

Episode 025

Why It's Absolutely Important To Raise Awareness About Autoimmune Symptoms!

LISTEN TO THIS EPISODE: www.dianahimes.com/blog/autoimmune_symptoms

DIANA HIMES: Welcome, welcome, welcome to today's episode of the **Tough Love for Sensitive Souls** podcast! I'm your host, Diana Himes. I've got another exciting topic planned for us today, so grab a beverage, your notebook, and get comfy!

Hey there Sensitive Soul, I'm so glad you're here! This is the second episode in a 4-part series about the correlation between Highly Sensitive People and Autoimmune Diseases. In this episode you'll **discover the importance of being aware of the symptoms associated with autoimmune diseases**. You'll also learn about the challenges of living with them every day and why it can be so hard to get a diagnosis.

Autoimmune diseases are a group of disorders where the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy cells and tissues in the body. To put it in simpler terms, your immune system is attacking your body including your skin, joints, muscles, and internal organs. What makes autoimmune diseases so hard to diagnose and manage is the unpredictability of symptoms. They come and go without a clear explanation, **leaving people who struggle with these conditions frustrated, misunderstood, and dismissed!**

To give you an idea of what it's like, imagine waking up each day not knowing how your body will feel, how your joints will ache, or how your energy levels will fluctuate. **It's a relentless battle that can turn even the simplest tasks into exhausting challenges**. From the moment we open our eyes, we're facing multiple hurdles that impact our lives every day. Here's a just a few things to consider...

- Many autoimmune diseases are called "invisible illnesses," because the symptoms are not immediately obvious to others. This can lead to a lack of understanding and empathy from those around you. In many cases **you're judged or stigmatized for a perceived lack of productivity or finding ways to manage your symptoms**.

- Fatigue is a common symptom. It's not like being tired and in need of a good night's sleep; it's exhaustion that invades every aspect of your life. **Simple tasks like getting dressed, preparing meals, or engaging in social activities can feel like an uphill battle.**
- Autoimmune diseases often cause chronic pain, which can range from mild discomfort to crippling agony. Joints ache, muscles throb, and your body feels like it's constantly under attack. **This endless pain can limit your quality of life,** reducing mobility and hindering participation in activities you loved doing prior your illness.
- Some autoimmune diseases can affect cognitive function, leading to brain fog, memory loss, and difficulty concentrating. Imagine struggling to recall simple information or feeling like your thoughts are perpetually muddled. **The impact on work, relationships, and overall mental well-being is extensive.**

One of the toughest things about autoimmune conditions is the challenge of getting a correct diagnosis. The symptoms of autoimmune can mimic and overlap with other conditions, making it difficult for healthcare professionals to pinpoint the underlying cause. This makes it a **long and frustrating journey that leaves you feeling isolated and disheartened!**

It took over 10 years to get my diagnosis and it was one of the most challenging experiences of my life. It started with a rash on my skin when I was out in the sun. The confusing thing about it was prior to this, I lived in SC near the beach and never had an issue with the sun. The only differences were I had a child about 6 months before and lived in Illinois. From there I had **debilitating neck and upper back pain, nerve problems, aching joints, numerous infections, and cognitive issues.**

Each time a new symptom would come up, I'd go see another doctor only to get more tests and be told "everything looks normal!" The challenge was there were so many doctors and none of them were talking to each other so they could figure it out together. Here's some further insight into the challenges of getting an accurate diagnosis.

- Autoimmune disease symptoms may appear and disappear seemingly at random, making it challenging to communicate exactly what's happening to you. This unpredictability **often leads to a delayed, wrong, or missed diagnosis which leaves patients feeling uncertain and stressed.**
- Healthcare providers can struggle when it comes to diagnosing autoimmune diseases. Because of the broad range of symptoms that come and go, medical professionals must rely on a combination of patient history, physical examinations, and laboratory tests. Keep in mind that even with these tools, **getting an accurate diagnosis can be a complex puzzle without a clear solution.**
- The journey to get an accurate diagnosis can take years where patients will likely visit numerous doctors, undergo numerous tests, and try various treatments. **The emotional toll of this process can be, in some cases, worse than getting an official diagnosis.** You'll likely feel unheard, invalidated, or dismissed on your journey of finding answers to the pain and suffering you endure.

Despite the challenges autoimmune warriors face, they can demonstrate remarkable resilience navigating every day life. Learn to manage your condition **by developing ways to cope with the**

symptoms, seek support, and advocate for what you need. This gives you the courage to keep fighting and refusing to let this condition define who you are. Ways you can do that is...

