



Reverse Autoimmune Disease Summit

Dr. Keesha Ewers Interviews Tricia Nelson

- Dr. Keesha: Hello everybody. Welcome back. I'm Dr. Keesha Ewers and I am delighted to bring you one of my favorite people on the planet. This is Patricia Nelson. She lost 50 pounds by identifying and healing the underlying causes of her emotional eating and has now spent nearly 30 years researching the hidden causes of [inaudible] personality. Tricia's an emotional eating expert and author of the number one bestselling book *Heal Your Hunger: Seven Simple Steps to End Emotional Eating Now*. She also certifies health coaches so they can get better results, referrals, and revenue, by helping their clients overcome emotional eating. She's the host of the popular podcast, *The Heal Your Hunger* show, and as a highly regarded speaker. Welcome, Tricia.
- Tricia: Thank you. Thanks for having me. It's so good to be here. So great to see you.
- Dr. Keesha: You know, you and I have been in this space for a long time together as little soul sisters and as always, what I have discovered in the space is that everybody has their own story. And when I introduced you, I alluded to some of it, but people are probably thinking like addiction? Addictive personality and autoimmunity. I don't get it and so I'm going to lay the foundation right now before I invite you to tell your story. And that is that 80% of autoimmune diseases are diagnosed in women. And I get a lot of women in my office, and this doesn't just apply to women, it's for men also who I hand them these eating plans. Like, okay, your immune system is firing off against this, then this is what's going on and we've got to watch what's happening.
- Dr. Keesha: And then there will be some that will say, oh, first, like the ones that are really aware of themselves, I'm so not doing that. Others will get better. Their pain will go down, their inflammation goes down, and then they'll go off the wagon and they come in and they used to tell me that they were good for a while and now they're being bad. Which are always trigger words for me. Like, oh no, no, no, no, no, we don't do good or bad. We're not doing a diet. This really does very much affect the healing and the progress on the journey of reversing autoimmune disease. This idea of relationship, typically relationship to yourself because with autoimmunity, your immune system is not in good relationship with you. It's just like this tiny little kernel that's being manifested in all kinds of areas in your life. And so that's why I brought Tricia on. Tricia, I want you to tell your story about how you came into this work.
- Tricia: Thank you so much. I definitely have an addictive personality and food was my number one addiction. I think I was an emotional eater from the get-go. And I did have sexual abuse as a child and food was my go-to for my whole family, we all had this tendency. I just love food. So food is like the highlight of my life. And, you know, I'd come home

from school and I'd have a binge basically. I had bins after school and popcorn or cinnamon toast or you know, whatever. I even make my own cookie dough. I was very creative, but I basically just needed food to get by. And that progressed. I was a chubby kid and then by age 21 I was 50 pounds overweight.

Tricia: And the problem really was that I hated being fat so much. It caused me so much anxiety. I was bigger than my friends and I had the strong self-hatred for myself and my body and on top of that, anything I tried didn't work for me. I joined a gym and I'd try so many diets and exercise programs and then I started doing self-help stuff and I had a shelf of self-help books and self-help programs and 12 step programs. I did a lot of different things, but nothing I tried worked for any length of time, even went to an eating disorders therapist. So, I mean, I had a lot of well-meaning people in my life trying to help, but I would always go back to my pattern of binge eating.

Tricia: What happened is I really felt like I tried so many things that really by the grace of God, very early in my life, I'm like time out, something is not working and this whole thing that I'm doing isn't going to get me where I need to go. But I didn't have another solution. And that's a very depressing place to be. I was young and I'm thinking, I can't do this the rest of my life just yo-yoing with my weight and with food. Thankfully I did meet somebody who really showed me that my problem really didn't have anything to do with food. I mean, I'm definitely a food addict, but beyond that, I was driven by those emotional wounds and I needed to address emotional eating.

