



Women's Vitality Summit - September 2016 – Dr. Keesha Ewers interviews Dr. Jolene Brighton 1

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Welcome to the Women's Vitality Summit: Caring For Yourself, Body and Soul. I'm very delighted to be interviewing Dr. Jolene Brighten today, who earned her doctorate in naturopathic medicine, and has extensive training in integrative women's health and autoimmune disease management

Jolene is a practicing holistic pelvic care provider, and after she developed Hashimoto's following the birth of her son, Dr. Brighten is a strong advocate for the Hashimoto's community. With a special emphasis on fertility, pregnancy and post-partum thyroiditis, she's the best-selling author of the book *Healing Your Body Naturally After Childbirth: The New Mom's Guide To Navigating The Fourth Trimester*, and is launching a new program aimed to support fertility and healthy pregnancy for the Hashimoto's community.

She's a regular contributor to several publications and websites and lectures on the subject of post-partum care, autoimmunity and women's health, to both healthcare providers and the public. Welcome to the Summit Dr. Brighten.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: Thank you so much for having me here, I'm really excited for what the Summit is setting out to accomplish.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: It's all about vitality, and the word vitality of course, I always remind our listeners, is your dazzle, your brightness, your passion, joy, and energy. Vitality runs as life force through you.

I see a lot of women that have come to me over the last three decades that are really severely lacking vitality. I'm sure you've seen that too. That's what drove me to do this Summit.

The first question I always ask the experts that I'm interviewing is what do you see as one of the biggest things that drains women's vitality in our era?

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: That's a great question. I think that in today's society we're seeing a rise of chronic disease, and we're seeing all of these very concerning things that are taking place.

We always start to look outward. We're looking for the toxins. We're looking for what nutrients are not coming in. It's very removed from the individual.

The number one I see that really drains women, and I think it's true for all humans, is this lack of self-care and cultivation with an emphasis on connection as well. What I mean by that is that, as women, we're programmed in some ways, especially once we become mothers, to be giving, and to be serving. We often forget that we also need to receive. We also need to serve ourselves.

People in general, I mean as humans, we really need that social connection. For women, we need social connection that serves us, that there's a reciprocation. The biggest strain I definitely would see is that we don't cultivate our intuition, we don't listen to our own needs, and then we don't actually serve ourselves and give ourselves those needs. We end up in these relationships that can be draining, and we're not feeling good because we're not listening to that intuition.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: That's a great answer. I think that what you're basically saying is that we need to put self-care at the top of the to-do list every day instead of if we have time, or once a month we might get to this.

Again, the subtitle of the Summit is Caring For Yourself, Body and Soul. What you're addressing is actually taking care of yourself, body and soul when you say this. It's really, really important. It's having good boundaries.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: Absolutely. I shared with you the story of when I was camping in the woods at this music festival. It was just gorgeous, and such an experience to be out there and to feel that connection to drive. It was a sustainable concert festival. There was actually one day where I only threw away one piece of trash, which was mind boggling to me.

After coming away from that, the best way I can explain it is that it was soul medicine. I tried to do a Google search, because I thought I can't be the first person who thought of that. Once I found it, I found a book out there and the book's fantastic. It's about Reiki and energy medicine, which I think is all very important.

When I think of soul medicine, I just think of what feeds your soul. It's different for everyone. That self-care is definitely a part of that. It's the soul medicine. It's so much beyond just the physical body, which is a very important aspect of health, it definitely is. As women, we're so much more than just our bodies.

I think a little narrative that has taken place in our society has reduced so many of us to thinking that we're valued by what our external appearance is. You can see that translate as well into medicine. Women will be motivated by the things that make them look better, but I would like to see women start being motivated by the things that make them feel better. That's real soul medicine.

Whatever it is that feeds you on that very basic level, and then rises up through the body. It's a hard thing to articulate. What just raises your spirit, and makes you feel like you could just soar.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: What infuses you with vitality - that's exactly the definition of it.

I wrote a vitality journal as a gift to all the participants in this Summit, and it's a gift that came through the emails along the way. It's posted on the Women's Vitality Summit website, and part of what it calls women to do is to find that thing that moves your soul. What is your passion? What is your desire? What moves you to be curious and optimistic, and to have gratitude and appreciation? These are the things that infuse you with vitality. Not a Red Bull. Not a cup of coffee.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: Yeah. Absolutely. Everything that you just said, which is just absolutely beautiful. I love the idea of that journal. We see it in children. If we think about who has the most vitality that's walking around this planet, it is our children. If you look at the things that they really embody, that's what we want to be cultivating. That curiosity and play is huge.

It's the number one prescription I write in my office - you have to play every day. Your heart needs it. Your entire being needs to play.

