



Reverse Autoimmune Disease Summit

Dr. Keesha Ewers Interviews Ginny Mahar and Danna Bowman

Dr. Keesha: Welcome back to the reverse autoimmune disease summit everyone. I'm Dr. Keesha Ewers and I'm bringing to you a great conversation today with Danna Bowman and Ginny Mahar. Who are two thyroid patient advocates who teamed up to create a diet and lifestyle support platform for thyroid patients. They are the creators of the revolutionary wellness game, Thyroid 30 and hosts of Thyroid Refresh TV, a podcast featuring the world's leading experts on thyroid specific diet and lifestyle, which is what we're going to be talking about on this interview. So, welcome to the summit, you guys.

Ginny: Thank you so much for having us. We're so excited to be here.

Dr. Keesha: We're talking about reversing autoimmune disease and 80% of autoimmunity is diagnosed in women and the big one is thyroid autoimmunity, Graves and Hashimoto's. I would love to have and I'll have one of you start, Ginny we'll start with you, but how did you get into being interested and working in this arena?

Ginny: Right. Well, I don't think it's something anyone really aspires to become thyroid patient advocate or anything like that. I was diagnosed with hypothyroidism in 2011. Right after the birth of my son and short story, I felt really miserable for four years. I was being tested. I was on the typical medication. My doctor was testing my TSH only and I had no idea that I even had Hashimoto's, autoimmune hypothyroidism. I also kept asking are there things I shouldn't be eating? I just don't feel like myself. I was tired all day, every day from the time I woke up to the time I went to bed at night and my doctor pretty much said, "No, you need to just eat less exercise more WeightWatchers, that kind of thing. I think that's what a lot of patients hear, my story is not really unique, but when I did take the reins of my health and start educating myself about the things I could be doing, I quickly learned that things like diet absolutely do matter. I learned I needed to get tested for Hashimoto's because over 90% of us who are diagnosed with hypothyroidism it's caused because of Hashimoto's disease. So, knowing that and having that information was incredibly empowering for me as a patient and life changing. Within about six months, I really felt like I got my energy back and I got my life back. I was like suddenly able to be the mother. I wanted to be the person I wanted to be. I felt that inner spark again. That was a thing I really noticed during those rough four years was like my spark was going out. I felt flat and getting that back was... You really appreciate it when you start to get that energy back. It felt like somebody flipped a light switch on inside me after four years of it being off.

Dr. Keesha: I wanted to point out what some of those lifestyle things are that you implemented because I think that anyone with autoimmune disease of any kind can relate to this, but I think, in particular, thyroid because it does regulate so much of our energy. It's the flip side of the adrenal glands and it regulated by the pituitary. There's a lot that has to do with how well we sleep, what we eat, all of those things and proper testing is so important. What lifestyle routine that we can put in place, so we'll circle back around to that after we hear from Danna and I want to hear about your story and how you got here and how did you guys get together on this great project?

Danna: Isn't it really cool? Okay, well a little bit about me. My whole life had something I felt kind of wasn't right, kind of off, but you just live life and you just go and you just do. I did and my family and I had relocated from Texas to Costa Rica and I was feeling, for about three or four months, I was feeling like this really low-grade fever. I could not keep my eyes open and always had really thin, brittle hair and just a lot of the symptoms, brain fog. I couldn't get words out, I was trying to think really hard for the words and I couldn't get them out, gut issues, a lot of the stuff. We went to the doctor in Costa Rica and I actually got correctly diagnosed with hypothyroidism and Hashimoto's, which is amazing. It was wonderful. The doctor was a really good doctor, but at the same time he put me on like a T4 medicine only, which is the only medicine I could get while living history. But I didn't question it. I was just kind of doing my own thing and I hadn't asked any questions and so I was fine with just taking a pill and going on. I thought that was gonna be great. I thought it was going to be my magic pill. I was getting on a plane the very next day to go to a Zumba convention. I was like great, I've got my pills and it's going to be awesome. It's three and a half-four days of full on dancing all day long, which is great. I went and I was tired at night. Everybody's going out, they have these really neat parties that they set up and stuff.

