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Dear Friends,

I just returned from a meeting of the American College for Advancement in Medicine, the best place for doctors to keep up with the latest innovative medical treatments and confirm the value of those they may be already using. Doctors who practice complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) are often told that they are not practicing scientific medicine, but the research and clinical presenters at these meetings are top scientists giving a clear scientific basis for many such practices.

However, my colleagues and I are also exposed to many heavily advertised dietary supplement products, medical devices, and treatments that have little or no scientific justification. I am concerned that many such poorly supported treatments are also hyped to the public. It disturbs me because they give the rest of CAM a bad name. I receive their flyers myself at meetings and through promotional mail (junk mail often has a very professional appearance).

Don't believe everything you see. I have been appalled by miracle cure claims, such as those for calcium from coral. It is hyped as a cure or preventive for 200 diseases, including cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, hypertension, eczema, heart disease, and many more (yes, "many more" are the exact words on one website!,

after listing 19 others, and on another website it is touted as an antibiotic and antioxidant – utilizing all of the recent buzz words for health). I don't believe it, and neither should you.

I could say the same for growth hormone pills (the documented benefit from GH is from the injectable form), graviola (maybe a delicious fruit, but not documented for heart conditions, coughs, difficult childbirth, asthma, hypertension, and more, for which claims are made), noni juice (very few studies; all based on injections in mice, or in test tubes), and dehydrated fruits and vegetables, sold at a high price. Be skeptical if there are no human trials or reasonable extrapolations to humans.

While these products may have nutritious components, it is not at all clear that they are equal to or worth more than fresh foods. For calcium products derived from coral, I am not at all convinced of their safety because of the possible heavy metal contamination of any natural calcium supplement from the sea. Just because something has traditional uses, or comes from the Brazilian rain forest, the Peruvian Andes, or the South Pacific islands, this does not in itself justify flamboyant claims.

Sometimes the hype is simply for sexual enhancement or weight loss, or it might be for brain function or age reduction. Don't be taken in by unjustified claims, but don't think that this is representative of most of CAM therapies. The science may someday find that these substances indeed have value, although it is unlikely that it will be for all they claim. But right now, stay with what is based on science.

## Toxic Metals

We are all exposed to toxic heavy metals at every stage of life, and it is a serious problem, but you can do something about it. Lead, mercury, aluminum, cadmium, arsenic, and others are widespread in the environment, and common practices in all societies add to the exposure.

Aluminum is the most abundant metal in the earth's crust. Cooking acidic foods in aluminum pots and pans increases the body burden. It is present in water due to acid rain, it is used as a precipitant to clarify municipal water supplies, and it is present in drugs, such as Maalox.

While lead is no longer used in house paints, residues in older houses still pose a risk from paint chips and dust. Other sources of lead include drinking water, contaminated soil with residues from leaded gasoline, various foods, and industrial exposures.

Mercury (as methyl mercury) is a serious toxin, with human exposure from dental amalgams, large fish (such as tuna, swordfish, and bluefish), industrial waste through incineration, vaccines and drugs preserved with thimerosal, as well as some contact lens solutions. It is also found in fungicides, and some paints. If you have dental amalgam fillings, chewing releases mercury vapor, which you then inhale or swallow.

We are exposed to cadmium through cigarette smoke, refined white flour, water supplies, and coal burning, as well as some dental amalgams, and nickel-cadmium batteries.

Heavy metals are particularly dangerous for children, as they absorb toxins more readily, and their nervous systems are especially vulnerable. However, adults are also affected by toxic metals, which are nerve poisons, and cause enzyme disruption, brain abnormalities, kidney impairment, and other health problems.

In children, mercury is associated with developmental and behavioral problems. While some of these exposures are inevitable, the large majority can be reduced by changes in public policy, industrial cleanup, and changes in immunization and dental care (mercury-free fillings, and vaccines that are free of thimerosal). Careful dietary choices will also help reduce exposure to numerous toxins.

## Metal-Related Health Problems

Toxicity starts early, as mercury and lead pass through the placenta to the developing fetus, and are also present in breast milk. While most damaging during fetal development and in childhood, these toxins exert their effects throughout life, and are suspect in numerous diseases and functional decline.

Toxic metals have been linked to decreased immune function, auto-immune disorders, depletion of antioxidants, disruption of neuronal function, Alzheimer's-like lesions in the brain, interference with energy production, and platelet abnormalities.

Lead and cadmium are associated with the development of hypertension and kidney disease. Lead increases the risk of stroke, and even low levels can impair neuromuscular control and manual dexterity, slow reaction time, and decrease intellectual ability. It also interferes with enzymes that protect against free radicals, resulting in increased oxidative damage. Cadmium is not only a carcinogen, but it enhances the growth and spread of already-established tumors.

Mercury causes so much damage that it is amazing that it is put directly into our teeth and used as a vaccine preservative and administered to children by health practitioners. It is suspected in neurological diseases (such as ALS, MS, and Parkinson's disease), liver and gastrointestinal damage, chromosome abnormalities and even depression and headaches. The association with autism and other childhood behavior and mental disorders is increasingly clear.

### Treatment to Eliminate Toxins

Various health practices can help you eliminate toxins and reduce their effects. Removal of dental amalgams, using proper techniques to avoid absorption during the process, will decrease the continuing supply of toxin into your system.

Exercise and saunas to induce sweating reduce the body burden of metal toxins. Selenium- and sulfur-containing foods, such as cabbage-family vegetables, onions, garlic, and eggs, help to displace mercury, and foods high in zinc promote lead elimination.

