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DR. KEESHA EWERS: Welcome to the Women's Vitality Summit: Caring for Yourself, Body and Soul. This is Dr. Keesha Ewers, I am your host, and I'm very honored and excited to be interviewing John Immel today, who is the founder and educational director at Joyful Belly.

He draws on years of research and clinical experience specializing in digestive disorders and directs the Joyful Belly Institute Masters of Ayurvedic Digestion, which is a 500 hour training program.

He studied Ayurveda under Dr. Vasant Lad and specialized in the advanced treatment of digestive tract pathology. He holds a bachelors degree in mathematics from Harvard University and first discovered Ayurveda while he was working on a public health project in Bangladesh.

John's interest in Ayurveda and digestive tract pathology was inspired by a complex digestive disorder acquired from years of international travel. Welcome to the Summit, John.

JOHN IMMEL: Thank you. It's great to be here.

DR. KEESHA: I always start every interview that I'm having with the experts from the different fields of body, mind, heart, and spirit for the Summit with the word vitality, because it's the Women's Vitality Summit. Vitality, of course, means your life force, your passion, your juice, your joy, and I have noticed - and it's why I did this Summit in the first place - that a lot of people that I see in my clinic are really lacking that.

I'm curious what your answer to this question is: what do you see as one of the primary reasons women, and probably men - because I see them too having some of the same problems - are lacking vitality in our day in age?

JOHN IMMEL: It's a great question. My answer to that would have to lie in the digestive tract for several important reasons.

The first reason is - and many people don't know this - that digestion can take up to 60% of a person's metabolism. What does that mean? That means that the rest of our lives fit into the other 40%. So what we do with digestion may, in fact, be the single most important factor in how much of our metabolism we have for life, as opposed to simply breaking down food and turning it into nutrients.

The importance of digestion; we could approach that even from a more philosophical direction: every single organism, it's first priority is digestion; from an amoeba all the way up to a human being. So it's natural that our body would invest so much in that area of the body.



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Right then and there, you see that digestion plays an incredible and important role in energy that we have for life. But it's not the only reason why I would say that digestion is the most important tool for vitality.

The second reason is that when a person isn't digesting food well, it causes an imbalance of bacteria in the gut and an overgrowth of bacteria in the gut, and these bacteria digest the food for us if we don't. That leads to common complaints that people may have of gas and bloating, and problems with their elimination.

But something else also happens: when bacteria digests the food that we're eating, it causes a buildup of toxins in the body. Our immune system has to fight these - it has to fight both the bacteria and cleanup all of these toxins - and that's a significant energy drain on the body. So not only is the digestion itself costly, but the cleanup of digestion can be very costly.

Last factor that I'll mention in regards to vitality with digestion is that if a person is eating foods which don't agree with their body type, or don't match their constitution, then that's going to place an additional strain on their body.

When a client comes to me complaining of vitality, the very first thing that I address is their digestion, and then we go into other areas that are important as well. Those could be routine, how are they sleeping; all these other factors which people are probably already aware of.

DR. KEESHA: Which actually directly influence digestion too.

JOHN IMMEL: Absolutely. Yes, it's a factor. It all fits together.

DR. KEESHA: Right. Everything leads to digestion in the Ayurvedic world, and that's what I love. You always start with digestion and the reasons that you gave are really great. It's a big number - 60% - and I love for our listeners to hear that, because that really impacts those lifestyle choices.

When I tell a client that it's important that they get to bed and are asleep by 10:00pm and up before 6:00am, sometimes their eyes cross and they just laugh, even tears can well up in their eyes when they say "You really want me to sleep that much? I don't have time."

Those words, that statement "I don't have time" means that you're automatically in that space of I'm the zebra being chased by a lion. If you're a zebra being chased by a lion, and you're in that fight-or-flight mode for most of your day, well the hormones that are responsible and influence your ability to have sexual desire, and to be able to digest your food, are gone. The zebra knows that it's not safe to stop and have a bowel movement, the zebra knows if it's got a lion on its tail, about to eat it for lunch, it's not safe to stop and have sex.



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All of those functions that the body does when it knows it's safe are put on hold. Everything about our lifestyle choices actually lead to whether or not our body feels safe enough. I mean, just that word 'safe enough to digest' - isn't that sad that we've come to that place?

