

DR. KEESHA EWERS: Welcome to the Women's Vitality Summit. This is Dr. Keesha Ewers, your host, and you're joining me today for an interview with Dr. Terry Wahls, who is the author of the Wahls Protocol, a radical new way to treat all chronic autoimmune conditions using Paleo principals.

Dr. Wahls is a clinical professor of medicine at the University of Iowa. She's also the director of the therapeutic lifestyle clinic, Iowa City VA Hospital, where she treats patients with chronic disease using diet and lifestyle.

She's also a patient with secondary progressive multiple sclerosis (MS), which confined her to a wheelchair for four years. She's restored her health and she used the diet and lifestyle program that she designed specifically for her brain and she now commutes to work by bicycle. Welcome to the Women's Vitality Summit, Dr. Wahls.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Thank you for having me.

DR. KEESHA: I start these Summit interviews by always reminding people about the word vitality; it means passion, fire, vigor, and life. One of the things I've noticed, and what inspired me to do this Summit in the first place, is that there are a lot of women I see in my clinical practice who are lacking vitality.

I'm seeing it as a cultural story, and I wonder what you thought of as the biggest drainer of vitality out there, for what you notice in your patient population.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: I'd say it's the foods that people choose to eat that have drifted in. We're eating foods that are very inflammatory, a lot of sugar and white flour, when instead we should be eating vegetables and berries. Like our grandmothers said, lots more vegetables.

DR. KEESHA: Right. Great. I wanted to have you tell your story about MS. It's an autoimmune disease where you're attacking yourself. I also had rheumatoid arthritis, where I was attacking myself.

You really notice with an autoimmune disease your vitality literally being drained away. I would love for you to tell your story about that. Then the great news about this is that when vitality is drained away, there's a chance to bring it back, and to fill it back up again. That's what you've done. So do you mind sharing that with our listeners?

DR. TERRY WAHLS: I would love to. I'm an academic control medicine doctor. I believe in the latest drugs and newest treatments in the New England Journal of Medicine articles.

In 2000, I was diagnosed with MS, on the basis of a history of dim vision, 13 years earlier. Lesions in my spinal cord and a spinal tap consistent with relapsing remitting MS. I knew within 10 years of diagnosis, one third will have difficulty walking, needing a cane, walker, or wheelchair. One half would have disability and unable to work.

I sought out the best clinical research center I could find, and began taking the newest drugs. Still,

within three years, my disease had transitioned into second nerve progressive MS. I needed a tilt-recline wheelchair. It was pretty clear that the best, newest drugs were not likely to stop my slide.

So that's when I began reading the signs, relearning cell biology and immunology. I would begin experimenting on myself with vitamins and supplements, after reading a whole bunch of mouse studies. That seemed to slow the speed of my decline. I was very grateful but I was still declining.

It was bad. I could walk very short distances using two walking sticks. I was beginning to have brain fog. I had severe fatigue by 10:00 am. I knew I would likely soon have to go on medical disability.

I should also back up a little bit to say, two years after diagnosis, my Cleveland Clinic doctors had told me about the Paleo diet. So after 20 years of being a vegetarian, I went back to eating meat. I gave up all grain, all legumes. But I continued to decline.

DR. KEESHA: Now, I want to stop you for just a second, okay? So you had been a vegetarian for how long?

DR. TERRY WAHLS: For 20 years. My parents were farmers.

DR. KEESHA: When I got my rheumatoid arthritis, I also had been a vegetarian for that long. It's an interesting observation I'm making here as we're talking. I also follow the Paleo diet, but I just wanted to stop there and ask how long you'd been a vegetarian, because I think that's interesting.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Yeah, my parents were horrified that I became a vegetarian. They said I was ruining my health. They were dead by the time I started eating meat, so they didn't have the satisfaction of being able to see that I went back to eating meat again.

I continued to decline, so the next year I needed a wheelchair, I needed physical therapy, I started experimenting with vitamins and supplements. I kept with the Paleo diet, thinking at least I was doing something and maybe all I was going to be able to do was to just slow my decline, because I knew progressive MS does not ever improve.

