



Reverse Autoimmune Disease Summit

Dr. Keesha Ewers Interviews Jodi Cohen

Dr. Keesha: Welcome back to the Reversing Autoimmune Disease Summit, everybody. I'm Dr Keesha Ewers and I am delighted to bring to you today Jodi Sternoff Cohen, who is a bestselling author and award-winning investigative journalist and nutritional therapist, a busy mom, a loyal friend and unshakable cheerleader dedicated to helping you and your family regain vibrant health. She's a born and raised Seattle girl who fights for the underdog. She's proud to have created a female-owned and operated company dedicated to helping people like you feel better with less work. The name of her company is Vibrant Blue Oil. The journey with essential oils began with her own health struggles, and she's been through a lot this year; and we're going to talk about post traumatic growth with her and what we can learn from some of those really, really dark challenges that life sends our way inevitably. Welcome, Jodi.

Jodi Cohen: Thank you. Thank you for the beautiful introduction.

Dr. Keesha: You really have lived out, I think probably everybody's said this: every parent's worst nightmare. And so I'm going to let you talk about this last year and what has come out of it for you. And your own learning because you've gotten deep into the well and come out with some gems.

Jodi Cohen: I took my children on the trip of a lifetime. We went to Peru for two weeks. We got back on a Sunday afternoon. My 12 year old son was very excited to see his friends. We took them all out for dinner and a movie and they decided they wanted to go whitewater rafting the next day. So that next morning I kissed him goodbye, told him I loved him. And at 1:30 in the afternoon, I got a call from a police officer who was investigating a vehicular homicide, which is a vocabulary word that I didn't know at the time. But when I started asking, were the kids okay? Oh, there was an accident. Was anyone hurt? One child died on the scene and it took some time for them to sort out who was alive and who wasn't accounted for.

Jodi Cohen: And it was my child who died that day. It was not something that ever, in my worst nightmares I never thought that would happen. But he has a sister. So I have a second child. And as I was trying to process through the shock, she said to me, mom, I need you. You cannot be that sad mom forever. So I had my marching orders. So now I just needed to figure out how I was going to do that. And I'm very lucky that I have lovely people in my life like you and like Dr Christine Schaffner who showed up right away with rescue remedy and all sorts of potions to help navigate shock. But, it's, it's been quite a journey, a lot of baptism by fire, figuring out what, when I feel better, why did I feel better? When I feel worse? What triggered that and how do I avoid doing that again?

- Dr. Keesha: So I think that's it. Like just that sentence of what you said is so important because people get autoimmune disease triggered after a big trauma. I mean, that's a very common theme and it can be childbirth, which I know a lot of women don't realize that's fairly traumatic for the human body. We go through plus all the sleep deprivation that happens afterwards. So autoimmune is often either reactivated and flared because of a big trauma or it actually activates the first time because of a big trauma, like the straw that breaks the camel's back when a lot of other critical mass has started really tipping the scales in that direction. So being called to say, okay, this is how I feel. What triggered that, and using yourself as a collaborative relationship, a team, which is what you did. Yeah, I don't want me and disease in a combative relationship.
- Dr. Keesha: It's an immune system fighting against its own host. And you know, I'm always saying, body, mind, heart and spirit that are at war with each other. There's no winner in that situation. So, what you've done is exactly what I tried to teach people to do is to really start inquiring; that self-inquiry is so important. So that curiosity and that loneliness to go into that space and do that investigative inquiry is lifesaving. You know, quite literally. And kudos to your daughter for being able to set a good boundary with the grief in her life and say, okay, I actually need; it's really wonderful.
- Jodi Cohen: Yeah. It's funny that you say that because I remember early on I almost felt like I was observing myself through a glass sliding door. Like I could see myself and what I was doing and I could see like, I'll give you an example that I wish I had done something differently. Like, could I have prevented it? That whole rabbit hole, magical thinking. No offense to Joan Didion who I love. That magical thinking was a big dead end for me because every time I tried to think of, oh, could I have saved him or if I had done this differently, it never made me feel better. It always made me feel worse. So I would have to notice when I was going down that rabbit hole and just stop myself and redirect my attention because I just knew it. This is not going to end well.
- Dr. Keesha: Yeah. No, I mean I don't know how it could because then you're going to continually beat yourself up for kissing your son goodbye and sending them off, you know?
- Jodi Cohen: It was a perfect storm that created the accident. It was nothing anyone could have anticipated or modified or changed.
- Dr. Keesha: Right. So from there, one of the things that Elizabeth Kubler Ross did a long time ago and got everyone's attention was by caudifying grief in a step wise manner, which I've gone through grief myself and I didn't find that that was that linear.
- Jodi Cohen: And really a lot of the stages, I didn't feel like they fit me.
- Dr. Keesha: So let's talk a little bit about that because I think in an effort to create structure and the way that our reductionist science works in our minds that grow up in this culture where we do try and like get to the heart of the matter, the active ingredient, the one thing, you know, that's to blame the one thing that'll fix it. And something like grief or chronic

