



## **Top Takeaways: #318 Maladaptive Stress Response and Why Resetting Your Nervous System is Critical with Alex Howard**

**Wendy Myers:** Hello everyone. My name is Wendy Myers. Welcome to the Myers Detox Podcast. You can find me and tons of free information on how to detox and why on earth you want to detox at [myersdetox.com](http://myersdetox.com). Today we have my friend Alex Howard on the show. He is the founder of The Optimum Health Clinic specializing in chronic fatigue and they have just had tens of thousands of people go through their clinic.

**Wendy Myers:** Alex is incredibly knowledgeable about chronic fatigue and stress and how to recover from it. And he is going to be discussing with us today the maladaptive stress response, which is how the body deals with different stressors and has inappropriate response like food sensitivities or shutting down like chronic fatigue, the mitochondrial shut down, and all the other different adaptations that people don't like, people develop unpleasant symptoms as a result. And we also talk about mindset psychology, and also how to identify stressors in our environment and just how to adjust your mindset, what role psychology plays in recovering from physical health issues and diagnoses, and how this all ties into detoxification. Really, really interesting show today.

**Wendy Myers:** And some of the top takeaways for the show are going to be essentially how stress is one of the biggest challenges in recovering from fatigue and illness, and how resetting the nervous system is one of the first steps in recovery of illness or chronic fatigue and to a successful detox, and how to identify stressors to get the body out of sympathetic nervous system overdrive. A lot of people are just tired but wired, they're kind of stuck in their fight or flight sympathetic nervous system. And why physical health issues do not always have a physical solution. Many get better or have a shift in their physical health with mindset, with psychological tools, and stress reduction techniques. So really, really interesting show today.

**Wendy Myers:** I know a lot of you guys are concerned listening to this podcast about heavy metal toxicity or how to detox, where to start, so I created a quiz. You can take this quiz at [heavymetalsquiz.com](http://heavymetalsquiz.com). It takes just a couple of minutes. And after you take the quiz and get your results, you get a free video series that talks about, why you want to detox, where you are in your general body burden of toxicity, and what the next steps are, how to get started. Just an incredible video series that I created for you guys, because this is one of the most common questions I get is, "I want to detox, how do I do it? Where do I begin?" So I answer all of those questions in this free video series. Just go to [heavymetalsquiz.com](http://heavymetalsquiz.com).

**Wendy Myers:** Our guest today, Alex Howard, is founder and CEO of The Optimum Health Clinic, OHC, one of the world's leading integrative medical clinics, which he set up in 2004 after his own seven year battle with chronic fatigue syndrome. OHC's team of 20 full-time practitioners have supported over 10,000 patients with fatigue in 40 plus countries. Alex and the team have published research and a number of leading journals including the British Medical Journal Open, Medical Hypotheses and Psychology, and Health.

**Wendy Myers:** A randomized control on the OHC approach to fatigue is currently underway in the UK with NHS patients. So I'm assuming it's a randomized clinical controlled study, is currently underway. Along with founding and leading the OHC practitioner teams for the past 16 years, Alex is also an experienced psychology practitioner having led the Therapeutic Coaching practitioner program since 2005, training the next generation of psychology practitioners. Alex also has a daily vlog and podcast, which includes interviews, film sessions with his patients, and inspirational recovery stories. You can find out more at [alexhoward.tv](http://alexhoward.tv).

**Wendy Myers:** Alex, thank you so much for coming on the show.

**Alex Howard:** Thank you for having me, Wendy. It's nice to be on the other side of the interview.

**Wendy Myers:** Yes. Well, why don't we start with you telling us about your personal journey with chronic fatigue syndrome and the role that psychology played in your recovery?

**Alex Howard:** Yeah, sure. I think the first thing to say is, I got chronic fatigue when I was 16 years old, and certainly at that point specializing in fatigue or psychology, neither of those things, were anywhere near my career plan. I think my parent's career plan was probably that I'd be an accountant or something rather less interesting than what I ended up doing. And really I woke up, I had quite a sudden onset. I woke up one morning and it was almost like if there's a plug of energy into the body, someone had just ripped that out. And initially, it was assumed that I had a virus or some kind of flu situation, and weeks passed and then months passed, and really nothing was changing. And I ended up somewhat out of the blue getting this diagnosis of chronic fatigue.

**Alex Howard:** And it was such a shocking diagnosis in the sense that, I'd been so used to, you go to the doctor, you're unwell, you get a diagnosis, you get a pill, you take the pill, and you feel better. And to be 16 years old and have this quite scary diagnosis, symptoms that were utterly debilitating at the time, I was at times bedbound and... I wasn't bedbound, I was certainly almost housebound. And to kind of look to the future from that point of view and realize that this is something that people sometimes never recover from, and I had been a super active teenager that loved playing sports and played guitar in a pretty bad punk rock band, but loved life, it was the only thing that was offered to me by the doctor on the day that I was diagnosed. He said, "We can offer you counseling."

**Alex Howard:** And that to me felt like the greatest insult somebody ever could have given to me because I knew I had this very real physical illness, and to have it inferred that really this was just in my mind, and either I had just to learn to come to terms with the fact I was never going to recover or this idea that the cause of what was happening was my mind and my emotions. I think I went to one session of counseling and was like, "This is definitely not something that's for me." And so then, two years passed and in those two years, really nothing improved physically, but I think psychologically and emotionally things got worse because I wasn't tired because I was depressed, but when you are completely utterly debilitated, if you're a normal human being, you will start to feel depressed and fed up and anxious and concerned and worried about what your life has become.