Sometimes we get so bogged down as we move through this life, and we allow ourselves to take on extra stresses, extra burdens, and we forget to say no. Then, there are little battle wounds. This life is a bit messy, and there is some good that comes from that, but in all of that we kind of lose touch with that child within us. That sounds almost like a little bit cheesy as it comes out of my mouth, but it's so true.

If we go back to those simpler times and we see, with my son, and just observe what brings him joy, it's so simple. When you allow yourself just to surrender to the simplicity and to even just the ridiculousness of being a giddy little child, whatever age you are, it's refreshing.

I love the phrase it infuses vitality, because that is exactly what it does, at the cellular level. It infuses vitality into every cell.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: I listed out five keys to happiness and well-being, which of course are the downstream effects of having vitality. The fifth one is the capacity to love and be loved. I wrote also the same thing that you just said about reconnecting to the child part of us that, the time when we were children, or as a mom when your children are small. It's like you get a second go-around on all of this. You see the world through those same little eyes again, and you get to feel that same optimism and idealism and excitement. You just love.

That's the thing. After you've had the traumas that life will inevitably bring, and the hurts, and the betrayals of trust, and all the things that every single human endures, along with the joy and the elation and the contentment and the love, if you wall your heart up, then you can't love and be loved.

In your effort to protect yourself from hurt, you're actually keeping yourself from being able to have that really wonderful, the word that you use, surrender. Any woman knows that you can't have an orgasm unless you surrender to it. You can't try. You can't go to sleep unless you surrender to sleep. You can't try.

It's like this effortless ability to love and to be loved. Children are embodiments of that. I think that's one of the wonderful gifts of being around children and to parent them. I actually will probably be a grandma in the next two years. I'm excited to have the third go-around on this.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: My mother-in-law says it's so much better taking care of kids.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Everyone says that.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: You just get to flow. I love what you said about getting a second go-around, and it's so true. I frame it where my son is going to teach me more about living life than really I'm going to teach him about life. It's something that I remind myself of often. There's only so much living we actually get to do in this life. There's only so much of it.

There's so much work and stressors, and fill in the blank for whatever it is for you that distracts you from really living. There's just not a lot left over. It's so true in so many ways.

My son's first time at the beach was like my first time going to the beach, being really present with him, which is such a gift; to be mindful and to be present. To feel the sand and to think about how he's feeling the sand for the first time. I think that there is nothing more amazing than seeing a child.

For people who don't have children, I went through this with my dog as well. The first time you take them to the beach, or to the woods, and you see them light up, and you see the excitement. You can't help but feel that as well.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Boundless joy that is so contagious. I agree. I get the same thing with my dogs now that my children are grown. I have four kids and my youngest is 19. I've got these two amazing dogs that give me that same boundless, unconditional love and joy that reminds me of how to be a human. There's that great bumper sticker: I wish to live up to be the woman that my dog thinks I am.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: Totally. I love that. I feel like our dogs really are more emotional than our kids. Our dogs give us a little nudge to be that better person, for sure.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Completely forgiving. You've got a story that's very parallel to mine in terms of the autoimmune disease process. You mentioned in something that we had talked about earlier about your journey with autoimmune disease, and about putting it into remission. You said it keeps you honest, and that is something that I think is the greatest gift of autoimmunity.

When you start attacking you, you have to sit down, be really quiet, and ask your question. Why? Why am I killing myself right now? Why am I doing this to me? That does keep you honest. The answers to that question, and what comes out later in terms of your healing process, that keeps you on the road of self-care.

I always am saying to women please don't get to that point. Do you find that that seems to be often what happens, where you have to get this giant wakeup call before you'll start taking care of yourself in the ways that are so important?

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: It's a really unfortunate thing. It's interesting because I just was at this conference and I got to hear Charles Eisenstein speak. He wrote this book, *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*, and I'm just diving into it. It's really an incredible book. The question he posed, because we were in a room full of thought leaders in the functional medicine community, was do you always need a healing crisis to basically put value on yourself, to change, and to see how important you are?

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Exactly.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: I'm still grappling with that question. In a lot of ways, I think it's yes. I think that we have to have that moment where we realize our mortality. What I like to say is that the way that most of us are living is not sustainable with life. It's a direct contradiction to how we're supposed to live.

It was interesting, because then he mentioned that if you look back and look at traditional tribes, we only worked about 19 hours. That was the average amount we worked. We thought that time was so hard. We look at what we've done in our society and there's a complete evolutionary mismatch.

Women say to me "Being a mom is so hard. I just don't know what's wrong with me. I can't do it myself." This is true of any condition with autoimmune disease as well. The simple, short answer of it is you were never meant to do this alone. We were never meant to walk this path all on our own. There is definitely a very individual component to it, but we're supposed to have support. We're supposed to have our tribe.

The question of do we always have to have this healing crisis, I think it's a yes. I think we get lulled by technology. We get lulled into this American dream, so to speak. We just get lulled and really sold on goods. We're working so hard, but for what?

