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**An ounce of prevention,
Worth a pound of cure:**

A role for Nutraceuticals

I have three goals for disease management as a primary care Internist... prevention, early detection, and effective treatment. Modern medicine has made significant advances in effective treatment for most diseases. Most people participate in some form of early detection such as screening colonoscopies, annual mammograms, or bone density tests. Unfortunately, prevention is frequently overlooked or underutilized.

Prevention may be the only way to treat some diseases. It is certainly the best way to stay happy and healthy. Preventing coronary artery disease is certainly better than having bypass surgery. Preventing emphysema is better than living dependent on a tank of oxygen. Preventing cancer is preferable than enduring surgeries, radiation treatments, and chemotherapy.

Preventing disease is not complicated. Most people know the basics but find them difficult to implement into their daily lives. In summary, diet and exercise are the two key ingredients. It's no secret that regular exercise is good for people. It helps prevent heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, obesity, and osteoporosis. Good nutrition is critically important in preventing disease. Diets high in fat and low in fiber are linked to heart disease and cancer.

Why is this true? The common denominator behind many chronic degenerative diseases is oxidative stress. It is what occurs as a by-product

of our daily metabolism. When our bodies burn sugar and fat as an energy source, by-products are formed called free radicals. Free radicals are charged particles that damage our cells. They damage the lining of our arteries, called the endothelium. When this occurs inflammation causes deposits of cholesterol and other substances which can lead to heart attacks, peripheral artery disease, and strokes. These same free radicals also damage our cell's DNA. DNA controls the way our cells reproduce, and damaged DNA can lead to mutations which may be responsible for the occurrence of tumors and cancer.

Foods and supplements that are beneficial in preventing these degenerative processes contain substances called anti-oxidants. Antioxidants mop up the free radicals before they can damage our bodies, and by doing so reduce our risk of developing heart disease, cancers, and other degenerative illnesses. The best source of these anti-oxidants in nature are fruits and vegetables. Studies have shown that people whose diets contain the lowest percentiles of fruits and vegetables have double to triple the cancer rates of normal individuals.

“Eat more vegetables and fruit”. It's the one recommendation in almost every diet plan, every guide to nutrition, and every fitness book. Even organizations such as the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, World Health Organization, American Heart Association, The American Cancer Society, and the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion agree that fruits and vegetables in particular help reduce the risk of degenerative diseases such as heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

Unfortunately, there are fast food drive-throughs on every corner. Fat, salt, and sugar have been added to almost every package on the shelf at the grocery store. Grabbing a bag of chips or a can of soda at the convenience store is certainly a lot easier than peeling an orange or tossing a salad. People often turn to vitamins and other nutritional supplements to improve their diets. Unfortunately, vitamins alone can't begin to replicate the thousands of different nutrients found in fresh fruits and vegetables. Americans don't suffer from a vitamin deficiency. We suffer from a whole food deficiency. The best advice is to incorporate 9 servings daily of fresh fruits and vegetables into your diet.

Some nutraceutical products are available for people who find it difficult to incorporate the recommended servings of fresh fruits and vegetables into

their daily routine. I have created a list of supplements which I feel would benefit most people, and which I recommend to my patients. The first supplement is a product called JuicePlus+. It is a combination of 17 fruits and vegetables which have been dried, concentrated, and put in capsule form. I use this product myself. It can be purchased on-line at www.juiceplus.com/+rw68164. The next supplement I would recommend is Fish Oil. These come in capsules. They provide Omega-3 fatty acids which are anti-inflammatory. 2-3 grams daily help lower triglyceride levels and may even be beneficial in treating osteoarthritis. They can be found in any drug-store. Olive-oil is my preferred cooking oil. It provides Omega-9 fatty acids, also anti-inflammatory. For most people 1 or 2 baby aspirin (81mg) daily is cardioprotective and may reduce stroke. Two spices, Ginger and Turmeric also are beneficial in reducing inflammation.

For some diseases other nutraceutical products may slow progression and reduce symptoms.

Arthritis:

- 1) Glucosamine- a natural compound found in healthy cartilage.
- 2) Chondroitin- 1st extracted and purified in the 1960s. Today it is manufactured from natural sources (shark, beef cartilage, or bovine trachea).

Prostate Enlargement:

- 1) Saw Palmetto- used a lot in Europe. Historically in the Americas traced to the Mayans who used it as a tonic.

Dementia and Cognitive disorders:

- 1) Ginkgo Biloba- may benefit people with early stage Alzheimer's disease. Some trials indicate may be as helpful as some drugs (Aricept). Well designed trials are needed.
- 2) Ginseng- a root used for more than 2000 years by the Chinese.

Insomnia:

- 1) Melatonin- Produced by your body during the dark hours.
- 2) Kava- Used to relieve anxiety and promote sleep.
- 3) Valerian root- An herb with sedative properties. Listed as safe by the FDA.

There is a lot of truth to the saying "An apple a day keeps the doctor away".

Become a partner with your physician in staying healthy. Good habits, healthy diet, and regular exercise don't require a medical degree.

For more information, please visit <http://www.safecare.com>.

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