**Alex Howard:** And so I really reached the point where it wasn't that I wanted to end my life, I didn't want to die and I didn't want to kill myself, I just couldn't see a way for my life to continue in really the hell that it'd become at this point. And so I had a phone call with my uncle who, I don't know if you've seen Lord of the Rings, was a bit like Gandalf, in Lord Of The Rings. He wasn't there very often, but he just seemed to always turn up at just the right time, say just the right things, and then disappear. You know, you spend the next half hour of the film thinking, "Well, if Gandalf was here, there wouldn't be any problems."

**Wendy Myers:** Yeah.

**Alex Howard:** But really we had this conversation where he helped me realize that if I wanted the circumstances of my life to change, like I wanted to recover from this illness, then I was going to have to be the one to do something about it. And it was kind of one of those tough love conversations where it definitely wasn't tea and biscuits sympathy and, "Oh my God, it's so awful. I'm so sorry you're suffering so much." It was really, "Well, if you want it to change, it doesn't look like anyone else is going to change it, so you're going to have to become responsible for doing that."

**Alex Howard:** And that catalyzed a five year journey where I ended up reading, I think it was something over 500 books on health and psychology, and I got into meditation and yoga, a whole kind of collection of things, and there was

no one miracle cure. I mean there was nothing close to a miracle cure on the recovery journey that I went on, but different things helped in different ways at different times, and I was able to piece together through nutrition, through psychology, through some alternative health methodologies. I was able to gradually find my way back to recovery.

**Alex Howard:** And by the time I'd recovered, so that was seven years after I'd first been diagnosed, I'd kind of, somewhat accidentally and somewhat embarrassingly, fall in love with psychology along the way. I describe my interest of reading self-help books and kind of positive psychology books in my late teens as being similar to most boys in their early teens and pornography. I didn't want anyone to catch me. I was embarrassed. It felt like the kind of most uncool thing for a kind of 18, 19, 20 year old, to go to the kind of bookshop and buy up a load of books. But I just, I fell in love with the idea that it is possible for us to create change in our lives.

**Alex Howard:** And as my life started to change and evolve, and I started to understand many of the factors that had contributed to the very difficult situation I was in, and I'd started to see change from that, it was kind of my first true love, which is, I don't feel embarrassed like that now but at the time it was an awkward thing. And so then just to kind of end kind of this part of the story, I wrote a book about my healing journey and the path that I'd been on, and I set up The Optimum Health Clinic with a mutual friend of ours, Niki Gratrix, and it was a kind of surreal time really because this was 2003, 2004, that this was happening, and within six months I guess of starting The Optimum Health Clinic, we had something like four or 5,000 inquiries of people. This wasn't obviously pre-internet but it was pre-social media, it was pre-online health summits, it was pre all of that. It was just this kind of crazy word of mouth that we seem to have some answers and we seem to be helping people.

**Alex Howard:** And in the year since then, Optimum Health Clinic I think has become one of the world's leading clinics specializing in fatigue. We have a team of 20 full-time practitioners who work with patients in over 40 countries around the world, and have had this approach really of, there is no one answer, there are lots of different answers to different people, and what we try to do is map and pull that together and build path to recovery which are pulling from all that knowledge but are patient's specific to the people that we're working with. So yeah, it was a kind of an odd life transition, but I'm ultimately very grateful for it.

**Wendy Myers:** Yeah. Fatigue has a lot of different underlying root causes and one of them is maladaptive stress where your body is presented with a lot of different stressors that it has to adapt to or create a response to. And a maladaptive response to stress can manifest in many different ways, including fatigue. So tell us what is maladaptive stress response or the maladaptive stress response and how is it created?

**Alex Howard:** Yeah, so this was a term that we started using quite early days in Optimum Health Clinic when we recognized that one of the things that

often happens with people with medically unexplained illnesses is the nervous system goes into a state of hyperactivation, and it does that because it's trying to protect us when we don't know, what's wrong with us, why it's wrong with us, are we ever going to recover? Should we rest? Should we push ourselves? Should we try this? Should we try that? How am I going to feel tomorrow? Like the most every day normal things in our life start to become a constant source of stress to the system.

**Alex Howard:** It's true to say that often people with chronic health conditions, and so broadening this beyond just chronic fatigue, there are certain underlying personality patterns which have been shown to be contributing factors. It's not that these things are the cause of... The way I think about this is, it's like a boat with loads and you have too many loads on the boat and that's then what causes the system to sink. And those loads can be genetic loads, they can be environmental loads, they can be physiological things are out of balance, and they can be the psycho-emotional elements.

**Alex Howard:** And so we recognize that people that have, for example, strong achiever patterns where they define their self-worth by what they do and what they achieve, so there's a constant kind of push in the system, or people that have what we classify as a helper pattern, where their self-worth again is kind of being defined by what they do for other people, so there's this constant draining and depleting of one's kind of own wellbeing in the service and support of others. And so there can be, and there are other examples of this, but there's different personality patterns that can also, predated someone developing chronic health issues, can be a load and depleting on the system.