Danna: I was like, "I gotta go to bed," and they're like, "Ah, you're just no fun." I'm like, "Yeah, I am. I'm not fun. I don't know what's going on." So, eventually after teaching for a year and wearing myself out, I just wore my adrenals down and I finally started asking the questions because I would go to work out to go to teach a class and I would get an instant headache and I'd be drinking agua de pipa and water. So, I knew it wasn't hydration and things. I would get an instant headache and I would need to take a nap, a couple hour nap after teaching one class. Finally, I started asking the questions and getting online and I did and realized there was a whole world of people suffering just like me and there were other medications. Once I kind of opened that door and once I started asking the questions, then all the questions and all the things started coming. I've been on this journey since 2012 so it's been rocky. I've moved back to the states and then to Colorado and now I'm in North Carolina and trying to navigate all of that. Living in a third world kind of country, where you don't really have the same food choices and things. It just made it really very difficult, but for the past year I've been working on myself and my lifestyle and I've seen a tremendous change in my happiness and my spark. You can ask Ginny, a year ago today, it was incredible. My antibodies are like in two hundred, they started out in the 15 hundred way back then, so know I'm making a lot of progress. I know a lot of it, 99% of it for me had to do with lifestyle choices and

changes that I made. It feels so much better. It just feels like, "Oh, okay, I remember this."

Dr. Keesha: When I met my husband, he had Hashimoto's and we got his antibodies to reverse within six months to be less than nine out of the thousands. He's so disciplined and dedicated like there's an interview with him on meditation. He's a meditation teacher on this summit. He was already doing all of those things, but he wasn't handling his emotions properly, even though he wasn't meditator. So, on the cushion he was, but then when he was upright, he wasn't. Then, food and some of these lifestyle things that we're going to talk about were a factor for him too. You can absolutely get your antibodies less than nine. I see this in my practice all the time and it's one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you guys because this piece around lifestyle. People will say, "Well, I don't want to have to live the rest of my life not drinking alcohol or drinking coffee or sugar." Your thyroid actually does not like sugar [Laughs]. It does not like sugar. It's one of the most inflammatory agents on the face of the planet. People will feel deprived and feel like they're being punished if they can't have some of these types of foods. Yet they're many amazing ways. In fact, my daughter Kendall, who did a natural infertility solutions talk for this summit, her free gift is actually a cookie that's a power cookie that has protein powder powder in it, no sugar, and it's really good. It's delicious! So, it's figuring out these different ways that you can do what you want to do, and have fun, right? But still not destroy your thyroid through your immune system having a reaction to everything is the key. So, let's talk about what some of these lifestyle changes are that you guys have embarked on and what you teach in your program that are helping people reverse their autoimmunity.

Danna: Okay. I'm going to go first really quick because I am excited. One of the main things for me, we have something we call the eight hours. I'll let Jenny explain it to you, but one of them is rejuvenation. It is all about self care and enjoying 10 minutes of self care day. And I really believe that it's such, it's one of those catch phrases, one of those words or those, you know, that's going around right now and everybody's saying it, but like to really stop and think about it and do it. You know, it's a little bit different. You think, "Oh well I went on a walk so that counts." It does count, but what I found that makes it different for me is being intentional about it, being very intentional about it while I'm in it, while I'm doing it, while I'm sitting in my bath as an example, I'm completely in my bath. I'm not talking to anybody. I'm not on any social media. Thank goodness. I'm not doing anything. I'm just sitting there. I'm in it, I'm happy if I'm sitting outside and I'm just watching the trees and the birds. I'm trying really hard. Like it's not so much trying anymore, but I was intentionally wanting to be present in the self care moments of all different things that if I was coloring with my daughter or whatever it was, I was looking at her in the eyes and those kinds of things. That kind of stimulates you and makes you want to feel better. It helps you be able to go on to the next thing, whatever it is. So, for me, self care, all the different things that they are there are, being intentional about it really changed my life.

