
THE NATURAL EVOLUTION PODCAST | SEASON 1: EPISODE 13
GUEST: CHRISTOPHER BLAKESLEE

PODCAST TITLE: I Was Always in Pain, Part 1 with Christopher Blakeslee

PODCAST DESCRIPTION:

Christopher lived with autoimmune diseases for thirty-five years. For fifteen of those years, the symptoms and excruciating neuropathic pain from them disabled him. Now he's completely healthy and on a mission to help others with chronic health problems to achieve their best health!

Christopher is an ADAPT-Certified Functional Health Coach who helps people with chronic illnesses and chronic pain. He's currently writing a book with former Mayo Clinic doctor Jim Lemons about how lifestyle changes, mindset work, pain neuroscience, and Functional Medicine form the best approach for dealing with chronic health problems.

Connect with Christopher:

- On Facebook: [Christopher Blakeslee](#)
- On Twitter: <https://twitter.com/BalanceHC>
- On Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/balancehealthcoach/>
- Online: <https://balancehealthcoach.com>

To learn more about Dr. Lemons, visit his website: <http://www.lemonscenter.com>

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT:

Michael:

Hello and welcome to The Natural Evolution produced by Rebel Health Tribe, a radio show focused on providing you with inspiration, education, and tools for true healing and transformation.

I'm Michael and I'll be your guide on this adventure as together we explore the very nature of the healing journey.

And I am here with Christopher Blakeslee. Christopher, thank you for joining us.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Oh, thank you for having me on, Michael. It's really an honor.

Michael:

Yeah, thanks. It's going to be fun.

This is one of the episodes that resulted from a little idea that we had to invite our audience to come on to the show. We were trying to think of a way to make this podcast a little different and a little more engaging with the audience itself and interactive so we sent out an email, asked who's got a really interesting healing story and a healing journey that they've been through, and you have quite a powerful one. You've been through a lot. I felt like this is definitely somebody that our audience would benefit hearing from.

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We talked a while before we came on air and I think you want to start this with where you're at and what you're doing right now and then we're going to backtrack-

Christopher Blakeslee:

Right. Back in the hovel.

Michael:

Because this is not where you were for most of your life.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Oh, no. No, no.

Michael:

And so if you want to just kick it off and share where you're at right now and then we'll go back to start off where things went sideways and what that was like.

Christopher Blakeslee:

[inaudible 00:01:41].

Okay, so I'm 41 years old now. I've been recovering from chronic illness and chronic pain for about four and a half years now. I test 100% healthy now. I've had all my autoimmunity in remission for eight months straight now and I'm nearly pain free. I used to have interstitial cystitis, irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia, burning mouth syndrome, and then also I got some nasty trigeminal and occipital neuralgia that develops from being down and out for so long and I had chronic pain for 25 years and 15 years of that I was disabled until about last year.

Now, I've turned it around to such a point that now I help people with their health. I'm ADAPT-certified functional health coach through Chris Kresser's ADAPT Academy. I'm actually writing a book with Dr. Jim Lemons who, he used to be at Mayo Clinic, now runs his own clinic and he helped me with my pain and he's the reason that I'm sitting here today. So it's really cool-

Michael:

It sounds like someone I'd like to meet.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, he is such a wonderful guy. He's the most chill person around, too.

Michael:

Yeah, maybe we should have him on. I'm sure we could have an interesting conversation.

You've been through Kresser's coaching program so now you are coaching people with chronic health conditions and before we came on air, told me it's going quite well and you're pretty busy.

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Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, it's awesome. I feel like I never work a day in my life. This work is so rewarding to me. As soon as I realized that I really figured something out with all these health things because I was doing stuff Dr. Lemons wasn't doing. He's like, "Hey, I don't know what all you did but you recovered more than anybody that I've ever seen." And I said, "Well, nobody's talking about their pain neuroscience stuff either. So let's just put it together, write the book."

Now, I actually do a couple of things with people where I do a consultation with them first. It's just free 90 minutes. I just hear all their story, teach them a few things, tell them about where I was at and how I got better, and then give them this 10-page guide of, "Here's what my research would indicate might be best." And if they want help implementing it, they go into the coaching side of things with me and we work long term.

It is just incredible to me to see how the method works and just seeing people that have been down and out for many, many years having sometimes improvement after just the first call even but usually, after about a month or so it goes pretty well for them.

Michael:

That's pretty amazing. We'll come back to your health coaching. We'll come back to where that's going.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Sure, sure.

Michael:

Let's go back to how this all came about. I know that's a long story that started very early for you. When I'm interviewing the doctors and practitioners on the podcast, I usually ask them, "Did you want to be a doctor when you grew up?" I'm guessing that you did not want to be a health coach.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Nope.

Michael:

When you were a kid, you probably just wanted to not feel bad.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Right. And that's my English creative writing degree back on the wall [inaudible 00:04:49].

Michael:

I've got a history education degree in a box in the garage. We can trade.

So you like writing?

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Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, yeah. Writing was the thing. Took me a while to figure that out. But really just it took me a long time to get behind that. I wanted my life to be larger than life and... I turned it in. I was like, "Hey, the writing could actually be that way. And then I went on a health journey that was. I got my adventure with all the harrowing twists and turns.

Michael:

The writing will come in handy with the book.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, but-

Michael:

And writing comes in handy with storytelling, too. There's verbal aspects of writing, too.

You said you were five or six but you think this might have even stemmed younger.

Christopher Blakeslee:

I'm really not quite sure because it's one of those things where it's there as long as I can remember.