**Alex Howard:** And then when someone ends up in a kind of crash state of some sort or a kind of overloaded state, the nervous system tends to go into exactly the opposite state of what it needs to be and to heal. So if you think about it in the simplest terms, the nervous system can be in a state of stress, so traditionally we would talk about the kind of fight or flight response where when responding to an immediate danger, it can also be in a state of healing where the sympathetic nervous system is calm, the parasympathetic system is kind of activated, and we can feel often if we're in tune with ourselves, we can feel the difference, and we can also feel the difference in other people quite often when their system is highly agitated.

**Alex Howard:** Often when people are in maladaptive stress response, we can get so normalized to being in that state. It's a little about like, if you take a frog, you drop it in a glass of boiling water, it jumps out. You put it in a glass of cold water and you gradually heat it up, it doesn't notice the change in temperature and it stays in there and it gets fried. This is not an experiment I'm recommending for obvious reasons, but it is the same thing is true in our nervous system that we can get so used to being in that hyperactivated response, and we can perhaps get into it in a bit, has a massive impact upon the body's ability to heal.

**Wendy Myers:** Yes. Yeah, so many people are in this tired but wired state. They're stuck in their sympathetic dominant nervous system, the stress response fight or flight, and like people's foot is on the gas pedal and they just can't get off of that. And we have so many different stressors in our environment. Even if people don't feel stressed, there's EMF and nutritional stress and financial stuff and emotional and family, we don't have enough time, blue light, we're not sleeping enough, not getting regenerative sleep, and not to mention infections and all the other stuff we have acting upon our body.

**Wendy Myers:** And so let's talk a little bit about the direct effect of stress on healing. Because a lot of people because of too much stress, find themselves get sick and that are still in this state of stress and can't... Like are in this kind of inertia where they can't heal and get better. Can you talk a little about that?

**Alex Howard:** Yeah, there's a number of different ways that we can kind of think about this. We can think about it from the point of view of when the body is in stress, the body's resources are literally diverted away from things like digestive function. So when we're in stress, we tend to have an increase of blood supply to our limbs literally so we can fight or flight. There's all kinds of data that shows that things like digesting of food, breaking down of nutrients, that function just is no longer prioritized because the fight or flight response is a kind of primal response that was created when we were literally surviving, running away from saber-toothed tigers. And if you were being chased by a saber-toothed tiger, digesting the woolly mammoth you had for breakfast, it's just not a physiological priority in that moment.

**Alex Howard:** And then in kind of more recent kind of decades, there's been a kind of surge of kind of research that's really been looking and investigating, well, let's really see the detail of how this works. And there's one landmark study which I remember from my psychology degree days, which was 1986 by Kiecolt-Glaser's, published in the Journal of Behavioral Medicine. And what they did was they took medical students and they did blood workups a month before exams, and then on the day of exams. And you find with a lot of research it ends up being medical students or at least students. One of my kind of memories of being at university was just the endless recruiting people to various kind of studies. But you can imagine what medical students are like on the day of exams.

**Alex Howard:** This research was kind of staggering at the time because it was where they were really starting to show, this is not just like stress doesn't feel good, stress isn't really good for you, stress kind of affects your digestive function and various other things, the first study was on 34 medical students, and on the day of examinations there were significant, not just about statistically significant, but like really significant declines in a whole bunch of things, particularly things like natural killer cell activity. So you start to see that the immune system is just shifting its function when we're under stress.

**Alex Howard:** There's then another study actually I think that well captures this. Is research that was done looking at people who were caring for people, which had dementia or kind of mental health decline, let's say. And obviously being in the role of a caregiver is inherently stressful. When you're going back to what I was saying as an example about the helper pattern, when you're taking care of somebody else that becomes depleting and draining.

**Alex Howard:** In this study, they did biopsies on people to create a wound, three and a half millimeter biopsies, and what they found was that the group which were the caregivers, took 24% longer to heal than those that were not. And that was the only difference. The two groups were matched for all other kind of things that you could match them for. So the only variable being that these people were caregivers, that's something that is a stress on the system, that healing was taking 24% longer in those cases.

**Alex Howard:** So we start to see that this is not just a mind body connection and people saying, "Stress isn't good and it's important to calm the system," this is a very real impact upon the body's ability to heal. When we then start to look at things like energy production, we need energy by the way for detox, for healing, for... If we haven't got energy in our system, everything else starts to get affected by that. When the body is in a state of stress, it's like being, you mentioned earlier analogy, it's like being at the traffic lights and you're revving the engine the whole time. Like the system, the whole time is wired. You're just wasting fuel, you're wasting energy, and the body is no longer prioritizing energy production. It's no longer prioritizing detoxing. It's no longer prioritizing healing. Because it believes you are about to get eaten by a woolly mammoth, or it believes that you're in some kind of immediate danger.

**Alex Howard:** I think we also, at this point, I think it's helpful to make a distinction between acute stress and chronic stress. Acute stress being that kind of example, the kind of woolly mammoth example, or the saber-toothed tiger example, where we're in immediate danger. Or where we're about to cross the road and we're not paying attention the way that we should. We're looking at our phone and we don't see the giant double-decker bus that's kind of hurtling towards us, and in that moment it is totally appropriate that we get a hit of cortisol and adrenaline and our system pumps, so we can either fight, but you probably wouldn't fight a double-decker bus, or we can flight, we can run away, or we can go into a freeze or a shutdown response. But in acute stress, what then will happen is the nervous system will naturally reset. The nervous system will calm down, we will realize that we've survived, no longer is the danger there, and the system will gradually come back into a normal state of balance and healing state.

