

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO EVERYDAY PROBLEMS (article)

After practicing conventional medicine for years and years, now that I'm working with a variety of alternative practitioners, it's very satisfying to be learning new ways to treat many everyday illnesses, especially those that mainstream medicine doesn't have much luck with. It was a very humbling experience to observe how other practitioners, outside the "select" circle of the M.D. are capable of really effective healing techniques.

The bad cold, for example. The sniffly, sneezy, utterly unglamorous coughing, aching and generally feeling crummy "it's that time of year" bad cold. Old medical school rule: Without treatment, a cold lasts two weeks. With all treatment, including antibiotics, a cold last fourteen days.

The big question: can alternative medicine cure the cold? Without hesitation, I firmly state, "No."

But using several alternative approaches: acupuncture, aromatherapy, combined with some gentle herbs or homeopathics, you begin to feel a bit better. Maybe the cold is sending your mind a message: overworked? stressed out? not paying much attention to yourself? As Dr. Bernie Siegel reminds us... any illness is the body's "reset" button. Use the time you're out of commission to explore what brought the whole thing on in the first place.

As long as we're in the nose-and-throat area, another condition that's genuinely one of life's annoyances: sinus infections. Seemingly month-in and month-out symptoms of dull pressure-type headache, drainage, and congestion make you want to scream. What demon created post nasal drip?

Conventional medicine offers decongestants and antibiotics, usually followed by more of the same under new names. When both of these fail, there's always surgery, which succeeds at first but a few months later as the "opened" area grows back, all the symptoms return. Allergy testing, using skin scratch tests, followed by allergy shots, is expensive and unrewarding.

The holistic approach is nicely summarized in a book called "Sinus Survival" which no sufferer should be without. Author Rob Ivker, an osteopath and current president of the American Holistic Medicine Association suggests a variety of approaches including food elimination studies (which can be done on your own), air filters, negative air ionizers, herbs, acupuncture, bodywork and homeopathy. Again, all physical problems deserve introspection. What was happening in your life when the sinusitis became a problem? Maybe that argument with your sister, or the job that placed you next to a copier. Maybe (you don't want to hear this one) it's the cat.

Irritable, or spastic colon, is a real frustration for both the patient and the conventional practitioner. Recurrent cycles, often for years, of crampy abdominal pain, diarrhea, constipation occur without any lasting relief. Perhaps a few peaceful months will pass, then one morning the familiar symptoms begin again.

For most sufferers, whether or not they're aware of it, the key issue is one of stress. In fact, there's a direct connection between the brain and the intestines along the vagus nerve. If emotional tensions are kept within, the nerve is overstimulated and abdominal pain, diarrhea and constipation follow without fail.

Treatment is directed at an outward release of tensions, through counseling, quiet meditation, bodywork, homeopathy or acupuncture. The healing comes through release, not suppression, of symptoms.

Some consideration should also be made toward the possibility of food allergies, or, less often,

absence of digestive enzymes or an imbalance of intestinal bacteria. Each of these conditions can be diagnosed quickly and painlessly, and treated by nothing more than avoidance of certain foods or some harmless digestive enzymes.

Patients with this condition need to remember there's usually nothing intrinsically wrong with the colon itself. Just an overreaction to a patient's misguided attempt to cope with an emotional conflict. Time to push that 'reset' button again; time for some personal exploration.

And so it goes. Colds, sinusitis, irritable colon, all everyday frustrations which can be approached anew using unconventional and alternative medicine. Others include the chronic fatigue syndrome, arthritis, asthma, PMS and menopause.

As human beings with hearts and minds, we are simply too complicated for mainstream medicine's "five minute office visit with prescription." If there's one single factor conventional physicians can learn from the alternatives, it is to listen, just listen, to the patient.