

## Dr Dave's guide to (really) alternative remedies

"I'm going on a cleanse."

"What for?"

"Duh, to get rid of the toxins."

"What toxins?"

"Oh come on Doc, you know, the toxins; the ones in your colon."

"That's called poo and it comes out on its own."

As physicians we are inundated with alternative remedies. My patients are always bringing in something new for my opinion. One of the most popular treatments is the *cleanse*. There are recipes and supplements to cleanse your bowel, liver, gallbladder, and more. One patient was ecstatic because she had taken this product with three phases—preparation, cleansing, and restoration. She was convinced it had worked because during the cleansing phase she felt awful and had horrible diarrhea. Sounded like norovirus to me.

One patient brought in an article that aspartame causes MS (even though this patient consumed aspartame and didn't have MS). This confused me because the local hyperbaric oxygen people claim that after 40 or so treatments at \$100 a pop they can cure MS along with cerebral palsy, stroke, postpolio syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's, and coma. My patient was quite concerned about her weight and consumed a lot of aspartame so I suggested she take her diet products in for hyperbaric oxygen treatments prior to consumption.

These products and treatments are full of pseudoscience backed by testimonies from numerous satisfied customers. I can't help but list a few of my favorites.

### Flukes

All disease is caused by intestinal flukes, for which the only cure is (expensive) anti-fluke pills.

### Malalignment of C1

Disease is caused by malalignment of C1 or the "atlas." Patients are warned that they will need a large number of adjustments and even if they feel better not to discontinue the program as they will relapse. Even after they are done it is imperative they come every 6 months because that pesky atlas has a way of wandering.

### Ionizer

Purchase a water ionizer to produce a super supply of antioxidants in each glass. This ionized water hydrates you better, is a rich source of extra oxygen (maybe this is what Aquaman uses), and flushes acidic toxins. Let's see, a fluid rich in ions, antioxidants, and oxygen—maybe vampires are on to something.

### Lithium

A pill for mood disorders that takes the lithium right in to the cells where it is needed the most, thereby not affecting blood lithium levels. It does this through its microvortex enteric coating. Now I don't know about you but I don't have any mini-tornadoes in my stomach.

### Biostructural medicine

Medicine for joint, respiratory, bone, CVS, digestive, and skin conditions.

### Bovine colostrum pills

Pills for MS, lupus, AIDS, rheumatoid arthritis, coronary artery disease, cancer, and diabetes. I wonder whose job it is to collect it.

### Ancient herbal liver formula pills

For flushing the liver of bacteria, stones, and garbage. Seriously, the pamphlet says, *garbage*. Now, if landfills are full of diapers then apparently we have livers packed with Huggies.

### Cetyl myristoleate pills

These cure rheumatoid arthritis. One bottle of 100 capsules is \$250, but that is all you need and you're cured for life. Most of these supplements have money-back guarantees, but you order them through a 1 800 number or a PO box.

### Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation

This is my overall favorite. It treats Parkinson disease, mood disorders, schizophrenia, and eating disorders. This is a machine with a handheld probe that the technician waves around your head. I believe the technician makes a buzzing noise during the treatments.

Before I get too cocky I am reminded of my wacko patient who claimed before the days of *H. pylori* that every time he took antibiotics his ulcer symptoms improved.

All of the above serve to remind us of our job as advocates for our patients. It is a thankless job because often if we voice a dissenting opinion we are labeled as trying to protect our turf. Regardless, it is our duty to protect our patients from unnecessary, costly, and at times potentially dangerous treatments. Now if you will excuse me I am going to relax with a good book while I sip some Manchurian Mushroom Elixir of Life.

—DRR

### Medical writing prize: \$1000 for best student article

The J.H. MacDermot Prize for Excellence in Medical Journalism comes with a cash award of \$1000 for the best article on any medicine-related topic submitted to the *BC Medical Journal* by a medical student in British Columbia.

## An Oedipus complex

I often wonder how mothers do it. How do they seem to have enough time in the day for everything they have to accomplish? Do they wake up really early, stay awake really late, or both? Who taught them to juggle so (seemingly) effortlessly? I can only do one thing at a time. I have a great deal of admiration and respect for mothers. I deliver plenty of babies and am constantly amazed at the strength and courage of mothers during the birth process, and, of course, beyond.

I grew up in South Africa. I did not see my mother have to juggle too much (I love you, Mother). Many middle-class South African households had a housekeeper/maid/nanny who did all the cleaning, cooking, washing, and ironing. My parents have had the same housekeeper for over 30 years. Jane is a mother and grandmother, too. Boy, can she juggle.

Take my wife (no, not in a Rodney Dangerfield sort of way). She is usually up before the rest of the household. I would list everything she does to make our lives easier, but, firstly, this would likely embarrass her, as she prefers to get things done quietly without much of a fuss, and, secondly, I

don't have enough space on this page. She is a juggler *par excellence*. She is the epitome of the saying, "Behind every man there is a good woman." She is the reason I am able to do what I do—work, be on call, serve on committees, schmooze, etc. Our sons are very fortunate to have her as their

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mother. I think they have a vague idea of this. One day they will truly appreciate this fact. I am very fortunate to have her as my wife.

I am writing this as Mother's Day draws near. You will be reading it around Father's Day. A few years ago, one Mother's Day, I was on my way to the hospital to do ward rounds. As I drove past a cemetery, I noticed a young lady visiting a grave. I imag-

ined it to be the grave of her late mother. I was saddened by the thought of a child visiting her mother's grave on Mother's Day. It made me appreciate what I have even more. It reminded me to tell those close to me how important they are to me.

You probably know the story of little Abe Cohen, whose mother doted on him from the moment he was born. When he went to school for the first time at age 5, he couldn't stop talking about his mother. All day long, he talked about his mother and how much he loved her. One day, the teacher, who was getting a bit tired of this monotonous conversation, called his mother into the classroom. She said to Abe's mother, "Mrs Cohen, I'm afraid to be the bearer of bad news, but I feel your son has an Oedipus complex."

"Oedipus Schmoedipus," replied Mrs Cohen. "Just so long as he loves his mother."

Happy Mother's Day, Mom, Rob, and all the readers who are mothers.

Happy Father's Day, Dad, and all the fathers reading this.

May we all appreciate what we have.

—DBC