

Live Case Recordings #3 - Initial Consult

Chris: So Jonathan, why don't you tell me a little bit about why you're reaching out for help, your main complaints and concerns, and a little bit of history surrounding those. What you've tried so far, some background, what has worked and what hasn't worked, and we'll go from there.

Jonathan: Okay. So right now, I'm 22. I'm a senior in college right now, but when I was a senior in high school four years ago, I was just about to turn 18. I had always been very healthy. I had been active, happy, and athletic. I'd had these little problems that are pretty common, allergies and eczema. I had probably more acne than most people in middle school, but that kind of cleared up. I mean, that cleared up really well by the end of high school.

Chris: Okay.

Jonathan: So going into my senior year feeling pretty healthy. I started to kind of not really feel like myself mentally and emotionally a little bit going into that fall. Maybe in September, I think if I'm remembering right, I started having issues. I'm sorry. I'm kind of in a house with other people, so I may have—

Chris: That's okay.

Jonathan: —maybe some interruptions. So anyway, I started having a lot more problems. The first thing that happened is I had this persistent sinus infection. I woke up one night in the middle of the night, and I had this terrible, like, pressure in my sinuses. My eustachian tube on the right side was swollen shut. I couldn't get it to pop. I was dizzy, and my ear was ringing pretty loudly. Being that I had already recently just started feeling a lot more anxious and having a hard time being just naturally happy, when that didn't go away, because it didn't, it was terribly bothersome. The eustachian tube would never open up, and I had this pressure in both my ears as well. It wasn't until months later, though, that I started having the problem where the left ear couldn't pop either. Then about a month after that point, after being—I mean, I was dizzy constantly. My ears were ringing constantly. I just kind of had a low level of dizziness. Never all-out vertigo, but every time I turned my head, things would kind of whoosh around.

Chris: Okay.

Jonathan: I was still hearing the ringing really badly, and then I started seeing stars all the time. So many. I had all these floaters in my vision. It really scared me. So, then, none of that stuff got any better. It didn't necessarily get very much worse, but maybe by December or January, I had started feeling very, very tired as well. I went from being able to just sleep a normal amount, like six to eight hours. Even if I did only get six hours, I'd feel okay, even though that's not ideal. I went from that to

having to always just try to go for at least nine or 10 hours. I had a really hard time just doing all the athletic activities that I was used to doing, and also during the fall the kind of emotional problems that I was feeling, they got much worse. I don't know how physical in nature they are, but I know that however much physical they were, they were compounded by just the emotional stress of dealing with what was going on. So anyway, I just kept seeing all these doctors. I saw an ENT. He said he didn't know what to do. He did some work on me. He put a tube in my ear. None of it really helped. He did a surgery to widen my sinus passages to help the sinus infections go away because I kept having them. Finally, after a year of all this and nothing helping, we finally went to an integrative medicine doctor. They helped me out. They did an IgG test. Is that right?

Chris: Yep.

Jonathan: So, they tested my food allergies. I had a good amount. Anyway, I stopped eating gluten. I just learned. I always just ate whatever I wanted, but I learned about that. They kind of put me on a lower-carb diet. They said they did like a stool test and said I had Candida issues. It was really low-carb in the beginning. It was like 40 grams of carbs a day. I felt terrible, but my acne got better, and my sinuses—well the sinus infection stayed a while. The problems that I was having really didn't get much better at that point, but my eczema did go away, and the acne went away. So then after about six months of working with them, I was just expressing to them how much suffering I was in. I don't know if I made that apparent in the beginning, and I just wanted to say, like, "You guys, we need to be aggressive about this because I'm very miserable." I had a lot of help from my parents, and they helped me say that. They did. They offered up some more suggestions. They suggested a grain-free diet, which I did, and it seemed like immediately when I did that, the sinus infections went away. I was still doing the really low-carb thing. I didn't really put two and two together at the time, but it was making me even more tired.

Chris: Yeah.

Jonathan: So, from that point, after about a year and a half in, when I had been working with the integrative medicine doctor for about six months, when they took me off grains, I started to slowly heal a little bit up until now. It's been right at three years since I started working with them.

Chris: Okay.

Jonathan: So eventually I would ask them, you know, would it be okay for me to eat some wild rice or some quinoa? They told me I could eat stuff like pseudograins. I did that. It helped my energy levels, but I was still pretty miserable, to be honest. My ears wouldn't pop. It wasn't until I think the summer before last that they opened up sometimes really, or at least for the right one. The left one would just be back and forth anyway. Also during that year, I saw—I don't know what he was called—but he's a doctor who works on the inner ear, and he told me that I have Meniere's disease. I didn't have the terrible vertigo like most people have but just the low-level dizziness. Eventually, as I started to feel better, the dizziness would kind of go away, especially when my ears would open

up a little bit. I did regenokine shots the summer before last. That's not really common, just a procedure that we found a couple doctors, or one doctor, that would do it.

