



Essential Alchemy

The Ancient Art of Healing Naturally

Season 2, Episode 24: Toxic Mold & Emotional Overload with Bridgit Danner, LAc, FDNP

Jodi: Hi, I'm Jodi Cohen, your host. And I'm so excited for our conversation today with Bridgit Danner. She is an expert in toxic mold and gentle at-home detox method. She's practiced natural medicine since 2003 and runs an integrated medicine clinic for 10 years. And is now pursuing online education at bridgitdanner.com. Welcome, Bridgit.

Bridgit: Hi Jodi. Excited to be here.

Jodi: I know. And I'm excited to delve into your story of resilience and mold. But first I'd love to ask you, how do you define resilience?

Bridgit: I would say adaptability. But to be honest, there's some aspect of survival that almost comes to mind. I think we need to be adaptable to survive and thrive. So that's I guess what I'll talk about it in my talk. You and I were chatting before we got online and I think as a child, I really thought if I check all the right boxes, life will be easy.

As an adult I have learned that that's not really true. And you do have to learn how to roll with things and be strong and think differently to really survive some tough times. And then create a future that is beyond what you imagine in a sense that you can be in this new paradigm where you are more adaptable in life. Your life lens is different, your outlook is different. And you can really embrace a different way of life. I don't know. Maybe that was too broad, I went too deep but does that make sense?

Jodi: Completely. I think it's really good. And I think what people don't realize about resilience, so many of the speakers have been basically saying that, "The difference between people that heal and people that don't is mindset." If you're easily overwhelmed, it's really hard to execute on anything. And if you can't execute, you can't change. And so we can delve into like, mold really throws off your cognitive functioning, your ability to execute. So I'd love it if you could share your story as a starting point, because you're such a role model for how do you slowly, one step at a time, unpack these things and move through them. So please share more about your journey, your experience.

Bridgit: I can start with the mold part so to speak. So I guess you can say, I was trying to just check my boxes and do all the right things. I got a master's degree. I got married. I had a baby. I opened a clinic. And I was not doing great. I was sick 10 times where I got pink eye, just weird stuff was happening. I was sore all the time. I was seeing different practitioners and doctors about back pain. And meanwhile, I was helping my health a lot. So I was already a trained acupuncturist, but now I got really into paleo eating. I was cooking everything. I was wearing a sleep mask at night, going to bed by 10:00 PM.

Again, I was checking all the boxes. I thought I was supposed to check for my health and still not feeling great. And this went on for about eight years. And then finally I had it like a low point. I was pursuing being online more as a career. I'm working from home more and it was winter. It was raining a lot. We had a little leak in our basement. I got strep throat, which has you using antibiotics first time in 20 years? I just didn't recover. I was exhausted. I did a detox. I was getting IV therapy. And finally I was just like, "There's something going on. There's no reason I should be doing so much work and still feel so crappy. "

So I got some testing for auto-immunity and some different things. But luckily someone at this naturopathic college I was at said, "What about your environment, what has changed?" And that led us to talking about this moisture in our basement and stuff. And I went home and told my husband at the time, he's like, "Yeah, I've always been suspicious. Let's do this mold test. "

So that was the beginning of a long journey of finding out that we did have mold. It was pretty bad. It's always hard to keep the story short. But it's good to find out root causes. It's always good, even though it's not always great news. Because that was a huge factor that was keeping me from moving forward in my health. And really I would have just kept getting worse and worse. The trajectory was not good for me. So we made a lot of changes and we'll talk about some of the steps we did. And it's a slow climb out when you've been sick for eight years in a moldy house.

So it wasn't an instant change, but I would say it was like a steady change to get my health back. And I learned a lot and my whole life changed a lot. I ended up selling my clinic and moving to Arizona and just making a lot of changes I didn't expect. Again, being resilient and adaptable. But really it all turned out for the best for me. So I always remind my clients of that when they're struggling and they're on their low point that, "You may not see what the ending looks like yet. But if you just keep pursuing, putting yourself first, taking care of yourself, there's going to be something good that comes out of that. "

Jodi: And even the resilience to say, "I don't know that I'm going to like what I learn, but I'm ready to roll up my sleeves and dig in." Can you share a little bit more. You mentioned some of the symptoms that you experienced with toxic mold. If someone's listening and they're hearing themselves in your story and thinking, "I wonder if that could be me." Talk a little bit more about how mold presents as symptoms or what they might be noticing.

