

THE HEALTH NUGGET



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Self-Betrayal, Part 1

Self-protection is the most frequently manifested, basic, instinctive reaction we exhibit on a daily basis. It motivates a host of human behavior. Our very physiology is wired to protect itself against invasion, harm, and destruction. But sometimes this system gets twisted. The very process that was created to heal and restore becomes a force of self-destruction.

When our own body attacks itself and does damage, sometimes irreparably, it is said that we have an autoimmune disease. Many diseases fall under this category, or are known to have an autoimmune component. These include multiple sclerosis (where the body has attacked the myelin sheath of nerves); type 1 diabetes (the pancreas is damaged); Graves disease (thyroid); rheumatoid arthritis (joint tissue); fibromyalgia (inflammation of fibrous or connective tissue); Crohn's disease (colon); lupus (can be skin, joints, kidney or lungs); allergies, etc. Currently 80 different diseases are estimated to have an autoimmune component.

Our own immune system is a key player in the development of this class of diseases. Unlike a specific organ, the immune *system* is a network of cells and organs that communicate with each other for the purpose of protecting the body. We know that this system is responsible for recognizing, identifying, remembering, preventing access, attacking and destroying the unwanted. Typically we think of the 'unwanted' as bacteria, fungi, parasites, cancer cells, chemicals, pollen, or any other damaging agents not normally present in the body. When invaders

are marked on their surface membrane with foreign molecules they are detected as an adversary, or antigen. Antigens are not only introduced into, but can also be produced by the body.

In a healthy environment, the body recognizes certain antigens as enemies and produces antibodies to bind to, neutralize and destroy them. In order to perform their crucial role, antibodies must be extremely diverse and specific to counter an enormous number of unexpected and unknown possibilities. Each antibody must fit a specific antigen like a key into a keyhole. Antibodies are produced through a complex process of gene splicing which results in millions of unique designs. In his book, *The China Study*, Dr. Campbell likens the various antigens to having different faces. Just as we recognize each other by distinctive facial characteristics, so the immune system must be able to recognize each antigen in order to deal with it. It must "customize its defense to each attack. It does this by producing a 'mirror image' protein for each attacker. The mirror image is able to fit perfectly onto the antigen and destroy it. . . . Every time it sees that face after the initial encounter, it uses the custom-made mold to 'capture' the invader and destroy it."¹ Ever after, our defense system will remember and have the exact antibody for the previously met antigen. Mass production of that brand of antibody can then be initiated.

In order to distinguish between self and a multitude of foreign species, antibodies need to have a highly discriminating method of recognizing

friend or foe on the molecular level. The billions of cells in our body are equipped with their own proof of identity—a special arrangement of protein molecules on the surface of our own cell membranes. These identity papers of the cell are to protect it against the body’s own police force—the immune system. Cells with faulty identification are immediately destroyed by the armed force constantly on patrol. “The human body’s police corps is programmed to distinguish between bona fide residents and illegal aliens.”²

The immune response to invasion is extremely complex, but this recognition capability appears to be a crucial part in relation to the development of autoimmune disease. With autoimmunity, something goes haywire. Confusion, over-activity, under-activity, disturbance, imbalance, . . . something takes place and leads to a direct attack against the body’s own tissue. What would cause this wonderful, extremely complex system to go against the very thing it was created to protect? That is what I would like to know!

There are a variety of theories as to potential causative factors involved in the development of autoimmunity, and all may have validity. Unfortunately, the view is not crystal clear.

Most scientists believe that heredity and genetics are instrumental. It is also generally believed that the environment is involved. Overexposure to radioactive materials or “mercury, gold, cadmium, and other heavy metals, coming from dental fillings, water supply, occupational exposures, and other sources, . . . has been linked to the development of autoimmune disease.”³

Some immunologists believe that autoimmunity is often triggered not only by viruses, but other microorganisms like bacteria and parasites. These organisms may bear on their surfaces elements and structures that also occur on body cells. As a result, the boosted antibody

attack is directed not only on the microorganisms, but also those body cells that happen to share surface characteristics. For example, in the tropical parasitic born Chaga’s disease, “the same antigen occurs on the parasite, in heart muscle and on nerve cells, and the immune system indiscriminately seeks to destroy them all.”⁴

It has been said that when viruses occupy human cells the surface changes and acquires antigen characteristics that make the immune system open fire. No longer is the human cell recognized as indigenous. Some of these invasive pathogens are thought to use molecular mimicry—“a biological trick by which certain organisms can resemble their host to fool the immune system into thinking they are normal cells.”⁵ In some situations, viral infections are suspected as key players in setting off autoimmune responses. For example, in some children chicken pox was contracted months previous to the diagnosis of type 1 diabetes. Some question its role in triggering this autoimmune disease.

Just as with autoimmunity, the first step in acts of self-betrayal is a failure to know oneself. Our natural tendencies, unless recognized as destructive, will carry their antigens of self-trust, self-preservation and self-indulgence into our soul. “We must have a true knowledge of ourselves. It is only he who knows himself to be a sinner that Christ can save. Only as we see our utter helplessness and renounce all self-trust, shall we lay hold on divine power. . . . We are safe only as we feel our weakness and cling with the grasp of faith to our mighty Deliverer.”⁶

We will continue to explore this subject next month.

¹ Campbell, T. Colin. *The China Study*, p. 185.

² Nilsson, Lennart. *The Body Victorious*, p. 21.

³ Shomon, Mary J. *Living Well With Autoimmune Disease*, p. 43.

⁴ Nilsson, Lennart. *The Body Victorious*, p. 186.

⁵ Shomon, Mary J. *Living Well with Autoimmune Disease*, p. 47.

⁶ White, Ellen G. *Ministry of Healing*, pp. 455-456.

