

Podcast Episode #028

## Surprisingly simple strategies to stop memory loss

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**Pamela:** We are back again speaking with Dr. Smith who had so much great information for us about women's hormones. We just had to have her back because one of the things that she was mentioning in that last interview was about memory and how our hormones impact memory. I thought that was so important that we really needed to just have one complete episode where we talked about the things that you can do to improve your memory. Welcome back Dr. Smith!

**Dr. Smith:** Thank you so much! It's great to be back!

**Pamela:** Thank you! You wrote a really great book that I spent a lot of time perusing called *What You Must Know About Memory Loss*. I have to say, I have noticed I have been forgetting things and I'm not able to find words. I just thought, "Hey, I'm fifty now so I just have to accept this." But what your book is telling me is, no, things like that are able to be turned around reversed. So maybe you can talk to us a little bit more about that.

**Dr. Smith:** My book is called *What You Must Know About Memory Loss and How You Can Stop It*. And you're right: there are so many things that we can do. The first thing that's really important to know is that you're not stuck with your genetic history. In other words, let's say that your mother had Alzheimer's disease, and let's say your dad had diabetes, and you inherited a gene for one or both of those diseases. Do you have to get them? No. You do not have to turn on the gene, you can literally put your body in a better environment with less stress, eating right, etc.

**Pamela:** I love that. You know I love that statement 'turn on a gene', because we do, we think that our genetic makeup is basically our destiny, but the idea that genes can be turned on and off by the things that we do in our lives is really different. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

**Dr. Smith:** Absolutely. Let me give you part of my own personal genetic history. I have breast cancer on both sides of my family, but do I really worry about getting breast cancer? Honestly, I don't. We know that breast cancer is related to several things:



hormones that are not balanced, stress, and as with all cancers, sugar feeds cancer. So not eating a lot of sugar or just saving it for wonderful, fun occasions is very helpful. Almost all of us get cancer in our lifetimes probably seven or eight times, but if we put our body in a better environment, including less stress, eating a little better etc., then we kill off those cancer cells. Again, I'm not really worried about getting breast cancer, even though I have it on both sides of my family. Putting the body in a better environment is a great idea.

**Pamela:** I find it interesting this idea that we get cancer seven or eight times, which really is just a matter of the cells as you so clearly pointed out, but that are bodies actually can kill them off if we are putting our bodies in the environment that allows that to happen.

**Dr. Smith:** Absolutely. Seventy percent of the immune system comes from the gut, the gastrointestinal tract, so if someone has reflux, they have GERD, IBS, constipation, diarrhea. The gut's not healthy. The good news is we can go back and fix that so that the immune system is better.

**Pamela:** Okay. Say more about the gut, because the gut seems to be this new conversation that we've been having in the media -- about the impact of the gut on things like our immune system and our memory. So maybe you can dive a little bit more into that

**Dr. Smith:** Definitely. It's important that the gut has the right kind of bacteria. There is so much bacteria in the gut, but it has to be the right kind. The gut even normally has a little bit of yeast. Too much is bad, and if the gut doesn't work right you can get something called "leaky gut syndrome" where the body can leak out toxins, leak back into your system, even your medications. So we can do a gut health test, we can find the cause of the problem, we can remove the bad things, repair, reinoculate. We can go back and do what we call the "four-hour program" and fix how the gut works in most people.

**Pamela:** Okay. First of all, how do we test the gut? And then secondly, maybe you can tell us a little bit more about this four-hour program?

**Dr. Smith:** Well, you can go back and test the gut by doing a gut health test. It's usually a stool test, and I love doing these stool tests because it gives me a lot of information for the patient and helps identify what the problem may be. For example, let's say that they have bad bacteria. We would need to remove the bad bacteria and help the body heal. A lot of times removing bad bacteria does require, believe or not, giving an antibiotic. Sometimes the patient has too much yeast, and we either have to give herbal therapies to decrease yeast or we have to give a prescription for a couple of months to fix the gastrointestinal tract and add good bacteria.

Removing is the first thing that we do. We do, many times, have to go back and repair. When we repair, what we do is give nutrients. There's a lot of nutrients that help the gut, like vitamins A, C, E, D, zinc, selenium, and many other things. If the person has things like belching or heartburn, cramps, or spasms, then probably something else is going on.



Maybe the patient has decreased digestive enzymes. Maybe they don't have enough acid. Maybe they have food allergies. But we can go and remove and then we can replace, repair, and reinoculate meaning giving good bacteria, and fix the issue in almost everybody.