Bridgit: There are so many different symptoms because of the fact that it dysregulates your immune system and you get this chronic inflammatory response. Also mold is a fantastic little traveler. It can get into all sorts of cells and tissues in your body. So it can affect so many things. I think the two most common are probably fatigue and brain fog. Those are probably the most common. But like I mentioned in my story, just like getting sick a lot, having depressed immunity was really key thing for me that nobody really said was related to mold. And even the chronic pain I had, I'd go to tons of all sorts of practitioners and nobody mentioned mold for me.

I had some irregularities with my periods, later I found out my hormone levels were really low, which can happen. Or you can get high estrogen and weight gain is another way it can go. So I was having breakthrough bleeding, certainly having anxiety, insomnia, tons of gut stuff, which was pretty well managed by my super hardcore diet. But later I found out I had parasites and Candida, I did develop Hashimoto's. So I was having some viroids symptoms, you can really just everything under the sun. Mental health issues can happen, especially if your brain is still developing. And for children, asthma, chronic sinus issues, it's related to cardiac issues from the inflammation. So just so many different things can present, skin issues as well.

Jodi: And we talked a little bit unpacking that and just taking slow and steady steps out of it. So obviously there's the remediation in the house. Can you speak to some of the steps that you took to regain your health and the resilience that it took along the way?

Bridgit: So it's nice now and I'm writing a book about mold right now. Because there is a natural progression. In the beginning, there's usually some suspicion. There's some suspicion about your house or about your health. And then you want to know. So there's usually some testing. Like a mold inspector or a dust test, or now, there's really great urine testing for mold toxins in the body.

And I would say also just to add to the mix, sometimes for people like me and probably many others, you've had a bunch of testing before the mold because you didn't know what was going on. So sometimes you're finding out a lot of information all at once that you need to sort through and prioritize. So we can talk about that. So there's the discovery phase and then there's the, "Oh, shit!" phase. Do you want me to say that?

Jodi: It's the right word.

Bridgit: Okay. I thought so too to be honest. Yeah, because this is again, where some of the emotional resilience needs to come in. It's like you realize this is a huge endeavor you're about to take on.

And not one you want it to like going back to school or something. It's like, "Wow, my house is infected with mold. I don't know where I'm going to live. How am I going to pay for this? I'm exhausted. I don't know what to do first about my health. All these visits are really expensive." So you have to just sort through what's most important right now. And I think also do your best to stay out of panic mode.

This is what we were saying earlier. Maybe before we came on that when you're in that panic mode, it's hard to make good decisions. And it's hard to heal. You can't really heal as you taught me when you're in a sympathetic dominant. So there's that sorting out phase and then just chipping away at it. Whether it's chipping away at the steps to move and sort through your belongings. Or maybe you're finding a place where you can use a sauna or trying to start on a few supplements. Or starting some new detox habits, like dry brushing, hopefully then some starting.

And again, I don't mean to be negative, but it is usually a long process. And I just try to make people really aware of that, because if your stuff is moldy or your house is moldy, your body's moldy, there's going to just be so many changes to make. And yeah there's a long period where it's just like you're doing the stuff and meanwhile, you're also taking care of your kids and working and trying to keep up with other things, which I actually think is healthy. As I look back on my own story, I didn't drop everything to study mold. I just learned it when I could. I just did what I could because I had other priorities in my life, like a seven year old child.

Jodi: You said a couple things that I want to unpack. Basically that every journey begins with the first step and that is the decision of like, "This wasn't on my bucket list and yet here it is, I guess I'm going to." You choose, "I'm going to fix this. I'm going to show up. I'm going to figure out how to do it." Then the second step is brainstorming like, "What are all the things I could do?"

And then prioritizing, "How am I going to, given my limited time, budget, energy." Whatever it is and all the things, what am I picking? And that clear step, like just stepping in and saying, "I'm going to heal. I'm going to do this and we'll figure it out." I think that is the hardest thing. I think a lot of people get paralyzed there and they don't even move into it. So can you talk about that a little bit with yourself?

