

Bio

Dr. Terry L. Wahls is professor of Medicine at the University of Iowa where she teaches primary care and conducts clinical trials. She also has secondary progressive multiple sclerosis and in 2003 became dependent upon a tilt-recline wheelchair. She began studying the medical literature night after night. In the fall of 2007, based upon her review of the scientific literature, she created a program of intensive nutrition, progressive exercise and electrical stimulation of muscles. Within one year she was walking again throughout the hospital and pedaled an 18 mile bicycle tour. She is now conducting a clinical trial testing her interventions in others with secondary progressive MS and has written a book, Minding My Mitochondria, detailing her interventions and includes over 100 recipes to help people get started on this new way of eating.

Questions –

When were you diagnosed with MS and what were your symptoms?

I was diagnosed in 2000, but in retrospect I was having symptoms as early as 1982, with episodes of face pain and problems with my vision. In 2000 I began stumbling and had a foot drop, which is what led to the diagnosis.

Did you take any disease modifying drugs?

Yes I did, I took Copaxone. It was a daily injection and had fewer side effects than the interferons. The goal was to eliminate the acute worsening or ‘relapses’ which it did. I had only one episode of weakness of the right arm. But I continued to slowly get weaker, with more difficulty walking and even sitting in an ordinary chair.

What was your state of health then in 2007?

I could no longer sit in a standard chair. I needed to fully recline in a zero gravity chair. I used the tilt recline wheelchair to get around the hospital / clinic. I could walk short distances with two canes. I had total fatigue disability – and I was losing things. I had lost my car keys, my cell phone and my daily planners.

How did you come up with your protocol?

When I was first diagnosed with MS I read the medical literature voraciously, but it was very grim. Half of the people are diagnosed are unable to work after ten years because of fatigue and a third have some level of gait disability. I quit reading because it was too upsetting, But when I got the wheelchair I knew how bad it was going to be. Eventually I would likely be unable to sit for any period of time and would be confined to bed. That was when I went back to reading the literature, using the internet PubMed, night after night. It was slow going, as I had to look up the words, relearn a lot of basic science which I

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had forgotten (or had not yet been discovered in 1982). That meant relearning biochemistry, cellular physiology, immunology, neuroimmunology.

IN your book you talk a lot about mitochondria, can you tell us what mitochondria are?

Mitochondria are the fuel processing stations for our cells. We have to convert the energy in the food we eat to a form that our cells can use to conduct the biology of life. The reason you are not a bacteria living in your neighbor's bowels is that you have mitochondria to help you manage and generate the energy necessary for life. That allows us to be multicellular – that is have more than one cell, and in our case, a trillion cells.

How to mitochondria make such a difference to people with MS?

Actually mitochondria are critical for anyone with a brain problem of any type, and to anyone with a chronic disease like diabetes, heart disease, obesity even. But first – I read about the mouse models for diseases in which brains shrink – things like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Huntington's and Lou Gehrig's disease. I saw that mitochondria dysfunction and early death was a common pathway in all those things. That made me think that mitochondria were a big issue for MS, and probably a big issue for all chronic diseases. That was why I began researching how to help my mitochondria be healthier

Is there a list of pills to take then?

The food you eat or do not eat is much more important actually. The standard American Diet is so poor that three fourths of Americans have diets that do not meet the recommended daily allowance for vitamins, minerals and or essential fats that are necessary for optimal brain health. The Wahls Diet on the other hand exceeds the recommended daily allowance vitamins, minerals and essential fats. I think the food is the most critical, although for some people, targeted vitamin and supplement use may be helpful. More details in my book.

How many people have MS in the country?

About 400, 000.

Can you review what MS is and what causes it?

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The current thinking is that people have some type of infection which starts that disease during childhood. The myelin, the fatty insulation around the wiring between nerve cells, is damaged. The transmission lines are gradually cut, leading to problems with sensation – such as visual problems, balance problems and pain, or problems with muscles, leading to weakness.

Are there types of MS?

There is relapsing remitting – of which 80% of people who are diagnosed have relapsing – remitting. This is where you have an acute worsening – or relapse which will gradually improve over time or remit. Ten percent will have very mild disease and another 10% will have primary progressive MS in which there are no acute worsening episodes. The vast majority of relapsing – remitting MS patients will convert to secondary progressive MS where symptoms steadily worsen. The standard treatments focus on immune suppression of some type. At present the traditional thinking is that once function is lost with secondary progressive MS, it never comes back.

Can you tell us about your clinical trial?

We are using the same interventions which I used in the first year of my recovery. We have 8 people in the study who have 3 months or more of the intervention. While not everyone is improving we are seeing improvements. One lady when from walking short distances with her cane to being able to take 3 to 4 mile walks with her dog before going to work.

We are sending abstracts of our preliminary findings to scientific meetings and anticipate making several presentations in the fall.

When will your study be concluded?

It January 2014 we anticipate completing the study.

Briefly, what is the Wahls Diet?

Eating non starchy vegetables, fruit, meat, no dairy, no gluten and no soy. Basically it is a structured Paleolithic Diet – eating what our ancestors could have eaten 20,000 years ago.

Would the Wahls Diet likely help people with other kinds of brain problems or health issues.

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First I have to remind everyone that the FDA has evaluated any my statements in my book, on my web site or made by me. This is education, and I do recommend that you speak with your personal physician to have these ideas tailored specifically to you and your health issues.

Genetic account for 5 to 30% of the risk of most autoimmune problems, mental health problems, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure and even cancer. The balance is the environmental factors. My perspective then is to teach people how to shift as many environmental factors to health as they can. So I teach people how to eat to maximize the vitamin, mineral and essential fat intake per calorie, how to reduce the toxin exposure, how to increase their exercise and reduce the stress levels. Doing all of those things, generally results in more energy, clearer thinking, weight drifting back to the ideal, better blood pressure, better blood sugar and better moods. And it does not take long for people to notice the difference.

How long does it take for someone to notice the difference?

Usually people can begin to notice changes in as little as two weeks of eating the Wahls Diet

How many people have autoimmune problems in the US?

24 million have an autoimmune diagnosis but another 50 million do not feel well and have autoantibodies but do not yet have enough antibodies to make a diagnosis. So 75 million have autoimmune problems. And more and more children are being diagnosed with an autoimmune problem as children.

Would the Wahls Diet be helpful for those with other types of autoimmune problems?

Yes – that is the case. It would probably also be helpful for those who are trying to lose weight, control their blood sugar, their cholesterol and are worried about heart disease or stroke risk. It would also likely be helpful for those with mental health or neurological problems.

Finally this is not intended to be medical advice.

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