

Radical Remedy - Dr Damiana Corca

0:00:00 - Chloe

Hey guys, it's Dr Chloe and you're listening to the Radical Remedy Podcast. So this episode is with my friend, Dr Damiana Corca, who is also a doctor of Chinese medicine. I know, surprise, surprise, but she is an expert in sleep health and she recently finally released her book, the Deep Blue Sleep. So this book goes into the different patterns of disharmony, the different patterns of insomnia, and what the underlying causes are and how to address them through functional medicine and Chinese medicine. Her work has been an absolute game changer for me and my sleep and I'm so grateful for her wisdom. She dropped so much knowledge on this podcast and I think you guys will be sleeping better in no time. So check it out, Let me know what you think and get ready for season two.

We are coming back at you really soon, All right, I hope everybody's doing well, Sending you all so much love. Thanks so much for listening and please share with a friend who needs a better night's sleep. All right, guys, I am so excited. Today I am joined by Dr Damiana Corca, who is somebody I have followed for years. She is an expert in sleep health and optimization and she recently released the book the Deep Blue Sleep, which I have been nerding out on all week and I absolutely love it. So, Damiana, thank you so much for joining me. It's such an honor to have you here.

0:01:21 - Damiana

Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to chat with you today.

0:01:24 - Chloe

Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to chat with you today Awesome, so let's dive right in. So, first and foremost, I want to just start with the basics. What do you consider good sleep? Because I figure a lot of people sort of bristle at the term insomnia and think that just because they have some sleep issues or wake up every now and then that they don't have insomnia. And you know, sometimes these categories can be a little bit difficult. But what do you think deep sleep is or good sleep is for your average person?

0:01:52 - Damiana

Good sleep is falling asleep within 10, 15 or 20 minutes. If you fall asleep within two, three minutes, you're probably sleep deprived. If you're falling asleep that fast which can happen to all of us sometimes, and also if it takes more than half an hour, usually you have some type of insomnia, and that also can happen occasionally to everyone. If you didn't wind down or maybe you had a especially full day and then sleeping for seven and a half to nine hours Everyone is different, but at least seven and a half, I would say. Most people need that amount of time. We tend to sleep in about five cycles of an hour and a half sleep and so that makes about seven and a half. And if you take a few minutes to fall asleep and maybe linger in bed, that's why sometimes we get that eight hour magic and sometimes we need longer than that.

And sleeping through the night is ideal. But if we wake up once and doesn't take long to go back to sleep, then that's good. Waking up to urinate maybe once, going right back to sleep, that's totally fine. It gets to be more than once, two, three times, then that's something to look into. Or even if you sleep through the night and you wake up in the morning exhausted, then that's another question to ask yourself Am I sleeping deep enough? Could there be a problem there? Possibly sleep apnea? That can sometimes be a hidden cause of why we don't feel rested. Of course it can be thyroid issues, many other issues, but if you sleep through the night and you wake up tired, then why so? Anyways, easily falling asleep, sleeping for at least seven and a half hours, waking up feeling rested and ready for the day, that's basically good sleep.

0:03:44 - Chloe
Yeah, I love that.

I think getting high quality sleep is so essential and something that so many people are struggling with.

I mean, it makes all of the difference in our day and in our lives. One of the things that I really love about your book is that you break it down into these five different types of insomnia, and in Chinese medicine we really look at the different patterns of disharmony which are underlying any sort of symptom that people are coming to, which is one of the things that's so challenging in terms of explaining Chinese medicine to people, because people constantly come to me and they're like well, what do I do for insomnia? And I'm like, well, where is the insomnia stemming from? And I think that this book does such a beautiful job of integrating Chinese medicine and functional medicine and just basic good old wisdom and helping people understand where the root of disharmony is coming from and how to help heal that. So, if you could, why don't we go into those five different types of insomnia and go through you know what you classically see in terms of the presentation for each of those different types that you discuss in the book.

0:04:50 - Damiana

I have found five different types of main ways in which insomnia shows up in people, and this is based on both Chinese medicine and functional medicine, which is not surprising. They overlap and they match, because we're talking about human beings and then we're just using a different language, whether it's Chinese medicine or functional medicine. That is all so. The anxious type comes with trouble falling asleep at the beginning of the night and, as the name implies, most people do have anxiety. Most people are pretty wide awake, they're tired, but they just can't fall asleep. These people tend to be able to read a book. That sometimes helps falling asleep if you read long enough. And then sometimes, what also happens, you put the book down, put the head down, and then you're wide awake again, which is very unfortunate. But typically, after a couple of hours of being unable to fall asleep, most people do fall asleep and that falls into the anxious type. And it's the stress and anxiety and long-term stress and it's this culture that we're in, where we go, go, go and it's a dysregulated nervous system with typically higher cortisol, which is a stress hormone that runs. It should be lower at night, and then it's not. Even if it's just slightly elevated, it gives us that sensation of just something is off, something is wrong, whether it's anxious thoughts or not, sometimes can be kind of a bodily reaction that we experience, where we want to go to sleep, we're tired, but we just can't fall asleep. So that's what we see most commonly in the anxious type. Then we have the overthinking type. You could say anxious and overthinking. They can be sort of close, but they're actually different. And the overthinking type tends to show up in the middle of the night. You go to sleep just fine and then you wake up around 1 or 2 am. Some people wake up and they're kind of wide awake and then they have lots of thoughts, sometimes worrying about issues in their life and sometimes about just random things. Just the mind grasps onto something. It could be even a random like.

I have a patient, her son just you know, children keep playing the same songs over and over again and then she wakes up in the middle of the night and just gets stuck in her head and it's very irritating and very hard to go back to sleep. And then so we see two root causes for this. One is digestion and digestive issues. In Chinese medicine when we talk about digestion, we talk about digesting food, but also we talk about digesting thoughts and we're not meant to ruminate and regurgitate like some animals do. We're supposed to process and let go, process and let go, and so when there are digestive issues and we wake up in the middle of the night, we're unable to let go and we keep ruminating and overthinking and unable to let go.