JOHN IMMEL: People are stressed, they've put a lot on their plate, and they haven't addressed, or really sat down and culled through their activities and said "What's my priority?" They lump everything into the day and create a lot of stress and tension, and that's not good for digestion.

We take that 60% and it turns into 80% of our metabolism, because we're not actually feeding the digestion, we're undermining it in certain ways, so it ends up being a little catch-22.

DR. KEESHA: Right. You mentioned eating foods that are right for your body type, and I just want to do a quick review about Ayurveda and how it does say that we are not all the same person, and we're not all the same body type, and therefore, the same diet, the same exercise routine, the same way that we sleep, it doesn't apply to every single person. Can you do a quick review of how we differ as people and how Ayurveda breaks that down?

JOHN IMMEL: Yes. Ayurveda breaks it down and looks at individuals through the lens of the three body types, that's one way: Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Vata tends to be characterized by deficiency, Pitta by excessive heat, and Kapha by, maybe excessive water or congestion, or just in general, conditions of excess in their body. Deficiency, heat, excess, is the way that Ayurveda loosely approaches or generalizes about different people's body types.

I present that in a sort of curt or quick fashion, because I want to get to something else with Ayurveda that I think is so important when a person is even asking themselves what their body type is or what kind of food is right for them, which is wholly based on a person's individual experience.

Our bodies are all different and we experience our bodies very differently as well. What Ayurveda offers that's so unique is that it puts words to those experiences that we have; words that characterize the most important therapeutic experiences that we have being alive. We all know that when we feel hot on summer day or cold on a winter day, that's an important therapeutic experience that affects our health.

Our grandmas told us this: if you go out without socks on a winter day, you could catch a cold. Or if you're shivering, get in before you catch a cold. We've been hearing this our whole lives about how hot and cold have an important therapeutic value for us. Really, it's our experience of what's going on: do we feel cold, do we feel hot?



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Right down the line, Ayurveda offers such a profound vocabulary for us to describe important therapeutic experiences. This is where the Ayurveda concept comes from of Vata, Pitta, and Kapha body types, characterized by deficiency, heat, and excess. We learn about our body type through these therapeutic experiences, and that lends itself very naturally into how Ayurveda approaches diet because it is so individualistic, so based on how we experience food.

How we experience digestion of food plays right into what our diet should be, and how we understand what our body type even is.

DR. KEESHA: This is really important, because if you go to your beautiful website - which is joyfulbelly.com, for everyone that's listening - one of the things you offer, John, are recipes, and you have a little quiz, "What's my Body Type?" I have one of those on DrKeesha.com too, for Ayurveda.

What I find is when people answer those questions in the quiz they often answer according to what their imbalance is. You and I both know that online quizzes aren't the very best way to find out what your Dosha type is, but your experiential process with it.

The quizzes are a great place to start, because you get to see what goes into each of the body types, and what constitutional indicators are in each one, and it's fantastic for you to start having some awareness of your own being. I call Ayurveda the manual that you were never born with; it's your users' manual.

If I look at some of the recipes you have featured right now on the sidebar of your bio that I just read to introduce you, there's Banana Ice Cream with Almonds, there's Carrot and Kale Soup with Ginger, Fennel and Lime, and there's Orange Zest Fig Jam.

I'm a Pitta-Kapha person. It's not very hot in Seattle right now - we don't get really hot temperatures, usually - so if I ate banana ice cream with almonds as a Kapha in my constitutional type, I actually would gain a ton of weight. I would also have a lot of mucus, and I would hold on to water and get kind of puffy.

What's interesting is a lot of people don't pay attention to those signs of what their body is saying. Instead, the carrot and kale soup with ginger, fennel and lime is a great choice for me, and it actually looks better to me than the ice cream. I somehow know that is going to nourish my body in such a way that I'm going to feel light, not heavy, and I'm going to have the energy I need to process all of the information that comes into my mind every single day, which is digestion.

One of the things I love about Ayurveda is we're not just talking about digestion that happens to your liver, your gallbladder, your tongue, your colon, your intestines. We're also talking about



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the digestive process of your thoughts into actions, your feelings, and everything that actually enters you as a sense is digested. If that's done in a way that doesn't match your body type, you will have feedback from your system.

One of the things I find is that a lot of women are very disconnected from that. I would love for you to address that too. How can people tell? Ayurveda is so great, because it talks about bowel movements, fingernails, tongue, energy, skin, and it's everything. Your whole body is talking to you at all times.

