

DR. CHRISTOPHER'S
Herbal Legacy Newsletter

Elijah: A Story of Hope and Progress

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Excerpt from Tatia Nelson's Master Herbalist Thesis: Slippery Elm

Meet five-year-old Elijah. He loves Nascar. In season, if he's not watching it on TV, you can find him and his mother, Janice, at their local dirt track. At this track, most of the drivers know him and they have been known to give him free memorabilia. His room is plastered with posters of cars and drivers. When Elijah sees number 88 (Dale Earnhardt Jr's car), he goes crazy.

In spite of his Nascar passion, Elijah is not like most boys his age. Elijah suffers from a multitude of conditions that makes his digestion complex and he has never been able to eat solid food. His entire gastrointestinal track is inflamed so that eating is painful. He suffers from "oral texture aversion," meaning that he doesn't like to feel food in his mouth. He is allergic to a dozen different foods, including dairy, gluten, corn, soy, and nuts. As a result, he won't and can't eat. For the last year and a half, he has been "fed" through a "G-tube." When he was three years, 10 months, he underwent surgery to insert a G-tube into his abdomen. Liquid formula can be pumped into the g-tube and directly into his stomach. Since then, he has gotten almost all of his nourishment through this tube.

I met Janice and Elijah in a rather unexpected way. Late one night, on the Christian radio station KLOVE, Janice called with a desperate plea for prayers on behalf of her son whom she thought might not make it through the night. On this night, he had been unable to keep any formula or foods down and was almost starving to death. Listening to this mother's plea—I'm a mother too with a little girl Elijah's age—I felt deeply impressed to call the radio station and leave my phone number. Earlier that day, I had read about the use of Slippery Elm in helping relieve similar symptoms to what this little boy was experiencing. After much internal debate, having doubts as to whether or not it was a good idea to teach a stranger about Slippery Elm, I heeded the feeling and called the radio station. I spoke with the radio host, Larry, and briefly told him about what I had read earlier, asking him if Janice had ever tried natural healing. He took my number and then announced on the radio, "Janice, if you're listening, please call back." She was still at the hospital and in spite of her anxiety over her son, found it humorous to hear her name called out on the radio. Prayers were answered for Elijah who was finally released from the hospital a week later, and then Janice called me.

I agreed to share with her the article that I had read about a boy with similar symptoms to Elijah's as well as any other educational materials that I came across that seemed similar to her son's condition. In our conversation, I learned that Janice is a deeply compassionate and religious woman. I asked her to pray about any of the materials that she received from me and to rely on God's direction if she decided to use remedies. I did this because Elijah's condition is so complex that inspiration was needed. I have suffered from debilitating health conditions and in my own pathway toward improved health, I have found that my journey has been illuminated through prayer. I feel that a higher power brought us together that night. Although, Janice and I

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live in different states, and have never met in person, I feel that I know her and her son Elijah. She has given me permission to share his story.

Elijah's Mother

Because of the complexity of Elijah's condition, Janice takes care of him 24 hours a day. No one else has taken better care of Elijah, not even hired nurses, despite her lack of medical expertise.

Relying on meager funds she does her best to care for and nourish her special son. She lives on few hours of sleep each night, obtains few breaks from this work, and happily carries out his rigorous schedule to sustain his life because she loves her son immeasurably. I personally have never seen greater love displayed from a mother and God helps her in every way.

Elijah's Story

In all respects, Elijah seemed like a normal baby. Until he was eight months old, he was thriving just like any other infant. He passed all of his developmental tasks. He was happy, healthy, talkative (he babbled like babies do), and very inquisitive about his surroundings. He was so curious; he even crawled into the pantry one day and shut the door. His mother finally found him laughing while exploring canned food. He was nursed by his mother from birth and ate so well that she could not produce enough milk to feed him anymore at eight months. Because he seemed like a healthy baby, Elijah's doctor recommended that she start feeding him whole cow's milk. He seemed to be thriving on the milk, gaining weight steadily. There was only one problem, he developed acid-reflux. The acid reflux got progressively worse until at the age of three he was prescribed medication to treat the problem. Because he was later diagnosed with a dairy allergy, Janice and I believe the acid-reflux may have been an adverse reaction to the milk and Elijah's gastrointestinal inflammation may have begun when switched to milk.

Elijah's condition declined shortly after his first birthday. Soon after he turned one, he received the MMR vaccine and two weeks later a booster. His mother reports that after these shots, Elijah quit verbal interaction and stopped playing with anyone but his mother. He wouldn't even interact with his dad anymore. During my research, I learned about an autoimmune disease that attacks the digestive system (ileal-lymoind-nodular hyperplasia) which is possibly correlated with the MMR vaccine. When Janice read the research, she thought Elijah displayed all listed symptoms for this disease including the behavioral and bowel disorders.