Bridgit: Yeah. I wrote about some of this in the book and one expression people may or may not have heard of is chunking it down. Taking a big thing and making it into smaller pieces. And you've written this beautiful book behind you and if you think, "I'm going to write a book or something really complicated. It can sound like a lot. It's probably why a lot of people don't do it. But if you say, "Well, these are the concepts I need to cover. These are the chapters I think that it would go with. " You do the same with your mold.

So it's going to be potentially a lot to look at and how do we make this into smaller steps that we can actually take action on? Because there's some steps you may be worrying about that are six months down the road. Well, don't worry about those right now. What can you take action on right now? And then coming out of that panic enough to consider options. I think people often feel that they don't have any options for where to move or what to do. They don't have the money. I get these questions all the time.

I do tell people, sometimes you have to humble yourself to get through this stage of life. You may be living in a situation that is beneath where you thought you'd be at the age you're at. To just live some more temporarily, to get out of a moldy situation. And as far as priorities, we say, "Always the priority should be your health. " I know that sounds simple, but in this situation, it's easy to prioritize other things about your finances, your work. I hear a lot prioritizing your kids' life and regularity like, "I don't want to move my child. He's got three more years of high school. " But you can't stay in that same house for three more years. So you need to work around that.

So stick with this vision you had of your life now needs to shift. And that's a lot to swallow. But I see some people do this so beautifully. Like our friend, Evan Brand. He's just no nonsense. He built a beautiful home that turned out to be moldy and he just left that. He left everything in it because his priority is health. And in the long run, he really is prioritizing the health of his family when he makes that decision as well.

I'm a health practitioner and not all of those decisions were easy for me. I was working at home. I didn't want to move out of the home. I was lucky. I had a partner at the time who drove some of those tough decisions. I was also exhausted. I was completely depleted and the last thing you want to do is move when you feel like that. So I think it's just good to keep going back. "What is the most important for my health?" And even if some of the answers to follow that lead are not really what you wanted, like living with your sister-in-law or whatever it is. Just accept that the universe is giving you some options to take that step forward and embrace the options that you have.

Jodi: And just remembering to be compassionate and kind to yourself and to know, "This is right now, this is not forever. " Because as you're moving towards your destination, it's a little bit like a hike. There are going to be parts that are hard. They're going to be parts that are steep. There might be parts that are slippery or not what you expected. They're going to be false summits. And yet you still keep moving.

Bridgit: Yeah, exactly.

Jodi: I love how you chunk it down. It's so funny, with my book, I outlined all the chapters and then I looked at the calendar and I figured out, "I have to write a chapter a week. "

Bridgit: I did the same thing. Yeah, because then you're like, "This will take me 16 weeks or whatever. "

Jodi: Exactly. But in terms of, people are in this new unexpected situation they weren't planning on, how do you help them unpack, roadmap, chunk? Just walk me through some of the things that have been helpful for other people.

Bridgit: So there's the house piece and then there's the body piece. And my specialty is in more the body piece. So I do try to help people with the house piece somewhat and mostly keeping them on their priority to be honest. And then if they have little questions like, "Can I take X, Y, and Z with me to my new house way in?" But the house piece can be complicated. You almost need a whole separate team of experts to consult with about your house.

Jodi: No, I agree, but what you're doing with the health piece. That's the thing people don't necessarily realize. The more you're able to actually get sleep, the more you're able to actually make sure the toxins are leaving your body so they're not another source of stress. That gives you internal resilience. So please speak to that a bit.

Bridgit: Yeah. I'm writing my book and we'll see how it all comes out. But I struggle a bit with protocols because I think people want just one protocol to follow. And there's some pretty cool protocols out there now that are in an order. It could be open up the detox pathways and then you work on the bigger infections or what have you, and then smaller infections. But as you mentioned with the sleep and I have the same exact example in my book, you can't follow that timeline if you're not sleeping the whole time. Forget it.