So in this busy, overscheduled life that we live today, and for women often it involves working and caring for others, and kind of self-forgetting, what I see a lot is people aren't paying attention to their internal system's feedback. They're waiting until they get to what Ayurveda calls the fourth disease state progression, where now they're starting to pay attention to the feedback because they can't move anymore without pain, or literally can't move.

That's one of the really joyful things about Ayurveda that I think we need to tap into, really listening to what the body is telling us.

JOHN IMMEL: You touched upon an issue of body awareness and feedback, and understanding of feedback, and you asked how can women get back in touch with their bodies?

I would say that there are two main roadblocks to body awareness that I see. The first is that people overcomplicate it. The hardest thing about becoming aware of your body is that it's simpler than most people think. They just need to take a few minutes. It doesn't need to be a 60 minute meditation, or sitting somewhere for an hour in total quiet, away from the noise of children and work, nothing like that.

Body awareness can happen in 30 seconds. It can probably happen in 10 seconds, or it could happen in 5 minutes, or 15 minutes. But taking that step away from what's happening right now, taking a few nice deep breaths and then what are you looking for when you take those deep breaths? Well, you're going to look for those main therapeutic experiences that we talked about - that I just referred to - hot, cold, oily, dry, sharp or dull, heavy or light. Do I feel heavy or light right now? Really simple.

We're just going to take an inventory of those experiences, which is very, very simple to do, and on top of that, I would add a few other things that a person should look for when they are trying to become aware of their body. Look for sensations of pressure anywhere. We all know what it feels like to have pressure in the head, like a headache or a weird feeling in our hand. They're sensations of pressure that can happen in many parts of the body: around the heart area, in the chest, in the gut area.



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In fact, when I'm coaching my clients on body awareness, I always tell them "Head, heart, gut. Head, heart, gut." Always look at those three main regions as the focal points of your body awareness, and then you can expand from there a bit to other parts of our body where we tend to feel our body. That's a longer discussion, but pressure, pain, discomfort, cramping, and all those sensations that we have that are physical internally.

This, in addition to these therapeutic experiences that I referred to, is the first step. Like I said, this can be done in 30 seconds. It might take you an hour or two to learn about what you're looking for, if you were going to look up those experiences and read about them, but after you make that initial investment, in 30 seconds you can become aware of your body.

Taking the time and not overcomplicating it. You can read in an Ayurvedic book about all kinds of fancy interpretations of the tongue, the pulse, and you might feel under-confident as you start to get involved in those subjects. Of course, the more you get involved in those subjects, the more you'll learn.

But if you don't know about the detailed Ayurvedic use of the pulse technique, or the tongue, or some advanced Western nutritional language, even without all of that knowledge, you can still be aware of your body just as much as any practitioner can. Basically, what I'm saying is not to be deterred by the feeling that you don't know enough, or to think that you need some special, mystical, or esoteric knowledge in order to acquire this body awareness. You don't. All you need are the basics.

DR. KEESHA: I couldn't agree more. This basic thing is to eat a food and feel how you feel. Really tune in and see how you feel. People don't realize that you're not supposed to feel tired after you eat. You're not supposed to feel energized either, to the point that you do after you have coffee, where you're wired and you have this surge of energy.

Your car doesn't react differently when you put fuel in the tank, it just keeps going. It's really important that people don't have these big swings with their food, and I don't think a lot of people are aware of that.

We're so used to chasing our energy, using some sort of stimulant and then alcohol at the end of the night to go to sleep, which of course is not going to help at all. It's a fascinating rollercoaster that I find that people ride. I call it the detox-retox rollercoaster, where the scale will reach a certain point and they'll say "Oh, I need a detox." So they go out and find some sort of detox to do, some sort of very restrictive diet process, lose a little weight, and then go back to what they were doing before. It's a cycle.

One of the things that Ayurveda offers, and what you do with the Joyful Belly, is to really get people off of the detox-retox rollercoaster. That's what I do with my work too. Make it a



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lifestyle. Really tune in every second to how you feel with each of the choices that you're making. Does this kind of exercise that you're doing make you feel good when you're done? Or are you completely wiped out and you have to lie on the couch for hours afterwards? If so, you probably overdid whatever it was. It's probably not right for your body type, or what your body is asking for in this moment.