Sometimes it takes that, and the healing crisis can look a lot of ways for different people. It can be depression, which is a very stark reality check. When we start to have depression or anxiety, that's our body saying "Hey, wake up here. There is something not right." It can be autoimmune disease. It can also be a major life event that happens to someone else. It's something that has to jar you, and jar your soul, to wake up to the reality and see life for what it is, and put things into perspective.

That's what my autoimmune disease did for me. I'll be the first to raise my hand and say I could be a complete workaholic. I love what I do. I love creating. I love all of it. The problem is that when you are dedicating so much to one aspect of your life, then you have these deficits in this other aspect of your life.

The first autoimmune disease I realized was Hashimoto's. That was the first one we caught. It was easy enough on the blood test. Then they had a more extensive panel. Then I saw the 21 hydroxylase antibodies, these are antibodies for Addison's disease. I know with those antibodies, full honesty, I had cortisol levels. I probably should have started hydrocortisone. I should have started to actually take exogenous hormones at the place where I was at.

I chose to honor what's called the therapeutic order in naturopathic medicine. With the therapeutic order posit - your diet, exercise, your soul medicine, your spirituality, sleep, and all these really foundational aspects of health - that's really where you have to work and where you have to start. You have to examine this.

That's not to say we don't have to go higher up on the therapeutic order interventions. I certainly had doctors monitoring me, making sure I was okay in that process. But I chose to really examine, through the lens of that therapeutic order, what I am doing in my lifestyle right now that is in direct opposition to health, and in direct opposition to living. I had to step back and be really honest. I'm not going to lie, it hurt. It was a painful process.

I'm the kind of gal that when there's pain and I feel pain - maybe this is its own evolutionary mismatch - I lean in and I'm just like "There's pain here. I'm going to go in."

There was a lot of my training with the yoga instructor to just follow that down and sit with it and be with it. There was a lot of truth in revelations that came through, that they straight up sucked. I didn't like some of the answers I was getting. I had to re-frame, and I had to rework my life, and I had to understand.

This is I think one of the hardest places for people to get to. It's not just going to be about supplements, and it's not just going to be about diet. You really have to shift your entire self to really embody who you are.

I'll never forget my first year of medical school when the concept of cognitive dissonance was brought up. That hit me hard. That is something that I realized I had been living before, and so many times it just disrupted things and I had to step away from that.

When I developed my autoimmune disease, yes it was a result of giving childbirth, but there were other things going on. There was this level of cognitive dissonance. I wasn't living my truth, and the way I was driving myself, and the way I was living was actually inhibiting my body from flourishing.

You talk a lot about vitality. In naturopathic medicine we call it the [inaudible], which is like chi. It's the life force. What are you doing? What is dampening your flame? What can you do to stoke that fire? That's my long-winded way of saying that autoimmune disease, yes, it keeps me very honest.

It's also something I think I needed. I needed to get a little shake up to be able to say "Whoa! This is not sustainable. I can't do this for the rest of my life." I feel so blessed that that happened in my 30s.

I have patients who come in who are in their 60s and just now realizing that the way they've been living for the past 50 years is contributing to this disease. They haven't been happy for 50 years. In so many ways, I think it was an incredible blessing to get that so early on in life, and to be able to have, in a lot of ways, all the ways that I was failing myself reflected back to me, which is a bittersweet pill to swallow.

If you can get that down, you can sit with it, then you can see everything that's possible beyond that. It's just an amazing gift.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: This was the exact same thing that I went through with rheumatoid arthritis and Hashimoto's disease, both of which have been long gone for 20 years now. I was in my very early 30s, I was 31 was it happened. I'll venture to guess?

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: I was 31. That's crazy.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: It was after childbirth. Childbirth is hard. Pregnancy and childbirth and the first year, they're hard on the female body. It's like this critical mass that happens. You've already got all this other stuff that's going on and now you just dropped a heavy load. You just get everything out of balance, so autoimmune disease will come up.

People will say "Why do I suddenly have this issue?" What I say is "Back way up, because your body was giving you signals all along the way, until you finally had a disease diagnosis."

Before that, I had acne when I was in my teenage years that would get worse when I was under stress. It would get worse when I was having negative thought patterns - cognitive dissonance. It's why the free bonus that I offer on this Summit is actually a program for getting your parasympathetic nervous system toned up - the rest and digest, or feed and breed side of your nervous system. Society rewards us for being in fight-or-flight constantly. This is part of what gets us so ill.

I was just going to say, I'll venture to guess that a lot of your insights weren't so much about what you were putting in your mouth, although they were part of it. I was definitely allergic to dairy, gluten and sugar and didn't know it. I had to cut those things out.

