

So Where Do All These Toxins Come From, Anyway?

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I had a woman (I'll call her Rachel) come to me two years ago referred by a patient. She was 33, with tightness and pain over her breastbone. I treated her with acupuncture, and the pain and tightness went away, but it came back in a couple of hours after treatment. I treated her again and the same thing happened. After six treatments, she decided to try something else.

A couple of months later, I saw the woman who had originally referred Rachel to me. She told me it turned out Rachel had breast cancer that had metastasized to her sternum; she was now undergoing chemo and radiation therapy. She wanted to know if acupuncture could help with cancer and if Rachel should come back.

I told her absolutely, and that even though I couldn't legally treat cancer, I could help with accompanying problems such as nausea, a weakened immune system and depression. When Rachel returned, wearing a wig, thinner, and with an exhausted look on her face, she seemed like a different woman.

Needless to say, it was a harrowing experience for her. Rachel had one question that has stuck in my mind. She asked me, with genuine simplicity, "I eat right and exercise; how did I get cancer?" That's a big question, one I, of course, don't have an answer for. But I know a place to start looking: our environment.

As stated in the last column, almost 800 billion dollars is spent in the U.S. and Canada on environmentally caused disease. Why so much disease, and where are these toxins coming from? Just as humans have the three treasures of *jing*, *qi* and *shen*, the Earth has three treasures as well. These are the oceans, the land and the sky. It is no coincidence that these are exactly the places the toxins that are poisoning us are coming from.

I'm sure it is no surprise to anyone that tap water can be full of toxins such as chlorine, fluoride and radioactive radon. Drinking bottled or filtered water can help (except for the emissions from plastic bottles), but what about absorbing these substances through our skin in the shower, or from the swimming pool, or when brushing our teeth? Fifty percent of America's rivers and lakes are too polluted for fishing, swimming or aquatic life. Lack of potable water is one of the greatest challenges to indigenous cultures around the world.

The air is full of carbon monoxide, lead, ash, hydrocarbons, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur, insecticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers. All of these end up in the earth and our lungs. I have a friend who lives in rural New York. He has to keep his windows closed in the spring because the farmers in the area spray pesticides, which develops into a thick layer of poisonous dust on the window sills. This is

even more frightening when you consider that he has a small child and a baby. Unfortunately, staying indoors isn't the answer either, since the EPA states that American homes are 70 times more polluted than outdoor air due to the use of household cleaners and vapors leeching out from chemicals such as fire retardants in our furniture, plastics, mattresses, carpets and unhealthy building materials. Other sources are personal products such as dyes, fragrances and chemicals in our shampoo, toothpaste, deodorants and laundry soap.

An example of how the three treasures of the Earth are connected is acid rain. It comes from emissions from cars and factory smokestacks; pollutes the air; falls on the land, poisoning lakes, rivers and forests; pollutes our agriculture; and runs into the ocean, contaminating fish and the sea floor with toxins and heavy metals such as mercury.

Unless you are eating organic foods, you are regularly ingesting large amounts of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Sixty million pounds of pesticides are applied to U.S. crops annually. Preservatives, colors, artificial flavors and hydrogenated oils are in almost every prepared food from every major food label in the country. Animals such as cows, pigs and chickens contain not only all of these toxins through the food they eat but are also given growth hormones, steroids, antibiotics and vaccinations. What does ingesting growth hormones and steroids do to our immune system and cancer in the body?

Prescription medications are modern chemicals that pollute our internal environment such as the liver and kidneys. The pharmaceutical companies' solution is to keep creating stronger chemicals to combat the results of our unhealthy environment and lifestyle. With 50 percent of the nation being prescription drug addicts, and as the second-largest industry next to big oil, it seems they are marketing their business exceptionally well. I would go one step further to say that the typical chaotic American lifestyle poisons us with stress. Do we really need years of double-blind studies to know these things are no good for us?

In a world this polluted, diet and exercise alone are not enough. Yes, we need to do these things, but my patient Rachel was led astray by the medical establishment's narrow view of health that doing these things, plus a regular checkup, is all that is needed to maintain health. After Rachel was diagnosed with cancer, she wanted to know from her doctor how to eat, what to drink, what exercises to do, what to avoid, and so on. Do you know what he said? "Just live your life." That's it. No lifestyle advice was offered.

Luckily, that wasn't good enough for Rachel. She came back to me, and I had some places to start. Patients are always amazed and grateful about how much time I initially spend with them. We are in a unique position to help with health suggestions since MDs are not trained in them (and have no time for it even if they were).

Something else we have to offer that doctors can't is a way to improve the immune system and reduce stress. Every time we needle the body with acupuncture, we activate white blood cells, creating an immune response that strengthens the whole body. This is why we can be so successful with diseases such as AIDS, cancer, chronic fatigue and allergies. We also know from people undergoing MRIs that endorphins are released during acupuncture, reducing pain, addictions and stress. As we reduce stress and tonify the immune system, our bodies are better able to deal with environmental toxins. Herbs can also be used to strengthen the immune system, reduce stress and detoxify the body.

A saying in Chinese medicine is, *The superior physician treats disease before it arises*. This can only be

done in conjunction with the patient coming in for preventative treatment. Is this not the same philosophy we should have with the environment - preventing destruction before it turns into disasters such as a nuclear accident at Chernobyl, an oil spill in Valdez and greenhouse effects causing a hole in the ozone and global warming?

We cannot be removed from the environment. In Chinese thought, man is considered a microcosm of the Earth. As I said before, polluting the Earth pollutes us, and healing the Earth heals us. My patient Rachel is still alive two years later, doing well and working on all aspects of her life. She feels empowered and optimistic about taking her health care into her own hands. It is a shame it took cancer to strike before she started.

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