**Pamela:** Wow, that's exciting! This sounds like an ongoing program of repairing, so this is not just a one-time thing where you go to your doctor and say, "Hey get this done." It seems like you really need to have a strong relationship, so that might be the fifth 'R', in order to get that done. How can we get that done with our doctors?

**Dr. Smith:** That's very good. Certainly seeing a metabolic specialist, who's someone who does personalized medicine, is a great way to begin. Someone who fellowshipped, advanced fellowshipped, trained, or even has a Master's degree in metabolic medicine, will be a specialist in this area. Although gut health is often done very well by naturopaths, chiropractors, and some gastroenterologists. Traditionally in gastroenterology, this is very much about scoping the patient, which is really important. We want to make sure you don't have cancer or another problem, so that needs to be done, but then going back and repairing is helpful after the scoping is done.

**Pamela:** Okay. There are lots of different resources that we can use to look for a doctor that can help us with this particular piece. Let's circle back for a moment because we're talking about the impact of all of this on our memory. It's really kind of how the body is a symphony, as you've said earlier. Talk to me also about other things that impact our memory and how we can turn around the things that we think are just a part of aging?

**Dr. Smith:** Certainly. The gut is just one part. If you have too much yeast, then memory's not as sharp, but also if you have too much stress. A small amount of stress is very important because a little bit kind of tweaks that memory and focus and keeps it sharp. But if it's distress, then memory and focus go down. Also the thyroid. The thyroid produces the hormone in the body that regulates everything including whether we make amino acids, whether we have high cholesterol, whether we break down proteins. But the thyroid has to be optimally functioning for very good memory and focus no matter how old the person is, even at seventeen, forty-seven, fifty-seven, or eighty. The thyroid has to be perfect to have really good focus and memory.

**Pamela:** Okay. You're talking about stress, which is cortisol, which is what we talked about in our last episode. And now you're talking about the thyroid and gut, of course. These are some of the things that impact our memory. How do we create a program to shift this for ourselves? Do you we go to our doctor and we say, "Look, I need to have my cortisol levels checked, and my thyroid checked, and my gut checked." What do we do?

**Dr. Smith:** Well, usually if you see a metabolic medicine specialist, which is a specialty field, they will start with what we call "chief complaint." So if you come in and you say, "Hi, I think my memory is just not quite as good as it used to be. It's great, but maybe I have word retrieval problems." We would go back and look at the cause of the problem



and not just treat symptoms. Perhaps the cause is that the thyroid is not working well. Perhaps the cause is you don't have enough vitamin D. We would measure vitamin D and fix that. The cause could be allergies. For people who have allergies, that can be a problem for memory loss. We could have people who have toxins. We know that lead and mercury can be measured, and these toxins can be taken out of the body. Lead and mercury at too high levels can compromise memory. There's a lot of things that effect cognition including male and female hormones.

**Pamela:** Wow, there's are so many pieces! One thing I do want to pull out though is this whole vitamin D piece, because that seems to be a new conversation as well. In fact, I had another doctor say to me, "You know, most people need to get their vitamin D levels checked." He said, "You'd be surprised just adjusting that, the impact that you'll feel in your body." Interestingly enough, I had blood work done because I had just gone to a different doctor and, sure enough, my vitamin D levels were rock bottom. Talk to us about vitamin D and that impact.

**Dr. Smith:** Vitamin D for most people, and there are a few exceptions, but for most people the optimal level is fifty-five to eighty, and what happens if you don't have enough vitamin D? It's not only memory. Not enough vitamin D increases risk for breast cancer, colon cancer, prostate cancer, Parkinson's, MS, high blood pressure, diabetes, fibromyalgia, polycystic ovarian disease ... I think you get the point.

**Pamela:** Yeah.

**Dr. Smith:** I could go on and on.

**Pamela:** Wow. Just from vitamin D!

**Dr. Smith:** Just from vitamin D. Because it's actually a prohormone, it's really not a vitamin.

**Pamela:** What is a prohormone? What does that mean? I read about that in the book and I thought, "Wow, we think of it as just a vitamin like part of our daily multivitamins."

**Dr. Smith:** It's actually a regulator of what happens with the genes. it's a neuroregulator, meaning what happens with neurons. It modulates what happens in the body, and so instead of being a vitamin and actually having vitamin functions, hormones and prohormones are made in one part of the body but they work in other parts of the body.

**Pamela:** Okay, so what I'm hearing you say is that vitamin D is basically something that's essential to help us regulate our hormones, so that if we're low in vitamin D, it basically will throw the rest of our hormones out of balance. We need that piece before we can even bring the rest of the hormones into that sort of symphony that you talk about.