What I really found out when I sat still, and did my own 'hero's journey' with autoimmune disease, which is what we're describing, is that I had really negative thought patterns that were attacking me. I held myself to a perfectionist bar that was unattainable and unsustainable. I had expectations about the way others were going to behave that they weren't, of course, doing. I had no patience.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: That sounds exactly like a woman in her 20s. It's an observation that I feel has taken me a long time to get to, but exactly what you just said there. Sorry for interrupting, but I think that is something that's so true in our 20s. We're always just trying to meet other expectations, and we're always thinking about what other people are thinking about us.

It's something that I was trying to articulate to someone the other day about the difference of being in your 30s. A woman in her 30s has a better grasp on what she does not want, which really gets the lens going in terms of really focusing in on what she does want, and recognizing what matters more sometimes, in certain situations. That's okay.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Let me tell you sister, it gets better when you're 50. Every time I turn another year older, and enter a new decade of life as a new chapter, I look back and I think, my gosh, I would never go backwards because of the wisdom that's attained with each new year of insight, and really searching and looking at your place in the world.

The feedback that the universe and your body is giving you, it's just fantastic. I would never be 20 or 30 or even 40 again: 50 is fabulous and I can't wait for 60, 70 and 80!

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: That's fantastic. It's so true though. It's something that to go back to your point about you having the negative talk, I've definitely experienced, and I see that to be very true in autoimmune disease.

What happens is that you are saying bad things about yourself. You're attacking yourself. You are way more powerful than you ever give yourself credit for. Your body follows suit. Your mind and your spirit are in this harmony, and you're saying these really negative things to yourself.

For me, in all honesty and transparency, I had not such a great childhood. I had parents who said a lot of things to discourage me, and told me all the ways that I just was imperfect. I am imperfect, and I'm okay with that. It was something that I went through a lot of counseling and guilt through, to really try and heal what I experienced in my childhood.

To develop autoimmune disease and then to realize that, oh no, I've bought into those things that they had told me, those kind of thought patterns that my poor little human brain was developing. Those neuronal pathways were being laid down and I was being told to tell myself I wasn't good enough. That I was stupid, or I was fat, or whatever it was.

I thought my 20 year old self was like "Whatever. I'm so empowered. I got over that." It really took the autoimmune disease, and the development of that, and being a mother for me to have to re-examine and say "No, actually, you bought into it. You subscribed to it. You're the only one who can change this. It doesn't matter what happens in the past. It doesn't matter what's coming in the future. What matters is right now, and that you choose to be gentle to yourself."

There is fascinating research on this that shows that people who practice self-compassion have lower circulating inflammatory cytokines, the chemical messengers that drive inflammation. Actually, being gentle and being kind with yourself drops that inflammation, and they correct for other variables. They even corrected for meditation, and all these other things we know that can modulate inflammation.

You think about this, and you think about the women who develop autoimmune disease and the women who develop depression, these things that are really seated in the inflammatory pathways.

It's something that I ask women as part of my intake. I want them to rate how they view their body, and how they view their life. I want to know what their perspective is on things. Based on this rating system, I know before even looking at the women's chief concern that she's got a chronic condition, either brewing or it's already there. Just by the perspective that she's bringing to life. It's that important and that powerful.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: I do the same thing. I have about eight things that people have to rate and I can do the same thing. The last page has some essay questions on my intake form. That's actually the most important form in my entire intake packet because it's someone telling their story.

I think your story, how you tell it, what's in it and what you've attached to it, the meanings, beliefs, and then the behaviors that come from it, is the most powerful predictor of health and vitality level that there is.

In my childhood I had great supportive parents, but I was sexually abused in my elementary school, and no one really believed me when I told them what was happening. I made up a meaning about this, and said I must not be worth protecting. I must be bad because here's this person who is a vice principal, an authority, calling me into his office in front of my whole class. I must be doing something wrong. I'm wrong. Our brains aren't developed until we're 26 and here's a 10 year old brain making up all kinds of stories that I carried with me into adulthood. That's one of the most powerful things I think in the healing of autoimmunity that there is, getting underneath what those stories are.

The Libido Cure, an eight week webinar series that I do, takes people on that path of what are the meanings you created. What are the beliefs you made up? What are the behaviors that have come from that? A lot of those behaviors are what we were talking about in the first part of this interview. Not saying no. Not setting good boundaries. Rescuing people. Have toxic people in your life because you somehow get a feeling of self-worth because you're helping.

A lot of autoimmune disease, in fact 80% of it is diagnosed in women. So many women have this issue. It's over-caring, outside of yourself, in order to feel like you have some worth and deserve to be even alive. That is a recipe for disaster.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: I just want to say, I'm a big fan of the patient story. I think it gives physicians more information than we can get from any amount of lab testing. What I really appreciate is that you said it's how you tell it. That is something that I definitely observed.