DR. KEESHA: Okay, so you knew that progressive MS doesn't get cured, it doesn't even really improve. Why?

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Well that's the traditional understanding, that if it is the progressive phase of the disease, there are no more spontaneous improvements. The goal is, you take these poisons to try and retain function because functions, once lost, are gone forever.

That summer, I discovered the Institute for Functional Medicine. I also discovered neuro-muscular electrical stimulation. I took their course, had a longer list of vitamins and supplements, added e-stim to my muscles while I did my little tiny workouts. Then in the fall, I had the 'aha' moment: I should figure out where these 20 nutrients are in the food supply. So that was more research.

I eventually identified that and reorganized my eating plan, still following Paleo principals. Now, what I discovered was, I was stressing vegetables in a really big way. Of course, I've since organized that, and I teach it according to the Wahls Protocol. That is when the magic began.

Within three months, my brain fog was gone. My fatigue was gone. I was able to stop taking medicine that I'd needed for five years. At six months, I'm walking around the hospital without canes or walking sticks. At nine months, I get up, and I do a bike ride around the block.

I really didn't know what to expect, in that I apparently was improving, in that I had no idea what the future was, but the concept that functions once lost are gone forever was clearly no longer the case.

At 12 months, I was able to do an 18 mile bike ride with my family. So this really changes how I understand disease and health. It changes how I practice clinically. It would change the focus of my clinical research.

DR. KEESHA: So I want to come back to this, functions once lost are not necessarily gone forever. I'm the same, my fingers were becoming disfigured, and now you wouldn't know. They're straight, no swelling.

It's been 21 years now since I had any autoimmunity in me. I had it gone within one year. Every function that I had lost is back, and I'm stronger than I was before my body started attacking itself. So at the age of 51 I'm in better health than I was at 31.

So I just want to say that this is something that we're told by the medical establishment for autoimmune disease; that it is not reversible, it is not curable. But you and I are both sitting here saying that is absolutely not the case. We've seen it in ourselves, and hundreds of people, even thousands that we've worked with.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Absolutely.

DR. KEESHA: So I think that this is an important thing, breaking free of this belief that has been perpetuated for so long.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Conventional treatments, which are all FDA approved, because they control symptoms to some degree, and that's how they get FDA approval but they don't get the root cause of why the biochemistry became harmed.

When we use the functional medicine approach, we address diet and lifestyle. We get to the root causes, which then allow the chemistry path of the cells to begin to thrive, the organs to begin to repair, and functions to be restored.

DR. KEESHA: Now I don't know about you, but the name of the Summit is Women's Vitality Summit: Caring For Yourself, Body and Soul. I actually had to learn to care for myself, not just through food and the body component, but also my emotional self, my mental self, and indeed even my spiritual self

in order to get fully better.

I learned how to meditate, I started doing yoga, I became a yoga teacher. I really went into the question of why I was attacking me. I think that's an important question to ask when we're talking about root cause. We are not just talking about leaky gut. We are talking about why leaky gut happened in the first place. You have to keep drilling down to the very root, to the why.

Genetics are widely available now, I do a lot of genetic testing in my own practice, and 15 years after I was cured of rheumatoid arthritis, I did my own genetic testing, and I am really wired for rheumatoid arthritis. My grandfather had it, it's in my genetics. This is another piece of this. I could be told by any doctor out there right now, and any rheumatologist "Well, it's genetic."

DR. TERRY WAHLS: People would foolishly think that there's nothing they could do about that. They're wrong.

DR. KEESHA: Right. That's the root cause, therefore you have it. So here, take some methotrexate. Right.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Methotrexate, or Enbrel.

DR. KEESHA: Right. Yeah.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: So this is more than just about food. Even though I think the lifestyle class over the years is one of the most popular skill classes we run; it has to do with understanding life. Understanding the meaning of experience. Then, creating your hero's journey for your life.

It resonates very deeply with the subconscious. We talk about Joseph Campbell, and I find myself spending more and more time talking about these factors of how we create resilience with the spirituality, the self-talk: what's the meaning you provide for your personal journey? How is it you're going to choose to conduct your journey?