Six years old is the first time I remember having the interstitial cystitis trouble, and if people don't know what that is, it's inflammation of the bladder. In my case, it's going to the bathroom all the time. It got to the point where is up to 40 times a day. I just felt like I had to sit on the toilet. Even just standing hurt the muscles so much to go. Some days, I could sit there for two hours straight and not get off the thing.

But man, it started six years old is really when I started to notice and it could have been because that was the transition from half a day school to whole day school.

Michael:

Is that common in kids? That condition?

Christopher Blakeslee:

Not as far as I'm aware, and very, very rare in men, too. It was hard to get diagnosed because... It took me 20 years to get a diagnosis actually because it's a women's disease just like I had fibro and they think, "Oh, that's a women's disease too." They weren't really looking for it. This is the 1980s. It was a dark ages-

Michael:

That's true.

Christopher Blakeslee:

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... for all of the chronic illness stuff.

Michael:

Yeah, that's true.

Christopher Blakeslee:

But yeah, and now, like I was telling you before this, that I found a grade card saying "Christopher uses his ills as an excuse for performance," when I was in kindergarten. So I'm not quite sure when it started. But that six-year-old year, and this was a pattern, I saw-

Michael:

Because a five-year-old is going to come up with some scam to get out of doing kindergarten school because they don't feel... I'm sorry. That's such a ridiculous thing but...

Christopher Blakeslee:

But school was always hard and I was just about to say that stress, anytime it was up, I always, always noticed that the symptoms were up and whenever I was six years old with a pretty stressful year around the house, I mean there was always kind of sibling stuff and I had a pretty great background with my family, no real trauma of any kind. It was just typical sibling stuff. There were scuffles and such and it kept me a little bit on edge and such.

I had a grandfather die that year and that just had a negative mood around the house and all of a sudden I have all these urinary difficulties and tons of headaches that started about the same time, too.

My parents, they were so diligent and they would take me to the doctors and try and get me help just all the time. They're taking me here, there, everywhere. It started out with the pediatricians and just went from there. I was seeing a psychotherapist even whenever I was six trying to teach me to warm my hands up because for some reason I was so scared. It's like well, I have a lot of pain and I have to go to the bathroom a whole lot. That's pretty spooky.

But it came and went there at first. I had a really warm teacher my next year in school and amazingly, I barely had to go to the bathroom then hardly had any problems. I just had that sort of stability and all of a sudden is like, "Hey, I'm actually pretty smart. I'm doing well in school," whenever this stuff is not in the forefront of my brain at all times.

It really didn't become too much of a problem until about four years later, I was 10 years old, and at that point, just another stressful here, just little sorts of stuff growing up and it seems like I may have gotten a parasite at that point because I got irritable bowel syndrome off the charts and I know there's some research out now indicating that maybe the onset of irritable bowel is that you get a parasite that damages the nerves there and it's just never quite the same.

Michael:

I've heard that theory.

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Christopher Blakeslee:

Okay. And that was really hard because that year I was in the bathroom for both bathroom functions at that point and I had to get special permission from the teacher because I was like, "I got to go," and I'd have to run out of the room.

That's where things started to change because I was a really popular kid. I was warm, just open. I was happy all the time. My parents told me... They always did a good job of making me feel loved and knowing that I was valued and I really flourished there for a few years but then that started to get pretty awkward. Just the feelings of, "Okay, I'm the weird kid."

I was athletic at that point and that year, I also developed exercise-induced asthma and then no more running the mile. That was a little bit of a fall but I was pretty plucky. I didn't let it bother me too much.

But grade school, it wasn't that bad. It wasn't until a little bit later that it got worse.

Michael:

Do you have siblings?

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah. I'm a baby. I've got an older brother, older sister, and thankfully, they have not gone through anything like that.

Michael:

Okay, so it's unique to you. It wasn't...

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah. Well, my mom also has interstitial cystitis. Hers is getting way, way better but she's had it for about 40 years now.

Michael:

Okay.

Christopher Blakeslee:

But other than that, no. Pretty much, it came from me.

Michael:

Okay. You're in grade school. You said you were somewhat athletic. I would guess these issues really made doing things like that difficult though.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, it was one of those things and I'm actually still breaking out of it now where just the muscular tightness, it's there almost immediately. This dull grip around the throat and then the

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chest tries to get going. And thankfully, I know what to do about it now and I can run. But back then it was just, "Oh my gosh, I feel like I'm suffocating."

I just started avoiding physical activity which led to the next obvious thing of, "Okay, I get to middle school," and then all of a sudden, I've got this spare tire around my waist. Where did this fat come from?

Well, I was always a kid that was sitting around playing with his action figures and video games, I didn't do sports that much and that pretty much shut me out to have the exercise-induced asthma, not knowing how to deal with that, I would just turn bright red. So I just sat around a whole lot and that led to me getting more and more socially isolated and just feeling awkward getting to the point where...

And the urinary stuff was coming and going. It really came to a head whenever I was 16 because that's whenever it became chronic and that point until last year, eight months ago, never stopped dealing with the urinary stuff. It was always there, just burned like crazy.

The pain, I'd say it was probably now having the perspective of everything I've gone through, I would say it was more a three or four. But I would have told you it was a seven when I was younger. And I was embarrassed. I didn't want to talk about it, it's like, "Hey, I'm the guy with the general pain." I don't want to talk about this to anybody.

I basically went through high school with nobody really knowing me. I just shut down. I just stopped talking, tried to get through school as quietly as possible, just the bare minimum, come home, take a nap because I just feel so crummy from everything I go through, hoping my gut wouldn't make weird noises while I'm sitting in class like everybody turns around, it's like, "No, that wasn't gas. My guts just does this all the time and I don't know why."

That was just a growing stress fire and I know, in hindsight, that was making things much, much worse.