Women come into my practice and there's a certain way they tell their stories. You know it might be six months to a year later, we revisit that story and the way they tell it changes so differently. My goal in my practice is all about self-empowerment. I do not believe in doctor as guru or the gatekeeper of health. I think that all people have a right to know what's happening in their body. This is why I run labs.

As long as I think we can get good information, if my patient says "I just really want to know about this lab" I say "Okay. You have a right to know what's going on in your body, and it's not for me to deny that to you. You have a right to know how to heal your body."

Even as a child, our body has this innate wisdom to heal. Sometimes it's something we have to remind our conscious being, our mind, of. The body knows what it's doing. There are simple basic tools, and again, that foundation, going back to that therapeutic word.

What I love about being a lab friendly doctor is that it's so much about putting the medicine back in the patient's hands. For me, I am not the healer. I am the facilitator. I help you with your body, and you own that. You heal yourself.

Let me back up and say that the big reason why I got into women's health was because I knew this observation: that medicine was always being done *to* women, and not *with* women. The gyno exam is definitely an example of that. It's just done to you, and I observed so many women who would pretty much leave their body. They're just on the table, like "I'm going to check out and not be present for this." That really is something that catapulted me into the work to say no to that. We need to partner with women. We need to respect the body, and we need to respect that women's intuition about her body.

I'm sure you see this too. As we said, 80% of autoimmune disease is diagnosed in women. How many of those women are actually heard and listened to? What's even worse is that if you look at some of the statistics, a woman with Hashimoto's doesn't usually get the diagnosis. In fact, 15% of all women with Hashimoto's will actually have several other autoimmune diseases by the time they finally get that diagnosis. It is so simple as doctors. All we have to do is listen. All we have to do is show up and listen and be present. It's there, right there in front of us. We can change so many women's lives by enabling them to change their lives. The biggest thing I hear in my practice is that you're the first doctor that's actually listened to me.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Same here.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: This is true of my own experience with autoimmune disease. I was a physician, going to physicians, and still being dismissed as "Oh honey, you're just a mom. You just need to sleep and exercise. You're just not doing a good enough job." In some ways I get it. Those were their tools. That was their understanding. In other ways, it infuriates me just enough to keep me driving to do the work I do, and to keep advocating for women in this way.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Let's move to that part of this. The title of your talk is from Blues to Brilliance: A Natural Approach to Post-partum. Everything we've been talking about leading up to this is actually a root cause for blues. Everything we've been talking about.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: Absolutely, every inch of it.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: We've been talking about the way that we think about medicine, and our culture is very reductionist. We like to think about symptoms. Let's go through some of the things that can happen.

You talked about your autoimmune disease being triggered by childbirth. Mine was too. It's very common for thyroid things to be triggered after childbirth. Let's talk about some natural approaches to some of the issues that come up after delivering a baby for moms that are wanting that information in that way. Obviously, for the last 35 minutes, we've been giving you the recipe. Let's go above it a little bit now.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: When it comes to childbirth, there are so many things that we're just not told as women. It's really funny, because as I was writing my book, one of my editors, she actually said

"Dear God, I am never having a baby. If anyone knew these things, they would never sign up for it."

I think quite the opposite. We actually had a good long dialogue about it. The more you know, the more you can be empowered. My book, *Healing Your Body Naturally After Childbirth*, is really based on a classic talk. It's what I take all of my patients through. It's got the basic stuff about troubleshooting breastfeeding, because we all get it in our head that breastfeeding it's something so natural that we should just be able to do it. The problem is that we don't see it as often as we once did.

This is really important. I think when I breastfed, I just put it out there, all in public. I had no shame. I was like "You've all done this. If you didn't, I'm sorry. But I'm breastfeeding. My small human is eating right now, and this is my job."

I grew up in this big Hispanic family. I got to see breastfeeding all the time. It was the one thing I knew. I got this. I'd seen it modelled enough. We don't see it enough now.

For women listening, there's no shame in breastfeeding. I even saw in the airport now they have these quarantined lactation rooms. Good for you. If women want that right, if they want to be in privacy, they can. The problem is this is normal and it should just be something that can happen anywhere, anytime. We're eating. Would you go into a special room just to eat your breakfast? Not necessarily.

That was a bit of a tangent there. What I was going to say is that in my book, I talk all about what can come up with breastfeeding. Things like developing blocked ducts, mastitis. Again, it all comes down to putting the tools in your hands so that you know how to heal your body naturally. At the same time, you know when it is time to call a doctor.

There's a whole lot of unknown as you step into motherhood. It's kind of the fun part of it, but it's definitely very scary. I actually designed my whole book to fit into a diaper bag. There are not a lot of post-partum books out there. There are a lot of pregnancy books. It's something that I often say: if we spent as much time prepping for the post-partum as we do for the actual childbirth event - which in all reality might take from six hours to three days - it's a very short period of times in the grand scheme of things.