After undergoing marked changes following the MMR vaccines, the pediatrician referred Elijah to a specialist to be tested for developmental delay. Their insurance put them on a 2 year waiting list to see the specialist. These were the worst two years of Janice's life. First of all, she received no further guidance as to what she could do to help Elijah eat solids. She continued to feed him whole milk and did everything she could to entice him to eat solids. He would drink the milk, but refused the solids. She even begged him while he slept through mother's tears of agony, "Please, can you eat for mommy," over and over in his ear. She would also kiss him and say "Mommy loves you...I love you the way you are, but you need to eat.." She would plead with God in

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prayer after prayer, night after night. She did everything possible to help him learn to eat. Janice said she really learned to trust God during this time.

Two years passed, along with numerous pediatric visits. Having only subsisted on cow's milk, Elijah developed nutrient deficiencies causing more health problems. By age three, he had been diagnosed with acid-reflux, gastritis and iron-deficient anemia. When he got in to see the specialist in June 2007, more diagnoses were issued: global developmental delays including underdevelopment of fine motor and gross motor skills, severe texture aversions to all food and textures sensed by the hand, sick sinus syndrome of the heart, central sleep apnea, and possible autism. Soon after seeing the specialist, he was referred to a G.I. doctor who recommended a G-tube just to help the bare minimum of food into him.

The day his G-tube was surgically inserted, June 22, 2007, an official biopsy revealed further diagnoses: esophagitis, gastritis, duodenitis, colitis, and delay of emptying after digesting food, among other diagnoses. The pediatrician also later diagnosed hypertension and a kidney disorder called bilateral moderate hydronephrosis. Elijah had gathered diagnoses the same way most little boys gather trading cards.

While the G-tube has made it easier to get food into Elijah, it has also brought its own host of problems into his life. The biggest problem the tube presents is that it only delivers 1200-1400 milliliters (mL) of food per day. The formulas available to him can only administer about 1200 calories in the amount of fluid his body accepts in a day. He is only maintaining a bare minimum weight for survival at this low calorie intake level.

His doctor's are trying to find ways to feed him more calories because he is slowly starving on so little nourishment. The calorie limitation is partially due to the capacities of the pump that delivers the formula, but mostly due to Elijah's inability to digest the food as efficiently as most boys do. Because of these limitations, 1000 mL is pumped in slowly over a twelve hour period, overnight. After that, he requires a three hour break in order to digest the food. After the break, he is fed 200 mL which takes 3 hours followed by 45 minutes of time to digest and if nothing interfered with previous feedings, he might have time for another 200 mL feed during the day before having to start his routine all over again at 7 p.m.

Because of Elijah's rigorous feeding schedule, he is digesting his largest meal during the night. Most people's digestive systems are allowed to rest at night while they sleep, giving a more restful sleep. A more restful sleep allows the body to repair and heal during the night. Digestion takes more "life-force" or energy out of the body than one realizes, especially for a boy with difficulties digesting.

Digesting is so exhausting to Elijah's body, there may not be sufficient energy left at the end of the day for his body to focus on repairing and healing to its potential. Janice would like to find a way to feed Elijah during the day so his body may focus more on healing at night, but the only schedule solutions involve feeding him fewer calories in a day...and he would not survive.

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Although his rigorous feeding schedule is hard on his body and does not allow for optimal healing, it keeps him alive.

Elijah's formula has also kept him alive, yet Janice began to wonder if the ingredients in the formula weren't contributing to his gastrointestinal inflammation. She asked that her son be tested for allergies and those tests took place in August of 2008. The results revealed allergies to at least a dozen different foods: tomatoes, dairy, wheat and gluten products, apples, rye, soy, corn in any form, bananas, cantaloupe, and all nuts. After Elijah's visit with the allergist, Janice took a careful look at the ingredients of his PediaSure formula. To her surprise, the formula contains at least three ingredients to which Elijah is allergic: milk, corn, and soy products. After pointing this out to Elijah's doctor, he switched Elijah's formula to "Peptamin Jr." because it was supposed to be lactose free, more easily digestible, and offered more calories. The fact that it contained derivatives of cow's milk, soy, and corn products was overlooked. His body was getting no rest from exposure to allergens and his gastrointestinal inflammation and acid-reflux kept getting worse, instead of better.