Tricia: And when I started to do that, I was shown how to do that in a very systematic way. It turned everything around for me and then I was able to lose the weight and keep it off, you know? And that this has been 30 years now. And so I'm so, so grateful that I have a solution and that's how I started to do this work because I know how hard it is to overcome this and how few "solutions" really do work. And so, it's so important that I get this message out to people and that's what I do through Heal Your Hunger.

Dr. Keesha: That's such a great story because I think most people, I shouldn't say most, but a lot of people that are listening can probably identify when I say most, that means I did

Dr. Keesha: Because also at the age of 10 I had sexual abuse and I used to come home and my mother was a really good cook and she would always have some dessert cooling on the counter top. My home was safety. But then also because my sexual abuse is coming from outside my home, at my elementary school. Then when I would come home there was safety and there was this dessert which would become my after school snack. And we have this little joke in our family that, you eat dessert first and then if dinner comes along, fine, if not, that's also fine. It goes back generations. I can remember my grandmother telling the story of living in Colorado and Wyoming and in the wintertime sitting on one of those old-fashioned radiator heaters and my dad tells the story of watching his mom eat ice cream with the famous Ewers hot fudge dip over the top of it.

Dr. Keesha: It's freezing in the house. She's sitting on the radiator eating her ice cream and dip, right? It doesn't make any sense. It's completely illogical. But as she was feeding those

neurotransmitters and her brain, yeah. Getting that dopamine kick. Now that we have genetics, oh my gosh, what a game changer. Because I can actually identify if you have a dopamine problem. And my family big time is that my daughter also has the same issue with food and dopamine. And so she, you know, we have a supplement that we use called NT balance and she calls them her crazy pills. And I say, why do you call them that? And she says, because I go crazy if I don't take them.

Dr. Keesha: Like I want that food,

Dr. Keesha: You know? And so it's a really interesting way of being able to conceptualize there is an emotional, there's a mental, there's a spiritual and there's a physical. And I love that you take all those into consideration. And you know, when people come to see you and self-sabotage is a word I hear a lot in my office where people will say, I self-sabotage. What does that mean exactly to you?

Tricia: Yeah. Gosh, I lived that hell for a long, long time. You know what that means for me? I mean, in my experience as a coach and coaching coaches, it's so ingrained in the addictive personality because anybody who overdoes anything, and I had lots of addictions; I mean, why stop at one, right? So it's just that food was my number one. But basically, it isn't just about the food, it's not just about the substance. And if you stop that thing, it doesn't mean you're done. It doesn't mean you're home free. Because, you know, my problem was mostly between my ears, you know? What would happen if I had this personality where I was so used to being miserable? I was so used to just struggling that that became my way of life.

Tricia: That even when I did stumble upon freedom, when I started to learn is that I have this brain that's like, you don't deserve that. Like, no, no, no, you don't deserve that. And so that's where the sabotage would come in. I had a threshold for good and for abundance and for love and all these things. And so it wasn't that these things were alluding me, it's that I can only handle so much and I would keep a lot of it out because I just had this wiring for misery, you know? I mean that's a whole conversation in and of itself, but you know, that has many different parts to it too. I didn't get a solid sense of self-esteem growing up.

Tricia: I was lacking in self-esteem, self-worth. I was always looking for it from the outside of me, but I didn't have it. So again, you know, I didn't feel worthy of good coming my way. I find that to be really true for a lot of people now when it comes to the food and our eating habits. And that's really where self-sabotage shows up big time. A lot of that also has to do with the fact that people are treating their weight issue or you know, if they want to lose weight or trying to get in a new way, they're treating it just at the physical. If they're emotional eaters, it's not going to cut it. You can't just take away all these things you've depended on emotionally for so long and expect to be okay.