Which is going to take your body an entire year to heal? I say the fourth trimester, which is the three months following childbirth. That's the really, really critical window. That is when your body has gone through arguably the most athletic event it will ever go through in its life. Then you roll into this phase of not sleeping. Your immune system comes back online, which is where autoimmunity can come in. Your adrenal glands take this major hit.

A lot of us find ourselves mothering without our tribe. We get this sense that something's not right. It took me a good while to really understand what was happening. We go internal, we know something's not right. I think a lot of times, and not to be reductionist, but there is depression that can be really spawned from that feeling that something's not right. We can't put our finger on it. We're not quite sure what it is, so it must be us.

Much like what you shared in your story, at being 10 years old and feeling like it must be me. It must be something about me that I'm doing wrong. In all reality, you need a lot of support, a lot more support than our society gives mothers. How many people held the door for you when you're pregnant versus when you have a stroller? This is something I see all the time. We honor this pregnant woman, we cherish her. Once baby comes, the rug's kind of pulled out from under her.

I see this in medicine as well. Women go for their six week post-partum checkup and they are told "Hey, you can go have sex and you can exercise, and everything's fine, be on your merry way." A lot happens in that time.

What I found clinically is that if in that post-post-partum period, we keep much tighter parameters on mom - running blood work during this time, screening for autoimmunity, depending on where the individual is at - and if we really feed them nourishing food, build up the adrenal glands, take heed to love your microbiome, and really work on those things that we see get destroyed in all women but especially get rocked in that post-partum period, we stand a much better chance.

Post-partum depression is actually really common. Baby blues is really common. We usually experience that within the first two weeks. Your hormones are going crazy, so to speak, during that time. Your brain is trying to figure out how to talk to all those organs again in a different way. You're not sleeping.

That's my gift to your audience: my quick guide to balancing your hormones eBook, because this is all the very foundational stuff. No matter where you are at, whether you're post-partum, or you're post-menopausal, these are the things that you do to really have amazing hormonal health.

In terms of the mood, it's the hormones a bit, but there's also a good argument for the inflammation that takes place. Childbirth is inflammatory in itself, then you roll into not sleeping. We need sleep.

It's funny because I was at a conference that was dedicated to sleep, and there was all this science about sleep, and I just had to chuckle. Do we really need science to validate the idea that our bodies need to sleep? We just do it! That's part of cultivating and following your intuition. Your body will tell you what it needs. You don't need a study. You don't need some scientist validating that. You know it. You know it to be true.

There's a lot of the sleep piece that I don't want to harp on, because if you're a new mom and you're listening to this, I know when I wasn't sleeping, the last thing that I wanted to hear was that I'm supposed to sleep more. We have to recognize that it's having an impact on your melatonin, which is a potent antioxidant. We're talking about preventing cancer, not just sleeping.

Also, your cortisol levels which are so crucial to controlling the autoimmunity and really dampening the inflammation, they can really get off kilter when your sleep cycle is disrupted. In my book, I give a lot of natural tips for how you can get more sleep, how you can get more energy, how you can do all of these things.

We also dive into utilization of herbs. I have a ton of recipes in there for using herbs, whether it's healing your vaginal tissue, or supporting your adrenals and your thyroid. One of my favorite herbs to use with new moms is rhodiola rosae. I call it the mama endurance herb. It really helps with your mental and your physical stamina. It can be really powerful in modulating the mood.

I want to say that you've got to be doing the other work as well. You've got to be eating well, and keeping good blood sugar stabilization by eating every couple of hours. Often I find that's just not enough in this day and age. It's not enough post-partum to be doing that.

We're looking at utilizing herbs. We're looking at utilizing diet. How do we get more magnesium in? How do we get women cooking with more turmeric? Turmeric will shut down those NF-kB pathways, which is how about we just drive autoimmunity. We're looking at things to do with eating probiotic rich foods. I'm a food first kind of gal. There's a lot in my book that talks about the foods.

You can also jump ahead and look at mood issues. Maybe at night you need to be getting more magnesium in. I can look at my diet and understand that I'm just not getting enough of that, or omega3 fatty acids, getting enough of the fish, salmon, mackerel, and sardines. Do I maybe need to feed my brain? Our poor little brains shrink. They shrink, and not a lot of people know this, but in that last trimester pregnancy, you don't get it back until around six months.

It's really a beautiful mechanism so that you become hyper-focused on the survival of your child, which I think is absolutely brilliant. It really reinforces that your body doesn't mess around. Your body knows exactly what it needs to be doing. If we want to fight off that mommy brain, it's a two for one.

The things that help with depression actually help with autoimmunity. Autoimmunity can be at the heart of depression. It's an important thing to say that any woman, if you feel that you're sad, or you're struggling with post-partum depression, you need to get your thyroid checked. You need to have autoimmune markups run. You need to look at your iron and your B12.