The second really big root cause that I see in the overthinking type it's perimenopause and menopause. So hormonal imbalances show up here a lot. Women may have hot flashes.

Sometimes it can be just a small temperature dysregulation where the person says, well, maybe I feel a little hot, but then I'm wide awake and I can't go back to sleep. And it's not the temperature. But if they did wake up because of that temperature dysregulation and the hormonal imbalance, then that person may be up for an hour or two and then they typically go back to sleep.

Overthinking type has a second scenario, when the person just cannot fall asleep at all from the beginning of the night. It's a little bit different than the anxious type. This person usually doesn't have any desire to read. They feel like they almost fall asleep. Sometimes they might doze off a little bit and it just goes on and on and on like that all night, and that typically, more than anything, is digestive issues, whether they're very apparent in a person's life or not. I have treated many people who didn't realize their digestion might have anything to do with their sleep, and because sometimes we don't, we think, oh, that's such a small thing. I have a little bit of acid reflux, so, yeah, I get bloated a little bit once in a while. Or yeah, I think I have a little pain, but it's not a big deal, but gut-brain connection and then our sleep can get affected. So I see that. So those are the first two types. Do you have any questions before I go over the last three?

0:09:43 - Chloe

No, I love that. Well, I think that the gut-brain connection I talk about it a lot on the show how important it is, but a lot of people don't realize that what is it? I think 90% of your serotonin is actually made in your gut and you have pretty much an entire chapter talking about regulating the neurotransmitters and how essential it is for gut health in order to optimize those neurotransmitters. So just sort of reinforcing that for people it is absolutely essential and I love when you have this one in your chapter about the gut. You said I almost started the book with this chapter because it is that essential. So just anybody listening optimize your gut. That's step one for literally every aspect of health, including your sleep. So I love that.

Yeah, those are very classical presentations that I have experienced. Definitely when I was reading the book, I read both of those and I was like me wants me. And then I got to overtax and I was like, oh, that wants me these days. So it is interesting also how we can sort of ship from one presentation to another, which is something you discuss also in the book. Yes, but yeah, so while we move on to overtaxed I love that, yeah, the overtaxed.

0:10:58 - Damiana

So the first three, I would say, are the most common ones. So the third one now it's the overtaxed, and that one is kind of a little bit. They're all common, as I said, these first three, but I feel like the overtaxed is the epitome of our society just being very stressed. And then what happens? We sleep for about four or five hours and then we're wide awake. So most people sleep until 3, 4 am and then they wake up and they can't go back to sleep and they kind of wake up a little bit wide awake. They usually feel frustrated, irritated, and sometimes it's not even that early. Let's say, your typical wake-up time is 6.30 and it's been like that for a long time, and then suddenly it's 5.45 and then some mornings it's 5 am and 4.45.

And for some people they would say well, that's not so early. What's the problem? Well, if you're used to waking up at a certain time and now your body does something differently, you feel very tired, even if it's just an hour, an hour and a half earlier. And this is a pattern that's very common in both men and women, but I would say I would see it almost more commonly in men. This is probably the most common pattern that I see men waking up to early in the morning with this overtaxed type. And the next type can show up similarly and also common in men.

So there is a little bit of a differentiation there. So there is a little bit of a differentiation there, but it's almost like when we need to survive, the body says, well, five hours of sleep is about

enough to survive short term if there is a danger, and the body can't differentiate between famine or war or a lion attacking or just stressful life, stressful thoughts that we have every day. So if we get to that point where the body doesn't have any more resilience, then it says, okay, we slept five hours, that's plenty, let's wake up and let's deal with this danger, whatever the danger is. Again, most of the time it's our thoughts, or imagined, you know possibilities or unworries of what could happen. And so the rest of those couple of hours of sleep is like the cherry on the top of the cake, it's like not really necessary from the primal survival point of view. We can't do that for long term. It's not good, but that's what happens in our society because of long-term stress. And so with that we often look at stress hormones, both that hormones like or stress hormones like cortisol, but also the calming neurotransmitters like GABA and serotonin.

And then the next one is the depleted type. This one tends to show up mostly in older people, and by older it could be in their 80s and 90s, but also earlier. It's just the name says it all it's depleted. We've lived a life, maybe we have certain genetic tendencies and certain levels of both, let's say, sex hormones and neurotransmitters. Brain hormones get depleted and we just don't have the resources and the resilience that we used to when we're 20 or 30. And so these show up more.

And overall we just need to figure out why is your body depleted? What are you missing, whether it's sex hormones or neurotransmitter and how can we support and lower the stress in the body? And the good news is that we don't have to get to those levels that we had when we were 20 or 30. We just have to have enough of these levels to be able to sleep well and to basically thrive, without having perfect levels of all the chemicals that we need or these healthy neurotransmitters that we need to sleep well at night. And then the last one is overburdened, whether it's mold or whether it's a long-term infection like EBV, Epstein-Barr virus, or whether it's Lyme disease. There are usually these or we could also be gut infections that have been chronic and just really create a lot of inflammation that the body can no longer keep to a level where it doesn't affect our sleep. So we have to figure out within that level, what's the instigator, what's the problem, what's the irritant that's causing this problem, and then after we find that out, then we nourish the body.

0:15:37 - Chloe

Yeah, I think people today are just so depleted and overtaxed and our systems are so overwhelmed. You know, it's like our bodies were supposed to go into fight or flight when the bear would come around every now and then. Now it's in fight or flight anytime your email dings. And on top of that, the amount of chemicals that we're ingesting either through our foods or through our skin day to day is so overwhelming for our bodies, our livers and our guts. So I think that it's so important for us to recognize how this is impacting our health overall and even impacting our sleep, which is so essential for our brain function, which is, you know, the heart of how we engage in this world, which is, you know, the heart of how we engage in this world.

