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** * * Intro Music * * **

Welcome to Supplementing Health, a podcast presented by Advanced Orthomolecular Research. We are all about applying evidenced-based and effective dietary lifestyle and natural health product strategies for your optimal health. In each episode, we will feature very engaging clinicians and experts from the world of functional and naturopathic medicine to help achieve our mission to empower people to lead their best lives naturally.

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[1:08] *Cassy*: Hi, everyone, and welcome back to Supplementing Health. I'm your host, Cassy Price, and today I'm joined by Pam Purnell. Pam is a health advocate who fell in love with the holistic approach to medicine due to her personal challenges. Welcome, Pam, and thanks for joining us today.

[1:22] *Pam Purnell*: Thanks for having me on the show, Cassy.

[1:25] *Cassy*: Do you want to talk about your journey into functional medicine? I know you had a long and winding path, and I think your story would be really interesting to our listeners.

[1:37] *Pam Purnell*: Yeah. I'm happy to share my story, and I'm very honored that you asked me to do so because I think my story is reflective of a lot of people who are out there struggling. If I can share some of the symptoms that I've had in my experiences with conventional medicine and help people find the answers, that's really what I'm passionate about. Why don't we start with where my journey started, which was in my teens? Does that sound good?

[2:12] *Cassy*: Yeah. That's perfect.

[2:13] *Pam Purnell*: Wonderful. As a teen, I was athletic, training five nights a week, three hours a day, teaching martial arts. I really was the Energizer Bunny. After I had mono, things were never the same. During that time, I recovered sometime, but mono always hit me pretty hard. I went back to training – A-type person, so I started training much too early, as a lot of people tend to. In doing so, my body struggled to keep up. I just never was the same after this.

[2:51] What I struggled with was fatigue, lack of endurance. I was at a young age, getting a lot of yeast infections and UTIs. This was when I was 16, 17, 18, so I didn't pay that much attention to

it. When I got to University, and I started to look around and realized, I was the only one who would leave class because I was so exhausted to go nap in the hallway. I realized something probably wasn't right with myself.

[3:26] So, it was at that point where typically people start, I went to my conventional doctor. He ran a ton of bloodwork, and I gave him credit. He ran everything that he could, and everything came back other than my white blood cell count was a little low. He said, "I think you're fine." I went, "Oh, okay. Well, maybe this is just how I am."

[3:53] Throughout my 20s, I worked hard, and I played hard. I definitely continued to get more and more symptoms. Again, it was fatigue. Brain fog was really bad in University, where I was serving at the time. So, not sleeping a lot in addition to a full-course load. While doing this, I remember being at the restaurant, and I remember people would ask me questions about the menu. There would be some days where I would just totally go blank. I thought, "Gosh, I'm really tired. I need a nap."

[4:29] Again, it didn't occur to me, what's really happening with your brain? I went back to my doctor a couple more times. He ran more bloodwork, and finally, he said to me, "You know, I think the exhaustion is happening because you're depressed." Funny enough, at this point, I started working in pharmaceutical sales, and I was selling anti-depressants.

[4:53] So, I had quite a bit of experience with understanding the anti-depressant world. There was a questionnaire that I would give doctors. It was called the PHQ-9. On this questionnaire, you would write the symptoms. So, I had done that, and I said, "Funny enough, I brought you a PHQ-9, and that's not the issue".

[5:15] He and I had a little chuckle, and he said, "Well, you know, I just don't think there's anything I can help you with". At that point, I started venturing into the world of holistic medicine. At this point, I was 25. I wasn't really a believer, but I was struggling. On girl's trips, I was always the one that was exhausted in the morning, living at Starbucks, going to Starbucks a couple of times a day, and still struggling with brain fog. But, aside from that, I could keep up.

[5:46] I just lived life with caffeine, and said, "This is fine". I could still work out. I could still maintain my daily activities minus some brain fog and chronic fatigue like I was saying. So, jumping into the holistic world, I was told I had gut problems, and it was probably Celiac. I went gluten and dairy-free. That definitely helped, and I started doing quite a few liver cleanses. Again, that helped boost my energy, but it never got to the root cause.