It seems so simple, what we're saying, and you're right, I think people overcomplicate the heck out of it.

JOHN IMMEL: Yeah, they really do. They feel like they need to know more about the kidney and read five books on it, or about the liver, and then they throw their hands up "This is too complicated for me. This is too much information." Well, what simplifies life is habit. If you're trying to digest - no pun intended - huge volumes of nutritional data, then you could be missing the boat.

What simplifies all that data, what reduces all that data down to something manageable, is habit. Habit is what's required to simplify our life. When we cultivate good habits, have a good routine and lifestyle, then behaviors become automatic, and that's where Ayurveda seeks to intervene: basic understanding of our body, basic awareness of our body, and cultivating a lifestyle of wellness, so that you don't have to worry about every morning waking up and saying "What am I going to do today for my health?" You're not swinging back and forth on that pendulum of detox-retox.

DR. KEESHA: I would love to have you talk a little bit about foods that enhance digestion according to each of the body types. Like I mentioned earlier, ginger, fennel, lime, kale are really good for my body type, and putting it in a soup makes it year-round good for me.

One of the things that Ayurveda also emphasizes is that you eat a small portion, according to what you can hold in your hands, and that you make sure that your food is fully digested before you stick something else in your mouth. I'd love for you to talk about some of these digestive tips and rules that are really lost in our culture.

JOHN IMMEL: Sounds good. I'll stick with this concept of easy versus difficult to digest for a minute and then expand upon how that idea can be used to help a person with their digestion.

I started today's talk on this idea that digestion can take up to 60% of our metabolism, and if we want to increase our vitality, then we should try to reduce that number to, say, 30%. Now instead of having 40% for the rest of our life, we have almost double the energy; we have 70% for our life, almost doubling our vitality. How are we going to do that?



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The first step is to choose foods that are easy to digest. There's this great story around that. Western medicine knows that we digest different foods at different rates, and foods that take longer to digest require more energy to digest, and that gets you up to that 60% of your metabolism. Foods that digest quickly take less energy to digest, and get us down to that 30%. We can get the nutrition and calories, or whatever that we need out of the food in the 30% instead of the 60%.

When did Western medicine really study this issue of easy versus difficult to digest? It was in the mid-1800s, and it was the father of modern gastroenterology that really did this in-depth study. What happened was he was in his doctor's office when he heard a gunshot and came running out to see if anyone was hurt. Sure enough, there was a man lying on the ground in the factory next door who had been shot in the stomach, after a dispute, leaving a gaping hole in the stomach.

By some miracle, this man survived, yet there was still a hole in his stomach. Well, the doctor immediately saw the opportunity and hired this gentleman who had been shot. He would open the flap and stick food in the man's stomach, and test to see how long it would take that food to digest. He found that certain foods digested very easily, certain foods were more difficult to digest, and he wrote them all down and categorized them. As a result, he became the father of modern gastroenterology.

I would say that the first digestive tip is one that was probably the first tip in Western medicine around the mid-1800s. It remains the first tip in Ayurveda, which is: choose easy to digest foods.

What are some easy to digest foods? White rice; it's an empty carb, yes, but it's very easy to digest. Cooked food is easier to digest than raw food. Soups are easier to digest. If you have a digestive problem, you're not going to eat a sandwich, which is both raw and cooked ingredients slapped on two dry pieces of bread. We're not going to do that. We're going to make food that looks a little more like baby food; a nice, warm soup.

It's still summer right now, we're not really thinking too much about soups, but autumn is coming, and the time's going to come where you're going to be craving a soup, or foods like a sweet potato, they're easy to digest foods.

What's hard to digest? Hard to digest would be something like steak and fries with Brussels sprouts on the side, or beans - many beans. There are some beans that are easy to digest, and Ayurveda really favors those, like string beans, sweet peas, and something called mung dal. But other foods are much more difficult to digest; pinto beans are pretty difficult to digest.

Then we get to cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage and other brassicas which may be also a little difficult to digest. I know that as soon as I put foods in those categories, easy and difficult, I can hear Keesha on the other end of the line saying "Wait, but I'm a Kapha. If I eat cauliflower and



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brassicas and broccoli, those foods make me feel good and energized." Am I right there, Keesha, that those foods work for you? Or do they not work for you?

DR. KEESHA: Yeah, if they're cooked. If they're cooked.