**Alex Howard:** The difference with chronic stress is, it's like we're being chased by the saber-toothed tiger all of the time. It's like the system gets so used to being in that state that like the frog example that I gave a little bit earlier, the system gradually gets more and more ramped up to the point that it

then normalizes at a state of high stress, which therefore means our body is fairly consistently in exactly the opposite state that it needs to be, for healing and detoxing to be able to happen.

**Wendy Myers:** Yeah, and this is just the state that a lot of people coming to me to detox are in. I have to figure out different ways to reduce their stress load and help them identify all the different stressors that they have acting upon them, so they can get into that healing and detoxification state, in that parasympathetic nervous system. And so you created a program that helps people do just that, identify all these stressors and help people to reset the nervous system. So can you talk a little bit about how people reset the nervous system and how you're helping people do that in your course?

**Alex Howard:** Absolutely. Firstly, I should say that this work is really the result of getting on for several decades, but certainly clinically as a practitioner for 16, 17 years, of really observing what works and what doesn't work. And I'm a very strong believer that theory is nice, knowledge is a great thing, but the real edge is clinical work. And as you know, when you're working people day after day, it's like, it's all well and good pulling something out of a kind of textbook or a theory, but it doesn't work... Things are not often that simple when you're working kind of one-on-one.

**Alex Howard:** This concept of reset and this reset program is really the result of thousands and thousands of patients, of testing and observing, and seeing what works. And there are elements of this that we're clear at the start and there are other elements that have become increasingly clear almost through the observation of the cases where the basics or the obvious things were limited, let's say, in their effectiveness. It's kind of one of those things that got bigger and bigger and bigger, and then it was the aha moments of kind of, "Actually, we can simplify this back to what are the key principles."

**Alex Howard:** So this idea of resets, stands for, to recognize, so we have to recognize the state that the system is in. We have to examine the thoughts, the patterns, the processes, which are creating and triggering that state. We have to learn to stop and interrupt certain thought processes. So there are certain habits of thinking that get the brain wired up in certain ways, and we have to literally have a way of catching and rewiring those thought processes. We then have to work with the underlying emotional factors that are going on.

**Alex Howard:** One of the things that often happens is, when we're in a high state of stress, we disconnect from our body. We disconnect from our emotions. So we don't then have that whole kind of landscape of information to inform how we feel, do we need to rest? Is that detox going too fast? There's a whole set of information that we're just disconnected from. So we have to work and process our emotional kind of history and things that are in the way of that.



**Alex Howard:** And then the final step being transformation, there are really two core underlying issues which tend to be behind much of this nervous system activation, one of which is, I'm not lovable as I am, like I'm not enough, and that's this driver of constantly having to push to be more, to help more, to kind of achieve more. And then the second one is, the world is not a safe place. Like we don't, at our core, we don't feel safe. And so this whole speeding up is a way of trying to compensate for that. One of the ways, one of the strategies, that people use to try and feel safe is, if I can worry about every possible thing that can go wrong, think about all the possible ways I could handle that, then off get a feeling of safety. So we try to think our way to safety. The problem is the more we try and think our way to safety actually the more we activate the nervous system, and the less safe that we feel.

**Wendy Myers:** And a lot of people are in that state. What is the payoff for that worry? Are people getting a dopamine hit or a cortisol rush or? There's a lot of people that are stuck in that worry state and they're in that because they get some sort of payoff from it.

**Alex Howard:** I think it's addictive. I think it's a chemical addiction that the nervous system has gotten used to having. And sometimes coming off that, initially that can be almost like a withdrawal. It's like we're so used to being tired or wired that you take away the wired and actually what you're left with is the underlying tired, and we have to then do some healing to work through and to resolve that.

**Alex Howard:** There's also often a kind of emotional payoff that by speeding up we get away from difficult feelings and emotions that we haven't really been able to deal with and process. And so it's also an avoidance strategy. The kind of works, like if you manage to say, so busy all of the time and your life is working well and you've got the energy to do it, you can just speed up enough that you never really have to feel anything. The problem is for a lot of people with chronic health conditions, that strategy isn't working anymore and you have to then therefore deal with the underlying pieces.

**Alex Howard:** Just to go back to, to kind of perhaps go through each of these elements a bit more.

**Wendy Myers:** Yes. Yeah.

**Alex Howard:** To give an overall picture. This first step in terms of recognize, we really have to recognize what state our system is in. And one of the models that we use in the reset program, which can be quite helpful here is, Stephen Porges's Polyvagal theory, which talks about really three states in the system. The first being, safe and social, really what I was describing as being in a healing state. Where in a state of safe and social, we put out what we tend to receive reassuring signs from the world. So the world feels like a safe place. And when someone's in that place normally they're quite easy to be around, they feel quite welcoming, they feel quite kind of supportive and easy.