His doctors are trying to find a formula that he is not allergic to, yet none seem available. Apparently they do not have any other solutions, except to continue feeding him formulas he is allergic to and prescribing pharmaceuticals to counteract the allergic side-effects. He is prescribed Benadryl for allergic reactions and Prevacid for acid-reflux. He is also prescribed Singulair and Nasonex to help prevent nasal infections and other allergic reactions resting in the nose. For severe reactions, the doctor prescribed an EpiPen for his mother to keep on hand in case of anaphylaxis. EpiPen's are injections that contain enough Benadryl to hopefully open his airways enough to get him to the hospital alive for treatment. He also constantly takes an antibiotic to avoid infections. The doctor also failed to advise Janice to give him probiotics, or beneficial bowel flora, to replace the flora the antibiotic kills. Killing off Elijah's bowel flora without replacing it had potential to worsen his gastrointestinal health.

Despite the prescriptions, Elijah's inflammation became more severe. Elijah's doctors noticed he developed malabsorption problems and is failing to thrive, meaning needed nutrition that entered his stomach did not always absorb properly. The nutrition he receives is already nutrient-deprived and processed, being an inferior form of sustenance compared to raw fruits and vegetables and wholesome, unprocessed foods. Janice believes if a more wholesome formula were available, containing none of Elijah's allergens, he might be thriving better by now. Because of these limitations, doctors held out a poor prognosis for Elijah. They know that his caloric and nutrient needs will continue to increase as he matures, but the feeding tube is already delivering the maximum possible food per day. If nothing changes, Elijah will slowly starve to death.

Natural Interventions

Rewind to the summer of 2008 when Janice and I crossed paths through the radio waves. From the first day we spoke, I shared a lot of information over the phone with Janice on natural remedies.

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She always gathered the information I gave her and took it to the Lord in prayer. With the Lord's wisdom, she felt instructed to administer Slippery Elm to Elijah. The powder was made into a "gruel" or paste and then diluted with water enough to feed it into his g-tube. The day after his first serving of Slippery Elm, Janice called me at 7 am (it was Saturday) to tell me through tears of joy that her boy was eating solid foods, something he has never done before! Tears welled up in my eyes and I couldn't believe what I was hearing! I had never heard of such a miracle in using herbs before. The foods he began eating included first, on Friday, about two cups of marinara sauce and later one Ramen noodle. On Saturday and Sunday he kept going to the fridge to get marinara sauce and continued to eat it. Then, the next Monday at school, the food placed before him was small bites of bacon, eggs, sausage, and toast. This kind of meal was always placed before him at his school to entice him to eat, even though these foods are a horrible choice of nourishment, especially for a body that has never accepted solid food before. On this particular day, he ate some of the eggs, tasted the bacon, tasted the sausage, yet avoided the buttered, hardened wheat toast. He also drank some orange juice. He digested this food fine until given something he is extremely allergic to: apple juice. In the afternoon, his school fed him the juice, even though they were informed of his severe allergy to apples.

The juice caused him to throw up and continue to throw up, starting on the bus ride home. He threw up everything, lost two pounds, suffered severe dehydration, and was hospitalized for this incident. This was a very discouraging moment for Elijah. If eating meant he was just going to throw up, he did not seem to want to try anymore. He did not try to eat again for a while. It seemed we had taken a huge leap forward, only to take two steps back.

Although this seemed like a setback to Elijah, for Janice and me, this was a huge step forward. Slippery Elm was the first thing he ever had that gave him any desire to eat solid food. This told us that we were on the right path. Over the next few months, Elijah continued to progress. The only water Elijah would drink was carbonated water because the bubbles were soothing on his throat. So, Janice started mixing Slippery Elm into his water. The first time she did, he loved it so much, that he drank 6-8 cups more water than normal that day. This began the Friday he first ate solids. The more Slippery Elm he took, the more interested in food he became, said Janice. Janice also noticed other developmental skills enlivened in Elijah when taking Slippery Elm, almost awakening him to his surroundings. His pale complexion began to fill with more color. Likewise, his acid-relux symptoms seemed to calm. She noticed Elijah's progress declined when he did not take Slippery Elm. For one week, prior to a medical procedure, she did not give him any Slippery Elm. His interest in food seemed to disappear by the end of the week, he became withdrawn as he once was, and acid-relux problems seemed to worsen again. Dehydration used to be the main reason for his constant hospital visits. His doctors have noted he does not suffer symptoms of dehydration while taking Slippery Elm.

Slippery Elm really seemed to be the gateway that opened the door to improvements in Elijah's condition. I continued to share with Janice information I found that matched the symptoms and problems Elijah suffered. She consulted with Elijah's doctors and dietitian about the things she learned. As she became more educated about these cases, she prayed about which foods and

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natural remedies to implement. His practitioners were delighted to know Janice had found ways to introduce more nutrition into his diet.