illness, like an autoimmune disease or cancer. I think there's nothing like that to show us that we never have had control.

Dr. Keesha: And any sense of control we think we have is just a delusion. You know? It really is like smack up against, Oh, I actually have no control over this. I think one of our biggest addictions in the United States is to control and so, tell me about that. When there's grief like this that has to be dealt with and life that has to be lived, how did you start to navigate them?

Jodi Cohen: I think I realized that very quickly that the only thing I could control this, my response. You know, even in the worst situations, you have choices, right? You can stay in bed all day, you can eat ice cream on the floor, or you can say, well gosh, I feel better when I go to yoga or when I walk my dog. You have choices of how you can navigate. So the world around you can literally be exploding, but you can decide that you're not going to get reactive or upset. You're going to do your best to stay solid. And I had a background in essential oils that I've used for years to help me stay grounded and resilient. And so I started there. I would wake up every morning and like certain supplements, if someone's very low on a certain mineral or nutrient, you mega-dose them to get them back up to baseline.

Jodi Cohen: In the really early stages of grief, I used a lot of essential oils very regularly. Rose oil was my go-to. If you put it over your heart, it really helps to kind of lift your mood. Blue tansy as well was another favorite early on. And then anything that I could do to ground myself and keep myself in that really stable, resilient space. So when something came along, I could handle it. The example I use is there are times when I'll be driving in traffic. We both live in Seattle. We know what Seattle traffic has become. When someone will cut me off and there are times when it doesn't bother me. I'll think like whatever. Maybe they're in a hurry and it's no big deal. And there are other times the exact same situation and four letter words out of my mouth. The only variable that's different is how stable and grounded I am. So I really made it a point to be as solid as I could all the time. So that whatever came at me, I was in my best space to handle it.

Dr. Keesha: Those are called vulnerability factors; like how many hits you already have taken. And then that last thing can actually send you into an emotional tailspin when another day when you didn't have a bunch of vulnerability factors. And those things can be like hunger, a lack of sleep, something that you're creating, you know, stress at work or with a child, something like that. And those are now you're just ratcheting up your vulnerability factors and decreasing resiliency. So, one of the things the research started talking about is when we go through great big challenges particularly things like sudden traumatic death of family member that can cause post-traumatic stress disorder. And we can talk a little bit about what happened with you and your sleep. I'm sure all the senses were engaged in missing your son and probably still are.

Dr. Keesha: So from that research, is starting to show that we can actually engage in something called post traumatic growth, which is actually possible after you've moved through a chronic illness like cancer or autoimmune disease. Like you hear a lot of people say, and

I know this is not going to come out of your mouth around this, but please forgive me for saying this because I'm talking about a disease. That's the best thing that ever happened to me. You know, and the reason that they're saying that is because they gained a lot of wisdom. That's the post traumatic growth. Walk us through that component because you're actually going to be writing a book about this.

Jodi Cohen: I am, yes. My first book is actually about oils for the brain, which is how I navigate that. And then hopefully that will sell well on that. There will be the second book about this. But yes, it's interesting. My therapist, I was already going to a therapist and I had graduated; and she does EMDR, which is amazing for trauma. So I called her when I found out and she made time for me the next day, but she said to me, you just need to sleep, eat and move. And I'm quite good at sleeping. I have oils that I use for sleeping. And our mutual friend Christine Schaffner dropped off this True Blue. CBD is legal in Washington state, so it's a CBD oil that really knocked me out. I was very, very meticulous about my sleep hygiene.

