



Episode 026

5 Interesting Reasons Why Autoimmune Conditions Can Impact HSPs

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

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 third episode in a 4-part series about the correlation between Highly Sensitive People and Autoimmune Diseases. In this episode you'll **discover some interesting reasons why autoimmune conditions can impact highly sensitive people.** You'll also learn about the research studies that show us deep feelers have a greater risk for chronic inflammation. And why it's critical to raise awareness and provide education that'll help with early detection and treatment of these life-changing conditions.

If you're like me, you believe that being highly sensitive is a gift. Unfortunately it also comes with a lot of challenges! One of them is the connection between heightened sensitivity and an increased risk of autoimmune diseases. This means your immune system attacks the cells and healthy tissue in your body. When this happens **you're more prone to conditions like Lupus, Sjogren's Syndrome, Rheumatoid Arthritis, and Multiple Sclerosis.**

So, the question is...why do highly sensitive people seem to be more susceptible to these illnesses? Here's 5 reasons:

1. You tend to feel intense emotions and chronic emotional stress which significantly impacts your immune system. Long periods of stress can lead to a dysregulated immune increasing your risk of autoimmune disorders.
2. You have a heightened sensitivity to your environment including allergens, toxins, and chemicals. Exposure to these on a regular basis can potentially trigger or exacerbate autoimmune conditions.

3. You may have a predisposition to chronic inflammation because of your heightened reaction to stimuli. Chronic inflammation or pain is a known risk factor for autoimmune diseases and are usually the first signs you may be dealing with one of them.
4. You can easily become overwhelmed by sensory input, leading to feeling stressed and emotionally exhausted. This can indirectly affect your immune function and contribute to autoimmune vulnerability.
5. Unfortunately, many highly sensitive people are not aware of their sensitivity traits or the potential risks they face. This lack of awareness can lead to delayed diagnosis and treatment of autoimmune conditions, resulting in unnecessary suffering and long-term consequences.

If you've listened to any of the other episodes in this series, you know I believe it's essential to raise awareness about the connection between being highly sensitive and being diagnosed with autoimmune diseases. By understanding the unique challenges faced by HSPs, you can help empower individuals and healthcare professionals to **recognize the early signs and symptoms of autoimmune disorders for us sensitive souls.**

With the growing population of people who're being diagnosed with these "hidden illnesses," more recent studies are showing a correlation between being highly sensitive and chronic diseases. One of the major triggers for an overwhelmed system is stress. And as HSPs, **we're way more prone to stress because of all the overstimulation we experience every day!**

Chronic stress and overstimulation leads to a weakened immune system. Add in the environmental factors that you can't control and your chances for developing an autoimmune condition goes up dramatically. Because stress is a HUGE challenge for sensitives, here's a few ways you can reduce the amount of stress you have in your life...

1. Set clear boundaries in your personal and professional life. Learn to say no when necessary and prioritize your self-care.
2. Design your living and working spaces so they promote relaxation and peacefulness. A few ideas include reducing clutter, using soft lighting, playing soothing music, and incorporating things that bring you joy.
3. Find creative outlets so you can express yourself and channel your emotions. Whether it's painting, writing, playing music, or dancing, engaging in creative activities can provide a therapeutic release and help you process stress.
4. Dedicate time each day to engage in self-care activities that nurture your body, mind, and soul. This can include activities like taking baths, reading, journaling, practicing hobbies, or enjoying a cup of tea.
5. Identify the things that overwhelm or trigger you and take steps to limit your exposure. This could involve reducing time spent on social media, avoiding crowded places, or creating a calm and quiet space in your home.

It's important to experiment and find the strategies that work best for you. Be patient and gentle with yourself as you explore these strategies and focus on those that help you reduce stress. When you

make this a priority in your life, you'll create a balanced and harmonious life. And potentially reduce your risk of chronic illnesses.

Let's not forget that **what you put in and on your body makes a difference as well.** The chemicals, toxins, allergens, and whatever else goes into these products are potential triggers for sensitive people. Do you know you can make a difference in your health by minimizing your exposure to these triggers? Here's 5 ways you can get started:

1. Choose organic produce, meats, and dairy products to reduce exposure to pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics. Selecting whole, unprocessed foods and reading ingredient labels can also help avoid artificial additives and preservatives.
2. Use a high-quality water filter to remove contaminants like chlorine, heavy metals, and pesticides from your tap water. This ensures that you're consuming clean and pure water.
3. Swap conventional cleaning products for natural alternatives. Look for plant-based, biodegradable cleaners free from harsh chemicals, artificial fragrances, and toxic ingredients.
4. Many perfumes, air fresheners, and scented products contain synthetic fragrances that can trigger allergies and sensitivities. Choose fragrance-free or organic products like essential oils instead.
5. Read labels and choose personal care products like shampoos, soaps, lotions, and cosmetics, that are free from harmful chemicals including parabens, sulfates, and artificial dyes.