Janice decided to start mixing fresh carrot juice into his formula. She did not have a juicer, so a kind neighbor of mine bought her a good one. Her name is Valerie and she had never even spoken to Janice before, but she just heard Elijah's story and wanted to help any way she could. Valerie's charity helped introduce vegetables into Elijah's diet and his body responded well. Because he responded so well, Janice decided to find a more concentrated sources of vitamins and minerals to nourish him even more. She chose a natural vitamin source called called Kid-e-min and a green drink called Jurassic Green. Jurassic Green is a dehydrated, yet raw source of sprouted greens in a powdered form. His cognitive abilities seemed to boost within a week after beginning to take this nourishment daily. For example, he progressed from communicating words like "Yah" and speaking unclearly some numbers between 1 and 10, to speaking in clear but short sentences, spelling words and he began learning to read.

To further nourish his nervous system, Janice also began to add an Ear & Nerve formula. She noticed his continuity and other cognitive skills became better while using this formula. In other words he did not seem confused about what he was asked anymore. For instance, if she asked Elijah to go get a shirt to wear, he didn't go get underwear or some other clothing like he used to, he got a shirt. Ever since using this formula, he also sleeps better and has stopped snoring.

With his cognitive abilities seeming to advance well, Janice wanted to focus on helping him gain weight. She began pureeing avocado to feed into the tube because of its highly nutritive fat content. A dietitian had also spoken to Janice about adding olive oil into his diet to boost calories. She started adding ¼ cup of olive oil a day into his formula. She also began olive oil massages into the skin as taught by David Christopher. After beginning the massages, Janice noticed his skin seemed a lot healthier, it did not dry or become flakey as it used to, and he did not bruise as easily.

When he got his blood drawn from the doctor, it used to leave a bruise the size of a quarter. The needle now only leaves a pin-sized mark. Also, the increased nourishment of olive oil alone has helped Elijah reach 36 pounds, the most he has ever weighed! He gained those five pounds in one month and the doctors are calling it a medical miracle!

Some other natural foods and remedies Janice chose to use include: Aloe Vera juice to aid in soothing the digestive tract, probiotics to replace intestinal flora killed by antibiotics, a kidney formula to help cleanse and nourish his weakened kidneys, Kid-e-col containing catnip and fennel to soothe intestinal upset, and "Kid-e-soothe" containing marshmallow and astragalus to help calm the body's allergic responses. Because Janice's work load has increased by adding all of these wonderful sources of nourishment, I tried to formulate one herbal syrup that would contain a few of these remedies combined. I called it "Elijah's formula". It contains Slippery Elm, Marshmallow and Astragalus, Ginger, Catnip and Fennel, Peppermint, Red Raspberry leaves, and a small amount of Lobelia. I made the formula, tried it on myself and my five-year-old daughter for two weeks, and after noticing my digestion improve on the formula, I shared the

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recipe with Janice. After praying about it, she decided to give him some. She said that while taking this formula, his digestion seemed to improve because his excretions did not smell so bad anymore. Before, even his urine smelled horrible enough to alarm his kidney doctor who began tests to pinpoint the problem causing such a smell. Janice also said his cognitive abilities improved again after starting this formula...Elijah started being cordial, sweet, and friendly. He began walking up to people in the store, saying, "Hi, what's your name?" When they told him, he would respond, "My name is Elijah and this is my mommy." Then he would say, "Bye now!" Janice said he had never before used introductions or salutations to cordially begin or end a conversation, yet he was now saying them to strangers!

I personally witnessed some of these changes as Elijah has progressed. He began talking to me on the phone, saying only "Yah" to my questions and has progressed to holding short conversations with me. He knows my name, my daughter Kaia's name, and asks to talk to Kaia all the time on the phone. He is now thriving in his world, becoming a part of it, whereas before he used to withdraw from it. His G.I. doctor specifically said to Janice while observing Elijah, "I am amazed at Elijah's [recent] progress, mommy you are doing a great job." This is the doctor who once gave the bleak prognosis for Elijah, thinking he would never progress this far. Elijah may not be out of the woods yet, but this progress is astounding!

Elijah, like his Old Testament namesake is an example of strength of will, force of character, and personal courage. His mother, Janice knows that he has a special mission on earth and she is doing everything she can to help him further his mission. Janice's greatest strength in helping her son is that she takes everything to the Lord. She has incredible faith, beyond what most people on this earth display when going through similar trials. She knows that despite some doctors' lack of hope for Elijah's prognosis, Elijah will switch to eating and will be healed of these complications he suffers.

The acts of Elijah of old seem to be almost a type and foreshadowing of the struggles of this boy. The prophet sealed the heavens with no rain for three and one-half years, just as this boy has been unable to eat solid foods for just over three and a half years. He blessed the widow's meal and oil, just as Janice has been blessed with the knowledge to sustain her son during his food trial. Finally, as the biblical story goes, he raised a boy from the dead; if Elijah's progress continues, he will be like one raised from the dead, and he may lift many others with his story.