In your book, you also mentioned, you know, when you were talking about the connection between stress and insomnia, you had a statistic from the American Institute of Stress that states that most doctor's visits are related to stress and that it was 75 to 90% of doctor's visits had some connection to the patient coming in for stress, and that's really and that was from 2011, I believe. So that's a pretty astounding statistic when you think about it and you think about the levels of stress that we're dealing with as a society. So you go into a lot of the different ways that stress is impacting your sleep. I'd love for you to explain a couple of those ways and maybe even go into how the cortisol is supposed to cycle throughout the day, because I found that really interesting.

0:17:16 - Damiana

Yes. So in essence, with sleep, we have to feel safe at night, because if we don't feel safe, we're in such a vulnerable situation, and so that's why I talk about stress. And then also, before we go into all the ways in which stress can affect our sleep, I just want to say that stress can be normal and can be beneficial too, and can be beneficial to Like when we run, when we eat, when we have an active, excited conversation. That actually puts a certain amount of stress, which we call normal stress. It's what keeps us going, it's what keeps us active and alive. So it's more of the stressors like that keep going all the time that really kind of affect our body. So you asked me about the cortisol.

Cortisol is produced by the adrenal glands. There are these glands on top of our kidneys, and cortisol has a lot of benefits. It has really good functions, but it's only when it's out of balance that is a problem. One of the greatest functions that it has really good functions, but only when it's out of balance. That is a problem. One of the greatest functions that it has is to keep our blood sugar regulated, especially at night. Our brain needs nice, steady amounts of glucose in order for us to stay alive. The problem is when we don't have enough of the cortisol produced during the day, when we need to have energy, and it's too much of it at night. So there are all these different stages that the body can go through. It's usually over time. That's why we talk a lot about stress management and stress reducing, because it's not what you do only one day or tomorrow. It's over long term. And then, of course, every one of us will react differently to this stimuli. You've seen people that they seem to abuse their body and minds and just go, go, go for many years and they seem fine and they might be fine. And then some of us, we work so hard to take care of ourselves and still we don't do so well. So it's an internal experience for each one of us, and so we can't compare ourselves to other people.

What I do see most commonly when it comes to the cortisol is that it's either that we get too high levels in the evening when we're trying to fall asleep, or we get a spike in the middle of the night around one, two, three, four o'clock, and that wakes us up. So then we have to wonder why did that happen? Is it because we're too stressed in our daily life? Is it because we have some kind of gut infection or inflammation or food sensitivities that also tends to increase this stress hormone? Is it because our blood sugar isn't stable at night? Maybe our blood sugar regulation isn't so good and it shows up at night. So if our blood sugar drops too low in the middle of the night for good reason, as I mentioned a little earlier, the cortisol will kick in to raise the blood sugars to keep them stable. But then also that will wake you up. Sometimes you might wake up feeling a bit agitated or having a little palpitations. So that could be another reason. Another reason could be that oxygen saturation drops at night because of sleep apnea and that can raise your cortisol.

So in my practice and as I explain in the book, I do use the saliva cortisol testing. It's a seven-point testing throughout 24 hours. So there's three in the morning for the cortisol awakening response, trying to assess if your body is able to create enough cortisol in the morning because, as I said, it's anti-inflammatory, helps with blood sugar regulation and then what happens throughout the day and evening. So that's where we get those seven samples to assess the healthy levels or not, and then, after we do that, we can use a couple of supplements to regulate them. But then the question is why? So that's always what we want to answer. Why is it blood sugar? Is it infections? Is it toxicity? Is it sleep apnea? Is it just daily stress and trying to teach the body to deal with stress in a different way? So that's the bigger question.

0:21:43 - Chloe

Yeah, it's getting to the root of those stressors are so important and you list, you go through a lot of the different ones, which I find super duper helpful because you break them down and which tests you like to recommend in terms of getting to the root cause and getting that tangible feedback from sort of the Western medical world and testing.

So when in your chapter about gut health, you talk about how the gut impacts neurotransmitters and again I found that to be really important and essential for people to understand my son, Remy, has a rare genetic disorder that impacts his neurotransmitters, specifically one called the syntaxin-binding protein. But what's really interesting that I watched very dramatically with my child is, you know, Remy will have seizures if his gut is impacted, if he eats something that he shouldn't be eating or that he has an allergy to. So it's such a really dramatic visual to see how directly correlated the gut is to the brain. But I've seen, you know, tremendous advancements with Remy and with other kids with special needs, when you're able to regulate the gut, which is something that's really, really difficult when the brain is dysregulated as well. But I'd love to hear how the gut plays such an important role in neurotransmitters, if you don't mind chatting about that a little bit.

0:23:12 - Damiana

Yeah, so you mentioned earlier, I think, serotonin, over 90% of it, being produced in the gut. It actually feeds onto the beneficial bacteria. So if you have imbalanced bacteria maybe not enough of the beneficial one or some of the harmful one is overgrown, so it's not imbalanced then serotonin is not produced as it should. The other reason why serotonin, for example, could be low it's serotonin comes from tryptophan. Tryptophan comes from food, from protein. So a lot of my patients I've seen this over and over again in my practice they have low stomach acid. Oftentimes they have the bacteria H pylori that's overgrown. They go hand in hand and so what happens is if we have low stomach acidity we don't digest protein quite as well. And then also, when we don't have enough stomach acid, we tend to have overgrown bacteria, some of the harmful one in the colon but also in the small intestine. So it throws off that balance.

And we know in our society there are a lot of people on acid blockers because we're told that we have too much acid.