Dr. Keesha: It sounds like it's not just intentionality, but it's also being present with the moment you're in. When people are future tripping, they get into anxiety, which is not good for

your thyroid and when they're going into the past, that can cause depression, right? It's regret and all of the things that can happen around the past and that's also not so great for your thyroid. Being in the present moment in your body, in your bath, you're embodying what you're doing. That's a really beautiful way that you just said it because you can go out for your power walk, you know, check. I just did a self care and you're thinking about like all the other things you have to get done when you get back from that log. To your point, that's really not doing you much good because it's revving up your adrenal glands because your future tripping.

Danna: It is difficult because you find yourself thinking future tripping or living in the past because you're just sitting there so you're quiet and we're not used to necessarily being quiet. I was talking to my husband not too long ago about the same thing. If you find it difficult then pick out small things like I would pick up the water and go "Ooh, pretty water." It sounded funny, I felt like I was a baby, "Ooh, pretty water."

Dr. Keesha: That's a good thing.

Danna: "It's crystal clear," or if I'm driving and this is my self care time where I'm going to listen to some kind of relaxing music and I look at the pretty tress where I'm trying to be really present in the moment. It's so not easy sometimes and so if you pick certain things to look at or notice or comment on, even out loud, that can sometimes help.

Dr. Keesha: That mindfulness. Beautiful.

Ginny: Yeah. I love that the way that you put that, and I think that it talks to the piece of mindset and you mentioned that earlier, Keesha, of people can get really easily overwhelmed on this journey, especially coming into it. Maybe they get a book, like I went through this whole process myself, so I know you get a book, you, "Oh my gosh, I have to get all this testing. I got to find a new doctor, I got to adjust my medication and Whoa! my diet. Oh, this is going to change my whole life." Take a breath, baby steps, and know that this is about you feeling well and staying well and getting your life back so that there is like a process that has to happen where I think instead of just trying to fix what's broken, we really have to make that shift to a place of self compassion and self love and self care. What we do is very much a part of that dialogue, but what we also done is we've tried to make the whole process all the things less overwhelming. We look to all the experts, you included, and what are people saying that we need to do? What have we found in our own experience that's been powerful for us? We boiled it down into what we call the Eight Daily Rituals. As Danna mentioned, rejuvenation is one of them and there's other things like just remembering. One is remember to take your medication and supplements, that seems obvious but can be a real hurdle for some people. Another big one, refuel. That is everything that you put into your mouth, so food and drink and thyroid nutrition, I'm sure could be its own hours long summit.

Ginny: The basic premise is that we're trying to avoid inflammatory foods and toxins in the diet as well as maximizing nutrient density. As people go along this process, we discover what our unique bio individual needs are as well. Everybody's different, one person

might have more of an issue with gluten or eggs or then another, so it is individual, but that's sort of the basic boiled down version of that. Another one of the Eight Daily Rituals is reactivates trying to stay active, but doing so in a way that isn't going to inflame your body, that isn't going to flood your body with too much cortisol. This is another place where there's a big mindset shift required because we have this, I had this very American attitude of more is better and "I'm gonna go to the gym five days a week."

Dr. Keesha: No pain, no gain.

Ginny: Yeah. It's that attitude of aggression towards our bodies and shifting to more of an attitude of compassion towards our bodies and really listening and noticing like Danna did. What used to work for me maybe isn't working anymore and in many cases, less is more. Maybe instead of a one hour Zumba class, it's a 30-minute walk or something like that. Finding what works for you with staying active.