JOHN IMMEL: If they're cooked, exactly. So here's where personal experience comes in. We have this general list of foods that are easy and difficult to digest, but then we have to return to constitution.

To shed some more light on that, I'll go over those recipes that Keesha mentioned earlier. She started talking about the banana almond ice cream. The way we make that recipe is by freezing bananas overnight, then putting a banana with a cup of almond milk, a pinch of cinnamon, and maybe a tablespoon of almond butter and sticking it in a Vitamix or blender. You get a thick, cold treat, which my kids love.

Why did we design that recipe for one person, even though it's not going to work in Seattle for a person who's Kapha? Well, in August, which is the time of year that we're having this conversation right now, in the middle of the day, it's very hot where I live, so people are sweating and they're losing a lot of electrolytes. Bananas have a good electrolyte profile.

On top of that, as we're moving into fall, the temperature is dropping, and our body naturally - as we approach fall - starts to take fats out of our blood and put them in the skin to insulate our bodies for winter. This is what gives us good, strong immunity when the temperature plummets roughly around October.

Just before Halloween we get a deep, cold spell and everyone catches a cold. If you have that insulating layer of fat in the skin by that time through eating things like the banana almond ice cream recipe, if you're feeding yourself that almond butter with the almond milk, you're going to feel strong by the time October comes.

But that's only if you're a body type that tends to be dried out; that you tend to have thin, dry skin. If you tend to be easily dehydrated, that recipe is going to be perfect for you. But if you're Kapha in Seattle, that recipe is going to work against you.

In fact, this time of year, if the temperature's starting to get cold and a Kapha person has ice cream, they're going to get congestion, just as Keesha said that she would. So she's going to want to look to a recipe that is a little bit lighter. The one that jumped off the page to her was the kale with carrots with ginger - I'm not sure if cumin was in there too.

DR. KEESHA: Not in the title, but it's probably in the recipe.

JOHN IMMEL: Okay, it might be in the recipe. Kale is a mild bitter and that mild bitter is going to do a gentle flush of the liver, pulling oily bile out of the liver. As you pull that oily bile out of the liver, you're really pulling oils out of the bloodstream, which is great for Kapha. Kapha people tend to have blood that is a little too rich. Maybe their blood sugar levels tend to be high as well as oils in the blood tend to be a little bit higher.

When you pull oily bile out of the liver with a mild bitter, that's very refreshing to a Kapha person. It helps weight loss. Kapha people usually tend to have somewhat thicker skin, so they don't really need to build up that insulating layer as much as a Vata person would, so they can afford to go for the recipe that's a little bit lighter, a little bit more refreshing.

Let's look at the spices in that recipe – ginger and cumin. Ginger has a bite to it, like black pepper does, and that's called pungency in Ayurveda. That pungency can be a little bit of an irritant in a good way. When you feel sluggish and you just take your hands and rub your whole body, you feel refreshed. Ginger, because it's somewhat of a gentle irritant, will refresh and get the blood flowing through your digestive tract, improving your digestion.

Ginger also does something that it increases the heart rate and gets things moving through internally as well, and that feels good to a Kapha person, to get their blood moving. It's like going for a little jog or going for a little walk.

Now look at our second spice, cumin. I like to refer to cumin as - and I love to do this with food, to pair it with a landscape - if cumin were a climate or a landscape somewhere, it would be the southwest: dry and hot. I always think of cumin as the way a person would feel at the end of the day walking through a desert, watching the desert sunset. It's not very hot, the desert sunset, but it's this mixture of dry heat that cumin gives a person.

That sensation of dry heat is very attractive to Kapha, because they tend to be cool and a little damp. Dry heat being the opposite really counterbalances the tendency of Kapha, which again, makes them feel lively and refreshed, which is a good thing.

DR. KEESHA: It's so funny that you do that with the landscape because I do the same exact thing with the Doshas. Ayurveda always says we're the microcosm of the macrocosm of the universe, which means all the elements that occur out there are within us. I'll say to my patients that means we're just like dirt, and the kind of dirt that represents each one of these Doshas has elements and qualities to it.

Vata would be like the desert sand: there's a lot of air and space between every grain, and when the wind comes up, it really causes chaos. Sand moves everywhere, you can't see anything, you lose your sense of direction if there's wind in the desert and sand is going everywhere. That is exactly what happens to a Vata body type. These light, super tall or short people, when the wind

comes up, their Vata gets worse and they have more ADD type symptoms, harder times to have bowel movements, their skin gets dry, they can get dizzy - all these Vata types of imbalances come up.