But in fact what I've seen over and over again is that most people have low acid and then right above the stomach stomach where we go into the esophagus, there is a sphincter that keeps very tightly so the acid doesn't spill up. And when we have low levels that sphincter doesn't close as tightly and so it's low stomach acid causing the acid reflux. And we take the medication to suppress the stomach acid even further, then we barely have any and that has consequences on the beneficial bacteria. It has many other consequences but I'm just pointing out the main ones, as it comes down to protein breakdown and making tryptophan and making serotonin and how that affects our mood, and then we tend to have more anxiety, more sleep issues, and then, if we have sleep issues, the anxiety builds up, sort of that anticipation anxiety, and then it feeds into the other. So those are a couple of the ways on which gut connects to the brain, connects to one of the calming neurotransmitters which is serotonin.

0:25:45 - Chloe

Yeah, it's so essential. I always find it funny with patients when you tell them to check on whether they actually might have low stomach acid. You discuss a pretty easy test in the book, I think, using HCL something that people can do at home. I love the little tips that we can give people that are actually free, that you can get, or close to free, where you can get a gauge, a little bit of like how to take control of your health. So one of the things I always recommend to people are elimination diets, which is something you discuss in terms of finding out whether different foods are causing inflammation in the gut.

That's free, you know. You just eliminate. There are different ways to do it, but you know I normally have people eliminate the five main allergens, you know gluten, dairy eggs, soy and corn. There we go. I was like nuts and then I was like no and corn, for, you know, two weeks to four weeks and then introduce them one at a time. Again, there are a bunch of different ways. If

anybody's looking to do it, just check online, but I'd love for you to chat about the sort of tests that people could do with HCL to see if they have low stomach acid.

0:26:56 - Damiana

Yeah, I talk about this in the book. It's called a betaine HCL stomach acid acidity challenge. Basically the only and I talk about this in the book is to make sure that they don't have this bacteria called h pylori. So a lot of the people do have symptoms. Some people are asymptomatic. So I like to test the most common symptoms that I see with overgrown h pylori bacteria is burping and also like when you don't eat for a few hours on the left side, like below the rib cage where the stomach is, you just kind of feel like a knowing pain. It's not a real pain but also just feels like you've got to eat because you're like hunger pain. Some people call them hunger pains and hunger pains are not. I wouldn't say they're normal after not eating for three, four hours. It's okay to be hungry but not to have that sensation. That typically is a sign that this bacteria is overgrown and I do want to say that most of the human population has this bacteria and also has been found to have some benefits. But here we're looking to see if it's overgrown and if you do this challenge with betaine HCL to increase your stomach acidity, it can cause issues, including stomach ulcers. So that's why we want to test.

If you have those symptoms and you tell even your medical doctor, they usually easily will test for that, either with a blood test or a breath Excuse me, not with a blood test with a breath test or a stool test. Those are the most accurate ones. And then you can do that test. You basically go to a health store and you can get the supplement and then I explain in the book how to increase it gradually. And basically, if you take one capsule and you feel a little bit of burning, it means you have plenty of stomach acid. You don't need any. But if you take one with a protein-containing meal, nothing happens. Then a couple of days later you keep increasing to a certain amount and that can improve your health greatly.

Now, with taking this kind of supplement and also testing, this could serve as a supplement over long term to help with protein digestion and increase your overall health. It doesn't really solve the problem. It helps you in the moment, but it doesn't solve the problem. So chewing more, decreasing stress and taking digestive bitters about 10 minutes before a meal, that's what will in time encourage your body to make more stomach acid. And the same with probiotic.

It's the same idea with probiotics they're great while you take them, but as soon as you stop you're back to where you were, and that's why you have to look at taking prebiotics or prebiotic fiber, which feeds your own beneficial bacteria and builds it up in time. So what I do with a lot of patients I do both at the same time and I talk a lot about that in my book, and also with everything that we recommend, there is always a little possibility that that won't work for you. So I try throughout the book to say well, this works for 90% of the people, but if it doesn't work for you, it means that you have this Like, for example, if you take probiotics or prebiotics and you feel crazy bloated and you don't feel well, it means that you probably have small intestine bacterial overgrowth, or what we call short SIBO.

0:30:11 - Chloe

Yeah, I love some of those tips that you put in the book because I think that those are so important for people and one of those things that we pick up as practitioners, seeing these things over and over again. But a lot of times people will read a book and say, okay, well, I want to optimize my health, so I want to optimize my gut. I'm going to start taking a ton of prebiotics or a ton of probiotics and then for them it's not working well. They're like, well, what's going on? And when you see this enough and you read enough about it, then you realize, realize, oh well, that's like placebo. Ok, let's figure this out.

And that's one of the things that I loved so much about the book, because it's really helpful for people in terms of actually troubleshooting while giving a lot of resources, including testing recommendations that they can ask for from their doctor, for not only you know different hormone tests, but different tests in terms of gut health and latent viruses. So it's really such a beautiful book in terms of how it's laying out information for people to really start their healing journey on their own but then go deeper with a practitioner, with the resources that you're providing. Also and as a practitioner. I even was learning a lot of stuff in there as well, so it's super cool. In terms of since you like fives, I noticed you had the five R's in terms of digestion. Then I'll leave digestion alone after this, but I do, I am, I am a gut nerd. So what are? Can you just review the five R's briefly and let people know sort of those steps in terms of gut healing?