**Dr. Smith:** It is really a hormonal symphony and vitamin D is one of the big hormones. It impacts insulin, and insulin is the hormone in the body that regulates blood sugar, and if



blood sugar's not perfect, it's one of the very big things that we're discovering affects memory. There's type 1 diabetes, and that's when people don't make insulin. And then there's type 2 diabetes, which is what ninety-five percent of diabetics in the United States. That's where they make insulin but it doesn't work effectively. But now there's type 3 diabetes, and you know what that is?

**Pamela:** What? I've never even heard of that!

**Dr. Smith:** Type 3 diabetes is Alzheimer's disease.

**Pamela:** Really?

**Dr. Smith:** It is. So it's important to regulate that hormone insulin and make sure blood sugar is perfect so people don't have cognitive decline.

**Pamela:** Wow, that is huge! The idea that regulating our hormones and our balance can stop or mitigate that cognitive decline is huge because we think that we just have to accept it. If you were to give us a general prescription, not the typical doctor written prescription, but a prescription for a course of action that we could take at any age that we could just put into place, what would you say? What actions should we be taking to turn these things around?

**Dr. Smith:** To maintain memory and focus at any age, number one exercise. It is really key. I don't know about everybody out there, but I personally hate exercise. I really don't like it. A lot of people get a high from it, but I don't. I was very lucky that I got to meet Jack LaLanne before he passed away, so I said, "Jack, how do I learn to like exercise?" I was so surprised at his response. He told me he didn't like it either!

**Pamela:** Really?

**Dr. Smith:** He didn't, but he loved the results. I totally agree with that. The main reason I exercise is to maintain memory. Exercise can be a lot of things. I happen to like to dance, and medical studies have shown that dancing is really great exercise and maintains memory. So you don't have to pump iron!

**Pamela:** Wow. That's the thing. We all think, "Oh exercise", and immediately it's the idea of "I've got to go into a gym and if I'm not going into a gym that's not good enough." The idea of exercise being something that we enjoy doing or that's not about going in and pumping iron is really radical actually.

**Dr. Smith:** It is! In fact, I have a ninety-four-year-old patient. You know, we were talking about memory, and she's always wanted to learn to tap dance, so at ninety-four she's learning to tap dance.

**Pamela:** Wow, I love that! That is incredible!



**Dr. Smith:** Exercise is key. The second thing in a prescription for being healthy and maintaining memory and focus is to make sure that you eat right. You have to eat breakfast, it's the most important meal of the day. Most people need to eat five or six small meals so that their brain gets some fuel throughout the day.

**Pamela:** Wow. Breakfast is one of those things that's always a big debate, because some people say, "Well, breakfast isn't important." Others are like, "Oh my gosh, I can't start." It seems to me like what you're saying is that breakfast is really fuel for our brain and our memory.

**Dr. Smith:** It is. In fact, twenty-five percent of the carbs that go into your body go straight to the brain for fueling, so you have to have good carbs like fruits and vegetables. You also need to have really good fat like omega 3 fatty acids from avocado, lamb, good fish from the ocean. You have to have protein, so all of those are really good fueling sources for the body. The brain needs fuel!

**Pamela:** Okay. Now we've talked about exercise. We've talked about eating. So what are the other pieces of this prescription?

**Dr. Smith:** The other two pieces of this prescription are to have enough nutrients and a balance of hormones. Nutritionally, there's a lot of nutrients that affect memory, and one of those is something called Co-Enzyme Q10. Unfortunately, we really can't eat our way into Co-Enzyme Q10. The body makes a lot until we're about age fifty, but even at twenty-seven, if we're marathoning or aggressively exercising, we might need to take it. At fifty, we need to take Q10 because our body makes less. Other things can deplete the body of that fueling source, such as medications. We can measure Q10, we have to have it. It's about thirty percent of the fueling source for the whole body including the brain.

**Pamela:** Wow. It's interesting you talk about that because when I was in my twenties and exercising really hard, I used to take Co-Enzyme Q10 and then I stopped. But then I saw that in your book it is one of the key things, so I just went ahead and ordered it again. I just remembered I used to take that along with Carnitine, which was one of the other things that you listed in your book.

**Dr. Smith:** Carnitine is a very important healing source, and you can eat your way into some of that. Carnitine is in red meat and avocados. So red meat is, for most people, a good idea two to three times a week. But it must be organic. And of course, the operative word is "How much?" The size of your palm and the thickness of a deck of cards. For no one is that a twenty-eight-ounce steak.