**Alex Howard:** We then have, if the system starts to activate, we then go into fight or flight. And in fight or flight, it's almost like tuning into a radio frequency where it's like radio station, worry and anxiety. It's like we just tuned in and then we're suddenly listening for and we're looking for the things that are dangerous because our body is protecting us. Like it's looking, what are all the things that can go wrong and how do I keep myself protected and keep myself safe? So in a state of fight or flight, the research shows that often we will misinterpret signs in our environment because we might be walking down the street and someone gives us what we think is a kind of a funny look, and actually they weren't looking at us at all, they were just lost in thought. But we thought, "Oh, they're looking at me a bit funny," and then our whole system starts to activate, and we have a whole narrative that they're going to mark us and this thing's going to happen, and this is awful.

**Alex Howard:** So we often misinterpret and we look for things that are not there. We start to distort our environment because we're looking for the danger. There's a part of our brain called a reticular activating system. And what that does is it looks for what we teach it to look for. So it's that experience where you get a new pair of shoes, let's say, and then you start seeing that brand or those shoes everywhere you go. Or someone falls pregnant and they suddenly see babies everywhere. It's not like the babies weren't there before, it's just that now they're activated and they're looking for that. It's like, as an exercise that I get people to do sometimes, where I get people to look around the room and look for a color, so people could do that now. Look around the room. Look for all the things that are blue in the room.

**Alex Howard:** And people you can close your eyes, and then the question is, tell me all the things in the room that were red. And it's like people can remember all the blue things, but they can't remember the red things because that wasn't what they were looking for. The brain has looked for something and it's collected that information. So when we're in fight or flight, we change how our brain is functioning. We look for certain things, the system becomes wired, we start to respond to things.

**Alex Howard:** Then the third stage in Polyvagal theory is the shutdown response or the freeze response. And a classic example of that, I remember years ago watching a TV program, and there was a, kids being interviewed, it was maybe six or seven, and others were being interviewed, they were kind of talking, and the host turns to this kid and ask him a question. And the kid just literally freezes. It's just like kind of jaw. And they were kind of asking like, I don't remember what the question was, the kid's just like... And then just like the whole system is just frozen. It's like it's gone into a kind of freeze response.

**Alex Howard:** Classic example of this is hedgehogs. What do hedgehogs do when the world is dangerous? They kind of shut down. Or tortoises their head kind of goes back in and they just kind of go into a frozen protected response. Some animals will fake death, they'll literally... And it's not like a cognitive

thing where they go, "Oh, there's a lion chasing me. I should pretend that I'm dead," it's literally the parasympathetic nervous system just shuts down the system. And so recognizing like where are we? Like are we in a healing state? Are we in a state of safe and social where our nervous system is kind of responding appropriately, it's responding well to kind of cues? We feel safe and feel like we want to be social? Or are we in a state of fight or flight? Are we kind of overactivated and we're kind of like the rabbit in the headlights that's kind of, wants to kind of escape and get away? Or are we in a shutdown state?

**Alex Howard:** If we can recognize what state we're in, then we can start to take some action. It's the first step to be able to start to take some action to start to address this. And this goes back to what we were saying a little bit earlier, that we can get so normalized, and as you were saying, people can go, "Well, I feel tired and wired, but that's all we're really aware of." But if we can recognize, hang on, I'm in a state of nervous system overactivation, and all of the things that we've been talking about that's affecting healing, that's affecting energy production, that's affecting my immune system, affecting my digestive system, so then the next step becomes this stage of examine.

**Alex Howard:** We need to understand the how. Like, how is my system being pushed into this state? And then that goes into much more detail, what we touched on around there's different personality patterns. I mentioned the helper and the achiever, there's other patterns examples of that. We start to look at the different loads that are on us. Again, you mentioned around the different stressors, be it environmental stressors, be it nutritional stressors. So we've got to understand what are the ingredients that are going in to cause these states.

**Alex Howard:** The next thing we then come to is we need to break the pattern, like the nervous system is wired to be responding in a certain way. And this is a kind of automatic unconscious pattern that's happening. It's a little bit like, if you imagine and if you've ever had the experience of moving home or moving office, and you've had a certain drive that you were doing twice a day in each direction, every day for kind of years, then you move, and then one day you kind of find yourself driving to the old house rather than the new house or the old office rather than the new office because you're just doing it unconsciously. We have to be able to have unconscious programs otherwise every time you get to a door you'd have to relearn how to open a door, "Oh my God, what is this thing? Like how..." But we just learn a program. We reach out, we turn a handle. These patterns happen unconsciously.

**Alex Howard:** So we need to interrupt, to break this habitual pattern of thinking. And if we think about neuroplasticity and how the brain functions, when we train a habit, we have a connection between two neurons in the brain. So it's like each time we do a habit or we have a consistent thought process, that kind of pattern fires and those neurons are kind of being wired together. We need to catch the habit enough times and retrain it in a

different direction, that the brain then learns a different response. And the most effective techniques that I've found over the years are some techniques that we've developed from areas like neuro-linguistic programming, from elements of hypnotherapy, where we have a way of catching patterns, stopping them, shifting focus, and calming the system.

**Alex Howard:** We have to do that enough times that then after a while the brain gets rewired. So just like that example of, you drive home to the new home, having moved, you do that enough times and that becomes the the new pathway and the new wiring. So we are learning to stop, to catch the thought processes, to retrain them, and by doing that, we are then training the nervous system to settle and calm and to come more towards being in a healing state.