0:31:46 - Damiana

Yes. So the five R's, those are not mine, those are from the functional medicine world, probably from the Institute for Functional Medicine to be more exact. I believe that's where those started and they're really wonderful because they provide a framework for gut health and sometimes healing can be so overwhelming. So having a little bit of a framework can be really helpful. I think I need a little gap here to pull them up in front of me. So the first one is remove and I mentioned earlier H pylori so removing infections or whatever is irritating the gut health and what's causing inflammation, whether it's yeast or an infection like H pylori or a parasite or anything along these lines. So usually we do a stool test, comprehensive stool test, and that tends to give us quite a bit of information and sometimes we can figure out just based on symptoms. And then the second step is replace and that's where we replace with what we just talked about actually, you know, the digestive enzymes, the stomach acidity. We improve the stomach acidity, whatever it takes to help the body digest the food better. And then the third step is we inoculate, and we're talking about prebiotics and probiotics and probiotics, and so we're looking at the gut health, to improving the gut bacteria. And then the fourth one is repair and we're repairing the gut lining. Usually, with infections and food sensitivities, the gut lining, the intestinal permeability and integrity can be affected. A common term that I don't really like but sometimes people recognize is leaky gut. Really, we're looking at the gut integrity, but that's what we're talking about. So we improve that with drinking bone broth, aloe vera and marshmallow root and all kinds of amino acids and supplements and herbs that heal the gut lining.

And one thing that I forgot to mention for the remove step, the very first step, one of the things that we remove it's not only infections but also it's foods that we're sensitive to. So that's a very initial step. And then the last step after repair is rebalance and this is where it's all about stress management. Stress will affect gut health and also it's about sleep. So it's a tricky thing that I talk about in my book because I don't want to stress out people. Most people that read the book they can't sleep very well anyways, so I try not to emphasize too much, but it is kind of the final step. But usually they go hand in hand. As you improve your gut health, you improve your sleep as well. So hopefully, by the time you go through these steps, then you get to that place.

I also want to say that these are five stages. They are done in order in a sense, but sometimes they can overlap. It's not like you have to do just one and nothing else. You know, yes, you remove the infections, as I said. For example, if you have an H pylori infection, you have to wait and treat that infection before you introduce betaine HCL. So that actually is true there. So there is a second order and then at some point there is a second overlap that happens.

0:35:28 - Chloe

Yeah, again, I can't emphasize how much I find gut health to be essential. I think the quote is from Hippocrates that the gut is the foundation of all illness, but I also think that you got to look at it as a flip side. Also. The gut is also the foundation of all health and wellness and vitality. So, really, if we're building health through optimizing the gut and our diet, that's really the

foundation of health and wellness, and I think that that's something that we really need to get better at in our society.

Yes, next, I would love to. I know, as a woman who just turned 40 and as a practitioner of Chinese medicine, I've treated so many women in menopause and perimenopause, and it's something I'm actually working on a new project for recently in terms of possibly a new herbal line that might be coming out this spring recently, in terms of possibly a new herbal line that might be coming out this spring. But I would love to hear about how these hormones are impacting sleep, because I know that this is such an issue for so many women out there and causing such havoc in our lives when we're already so tired. So how do you see hormone health interplaying with sleep?

0:36:40 - Damiana

The most common cause for sleep issues for women, I would say, is hormonal imbalance, and part of what's happening is that perimenopause, the period before menopause, can be quite long up to 12 years on average, about seven years.

So I see a lot of women in their 30s, mid-30s, late-30s and, of course, early 40s and from there on that struggle with these hormonal changes. On the surface it may seem that their hormones look fine, whether they've been told that it's okay to have painful periods or cloudy periods, or they've been told that it's normal to be on birth control for a very long time and not worry about it and all these different scenarios that can happen. And having healthy sex hormones is really good news for good sleep. For example, estrogen supports serotonin production and progesterone supports GABA production. They're all very closely interlinked, closely interlinked, and so, as these changes happen, if we really watch the menstrual cycle and we work on balancing it, we see great changes in sleep, and so that's a big, big area that I cover in my book. I'm trying here to think which part of it should I cover. Do you have specific questions that I can answer?

0:38:01 - Chloe

One question I get asked a lot is about thyroid disease and thyroid testing, so you do a great job breaking that down. I know that that's something that you deal with also in terms of some level of Hashimoto's, and that's a huge issue for women. I had Dr Heidi Lovey on the show, who's a doctor of Chinese medicine as well, who's an expert in Hashimoto's and really talks about it as a feminist issue because it affects so many women. I would love to hear how the thyroid impacts sleep and also which tests you would actually recommend people ask for, because it seems like my bare bones understanding of it. I don't do much functional medicine testing. Is that the test that you get from your doctor woefully inaccurate or incomplete? Unless you're getting some additional testing done, you're really not going to get to see the full picture of how the thyroid is functioning.

0:38:53 - Damiana

Yeah, so hypothyroidism is Hashimoto's, an autoimmune disorder, and you would think that with that's hypothyroidism, so you're supposed to feel tired, and a lot of women feel tired, including myself, but also a lot of women have insomnia with this, unfortunately, because with Hashimoto's being an autoimmune problem, there are a lot of gut issues. Dr Fasano, an expert in this area, he really talks about having three different prongs to any autoimmune issues. You cannot develop an autoimmune problem such as Hashimoto's unless you have a genetic tendency. That's the first kind of part of this three stool for autoimmune disorders, and then the second one is having digestive issues, and then the third one is a trigger. Now the trigger could have been anything from stress to an infection, to the gut issue in itself, and so with the gut inflammation, we talked a lot about how the gut is involved with sleep, and so I see a lot more women with hypothyroidism having sleep issues rather than hyperthyroidism. It feels to me and I don't know, maybe it's my private practice, maybe because I've struggled with this that I've

attracted so many women with hypothyroidism, but it's still surprising to me that I have so very few patients with hyperthyroidism or with Graves' disease, same when insomnia is indeed very prevalent. It's part of the clinical explanation. And with hyperthyroidism, more often, if you look at the classical symptoms, you see fatigue and sleeping a lot, which can also happen.

