

THE RADICAL TLC SOLUTION

A PARTNER'S GUIDE TO THYROID & AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE

Understand Her Struggle & How To Help



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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

WELCOME



Thyroid, autoimmune, and inflammatory diseases don't just affect the person diagnosed—they affect everyone in your life. If you love someone who has been diagnosed with a thyroid, autoimmune or inflammatory disorder, you most likely feel as though you've lost the person you once knew, that you're being emotionally and physically neglected, and you may even feel some resentment and misunderstanding.

Most of all, you may feel powerless because you don't know how to fix it.

I can imagine what you're going through. Your loved one has become a shell of her former self. You've lost that happy, energetic, fun person you once knew. I'm sure you resent that they can't do and be all they want to be....that they can't show you the love and physical affection they once did. You feel alone. Your needs not met. Where did your spouse or friend go? The person you love knows that this is hard on you and that only adds to the suffering they are feeling.

I know how you're feeling because my husband and I had some very raw talks a few years ago and we admitted how we were both experiencing the thyroid disease that had befallen me—and how it was tearing our family life and love apart.

My husband missed his friend and partner-in-crime...the girl who kept him in hijinks, hilarity, love and affection. The adventurous girl who was always out for exploration and new journeys. Now, he came home to a wife who was unable to work, could hardly move herself off the couch and did absolutely no house work. Someone who could only give her wee bit of energy to their newborn but had none leftover for him or anyone else. I was a shadow of myself....almost a ghost of a person...and the worst part was that I looked "fine." From the outside, I looked like a healthy new mom while inside everything was falling apart...my body was attacking me.

Finally, we had both had enough. We'd had enough of my suffering and the neglect to the rest of our life together. After expressing tough feelings, we committed to beating thyroid disease together. As a force, we were able to support each other so I could reverse thyroid disease...and as I got better, I had more time and energy for him. I was interested again in being connected intimately. I was able to contribute

to the housework more. I had the energy to hang out with our friends and be fun again. I got *me* back and so did my husband.

I could never have healed if I hadn't reached out for help and enlisted my friends and family in the process. Once I was honest with them and asked for their help, I had the support I needed so that I could reduce stress, have time to do things that would be healing to my mind, nervous system and organs and I was quickly able to reverse disease. This required a commitment on my husband's part and it was one he was willing to make.

This book is designed to help you understand what your loved one is going through and provide you with concrete, actionable suggestions to help you help your loved one. Imagine what your life and relationship with your loved one will be like when she's¹ finally symptom free! That's what we're working towards.

You've already made a huge gesture just by reading this book! And if you apply even a few of the suggestions that follow, you'll be making a huge impact on your loved one's health.

Just remember: every person and every situation is different. Feel free to tweak and adjust these suggestions to fit your specific needs.

Let's get started!

¹ For simplicity, I'm using the feminine pronoun in this book to refer to your loved one, but I mean no disrespect; these disorders can strike anyone, male or female.

ACTION PLAN

WEEK	PLAN
WEEK 1	Have an honest conversation with your loved one about needs and expectations.
WEEK 2	Fill out the ninja time management worksheet together and make a plan for how you will tackle and divvy up obligations together.
WEEK 3	Discuss and decide together what the family's diet will look like and how you can support your partner's dietary goals. Clean out the kitchen together and stock up on healthy foods.
WEEK 4	Make a plan for how you can support your loved one's self-care routine and how you will be taking care of yourself as well.

WHAT ARE THYROID, AUTOIMMUNE AND INFLAMMATORY DISEASE?

THYROID BASICS

The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland located in your throat, right below your Adam's apple. The thyroid makes, stores and releases thyroid hormones (called T3 and T4) into your blood. This process affects almost every cell in your body, helping control the body's metabolic functions, and it has a profound effect on cellular energy and metabolism.

A person with thyroid & autoimmune disease can experience a myriad of symptoms including hair loss, weakened bones, depression and infertility. In fact, there are more than [300 symptoms](#) associated with thyroid disorder alone (check that link for a full list).

Thyroid imbalances come in two major forms, hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism. Hypothyroidism is when there is too little thyroid hormone in your blood. This makes your body and its functions sluggish. Hyperthyroidism, on the other hand, is when you have too much thyroid hormone in your blood and everything starts racing.