Tricia: People are just like; I'm going to go on a diet and it's all going to be good. But they not only like need a replacement for that crutch that food was providing for them, but also there's a whole other issue of not being able to handle being in a thinner body and

there's like, it just seems so cut and dry and I'm going to lose weight. I'm going to fit into size four jeans and it's all going to be good. But what, especially when there's trauma and sexual abuse, being in a thin body that brings in a whole another host of issues that we didn't plan on. When I've used fat for so long to protect myself from the idea that I might be advanced on or perpetrated upon, when it gives me that sense of comfort. Just going on a diet isn't going to cut it because I'm going to be like really without any source of protection and I'm not going to stand for that. And so I am going to sabotage and I'm going to go back to what I know, the foods that I know, the comfort that I know and the protection that I know. So it's just all that has to be addressed with someone who really wants to change the way they eat and change their body.

Dr. Keesha: This is so important because in the Aces study, the Adverse Childhood Experiences study that actually was conceived of after Kaiser Permanente's weight loss clinic; all these people in this program, it was a very successful program. People were getting to their goal weight, they were losing weight, but then there were the big percentage of people that were dropping out even though they were successfully losing weight before they got to goal. And luckily the investigator went back and started asking questions and found that most of them had been sexually abused in childhood. And so that started the inquiry of okay, how is this related? And it led to the Adverse Childhood Experiences study that was done with the Centers for Disease Control. There's definitely a link between trauma and relationship to food because if the relationship itself is fractured, then it's not going to come together until you get that done first.

Tricia: Despite it all, I always say, if you want to lose weight, you think you want to be thin. But the real question is can you handle being thin? Food covered up so many feelings. I use food to anesthetize my feelings and I can go into what those main feelings are. But I have to just say that when you stop eating the food that you're depending on the kinds of foods, like you stop. If you take away the ooey-gooey chewy foods and you eat less, you're going to have more feelings. You're automatically going to have a higher quotient of feelings and you have to be able to handle those. You need space and an ability to deal with that many feelings. So, I always say like, if you're losing a hundred pounds, that's a hundred pounds of stuff that's going to come up in your face that you better have the tools and a system for dealing with. And it doesn't have to be therapy. I'm not talking about 20 years in therapy. There's a very easy way to go through that. Not, not easy, that's not the right way simple, but there's a way to address that stuff. But if you don't, you will self-sabotage. No question about it.

Dr. Keesha: Anatomically in our fat, we store toxins. And so we already know that when you start losing weight and fat starts to mound, that these toxins are going to be released and you're going to be cranky if you've had a lot of stuff built in those toxins. What we don't tell people, and I think it's fairly widely unknown, is this part you're also releasing emotional and the mental stuff and the spiritual stuff and that that has to be digested too. You know, in autoimmune disease, Ayurvedic medicine says that it's undigested anger. So once you start getting rid of your comfort foods, right, and the cushy blanket of fat that you've held around you to keep you grounded, what the wise mind of the child knew to do at that time was perfect, but it's not a strategy that you can continue

into adulthood now that you have a fully developed brain and so you have to learn how to digest those feelings, just how you digest your food. And so I love this discussion because this is directly related to why autoimmune disease is there and how we can actually reverse that.

Tricia: Absolutely. That's such an important conversation. No question about it. And just talking about the anger, you know, I thought I was like, I didn't know I was angry until I stopped overeating and then I experienced rage. It's like all that buried stuff just started coming up and I had so much anger and so much rage. And again, that's why people go back to the food or whatever their addiction of choice because they're just like, whoa, this is not who I think I am. Like I'm not a rageful person. I'm not a mean person. I'm not an angry person. And all of a sudden, what are all these feelings? Let's tamp it down quick. Some people just feel like, we have a family or a spouse, I'm going to get divorced really fast if I do this. It's just really important to have the proper support because otherwise it's like food is going to be the thing that we turn to or some other addiction.