Jodi Cohen: I knew that that was going to be important. And in the early days I would kind of wake up; denial is big. Shock is really powerful. And early on. And quite truthfully, even we're coming up on the year anniversary on August 27th and there are still moments when I forget and I'm like, wait a minute, is that really true? And I think that's how the body copes because it just can't take everything on. So I would wake up in the middle of the night and just put oil over my heart and it's almost like these crazy waves and you just have to breathe through it and breathe into it. And if I couldn't, sometimes super-hot showers helped me, like they just relaxed me. So that was wavy that I was pretty committed to making sure that I got sleep and I have a dog who needed to be walked. So that was really helpful to make sure that I got out like two or three times a day because just moving, I felt moving my body, helped me move through emotion and eating less often.

Dr. Keesha: And a daughter that had to eat

Jodi Cohen: A daughter that had to eat and a daughter that would walk with me and we would talk about it. I was really trying to model even though there are models and their experts, I didn't know how it was going to affect me or her. So I was just doing the best that I could. I noticed that when I slept well, I felt better. I noticed that every time I went to Yoga I felt better at the end, so every time I noticed, okay, when I do this, I feel better. I kept moving in that direction and the alternate, there were certain people in my life that weren't able to show up in the way that I needed them to. I gave myself permission to not make an effort for people that made me feel worse.

Dr. Keesha: I think this is, oh my gosh, that right there is the most powerful statement that I want everyone to listen to. You do not have to have lost a child to be able to say that, right. There are certain people in your life that if they, that chemistry isn't matching, that energy isn't matching that you get to have a boundary and not make an effort to have them in your life. I mean, what a powerful healing practice just that is.

Jodi Cohen: Yeah. I mean, the interesting thing like I'm not sure what language I would use because truth be told, there have been a lot of unexpected gifts that I've learned since I lost my son and I would try them on so much more in a heartbeat for like one more day. But that's not an option. And so that's you know Sheryl Sandberg, that was the first book I read, that Option B book, that Option A doesn't exist, so you have to just forgive me, but kick the shit out of Option B, which is what I'm trying to do. I really go to that place of, I don't get this, but I think it's, you know, the whole principle of decluttering is when you open up space in your life, new things come in. And so losing a child, especially a child who was such a passionate, intense, wonderful child, but he took up so much space. I was, you know, he was in seventh grade and he was exhibiting symptoms of ADD and no impulse control still. So there was a lot of effort that went into supporting him that suddenly gave me space. And I can be very selective on how I felt that and just having that space I think allowed new people in my space. New options; new abilities to learn.

Dr. Keesha: So option B, taking away option A and putting in option B.

Jodi Cohen: And then when you look at option B, it's like what's the best life that I can have given the constraints that exist, given that I can't bring someone back from the dead. Like I truly believe that you can do a lot to heal somebody. Until their soul leaves their body. And at that point there's really, you have to surrender to the fact that you cannot help them or bring them back, but you can continue. You know, you have a choice. You get to kind of determine what your healing story is or you go. And there's so many healing stories about the mothers that are never the same, that really stays stuck in grief and can't move beyond that. And I was so fortunate in our community, there are a few healing stories of mothers who, Michelle Norris, who lost her beautiful daughter, Brittany, in a car accident and went on to found Paleo FX and touched so many people in her name and in her honor, you know Dr. Anna Subarea who lost her son and then went on to do amazing work. And so I looked at those role models and decided that's what I want.

Dr. Keesha: These are guests on this Summit: Dr. Anna Subarea and Michelle Norris. Christine Schaffner. Everybody you've mentioned thus far as actually on the Summit. Really powerful, great space. I know powerful women who have taken, you know, this great, great trauma and turned it into something beautiful to help the world. Now I want to, I'm sorry to circle back to option B again because I was realizing it's so often my patients will come in to see me and the biggest thing I'd say the most common request I get when I say, how can I serve you, is I want my body back. I want the body that I had before I was diagnosed with this disease. I want that back. I want to call out option A because a lot of times what'll happen is people will grieve there.