[6:24] This was a great band-aid tool for a lot of years. When I got into my 30s is when things started to change. As it does for many people who are struggling with chronic issues. At this point, I had a different family doctor who didn't have my history. I started seeing her and explaining everything that I had done. She started testing me for all kinds of autoimmune diseases.

[6:56] Eventually, she sent me to a rheumatologist. Before I went to the rheumatologist, I went to a GI specialist. I had to fight to get to the GI specialist, and I was grateful that she let me eventually go. The test came back fine. So, I was frustrated, and she sent me to the rheumatologist.

[7:22] Again, like so many other people who struggle with seeing specialists, what happened was, I sat down. The doctor did not even look at me; read his list of the questions, and without looking at me said, "You have fibromyalgia." At this point, I had done a ton of research, and I knew a lot about autoimmune diseases. I had looked into functional medicine.

[7:53] I started questioning him and saying, "You know, Doc. You didn't run any extra bloodwork; you didn't test any extra markers; how can you make the diagnosis even without checking me?" Basically, he said, "I'm a specialist. I know, and you don't seem like you are willing to take drugs. So, unfortunately, this is just going to be the rest of your life.

[8:19] *Cassy*: That must have been pretty frustrating.

[8:22] *Pam Purnell*: Oh! It was so frustrating. In fact, I went into the parking lot and was sitting in my car crying. That wasn't the first time because, at this point, I was so exhausted all the time that getting out of bed was difficult, and getting through my workday was difficult. Thankfully, I didn't have kids. I feel for anyone that has kids and is living in this scenario. It was at that point that I started to make some real changes.

[8:53] Concurrently, I knew that I needed to change jobs. So, I had sought out a functional medicine lab, which is Rocky Mountain Analytical, which some of your listeners may know. At this point, I had been working at the lab for a couple of years. Aside from seeing a specialist, I was working with a naturopath, who was supporting me with IV therapy. That was really what was keeping me going.

[9:21] I was super grateful to see the functional world and learn about it at the same time. So, I felt very empowered as an individual. I had taken a lot of these functional tests into the rheumatologist. He just basically scoffed at them and wouldn't even look at them, and that, to me, was infuriating.

[9:42] It was shortly thereafter that I decided that I needed to make real changes. Thankfully, with my job, I've gotten to meet all the functional doctors across the prairies and some into BC. There were a few where I went, and "You know. I really resonate with these docs, and I feel like they have an understanding of symptoms that a lot of clinicians don't have, not because they aren't caring, great individuals. It's just not something they're taught in med school.

[10:23] So, I approached one of the docs, and he said, "I think you would be a good fit for my clinic". When I started working with him – what he does is, he starts out with two EEG scans,

which looks at your brain to tell you what's going on with your body. This is helpful in understanding which functional test to do about it and just guessing because, as a patient, that can also be frustrating when you spend money on functional tests, and it might not be the best test for you.

[11:00] In doing the test, what it showed is I had two things: 1) Chronic Inflammatory Response Syndrome, which can happen in response to mold and micro toxins. 2) After we started treating the mold, I did a test for Lyme. I tested positive for the Lyme bacteria, but also, I had five viruses running through my body at a very high level, one of which was Epstein Barr.

[11:30] So, if we circle back to the beginning of the story when this all started with mono, that was either the trigger, which at some point allowed the Lyme bacteria in or I already had it, and that was what tipped the scale in my body at that point, and it was just years of declining from that point.

[11:52] *Cassy*: It's crazy to think that something you completely forget about from your childhood can actually be affecting you so strongly as a young adult. Like you said, your story is so indicative of numerous people that I now that I've talked to through the years where you know something's not quite right, but it's not so wrong that you're considered diseased, ill, or sick enough to get a diagnosis. Then, unfortunately, a lot of the time, it does lead to these misdiagnoses that you, yourself, fought against.

[12:33] *Pam Purnell*: Yeah. That was honestly the most frustrating part of my story, was, knowing that there was something wrong, but not having someone be able to understand it. It made me feel as though I was crazy. When I was declining, I thought, "Am I going to go on disability? Is this going to be the rest of my life?" it really did freak me out, and I think to myself, "I am so lucky because I work in functional medicine, and I know all this information, and I know all of these doctors. What about the average person who doesn't have access to this?"