Dr. Keesha: I had someone in here that was going through a smoking cessation program that I put them in last week and he was in a rage when he got here. And I said, good, congratulations to you. And he said this isn't me. And I said, it is, we all have the Hulk inside of us. First there are those boundaries that we've kept stamped down and contained because our over culture, our mother culture, our mother and father said, you're not allowed to express those feelings. I mean you were powerless than childhood and we didn't have autonomy. And so now we're trying to figure out, you don't have to go through your whole life being in a rage, but you do need to get in touch with are you a member? When I got in touch with my rage and I wrote a long letter and I had to decide what I was going to do about it.

Dr. Keesha: I was going into the back country to go backpacking because I figured the only person that should be around me is me and the bears, and the trees, right? And my father contacted me and he said, you know, I understand that you're going through some anger with us. What had happened is I found out my sons had been sexually abused and my daughter also by a babysitter. As somebody that was sexually abused in childhood, that was the number one worst thing that I could possibly subject my children to. And I just failed on my watch as a parent in my head. And I was just filled with shame. And so I went through this process. It amazingly actually facilitated that forgiveness process between this perpetrator and the kids. And they went through, I had hand paid for some of the counseling and we just went through this amazing, oh, it's beautiful.

Dr. Keesha: And when it was all over, I had breast cancer and the ultrasound wand was on my breast and I saw this tumor with a blood supply to it. And I just went, I know where that came from and give me a month. And so it was in that month where I'd got in touch with this rage I had toward my parents for not doing the same thing for me, that I had just done for my children. And you know, they didn't even entertain the idea of helping me to navigate this, right? And I was filled with anger about it and it was literally killing me, you know, is the tumor over my heart in my left breast. So my dad calls me and he says,

Mama and I understand that you're going through this, you know, and he says, I'm coming out.

Dr. Keesha: And I said, if you're coming out, then you're going to need to wear a backpack with all your stuff and your food and you're going to come with me into the back country because I'm not fit for human consumption right now. I said, and you're going to need to sit still and you're going to listen to whatever it is I say and if I have to howl at the moon and scream at you. It's got to be okay for you. You've got to be able to hold space for that, otherwise don't come. And I wanted, he said, I'm good for it. And so we had this really amazing backpacking trip. It's incredible. That was just like, oh, all of the things that are, someone came along in the night and stole all of our food from the bear containers that you have. And so we didn't have any food for the next day. Everything had been cut in half. We had just like a couple of things. And my dad, interestingly enough, went a little crazy about not having his self-soothing technique.

Tricia: Okay. Yeah. Oh this is interesting.

Dr. Keesha: And so we talked about it, like what food, having it missing for now. It was also an ex-smoker and you know, it's just like how uncomfortable he was. He literally thought he would die because we had to hike back out and all he had was like a packet of oatmeal and a protein bar. And I said, Dad, you're not going to die. Like, it's okay. It's not that far. We will get down and it'll be fine, you know? It was like he'd never replaced that addiction with anything else. So he had to hold space for my anger and he couldn't do it without food.

Tricia: I'm sure he had a lot of feelings going on. And wasn't able to actually navigate them without food.

Dr. Keesha: It was a beautiful experience that kind of unpacked a whole bunch of layers. So when we talk about this then, you know, you talk about the anatomy of an emotional eater and I would love to have you describe that because like I tell you, my dad was not in a good space in that moment, but there is a specific anatomy to those.

Tricia: It really is. You know, and it's so much of the time people think emotional eating is about what you eat or how much you eat or you know, whatever or how much you weigh. It's really not any of those things. You don't need to be a binge eater to be an emotional eater. You don't have to be a food addict to be an emotional eater. But what's common for emotional eaters, people who have struggled is a personality type. I've identified this as an anatomy of the emotional eater and it's 24 personality traits that have nothing to do with food. And that's why it's so important to look beyond the food. Knowing that emotional eating has a lot to do with how we show up in life and how we react to situations because back to childhood is we have coping skills growing up that we need, you know, depending on the kind of situation we have and traumas that we're experiencing, we develop coping skills that save our lives.