Dr. Keesha: Loss of youth when they're going through menopause or the dream that they had for a child when they held them in their arms with babies and then that child is not turning out the way that they had dreamt that would happen. Maybe they're addicted to drugs or are rebellious or you've lost one. You know, like you're having to grieve dreams too, right? The dream of what you believe your body should be. And there's nothing like autoimmune disease to put a wrench into that dream. And so I want to help people

understand that this too is a trauma and feeling betrayed by life and the dream that you held, right? I want you to move to option B, which can be, okay, so what can this body do and can I actually optimize this body to be better than the one that I had before? Because that's certainly what happened to me. Can I take the wisdom that I've learned and understanding my mortality and my loss of function and the pain that I was in and create a better mind and a better mission for myself in the world and have that galvanize me. So I think there's option B and it happens with a variety of different things that we'll have in life that will feel like betrayals,

Jodi Cohen: Oh absolutely. There's that whole book Expectation Hangover. Any expectation that's not fulfilled becomes a disappointment. And I think it's kind of like what I was saying earlier, it's like you go through a maze and you hit a turn that takes you to a dead end and you don't repeat that turn, that's dead end thinking, and maybe you can get back to that and exceed that, but what you need to do. My therapist gave me this great line that you can't be a victim if you have choices. The opposite of being a victim is I have choices. And so there were days when, you know, this was not the family that I wanted. I wanted two kids. I wanted a wonderful supportive husband. I'm not married to their father anymore and now it's my daughter and I.

Jodi Cohen: And so I started brainstorming what option B do I have? And in this past year we have made our own family of friends; we have taken trips with so many of my close friends who have kids my daughter's age, she calls them all of her cousins. She's so close to them. She, you know, she's 15, so she's on like Snapchat and Instagram with them, but we don't get Max, but we get option B which is in some ways better because it's allowed her to bring new people into her life and myself included. And I think if you can even just get out of your comfort zone and brainstorm everything that's possible, even things that feel outside of the reach of possibility, like getting this book deal; that was on my vision board. That was something I wanted. It didn't feel possible, but why not? It's a choice that I can try to pursue. So I think it's almost like, I can't think of a great example, but if you set your sights on a Honda Accord, like that's the perfect car for you. That's exactly what I want. You limit yourself. You know, maybe your Mercedes is going to come into your life. You don't really know. So holding on to what you thought you wanted and what you thought was the perfect idea, limits you from opening up to things that can be so much better.

Dr. Keesha: I want to have you restate what you said earlier because I'm sure some people are going to hear this as your life is better without your son. And you have already said that you trade all of it for even another day. I want to circle back to that so that you guys are hearing that because I can--

Jodi Cohen: No, it's not. No. I mean, no, it's not better. I mean, I miss him every moment of every day.

Dr. Keesha: I know you do,

Jodi Cohen: But, and I guess it's not a "but" it's an and", I miss him every moment of every day. And I wish that he was still alive and that I allowed in this expansive experience because in some ways when he was alive, I was thinking, small, and things were good enough that I never had to push myself. T's interesting. Someone told me when this happened, this is your initiation. And what they meant by that is that you never change when things are comfortable. When your life is pretty good or good enough, why would you make an effort to do things that are incredibly hard? It's only when you are brought to your knees and your life is completely unbearable that you step into that possibility of allowing yourself to grow and change. You know, it is baptism by fire. It's alchemy; it forces you, It destroys everything that you worked your entire life around, that you thought you wanted and forces you to reevaluate and maybe set new goals and different goals that you would never have looked to attain if everything had been perfect.

Dr. Keesha: I was talking last night, I do screening calls to make sure that prospective students are a good fit for my health coaching program. The Academy for Integrative Medicine Health Coach certification program. And I was talking to a woman last night who called me and said that in the winter time her husband had been diagnosed with colon cancer and it had metastasized to the liver and the lungs. And she said because of this, I've had to dig so deeply and your program is perfect for us because it's taking on the emotional, the spiritual, the mental, as well as the physical. And we would have never searched for anything and learned what we have learned had he not gotten this; it took them to their knees. And they had to start looking outside of what they knew to be their world. So it's absolutely true. And we do not learn in times where everything is just calm waters, you know, you have to all of a sudden learn how to navigate that boat when it's choppy.

Jodi Cohen: That was kind of my expression, I felt like I was learning to swim while I was drowning.

Dr. Keesha: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And now you're in the boat.

Jodi Cohen: The boat, I mean, I still miss my son, but that also has changed a little bit. Like instead of missing him and longing for him here, I just really appreciate what we had. Like we were at actually another funeral last night and someone, a camp friend of his had a video that he had done. They did this music video that I'd never seen and it brought me so much joy just to see like my goofy kid dancing to George Michael. You know, because I didn't even know that existed.