Michael:

It sounds exhausting and really isolating in high school because high school is the time where for kids like peers is everything and social things is everything. That's probably a very difficult way to go through high school and probably not even that the kids were jerks to you or that you didn't know how to communicate with them. It's like you didn't want people to know all this stuff that you're dealing with, going through the troubles you had, and I guess naturally then just keeping people away is the easiest way to do that.

Christopher Blakeslee:

It was. I got teased for it quite a bit so I just tried to camouflage it as much as I could. It's like the fight-flight-freeze dynamic is like I was absolutely either fleeing or just freezing. Just Mr. Blank in all those sorts of circumstances.

Michael:

Kids are brutal.

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Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah. It was really hard to try and get through all that. Trying to ask a girl out is nervous off the charts thinking, it's like, "Can this even work? I hurt so much and what the hell is wrong with me?" It was a really awkward situation.

I started building up sort of view of the world that wasn't true where I started to think I was a bad person that I would start describing myself, did very well with my grades, I'm like [inaudible 00:14:39] in grade school, then in the middle school, it's a little harder, but just I was obviously bright but I would write down I was average.

At one point, I was asked even to describe myself and I just sat there and never would say anything. I was like, "No, I refuse to." It's a repertory theater interview and I just couldn't think of anything good to say about myself because I can't keep up athletically. I have a middle-aged guys build whenever I'm in my teenage years. I have no idea why. Exercise is hard.

I just felt like the world was a very harmful place to me but thankfully I had enough going on mentally to realize this like, "No, I don't think the world's actually like this. I think my circumstances are influencing me." So whenever I went to college, I told myself, I was like, "This is a reset just. Nobody knows you. You're going to a new place. This is going to be totally different. Just start over again. Trust people again and talk" and I did that. And what do you know? My symptoms started to get better for a few years.

I started to see a little bit of a pattern there, it's like, "There's something going on here on the mental side of it."

Michael:

And how that works.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, for sure.

I had pretty good use there in college. I started becoming Mr. Social again, had tons of friends. We're hanging out like 20, 30 people just having a good time.

But still, it didn't change the fact that there was something physiologically wrong with my body. I was still in the bathroom all the time, certain foods... I was doing the whole low-fat thing because I thought, "It's the '90s this is what everybody says I should do to try and lose weight that I can seemingly never lose."

And then I develop a Candida infection and I only know this not because I got tested but because I was the guy that anybody's lights up a cigarette next to me and my nose swell shot or if I have a beer, oh my gosh, such a symptom flare up and then just the [inaudible 00:16:40] I'm in the bathroom going all the time all day, so Mr. Designated Driver for many years there.

Michael:

You're better off for it. Trust me.

Christopher Blakeslee:

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Yeah, yeah, I say-

Michael:

At the time, you wouldn't have agreed.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, I thought I was missing out.

Michael:

There's not a single positive thing that alcohol has ever done for me.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, I know. I tell a lot of people it's like the straight jacket that my conditions put on me stop me from probably doing some dumber things.

Michael:

And it's almost-

Christopher Blakeslee:

It's like a comedy.

Michael:

Yeah. If I listed the 10 worst decisions I've ever made in my life, at least eight of them would have involved alcohol. Several injuries, even. So I would agree with that and I would have benefited from some similar sort of straight jacket at the time.

Now that's one of those things we talked about earlier that you wouldn't want to be told at the time, that, "Oh, this is probably good for you," but you didn't miss anything.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, I know that now. I've got a lot more wisdom after all this.

So I managed to get through... I mean I excelled in college. I got to take the classes I wanted, I loved it. I was taking everything. I was just near the top of my class and everything. Gotten to English, realized, I was like, "This is how I'm going to be happy. I'm going to write these fiction stories. I'm going to write adventure stories. This is going to be fun." I'm feeling really good.

I finally start to think like, "All right, I'm going to tackle this body thing." I start lifting weights really low, man, with a bar. I was weak. I was not very strong and just trying to build up through that and I started to get in really, really good shape. I was like, "Okay, I'm actually breaking through this," and now I'm lifting three times a week and I went a little too far.

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I started running intervals five times a week and the exercise-induced asthma, suddenly not really there, and I can run for the first time. And all the while, because of way back when, when I was a kid, 10 years old or so, we've taken me to so many doctors and all they ever do is throw antibiotics at me.

Michael:

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Also, if you're on Facebook, we've got a fun, engaging, and supportive group over there as well with thousands of health seekers just like yourself. Just search for Rebel Health Tribe and you'll find us. Thanks for listening. And now back to the show.

Christopher Blakeslee:

The background to all this is I'm just gritting my teeth. Through everything. It's like the pain is always there and I think, "Okay, I don't know how to work with this and now I know I probably had fibromyalgia too." When I was about 16, it was just bare. Once I started working on my muscles like, "Ha, I just ache everywhere and there's these weird deposits in my body."

But I had been operating on this premise that was so wrong to just grit my teeth because I thought doctors can't do anything. "Nobody can help me with this." That's another reason why I didn't tell anybody anything. I was just failed by the medical system over and over anywhere. "All right, nobody can help with this. Why would I just open myself up to criticism that burden people with. They don't know how to fix it either."

That's the attitude I'm putting into everything. I'm working out that way. It's like, "Oh, it hurts." It hurts a lot but I'm like, "Let's see in the mirror. I'm looking good. I'm losing all the fat." And that was what really led to the severe portion of my health which was ages 24 to I want to say... It's hard to draw a line because I was getting better but the pain was still there until I was about 39. Still, it was like I'm dealing with six pain daily all the time.

Michael:

That's about 15 years and that was after college?

