

# WHAT REALLY TRIGGERS AUTOIMMUNITY? IT'S MORE THAN JUST "BAD LUCK"

05/02/2025

ASK DR. HIBA

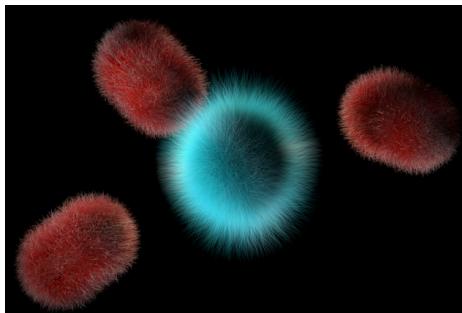
NO. 006

Autoimmunity often feels like a mystery. For some, it begins with years of vague, frustrating symptoms—fatigue, joint pain, brain fog, digestive issues—long before any diagnosis is ever made. For others, it shows up seemingly overnight, with a name they've never heard and medications they didn't expect to need.

But here's what I wish more people knew: autoimmune conditions don't just appear out of nowhere. They don't mean your body is "broken." And they certainly aren't just a matter of bad luck.

As a physician, I've sat across from countless patients who've asked, "Why is my immune system attacking me?" That question matters. And while the answers can be complex, they're far more hopeful than most people realize.

Let's explore what's really behind autoimmunity—and why understanding the why is the first step toward long-term healing.



## Autoimmunity Isn't Random—It's a Response

Autoimmune disease occurs when the immune system—your body's built-in defense system—mistakenly targets your own tissues. It's not doing this out of nowhere. It's responding to signals. It's acting as if it's under attack, even when the true threat is long gone—or never truly harmful in the first place.

So instead of asking, "How do we suppress the immune system?" we should be asking, "Why is it reacting this way?"

To answer that, we need to move beyond the diagnosis itself and start looking at the landscape the immune system lives in—your body's environment, past experiences, and current exposures.

## Genes Set the Stage. The Environment Directs the Play.

Yes, autoimmune conditions can run in families. Certain genes may raise your risk. But carrying those genes does not mean you'll develop the disease. In fact, many people with genetic susceptibility never do.

That's because genetics are only one part of the story.

The other part? The triggers. Environmental stressors and exposures are what often "flip the switch." These can include:

- **Chronic infections** (like Epstein-Barr, Lyme disease, or unresolved gut pathogens)
- **Environmental toxins** (such as mold, heavy metals, or pesticides)
- **Food sensitivities** (gluten, dairy, soy, nightshades—for some people, not everyone)
- **Chronic stress or trauma**
- **Gut health imbalances**, especially increased intestinal permeability (or "leaky gut")

Think of it like this: genetics load the gun, but environment pulls the trigger. And unlike your genes, your environment is something you can influence.

## Molecular Mimicry: When the Immune System Gets the Wrong Message

One of the ways environmental triggers can confuse the immune system is through a process called molecular mimicry. This happens when a foreign substance—like a virus or food protein—resembles the structure of your body's own tissue.

So when your immune system goes to attack the invader, it ends up attacking you, too.

A well-known example is gluten and thyroid tissue. In people with Hashimoto's thyroiditis, the immune system may mistake thyroid cells for gluten fragments and launch an attack on both. This is one reason gluten can be a trigger for some—even if they don't have digestive issues.

This doesn't mean everyone with an autoimmune condition needs to eliminate gluten. But it does mean we need to get curious about which specific exposures are triggering your immune system.

## When "We Don't Know the Cause" Just Isn't Good Enough Anymore

If you've been told, "We don't know what causes autoimmune disease," you're not alone. That's a common phrase in conventional care—and unfortunately, it's often where the conversation ends.

But for those living in the reality of daily symptoms, declining function, and unanswered questions, that explanation just isn't enough anymore.

We may not always be able to identify a single cause, but we do understand that autoimmune conditions emerge from a complex interplay between genetics, immune dysfunction, and environment. And we now have better tools to investigate those connections than ever before.

Root-cause medicine doesn't stop at "we don't know." It digs deeper. It asks better questions. It considers your whole story—and your potential to heal.



## There Is Something You Can Do

Here's the most important part: while you can't change your genetic blueprint, you can change the way your immune system is being influenced.

By identifying and reducing the triggers—whether they're infections, toxins, foods, or stressors—we can help calm the immune response. In many cases, we can slow or even reverse the progression of autoimmune disease. And sometimes, we can catch it before it fully develops.

This isn't about quick fixes or one-size-fits-all protocols. It's about personalized, compassionate care—and a deep belief that your body wants to heal when given the right support.

## You're Not Broken. And You're Not Powerless.

Autoimmunity isn't your body turning against you. It's your body trying to protect you—just with the wrong information.

When we understand that, everything shifts. We stop blaming the body and start listening to it. We stop fearing the diagnosis and start getting curious about what led us there.

You are not broken. You are not unlucky. And you are not alone.

With the right lens and the right support, healing becomes possible—not just symptom control, but true transformation.

**To Your Health,  
Hiba Georges, MD**