Tricia: They'll grow their usefulness to us, but we still have them, and we bring them into our adult life and they're not working for us and all they're doing is causing stress that we're stress eating over. And so that's why it's so important to go there. Like the diet thing. I mean, that's why 98% of all diets fail is because we're just doing the physical and not getting underneath. So some of these traits, I mean it's, people would be amazed, you know, how much they fit the profile if they do struggle with food and weight. But obviously I can't go through 24 now, but I'll give you at least one or two of the top ones. And the top one, I know you'll concur with this is people pleasing.

Tricia: I've never met an emotional eater who wasn't just very skilled at people pleasing. And again, this comes from an old place where we needed to please perhaps, that's how we got our approval. That's how we got the attention. That's how we kept ourselves from getting hurt. It's like a very well-developed skill and because we don't have a developed sense of self-esteem, it works great in adult life to get validation. And so we ended up saying yes to everything and if there's some job needs to be done and our hand is always going up and we're the ones picking up the slack and we're the ones doing our kids' homework for them, or the ones who are chairing the committee yet another committee, right? And we do all this thinking we're going to get like that filled, we're going to get filled

Tricia: With that validation. But the problem with people pleasing is not only do we get completely exhausted and burnt out, which is where autoimmunity can come from and it's like we're exhausted. And then on top of it we're pissed off because nobody's ever as pleased as we want them to be, right? Like we have these fantasies of all the accolades and all the Atta girls, and it doesn't happen. So then we'd go home when we have what I called the, I deserve a binge, like nobody else is appreciating me, dammit. I'm going to appreciate me with this ice cream and cookies, and I deserve this.

Dr. Keesha: I've had a hard day.

Tricia: Exactly; poor me. And it's like nobody's appreciating me. And so, it's just a prescription for disaster and for self-abuse. And the thing is, it's totally avoidable because that was our choice.

Tricia: Nobody made us raise our hand for all of those different tasks. We thought the payoff would be greater and it's very empty. It's just like ice cream. Like it's great in the moment; approval is great in the moment, but it doesn't last long. So that's a really big one. It has to be addressed. Like we have to stop doing, doing, doing. We have to stop trying to get that approval, and proving ourselves in the world and start focusing on something more important and more fulfilling. Another one of emotional eaters is being deep feelers. We are such deep feelers and so much of the time it's not okay with us. We're just trying to get it away or admonish ourselves for feeling so deeply.

Tricia: But you know, it doesn't have to be a liability if we know what to do with those feelings. And typically our feelings are so big. Anytime we get bad news or something that scares us and we dive right into the food, or wine, alcohol, cigarettes, whatever it is, shopping.

The problem is that if we can start just realizing that we are the feelers and we have a lot of feelings with whatever happens and then start using different self-care tools to try to address that stuff so we don't harm ourselves instead, it's so important. The last one I'll mention is emotional eaters have racing minds and so we just, we think, and I always say overeaters or over thinkers, you know, and we just think everything to death. Like what did she mean by that?

Tricia: And why is he doing that or why they look at me that way.? Or, you know, it just goes on and on and drives us crazy. That's where that serotonin hit from the carbs comes in as that we just trying to settle that thing down, you know? And obviously you know that there's so many more healthy ways to do that through meditation and prayer and walking in the woods and doing different things because you know, it does get the best of us so often and drives our unhealthy habits. So what you just said,

Dr. Keesha: Describing what I call the three p's of auto immune disease. Everybody with autoimmune disease has perfectionism, people pleasing and they're holding onto the poison of past pain. That's why they're so intertwined. I see this so often in these deep immersion retreats for trauma and healing that I do. There's a lot of emotional eating stuff that I may ask like, what do I do about this and how can I replace this? And so I'm so happy that, you know, you have, you actually have a quiz for people to take.