**Wendy Myers:** Yeah, and this is so important to discuss and to address not only for people that are ill or have a diagnosis, but for people who are merely experiencing the beginning stages of fatigue or brain fog, or who feel stressed all the time. Because if you remain in that state, say it's preclinical, you don't have a diagnosis such as irritating, eventually if you keep doing the same thing, same lifestyle, same diet, same patterns, your body is eventually going to continue to break down to where you eventually may have a diagnosis of some sort.

**Wendy Myers:** So my urge to people, my plea to people, is don't wait. Heed the call. Listen to your body. If you don't feel like you did 10 years ago, there's something going on. It's not because you're getting old.

**Alex Howard:** I think that's a great point, and actually that's a really good... Kind of opening to this next bit of this reset model. We've had recognize, examine, stop our emotional life. And one of the things that happens is we end up so disconnected from our emotions, from our bodies, from that information, that it's like... The way that I sometimes describe it, it's like the body tries to get our attention. So it sends us a text message, and we just go busy and we kind of ignore it. And then it sends us like three messages on WhatsApp and we're like, "Whatever." And then the phone rings and we kind of send it to voicemail, and then the landline rings and the mobile rings and we just unplugged the landline and turn off the mobile. And then we noticed we've got 10 emails and we shut... There's an endless attempts to try and communicate, and we ignore.

**Alex Howard:** And so in the end the body has got no choice, like it's got more and more depleted over that period of time of trying to give us the information. And I think we also have to remember if we, let's say at our Optimum, we had a 100 units of energy a day, and let's say we were always trying to spend 105, 110, so one of those people that was always kind of pushing the boundaries of what our body really had the energy to do. And then as our body gets more and more depleted, it becomes more and more toxic. We get more and more fatigued. Our energy capacity goes from a 100 to 90 to 80 to 70. So let's say now we're at 70 capacity. We're still, perhaps

we're not trying to spend the 105 now because we just simply can't do it. So we've now reduced our capacity.

**Alex Howard:** But instead of being at a 100 capacity and spending 105, we're now at 70 capacity and spending 75, and then that person walks in and says, "But Wendy, I'm doing so much less than I was before. Like I'm resting in the afternoon and I'm doing my meditation practice and I've reduced my stress at work, I'm so much calmer than I was." But if that person's pattern is, they're always still pushing the edge in what they think is them having restructured their life to support their healing process, may still be that they're pushing beyond the capacity that's there. So we need to get our energy expenditure, the demands we're placing upon ourself, below our current energy production. We then have a surplus.

**Alex Howard:** That surplus can be used for healing, for building energy reserves to support the body's detox processes. And then what should happen is our core capacity starts to increase, but we need to shift that balance where we are creating more energy, more resource, in our body than we're spending. To do that though, we need to learn the language of our emotions, the language of our body, because otherwise we're just simply not getting the feedback. We don't know where those levels are because it's like we're saying to our body, "This is what's going to happen and just tough luck deal with it," as opposed to that being a relationship that's in balance.

**Alex Howard:** But I think for a lot of people they've learnt, be it through childhood, be it through the cultures that we live in, that they've learned that their feelings and their emotions and their body's information, is not particularly important, it is more important to achieve the things you need to achieve, it's more important to be a good husband, wife, parent, whatever the demand is. And of course those things are important, but we learned that this information doesn't matter. And so there's a kind of chronic disconnects from ourselves really. And one of the challenges is, as we start to reconnect, we also then have to start to unpack and deal with some of this material, what we've been disconnected from, has not been there.

**Alex Howard:** What I observe often happens with people is, going back to this final step of transformation, and one of the key pieces that we deal with in the reset program is that, if we've got this underlying feeling that the world is not a safe place, and that may be because of kind of overt kind of Big "T" trauma or abuse that we were sexually abused or physically abused or whatever as a child, or it may be what I call trauma with a small t or kind of covert trauma or developmental trauma, where there wasn't any one single event, there wasn't like a shocking event that happened, but we just didn't get the emotional holding and nourishment that we needed. Like we felt sad and we were told that feeling sad didn't matter and it wasn't important, or we needed physical holding, and all the research that shows the power of physical touch for babies and the children, and we needed physical holding and it just wasn't... My family didn't do hugging,

didn't do touching. I had to be taught how to hug by a friend at university when I was 18 years old.

**Alex Howard:** I was like... But bless my poor children, I already get hugged to death as a result. But it's like we have this kind of underlying sense that we don't feel safe, like the world is not a safe place. So going back to what I was saying a little bit earlier, what we then start to do is we speed up, we go back to that pattern we touched on around, we think about all the things that might go wrong, to try and get the feeling of safety. The problem is safety is not in the mind. The feeling that the world is safe is a feeling, like we feel. We won't say, "We think safe, we feel safe." The more we go in our mind, the more everything speeds up, the less safe we feel, the more we go into our mind and we speed up. So disconnection feeds disconnection.

**Alex Howard:** Because the more disconnected we get, the more we use the strategy that causes us to be disconnected, trying to feel safe, to get more disconnected. Equally, connection feeds connection. So we have to deal with some of these underlying issues, and say, "Hey, the two core issues, the world's not safe, I'm not safe in the world, or I'm not enough, I'm not lovable as I am, therefore, I need to do and achieve more or give more or care more or whatever it is, to get that feeling." Again, just like you can't get safety by thinking your way to feeling safe, you don't get the feeling of being loved and being enough on the outside. In fact, the more that we get on the outside, and it doesn't resolve the issues on the inside, actually the more crazy making it becomes.