Hashimoto's thyroiditis is an autoimmune condition in which the body's own immune system attacks the thyroid, and it often results in hypothyroidism but can volley a patient back and forth between hypo- and hyperthyroid symptoms. Hashimoto's disease is progressive, and can be difficult to diagnose, as the thyroid levels can start out within the "normal" range but still not be at optimal levels. It is only one cause of hypothyroidism, but it is the most common.

There are lots of different "flavors" of thyroid and autoimmune disorders, but these are the broadest and most common.

SUPPORT IS CRUCIAL FOR HEALING

I speak from personal experience and the experiences of dozens of my clients when I say: the good news in all of this is that these disorders can be reversed and symptoms completely eliminated with the right dietary and lifestyle support.

And that's where you come in.

It takes a village when it comes to healing, literally. And, your loved one needs people on her team. Her friends and family are her most important allies in healing.

For people like us, asking for help can be hard. Almost all of the clients I see for thyroid and autoimmune disease have very similar characteristics. (I am including myself in this group!)

- They are type-A people who put pressure on themselves to do it all.
- They are nurturers who take care of everyone else; often putting their own needs on the back burner.
- Most of them are self-admitted control freaks.
- Although type-A, they may really be shy, timid, or insecure. They worry about what others think of them.
- They tend to avoid conflict at all costs. They don't feel safe or comfortable in arguments and feel easily overpowered by others.
- When they try to confront others, they are either so choked up or blocked that they can't, or they tend to come across far too aggressively. (This is so me!)
- They often feel isolated from others, even family. They often feel that there are things they cannot share about themselves, such as their beliefs or life choices, and they have to hide who they really are because they want the love and approval of others.
- They may have experienced abuse or felt embarrassed by family members and felt they had to keep things hidden from others.

- They tend to be chatty cathy's and drain their energetic reserves when in contact with others.
- They often crave attention and need to feel listened to, appreciated, and understood.
- Because they have challenges in expressing themselves directly, they tend to feel angry or resentful towards others because they cannot confront them and they feel like they don't have a voice.

You've already taken a huge step towards supporting your loved one by committing to using this book to better understand her disease and what she's dealing with—believe me, just the fact that you're here, reading this, is huge. Because what she is dealing with is not only hard to cope with, but also hard to see and hard to explain.

These disorders attack her internally—but more than that, it attacks every aspect of her life. They are invisible diseases; most of the time, other people can't see her symptoms, but they're always there, and they're very real.

These disorders can cause insomnia, or make her want to sleep all day. They can cause her to gain weight and be unable to lose it, no matter what she does. They can suck all the energy she has right out of her, and leave her dealing with intense pain or a deep ache all over. They can even make her feel anxious or depressed.

None of those symptoms are separate; none of them are "just in her head." They are real, scientifically studied side-effects of these disorders.

Because these disorders affect several systems in the body simultaneously, they are very hard to diagnose and even harder to treat. And it's also hard for anyone who isn't physically experiencing these disorders to understand what she's going through. It may have seemed like she was complaining in the past, or making a mountain out of a molehill, but what she has is real, and it's not going away without a fight.

Of course, I know you wouldn't be reading this book if you didn't want to try to understand, so you are already half way there!

Make the commitment to support healing

So, here's the action you need to take:

1. Commit right now to reading the rest of this book and applying the supportive suggestions as often as you can.
2. Take the time and make the effort to find out exactly what kind of support your loved one needs by asking and actively listening.
3. Try to be empathetic and recognize that the majority of what your loved one is dealing with is invisible to the naked eye, but very, very real.

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

We all want to hear those magic words “tell me what I can do to help,” but the real magic happens when the words get followed up with helpful deeds.

This could be as simple as being understanding when she doesn’t have the energy to do all the things she used to do, or as involved as brainstorming ways to get her help doing some of the things she can no longer manage for the time being.

The important thing to remember here is that what your loved one needs from you will be unique. I can’t give you a one-size-fits-all prescription to do the laundry or be in charge of dinner twice a week and expect that will fill all your partner’s needs. Just listen to some of the different things my community mentioned when I asked what they needed:

- Don’t ignore me. I think my husband thinks if he ignores that I don’t feel well, it will go away, when in reality he’s leaving me to suffer on my own. Sigh. I just want a hug and some help! –K
- Extra sleep. Even a couple of hours a week. –Anonymous
- Few house chores but I like it all done my way!! – M
- A nanny. –W
- I wish they’d understand my need for naps and due to Hashimoto’s my ups and downs. I personally never understood why my mom was always tired, cold and not active. Now I get it!!! I am there myself now. –P
- I know I’m not easy to be around when I’m in pain and afraid, but a hug would go such a long way in helping me. –J
- Just leave me alone. –M

As you can see, some of them want a hug, some of them want a nanny, some want to be left alone. Very different needs because they’re all very different people.

