

To Your Health!

By Judy Hargis, P.A., and Audeen Wagner



We continue our series focusing on the holistic approach to medicine – the emphasis on physical, emotional, social and spiritual health.

Today's topic: expanding our understanding of integrative, holistic medicine and introduction to the world of supplements.

We live in a complex world which is stressful, fast-paced and not conducive to good health. We are each unique and continually influenced and affected by how we live our lives and relate to the world around us. We often see ourselves in terms of our genetic make up and predisposition to diabetes, heart attack, stroke and breast cancer, to name a few, and take a fatalistic point of view about our health and its impact on the development of future health issues. We feel that diet, exercise and other healthy lifestyle changes offer no benefit because we see ourselves as destined for bad outcomes because of family history and genetics.

The good news is that there is strong emerging evidence that our genetic predisposition plays only a small role in our overall health. There is much evidence-based research that supports the significant role that our environment and lifestyle play in turning on the triggers that cause disease and chronic health problems. This, in turn, supports the concept that we can make lifestyle changes that can improve our health and reduce our risk of developing chronic disease.

The World Health Organization defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well being". This can be accomplished only by changing the focus of our current health care system. It requires each patient to take personal responsibility for their own health and welfare by creating a partnership with their health care provider that includes education and developing a plan for health that leads to a common goal. This is where integrative medicine comes into the picture. This approach combines conventional medical care with evidencebased complementary therapies and treatments. It focuses on the holistic approach to health care that we have been discussing in the last few columns.

There are new centers for integrative medicine emerging at major medical centers all over the country. Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine, in La Jolla, California, is the largest and most comprehensive hospital-based integrative medicine center in the country. The center is involved in extensive evidence-based research and is committed to education for health care providers, patients and the community. I have participated in two Scripps intensive trainings on integrative medicine and, most recently, on herbal and dietary supplements.

There is a lot of positive research that supports the benefits of using some supplements along with healthy diet, exercise, and stress reduction. The challenge is educating and providing clinicians with timely evidence-based tools for discussing the risks, benefits and regulatory issues related to nutritional supplements so they can better partner with and educate their patients. This is a win-win situation for provider and patient; the provider can guide the patient to health while the patient takes more ownership in their health outcomes.

Let's talk more about dietary supplements. Americans spend in excess of \$20 billion annually on herbal and dietary supplements. There is a continuous stream of advertising for supplements on TV, radio and the internet. They offer promises including instant weight loss, miracle cures and better health without lifestyle changes. These products are marketed to the general public, who often do not have the knowledge or tools to sort out what constitutes a safe, quality product that is beneficial and delivers on its claims. They also tap into

our desire to find a quick fix without major changes in our lifestyles. Some patients will let clinicians know that they are taking these herbal remedies and supplements but many do not. There is a misconception that, since it is sold over the counter, it must be safe. The problem is there can be allergic reactions, risk of impacting current medical problems such as hypertension, interference with effectiveness and possible interactions with prescription medications.

There are no magic bullets in the world of herbal treatments and dietary supplements. There is strong evidence-based research that there are herbal treatments and supplements that can help with disease prevention, treatment and play a role in overall health. The challenge is creating awareness of how to assess which supplements offer true benefit and how to locate a safe, high quality supplement. One way to address these concerns is for clinicians to educate themselves on what dietary and herbal supplements are out there, which ones are proven effective through evidence-based research and by being aware of what their patients are taking in addition to prescription medication. Patients need to work in partnership with their clinicians by always letting them know what supplements they are taking, educating themselves through reputable sources and not buying into marketing strategies designed to sell a product by tapping into our need for a quick fix.

This summer the FDA will begin inspecting manufacturers of dietary and herbal supplements, which will improve quality and safety, but it still falls on the provider and the patient to do their homework and be partners in developing health plans and goals.

Ultimately, the focus of healthcare needs to change direction. Our healthcare system needs to change its focus from disease management toward guiding patients to total health through nutrition, healthy diet, regular exercise and stress reduction. Dietary supplements and herbal remedies can play a positive role, too. We can no longer afford to maintain the status quo in our healthcare system. We have increasing evidence of obesity as a result of poor diet, lack of exercise, and high stress. These all lead to significant long term health problems and contribute to the high cost of health care. Education is a key first step toward change. In the next several columns we will share evidence-based research on specific dietary supplements, herbal remedies and complementary therapies and treatments that can support good health and help with chronic disease management. Listed below are some great resources including books and websites. We welcome your questions and feedback.

Diabetes EXPO this Saturday in Portland

"The Largest EXPO Dedicated to People with Diabetes" put on by The American Diabetes Association will be at The Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE MLK Jr. Blvd, Portland, Exhibit Halls D & E on Saturday, February 23, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Diabetes is the nation's fifth deadliest disease and it has no cure. Diabetes can lead to serious complications and premature death, but people with diabetes can take steps to manage the disease and lower the risk of complications. Early diagnosis and treatment of diabetes is critical. Unfortunately, many people living with diabetes do not even know it.

The Diabetes EXPO, presented by Safeway, has everything a person with di-

abetes needs to know under one roof. This highly interactive event includes activities for people of all ages, including exhibits featuring the latest products and services, free product and food samples, exciting lectures throughout the day, answers to your medical questions, free screenings, several free immunizations, tips for healthy living, and a Latino World that offers information and products in Spanish and will address the concerns of diabetes in the Hispanic community. The Diabetes EXPO provides the public with a unique opportunity to talk with health care experts and obtain important medical and nutritional information.

To register call 1-888-DIABETES (1-888-342-2383) or registe at www.diabetes.org/OregonExpo.

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Cornelius, OR 97113-0543
Bus 503-357-3131 Fax 503-357-9667
bunny.girt.b71g@statefarm.com