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah. So I [crosstalk 00:20:51]-

Michael:

The six pain was mainly the fibromyalgia? The burning pain?

Christopher Blakeslee:

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And the interstitial cystitis. At that time, it was that but then it exploded because as autoimmunity does it just spread throughout my body because it was unchecked. I'm eating the standard American diet then when I'm trying to bulk up I'm like, "All right, natural peanut butter." Well, my gut gets scratched up crazy like that. And I have a salad, I'm trying to eat clean and it just feels like glass going through me and I'm like, "Am I the only one? What is this sort of thing?"

But it led to my collapse because I was doing all this lifting and finally one day is I get this charley horse in my pelvic floor whenever I'm trying to do some squats and I couldn't get very far on squats. I was only doing 100 pounds because I was so undeveloped because I sat all the time and there was so much pain down there. I didn't want to squat or anything. It was just so painful.

So that led to the severe symptoms where, "All right, it's so high that it's interfering with my activity." I'm just sitting and I'm sweating at this point. I go on a trip I'm driving in a car and the bouncing just, oh my gosh, excruciating. So I finally tell my parents and my family, it's like, "All right, I've been holding this back for eight years. It became chronic on me and I never told any of you and I can't deal with it anymore. I got to have some help. I don't know where to go. I guess we go back to the conventional medicine."

And what do you know? They throw antibiotics at me yet again telling me I've nonbacterial prostatitis, whatever the heck that is.

Michael:

I can't even guess how many times you've been prescribed antibiotics.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah. I made a list of all the drugs that I've been on and I lost count at about 65 throughout my life because I tried so many... It was all these different ones. My dad's like, "Try a sulfa-based antibiotic even. Maybe that'll work with prostate sort of stuff." So I do that. I tried so many medical interventions trying to get through it. And the irony is that I needed none of them to get better.

Michael:

Yeah. It gradually got worse from 24 to 30s? That was the period that was the worst?

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah.

Michael:

All of the conditions and symptoms basically?

Christopher Blakeslee:

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Yeah, because at that point I was such a trooper that I didn't stop till I couldn't keep going at all. At that point, I could not stand. I had to give up everything physical which was one of the harder days of my life because I had too much... My self-esteem really tied up into the working out back then. I was like, "Hey, I look good. So I'm good, right?" But thankfully, I worked through that pretty fast.

But that day, I cried for about an hour or two and realized, "I have to give up everything physical. I cannot stand from this pelvic pain that I've got anymore." And started going down that road with the doctors and pelvic floor rehab and just starting to talk a bit more about the symptoms and it shocked everybody because everybody thought I looked the best I've looked, I was functioning in a really high level so it was shocking.

But from that point, for the next 15 years, I barely stood. I was down almost that entire time. I was just reclining on my side is what I started to have to do because sitting would hurt so much. So I was just lying sideways on the couch with my dog, Archie. He would be up against me.

Eventually, I had to get him to go away from me because his heat was causing me more pain because the whole thing, and what I know now the central sensitization of my nervous system for being in pain for so long, it was just going crazy and it was spreading into such a way that I noticed... Well, TV and music are causing me to feel like I'm getting stabbed in my midsection. I was like, "What the heck is happening to me?" And it gets worse and because I'm the type of person that does the gritting my teeth thing like, "Well, I'm not giving that up. I don't have much else to do." That keeps getting worse.

But during this, that's whenever I start studying health because I thought, "I can't improve it any more. Maybe I'll never be able to. So the only real avenue open to me is to do it cognitively. So I'm going to go read philosophy, I'm going to go read all sorts of things just to enhance my mind. I'm going to consume all sorts of science and maybe I'll start looking into health because this stuff still isn't working that the doctors are saying, that all the while this nervous system hypersensitivity is getting worse as my pain keeps creeping up. It's just one by one they're inching up."

I had to give up TV and music after about a couple of years. That just became a thing where I was screaming on the inside whenever that stuff was going on. So then I retreated down to... It was just reading and talking. But-

Michael:

Did you ever figure that out? The TV and the music?

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, yeah. Thankfully, that's all gone. I can do whatever I want. One of the most liberating moments I had was going to a concert and it didn't [crosstalk 00:25:54]-

Michael:

Oh, was it just the nervous system activation from those things?

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Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah. It was the inflammation that was being caused by the conditions that inflamed me to such a degree that there was a physiological cause so I had to get that knocked out and then I had to do a bunch of other things to try and lower the nervous system hypersensitivity which I'll get to here just in a little bit.

But the part of where it was getting worse, it started getting real scary there, my pain seven, eight, at this point. I'm only walking to the bathroom. I start... I don't know much about diet at that point. I'm just trying the [inaudible 00:26:27] diet which makes me feel worse too. I'm trying all sorts of things.

And then this nervous system hypersensitivity just... I have to admit that the reading and talking hurts too much for me. At that point, I decided I was going to try isolating myself in my bedroom and I turn on a white noise machine and I put a blackout shade up and I just lay in the dark and see, "Well, if I get no stimulus, maybe this is going to make a difference for me."

I'm a really emotionally resilient guy but that was hard to just take a step back, go be in my room, just have my mom or my dad bring me one meal a day and sometimes two and we talk really quietly for about five, 10 minutes. Ugh, man, just-

Michael:

How were they with all that?

Christopher Blakeslee:

They were devastated. I wouldn't be here without them. Without their support, there's no way I ever would have figured this out. That's one thing I always make sure with all my clients and like, "Do you have a good support system?" Because my parents were wonderful throughout the whole thing. With my mom having interstitial cystitis, too, they had really good coping setup for that sort of thing. They were very empathetic with me.