This is where those healing words will come in exceptionally handy: Ask your loved one how you can be most helpful and then *listen carefully* to the answer.

Remember that people aren’t comfortable asking for help. We feel as though we *should* be able to handle it on our own, that we’ll be a burden or that our loved ones will think less of us if we ask for help.

And, tell your loved one what *you* need as well. If you would like very specific instructions or concrete tasks that you can do to support her, let her know. If you work best with a checklist you can follow, ask her to help you create one. If you need a couple hours every weekend to go hang with your buddies, let her know. This support thing is a two-way street!

Fortunately, the right words can be pretty powerful, too. **Try any of these the next time you are talking with your loved one about her disorder:**

- I don't understand what you're going through, but I want to.
- What can I do to support you right now?
- What are you most afraid of when it comes to this disease?
- What's your biggest goal right now for your healing? How can I help you get there?
- What do you need from me that I'm not giving you?

I don't know *anyone* who wouldn't love to hear those words coming out of their partner's mouth! You'll get extra brownie points for trying one of these out when your loved one isn't expecting it.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

I polled my TLC community before writing this book, and I thought some of the best insights came when people told me the things that well-meaning people in their lives have told them.

Of course I know *you* would never say any of these things! But just in case you could use a refresher in what not to say...

- I have been told that "you need to just push through." I need them to realize that every day I am out of bed, I HAVE pushed through. –C
- I truly wish they would understand that it is a medical disorder not just in my head. I hurt every day, have fatigue, can't sleep, am gaining weight, sore throat all of the time, cold/allergies everyday, swelling, and so much more. I am a very hyper person that could multitask like wonderwoman; now I am lucky to vacuum the house without having to lay down. –M
- I would like it if my significant other believed I actually have a chronic autoimmune illness, not hypochondria. –A
- Ug...I wish they wouldn't tell me it's easily fixed so get over it! –J
- It amazes when well-meaning people just can't believe that ALL of my symptoms are related to thyroid. Without ever really reading about or researching Hashimoto's, they want to suggest all these other ailments that they just heard about on TV news. –B

- They think my anxiety is a choice. I can be cool as a cucumber and my insides feel like they're shaking. It leaves me frustrated. –H

UNDERSTANDING THE THYROID

The systems in our body don't function as separate pieces, but rather all influence one another, and the thyroid is no exception.

The thyroid gland works together with the pituitary gland and hypothalamus to control the amount of thyroid hormone in the body. In short:

1. The hypothalamus gland sends a message using thyroid releasing hormone (TRH) to your pituitary gland.
2. Your pituitary gland then determines how to stimulate the thyroid by sending thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH).
3. TSH stimulates your thyroid to produce inactive T4 and active T3 (thyroid hormones);
 - a. The inactive T4 goes to your liver and intestinal tract to be converted to active T3.
 - b. Active T3 goes straight to the bloodstream to be delivered to your cells.

Important Takeaway: Active T3 is the hormone used by our cells to produce energy and protective steroid hormones. Our thyroid only makes 10% of the active T3 we need to function properly. The rest of the Active T3 (the other 90%) is created when T4 gets converted in the liver.

The more I've learned about the thyroid, the more it seems to be in charge of everything that goes on in the body from basic aspects of body function to all the major systems. (It's actually kind of annoying that it's such a big deal!) Every cell in our body has thyroid hormone receptors, and so every system in your body can be affected when the thyroid is off.

To actually help your thyroid remember how to function properly again, patients have to address several of those other systems. For instance, thyroid hormones are responsible for many basic functions in the brain, the G.I. tract, the gallbladder and liver, the cardiovascular system, bone and red blood cell metabolism.

Understanding more about the condition your loved one is facing can be a great starting point for conversations about how to help.

For a deeper understanding of thyroid disease, information on doctors, blood tests, symptom relief and a comprehensive lifestyle plan to reversing thyroid, autoimmune & inflammatory diseases, check out my simple 6-week home healing program, [The Radical TLC Solution](#).