Tricia: It's an emotional eater quiz. You find out where you're on the spectrum? You know, my experiences were all emotional eaters. Like I believe we're hardwired to have some kind of emotional connection with food. So like eat and subsist as you know, a species; so nobody gets out, like, gets away from this. So I believe we're all emotional eaters. We're all on the spectrum, but it is a spectrum. The low end is emotional. Like, eat too much at a party or you go on a cruise, you put on five pounds, you work out extra at the gym, you take it off, no big deal. It's just where you mostly eat and then we get over it. But as you go up the spectrum, the high end is food addiction, which is definitely where I lived.

Tricia: Where the binges were severe and I packed in a lot of calories in one sitting and I was always nibbling and eating and it was all starch, sugar and fat. My three favorite food groups, that's a whole another story. And that there's lots of consequences to that that affects our health. Obviously our jobs, our relationships, our libido, our ambition, I mean everything. So you can take the quiz and find out where you are in the spectrum and get a personalized score, and then there's action steps you can take after that. So I think that's just a really great place to start because so many people tell me and they're like, I'm not emotionally there. But once I talked to him for a little while, they're like, oh yeah, I'm an emotional eater.

Dr. Keesha: And you know, and not shaming your software because I think that perpetuates it. You know, recognition people, people will say to me so you really want as awareness then? And I say, well, now, I mean, awareness gets you to the threshold of the door, but then you got to walk through, and you've got to do the integration work. You know, you have to do the practices. And when you stepped down to learn how to play the piano, it's a lot of clunky, hard, awful sounding chords until you actually sound beautiful as a piano;

and emotional work people don't apply that same, we have to sit down and practice. We have to integrate. Awareness only gets you to the doorway.

Tricia: Yeah. Don't take those actions you're just aware of like, yeah, different reasons why you're hurting yourself or why you sad because now I should do it better. I know better.

Dr. Keesha: Right as though it could create the bully stick that you self-flagellate with. I should know better, and which is just more of the same. The way that I conceptualize this, as I always say, like when you're born there's a worth meter inside of you. It looks like a thermometer and it's at 100% and nothing anyone can do say, believe or you know, like act, will affect your worth meter except for you. It's up to you just knowing you're worthy and deserving of the very best life has to offer. And it's why doing this work is so important because you deserve to be free of whatever is happening with this auto immunity. But you also deserve to have the autoimmune disease because it's here to teach you some lessons and you deserve that too. The wisdom that comes from it, like the good things that happen in life we deserve and we don't deserve the bad things. I always try and get people out of the idea of good and bad and just like this is just life as it hands it to us. When we judge it as good or bad, then that means we will judge ourselves as good or bad. And we'll judge food as good or bad and we'll judge the whole process as good or bad. And that's a trap.

Tricia: Absolutely. I'm so grateful. I mean really that this is the teacher I chose. I've got other ones, no question. But this is the big one. It's at the beginning people are like, I don't want this. I don't want to be an emotional eater. I don't want this problem. I want it to do what it takes to overcome it, you know? It's exactly what I tell them. I said, look, my life is so, I have such an amazing life. I'm so blessed; all because I was driven to deal with this food thing. Like I would never have the abundance I have or the spiritual life I have if I wasn't just totally kicked to the curb with being out of control of food. So it has so many, so many hidden blessings.

Dr. Keesha: So the next time you're calling yourself bad or self-sabotaging, I want you to sit with that for a minute and just what is the lesson that this blessing has to teach you? What is it that you're meant to learn from it? And always the hero's journey,, you have to find a mentor to learn new skills when you're confronted with a challenge that you can't manage. And so here's your mentor. Here's Tricia. We have all your contact information here on the website and people can of course reach out to you to take the quiz. I appreciate you so much for your work.

Tricia: Thank you so much for your beautiful work and being such a bright light in this world and guiding so many people to health.

Dr. Keesha: Thank you. And until next time, everybody, and thanks again, Tricia.

Tricia: Thank you, Sweetie. Bye.