Bridgit: So you do have to let the body lead a little bit. And what is the body telling you right now? So to give better examples about picking what to do now. Are you not sleeping? Are you not pooping? Are you super anxious and it's wearing you out? How are your relationships right now? Are you asking your body to work more hours than it can? What is not working right now? And what's most important amongst that? I have a lot of trouble with my period. But it wasn't like my highest priority because by the time I was at my sickest, my rain wasn't hardly even working. That became my biggest priority.

So yeah, I think it's okay to look at your body and what support does it need. And sometimes that's just like fasting more or being outside more. It's probably going to be moving if you were in a moldy space.

A lot of people struggle too with, how much is too much and often do try to do too much. So I really work with people who are sensitive. What can you do? Maybe you can do red light therapy. Maybe you do 10 minutes of sauna instead of an hour of sauna. So if your digestion's poor, maybe you're doing more soups and smoothie.

So just looking at what's going on right now. I'm in a usually a lucky place. The clients who come to me are pretty knowledgeable already about general health and cooking and all that. So we can skip forward and just cater to what's happening now. Maybe they are eating well, but they're still constipated and they can't figure out why.

So we can get a little more targeted with supplementations or different techniques or where's that constipation coming from. I think it's okay to just put out the big fires and then over time, those big fires will go out and you can work on your period or other things that aren't quite right. And it's in a sense where I am now. My health is pretty good but I'm always curious to tweak this or that to make it even better.

Jodi: I love the expression, "You can't mow the lawn when the house is on fire." If you're not sleeping, you fine tune later. So you really hit on the main points, sleep, stress, drainage, just getting that energy going. And also being compassionate with yourself. I think so many of us, especially when it used to be really easy to be more productive and now we struggle with what we used to be easy. Just giving ourselves compassion and kindness that it's okay.

Bridgit: And I used to do interviews like this and I was already out of mold for a couple years, but I still had some poor recall. And I just had to give myself permission that if I was on an interview and I couldn't remember something, I could just be like, "What is that thing called?" And usually the person I was talking to could remember, and that was like a big step for me.

Bridgit: Because it's either like, hey, I either just sort of shrink back in my career and not do these interviews or just accept that the way my brain works right now, I forget things sometimes. But if I have someone to help me out, who's equally as knowledgeable, probably on the other end.

Jodi: And I think, would you say you're on the other side of mold? Do you feel like you can, looking back, tell people that are starting their journey?

Bridgit: Yeah. I really do. I really do. I think that health is complex. And that's another part of it. It's not just mold. There's so many other things going on. And since then I've gone through a divorce and had a severe concussion and I'm getting closer to menopause. So there's newer factors in my health to play with and manage. But I don't feel like mold is a big part of my story at all.

I think that there's some sensitivity still thanks to the moon. I've developed some springtime asthma. I think my body's just on high alert for what's in the air. So I think there's some things that resulted from that. But that's true of any body. If you broke your ankle in three places, that's probably always going to be an ankle you have to pay attention to and give extra love to. So just the older you get, the more carrying around from the past to

Jodi: But somebody who's listening who might be at the beginning of their journey, knowing that it's possible and that you're on the other side. I think that gives a lot of hope.

Bridgit: It definitely does. And I think you just have to be patient. I can say, when I moved to Arizona, I think subconsciously I thought, "It'll all be done. I've made this big step. I've chosen to live in this dry place." But I still had a lot of healing to do internally. And that was something I had to grieve sometimes, just like, "Why am I still waking up with a sore throat or why this, or why that" But now, I've been here four years now actually. I'm not grieving mold. I feel fine. Even when I was sick or getting through it, I couldn't imagine trying to teach people this stuff or work with people. I just had still so little to give, I just had to give everything to me. And now I'm completely evolved with that. Like happy to study mold and write about mold and

Jodi: That's an awesome point because I think so many of us are our caregivers. We nurture our children. We nurture our partner. We nurture our parents. We nurture our friends. To actually be able to give our energy to ourselves and prioritize ourselves. That's something that I think people struggle with.