STRESS AND THE THYROID SUFFERER

We all have stress in our lives whether it comes from our jobs, our circumstances, our finances or challenges with our family and friends. Some days I imagine myself as a superhero using a shield to defend and deflect everything that's trying to attack my mind and body.

But living in a state of constant stress is quite possibly the worst thing one can do for a thyroid condition. Many times, we accept stress into our lives that is unnecessary. It's important to understand what stress really does to the thyroid and techniques for keeping stress at bay.

Stress greatly affects the adrenal glands, and that is directly related to the health of the thyroid. The adrenal glands secrete hormones (cortisol, epinephrine and norepinephrine) to regulate the stress response. When it comes to your thyroid, the ways in which our adrenal glands respond has far reaching consequences.

Beyond the obvious daily stressors in our lives, the adrenal glands pump out more stress hormones when blood sugar isn't regulated, the gut is leaky, there are food sensitivities (such as gluten), toxins and infections are present, or the body is inflamed and under an autoimmune attack. When it comes to thyroid disorders, you can't look at one without the other, and adrenal stress could possibly be the most important component.

Adrenal stress creates a host of symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, insomnia, mood swings, sugar and caffeine cravings, irritability and dizziness. It also affects how hormones are used by cells, reduces the conversion of T4 to T3, weakens immune barriers, causes hormonal imbalances, promotes the autoimmune response and disrupts the interactions between the hypothalamus, pituitary and adrenal glands. This affects how a person reacts to stress or trauma, body temperature, digestion, immune system, mood, libido and energy.

In fact, weak adrenal glands can mimic symptoms of thyroid disease—whether you actually have thyroid disease or not!

So, as you can see, eliminating stress becomes a very important part of healing thyroid, autoimmune and inflammatory conditions.

COMMON STRESSORS AND SOLUTIONS

One of my community members said, “My family is pretty understanding when it comes to not pushing me to keep the house perfectly clean or always have a home-cooked dinner ready on time, but do they actually help out in these areas? NOPE.”

As I mentioned above, what your family or situation demands may look very different from someone else’s. The key is communication, as always, but these are some common stressors and how you can help eliminate them:

Overcommitment and Obligations

I know: you’ve got a job, you’ve got kids or you’ve got a host of outside commitments. What’s left for taking care of yourself—or your loved one? Well, unfortunately, in this society, no one is going to hand you a block of time. We don’t live in a culture of daily siestas. We have to actually make a decision to take control and carve out time for ourselves.

When we’re over scheduled and running on adrenaline, we tax our bodies and create more stress. How do you get a handle on it all? You empower yourself by realizing that this is YOUR life and you need to design it for yourself. Yes, there are obligations that can’t be avoided but there are ways to redefine your schedule to promote overall health and wellness.

One of the first exercises I do with my clients is to take a step back, breathe, and look at their schedule. I present them with a blank schedule ([click here for schedule](#)) and have them fill out everything they do on a given day on the first schedule. Then we go over it with a fine tooth comb.

This is an exercise you can do with your loved one, to help her reimagine her schedule and find blocks of time for rest and healing. It’s also useful for you to do the same exercise to look for any times when you can help out and to block out restful times for yourself.

You may both have to take a hard look at your commitments and see where you are losing time, how you can be more efficient, and what kind of support you need to ask for.

- Can one or both of you ask your boss if you can work from home a few days a week?
- Can one of you run all the errands on one day instead of driving back and forth all week?
- What areas in your life can you tweak your schedule so that you are in control of it instead of the other way around?

- Where are the redundancies in the week?
- Where can things be done more efficiently?
- Where are areas you can find support with your work? (e.g.—Can someone else pick up your kids once or twice a week so she can go to the gym or workout uninterrupted at home?)

Together, you can figure out where best to make changes to the schedule so you can pursue health and healing as well as take care of the day-to-day hullabaloo.