**Pamela:** I think I'm going to play this part back to my husband!

**Dr. Smith:** It really is important to have the right kind of meat, the right balance. But again, not too much either.



**Pamela:** I love that. What I really am interested in is what we've broken out here: this distinction between eating and nutrients. Something that we tend to conflate is that, "Oh, if I eat well then I've got all the nutrients I need." That's not necessarily the case. It's something that we need to test and see.

**Dr. Smith:** Absolutely. We can measure thirty-five vitamins in the body, and if we're really stressed all the time, the body uses extra nutrients so we have to put extra ones in like B vitamins. B vitamins and vitamin C are water soluble, so you have to take them twice a day, but you can eat your way into a lot of Bs and Cs. Bs are in nice leafy green salad, vitamin C is in some citrus fruit. Even onions contain vitamin C. So sometimes the nutrients are in foods you're not expecting. But can you get all the nutrients from food? No. A good multivitamin in addition to eating well is very important.

**Pamela:** Okay, all right. The fourth piece of this prescription you mentioned were the hormones and that is actually important for not just women but also for men. Can you talk more about that?

**Dr. Smith:** Certainly. We know that estrogen is very important for both men and women to have good cognitive function. Women have to have estrogen; in fact, it is their memory. If men have too little estrogen they have cognitive decline. Too much, and they have increased risk for other diseases. The hormone progesterone is very important for nerve endings and nerve communication for both men and women, and the same thing holds true of testosterone. For men, testosterone is their memory. For women, a small amount of testosterone is needed for cognition as well.

**Pamela:** All these can be tested by a metabolic doctor?

**Dr. Smith:** Absolutely. We measure looking at male and female hormones most commonly by doing salivary testing. We measure the thyroid by doing blood testing, and then of course we measure blood sugar and fasting insulin by blood testing as well.

**Pamela:** Okay. Basically getting all of those tests ends up giving us a prescription that will help us maintain our memory and be sharp all the way into our eighties and nineties.

**Dr. Smith:** Even one hundred.

**Pamela:** Really?

**Dr. Smith:** Many people now will live to be a hundred, so our goal is not just a hundred years, but a healthy one hundred.

**Pamela:** Ooh, love that! Yeah, you see those people that are sharp all the way up to that age, and you think, "How did they do it?" And you've just handed us a prescription today to do that for ourselves!



I could talk to you forever about this, but we do need to wrap it up. I want to end by asking you two personal strategies that you use to lift your life.

**Dr. Smith:** For my life, exercise has become more and more important because it decreases stress. I exercise three times a week, but I usually begin the days by exercising. Most of us get busy and we all have really good intentions, but we don't really get out there sometimes if our day gets hectic. So I do formal exercise three times a week. Then the other days I just walk a mile or two a day and it's really nice just to get out and decrease stress.

**Pamela:** Okay.

**Dr. Smith:** I really do try to eat well, I really do. Sometimes I eat a little bit of chocolate, but everybody eats something they're not supposed to, but just a little bit. In fact, dark chocolate has been shown to help maintain memory, an ounce a day, so a small amount. Of course, do I take hormones at the age of sixty? I do. I have them measured by saliva testing. The two hormones I'm deficient in now are estrogen and progesterone. I'm about to have a hormone measured we didn't mention though, called pregnenolone, that literally is the hormone of memory. It starts going down in some people at the age of fifty, a little more common at sixty and the age of seventy, so it's important to have pregnenolone measured also. Then of course, do I take nutrients? I do. I really do try and do all four of these things to be healthy.

**Pamela:** Okay. You follow your own prescription. Just as an aside, the pregnenolone, is that something that's part of that saliva testing or is it something that you would have to specifically ask your doctor to test?

**Dr. Smith:** Pregnenolone is measured by blood.

**Pamela:** Okay.

**Dr. Smith:** Pregnenolone is what we call a "mother hormone," so it produces estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, DHEA, and cortisol in both men and women. Pregnenolone's a mother hormone, along with being the hormone of memory.

**Pamela:** Okay. We have to ask for that as well.

**Dr. Smith:** Yes.

**Pamela:** All right. Well thank you so much, Dr. Smith, for all your incredibly insightful, smart, ground-breaking advice. This is all new, this idea that we have so much influence and control on our memory and the quality of our life until age one hundred. Thank you for giving us the tools today!





**Dr. Smith:** Thank you very much. It's important that everybody realize that this is not Star Trek medicine. It's available now. We're not stuck with our genetic history and we can do some very positive things to maintain memory.

**Pamela:** Wonderful, thank you so much!

**Dr. Smith:** Thank you

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