DR. KEESHA: One of the things I find so important when we start talking about the hero's journey, which is something I find vitally important when I work with people too, and teach in my webinars, is that's your story.

I call this your libido story, and the reason I even talk about libido is because it's a measure of vitality. It's a reflection of it. When you were in the throes and the thick of your autoimmunity, you probably weren't thinking too much about your libido when you were in a reclining wheelchair, were you?

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Oh goodness, no.

DR. KEESHA: You just wanted to be able to function on any level, right? Let alone your sex drive.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: You know, I was exhausted by 10:00 am. So within a couple of hours of being

up, I struggled to get through the day.

DR. KEESHA: I think that it's one of the last things to come back online, which is why I emphasize it because I think it gets forgotten.

I believe it's part of your care for yourself and your soul. I believe that spirituality and sexuality are very much intertwined. Chatting about sex and MS, a lot of times people will think about just the bodily function rather than this idea of vitality, what's feeding your spirit, what's keeping you emotionally happy and satisfied, what's keeping you mentally challenged and satiated.

So I'm glad to have you on this Summit to be able to address these things, because I think that any of the leaders in the autoimmune world, all of us that write about it, talk about it, teach about it, and treat patients with it, we really start with food because it's something we do three times a day. But I always end with libido.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Good for you. It's a very sensitive marker for your energy, your inflammation, your hormonal balances. I think you're right, that libido's not going to be there if your hormonal balances are still off, if you're still full of toxins because of all these endocrine disruptors circulating.

DR. KEESHA: Right. So let's talk about the Wahls Protocol, and vegetables and phytonutrients, and all of the things that go into getting the body healthy and making those great lifestyle choices that people are confronted with, I would wager to say, every minute of their day from the time they wake up.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Absolutely. As I was creating the Wahls Protocol, and reshaping my diet based on functional medicine, based on the review articles I found about brain nutrition, I was stressing vitamin mineral antioxidants, essential fats, and so on.

As I went over food plans, it came down to wanting to have a really low glycemic index diet. So it involved ramping up greens, ramping up deeply pigmented beets, carrots, berries. Vegetables in the cabbage family, onion family, and mushroom family because those vegetable groups really boost your ability to clear toxins, and how you metabolize your sex hormones are greatly influenced by those vegetable groups.

Mushrooms help prime and re-balance your immune cells and they boost production of nerve growth factors, brain-derived neurotrophic factors, and insulin-like growth factors.

Now my research assistant in my lab is vegetarian for religious reasons. I decided that I needed to try and create a plan for vegetarians who wanted to continue to be vegetarian for their spiritual beliefs, but to do so in a way that would be less harmful to them.

So that's part of why I created a plan that people can do as vegetarians. It makes a case for why being a Paleo eater is probably healthier and safer.

DR. KEESHA: Like I said, I do a lot of genetic testing for my patients, and my family also has been

part of that group. My husband has the APOE4 gene which puts him at high risk for Alzheimer's disease. So for that particular subset of the population, which is only about 10% percent of people on the planet, that we know anyway right now, being vegetarian is what they need to be in order to protect their brains from the assault that can happen later on in life that will cause dementia and Alzheimer's, as well as heart disease for them.

I think it's important that people know that they can eat a Paleo, non-inflammatory diet, and still be vegetarian. It seems like it's counterintuitive, but it's not, you can actually do that.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: It certainly can be done. There are ways of handling the gluten free grains and legumes that make them less irritating. Clearly it's possible.

I get very frustrated when people tell me "Well, your Paleo diet that cured [inaudible:21:15] ... "Oh I went Paleo and went downhill for five more years." Then they'll say "Well it's the supplements that cured you." I say "Well no, I did the Paleo diet and supplements, and still went downhill."

It may be enough for some people, but for others, we need to be much more specific and intentional in our approach to eating and how we're going to get our health back.