Fresh Tips:

Once you've infused your schedule with a little life, use these tricks to stay on track:

1. Get a calendar or organizer and **WRITE IT DOWN**. When you're out and about, it's hard to keep track of things and easy to forget to include them on the schedule once you're home. Use the calendar on your phone or a planner to jot down a new task and designate a time to do it in your schedule right away. This way, you just have to follow your schedule and not worry that you might be forgetting something. (This is especially important for your loved one if she's battling brain fog!) You might want to set up a Google Calendar or other digital calendar that the whole family can access.
2. Don't take on everything! Instead of saying yes to everything and everyone, consider whether or not you have to be the one to actually attend or do the work for such-and-such. Also, look at your schedule and make sure that adding this task to your calendar won't be taking away from something that brings you a moment of peace, health or joy. I tell my clients to guard their schedules like a superhero. (There's a lot of talk of superheroes in my house these days with a 5-year old) Imagine you have a shield that deflects any time suckers from making their way to your schedule.
3. Use the "5-minute rule" on things that just pop up—if you can get something done in 5 minutes or less, do it. If it's going to take more than 5 minutes, designate a time to complete it right away and put it on your schedule right then. Set it and forget it.

Household Chores

In today's society, our to-do lists are completely stacked. In addition, women tend to put a lot of pressure on ourselves to be perfect when it comes to traditional roles—have a perfectly clean house, perfectly healthy dinners on the table, perfectly mannered children—and consider ourselves a failure when we can't meet an

unreachable standard.

The truth is, if your loved one is in the throes of thyroid, autoimmune or inflammatory disease, her health has been decimated, and even taking care of the “basics” may be a stretch.

One member of my community said, “Have you ever *wished* you had the energy to clean the toilet? I have.”

Remember that it’s not that she doesn’t want to do the work or that she’s being lazy; life has taken a completely unexpected turn for her, and what used to be mundane is now an insurmountable task.

Try some of these suggestions to keep the house running:

- Redistribute household responsibilities among family members. For example, a 7-year old can put the clean dishes away. A 10-year old can help you prepare food for dinner. A 12-year old can be doing the laundry. There are many great websites that list out age-appropriate tasks for children to do. Giving children responsibilities empowers them, teaches new skills and takes items off your to-do list! You also get to work with your family as a team to complete tasks while enjoying quality time together as well.
- Don’t have a litter of children to help you with your household chores? Ask a friend to support you while you heal by helping you with the groceries, picking up dry cleaning, running an errand. Your friends, work buddies and family are there to help you. All you need to do is explain that your family needs support in order for your loved one to heal and ask for their help. There are many tasks out there that don’t really require any expertise. Hand over the reins to someone else who can help.
- Hire help if necessary and possible. Even once or twice a month can make a huge difference! If a house cleaning service is not for you, maybe you can hire out a portion, like getting a laundry service or a service that delivers groceries to your door.
- Just like with your schedule, whittle down your to do list. What chores aren’t totally necessary? Believe me, your windows will not fall off if you don’t wash them this spring.

Childcare

If you do have children, you know that their care, feeding, maintenance and loving is a neverending, 24/7/365 job. Especially if your loved one is a parent, it’s important to support her wherever possible in her duties—because it’s extremely likely that she’s beating herself up for not being able to “do it all.”

Try some of these suggestions to ease the expectations:

- Can you find other friends or family members to help pick up and drop off kids at school and activities?
- Are there volunteer positions that can be eliminated? Now is not the time for either of you to be signing up to run a bake sale or coach little league.
- Do you need to reassess how many extracurricular activities your kids participate in? Even cutting out one thing per season could have huge effects on your time. On the other hand, enrichment activities might buy you or your loved one some much needed time without kids. Does one of you really have to be present for every soccer practice or piano lesson?
- Can you trade babysitting with your partner or another family for a few hours a week? My husband and I do this. We each get a block of 2–3 hours during the weekend for ourselves while the other one watches our son. It's free "babysitting" and it allows us each to have quality time alone with our child and quality time alone for ourselves. If you are a single parent, swap childcare with a friend, neighbor, or coworker. Schedule a standing day every week where each of you gets to have time to yourselves.

DIET AND THE NEW NORMAL

Eating is one of the most natural things we do as human beings—as natural as breathing. Infants only minutes old figure out how to eat. Yet somewhere along the line, we have made things incredibly complicated!

When you have a thyroid, autoimmune or inflammatory disease, eating can feel even *more* complicated. But it doesn't need to be!

Food and nutrition lays the foundation for healing. Our society has separated healthcare and food, but for centuries and in many cultures, the two were one in the same.

The popular quote by Hippocrates, ***“Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food,”*** could not ring more true. In order for the body to heal, we must provide it with the nourishment it needs through whole, unprocessed foods. But, what happens to healing when your body isn't absorbing the nourishing foods properly?

