

# Sustainable Health

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## Creating Your Own Health Reform

If you are as frustrated as I am listening to health care reform devolve, perhaps you'd like to know more about how you can take better care of yourself despite the insurance and drug rackets.

All states of illness, whether as temporal as the flu or as chronic and degenerative as cancer or cardiovascular disease, can be understood both as a collection of symptoms, or as a series of processes taking place at the cellular level. And where where we focus our attention and intervention is a key to determining outcomes. Most of us want relief from symptoms if we have ones that make us more than mildly uncomfortable. But for chronic problems, going that route is never adequate as more than a temporary solution, because the underlying dysfunctional processes will, in most cases, continue at the cellular level. If these are not addressed, over time more symptoms will appear as the function of different systems of the body progressively become stressed and compromised in a domino effect.

People wedded to the allopathic medical system for relief from all kinds of chronic problems, more often than not end up accumulating increasing numbers of prescription drugs to manage the increasing numbers of symptoms as the domino effect plays out. This is also frequently exacerbated by the side effects of the drugs. The need for more, and more costly, interventions keep the costs of health care spiraling upwards, both individually and societally while at the same time U.S health care outcomes are far below most industrialized nations. As too many in Congress remain swayed by insurance and Big Pharma lobbyists, I believe that reform will come only with a change in the mindset and health care choices exercised by those seeking care. We've seen over the last 20 years the increasing corporate embracing (for better or worse) of herbs and nutraceuticals as consumers have demanded them. To that end, I'd like to offer you a way to think differently about your health, and to reform your own health care regardless of what Washington does or doesn't do.

Three clients come in with three different health concerns. The first, has daily migraines, dizziness, and loss of balance that has been going on for years. The second comes in with a medical diagnosis of Rheumatoid Arthritis, and has a significant amount of pain, limitation in activity, and need for constant pain medication (over-the-counter, non-steroidal, anti-inflammatories or NSAID's). The third had developed Psoriasis --again medically diagnosed-- all over the back, chest, arms and legs. All had previously received varying levels of diagnostic testing, prescription medications, and names for their conditions. But none had found more than temporary relief from the discomfort.

The three scenarios I gave you on the surface look completely different, but from a functional perspective (rather than a symptom perspective), they have some common threads; they all involve inflammatory conditions that have escalated. In fact, inflammation is a key element in most illness, whether temporary or chronic; the only difference being that in a temporary condition the inflammation comes and goes when the job is done, whereas in a chronic condition, the inflammation doesn't stop because the event(s) that cause the inflammation are not identified and

addressed. Inflammation is a normal physiological response of your immune system that is designed to heal your body. In chronic conditions, the inflammation doesn't stop because you either aren't aware of, or can't control the triggers. And then, the inflammatory process is not healing, it's destructive, and left unchecked, starts a cascade of health-deteriorating effects.

Almost always, the triggers to inflammation fall in one of the following categories: the food we're eating (or not eating), chemical toxins in our environment (medications, personal care products, household products, pesticides, industrial waste, outgassing from plastics and building materials, etc.), "cooties" (bacteria, viruses, fungus, and parasites), or heavy metals (mercury, arsenic, aluminum etc.). Typically people have more than one trigger and over time all must be addressed if optimal health is the goal. And because chronic inflammation will cause damage to tissues and changes in an organ's ability to function optimally, there is almost always repair work needed in addition to removing the inflammatory triggers.

Let's look at the clinical situations presented above. The person with the daily migraines and dizziness had a gluten intolerance that had gone unidentified. Gluten intolerance doesn't always manifest in this way, but it can show up as neurological symptoms as it did in this case, rather than as the more commonly known gastrointestinal symptoms. Eating any food that is an allergen to the body will cause inflammation to the intestines which, over time can damage the gut lining, allowing it to become "leaky" or permeable to undigested particles of food. These undigested particles enter the blood stream before they are appropriately broken down, which in turn can cause neurological symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, or behavioral and emotional disturbances. In this person's case, removing gluten from the diet almost immediately stopped the occurrence of the primary symptoms, while work to repair the intestinal surface is an ongoing process that will continuously improve health.

Rheumatoid Arthritis, affecting the person in the second scenario, is an autoimmune disease, meaning that the immune system no longer differentiates between cells that are self from those that are foreign and represent a threat. As a result, the immune system attacks your own body and an activated immune system produces inflammatory chemicals. An autoimmune disease usually occurs when an underlying inflammatory problem has gone on for a long time, ultimately making the immune system go a little crazy. They almost always involve the "leaky gut" referred to above. Any organ can be affected and which autoimmune disease it is, depends on which organ is affected.

Two people with the same RA symptoms don't necessarily have the same triggers, hence the need for detective work. Food logs, health histories, observation, lab work, and in my case kinesiology (muscle testing) are important tools that can help identify the triggers of an individual's health problems. In this particular case, an earlier exposure to Giardia (from lake contamination) was a piece of the puzzle. Why? Because all the "cooties" produce toxins, which trigger inflammation. A diet high in sugar and processed foods factored in as well. These foods cause inflammation and they also feed all kinds of cooties, which keeps the inflammation ramped up; ultimately, in this case, leading to an autoimmune problem,

Supplements and dietary change will get rid of cooties, heal the gut, manage inflammation and pain until the body is calmed down, and block the production of the Rheumatoid Arthritis antibodies that cause the joint and tissue damage. Approaching the problem in this

way restored energy and vitality to this individual and removed the need for NSAIDS, which are known to cause liver damage, and do nothing to reverse the autoimmune process..

Although there are many inflammatory foods which must be avoided in order to reverse and /or stop further damage in most health issues, autoimmune or otherwise, this is rarely addressed by allopathic medicine. If the gut continues to be compromised, absorption of nutrients is hampered leading to nutritional deficiencies that then create other problems and symptoms. So nutrition is a core, rather than an ancillary, part of any healing program.

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Psoriasis, in the last scenario (or eczema) is also autoimmune and involves an inability of the liver or kidneys or both to adequately remove toxins from the body. As a result the skin is used as an elimination route with the accompanying inflammation. So, in the third situation, supporting the liver in its ability to detoxify allowed the skin to give up this job, letting it heal. As above, removing inflammatory foods from the diet, providing symptomatic relief for the skin (with herbal rather than steroidal cream), and healing the gut were all important to clearing the psoriasis and keeping it gone.

Instead of looking to name a disease and prescribe drugs, or even natural products to suppress symptoms, a functional approach to health identifies the stressors or triggers (food, toxic chemicals, cooties, and heavy metals) that are compromising healthy function. Unidentified, the resulting inflammation causes system dysfunction, which in turn manifests in any number of symptoms. In most cases, however, changes in diet along with supplements chosen for their ability to eliminate the triggers and to support healthy organs can restore healthy function. Before there were pharmaceuticals, people used herbs, homeopathic remedies, essential oils, and healthy, chemical-free, grown-close-to-home food to nourish the body, in order to restore and maintain health, and these tools still work.

The idea that serious health problems can't be addressed without the "big guns" of drugs and surgery, is outmoded and expensive. Understanding how the body functions, what derails it, and what can get you back on track is a potent combination, and choosing health practitioners that understand this will have big payoffs for your health, and for healthcare in this country. It requires more participation and commitment on your part than popping a pill, but in my experience the results are well worth it.

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