[13:12] *Cassy*: Yeah, absolutely, and especially because here in Canada, conventional is covered for us, but alternative or functional medicine often has additional cost to it. Many people just don't have that opportunity financially to continue to chase these possibilities to have to get a quicker answer just because the pocketbook doesn't allow for years of trial and error.

[13:40] *Pam Purnell*: Exactly. So, because of what you just said, after my experience, I went, "I need to be an advocate for other people." I was able to advocate for myself, and knowing what I know about all of the doctors' specialties, I need to become a health concierge, for lack of a better word and connect those struggling with the right practitioners, so they don't have to spend years guessing and spending money unnecessarily.

[14:13] This way, they can be connected to the right person, and whatever investment they had to make, they can at least put it toward finding the diagnoses early on. That's actually been to me, one of the silver linings that's come out of my story is there have been numerous people

who get referred to me by family and friends and say, “Can you help this person?” That’s how I started a side coaching and consulting business called Healing Tree Alchemy, to a) point people in the right direction, but b) help them understand what the road ahead of them is going to bring.

[14:54] If your doctor is saying to you, “I need to do these tests, and you need to spend this money, and you haven’t had anyone pre-empt you of this, it can be a sticker shock for one, but also because the doctor is placed in the position where they need the information, and they’re saying, “We need this,” and they have to sell it to you. It’s just not part of our Canadian mentality, so I help people get their heads wrapped around this concept before seeing the doctor.

[15:21] *Cassy*: That’s fantastic. For your personal journey, are you still on your healing journey because I know you had mentioned that there were numerous viruses that came out of your healing process? Would you consider yourself healed up, or do you consider it a maintenance thing now?

[15:40] *Pam Purnell*: I wouldn’t say I’m at maintenance. I’m still on the treatment plan. If you’ve ever heard of Dr. Schumacher – have you heard of Dr. Schumacher out of the U.S.?

[15:52] *Cassy*: Yes.

[15:52] *Pam Purnell*: Dr. Ritchie Schumacher was a doc in the Midwest, and he was seeing all of these patients that were struggling with random symptoms. He realized they were eating fish out of a local lake that was poisoned. So, all these people had Chronic Inflammatory Response Syndrome. He developed this protocol, and thankfully, I’m at the point now where I’ve almost done it. My energy is much better than it was. I’m still not able to have really strong workouts, but I’m grateful that I can even have the energy to make it through my day.

[16:32] What I’m still struggling with is brain fog. The last piece of the Schumacher protocol is what’s called VIP spray, vasoactive intestinal polypeptide. That’s a spray that you inhale. It’s able to migrate to the brain, and it helps the brain neurons reconnect again because after years and years of having all these viral toxins floating through the body, it actually does impact the physicality of the brain, so this helps repair the damage.

[17:07] I just need to be on binders to remove the toxins a little while longer. My hope is once I take this spray, my memory and cognition will be back. Right now, I find that I struggle with words. For example, I went to the frig the other day because I was going to make an endive salad, and I literally stared at this vegetable for probably five minutes going, “What is this sucker called?” I’ll be so happy when that is done. But I have to say, even though I still have a way to go, I’m so grateful to have found the answers and be at least as far ahead as I am.

[17:56] *Cassy*: I think it’s interesting, too, because a lot of people think those moments of brain fog are normal. We live in such a fast-paced world that we except fatigue as a common-place

thing. We forget things like where we put our keys or put them in the wrong place. I know the other day I put mine in the fridge when I went to grab something. I set them down and forgot them there.

[18:22] We just go, “Oh, well. It happens.” But that’s not necessarily normal. If it’s happening one-off here and there, that’s one thing, but when it starts to become a commonplace occurrence, that’s when it’s something that should be looked at. Right?

[18:38] *Pam Purnell*: Exactly. Just because it’s become commonplace in your own life doesn’t mean it’s normal in the health spectrum. Like you say, people tend to go, “Oh, well, I’m sure I’m fine.” The early warning signs, whether it’s a physical sign, a cognitive sign, we tend to leave. One thing I’ve become so passionate about is really nipping them in the bud before they get to the point where I was at. I think when I was a teen if I could have treated the viral symptoms properly, then I wouldn’t have had 25 years of chronic symptoms and chronic fatigue.