Chris: Did you have any benefit from that?

Jonathan: I don't know. That was a summer where I did notice some good stuff, but that was the same summer I took out grains. I really don't know. I mean, I'm glad we did it just to do it. Maybe it did help. Anyway, so from that point, that was when I was starting my junior year of college. Through my junior year of college, I just kind of kept to the same, but I kept doing—I went back to the low-carb stuff just to say, well, you know what, I think maybe this will help. I gave it another shot. I did it throughout that whole school year basically. After that point, I kind of thought, well, you know, I do know diet can make a difference because it has for me. Maybe I need to experiment with some different things.

For short periods of time, I tried the GAPS diet. I ended up taking out meat completely at a point. I ate just like a lot of winter squash, starches, and stuff, but there was also a point where I ate like a lot of nuts and vegetables. It was like a low-carb Wahl diet. That diet with a little bit of fruit added in. It didn't really help. I was kind of just shooting in the dark. I realized at that point I don't have the knowledge to be doing that, but I did know that at least if I do something that I know is going to keep the symptoms away but doesn't seem extreme and still gives me some variation, it would be kind of what I was doing before, just without the grains but still the amount of carbs that gives me energy and just protein and fat whenever, however much I wanted of that as well. That all seemed to help.

Actually, at the end of my junior year of college, after I kind of just ate—I did GAPS a little while again but really learned about Paleo style of eating. I just did a lot of research. I read a lot of your articles. A lot of the similar stuff that you recommend is probably actually spot on with what you recommend because I was getting a lot of the info from there. So, you know, that was all doing well for me. My digestion was decent. I didn't mention earlier that I had had constipation the entire time too, so that's definitely—

Chris: Okay.

Jonathan: While I'm at it—I'm sorry. I'm remembering big details just now.

Chris: It's okay.

Jonathan: When I first got to the integrative medicine doctor, they diagnosed me with Hashimoto's.

Chris: Okay.

Jonathan: It wasn't until January 2015 that I took any medicine. I took Nature-Throid. I tried some different things, and now I'm working with—oh man, I forgot what it's called—an endocrinologist. I tried Synthroid with her, but eventually I ended up on WP Thyroid.

Chris: Okay.

Jonathan: Basically like the Nature-Throid. I'm taking that now. It's a pretty low dose, though. We're still trying to get my levels right. Anyway, so I just want to make sure I don't forget any other stuff.

Chris: Okay. Like, as of today, would the main complaints be the ear pressure and symptoms related to Meniere's? Are gut issues still present, or have those been mostly resolved with Paleo and some of the other changes?

Jonathan: The gut issues are definitely present. I have better days than I used to, but they are present. My ears eventually unstopped pretty much. They almost never get stopped up, which is great, but they ring just barely. I still have eye floaters but not quite as many as I used to. This past year, psoriasis came up. That's been a big issue for me. It's kind of all over. It's little spots all over my body.

Chris: How about mood and anxiety? Are those still issues for you, or have those resolved as well?

Jonathan: Yeah. No, that definitely has not resolved. I don't feel anxious anymore just because I think I've just learned to cope and be okay with things, but I definitely still struggle with feeling depressed. I'm very tired, apathetic, and kind of sad feeling, which is definitely not characteristic of me before.

Chris: Right. And Jonathan, when you think back to the senior year in high school prior to all of this happening—I'm sure you've been asked this question many times—but was there anything notable that stood out to you? Did you travel anywhere? Did you move to a different house with your family? Was there anything that stands out to you that was different and preceded this change?

Jonathan: I did go to Guatemala three times in high school. My room was in the basement of our house at the time. I think I moved down there maybe sophomore year of high school or maybe junior year. I'm not sure.

Chris: Okay.

Jonathan: We also live way back in the woods. I was always in the woods, so I've always considered the idea of maybe I got bit by a tick or something.

Chris: Right.

Jonathan: I had actually—I'm sorry. I just remembered one more thing. I had started going on the lake a lot, and I was always getting kind of dirty lake water up my nose and down my throat.

Chris: Okay. All right. Okay, that's really helpful. Thank you for laying that all out sequentially for me. When there is such an abrupt change in health status like that, I'm always thinking about what could have happened that lead to that change, of course. Some of the things that you've brought up, certainly travel to a place like Guatemala. The basement room makes me think about the possibility of mold or other toxins that are related to a water-damaged building, not that the basement guarantees that, but it is more likely in that kind of setting. Was the humidity level pretty high where you were living? Was it like in a shady area?

Jonathan: Our house? Was it shady?

Chris: Yeah.

Jonathan: Oh, yeah. I mean, we literally lived in the middle of the woods.

Chris: And what part of the country?

Jonathan: North Georgia.

Chris: So quite humid as well.

Jonathan: Yeah.

Chris: Okay. Was there algae in the lake that you lived near and you were spending time on? Do you recall?