As far as testing the thyroid, you know, with the TSH, the thyroid stimulating hormone, the conventional ranges are somewhere between 0.5 to 4.5, but the ideal and optimal ranges are between 0.5 and 2. So that's one red flag to look if your TSH is above 2, but under 4.5, and your doctor says that's normal. But if you have all these symptoms that match thyroid issues, then it's a good thing to look further, such as free T3, free T4, reverse T3, and then looking at the thyroid antibodies like TPOAB and TGAB and I talk about all of these in the book, and so those are some of the tests that you can look further and gather more information. For me, I had a relatively normal TSH level for many years, just ever so slightly elevated, but I experienced a lot of brain fog and fatigued.

But I just kept going and going and going and when I started learning functional medicine, I did a test on myself just out of curiosity, and I still remember I was going to Miami and I was in the airport in Denver and I just opened my email and I noticed that I got the results and I remember looking at the email and seeing that my thyroid antibodies, the TPOAB, were about 400 or something like that, and normally it's under 35. And I thought it was a mistake. Even then I could not believe. And then I was on that plane ride thinking about it and I'm like you know what. I'm so fatigued sometimes I can barely find my words and it feels like a workout, just to excuse me, just to pull up little words out of my brain and suddenly I started, started making sense, you know.

0:42:45 - Chloe

And so sometimes we've had an issue for so long and it developed so gradually that we don't even know what normal is. Again, because we're under such chronic physical and psychological stress that it's so hard to really envision what it feels like to not get bloating after eating or to sleep well and wake up and have energy and vitality. And I think it's so important that we start building health. And one of the things you mentioned in the book is I think somebody had told you that healing is a lifelong journey or something along those lines, and I think that you know, I think that that's such an important mindset shift in terms of you know every step that you can take every day in the direction of health is a win. You know, instead of feeling like there's this one end goal, that one day you're going to be healthy and vital, you know it's looking at every step that you're taking along the way as a step towards health and a step towards living your best life.

So I think, especially as women, or especially as people in sort of a hyper drive society, we can get really goal oriented. But looking at it as a process and as a journey can be really helpful for people, especially if they're dealing with multiple layers of chronic illness that are leading to these disharmonies. Yes, one thing I would love to teach women about briefly in terms of another quick, free not quick necessarily, but another free way that you can sort of assess your hormones. Could you explain how somebody would do the basal body temperatures and what that might indicate for women who are trying to see what their hormones are doing and whether they have a hormonal imbalance?

0:44:32 - Damiana

Yes, I love the basal body temperature, as you probably have noticed from the book, but it's such an easy, nearly free tool. I mean, one of the cheapest ways to do this is to buy a basal body thermometer, which is around \$40, I would say. But basically, what happens, day one of our cycle is the day we bleed, and then around day 12, 13, 14, 15, everyone is a bit different we ovulate, and the moment we ovulate, our temperature goes up because encasing of the egg makes progesterone that's what will bump up our progesterone, and then progesterone is

thermogenetic. It increases our body temperature, basically. And so, learning, like taking your temperature every morning, it will tell you if, if you're ovulating, because your temperature will go up for a half to one degree every month for about, you know, 10 to 14 days, and so for a woman who wants to either conceive or wants to use this as a birth control, it can be a really good tool over long term. So let's say you want to use this as a birth control after taking your basal body temperature. If you do this over a couple of months and also you look for the change in vaginal fluid, then you're able pretty closely to predict that window of four, five, six days when you're fertile, and so it's a really wonderful tool to have that way, and also, if you want to have a baby, then also you know when your window, when you should have intercourse.

But also, as we approach perimenopause, if you've been doing this for a while and you know, let's say, you pretty much ovulate every month, if you start skipping and you don't ovulate as much, or if you notice that that luteal phase that's the second part of your cycle, from the moment you ovulate until you bleed they've been, let's say, 12 days, which is a healthy amount of days, 12 days for a long time, and now suddenly they're getting shorter and shorter. That's also giving you information that you're probably approaching menopause or you're in perimenopause, and so this is such a valuable information because you're empowered, you know what's happening in your body. If you work with a practitioner that understands this, which is usually acupuncturists, naturopaths, functional medicine practitioners, they'll be able to help you. Because you know your body, you understand what's happening in your body and also our mood tends to fluctuate throughout the month and so, for example, when we're doing that menstrual bleeding period, it's okay to slow down and take our time and then, as we lead up to that ovulation, we tend to have a lot of energy and then as you ovulate, as you head into that premenstrual period, you notice that you start becoming a little more inward.

You get more sugar cravings. Maybe you get a little more irritable before you menstruate. If you are aware of where your body is at, it's a little bit easier to predict how you're going to feel and also take care of yourself a little better and give yourself grace. When you're tired or when somebody says, hey, let's go out, and you're two days before you're about to menstruate and you want to just strangle someone, you're like no, you know what, I'll stay home. I need this time for myself. I need this time to nourish myself, and that's important to remember so important, it's essential and it's.

0:48:26 - Chloe

I love the basal body temperature as a practitioner because you can learn so much about what's going on in a woman's health.

Again, fertility and infertility is such a huge challenge in our society today. I'm hoping to get Dr Shana Swan on, who is like an expert in the declining sperm rates and that's the flip side of it. But I think what is it if we keep going on the trajectory that we're on? By 2050, I think 50% of men will be clinically infertile if we don't start changing some of the things that we're doing. So it's really terrifying.

But also, women are also having massive challenges when it comes to fertility due to the increased levels of stress, the imbalance of hormones and the additional hormones that we're getting in our water and our foods and all of the different chemicals that are overloading our systems. So the basal body temperature and tracking that as a practitioner, we can really see a lot of insights into how your hormones are functioning and how we can support you if you are somebody who's on that fertility journey as well, just so you all know anybody who's listening. It's a great, great tool to work with and, again, it's \$40 for one of these thermometers, and it's something that you can do to track your health and feel really empowered about what you're doing, so I absolutely love that.