Kapha is going to be water and earth, so it's more like clay. You stick a fork in clay, it's not going to move, it's not going to fall over. It gets stuck in there, which is exactly what happens inside of a Kapha body when they're imbalanced. They get more couch-potato-y and have a harder time moving things through their bodies.

So in order to counterbalance each of those two kinds of dirt, for sand, in order to get it to be nice and stable so it doesn't blow everywhere, you want to add oil and water and moisture to it. For Kapha, you actually want to dry that clay out a little bit. It just makes complete sense if you take Mother Nature as your metaphor for what's going on inside your body.

Pitta is going to be like the rainforest soil: it's hot and it's fertile, and if a bird flies over a rainforest and drops a seed in it, you don't have to tend it, it just blooms and grows. That's what happens inside of a Pitta mind; it's very fertile and their ideas are able to grow into fruition. But like anything hot, it can become overheated and inflamed so you're going to want cooling things to actually calm that down a little bit.

I love that you use a landscape too. It's interesting, because Ayurveda encourages us to do that. Each of these Doshas is also attached to a season, so as you've been talking about foods good for digestion, not only does it change according to your Dosha, but it changes according to the season you're in too, as you mentioned.

It's being constantly in tune with your body and your environment, and I just think that's the message of Ayurveda is to stay connected, stay in tact, stay tuned in, and then you'll be able to listen to the direction that you're actually being provided, and move gracefully through each of the season changes and life stages, instead of getting stuck and having these big potholes you fall into.

JOHN IMMEL: Yes, absolutely. You get to experience the joy of being in tune with what's happening around us, and as soon as you do that, you feel that you can fully appreciate the seasons, and fully appreciate the cycles of nature.

One person may think of it as an intellectual exercise, another person thinks of it as enjoying, in a way, the whole drama of creation, enjoying the joys of the best of the winter, the best of the spring, the best of the summer, the best of the fall, because we know it so intimately that we're with it.



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It is incredible joy to cultivate that habit of Ayurveda that brings us into touch with ourselves in our relationship with the world around us, and in touch with the world around us as well; in touch with what other people might be going through, what other people might be feeling, and ride the wave with it.

DR. KEESHA: Well, it's so helpful to know Ayurveda in that way that you're talking about, because if you live with somebody that is Pitta predominant - like me - and they have cup of coffee as their routine or their habit and it's hot, you're going to have someone that is probably going to be cranky, short-tempered, and impatient with you. You can start to identify the people in front of you and start to understand and not take things personally.

If your boss is having a cup of coffee at 1:00pm and it's July, then you're probably going to want to steer clear, or else bring them the gift of some coconut water. You can manage your environment a little bit that way.

JOHN IMMEL: Yes, schedule your work meetings before the cup of coffee.

DR. KEESHA: Exactly. I think it's really helpful to be able to understand why people behave the way they behave around you too, and stop internalizing it and taking it personally, when there might just be a Dosha out of balance in front of you.

You can be an example and a gentle reminder, or a teacher of these things, as you learn them about yourself. That is, I think, one of the best gifts that you can bring as somebody that's in touch with Ayurveda.

JOHN IMMEL: Absolutely. The compassion - once you know what people are going through around you, you're not going to argue with your boss, because you know that you're not really arguing with him, you're arguing with his cup of coffee.

DR. KEESHA: Exactly. And that's a lose-lose situation.

JOHN IMMEL: Yes, it is.

DR. KEESHA: As I introduced you, John, I said that one of the ways that you had come upon Ayurveda is through your own personal story of a complicated intestinal tract issue. Of course, I came to Ayurveda through the path of rheumatoid arthritis, me attacking myself.

Talk about waiting until the disease has progressed to the very end stage before I started really doing some research and figuring out what to do with myself. I would love to hear your story and how this unfolded for you.

JOHN IMMEL: Thank you for asking. Well, I had been traveling for a number of years in search of great food, and I spent some time living overseas in France. I spent some time living in Morocco studying architecture and language, and then I was in Bangladesh for a year, working on a public health project; really throwing caution to the wind and enjoying the local cuisine in every way, shape or form.