But it was just devastating to them. They just were like, "Okay, we don't know what else to do. You're trying every drug." At this point, I'm even trying all sorts of weird things. I'm taking over the counter guaifenesin because I'm trying to chelate the metals maybe out of me and I've read this book that says fibromyalgia gets helped by that. I'm just trying everything. Going down the chiropractic road, I'm trying acupuncture, I'm trying massage, and people just touching me flares my pain up for a week at a time to where it's like I'm nonfunctional every single time.

I go to the bedroom and lie down in there and did that for almost a year. Just a year of that lying down. Now that I understand how the nervous system works. What happens if you're in a quiet room, you hear a loud noise? Whoa. My nervous system gets more hypersensitive for me doing this so I'm reacting now. "Is that little fluctuation of a sound and the white noise machine, is that causing me pain too? What the heck is going on?" But I didn't know what else to try so I'm just staying down with this thing.

The worst day of that was I saw my dog, Archie, because he missed me so much. I saw him just lie up against the door and I could see him blocking the light and I just started bawling whenever I saw that. It was just the realization of everything that I was missing. I'm 29, 30 years

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old at this point and my life never really got started and I'm just stuck here. Where's this going? How am I going to get out of this?

But like I said, I'm a pretty resilient guy and I thought, "If I don't figure this out, somebody else will. If I can stay alive long enough, maybe this all will be over with. Just keep at it. Keep studying, keep doing things." Because I was lying down for so long it caused irritation of my occipital and trigeminal nerves in my face which, man, that is some bad pain.

It was just constant and that is still one symptom that I barely have left to deal with is if I get pressure on the back of my head, it still tries to set those nerves off and tries to get the burning mouth syndrome back because that's when burning mouth syndrome started which led me to think erroneously that I reacted to just every food that I ate. I thought, "Wow, I just burned from everything."

Now I'm in a real pickle at that point. I am so good at shifting throughout all this, change position, whatever I got to do to keep surviving. But now I can't lie down and I'm exhausted. At that point, I can only be awake about 12 hours. It's funny how if you don't move, your body just doesn't stay awake.

I realize I have to sit up now all day because my pelvic floor hurts too much to stand and I'm so atrophied at this point. I looked like a grown child. My trapezius muscles were... They were huge. Now I'm tendons and bones after all this and then I come out of the bedroom, defeated, and thankfully, I come across a couple of friends talking about a paleo style diet. I give that a try and this is 2010 and then hear a little bit more about functional medicine about let's try and find all your root causes and address them simultaneously.

I'm like, "I think I've got this. This actually makes sense." All these things. Let's do diet, let's do exercise. I don't know how to do exercise because that hurts so much. But here are these things to try. I worked on that for about a year and I lost some weight because I've been putting on some weight at that point. I was about 50 pounds overweight but that's all that happened and all these people are saying like, "Oh, diet changed my life and these other things." And me, "I'm still just in as much pain and what the heck's wrong with me?"

So I tried. I tried walking around the block. The big question wherever you have chronic pain is, what the heck do you do whenever you hurt all the time? Where is the line of what you can do? It's like I do more and I hurt more. So isn't pain bad? Should I just do nothing?

After a bit of trying that, I burn out and get horribly depressed of the whole thing because I don't get better than... That was the start of the worst years.

Michael:

And the worst years... This is already such a long, long time.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah.

Michael:

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A lot of people... The longest flare that Mira has had was a year and it was really severe for probably half of that time and it wavered. But even that, a third of my head turn gray. Even one year of that with the chronic pain and that she has neuro symptoms and pain and a bunch of things, it is a long time. A year of that is five years of normal.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah. I tell people I feel like I've lived three different lifetimes now before chronic-

Michael:

You're like 130 years old.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah. Dr. Lemons tells me I have the oldest soul. It's like, "Well, I've seen a lot." The beauty part of this is I had nothing to do while I was sitting alone and lying alone in that room but think and think about if I get out of this-

Michael:

Time stands still then.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah, I'm like, "If I get out of this, what do I want my life to be?" People always tell me now, "You have so many plans." Well, I had a daily plan [crosstalk 00:33:26]-

Michael:

I had a while to figure it out. Yeah, and a while to plan what I would do when I felt better and then...

Christopher Blakeslee:

Right. [crosstalk 00:33:32]-

Michael:

I don't want to skip ahead. But I can't even imagine. Those of us who have not been through things like this really take it for granted to not be in pain like not feel... To not be sick until like... I can wake up and be like, "All right, I'm going to go for a walk and then I'm going to cook breakfast and I'm going to eat whatever I want. And then I could work out, I could ride a bike, I could do work, I can read, I could sit on Zoom all day," which is what I do now.

And then grumble. I grumble about some of those things that I have to do and it's things that a lot of people can't do.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Right.

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Michael:

And then...

Christopher Blakeslee:

It's just this happens to way too many people and it becomes this prison because I almost liken it to living in a dictatorship in a way because it's like you are forbidden to live by your own body where it's just how can you have values anymore and it's just mentally devastating because just what am I?

I got to the point where I couldn't see young people anymore because it was just physically painful as a reminder to me thinking because it is emotionally painful too but just I would hurt the thinking they have all these things I'm never going to have and it was just heartbreaking to go through that all the time and think who understands this? I felt like I was the most isolated person on the planet because even my mom is like, "I can't fully relate to what you're going through. Yours is so much worse than mine for some reason," and we don't get it.

But it was devastating in every sort of way just to think about my function is worse than geriatric. I basically never got to have the healthy life ever because it was chronic the entire way. That's one reason I say to people that I think the mindset component is 100% essential to surviving and getting over it. I call it survive and thrive mindset because it's like, "All right, you can't thrive at all when you're that bad. It's just survival at the beginning but you start trying to find value wherever you can."