0:49:55 - Damiana

Yes, and also I will add to that. Nowadays other devices, such as the Oura Ring, connect to natural cycles and will do it for you. I do hear and I've noticed this in myself, I do have an Oura Ring that the temperature that shows up it's a lower by half a degree. But at the end it matters, and it doesn't matter for that purpose, because the lower it's going to be, you know, the values amongst them will be accurate. So that's OK.

0:50:25 - Chloe

So I have a love-hate situation. I really want to like Oura Rings. I should maybe I'll buy another one. I've gotten two of them and the second one that I got was like the upgraded one and I was like, sweet, I'm going to do this one.

And I ended up returning it because I got it mainly to like track Remy's seizures at night. Cause I was like, cause I'm in such a fight or flight the whole time when Remy's having seizures, he'll have seizure clusters and so I would sleep with him. But I wouldn't get up and like track how many he had. So I was like, all right, I'll get an aura ring and then when I'm getting up it'll tell me how many times I get up and I can assume that's how many seizures he has, because otherwise I'm passed back out if I'm sleeping at all.

And I remember one night where we must have had like seven seizures and I got up in the morning and my aura ring was like you slept perfectly up at night and I was like I'm going to do this thing, but I think maybe I just had it on the wrong finger, Like maybe it wasn't fitting exactly the way it's supposed to, which I think is pretty important in terms of the precision of it. I found the bio strap to be more effective, but they don't integrate. But Aura's had a couple of updates since that time, so maybe I should not talk shit about them and give it a try again. I know a lot of women really love it, but I it's.

0:51:44 - Damiana

You know it works well for some people and it doesn't for some people. And then sometimes I just don't have an explanation why. I mean, especially if you got up, it should record that. That's not like lying in bed awake and you're still, and it it says oh, you're asleep, this was like you're walking around, right?

0:52:01 - Chloe

no, it's not walking around, but it's definitely sitting up at me being in like full fight or flight. I mean having, you know, like having your kid have a seizure, like the my heart rate's going for sure, you know, like it's not huh interesting, but maybe I'll contact aura and be like so, guys, I returned to my last one and now I'm talking shit about your own podcast. So why don't you send me one and give it a try? Um, so I can, hopefully, because I it seems it's so handy to have it as a ring as opposed to one of the watches, you know, yes, but anyway, I digress.

Um, so in book you also go into a lot of information about different toxins, different latent viruses that people might have. I want to get to the sleep foundations and the things that you recommend most in terms of building healthy habits to build optimal sleep. But if you just want to touch on a little bit about how some of these latent viruses and pathogens might be leading to sleep disruptions as well, I think that's just a sleep. But if you just want to touch on a little bit about how some of these latent viruses and pathogens might be leading to sleep disruptions as well. I think that's just a really important topic just to give people a teaser on, because I really do want everybody to go and read the book, because it's jam-packed with much more information than you're going to get in this one hour, so I highly highly recommend it.

0:53:12 - Damiana

The people with latent viruses or toxicity of some kind. They typically have quite a few health struggles that are unexplained, and they usually bounce from doctor to doctor or eventually

they find out that oh, I've been exposed to mold and now I also figured out I have Lyme disease, and so it can be a combination of issues. And so, because it's a combination of disorders, because they've been going on for a long time, it's almost hard to know exactly how did they get to not sleep well? How did they get to not sleep well? But in general, I would say I would boil it down to inflammation and stress in the body over a period of time, internal stress, you know, outside of the possible mental and emotional stress that they've been having. And so I noticed over the years that people come in and I try to just address the sleep, such as lower stress levels in the body, decrease inflammation and nourish the calming neurotransmitters levels.

But it always gets down to like, oh, we need to deal with this virus because otherwise things just won't change and it takes time, I do have to say because otherwise things just won't change and it takes time. I do have to say it can take time more than other types of insomnia. But as long as we're aware of what's happening and we work towards addressing these issues, then people heal. And that's why in the book, when I talk about these infections and toxicity, I touch on them so they can recognize them. But I don't go as deep as I go with the digestion and the hormones, because you really do need a specialist to help you. More than anything, you may need a specialist with the digestive issues and the hormonal issues and the stress response, but there is a lot you can do on your own, while these toxins and latent infections usually need the help of a practitioner and the help of a specialist typically.

0:55:24 - Chloe

Totally. I think it's really underestimated how prevalent some of these latent pathogens are and how much they're adding to the burden of disease in our society adding to the burden of disease in our society. I also think it's interesting to think of insomnia and or, you know, good sleep as a reflection of your state of health, and I think that that's really one of the things that you're bringing home with this book is that there are so many underlying health challenges that we're dealing with as a society and you know, as we heal those health issues, we're able to optimize our society. And you know, as we heal those health issues, we're able to optimize our sleep and really feel our best and live our best life. So, just in terms of those health foundations for sleep, what are some of the things that you recommend?

I mean I live in the weird biohacker world, so obviously everybody I know is like wearing the stupid orange glasses and red lights everywhere and all of these things. I mean they're not stupid, they can be really helpful when I've been in the research and I have a red light and love it. But what are the things that you've found are actually most beneficial for people, especially the things that are really just easier habits that are low budget, that people can just work into their nightly routine as they're getting ready for bed.

