

Women's Voice Article March 2003

Medications and Your Health

Research has shown that persons on three or more medications are subject to chemical interactions that are beyond physicians understanding. Yet still most Americans have a medicine cabinet full of medications. Although no one can dispute that medications have an important place and a purpose, especially in emergency and life saving situations a growing number of physicians and health care providers are looking towards more conservative measures first.

Antibiotic resistance is a great case in point. When the first antibiotic, penicillin became available to the general populace in 1940 many lives were saved. However now, fifty years latter, there are patients in hospitals that have bacterial infections that are not responsive to any antibiotics. Why? Bacteria are one of the smallest and plentiful life forms found on this planet and are quickly adapt to new conditions in order to survive. Bacterial drug resistance is a matter of natural adaptation. The longer the bacteria are exposed to a given drug the more likely it is to develop universal resistance. Smart life forms they are. Before 1975 almost every case of gonorrhea was treatable with penicillin. Today above 50% of these cases in the U.S. are penicillin-resistant and in places like the Philippines and Thailand 90% of the cases are resistant.

Similarly mutations in the HIV virus due to medications has caused debate. Originally, the HIV virus was thought to be untreatable. However various "cocktails" developed which significantly improved patients' quality and length of life. As peoples quality of life increased the virus mutated more rapidly making research for a long term "cure" more and more difficult. Many people argued that the cocktails were ruining the health care of future generations. Others argued that we should not waste human life now. How do we decide about medications that affect the lives of people we love now in exchange for increased difficulty in future generations? Not easy questions!

These are just two examples of how medicine has brought to question the long-term effects of medications on our day-to-day lives. As people learn from the past experiences they are looking for new answers. Many health care providers are looking at ways in which we can naturally enhance our immune systems to help fight off existing problems or prevent new problems from occurring. For years the National Institute of Health and the Center for Disease Control have suggested that prevention is the best route in avoiding most disease and illness.

Our bodies contain complex and powerful disease fighting weapons, consisting primarily of the immune system. When this system is functioning at an optimum level the body can best attack and destroy foreign invaders such as bacteria and viruses. Often times the signs of "illness" such as a fever and swollen glands are treated with medications. In reality such signs can indicate that your immune system is working. A fever, for instance, is the body's way of raising the temperature to kill off threatening bacteria. The Merck Manual states, "Experimental evidence suggests that host defense mechanisms are enhanced by an elevated temperature; thus, fever is potentially beneficial and should not be suppressed."

What can you do?

Be conservative with Medications for non-threatening illness!

Many studies have shown that colds and flues are best treated by sufficient rest and time. Headaches and indigestion for example are often healthy signs that a behavioral change might reduce the symptom instead of pills. Reserve medications for serious concerns.

Listen to your body ! Many times we ignore the signs our body is trying to tell us because we are too busy or it is inconvenient. If we can fine tune are listening many times a problem is circumvented. There are many alternative health techniques that can help you to pay attention to sub-clinical findings.

Minimize stress! Many Articles have been written about the detrimental effects of stress. This was written in one of the most prominent medical journals.

“Chronic stress affects the immune system by increasing sympathetic activity and decreasing cellular immunity. Immune cells migrate to different parts of the body and can worsen autoimmune and allergic conditions. Over time, this creates a suppression of the natural positive acute mobilization of immune cells to the point of challenge.” New England Journal of Medicine 1998.

Don't Change or Quit Medications Quickly!

Often people will ask about “going off” or “decreasing” their medications. People who go “cold turkey” often times are doing their bodies a large dis-service, as the chemical changes are too fast for the body to absorb. Many times this can lead to a severe case of the original symptom, a new larger symptom or at least the feeling of failure at the inability to the make the change you desire. Consult with the prescribing doctor to see about gradually changing your dosage or trying a different method.

Dr. Laura Polak, D.C. is a chiropractor that specializes in Network Spinal Analysis at **The Radiant Health Center** in Sebastopol. Please write questions or concerns for the next article at drlaurapolak@sbcglobal.net. Or call **(707) 824-0340**