Thankfully, I had some good voices in my ear talking about, "Focus on values, try and have a few things you can do every day that you can at least look forward to that no matter how meager it is. "It's hard really to adjust myself thinking to that back then of what it was like to try and say, "All right, I have to accept that this is me and this is all I can do."

But that was the start, and I think it's one of the reasons why I was able to get through what I did for as long as I did was just having this life based focus and thinking like, "This is my one shot at life and I don't want to go down like this. I always wanted something huge and great for my life. So I'm going to keep trying through this and keep studying." Even though it's like I come out of the bedroom and the nervous system is bad. The reading is hurting but I'm going to still read.

It's funny. Once I got better I had to print out all the health information I read and over the years, whenever I was like, "I'm over it, I can get rid of it." I had 15 trash bags that I threw out whenever I got done because I consumed everything that I possibly could to try all these things. But I just kept getting worse.

Once the trigeminal and occipital stuff got started, I got pneumonia right after that. That's where I just had the, "All right, I hate this. Screw this [inaudible 00:37:06]." This has got me totally fed up because at this point too I go and finally concede, "Let's try narcotics to try and calm down the nervous system." I get on long and short acting narcotics, I get on two muscle relaxers, just a boatload other stuff for nerve pain and such, antidepressant and trying to calm everything down to the medicine.

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Well, that just made me more sensitive to pain in time because that's unfortunately one of the things that they can do. But I'm leaning on that stuff. I just get so depressed there. I tried functional medicine. This sounded like, "This is what should work." My pain is seven, eight all the time now and I just go and sit on the couch and go to the kitchen once a day and sit on the couch the rest of the day and go to the bathroom.

That's the only thing I do. And I'm stuck now where my pain is so high that I'm awake 20 hours every day on average for a wakeful period because the pain is just off the chart.

Michael:

Because you cannot sleep.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Right. I couldn't fall asleep because of the pain and if I tried to lay down any earlier then the occipital and trigeminal stuff get going and I make myself worse and I start shaking and spasm start in my body so I have to wait till I'm just exhausted to even pass out.

I get into this really unhealthy avoidance behavior at this point because I was like, "I can't take this." I think the narcotics dulled my thinking because I just took a holiday when I get pneumonia and I'm like, "I'm going to play video games because I haven't done that in forever, and I know they make me worse, I'm just going to do it."

I didn't know these... "I'm going to stay busy even though I can't move." I just stay mentally busy. That's so bad for the nervous system. I just wired things to where I was... I gave myself an ADHD thing. I'm just talking really fast. I'm bouncing off the walls, I'm starting to have trouble putting sentences together.

I went on like that for three years of just pure hell where my pain is never below an eight where I can barely talk to anybody but I'm just like, "I'm going to read on my phone," or "I'm going to watch TV," or "I'm just going to play video games," just to keep my mind and run from it all the time and I keep going down this road until now I'm awake 30 hours on average every day. The sun, sometimes I see it twice. Sometimes, it's just once.

That was one of the most depressing things because I no longer... It was just living in chaos. I just had no way anymore to ground myself with anything. I've no habits or anything and that's whenever I say, "Okay, I will try an immunosuppressant for my immune system even though I don't think this is a good idea." That was a really bad choice but it led to the good stuff.

I take that for two months and I think, "All right, I need to have this careful laboratory. Don't move very much. Move even less than you did. Just sit there." I'm just pouring with sweat. If I got to go to the bathroom and have a bowel movement even, I'm sweating for three hours beforehand. It just hurts so bad. I'm sitting there for two months of this trial on this drug and I'm just getting these worse symptoms.

And then it all changed for me. It was January 16 in the night of 2017. I've been on this drug for a couple months. Okay, I'm sitting there and I just start to see these black spots all over the place. This really freaks me out. I'm like, "Okay, maybe I'm dying. I don't know what the hell is happening to me," because I've been really grounded all this time and I-

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Michael:

Seems like it's a fair assessment.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah. I'm starting to get real worried and then I start shivering and it just keeps going. For 12 hours, this goes on, and my heart rates up. I'm just pouring with sweat, I'm shaking like crazy.

It was like, "I got to change something." I am just a total Frankenstein monster at this point because I'm on 15 prescription simultaneously. I never move. I get 150 steps a day. I only go outside to go to a pain clinic so they can renew my prescriptions. That's the only thing that I'm doing for myself. My sleep schedule is all over. I was awake sometimes up to 40 hours was the longest and I would sleep 20 hours after that and be a mess because my head was all over.

I'm just thinking, "I've got to change. What worked? What was the closest thing to working?" Well, that functional medicine thing. Let's start with some lifestyle changes and I know it's going to be so hard but it's like, "I got to stop relying on these medicines. It's not working."

I make a plan to get off my medications. I want to have it done by the end of the year like I don't care I'm going to do this no matter what. And then I start forcing myself up. I start walking around, I managed to stand for 10 minutes at a time, and not happy about it, but I'm like, "I got to do this. I got to feel better and this is the only way it's going to work. How can my body detox if I don't move?"

So I start walking really slow, old man speed inside my parents' house, and I do that for 10 minutes and then just sack out for four hours because I'd be so drained. Unfortunately, my pain is still in the eight range all this time but I go on an autoimmune protocol diet and it was the tweaked version, it was a keto version of what Sarah Ballantyne recommends. Also, I start cutting down the meds really fast.