Dietary supplements are critical to the treatment of metal overload. They not only promote excre-

tion, but they decrease the damaging effects. Extra selenium and sulfur (in the form of methylsulfonyl methane, or MSM, 2 to 6 gms), may be essential in addition to food sources. Alpha lipoic acid (200 to 1000 mg) is both a sulfur source and an excellent antioxidant for the brain, protecting against degenerative brain disorders.

Vitamin C (2 to 6 gms) is not only an antioxidant, but it is also a metal chelator, binding with metals and removing them from the system and decreasing free-radical damage. Magnesium and calcium in food or supplements help to block toxic metal accumulation.

Other antioxidants work in concert with these nutrients to protect the kidneys, brain, liver, and other organs. They include flavonoids, carotenoids, melatonin, vitamin E, and coenzyme Q10. Silymarin (500 to 1000 mg of standardized extract), derived from milk thistle, is an herbal remedy that promotes liver detoxification and acts as a brain antioxidant.

Finally, chelation therapy is sometimes essential in treatment of toxic metal exposure. Intravenous administration of EDTA, a synthetic amino acid removes lead and cadmium. This is a safe treatment done in a doctor's office.

Oral treatment with DMSA (dimercapto succinic acid) is the best treatment for mercury, and also removes some lead. This is available by prescription and as a dietary supplement (available from some pharmacies and physicians).

Clearly, avoiding exposure is the best way to decrease the damage from heavy metals, but even after metals accumulate, you can eliminate them and reverse some of the damage.

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### Ask Dr. J

Q. My friend is often dizzy; is there anything natural that can help? B.G., Internet

A. Many conditions may be an underlying cause of dizziness or vertigo (as opposed to loss of balance). Sometimes it is an inner ear problem (Meniere's syndrome), and this can be helped with supplements of ginkgo biloba (120 to 240 mg of standardized extract) and timed release niacin (250 to 500 mg; not for those with liver problems). Sometimes dizziness can result from hardening of the arteries to the head and neck, reducing

circulation to the brain, a condition called transient ischemic attack, or TIA. Treatment for the arteries includes diet (mostly vegetarian, whole, natural foods), and exercise, as well as vitamins C (3000 to 6000 mg) and E (400 to 800 IU), EPA and DHA from fish oil (1000 to 3000 mg of omega-3 oils), magnesium (500 to 1000 mg), alpha-lipoic acid (300 to 1000 mg), carotenoids (25,000 IU), ginkgo biloba. I also suggest chelation therapy.

Dizziness can be the result of drug reactions, postural hypotension (low blood pressure when standing suddenly), infections in the inner ear, and metabolic disorders, such as diabetes.

Hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, can also cause recurrent dizzy spells. This can be managed with a whole foods diet, eliminating refined sugars and white flour, eating small frequent meals, doing regular exercise, and taking supplements of chromium (200 to 600 mcg), as well as timed release niacin (250 to 500 mg), vitamin C, magnesium, and B-complex. Finding the cause will help determine the right treatments.

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## In the Health News

- Mental stress is increasingly recognized as a contributor to disease states. A recent article published in *Circulation* (Rapid Access Communications, May 21, 2002; reported in Reuters Health) shows, that a brief three-minute stressful situation can impair the ability of blood vessels to dilate. This can lead to heart attacks in those with compromised arteries. This stress decreased the ability of the artery to respond by 50 percent, and the effect lasted for 45 minutes. Stress management and antioxidant protection of the endothelium (the arterial lining cells) are important for prevention of heart attacks or sudden cardiac death.

### Diet and Disease

- Fecal bacteria contaminates most of the chicken that you find at the market. Many of them are human pathogens, and a majority are resistant to antibiotics. Researchers presented their findings at the annual meeting of the American Society for Microbiology (Reuters Health, May 21, 2002), finding that of 253 samples, 233 were contaminated! Three quarters of the bacteria were fecal, and five percent were related to food spoilage. Over 90 percent were resistant to one antibiotic, and 87 percent were resistant to two or more. They suggest cooking chicken until it falls off the bone—my advice is to avoid it altogether, as well as meat, which is also commonly contaminated.
- A new study confirms the value of fish (those containing omega-3 fatty acids) in prevention of heart attacks. (Albert CM, et al., *N Engl J Med* 2002 Apr 11;346(15):1113-8.) Sudden death is often the first sign of heart disease, and men with high omega-3 oils in the blood had a 72 percent reduction in risk of sudden death. The trick is finding clean fish that are not contaminated with mercury, PCB's, and other toxins.

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## Summer Grill and Almond Sauce

No need to give up on the barbecue for health. Use a gas grill to avoid fumes, and you can skewer fresh vegetables (such as peppers, zucchini, mushrooms, onions, and garlic) interspersed with chunks of tofu, tempeh, or fresh fish (for those omega-3 oils, choose wild salmon from Alaska or bluefish from clean waters—not the Northeast). Drizzle this spicy almond sauce over them: combine a half cup of organic almond butter (or peanut if you prefer; it is less expensive) with a half cup of water, three garlic cloves, two oz. lemon juice, and 1/4 tsp of cayenne (or to taste). Add a fingertip-sized piece of fresh ginger and a touch of soy sauce. Blend with an electric whisk or in a blender, and then add chopped scallions or chives. This also goes well over soba (buckwheat) noodles.

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