I've always loved food, that's one of the reasons I was drawn to Ayurveda. But with all that travel, and overconfidence, I had acquired a host of critters in my gut that really knocked me out. I lost a lot of weight, my digestive system was a wreck, and I felt awful all the time. I would also say that I even refused to admit it.

There's always that element of the ego that comes into our disorders. I refused to admit how sick I was until things got pretty bad, and I came home and started the path to recovery, started wondering what can I do to help myself? It wasn't too long before I found Ayurveda and started to learn. Originally, I rejected Ayurveda because being a person that loves food, I didn't want to adopt some system that could possibly restrict my creativity or restrict my culinary talents in any way. That was the way I expressed myself, through cooking.

It wasn't until some time that I really embraced Ayurveda. In fact, it was around the time where I realized that Ayurveda wasn't going to hurt my creative ability, that it would actually enhance it. The way that Ayurveda looks at food are incredibly profound, and the recipes that you can create with Ayurveda were actually like you could balance tastes and flavors and it really created a framework for me to create food. That's when I really started to embrace it.

I quickly found that Ayurveda could also help me in ways that other forms of medicine couldn't around digestion. Digestion is a focus or specialty of Ayurveda, and Ayurveda has such a profound knowledge of digestion, offering what I think are some of the most advanced techniques for functional GI disorders. Even though they're ancient, I think we can safely call them advanced because of the level of depth Ayurveda offers in this area.

So I went through that whole process of figuring it out. I was in Ayurveda school by this point, and learning the Ayurveda knowledge around this, but I had to really pave the way. I didn't have anyone giving me specific advice around digestion. I really had to get into the ancient texts and figure out all the details around this through researching Ayurveda.

Then I began the road to recovery, and each month for the first year or so, I would reach some epiphany that really helped me. And then, over the next few years, and even until now, it's something more like every six months, I reach his epiphany where suddenly I feel so much better, so much more easily taking care of myself.

But I went through all of it. I studied different types of laxatives until I could find a gentle, safe laxative that would help with my elimination at the time. With anti-inflammatories that would cool my system down from some of the infections and difficult things I was going through. Finding digestives that could help digest my food without aggravating inflammation.

So often you look up a list of digestives, you get a list of foods that will irritate your gut, and that's not good for inflammation. So I had to find special foods like cilantro that would help in that area.

I should probably mention some of the things I found out there: aloe vera being an anti-inflammatory. Some modified version of Triphala, a famous formula in Ayurveda - that was what I settled on as a gentle laxative. Then also antimicrobials to reduce fermentation and get rid of those infections in my gut. Soothing foods - I mean, I went through step by step in healing my gut over time, and I felt better. I felt functional again. I felt like I had a life again, really, after all that.

DR. KEESHA: These are the same exact things that I found to treat my rheumatoid arthritis too, because it's an inflammatory disease, it's not a disease of the joints, as most people think. It's a disease of the digestive process. It all boils down to the same thing. Autoimmunity. Every single person with autoimmune disease has a digestive problem. Autoimmunity is always a problem with the digestion, not with the target organ that the immune system goes after; it's of digestion.

That can't be hammered home enough because in Western medicine, we tend to chase the symptom, which leaves us looking at the target organ rather than the root cause. The root cause is so essential.

Of course, any resistance that you have against that treatment process for yourself, I think, is the adolescent part of us saying "Don't tell me what to do." I went through the same thing in terms of resistance: "What do you mean this isn't good for me?" as I'm reading and talking out loud to the book in my mind. "How can this possibly be true?" But we have to go through that process, we just have to.

We have to heal all the aspects of ourselves and integrate them with compassion and love, and that takes time. None of this stuff happens overnight, and as you've mentioned, it was several years for you. It was several years for me for the full recovery, but I reversed my autoimmunity within just a few months of practicing this.

A lot of my journey took me into really understanding the way my mind worked. My Pitta mind was inflamed and so it was really good for me to see that.

One of the reasons we call your gut your second brain is that all of these neurotransmitters in the metabolism and digestion that are going on is of your thoughts also. I had to heal that too in order to move through this, and do a lot of forgiveness work. I had to let go of a lot of the way my expectations functioned as a Pitta person, and lo and behold, I stopped attacking myself. It's nothing short of a miracle in Western medicine to have this occur, right?

JOHN IMMEL: Somehow our body has these tools to balance itself, even if scientifically, we can't come up with a formulaic approach for the general population. As an individual, so often through our self-discovery, we find that resolution is possible.