Hippocrates also said, ***“All disease begins in the gut,”*** and that's where we'll start this story. Poor gut health is intricately connected to low thyroid function and additionally, can trigger Hashimoto's disease.

Most people with thyroid and autoimmune disease have a leaky gut which makes it harder for them to get nutrients from their food. Leaky gut is when food toxins (like gluten) or chemicals breach the barrier the intestines are supposed to provide and make their way into the bloodstream. It's crucial to heal the leaky gut and limit inflammation in the body in order to start healing.

THYROID AND LEAKY GUT

When the thyroid isn't functioning optimally, it causes inflammation and immune dysregulation which in turns causes a leaky gut. The leaky gut then causes more inflammation and immune dysregulation which then further harms the thyroid. Press repeat. The cycle of destruction is endless if it is not addressed. An inflamed and leaky gut contributes to just about every disease out there. Without healing the gut, you cannot truly heal the thyroid or reverse the autoimmune response.

Major Takeaway: There are five major reasons that your loved one needs to get her gut back to health in order to heal her thyroid:

1. There needs to be a balance of beneficial bacteria in the gut to make your thyroid hormone levels work right
2. We need to keep stress and inflammation low in order to heal our bodies
3. We need to reverse the autoimmune response
4. Low stomach acid increases intestinal permeability which is linked with autoimmune thyroid disease. It is also associated with GERD, inflammation and infection.
5. Constipation can impair hormone clearance and cause elevations in estrogen causing problems with the thyroid. It also increases inflammation, infections and doesn't allow for proper absorption in the gut.

I'm pretty certain that my friends and family are tired of me telling them that they have a leaky gut. But they DO! And your loved one does too. And it needs to be fixed to start feeling better.

DIET CHANGES AND WHAT TO EXPECT

There's a lot of contradictory information out there about thyroid, autoimmune, inflammatory conditions and diet, and a lot of it focuses on an extremely restrictive, limited meal plan.

In my experience, that's really daunting and hard for anyone to follow. Instead, I usually coach my clients to eliminate one food stressor at a time, and build their diet around real, whole foods like vegetables, meat, fish and healthy fats.

Depending on her specific situation, your loved one may be looking at giving up gluten (wheat and wheat products), grains, sugar, soy, chemicals in processed foods, vegetable oils, alcohol, caffeine, food allergens like eggs, dairy, nightshades (tomatoes and eggplants) and maybe other foods. It can be a big change, and your loved one will need a lot of support to make it happen.

But this lifestyle is not about deprivation, it's about reparation. Repairing the years of damage from eating the SAD (Standard American Diet). Repairing the gut lining so the body can metabolize food properly and absorb important nutrients and minerals. Repairing the body so it can support the thyroid and manage weight.

Here's what I do: I believe in veggie heavy Paleo eating. Meals should consist of loads of vegetables with a side of meat. Yes, a side of meat and not the other way around. I found that when the diet gets too meat heavy, my body and my system

got a little sluggish and stinky (I won't go into all of the dirty details). The point is that, although I felt better overall, I didn't feel great when I was eating too much meat.

Now, don't get me wrong, I am a lover of meat, especially my dear friend, bacon. However, I notice a huge difference when I turned the Paleo diet upside down and made my plates consist of 75–80% organic veggies, 10–15% pastured, grass-fed or wild-caught meat and 10% fats from avocados, olives, coconut oil, butter from pastured cows and from properly processed nuts and seeds.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Whether you and the rest of your family decide to adopt this way of eating with your loved one or not is up to you. This diet is healthy for anyone, but I realize it can be a tough at the beginning. As always, communication is key. Ask your loved one if it would be helpful if you tried to eat like she does, or if she doesn't care.

Here are some ways you can support your loved one, no matter what you decide:

- Make the kitchen a safe zone. Help her clean out the fridge and pantry and restock with foods that will help her heal.
- If you want to hang on to some of your favorite foods that she should avoid, help her by putting them out of sight: in an opaque bin in the pantry or fridge, on a high shelf, or stored somewhere other than the kitchen.
- Keep an open mind when she brings new foods or recipes to the table. Think about how much harder it would be for her or for you to cook two different meals, and see if you can find some common ground.
- Be a good example for kids; don't complain about the foods or trying new things.
- Don't preach if she slips up or "cheats;" nobody's perfect! Maybe you can gently remind her how much better she feels when she eats the foods that heal.
- Take on some kitchen chores if you can. Even if you think you can't cook, I bet you can wash, chop, set the table, stir a pot, round up the rugrats, do the dishes, etc.
- Help plan fun events, date nights, and family gathering that don't revolve around food. She's going to be navigating the pitfalls of barbecues and holiday dinners for the rest of her life; bowling and the zoo are sounding better and better.