[19:20] *Cassy*: Yeah, absolutely. For our listeners, if you want to learn a bit more about EBV, Epstein Barr Virus, and how that can be a triggering factor for your immune system, go back and listen to Episode 10 with Dr. Courtney Ranieri. She talks about how that can affect your body, how it can affect your thyroid and your immune system along with some of the other viral and autoimmune connections that can happen. So if you want to dig deeper into this topic, it’s a great listen for understanding more of what Pam here has gone through and how that ties back to the original mono episode that you had as a teen.

[20:03] *Pam Purnell*: Yeah, and on that note that for anyone with thyroid issues, I’m sure that podcast you guys deep-dived into it, but thyroid issues are almost always connected to Epstein Barr. Again, this is where I implore people listening, dig deeper and get the answers and get to the root of the problem rather than, unfortunately, being told like, “There’s nothing that you can do.”

[20:29] We are meant to heal, and that really is a message that is, unfortunately, not put out there in our society: prevention, healing. It’s starting to get an impact, but unfortunately with the pharmaceutical giants out there, at the end of the day, it’s their job to make money. And look, I come from the pharmaceutical world, so I see the good that can happen, but I also see the fact that when you have a drug tied to profits and shareholder accountability, that’s the business model of sick care, not health care.

[21:09] *Cassy*: Yeah, absolutely. Do you have any advice for listeners who maybe are where you used to be and are trying to start their battle of advocating for themselves? Do you have specific things they should be asking or steps they should be taking to gain progress in their journey?

[21:26] *Pam Purnell*: Yeah. The first thing is if you work with a medical doctor who has the belief that he or she knows best – if they’re not willing to consult with you, listen to your opinion, see

research that's you've brought in, it's time to find a new medical doctor. I have ones that have been great and ones that haven't. The ones that have been great who have fought for me, even though they couldn't bring me the answers, at least I knew they were doing everything in their power.

[22:01] Secondly, do your research. I know it can be overwhelming, but the more you educate yourself, the better you can advocate for yourself. And, three, when you start to dig for answers, know that lab tests are vital. One of the mistakes I made in my journey was assuming that we could fix me with supplements or different holistic practitioners. Hey, they were important in sustaining me, but I think of all the time and money I spent on guessing.

[22:39] I know this is common with patients. You don't want to layout the initial investment, but in the end, I ended up spending way more than if I had just done the test. There was one doctor along the way who said to me, "Well, I don't know. Maybe it's Lyme. What do you think?" Because she was not certain, I definitely wasn't going to spend the \$2,500 just to test.

[23:07] That's the other thing I would say to any clinician listening: you are the expert. If you know based on your clinical understanding or you just have that intuitive hunch, talk to your patients about it with confidence because if you're not confident, the patient is not going to be confident.

[23:26] *Cassy*: That's absolutely true, for sure. This has been awesome, and I'm so glad to hear that you're finally on that last stretch of your healing journey. It would be great to get updates from you once you've done your last step in the protocol and see how that's affected your brain fog and brought you to a place of maintenance finally. If any listeners want to get ahold of you directly, how can they do that?

[23:55] *Pam Purnell*: I have a website and an Instagram for my consulting business, which is Health Tree Alchemy. I don't have any services on the website right now. When I first started, the intent was to help people understand what the lab tests are before they spend the money. They can reach me through that, or they can email me at pam@healingtreealchemy.com. I'm happy to discuss where they're at, if they're a good fit to work with me, and if there's any way that I can help them, in general.

[24:33] I also want to make two recommendations. Two of the biohackers that I really admire are Ben Greenfield and Dave Asprey. They really do understand a lot of innovative treatments. They understand functional medicine. Listen to their podcast. Some of it might be over some of your listeners' heads in the beginning, but they really do break down a lot of, not just treatments, but ways to optimize our health.

[25:07] Download some episodes. They talk about Red Light Therapy; they talk about peptides, which I did. Peptides are amino acids. They talk about how WIFI impacts us, how our water

impacts us. They really look at health from a 360 view with their latest and greatest information, and they make it accessible, so that's a really great place for people to start.

[25:33] Cassy: Fantastic. Thank you. It's been a pleasure having you on the show, and I really appreciate you taking the time to come and share your story with our listeners.

** * * Outro Music * * **

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[End of episode 26:15]