Bridgit: Yeah, for sure. I was that way. I was like a Virgo clinic. Acupuncture, that was another piece of, I think how I ended up so sick is I didn't have good boundaries with my time and I over gave. So I really had to learn that. And I'm thankful. This is another example of all of the good things that can come out of a journey like this. But some of the lessons I've learned are just incredibly valuable in the way I approach life is so much more gentle. Gentle on myself, gentle on others. And I don't think I would have learned that another way.

Jodi: It's funny when Max was in kindergarten, he was in blurter outer and he was smart. So he'd often know the answer, but his kindergarten teacher used to be like, "When you blurt out, you rob someone else the opportunity to know the answer." And I feel like one thing with over-giving, we feel like that's how we're sharing love, but when we're doing everything for other people, we're robbing them of the opportunity to figure that out for themselves. So it's okay for us to pull back

Bridgit: Very true. It's so true. And like they often say, "Fill your cup first." And it's like a little tagline. It really got ... but it's so true. It's like when you really invest in becoming the best version of you, you become this grounded, secure person that other people can relate to instead of striving or peoplepleasing, all that stuff. Again, all this stuff can be a great lessons. I remember one time my son was throwing a fit about something and we said, "Well, you learned a lesson." And he said, "I don't want learn lessons." That's how we all feel sometimes. You don't learn the lesson because it hurts. All the stuff that comes with it hurt. But in the end, I learned great lessons.

And again, I think your lifestyle can actually improve a lot. I was spinning my wheels, running this clinic and not getting out of it. And it's not really what I wanted in my life. So this experience gave me the courage to let go of that and fully commit to this online business I wanted. And luckily I had to be openminded enough to think about living somewhere new. And I completely love where I live and have completely adapted to a new culture. Frankly, moving out of Portland, Oregon. So I think a lot of good things can come out of it. It's almost the time that you can reevaluate your life and be like, "Well, what is working? What do I want to keep here?"

Jodi: Struggle is a doorway.

Bridgit: Yeah. Because sometimes we're just in our rut and we don't think, "I want to get out of this or that." And when everything's been turned upside down, you can say, "Well, what do I really want?"

Jodi: And this actually brings us full circle back to where we started this idea that we think that if you get good grades and get a good job and get married and have the kids then you'll live happily ever after. We don't question until the roadmap doesn't quite take us to the destination we thought we were supposed to land in. And then there's the reevaluation. And sometimes we get to make different choices that are a better fit for who we actually are, because what we're supposed to do, isn't really what we want to do.

Bridgit: So true.

Jodi: Is there anything else that you wanted to add on resilience that might be beneficial to anyone listening?

Bridgit: I think we covered a lot of good stuff. I bet some of your other guests are covering some of the nuts and bolts. I don't know if you want to cover, Jodi, some of my favorite little techniques for detox?

Jodi: Yes. Please share that.

Bridgit: [Inaudible] so maybe I can get into

Jodi: Yeah.

Bridgit: So I listed these; my top things, which turns out to all not be supplements that helped me the most when I was my sickest sauna, dry brushing, green drinks, exercise, especially outdoors and coffee enemas.

Jodi: So those are all drainage. Do you want to talk about why drainage is so basically, the toxins and how they don't necessarily leave the body?

Bridgit: Yeah. So a lot of reasons that could happen. But if the liver is overloaded and it can't keep up with filtering and then so things can be stored in fat tissue or stored in lymph, depending on your body type. For me, I had a lot of lymph congestion. So getting that moving was super helpful. And then you can get it out through pee, through sweat, through your bowel movements, even through breath, like with exercise. And I think it just takes some of the burden off of the body, like doing all that work itself. It's like, I don't know. It's like getting a massage to the body in a sense. That's a good point. I hadn't really thought about how all those can-

Jodi: Green juice mobilizes the toxins, but movement coffee enemas, which stimulate the gallbladder to release bile, which then carries toxins out all of those. Drainage, it's really key. It's like Sisyphus, the liver does all this work. It pushes the toxins into the bile to take to the gallbladder, then the intestines, and then the toilet. But if it gets reabsorbed, then it has to start over the next day with new garbage to get rid of and yesterday's stuff. So every little thing you can take off the body's plate, I think really helps.