With your support, she *can* heal and reverse a great deal of her symptoms, but I'm not going to sugar coat it; it's not easy! But understanding her diet plan for healing and supporting her choices in as many ways as you can will go a long way to making it easier.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF SELF-CARE

One more key component of healing for thyroid, autoimmune, and inflammatory disease patients is self-care. It's incredibly important to ensure that the body is getting enough sleep, detoxifying itself properly, and that healing functions are being supported in every way possible.

But this step is particularly hard for many of my patients. They're not used to putting themselves first. These self-care practices I suggest sound like luxuries at first because our society puts so little stock in preventive care. But I assure you: these are all important and necessary to your loved one's healing.

SLEEP

When asked what they most needed, one of my community members said, "Extra sleep. Even a couple of hours a week," — and *lots* of others echoed her sentiments.

There was a time when I hadn't slept in three years. I had a terrible time sleeping while I was pregnant, as my thyroid disease was undiagnosed, and then I didn't get the chance to sleep for the first two years of my son's life. Somehow, I kept getting up and making it through the day, but I was running on empty.

For the body to restore itself, we must rest fully each day. Poor sleep is a typical symptom for people with thyroid disorders and often it is just accepted as something we have to live with as part of having the disease. The problem is that insomnia or restless sleep must be addressed so that the endocrine system can be supported in order to heal.

Here are just a few of the side-effects of insomnia:

1. Sleep loss can cause weight gain.
2. Lack of sleep can make you feel depressed.
3. Sleep deprivation can lead to serious health problems like heart disease, heart attack, heart failure, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes.
4. Lack of sleep affects libido.
5. Sleepiness impairs judgments and makes you prone to/causes accidents.
6. Sleep loss affects intellect and memory.
7. Lack of sleep ages your skin. (Yikes!)

A lot of the symptoms of not getting enough sleep mirror the symptoms of thyroid and autoimmune disease, so sufferers must make sure they're getting enough sleep to be sure that their symptoms aren't being caused or exacerbated by exhaustion.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- Help your loved one maintain a regular sleep-wake schedule. I did this by trying to go to bed 15 minutes earlier each night for 5 nights until I was able to fall asleep by 10pm. I also set my alarm for 6am each day so I could exercise. After 3 days on the 10pm–6am schedule, I was hooked and it was easy to stick to.
- Help your loved one avoid caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and other chemicals that interfere with sleep. I can't stress this enough. I went from drinking coffee several times a day to doing a caffeine detox. I don't need or crave caffeine anymore. It's pretty amazing and it greatly impacts your energy levels. I hear most often from clients that they can't believe how much energy they have *after* giving coffee the boot.
- Make your bedroom a comfortable sleep environment. Keep your bedroom uncluttered and cozy with the right bedding, blankets and a heater (if you need it).
- Encourage her to go to sleep when she's tired. Research shows that our body wakes itself up again after 10pm.
- Keep lights low in the evening. Bright household lights and light from computers and other electronic devices can disrupt messengers in your brain from eliciting the sleep response.

DETOX

Helping the body detox itself is key to promoting self-healing, and one easy way to improve health is to implement a daily detox regime. Not only are these practices good for the body, they're good for the spirit, too.

Encourage your loved to try the following:

- Epsom salts baths increase circulation, relieve stress and promote detoxifying.
- Saunas draw out toxins through the sweat. Even a few minutes once or twice a week has benefits.
- Dry brushing is excellent for stimulating the lymphatic system.
- Massage promotes circulation and the elimination of toxins from the body, which are key to improving thyroid health.
- Complementary healing techniques such as acupuncture, reiki, cranial sacral work and others can have tangible healing benefits.

Help your loved one find the time and resources to explore these self-care practices. You might even try some of them for yourself!

SEX

I've got to admit, I blushed when the doctor who diagnosed me said if I wanted to heal, I'd need to start having more orgasms. Uhm, we hadn't talked about sex. He didn't know how much or how little I was having but he didn't seem to care. He just wanted to let me in on this little secret to healing. So I researched it and discovered that orgasms are crucial to healthy living.