DR. KEESHA: Now, one of the things I advocate, and I know you do too, is to eat at least nine cups of vegetables a day. I'll usually say 12-15. One of the ways that I recommend people do that is to take a lot of the green ones that have low sugar in them or low glycemic index, and juice them first thing in the morning. That's instead of having a cup of coffee which is a lot of acid.

Just juice those vegetables, drink it and you'll get a bigger energy shot that lasts for a lot longer. If you can have that along with some protein and some fat, you're getting a bunch of your vegetables in with those micronutrients that your body doesn't have to fight to break down first thing in the morning, so it's a really nice way of doing it.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Actually, I have a number of folks in our study who are small. They couldn't get in their nine cups, and so they would eat four to five cups and then juice the balance. The magic really is in all these phytonutrients and a wide variety of species.

DR. KEESHA: Right. That's a great way to do it. If you're not a great carbohydrate metabolizer, and are flirting with insulin resistance or are full out diabetic and know what your hemoglobin A1c is, which is that marker telling you how well you're doing, then you definitely want to stick to the greens that you're juicing.

Don't juice fruits, and don't juice starchy vegetables like beets and carrots as they are straight sugar once you've taken all the fiber out of them.

So, great advice. I just want to add another caveat to that whole juicing thing; if you do juice beets, and you drink beet juice, or you drink a bunch of greens, and you're not used to it, it can make you really lightheaded. So go slow. Go slow. Your body's not used to so much nutrition at first if you haven't had

it.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: You know, that is true. That is absolutely true.

DR. KEESHA: You might throw your body into a detox reaction by up-regulating your liver pathways, and they'll be so happy, but your body might not be able to handle what comes through there at such a high speed.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Something that we've learned to offer people as they come on the program is to take *saccharomyces boulardii* to help with the die-off. Then to also take some activated charcoal and to take that with a little bit of fat, and you take a couple of capsules a couple of times a day, because that binds the toxins that you're releasing. That can diminish the headaches, the fatigue, the malaise. You'll have to watch for constipation, because the charcoal is constipating, so then take prunes or milk of magnesia, extra fiber as needed, make sure you're still pooping snakes a couple of times a day.

DR. KEESHA: Another one is an Ayurvedic herbal combination called triphala. Triphala means three fruits, and it's a great bowel toner that you can tell your folks to take instead of milk of magnesia. It's a bowel toner and they can take it with the charcoal, well after it, because it binds with it too. If they're having constipation, they can take triphala at night and again in the morning, and it's really, really helpful for that.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Well, good. Thanks for the tip.

DR. KEESHA: Yeah. It's wonderful. In the world of Ayurveda, bowels are the most important thing to keep regulated, because that's where we dump our trash, you know? Functional medicine, we know that too, so it's great. Always want to be emptying your trash, or pooping snakes, I've never heard it put that way. That's great.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Thanks. If snakes escape into your pants, you probably overdid it a little bit, and you can back off.

DR. KEESHA: Yeah, we don't want snakes in the pants.

What are your favorite self-care activities? As we talk to people, I don't know if you run into this but I run into it in my clinical practice a lot, where if I say up your vegetable intake or start juicing, people cross their eyes and look at me like they're going to cry because it's just one more thing in an already busy life that they've over-scheduled themselves and they're maxed out to the limit on.

So this Summit is really about learning how to prioritize and put yourself first because, I mean who were you putting first when you got into wheelchair-bound mode?

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Probably it was my kids, because I was like "What is it that's still important in life? What can I still be doing?" So being an effective parent and how I can model that. Over time, I've come to appreciate that understanding what your meaning in life is so that you're still having a

meaningful life.

In our clinics I tell people that as we improve how their cells work and they begin repairing themselves, I may be able to stop their disease, or regress it. I don't know for sure. But I want them to have meaning in their life right now as they know it. If they can find that, it will give them more joy in their life and make it far easier for them to adapt and sustain the changes we're going to ask them to do.

I find myself talking more and more about how we find that meaning so we're willing to do the work, and make the priorities to do the adapting and sustaining this new life we're going to create.

DR. KEESHA: If you come back to where you were when you wound up in a wheelchair, were you putting your patients first? Were you putting your career first? Were you putting your kids first?