Remember, transitioning to a cleaner and healthier lifestyle doesn't have to be hard. Start by making small changes and gradually incorporate these practices into your daily routine. By reducing exposure to chemicals, toxins, and allergens you'll can create a healthier environment for yourself and your loved ones.

While more research definitely needs to be done on this topic; raising awareness, early detection, and prevention strategies are necessary for those of us at higher risk. **When you work together with your healthcare providers, you'll be on the look out for early signs and symptoms.** Even if you think it's nothing, document how your body feels every day. It's a way to track patterns and identify triggers that indicate a flare up of symptoms.

Early detection and intervention can make a big difference for individuals more susceptible to autoimmune conditions. Don't ignore what your body is trying to tell you, Symptom treatment can potentially reduce disease progression, minimize complications, and enhance overall quality of life.

Raising awareness also empowers deep feelers to prioritize your self-care and adopt lifestyle habits that better support your immune system. Mindfulness practices that include stress management, healthy nutrition, regular physical activity, and adequate sleep plays a crucial role in reducing the risk of autoimmune diseases for anyone, but especially HSPs!

Do you think you're at higher risk for an autoimmune condition? Let these journal prompts help you decide what to do next. Write freely and honestly letting your thoughts and emotions flow onto the paper.

1. Think about your family health history, has anyone been diagnosed with a chronic illness or autoimmune disease? What symptoms do they have and how are they treating those symptoms?
2. What about your own health history, do you have any symptoms like pain, fatigue, and inflammation that seem to come and go for no reason?
3. How much stress are you under at home and work? Be sure to include both major and minor stressors and how they affect your physical and emotional health.
4. When it comes to your lifestyle habits such as diet, exercise, and self-care practices; which ones have a negative impact on your immune system and what small steps can you take to change them?

Well that, Sensitive Soul, brings me to the FAQ of the week... **How do I know if my symptoms are signs of an autoimmune condition?**

Let me make this totally clear, only a healthcare professional can give you an accurate diagnosis! My job is to raise awareness so that you feel empowered to take charge of your health and work together with your Doctor.

Now that I've hopefully made that clear, here's 5 things to watch for and document..

1. Persistent and unexplained fatigue is a common symptom in many autoimmune conditions. If you experience severe exhaustion that doesn't improve with rest or sleep, it could be worth discussing with a healthcare professional.
2. Joint pain, swelling, and stiffness are hallmark symptoms of many autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus. If you have persistent joint issues, especially in multiple joints, it's important to seek medical attention.
3. Certain autoimmune conditions can manifest with skin-related symptoms like rashes, hives, or photosensitivity. If you notice persistent skin changes that don't respond to typical treatments, have your doctor check it out.
4. Some autoimmune conditions, like celiac disease or inflammatory bowel disease, affect the gastrointestinal tract. If you experience chronic digestive problems, including abdominal pain, diarrhea, or bloating, it's worth a discussion with a healthcare professional.
5. Family history can be a significant factor in determining if your symptoms could be related to an autoimmune condition. If you have close relatives with known autoimmune diseases, it may increase your risk and warrant further investigation especially if you're experience symptoms.

Remember, a healthcare professional is the best person to evaluate your symptoms and provide an accurate diagnosis. **DO NOT self-diagnose!** Not only will you go down a rabbit hole of worst case scenarios, many autoimmune conditions share similar symptoms with other medical issues. Working with your Doctor helps you navigate the diagnostic process and make sure you have the information you need to make informed decisions about treatment.

Join me next week when I dig deeper into the mindfulness practices you can do to reduce your stress and limit your chances of developing an autoimmune condition. Plus you'll learn ways you can eliminate triggers that increase common symptoms.

I'm excited to share there's an upcoming LIVE episode of the Tough Love for Sensitive Souls. Join me and my guest Justine Rodes from the brand Mentally A Badass as we talk about how hard it can be to live with autoimmune diseases. On July 29th at 2:00pm we'll shed light on the struggles faced by those fighting hidden battles every day. Seats are limited so save your spot by registering today at pages.dianahimes.com/live.

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!