I don't know too much about stress management at this point but I started getting a little bit better. So I started to have a little bit of a hope finally for the first time like, "All right, maybe this is going to work. Maybe the medications are why I didn't get better back in 2010 whenever I was addressing all these things."

Now I know it's the analogies that you hear from the functional medicine people whether it's the sinking boat or it's the roof with all the holes in it, I was screwing up before because I do the piecemeal treatment. I'd say diet, "Plug that hole," and then I'd say, "That didn't work," and then I just pull out and try exercise instead of realizing, "Hey, diet. Hey, exercise. Hey, stress, and maybe I'll start to stop sinking at this point."

I start to have some progress there and I get off half of my medications by the middle of the year. I'm off one of my narcotics. It's really painful still but I just can't get over the hump. I get to 5000 steps a day and I still hurt so much. I go see a physical therapist and say, "Teach me how do I sit up again," because I lost three inches of my height because I was sitting in the same position all the time, hunched forward, and I just use my bones and ligaments to hold me up and I'm just trying that all the time.

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On top of that, I've gained at least 100 pounds during this period because I stopped weighing when I was 242 and I just said, "I'm never getting better." I can't tell you to this day how much weight I really lost because when I started to turn it around I didn't have confidence that this was the moment that you hold the paper and take the picture because how should I [crosstalk 00:44:24]-

Michael:

Yeah, it's impossible to trust at that point that something's going to continue because you probably had had a million days where it was like, "Oh, this is a little better. Maybe today's the day," and then you would get crushed the next day.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Right. Just a million failures is what I felt like just throughout this whole process.

I gained all that weight but at that point, getting off the meds, I lost about 40 pounds so I was like, "Okay, it's a little bit better."

But I see this physical therapist and she says, "Christopher, you are the most sensitive person I've ever seen. I touch you on your midsection and you hurt for three days." She said, "I know this guy nearby named Dr. Jim Lemons who he does some interesting things. He can help people get off their narcotics and you've got off of one. But maybe he can help you get off the other. It's a comprehensive behavioral program." I'm like, "Ha, behavioral. What are they saying? I'm crazy?"

But it's five days a week, four hours a day for six weeks. I just laugh because I think, "I haven't done anything that intensive since college. I can't do this."

Michael:

College, yeah.

Christopher Blakeslee:

I was like, "No way."

I just go off on my own for three more months, try and pull off of morphine, and shockingly... That was the worst experience in my life. I started to go off of that and that was my short acting narcotic. I was near max dose on that. My pain was just too high to go off and I said, "I can't do it." After about three weeks of trying to try and titrate it down, I say, "I can't do it." The pain clinic says, "Fine. [inaudible 00:45:55]." Psychologically, I've told myself, I can't do this.

One week later, the government sends an edict saying, "Interstitial cystitis can't be treated by that. You have to get off of it." So I am in total panic at this point. They say, "Well, we can switch you to a long acting." Boy, did that thing not act as a substitute and I just was bonkers for about eight weeks. My nervous system went wild.

That is the first time and only time in my life where I thought maybe I'm going to be suicidal because after everything I've been through, I know it's so much but I was like, "I can't

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trust my mind anymore." I was afraid of everything. I was inventing irrational fears and it was so much worse than what I expected. It went on for two months of nonstop of that withdrawal sensation. It was terrible.

Michael:

That's what got you to go see Dr. Lemons?

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yep. You're ahead of me there. I was like, "Okay, what-"

Michael:

It's the extreme pain point. We talked about this too before we went on air is that one of your goals as a coach now is to help people make decisions and choices and changes before they hit what I guess in a health world would be considered rock bottom equivalent of an addict because so many addicts don't take the necessary steps to recover until they've severed all relationships in their life, they've blown up all aspects of their life, they have nothing left, there's nothing else for them to destroy. And then the changes happen.

And so often with health conditions, I'm not saying yours specifically because you did try so many things but a lot of people will continue the same path until the misery point is so extreme-

Christopher Blakeslee:

Right. And then [inaudible 00:47:55]-

Michael:

... that it's like, "Okay, I'll do anything, I'll change anything. I'll do..." There's this breakdown point. I think that's a very worthy goal to set to try to help people make decisions before they get to that.

Christopher Blakeslee:

I think it's a really complex question, well issue, not question, to address because negative motivation is what so many of us live off of where it's like, "Oh, I look like crap. I got to change." Whereas we need to have a value life based perspective of, "I'm going to gain that." That's what I love about my coaching now is that I had a common sense version of that with myself where I was like, "I'm getting in my five bright spots every day, I'm going to write my three good things book, and whenever I'm going through the morphine withdrawal, I realized I am so in danger here."

The thing that scares me is I just have this vision of a gun going off when my pain is a 10. At this one point, I can't talk and I'm in bed. I'm like, "Oh, I'm smart enough to know that that occurred for a reason in my mind. I've got to do something else." I was like, "I got to see Dr. Lemons and I got to just look at what's good," because really what had happened there was my

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mind was telling me now without really saying is, "I can't take this pain anymore and I don't see a future so there's no way out a year."

But I knew the solution bad is I have to start focusing on value so I made this game for myself but it shows you where I was at and how devastated. It's like, "Okay, I can't do anything right now. I'm just going to look out the window and I'm going to look at everything that's there and just name why what I'm seeing could be a value." Even picking out stuff that looks not so great like the garbage. I'm like, "Okay, the garbage is out there. Well, it's nice we live in a culture where somebody comes and takes that from me every day so that I don't have to smell that," and stuff like that.

I'm doing that a couple of times a day just to try and remind myself. I'm starting to play a solitaire game on the computer and some Sudoku in between the miserable parts. I start watching some Bollywood movies because some of those are just such uppers. It's like nothing else where it's just like, "Here's life in a great sense." I'm doing some things like that.