Most importantly, you need to find a doctor who honors your voice, someone who's going to hear you and is going to partner with you to ask why. That is something I really, really believe every doctor should be doing. It's something that I do in my practice. I'm going to ask why until I've got that answer, or what you're experiencing is gone.

Maybe I was never able to name it, but we were able to test and to try things to work on empowering you to make those changes. Maybe we never know the why, but I'm not going to stop asking until you feel better. Does that make sense?

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Absolutely. It's so important. I think the why of course is essential. Everything that you talked about is really, really important for what you're calling the fourth trimester.

You gave such a great, eloquent illustration of the brain shrinkage that happens. I think a lot of moms will resonate with that, and say no wonder! Food first is obviously where you're going to go for any time you're having an imbalance.

Often what I see with any autoimmune thing that's happening with new mamas, or anybody that's got autoimmune issues, is because they're hyper-vigilant in their immune system, and obviously you're hyper-vigilant in your mind after you have a baby, you have this hyper-vigilance because you don't want your baby to die. I always see the immune system reflect that hyper-vigilance of the brain.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: Absolutely. I think you're absolutely right about that. The Internet is a scary place for moms. I actually encourage all my patients to stay off of it. My son had some stuff that was going on when he was born. He had some allergies and dairy insensitivity. I actually went

autoimmune paleo for months because of my son's allergies that he developed. It ended up being an issue with our ducts in our house.

When all was said and done, I got on the Internet and started just looking about beyond my own knowledge, at what else I could find? Finding these blogs and articles – oh my gosh, if I wasn't a doctor, I would be downright terrified right now.

You're absolutely right. We get into that hyper-vigilance. You mentioned before about that parasympathetic cultivation gift that you're giving, which I think is brilliant.

As moms, the other thing we do that isn't always well recognized that drives that sympathetic dominant is that we eat standing up. We're throwing food in our mouth and just swallowing. We're not making space to care for ourselves. People listening might be thinking what does that have to do with your nervous system?

When you sit, and you're present with your food, this is the simplest way to practice mindfulness that I encourage all my patients to do. Sit and feel, whether you want to feel your sitz bones or your feet on the ground, just feel your body. Smell your food. See your food. Taste your food. Be present with it as often as possible.

I have definitely been in the stage where my child was chucking food at my head. I'm like "Oh my gosh, get the food in!" It's a very simple thing that if you can carve out even just one meal a day to be able to do that, and you're breathing deeply, and you're being present, you're going to cultivate that parasympathetic activity.

We get in that sympathetic overdrive, and then we're so worried about our child, and we're worried about ourselves, and then we're reading this stuff online and we can really get amped up. I just love the simple interventions that we can do. How wonderful is that? That you can just, at least once a day, sit and be present with your food, and you can do so much for your nervous system.

You can calm that immune system down, because the idea that your immune system is separate from your gut, from your nervous system, from all this, is just not true. All the things are connected.

This is my favorite part of my job. I tell people that you're going to tell me your story. I'm going to run laps. I'm going to take all those puzzle pieces, and I'm going to put them together to make the picture, the picture of where you've come from, where you are right now, and where you're heading.

Where you're heading is what I'm going to prevent, and where you are right now is where we're going to intervene and do that prevention. Where you came from absolutely laid the foundation of who you

are today. To think that it didn't matter that when I was a child my parents said awful things to me; no it very much mattered. That was part of my healing. I had to go back and say, I forgive my parents.

Also, I don't have to talk to myself that way. I'm being very vulnerable in a lot of ways. I don't talk a lot about my childhood, and a lot of it is because I never want people to be like "Oh poor Dr. Brighten." I absolutely had to go through that to be who I am today.

At the same time, there were some pretty terrible things that happened in my childhood. I don't want people to think I had the most awful parents. My mom was 16 and my dad was 17 when they had me. They didn't have good examples to lead them. They did the best that they could.

Was it a good, healthy way to grow up? No, absolutely not. I could have lived in that story for the rest of my life, but I chose to write a new story, and to really take ownership of my life and at the same time, recognize that I am now a mom. Whatever happened then, I can't bring that with me. This is something that I think is really at the crux of healing, and that is to recognize and to honor where you've been, and to also see that it's just a story. You can change the narrative at any point in your life.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: That's part of that journal that everyone gets to download. It says you have the pen to write the story of your life. The pen is in your hand. No one else is writing it. Is the next chapter going to be a tragedy? Is it going to be a comedy? Is it going to be a drama? You get to actually pick the genre of your life story.