DR. KEESHA: I started with this thought process of really tuning in, and I want to finish with that too: tuning in to your own individual body, your own individual life circumstances, and the way that you're processing all of that, your level of vitality, your level of libido, your level of passion for your life, of enjoyment in your life could be considered like a gas gauge on your dashboard of your car. If it's flagging, if it's low, it means you need attention, and that means pulling over and really spending some time in refueling.

That's not always just with food. It's also with some of the other aspects of your life. It all becomes part of your digestive process, to make new tissues for yourself and new levels of vitality.

That's another thing I think Ayurveda is so wonderful at is describing the fact that each level of our being is actually manufactured from the food that we eat and our digestive process. Would you describe that, John, a little bit, so people understand that?

JOHN IMMEL: Yeah, I believe you're referring to what's called dhatu nutrition. Dhatus are the different tissues of our body, and Ayurveda has this idea that food first nourishes our blood plasma, which is called rasa dhatu in Ayurveda. It's that blood plasma that then nourishes the red part of the blood, which is called rakta, and then the red part of the blood nourishes the muscles.

Then the muscles nourish the fat, the fat nourishes the bones, the bones nourish something called majja, which you could think of as the myelin sheath or the bone marrow, and then finally, after we've nourished all of these basic building block tissues of the body, then it nourishes our sexual organs. Then what's called our ojas, and I would consider ojas to be the excellent expression of physical tissues; our resilience.

In fact ojas, being a little complicated to understand, perhaps could be simplified by this. When you go to a butcher and look for a fish or you're buying beef, you can see the difference between the flesh that looks healthy and the flesh that does not look healthy. That healthy, excellent tissue of the body is known as ojas. So, finally, after each successive tissue layer is nourished by the



layer before it, ending in the sexual reproductive organs, and then finally into this concept of ojas, then our whole body is well nourished.

This concept and this idea is nothing different than what we notice that happens every day. We eat food, it nourishes our blood, the blood nourishes the tissues of the body. That concept is formalized and studied in Ayurveda as how our body nourishes itself in successive layers.

DR. KEESHA: It's such a great way of thinking about things, because it's why we have a new body every month or so, because we're regenerating our tissues and the way that we digest. That means that nothing is set in stone. If we have an imbalance, we can transform it. You're never stuck with where you are today. If you're not happy with it, you can change it, and that's a really lovely way of living your life. Knowing that you always have that ability and the power to transform whatever is happening for you in this moment to something even better.

John, I want to thank you for taking the time to share even a tiny bit of your wisdom on the Summit with the women that are participating. You're providing them with a free gift, and I would love for you to talk a little bit about that, so that they know what this is.

JOHN IMMEL: Well, this free gift is very much about what we started talking about today, about this issue of body awareness specifically as it relates to food and eating.

What I'm referring to specifically is a book that we published last year called *Explore Your Hunger*, which starts with showing people how they experience hunger, and all the nuances of that.

When people say "I'm hungry" they're often referring to a complex set of feelings that are worth delving into a bit, so that we can understand how our body is talking to us when it says the words "I'm hungry."

From there, we talk about food cravings. We think of hunger and food cravings as the same, but a craving is sort of the direction our hunger is taking, or the object of our hunger. The food choices that we want to satisfy our hunger is called a craving, and we discuss in the text how people should think about their cravings. What are cravings really like? What's really happening when you're craving something? Again, talking about this from a body awareness point of view.

Finally, through to the experience of eating itself, and then the experience of digestion. So this book *Explore Your Hunger* goes through the body awareness and the experiences that we've been talking about today, and what I'd like to offer everyone who comes to the Summit and hears this talk, if you feel motivated and inspired by some of the things that you heard today, then you can get a free electronic copy of the book by coming to joyfulbelly.com and Keesha will provide



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the link for that with the Summit materials, so that you can get that free e-book - that free electronic copy of the text.

DR. KEESHA: Great. Thank you so much, John, and I appreciate you taking the time to share all of this with everyone.

JOHN IMMEL: Oh, it's my pleasure. It's fascinating, it's something that I'm passionate about, and it's helped me. I hope it helps others and I'm simply delighted to be invited to participate in the Summit.

DR. KEESHA: Remember, everybody, to live, love, laugh, keep on learning, and have a fantastic day, until next time.