Dr. Keesha: What I tell my patients is "If you're a zebra being chased by a lion and you think that lion's about to eat you for dinner, all your hormones shift into survival." So that affects every one of your hormones, including thyroid and if you're going and your adrenals are already burned out and you're going and doing CrossFit or running or training for a marathon, this was me, then your body can't tell the difference between being chased by a lion and going to exercise because you think it's fun. It's going to shift all your hormones and just survival mode, which will mean no libido. Your estrogen and progesterone and testosterone are actually going to get reallocated to make cortisol instead with what's called the pregnant alone steal, right? So, everything gets shifted from reproduction mode to survival mode and in that case, your thyroid, you are not wired to continue in that state and the thyroid will power everybody down. If there's all this reallocation happening, if someone's robbing Peter to pay Paul, the thyroid says, "Okay, hang on, we're not getting along together as a team. I'm going to power everybody down." That's hypothyroidism. It's really important that we understand that that exercises as much of a prescription as anything else. That you have to have enough for what your body needs and not too much and not too little and I always say test, don't guess to find that out. I like salivary adrenal and hormones, so I can kind of see and say, "Okay, here's the time of day that you ought to be doing your heaviest exercise," and then I can actually say like, "Here's what you need to be doing to match your cortisol curves so that you don't go into panic zebra mode." Which is never going to allow you to reverse your disease. You'll never be able to reverse it if you're in panic zebra mode.

Ginny: We're so lucky to have so many testing options available to us and that is extreme. I mean that's where you got to start is get a good doctor, get the full thyroid panel, get an accurate and complete diagnosis and do that comprehensive testing so that you're not missing some underlying root causes and just trying to diet and lifestyle and mindset your way out of something. You know? It's all of those pieces.

Dr. Keesha: What does a full thyroid panel look like, what's on that for you?

- Ginny: Mostly what conventional medical doctors do is they only test TSH, thyroid stimulating hormone, whereas a full thyroid panel includes the individual, look at your T4 and your T3, which is the active form of thyroid hormone. Most of us are put on T4, which the body then has to convert into T3. I've found that experts kind of vary on whether or not reverse T3 is...
- Dr. Keesha: We reverse T3 if you're on medication because then we can tell if you're on too much or if it's converting properly, you know?
- Danna: One thing I didn't know, sorry Ginny, and realize was how important the liver was. I think that along my journey, in the very beginning, my liver was congested. That's where you do your conversion, right? Of course, that's what led me down the path, it all makes sense now looking back.
- Dr. Keesha: Let's finish out this panel. We want free T3, T4, TSH, we want to reverse T3, I do advocate for that one if you're on medication. Then we also want your thyroid auto antibodies, that's the only way people are going to be able to tell if this is auto-immune. In that case, it's not a disease of the thyroid. It's a disease of your immune system.
- Danna: Isn't that where people kind of miss the boat or a lot of people, a lot of my friends are like, "Well yeah, I'm hyperthyroid" and I'm thinking to myself over 90% of people. I already know the answer to this and I'm thinking, "Did you get your antibodies tested?" They're like, "I don't know what that is." I'm sure my doctor did it and I'm sure it's fine. That's a hard one.
- Dr. Keesha: Yeah so then, you're absolutely right. Liver so important because that conversion process can't happen if you have fatty liver disease or if your enzymes are bumped. Knowing that is really important. So very good. What else do you guys look at? I really like looking at iodine too and there's a lot of controversy inside that autoimmune thyroid community about whether or not iodine is good or bad and I land on that side of it's not good or bad, it's not right for everybody. But if you're really, really deficient it's going to cause problems and so making sure that you start low, go slow, test properly. I really like to look at iodine and I know that that one can be kind of a hot topic inside of the community. What are you guys' opinion about iodine?
- Danna: Yeah, I am just now at a place where I have a doctor who is testing my iodine. So, I'll get back to you on that one, but I really kind of always felt like iodine and thyroid, it's all connected. So I always thought to myself, "At least see where it's at." You may not do anything different than what you were going to do, but at least see where you're at with your iodine. To me that seems like the smart play.
- Ginny: Yeah. I think part of what we do and part of our value is that we always have an ear to the ground to all the experts and we take all the opinions and we put them in the scale and we kind of weigh them out and we all have to do that as individuals as you know. Of course, in deciding what we don't necessarily make recommendations, we try to share options and information and inspiration with people. Personally, the iodine thing, I've

heard the concerns about iodine aggravating Hashimoto's for example, and my fallback is dietary sources of iodine feel good to me, feel safe to me. I feel good if I make a point to incorporate things foods that have iodine in them, especially since I don't really eat dairy. By eliminating dairy you are eliminating some iodine from your diet. Thinking about things like those seaweed snacks or sea food, things like that to incorporate more of that into my diet. That seems to help just for me.