I took my prescription home to my hubby. I'm not sure who was happier—him or me—but we had committed to do everything we could to help me heal. So off we went! ;-)

But why is an orgasm so powerful? Here are a few ways sex will improve your partner's health—especially as it relates to the thyroid:

- 1. Improves circulation to the organs in the pelvic cavity.** This helps deliver all the necessary nutrients to her organs and regulate her menstrual cycle.
- 2. Energizes the hypothalamus and increases fertility.** The hypothalamus gland is responsible for regulating appetite, body temperature, emotions and the pituitary gland.
- 3. Helps the body detox** by giving her an overall lymphatic massage, which also helps improve digestion and mood.
- 4. Keeps estrogen at healthy levels.** An important part of hormone balance.
- 5. Relaxes the body by kicking up endorphins** and kicking out cortisol.
- 6. Gives DHEA a healthy boost.** DHEA hormone is important for healthy brain function, immune system and healthy skin.
- 7. Boosts immunity.** It can help fight off colds and flu up to 20% more.
- 8. Elevates pain thresholds** which can help cure migraines and other kinds of chronic pain.
- 9. Provides a hit of oxytocin,** the love hormone, which is linked to successful relationships, passion, intuition, and social skills.

In addition, studies have shown that sex is good for **men's health** as well:

1. Improves immunity
2. Better cardiovascular health — studies show that men who have sex twice a week have a reduced risk of heart attack.
3. Reduce stress
4. Better sleep
5. Reduced aches and pains
6. Extended life span

Now, you don't want to be missing out on all these benefits, do you??

Here are some tips for making "it" happen:

- Schedule sex to build anticipation. Just like you might anticipate a reservation at the hot new restaurant in town or tickets for a show.
- Schedule dates just to be intimate. If it's been a while, schedule time just to spend together cuddling, touching or massaging one another to rebuild your intimacy.
- Schedule sex for times when you both have plenty of energy. If you're always tired after work, the old dinner and a movie standby probably won't work. Try mornings or mid-day.
- Unusual times work, too, and can make things more fun. Kids at soccer practice for an hour? Awesome. You both have to shower every day, right? Save water! Shower together.
- Remember that babysitters, family members, and play dates exist for a reason.
- Worried about your kids walking in on you? Set clear bedroom boundaries and knocking policies. But it doesn't have to be a big secret, either. If kids are curious, you can say, "Mommy and daddy are loving each other." Love is a verb, remember!
- Add your dates to both of your calendars and set reminders. No excuses!

Hopefully, this will be an amazing way for you to help your partner heal *and* reconnect and support your relationship.

DON'T FORGET YOURSELF

I understand that being a caregiver and partner is also challenging and stressful! It's entirely likely that you'll be taking on new roles and responsibilities as you help your partner get back to health.

So don't forget yourself in this whole self-care section. Take a few minutes to figure out what you *really* need to de-stress and feel like yourself at the end of a long day or a long week. Do you de-stress by watching sports? Taking a long drive? Heading for the golf course? Getting a beer with your buddies?

Whatever it is that will help you feel like yourself, discuss it with your partner! I guarantee she wants you to feel healthy, happy, and whole as much as you want the same for her. Work it into your schedules and make it non-negotiable. You'll thank me.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Hopefully by now you feel like you understand your loved one's and what she's going through a little better. And, hopefully you have a few new ideas for how to support her in mind.

Here's a rundown of the key takeaways:

- Your support is crucial for your loved one's healing.
- Everyone will have a different idea of what support they need; ask and truly listen to what your loved one needs.
- Choose the right healing words when talking to your loved one about her diagnosis and what support she needs.
- But remember that actions speak louder than words.
- There are three main components of your loved one's healing plan: eliminating stress, healing her gut through diet, and self-care.
- Eliminating stress is integral to healing. Find ways to help eliminate common stressors that can include outside obligations, housework, childcare, and more.
- Your loved one needs to make major changes to her diet and needs your support to make those changes happen.
- Self-care is equally important for healing, and you can support your loved one by helping her find ways to incorporate more self-care into her routine.

I hope you find this list a good starting point for conversations with your loved one on how best you can support the healing process. Remember to take care of yourself as well! Your health and wellbeing is important to your loved one's health and wellbeing, too, and together I know you can find a way to support one another through this journey. Help her kick this disease so she can feel normal again & you can get the person you love back!

Warmly,

 Jen