And then I managed to survive through that period of the morphine withdrawal and go see Dr. Lemons. Immediately, we have a really good rapport. He's like, "All right, it's behavioral change. You can see some good results here and we're going to do two hours of physical therapy a day." I'm like, "Whoa." He's like, "It's different from any other kind. I assure you."

So we go in there, and I should just say his website for anybody, it's www.lemonscenter.com, so it's L-E-M-O-N-S-

Michael:

We'll link it below in the show.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Okay, cool.

He's great. Day two of that program, start talking about pain neuroscience with this physical therapist in there. It's like, "Oh, my gosh." She's saying, "Oh, here's how your nervous system works and how it reacts to things." I see immediately this is the answer to why I was stuck for so long. This is why I'm so hypersensitive to things. I keep doing what's called overdue collapse in pain neuroscience circles.

My pain threshold is way, way down and the floor of my pain is way high so it takes very little for me to cross and hit the flare up line and I'm just hitting a flare up line whenever I'm doing things all the time that seems so unpredictable to me. So the secret to this is if I don't cross this flare up line, each time the brain says, "All right, this isn't quite a life threatening danger, lower the overall pain level, your baseline, and raise the threshold a little bit."

I have been doing this, it's called teasing the pain, for the last four and a half years to the point now where I am lifting weights now, I can run intervals, I'm in the best shape of my life, and it's all because I found this on top of... I'm making the lifestyle changes. I designed a supplement protocol for myself even I had my gene sequenced and saw, "Okay, I've got the MTHFR going on. I've got a [inaudible 00:52:08]. So I've got some things I need to be concerned about here."

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I make my own supplement protocol but it's those lifestyle changes plus my mindset and then the pain neuroscience with that little bit of a functional medicine side and I've been improving ever since. It was slow at first but I kept getting off the meds. I got off that long acting narcotic like it was no big deal after seeing Dr. Lemons. He teaches me how to calm my nervous system down through these thinking, moving, and breathing things.

I do deep breathing. It's pretty much automatic now that he's trained me to do it throughout the entire day where I just have always taken a deep breath in. I tried to have my heart rate variability measured and they told me that I breathe too slowly and have to cause myself artificially to breathe faster. I was only breathing twice per minute whenever I was relaxed because I've been doing this for... It hasn't been quite four years yet.

Michael:

People don't realize that that's a huge missing component in most of the recommendations.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Absolutely.

Michael:

There's a book that's really popular right now called *Breath* by James Nestor who's a journalist, not a doctor. I thought I knew quite a bit about breath and breathing and that book blew my mind. There were things in there that I hadn't ever heard of or thought of or knew.

But it makes absolute sense that the breath is probably the most immediate and available way to modify our physiology more than food. If you eat a food, you got to chew food, you got to swallow a food, the food's got to be in the stomach, the food goes in the intestine. What do you digest? What do you break down? What do you actually take in? There's all these factors with food and with supplements and with a lot of things.

And you can go, I don't know how long you've ever fasted for, for me my record's about only 74 hours-

Christopher Blakeslee:

I did.

Michael:

But you can go five days without food. Hell, you could go 50 days without food if you did it right. And you can go awhile without water, longer than people think. I'm not advocating anyone to not drink water but I know someone who does dry fasts and according to what I had been trained previously, that should kill him or ruin him or destroy him in some way and he does it pretty well.

Food and water, super important. Breathing way more important. How long you've been on a breathing fast? I've held my breath for about three minutes once and there's an immediate physiological response to every breath that we take and our breath changes patterns change due

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to physiology. It's a back and forth loop pattern relationship between our physiology and our breath that exists at all times.

This is common knowledge and the basics and the foundations of yoga, ayurvedic, the Vedic texts, traditional Chinese medicine, like indigenous culture. As long as humans have been paying attention to what makes them feel differently, a breath has been at the top of the list. I see it overlooked in almost every functional medicine conversation.

Christopher Blakeslee:

Yeah.

Michael:

That it's not an important... Nobody ever talks about it. I looked up Dr. Lemons website after you said it and he's actually a PhD in psychology which I find [crosstalk 00:55:50]. But the breath techniques like Buteyko breathing and there's a few of... Box breathing. There's all these techniques that people are like, "I don't have money, I can't do anything for my..." They have an immediate impact on your nervous system. So I just wanted to inject that I am on a breath kick.

I'm not allowed to immediately sign up for any more trainings because I've been overloaded for too long and I'm trying to give myself space. But the next training that I'm going to be doing is going to be entirely focused on breath work.

Christopher Blakeslee:

It really is essential. It's one of those things where so far I've had 100% success rate with all the clients that I've worked with. I think it's 29 people now.

It's one of those things where I always have that arrow in my quiver before addressing the breath side of things and because now Dr. Lemons and I have talked about the pain neuroscience stuff I'm an expert on and I've written two medium articles which are also on my website about it where it's just I've gone into the deepest level of this stuff where it is amazing how you can change your pain responses through how you think about your pain which is where all the horrible, "It's all in your head and you're making your pain comes up understandably," because it's like, "Oh yeah, I can change my pain responses simply if I fixate on them with fear. It absolutely makes my pain worse."

Speaker 3:

We'll stop here for now. Come back for our next episode and we will hear the rest of Christopher's story.

Michael:

And this brings us to the end of today's episode. Head on over to rebelhealthtribe.com/kit to access the RHT Quick Start Bundle which includes four full length presentations from our RHT master classes, two downloadable PDF guides, and a 15% off coupon which you can use in our retail shop.

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Thanks for joining us. I'll see you again soon.