DR. TERRY WAHLS: I was working too damn hard!

DR. KEESHA: Yeah, and that's where I was, too; four children and just over-scheduled, overdone, on all levels. It wasn't until my body itself shut me down and wouldn't allow me to move, that I really started paying very serious attention to what was going on. I call that the misery to motivation quotient.

I just want to say to our listeners, try to look at us and don't do that. You can say that until you're blue in the face, but really, try not to get to that level of misery before you put yourself first. It's just so important that we do the airplane instruction where you put the oxygen mask on yourself first and your children second, because if you don't have anything to give, then you're not going to be of any use to anyone else.

So what are your favorite self-care activities today?

DR. TERRY WAHLS: A couple of things I enjoy. I do HeartMath a couple of times throughout the day. I also listen to binaural beats in the evening as part of my little ritual I go through in the evening: brush my teeth, doing a little gratitude meditation, and then I put in ear buds and I listen to a sleep induction binaural beat video for 10-15 minutes, and then I fall asleep. I just have fabulous sleep ever since starting that little evening ritual.

DR. KEESHA: That's wonderful. I asked you a series of questions that you filled out before I started interviewing you, and I asked you who inspires you and I loved your answer.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: I don't remember. What did I say?

DR. KEESHA: You said your patients, the people that you work with. The Wahl's Warriors, right?

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Yes. You know, my patients have taught me so much over the years. They have so much wisdom. I just really value hearing their stories. Like a veteran who had a horrific phantom pain for years and coming through the protocol, he's lost a lot of weight, his pain is markedly reduced, his family life is much better.

So he talks eloquently, and with tears in his eyes, about the gratitude he feels getting his life back, and he's quite often appearing at the hospital. He's a huge referral source because he's telling the other vets and volunteers about how his life's been transformed.

It's inspiring as people who felt so hopeless move into their own version of their new life, by giving back, and telling folks who were stuck and hopeless that, no, no, there's a lot you can do. You can reclaim your life. It's immensely satisfying to watch my patients go through that change.

DR. KEESHA: Beautiful. That's exactly what inspires me too. Who have your female role models been?

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Being a farmer's daughter, my mom worked incredibly hard. I remember being very impressed with the manual strength that she had doing our various farm chores. So it wasn't until I was 17 that I could work the corn elevator the same way that she could. So her physical strength, and her stamina has been very inspiring.

DR. KEESHA: What would you want to let young women, middle-aged women, and older women today know?

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Strength and resilience. How powerful you are in your life and in the lives of others around you.

DR. KEESHA: Wonderful. So, Dr. Wahls, you've given a really generous free bonus gift that people can take advantage of, would you like to talk about that? We'll put that on your speaker's page as part of the Summit.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Okay. We have some audio files. The one that we have here, Food for Thought, really talks about mostly diet, but it's also some conversation about the lifestyle and how that impacts, how well your mitochondria work, how well your brain can make the various structures.

Most importantly, since life is a series of self-correcting chemical reactions, if we provide more appropriate nutrition, the brain can begin to rebuild and repair itself. So it's a little extra and will hopefully give your followers another toolkit for super charging their brain again.

DR. KEESHA: Wonderful. How do people find you? We will have your URL on the speaker's page, but just for those who are listening who want to look you up real quick.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: It is terrywahls.com

DR. KEESHA: So Dr. Wahls, you're cutting out right now, and no worries to our listeners, that information will be on the speaker's page like I said. I want to thank you for the amazing inspiration that you are, the courageous inspiration that you are, and how much time and effort, energy and wisdom that you have put out in the world on behalf of all of those who are suffering from chronic

illnesses from autoimmunity on, and continue to do what you're doing.

DR. TERRY WAHLS: Well, it is a community, I'm very glad to be part of it. We all create this possibility of returning to health.

DR. KEESHA: Thank you. Everybody, remember to live, love, laugh, and be the fabulous best you that you can be. Until next time, this is Dr. Keesha Ewers, and this has been an interview with Dr. Terry Wahls.