Dr. Keesha: It's really interesting because this is another instance where Ginny, you had said, "The American way is go big or go home." I'm always talking about the fact that everyone's different and that actually in the case of iodine, it's not go big or go home. In this case, you want to like check in with your body. If you remember the elemental table from science in chemistry, we think about that and what your thyroid actually uses iodine was part of your immune system's capability and bromide, fluoride and chloride are all heavier on the elemental table. So, we're exposed to so much bromide and so much fluoride and so much chloride and it just kicks the iodide receptor off the thyroid, so we don't get enough iodine. Iodine is so necessary for brain function and immune function. All these things, right? Checking into where you are is really good idea and then not getting caught up in, "Well I'm really, really deficient so I'm going to go with the supra therapeutic dose." No. You can't just dump iodine into your body. Your body won't know what to do with it and you can actually have trouble. You want to go a little tiny, tiny bit at a time and do it under the guidance of somebody that knows what they're doing. It's the same as when people hear, "Oh, I should be chelating heavy metals" and they go find a blog post and buy a product and start chelating their own heavy metals without testing, without knowing where they're at, without knowing how their liver is and their adrenals. Stop, don't do that! You can make yourself so much sicker. It's this with everything. We have a lot of wild, wild West out there. If you just do it smartly, intelligently, listening to your body, responding to the data, checking in with how you're feeling, that's important. What are some of these other eight pieces that you guys do with your program that helped people to get centered with their thyroid healing?

Danna: Another one of my favorites is sleep, we call that recharge. I really never knew until several years ago how important sleep was. I never asked the question until it became something that we all heard about on the news and in every magazine on the stand. I really just never paid attention to it. I always knew I wasn't a great sleeper because I would wake up, I could go to sleep great. But I always knew something's off with that, I just didn't realize until we started putting such emphasis on it. So, for us that's recharge and it's very important. It's very, very important and I think we just had Mary Shelman, a thyroid advocate on a Facebook live with us. She's been doing some studies and some work with some experts and she was saying "Maybe the sweet spot that you can at least try to hope for is seven hours." So for me, just trying, that's what I'm doing is seven hours to try to get myself good sleep. When I'm going to bed at night, I want to go there, I want it to be comfortable, I want it to be pretty, I want it to be for me. Other people have their own things, but whatever it is for you, make it that. Buy some good sheets, you use them every day. Don't worry about some of that stuff, whatever it is because this is a really important aspect too. Everything that you do, you have to have

sleep. A recharge is another big one for us. Ginny, probably you'd have a couple more, I know.

Ginny: Yeah, I think we've covered most of them. Repair, is healing the gut. Doing something every day to support your gut health, whatever that may be for where you're at on your journey and what you and your healthcare provider have decided is right for you. Maybe that's a probiotic or other gut nourishing supplements. Maybe it's more of a maintenance plan, like incorporating collagen and bone broth and things like that into your health to really maintain your gut health. Reduce is reducing toxins in your home and body. We're not advocating for these hardcore detoxes, which can be really stressful on our bodies, especially for those of us with autoimmune thyroid conditions. It's more of can you do something every day to just reduce that toxic load, whether it's filtering your water or maybe you're going to switch toothpaste brands, maybe you're going to start using some nontoxic cleaners or switching out toxic beauty and makeup products. There are a lot of toxins that we are exposed to, especially women. Trying to do something every day to reduce that environmental toxin load and also maybe supporting your body's natural detox pathways, the liver and the kidneys. Finally, I think the last R that we haven't covered is relish, which is another fun one. It's about celebrating. Celebrating small victories because this is a long journey. This is scientific, habit change science here, to celebrate your small victories, to honor and acknowledge the progress you've made, no matter how small it is, is going to help you stay on this path towards optimal health. What we want to prevent is what we see way too much, people who are so ill and hopeless and their lives have been so compromised and they haven't found the right help and they have been led astray by misinformation or whatever it is, and they don't believe that they can heal anymore. You can heal, you can feel better. Thyroid issues happen to us.

