

Diet, Medicine and Supplements for Arthritis, the back story

Description

Gentle Reader,

Before going into dietary suggestions, I want to share how I came to hold the beliefs and attitudes I have about allopathic medicine.

My father was an Orthopedist. My mother was a nurse. They believed in the miracles of medicine. Mother worked for a General Practitioner during a New York City outbreak of the flu in the 30's. It was nothing like the great Pandemic that swallowed up between 20 and 40 million people, but she and her doctor never saw their whole list of patients in a day's work. When my parents met at the still new Morrisania Hospital complex in the Highbridge section of the Bronx, he was an intern, she a nurse. Beginning married life in the Great Depression, theirs was a youthful enthusiasm for life, for medicine as a burgeoning panacea, for a future for any hard working person.

By the invasion of Normandy, recently discovered penicillin would save thousands who might otherwise have died of infection. He would have had penicillin in his kit on board the USS Boise in the South Pacific where he was a navy doctor from 1942-45. Before the war, practicing from his office in our home in West Chester County, NY my father became involved in the debilitating and wide spread polio epidemics of the late 1930s, early pre-war and on into the 50s years. I remember his lecturing to parent groups and civic leaders about good diet and rest. He encouraged people to continue to mingle in public places, but not large crowded movie theaters or swimming pools. He felt isolation prevented the buildup of immunity. He took me and my brother on home visits to polio patients, mostly children, expecting us to get exposed and build immunity. Imagine his excitement when the poliovirus vaccine against polio wiped out this disease in the later 50s. Much of his work in New York and later in Oklahoma beginning in 1947 was with polio victims and their rehabilitation through therapies and prosthetics.

I recount this history to get a better understanding myself of the enthusiastic embrace of pharmaceutical breakthroughs on the part of my parents. Unfortunately my father's excitement over each new drug led to indiscriminant experimentation with himself and his children. The largest drawer in the bathroom cabinet was filled with physician's samples.

At the slightest sniffle, I would be offered the latest anti-biotic. One such drug caused my first arthritis.

I was in high school, a competitive swimmer and when I came down with a serious sinus infection and was unable to continue swim practice, he gave me several doses of a new drug. Unfortunately it settled in the synovial fluid of my knees causing pain especially when sitting in the back seat of a 2 door car or balcony seats in the theater. Folding my legs tight was extremely painful. I used aspirin for relief, carrying a bottle in my purse and often eating several tablets without benefit of water.

I deviate to tell you a little story about drugs and the Johnson family. My brother Eric and I raised white Leghorn chickens for a 4H project. The county extension agent recommended growth hormones. This is the 50s when better living through chemistry was heralded on every side. My brother decided he could hurry his growth by drinking one of the vials himself. He was about 12 at the time.

Sometime during college my knee pain subsided somewhat, but residual creaking persisted. Nothing stopped me from an active life of biking, swimming, walking, dancing and anything else where movement was involved. There was always a bottle of aspirin in my purse.

Winters were tough on me. I often had colds that descended to the chest, became bronchitis and required antibiotics. A typical winter saw three rounds of colds, bronchitis and antibiotics. Following my father's model, at the first sign of the sniffles, I started taking Coricidin, drying up the natural response to a cold virus.

This cycle happened year after year until my senior year in high school, my sinus condition became so severe, and I begged my father to take me to a specialist in Oklahoma City. It was a 4 ½ hour drive and a full day away from his own medical practice. I remember sitting next to him in the front seat of our Nash station wagon, feeling special that he would make this effort on my behalf. I am sure I had been a willing user of all the drugs he had offered me over the years. After the office visit and some diagnostic procedure like today's nasal endoscopy, the specialist told me there was nothing that could be done surgically. I should give up swimming and certainly never dive into the water.

Medicine could not perform the magic I wanted. My disappointment was profound. I would not give up swimming. I would wear ear plugs and a nose clamp, taking precautions. Within three inactive winter months, I had gained 25 pounds. No one noticed

until one day a Doncaster clothing representative had set up his wares in our living room for my mother and several of her friends. Mother urged me to try on several stylish slim fitting long skirts from his model size 12. When I could not close the zipper, standing there in my bra and panties, she all but shrieked at the sight of me, belly too large with angry stretch marks running diagonally in two tracks down each side. Now that I was the object of close inspection, further stretch marks were discovered on my breasts, buttocks and thighs.

This humiliation was reported dramatically at the breakfast table the next morning. My father laid down the gauntlet, my two younger brothers cheering him on. I would lose this weight. Mother, who had slowly put on a few extra pounds, challenged me to a contest to see who could lose the most by summer. Drugs to the rescue. We bought boxes of those little chocolate and caramel chews laced with phenylpropanolamine – a substance the FDA has now ruled “not recognized as safe”.

What were we doing? Lose weight without dieting. Miracles through chemistry.

When I married Don Bell after my sophomore year in college, I was still a round person, strong, athletic, but carrying 25 extra pounds. He gladly took over my father’s task of counting my calories and checking my weight every day. But I needed to flex my independence from this tyranny and did so by eating a delicious double dip ice cream cone every afternoon from the shop on the University of California Berkeley campus. After months of this indulgence, I experienced a humiliating episode of uncontrolled bowels. I was paralyzed with cramps and loose stool as I trying to walk home from campus. Finding a pay phone, dialing through tears, Don came to pick me up. Tenderly sympathetic, he helped me to the bathroom where I cleaned myself up. At an appointment with a proctologist the next week, I had to confess to the daily intake of rich creamy cones which had caused this mess. Ice cream is not my friend.

In January of 1971, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and wheeled into the operating theater on the day my oldest of four daughters turned 10. I made a pact that day with God that I would do everything in my power to lead a healthy life so no cancer would return. Making sense of cancer at age 34 led me to believe all those antibiotics and other medications over the years had destroyed my own immune system’s ability to respond. Perhaps irrational but nonetheless compelling, I decided against allopathic intervention for any illness I might develop until I had tried everything else.

Now that you have the back story for my crusade to heal the body without medicine, I will

tell you what I have discovered to be helpful dietary choices and supplements. Stay tuned.

I'd be interested in your story around medicine and medical intervention. How do you feel about drugs? How did you develop the attitudes you have? Please share.

Be Well, Do Well and Keep Moving.

Betsy

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