1. Making changes to your lifestyle that help manage your symptoms. These may include dietary changes, regular exercise tailored to your abilities, stress reduction techniques, and establishing a consistent sleep routine. While these changes can be beneficial, they require significant dedication and discipline.
2. Finding support for the emotionally draining journey is crucial. Friends, family, and support groups can provide a safe space to share your experiences, gain understanding, and find comfort in knowing you're not alone in your struggles.
3. Advocating for yourself by learning to communicate your needs effectively, assert your rights, and actively engage in your own healthcare. Empowered patients who educate themselves about their condition and treatment options are often better equipped to navigate the complex healthcare system.

Living with autoimmune conditions is an uphill battle filled with uncertainty, pain, and frustration. The impact is serious because it affects your physical well-being, mental health, relationships, and overall quality of life. The challenges of obtaining a proper diagnosis only add to the burden you bear. As a society, it's essential that we raise awareness about autoimmune diseases, foster empathy and understanding, and provide support for those who face these daily struggles.

Remember, compassion goes a long way. By extending a listening ear, offering support, and educating yourself about autoimmune diseases, we can create a more inclusive and understanding environment for people battling these relentless conditions. **Let's stand together, united in our commitment to alleviating the devastating impact of autoimmune disease symptoms and improving the lives of those affected.**

If you know someone with an autoimmune condition, let these journal prompts give you some ideas for how to better understand their challenges. Write freely and honestly letting your thoughts and emotions flow onto the paper.

1. Consider the challenges faced by individuals with autoimmune conditions in their daily lives. How can you create a safe and supportive environment where they feel comfortable expressing their needs and concerns?
2. Imagine yourself in the shoes of someone with an autoimmune condition. How would you want others to approach and support you? What actions or words would make you feel truly heard and understood?
3. Reflect on your role in advocating for individuals with autoimmune conditions. How can you use your voice and influence to raise awareness, promote research, and support policies that benefit those affected by these conditions?
4. Consider the importance of active listening when engaging with someone who has an autoimmune condition. How can you improve your listening skills and create an environment where they feel valued and validated?

Well that, Sensitive Soul, brings me to the FAQ of the week...**What are some things I can do to make life a little easier for someone with an autoimmune condition?**

Simple tasks can become overwhelming, and the invisible nature of these conditions often leads to feelings of isolation and misunderstanding. As a caring individual, you can make a difference by offering support and making life a little easier for those facing autoimmune conditions. Here's 5 ways you can help...

1. Educate yourself about their specific condition. Take the time to learn about the symptoms, treatment options, and challenges they may face. By understanding their condition better, you can offer more informed support and empathize with their experiences. **Remember, knowledge is key to fostering understanding and compassion.**
2. Sometimes people with autoimmune conditions just need someone to listen without judgment or interruption. Create a safe and non-judgmental space for them to share their experiences, frustrations, and concerns. Show genuine interest and compassion, allowing them to express themselves openly. **Your attentive listening can provide much-needed emotional support and validation.**
3. Simple acts of kindness can go a long way in easing the burden for someone with an autoimmune condition. Offer specific assistance based on their needs and limitations. It could be helping with household chores, running errands, or preparing meals. By lending a helping hand, you not only provide practical support but also **show that you genuinely care about their well-being.**
4. Put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine what it feels like to live with chronic symptoms and limitations. Be empathetic and understanding, recognizing that their experiences may be different from yours. Avoid making assumptions or minimizing their struggles. Instead, offer empathy, validate their experiences, and **acknowledge their strength and resilience in facing their condition.**
5. Recognize that the symptoms of autoimmune conditions can be unpredictable because they come and go. Be understanding when plans need to be changed or canceled as a result of their health issues. **Offer flexibility and accommodate their limitations without judgment.** This helps reduce their stress and anxiety, allowing them to manage their condition with greater ease.

Making life a little easier for someone with an autoimmune condition is within your reach. By educating yourself, being a good listener, offering practical help, and being flexible you can give them the support and understanding they desperately need. Let's strive to create a more inclusive and **compassionate world where everyone, regardless of their health condition, feels valued, supported, and empowered to live their lives to the fullest.**

Join me next week when I dig deeper into the connection between highly sensitive people and autoimmune diseases. You'll learn more about how your sensitivities can lead to a compromised immune system and why raising awareness can lead to early detection and prevention.

And that brings us to the end of this week's show! Now it's time for you to decide what you're going to do differently this week. Take 10 minutes right now and get started answering the journal prompts.

If you found this episode inspiring, don't forget to share it with other sensitive souls. Together, **let's ignite a movement of empowered individuals who believe in their infinite potential!**

Thank you so much for spending this time with me. I hope you got a few new ideas for doing things differently. Remember, **you're the only one in charge of your life regardless of what anyone else says or does.**

Join me next week for another episode of **Tough Love for Sensitive Souls**. Until then, don't forget that you've got everything you need to get anything you want!