Bridgit: Yeah. So those are my favorites and they're not even supplements. I do like some supplements. You're probably going to need some supplements probably for various things. I'm actually a big fan of supplements for sleep if you can't sleep. Because I think it's so important. Sometimes people will be a little stubborn about that. Like, "I don't want to take anything to sleep."

Jodi: What do you like? What do you recommend?

Bridgit: We use time-release melatonin and then we use ananarable adaptogen formula. We have a couple of different ones.

Jodi: How to calm cortisol?

Bridgit: Yeah. Basically. So depending on your type. Also I always use both of those in a night or one or the other. Time-released is nice because sometimes people have more of a problem waking up. But for me in my body, it's usually seems to be just that nervous system regulation. Also, when you have molding, you generally will make less melatonin from infection you have in your nose. So sometimes that can be a helper. I know you're a fan of melatonin. You wrote about it a lot in your book.

Jodi: I love melatonin.

Bridgit: Yeah. It's so powerful. So sometimes people are so focused on supplements for detox. Then we can hit on some of those, but actually sometimes what you need more of is just those different body supports. Getting support for your sleep or inflammation or your hormones. Definitely your gut is going to be part of this journey. So yes, I think there's some great detox supplements, but that's not happening in a vacuum. And you have to look at these other body systems that have been damaged and give them some support as well.

Jodi: Yeah. I agree with you. I honestly think if you can sleep, if you can help your body shift into parasympathetic and if you can open up drainage, that goes a very long way towards returning to balance.

Bridgit: That's a great point. I think that's so true. I love it.

Jodi: Because I think that when toxins are reabsorbed, then they turn on the immune system, then that triggers inflammation. Anyway.

Bridgit: Some other things that make, I don't know how much toxicity is being spoken about in this, but glutathione and binders are probably our two top detox type direct supplements. Some other things I've used or liked like prebiotics and probiotics. Actually, I don't know if you can see, I actually have an oxygen chamber I got very late in this process.

Jodi: Wow.

Bridgit: Yeah. I have a lot—

Jodi: Wow. Is that crazy expensive?

Bridgit: I got it used on credit, so it was half crazy expensive. And I figure I can just sell it again when I don't want it anymore.

Jodi: Yeah. Oxygen is amazing for you.

Bridgit: So I just felt like mentioning that. I love antioxidants too, especially when I had my concussion I really got into antioxidants. They're so supportive for the immune system too. So if you're getting some of that onion struggle, getting sick a lot like I was. White blood cell counts will often come quite a bit down with a long haul mold situation. And that can help your brain as well. Adrenal support can be helpful because your body is going through a lot.

Jodi: That's actually a really important point to mention. Sometimes people think it's the adrenals, but the root cause is mold or parasites or viral load. The reason your adrenals are screaming fire all the time, there might be an underlying root cause that people haven't thought of.

Bridgit: That's a great point. The wire your adrenals into acting a different way. And mold can really make amongst any hormone, like higher or low, pretty much if you want to broad spectrum it. So cortisol can initially be going up, up, up, trying to deal with everything, probably eventually it's going to go low. And similar to female hormones and that kind of a thing.

Jodi: The hormonal rollercoaster.

Bridgit: Yeah. Another, I'll just say a few more supplements that I like and close it out. Phosphatidylcholine, I really enjoyed for my brain. It was a huge help for my brain. It's also detoxifying and then magnesium and fish oil. I took those two things with phosphatidylcholine when I was in a flare up. If I was having three-day headache or whatever was going on. Sometimes I get really nauseous because your brain's in pain and then you're not hungry. But those three things were my magic combo. And sometimes I was doing them two, three times a day if I was flared up just to calm everything down. So some of those are really simple, like a good quality magnesium, good quality fish oil. But it's just giving your body these raw ingredients it needs to put out the fire.

Jodi: I love that. So can you share how people can learn more about you or work with you?

Bridgit: Yeah. So my website is just my name. It's bridgitdanner.com. We put out a blog at least every week and cover a lot of different topics. We do offer mold testing and a lot of different guides. So there's tons of free information that people can find on there.

Jodi: Well, this was amazing. Thank you so much. We covered the gamut. This was fabulous.

Bridgit: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Jodi: Thank you.