You can choose to say the things that happened to me are what made me who I am today, gave me the compassion, the ability to forgive, the resilience, the flexibility of mind, the wholeness of spirit, all of the things that actually come out of healing something like that, because it is a 'hero's journey.' You get to evolve your consciousness so many times faster when you have to actually sit and deal with the sludge. You get to make it in an alchemical process, go from lead to gold, or be polished into a diamond.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: That's great. I love that.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: It's really powerful, and that's from 50 years old, looking backwards. It's the process.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: I just want to take a moment to really say, we need to honor age and wisdom in this life. We live in this really interesting time where never before in society have we really had beauty shoved in our faces, and told that this is what beauty is and this is what it is not. Granted, there are extremely beautiful people in this world, and they're on TV, and they're in the media, and we're told this is what we need to aspire to.

But it's so sad to me, when we look at other cultures and we see how much they value the aging population, that in our culture when women especially reach a certain age, they're told that they don't really have much value. I bring this up because this is the second time you've said 'at 50 years old' and I just freaking love how you celebrate that! You just embrace that, and I think it's so important because I am 35, which is a great age, I'm happy with where I am in life, but it's something that women even at my age feel ashamed to say.

There's this joke: "I'm like the store, I'm forever 21" and, like you said before, I would never want to be that age again. I was just having this conversation last night. I would never go back to that time. I did stupid for a long time, and now I don't do that. Although I do joke that wait until I'm 60, I'm going to look back at my 30s and be like "What were you doing? Seriously?"

We need to celebrate that, we need to honor that. There's so much goodness in this life that you can just drink up and soak in every single day, and we shouldn't be framing things like getting older as something to be afraid of, or to reject, or be ashamed of. There's so much goodness in life, and so much perspective, and so much wisdom. We really need to honor all people at all ages.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: We're coming to the end of our time, but I want to make sure that I pay back on that and say that however you are with your age and your body, if you are a mother, your children are observing that, and soaking it in and making it their own foundation for how they love themselves. This is how I really talk to moms.

If you can't do this for you now, I want you to do this for your child, and it will eventually become yours. Please.

My two daughters are 19 and 22, and I have two sons who are 21 and 25. All four of them are excited about growing older and wiser. They don't look at it as older, they look at it as wiser. They all have amazing body images, and they love themselves from the inside out instead of the outside in.

I think that this is something that the attitude of being excited about another birthday, another bit wiser, has rubbed off on them. Your kids are watching you and by the time they're four years old, they have completely mind mapped you.

They know if what you say is out of congruence with what you do. It's so important that as often as possible, you're not being incongruent with what you say and you do because they make up stories about that. They don't know how to deal with dishonesty and inauthenticity. They figure out things and a lot of times, in that childhood brain, not a great behavior that will emerge from that for them. It's



Women's Vitality Summit - September 2016 – Dr. Keesha Ewers interviews Dr. Jolene Brighton 19

important that you live authentically, and you embrace all parts of your life as if it's the last moment you're going to breathe. It absolutely could be. You never know.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: Absolutely.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: It's really important.

DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN: Again, there's only so much living that you get to do in this life. I really appreciate you saying that, because it's something that I have to frame to moms in my practice.

It's like they're trying to be that perfect, supermom, and it's like "Do you want to be teaching that child perfection?" I know I don't. I want my son to see that I fail, and then what do I do with that failure? That I try and sometimes it doesn't work out the way I think it's going to. It's the adaptive organism that survives. That's really what we want to be modeling. I mean, just be real.

At the same time, your child is the clearest mirror that will ever be held up to you. There are times where I definitely have said things about myself, and then I hear them come out of my child's mouth, and I'm like "Oh that is very ugly, that's not what I want my child saying." I mean ugly in the way that it just doesn't feel good.

If you think you're going to enter into motherhood and it's all going to be about teaching this small human, that it's going to be all about them, it's not. It needs to be about you too. You're going to change. You're going to grow. That's something I really encourage women to do. Embrace change and cultivate your intuition so that you know what's right for you. You're the only person who knows what's normal, what's not normal, and what's right for you.

Sure there are a lot of people lining up out there to tell you how to live your life best, but if you take nothing away from hearing me talk, I want you to know that you have all the answers inside of you, you know what's best for you, what's best for your child. Sometimes all you need is someone like me to facilitate the journey and to basically wipe the mirror a little bit cleaner so you can see how beautiful and brilliantly you shine.

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Dr. Brighten, thank you for shining so brilliantly for all of the participants of our Summit and for everything you do in the world.

Your contact information and free gift is on your speaker's site of the Women's Vitality Summit website. Make sure, everybody, to download that. Dr. Brighten has got so much amazing wisdom, as you can tell, to share with you. So they can all find you that way.



Women's Vitality Summit - September 2016 – Dr. Keesha Ewers interviews Dr. Jolene Brighton 20

Remember to live, love, laugh, keep learning and be the most fabulous version of yourself that you can be, until next time.