0:56:42 - Damiana

Well, I like to start with the morning, because the way you start your day and how you do your day is going to affect your sleep at night. So the three most important things in the morning to regulate the stress response and set your day in the best possible way is to make sure they eat protein in the morning. And I know we live in a society where fasting is very popular and I would say, especially for women, I would say, while you have insomnia, having breakfast whether it's whether it's a protein shake of some kind or eggs or whatever works for you. But you know, for example, oatmeal is seen as such a health food, but it's just mainly carbs. Honestly, I've had a lot of patients do the continuous glucose monitor, where you can check your glucose balance every two minutes basically, and every single woman and some of the men who had oatmeal in the morning it would spike their blood sugar and then they would get really hungry at around 10 and 11 or just not feel well in the morning, as opposed to having something that's mainly protein, very, very little carbs. So protein, a little bit of movement in the morning, even if it's just 10, 15 minutes, and then the third thing is being exposed to natural light, to sun. And if you don't have access to sun like, for example, I live in Colorado the sun

takes a while and you live here too it takes a while for the sun to come up and sometimes we wake up at six and the sun is not up yet for sure. Or you live in a place where it's cloudy all the time. Then you can use a lamp 10,000 lux that's the intensity of the light for 15, 20 minutes each morning and that will stop the melatonin production, increase serotonin production and just give your body a signal that it's time to fully wake up. So then you can fully let go in the evening and go to sleep to create that bigger jump in the morning so you can have the drop in the evening. So those are the three things in the morning.

And then you know, everyone talks about caffeine. I'm a big fan of no caffeine until you sleep well and then introduce it After you sleep well, introduce in the morning and see what happens. And in general I would say I tell people no caffeine past 10 am. And then I love naps. I know it's a little bit of a controversial kind of a subject, but if naps are done correctly, which is at least seven, eight hours before your bedtime, so that's usually between one and 3 pm for half an hour or up to half an hour. Just lie down, maybe do a guided meditation, just get comfy, and the goal is not even to nap. I get a lot of people they say I just can't nap and I'm like I just want you to rest, to lie down and rest and allow your body to slow down. That gives your body the signal that everything is safe in the world, especially because you're doing in the middle of the day, which is probably a novel idea for most people. So it's a very healthy habit to have.

And then in the evening, I like to call it life after 7 pm, when everything slows down. You know, if you live a kind of a typical schedule I talk in the book about the 12 and 12 hours, 12 hours of activity. So let's say that's 7 am to 7 pm of just being out in the world doing moving, working activity, and then 7 pm to 7 am of slowing down. And you know we're only sleeping a part of those hours. So the other hours is all about finding ways to nourish yourself, to slow down and also creating boundaries around your mental thinking.

So if you tend to worry in the evening and think about things, or when you wake up early in the morning, just tell yourself this is my time, there is nothing I can do about it. I'm just going to let go right now as much as possible and just focus on how can I enjoy this evening with my family or with myself. And so creating those mental boundaries of saying this is for me, this is okay to slow down, it's okay to let go for a little bit, because problems never stop. So there is always me. This is okay to slow down, it's okay to let go for a little bit, because problems never stop. So there is always something that we're going to worry about.

And then I'm okay with people watching some TV, but as long as they leave 45 minutes to an hour before bedtime to wind down, I almost always tell my patients to prepare for bed at the top of that hour, the beginning of that hour, so if they get sleepy at some point, they don't have to now have this whole routine of brushing their teeth, preparing for bed, but they can just slide right into bed and go to sleep.

And one of the last things that I think I like to say is we're told that going to sleep at the same time and waking at the same time is really important, and I would say, waking up at the same time it's quite important for the body's routine. But I would allow a little bit of flexibility with going to sleep and make sure that when you go to sleep you're actually very sleepy. Sleep, you're actually very sleepy, I would say, especially if you have trouble falling asleep, it's just focusing, maybe reading a book or something like that, and just feel your body and allow your body not only to feel tired but feel groggy and sleepy. And then, even if it means that you're going to be up for a bit longer, just don't look at the clock, just allow yourself for that sleep to come. And that doesn't always happen. Sometimes we need extra support, whether it's testing or supplements or other things, but that's definitely a step in the right direction.

1:02:31 - Chloe

Yeah, I love that. Do you ever recommend sleep supplements or sleep meds while people are working on some of these underlying issues?

1:02:41 - Damiana

Definitely. To talk about sleep meds, I have quite a few of my patients who are on them and I tell them to stay on them and then when we think we're ready to taper off, then they talk with their medical provider and supplements I use supplements and herbs all the time, for sure, so it's a combination of healing the body while working with these healthy habits, and then some of the supplements can be used long-term, some shorter term. I'm always a big proponent of not having an entire pharmacy at home, but optimizing what you're taking, Because we don't need to approach every single aspect. We just have to choose the top two, three things and then, in time, other things regulate. And if there is one sticky point that's still there after two, three, four months, then we're looking again like why do you still have this? I don't know stomach pain, Like what's going on over there? You're feeling better, you're sleeping better, but this is still present. So then we look at that.

1:03:39 - Chloe

I love it. I think this has been so much information and again, I highly recommend that everybody check out the book because there is so much more information in there. I never really do the videos, but maybe we will. But it's really beautifully put together, really honors the foundation of health within our bodies and the individualism that is health and how we need to like look and sort of be curious about what's actually going on underneath that's causing these abnormal patterns of sleep. So I think it's really groundbreaking. So I think it's really groundbreaking. I think it's going to be so helpful for so many people out there who are struggling with insomnia because it goes so much deeper than any other book I've ever seen on the topic and I really just appreciate all of the years of work. I have been referring patients to you for insomnia since I started Urban Herbs almost 10 years ago.

So I know this has been really a passion project for you and something that you have been working on for so long. Is there anything that you'd love to share that I missed? Or is there anything else that you wanted to tell anybody?

1:04:48 - Damiana

Well, if someone is struggling with sleep and they get the book and they need additional help. At this moment I do take patients locally here in Boulder, Colorado, and also via telemedicine all over the world.

1:05:01 - Chloe

And we will put all those links in the show notes. So please check out the website, grab the book. And, Dr. Korga, it is such a pleasure. Again, I'm so grateful for your work and so honored to get to share this hour with you and share your work with as many people as I can.

1:05:16 - Damiana

Thank you for having me.

Chloe

Thank you, it's been fun. Thank you.