Dr. Keesha: Yeah. Oh, that's beautiful. So, this is only if you're willing because you could have stayed on the floor eating ice cream; put the covers over your head and I'm not saying this is an option that you can't have, but gone on medications to numb it. I'm not judging anyone that does that. You just really like took this on and went head into it and you learn so much and it's really been beautiful to watch; just how you taken this and expanded and grown by choosing this other option rather than feeling victimized by having it dealt to you as a bad hand, which I think is really lovely.

Jodi Cohen: Thank you. I think it's funny, I had the privilege of meeting when a Gwyneth Paltrow who has children the exact same age, they were born like right around. And she said to me, I would kill myself. And I said, no, you wouldn't because I have this daughter and I have this daughter who needs to go on to have this bright, wonderful life and she needs to know that there are options and that you can navigate that she's looking to me as a role model and I can't let her down. So I really feel like there were choices. I felt like I have to figure this out because I'm saving not only myself, but my child.

Dr. Keesha: When I try and get women to take care of themselves that are mothers, I lean into that really strongly. You know, like if you can't find it in you to consider yourself important enough for caring and changing your diet and staying on your supplements, that emotional trauma work that you need to do, do it for this next generation. And that's a good strong pull and motivating desire for us to be amazing parents, so that's a really good thing to lean into. You guys find your why about why you want to reverse autoimmune disease. Then one of the things that I realized when I was reversing my own that is advice that down at the dining room table every night at dinner with my four children and actually shared what I was learning along the way, oh my gosh, I just learned today that I am a raving perfectionist and then laughing because they're like, really?

Dr. Keesha: You didn't know that much? I remember my mom when I called her and said, oh my gosh, I just found out I'm a raving perfectionist how am I just learning about this, and she started laughing. You didn't know that already? And just having that humor and that ability to share my own process, my kids role models to them, that as you unfold, they get to watch an adult unfold and grow in wisdom, in response to these big challenges. And that I think is the very, that on top of saying, I'm sorry, when that's appropriate to your child are the two most important parenting skills that I think I learned from parenting for kids into adulthood.

Jodi Cohen: Yeah, we do that. We have a check in every night and you know, she shares her day. I share my day, I share my learnings. She's got a fantastic sense of humor and really gets me. And then we do the other Sheryl Sandberg process. We talk about what we are grateful for so that you go to bed grateful.

Dr. Keesha: Nice, good. I'm sure it's awesome for each other.

Jodi Cohen: She's adorable. She's an athlete and she's always grateful when she beats her own personal record. I'm very lucky. I mean, both of my kids were amazing, but I feel very grateful for her attitude and humor and she's just she's great. She's fantastic kid.

Dr. Keesha: Beautiful. Well, I want to say how grateful I am to you for coming and sharing your story and helping people see there is an option B, and that you can choose it anytime and that there's an "and" in there not just a "but", that's super important to understand and to choose the "and". So one of the things that I love about, and I'm just going to put a plug in for Jody's Vibrant Blue Oil is she has a parasympathetic blend that when you feel like you're in that fight or flight, can't manage your life; overwhelmed, over busy; over-

scheduled. That's the kind of person that comes and sees me; this parasympathetic blend is really important. You guys all heard Dr Tom O'Brien talk about on his interview that perennial nerve that actually is olfactory, that goes straight to the brain. And so when we're working with this blend, it's very, very, very powerful.

Jodi Cohen: Thank you. Yes, that's actually, that was kind of my talisman because I think there's something we talked about this, the more you can engage more than one sense, the more it really brings you into your body and into the moment. And it's really hard to be in a space of grief or any kind of negative emotion when you're in your body and in the moment so you can smell it. It smells like clove and lime and then topically apply it behind the ear lobe. I was doing it behind both ears, like in my kind of deepest moments. And then I would very intentionally feel my feet on the ground. I would take my shoes off and really try to ground essentially myself and almost visualize just anything that wasn't really helping me kind of showering off of me. So that was what I did definitely every morning and every night, sometimes every five minutes.

Dr. Keesha: Right. Beautiful. We have a contact information for Jodi and her Vibrant Blue Oils here on the website. And I just appreciate you, Jodi, and, and what you represent, and the inspiration you are to all of us.

Jodi Cohen: Thank you so much.

Dr. Keesha: All right, everybody; until next time.