Ginny: Autoimmune issues happened to us, but there's always choices we can make. Every single thing you put in your mouth, like the way you spend your time and how you prioritize the way you're loving and caring for your body. Those things can make a world of difference and we see it every day. Also, to add onto that, not shaming yourself or blaming yourself when you do fall off the wagon, when you do have the cookie that has sugar in it, and that was part of your setup that you needed to avoid or whatever it is, wherever you're at, not getting so on yourself because that also perpetuates you feeling more depressed and all that stuff. For me, letting go of some of that and just not holding onto it and being like, "So I had that, but look, I also did this." I didn't do this right, but I also did this. I think that with our Thyroid 30 game, that's kind of the underlying theme is celebrate the small victories and forgive yourself.

Ginny: and celebrate each other too. That's the other piece that is part of the relish ritual is you're not just celebrating your own victories, you're celebrating each other's and you're connecting with a support system of people who get it, which is an incredibly powerful healing tool for people.

Dr. Keesha: Tribe is so important. There are a couple of things that drive people to not being able to celebrate themselves, to being self-judgmental and self-recrimination. That's

usually when they've had past trauma. I always say that people that have autoimmune disease have perfectionism, people pleasing and the poison of past pain. If you find that you're unable to forgive yourself, if you love to just put yourself into a judgment timeout, then you might need to do some work around that, about what drove you to use that as your strategy for keeping you in the lines because it doesn't work. It's that strict authoritarian parent voice and you've got a little child in there that needs to be loved and hugged and had compassion for and you've got to learn how to integrate those two, so that you're a good, healthy, grounded adult, then you can make those good choices. We also know that past trauma shrinks your prefrontal cortex, which makes it harder to make the good choices about what's on your fork. Just know that if you do struggle with that, sometimes I'll have someone that comes into my office, flops down in the chair and says, "I'm really good until I'm really bad and I self-sabotage myself all the time. Can you help me?" And I say, "Yes, but it's not going to be in the way that you think," we're going to go back and see where you first developed that pattern and why. We're going to heal that to because that's the root. They embark on that journey of not just a tool for here's how to change your habits with your adult brain because when you're in that space where you're reaching for the cookie, usually you're in your child brain. Then, start punishing yourself for it afterward and you're never going to reverse your disease if you're doing that right. So, I love that you guys brought this up. It's really important.

Ginny: Well, we love the work you do with especially focusing on the emotional piece of the healing our past pain. We recently interviewed you on our Facebook page and I'm telling you there's so many people including Danna and I who are like, that completely changed my whole outlook. I am going to spend this time focusing on healing past pain. Danna and I both talked to our Thyroid 30 teams about that and there were other players who chimed in and said, "I saw that and I'm doing that now too." So, thank you for this important work, for us it sort of fits into that rejuvenate, the self-care piece. Yes, healing ourselves.

Dr. Keesha: Leaky boundaries create leaky gut. Just so you guys know that all of you that are listening right now, I know Danna and Ginny know it, but leaky boundaries create leaky gut and your leaky gut will never heal if you have leaky boundaries [Laughs]. You got to get those energy vampires out of your life and have good boundaries.

Ginny: That's right.

Dr. Keesha: Thank you so much you too. I appreciate your expertise and your mentoring and wisdom and coaching. Being thyroid advocates is such an important role right now in our society. Auto immunities going up rather than down. Never has Thyroid 30 been more needed than it is now, so thank you so much.

Danna: Thank you. We're happy to be here.

Ginny: Thanks for having us. It's great to be on this shared mission together.

Dr. Keesha: Yeah. All right, everybody, we have a free gift from Ginny and Danna that we'll have as a link under here, so that you can follow up on their work and see how they can be of assistance in your journey. Until next time.

Danna: Bye guys.