to your doctor or other health professional who's helping you. If they dismiss it, or refuse to work on diet & lifestyle changes with you, I strongly recommend you find someone else to work with. Having a good practitioner who will help you work on your autoimmunity is a key component to getting back the life you want.



The End and The Beginning

So here we are, at the end. I hope this has given you a glimpse into a different, and I believe, better approach to treating autoimmunity. I hope this has given you some hope that there is a way out of the pain and suffering you may be dealing with. I hope this counteracts the doom & gloom that many people feel from their doctor's "sorry about that, guess you're screwed, let's try this drug..." response. I hope I've answered the question...

Is there a better way to deal with autoimmunity?

Yes there is!

If you found this paper helpful, please share it with anyone else you think might benefit from it.

And please let me know if I can help you!

Sincerely,

Dr. Tim Gerstmar

Dr Tim Gerstmar



Dr. Tim Gerstmar • Aspire Natural Health

www.aspirenaturalhealth.com

Phone: 425-202-7849

info@aspirenaturalhealth.com

 [AspireNaturalHealth](https://www.facebook.com/AspireNaturalHealth)
 [@DrTimGerstmarND](https://twitter.com/DrTimGerstmarND)

A Few Resources to Find Other Doctors Who May Embrace this Approach:

- **AANP** - American Association of Naturopathic Physicians
- **IFM** - The Institute for Functional Medicine
- **ACAM** - American College for Advancement in Medicine