**Wendy Myers:** A lot of people have resistance to psychology, especially when they have a physical health issue. Many people are looking for a physical resolution, a protocol to do or a medication or a supplement, something... There must be a physical resolution to this physical symptom. And I don't think people realize how much mindset and psychology plays a role in their physical health issues, and how when you address mindset, address stress, address through a psychological method, that people can then have a shift in their physical health when they've tried all these physical things that haven't worked. Can you discuss that a little bit?

**Alex Howard:** Yeah, I think it's a great point and I think it's a particularly fiery issue with fatigue related conditions, and I get it. When I was ill, there was only very few things that would give me a short-term injection of energy. And one of them was the inference that I was making up my condition or that it was in my mind. Because I wanted to rearrange your face. That's why it takes energy. And I think we have to make a really clear distinction between someone who is making something up, like something that is not real, and something where the state of our mind and our nervous system is either inhibiting the healing of, or directly impacting, causing very real physical things that are happening. And I think this has been particularly confused in the fatigue world because the lack of a consistent biomarker for fatigue related conditions has resulted in the kind of psychiatric

population kind of hijacking, less so these days but certainly for a number of years, hijacking both the research and the focus around there.

**Alex Howard:** And to me it's the highest level of medical arrogance when we take the position of we can't find anything wrong with you, therefore there must be nothing wrong with you. Or we can't find anything to help you get better, therefore there is nothing you can do to get better. And when you really break it down, it's such a... this is just a shockingly arrogant position for anyone to take. But the kind of results of it has been the lack of a biomarker, has resulted in this kind of hijacking that it must therefore not be real. And this has led to a lot of cultural misconceptions and misunderstandings, which I think has only perpetuated the suffering of a lot of people that have chronic health conditions. Because -

**Wendy Myers:** Yeah. And then, let me refer you to a psychologist because it must be in your head.

**Alex Howard:** Right. Exactly.

**Wendy Myers:** That's not the psychology we're talking about here.

**Alex Howard:** That's right. That's an important point, and of course therefore people, it's like not only now have they got this serious kind of deeply awful kind of health condition, now because of this perception, they're not even getting the emotional support. It's fascinating I've had patients over the years that have been on their chronic fatigue journey and then sadly had, for example, a cancer diagnosis. But what's been stunning for them is, with the cancer diagnosis, everyone's down and supporting, "Can I cook for you? Do you need this? How about this? What do you need? What does the family need?" And it's just the kind of shock of, "But I was ill for 10 years and no one paid any... Everyone just kind of acted like nothing was wrong." So I think it's very understandable why there's so much reactivity around the role of psychology. And I think the point that you made, Wendy, is a really important one.

**Alex Howard:** That there's a clear distinction between someone making something up, something like Phantom limb pain, where someone's had a limb, lost a limb, and they still have pain in the limb. Like they've lost a leg through an accident, for example, and they've got pain in toes that don't exist. Like that clearly is something that exists in the brain and there's nothing physical you're ever going to do about that pain because there's no foot to have the pain in. But what we're talking about here is very direct impacts of our mind and our nervous system on our physical body. Impacts upon our immune system. Impacts upon our digestive system. Impacts upon our cellular energy production. There's direct impacts on mitochondrial function of the system being in an activated state of stress. And so it's not that we're in a state of stress, therefore we're making up all these things, these are very real physical realities that with good functional testing you can absolutely test the impacts on the mitochondria. You can absolutely test the impact on the hormones, the immune system.

**Alex Howard:** But the thing is, what's the path to resolution of these real physical realities? I'm a very strong advocate that, as I said earlier on in my recovery story, there is no one thing. I absolutely believe we need to take a multifaceted approach. If we've got impaired mitochondrial function, we need to look at what's the cause of that? Are there blockages? Can we give raw ingredients to support mitochondrial function? Is digestive function meaning that we're not breaking down food, therefore, we're not giving the body the ingredients it needs to manufacture energy? So we actually need to look at that stuff, but if it takes 24% longer to heal from a biopsy just by the fact that not even measured activated stress, just by being a caregiver under stress in that situation. Or if medical students have significant changes in immune system function just in exam stress, imagine the stress of living with a severe chronic illness or living with heavy toxicity that the body is not dealing with. That's a much deeper stress.

**Alex Howard:** And until, for many people, until we calm the nervous system, until reset the function of the nervous system, you can take supplements and not absorb them. You can change food, but your body's not getting the energy from the food that you're eating. You can work on detoxing, but everything you take, the system overreacts to it. Because when we're in a state of sympathetic over arousal, we're much more likely to have reactions to chemicals, to food, to supplements. And when we calm this down, one of the things that we see is a calming of a lot of these reactions and responses.

**Wendy Myers:** Yeah, and that's a very good point. Because when people's immune system is malfunctioning, which can have a lot of different origins like toxins and metals and other things, many other things, that people start developing reactions to foods and reactions to supplements. That's a very good sign that your body is having a maladaptation to stress, mitochondrial dysfunction, and other things, as a result of different stressors that are acting upon our bodies. And I also love that point you made about how people that are chronically fatigued, that's not recognized with the doctors, friends and family aren't necessarily terribly supportive, and eventually people also just kind of get tired of hearing about it.