Jonathan: I don't know if I can say with certainty, but I can say that I'm like 99 percent sure yes because the water was green.

Chris: There are toxins in algae, Ciguatera, for example, that can cause illnesses. There are a lot of potential things that we could investigate here. I think as a starting place what we typically like to do is begin by checking the health of your more fundamental systems, your gut, especially, since you have digestive issues and because of the connection between the gut and the brain. You may know a little bit about it if you read some of my articles. In fact, one of the more prevalent theories of what causes depression now is called the immune or inflammatory cytokine model of depression where it's believed that inflammation in the gut actually affects the brain in a way that leads to the symptoms of depression. Whenever someone is dealing with mood issues, we always want to check their gut, even if they don't have gut symptoms, but if they do have gut symptoms, we especially want to check their gut.

Then the third part of that axis is the skin. I actually did a presentation at a conference a while back called “The Gut-Brain-Skin Axis,” and it looked at the research supporting a connection between symptoms in all of these three areas. So you have the psoriasis now, but you also have the history of eczema and acne. In fact, many of your symptoms are on that axis: the gut, the brain, and the skin. So, I’d like to do an assessment of the gut with stool, breath, and urine tests. I’d like to look at the HPA axis, which is the system that governs and determines your tolerance of stress. A lot of what you’ve been going through since these health problems started, they are all stressors in one way or another, either emotional or psychological but also physiological stressors. Just having a chronic health problem can be a big stress on the system. I also want to see if there is something there that could give us information about what your susceptibilities are, like why you are reacting in this particular way. Then I would want to do what we call a case review blood panel, which is just a really comprehensive blood panel that looks at blood sugar, nutrient status, metabolic function, and immune function. It just gives us a really good idea of how your overall foundational health is. From there, depending on what we discover in that initial round of testing, we may go on to do more specific testing for mold or biotoxin exposure or tick-borne illness. At the integrative doctor that you saw, did they ever test you for Lyme or any of the tick-borne illnesses?

Jonathan: Yeah, I think they did a viral panel, and I think it included whatever test they were using to look for Lyme. I think they did a coinfection test.

Chris: Coinfection. Babesia, Bartonella, and those kinds of—

Jonathan: I think so. Everything that they tested looked negative.

Chris: Okay. As part of the case review process, you can submit some of the lab work that you’ve already had, and it would be good to see what they did so we can determine if that was the same kind of testing that we would do. I’m assuming you haven’t been assessed for mold illness or water-damaged building toxin illness?

Jonathan: I don’t think so. No.

Chris: On previous stool tests, did anything come up? Parasites or anything like that?

Jonathan: No. No parasites. Not parasites. Some other things but not that.

Chris: Okay. I think this is a good starting place. Depending on what we learn from these results, more than likely we’ll do some treatment, and we’ll see where you are at. Then I may even just go ahead and order additional testing after the case review based on your responses to the longer, more detailed questionnaire that you’ll fill out prior to that appointment and based on the results of the initial round of testing. Part of this is like a screening process that helps us to determine what directions to go in that would be most fruitful so that we’re not just kind of flailing around and running a whole bunch of tests for the fun of it. We want to be more specific and directed in what we do. Do you have any questions about the process or how this works?

Jonathan: I mean, after all this testing is done, do you oftentimes have people who need more testing based on the first round of tests than their first appointment?

Chris: Yeah, we often do some follow-up testing. We might find something on the initial round of tests that requires clarification. Maybe the results on the initial round are equivocal, and we need to do follow-up testing to confirm or rule it out. Maybe something raises a red flag that we need additional testing to determine whether it's an issue or not. Maybe in the detailed health history that you fill out where you go into even more detail about what you've done and haven't done, I see something that makes me consider something else that we haven't already considered. That does happen pretty regularly. Typically what we will do is, for most of my patients, we usually do find something that needs to be addressed in the initial panel of testing. Then we'll go ahead and address that. We may or may not order additional testing right away. We'll see how you respond to the treatment, and if you respond well and you're feeling really well, that's great. We may not need to do additional testing, but if some symptoms improve and others don't, we may want to do additional testing at that point if we haven't done it already.

Jonathan: Okay.

Chris: My staff will be in touch with instructions on how to complete the tests. Before the appointment, I'll get all the results back along with your questionnaire, and I'll spend some time reviewing everything and create a report of findings, which will contain what I think are the underlying mechanisms that are causing your symptoms, recommendations for further testing as we just discussed if necessary, and then outline a treatment plan for the next few months. Then we'll just go from there.

Jonathan: Okay. Awesome. I'm really looking forward to being able to come and work with you guys.

Chris: I'm looking forward to meeting you in person, Jonathan, and working with you.

Jonathan: I'm looking forward to it.

Chris: Okay. Take care. I'll see you in a couple months.

Jonathan: Okay. It sounds great. Thanks.

Chris: All right. Bye-bye.

Jonathan: Bye.