**Wendy Myers:** I know someone that has a pain syndrome and no one wants to hear about it anymore and they actually have to go to a psychologist that specializes in just letting people talk about their pain syndrome, because people don't get support for chronic fatigue syndrome, especially, it goes on years and years and years. No one's rallying around you trying to help you.

**Alex Howard:** Yeah. Yeah. And I think that's often the case, and I think also I would argue that I lost several years of my life, of my refusal to accept that psychology could play a role in facilitating healing. And what I say to people is, really you have to act like a scientist and a scientist will test a hypothesis. So if your hypothesis is that my nervous system, which is obviously dictated by my mind and my emotions, has no role in healing,



do some research of... Subject one, research on yourself. Like what happens if you learn some tools and techniques to calm your system? Do you see a change in how things function? Because otherwise really what you're doing is you're taking a position without really checking out whether that position is valid and true. I also think it's important to say that the sort of psychology that I'm talking about here is not kind of tea and biscuits sympathy counseling where you just kind of talk about how crap and how miserable things are, although there can be a place for that, and I'm not negating that -

**Wendy Myers:** I did that for a really long time and it helps on some level, but there's a lot of other things you can do that really move the needle a lot faster.

**Alex Howard:** Yeah. That's right. If you've just learned to completely ignore or reject all your feelings, having someone be empathic and caring towards your feelings will help them come to the surface and then that has value. But we need to be more strategic than that. We need to have tools, we need to have tactics, we need to have strategies, will actually will change the way that we are thinking, that will change the way that we are breathing, that will change the function of our nervous system, that will allow us to process the emotions that we're trying to avoid mistake from to allow us to calm more deeply down and grounded in a safe and social state in our body.

**Alex Howard:** We need to deal with the underlying core wounds and core issues that mean that we feel that we need to be activated all of the time. And talking about that stuff might create some awareness, but it's not really going to change it. We have to be... Just like knowing that we should eat a balanced blood sugar or knowing that we should take certain supplements to help detox. Knowing that is not the same as actually following through on those actions. The same as head, knowing that your system is activated, talking about the fact that it's activated, is not the same as actually resetting the system and calming what's happening.

**Wendy Myers:** So why don't you tell the listeners where they can find you, where they can do your reset program and work with you?

**Alex Howard:** Yeah, so we are just in the process of releasing a series of videos that takes what you and I have been talking about in this interview, but breaks it down into much more detail, although there's been things that I've been shooting over about the different personality patterns. In this series of videos, I go into the exact mechanism of how stress affects mitochondrial function and actually the science of how that works. I go into the different ingredients of what causes that maladaptive stress response and break it down in some much more kind of helpful practical ways because there's more time to do that, and then go more into the practical tools that we're talking about here in terms of resetting the system.

**Alex Howard:** So I think you can share with folks a link to sign up for that video series, that video series is free, so people can go deeper and understand more

of the science behind this. And then if people want to go further from that, they don't have to, they can just sign up for free videos, but there is then a 12 week coaching program where I teach you the tools, the strategies, the models, so you can then work with yourself to switch off, to reset the system. It's an interactive program, so there's the teaching modules, but then each week people send in their questions, their feedback, my team and I go through that, we then create videos in response to those questions. So it's an interactive program as we go through it.

**Alex Howard:** I also do mini film sessions with the participants in the program as we go, so people can see me actually using techniques, so people see the impacts of those. It's a kind of very powerful way of working with people all over the world but in a contained, supported, action-oriented program.

**Wendy Myers:** Yeah, and if anyone wants to learn more about it, go to [myersdetox.com/reset](https://myersdetox.com/reset), and you'll learn more information where you can get the free video series or do the 12 week coaching program. Because I think this is really important. I think that reducing stress, identifying stressors, and learning how to reset your nervous system, is one of the bases that people have to address in order to get better from whatever ails them. If they can't detox, if they have a diagnosis, if they are trying to feel better and improve their health or prevent disease, no matter what they're doing, they have to address reducing stress. And it's a whole skill set. You have to learn to do that. So I applaud the work that you're doing.

**Alex Howard:** Thank you Wendy. And I think as a kind of final comment, what I would say is that, it may not be the only thing that someone needs to do, they may well need to... For example, your work around detox and other approaches. But it may also be that not doing this work means that nothing else can have the effect that it needs to have because the system's not in a state that it needs to be in. And I think that's an important way of people thinking about it.

**Wendy Myers:** Yeah. And this is a foundational thing. This is something you want to do as a precursor to other things that you want to try protocols or what have you. You have to reduce stress in your environment and identifying them and learning this tool set to be able to reduce stress. Like, do you want to learn a skill or do you want to take a pill? I want to learn a skill, frankly.

**Wendy Myers:** Again, Alex, thank you so much for joining us on the show today. And everyone, thanks for listening. Thanks for tuning in every week to the Myers Detox Podcast, where we give you all the tools and strategies and skill sets and information to learn how to dramatically improve your life with alternative health information, and lots of information on detoxification, of course.

**Wendy Myers:** Thanks for tuning in. I'll talk to you next week.