

Health is a choice.

by Dr. April J. Modesti



A man goes to see his doctor, holds out his arm and wiggles it side to side saying, “Doc, it hurts when I do this.” To which the doctor replies, “So don’t do that.”

You’ve heard that joke? Here’s the real punch line: The man leaves the office, fully aware of what he’s doing, and keeps doing it anyway.

As a medical professional, I am pleased and gratified when I can identify a patient’s issue, and intervene in a meaningful way to help that person feel better. The truth though, is that a huge percentage of reasons why patients come to see me, and why anybody goes to see her doctor, could be eliminated with a single simple prescription: diet and exercise.

So why are we doing it?

What keeps us from taking the simple steps that could help us turn the tide and regain our health and vitality?

It’s well substantiated that our sedentary, high-stress, processed food lifestyle is leading to an alarming rise in rates of diabetes and heart disease. And at the same time, the cost of delivering medical treatment is threatening to break our national budget. It’s as if we’re creating a perfect storm of disease.

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I think the first problem is that we’re addicted to the quick-fix. People think of their bodies the same way they think of their car. When they hear a noise, they want to drop it off, have the mechanic fix it, and then not have to worry about it for a while.

The second issue is that people think their bodies are a mystery, or too complicated to understand. They don’t want to know, or believe they can know, what’s really going on “in there,” so they completely depend on their doctor to tell them what’s best.

Lastly is our penchant for going after the next new thing. If something’s just been discovered, is new, better or cutting edge, then people want to try it. If it’s more of the same old thing, something people have heard before, then it’s easy to ignore.

I see things (and people) somewhat differently.

I know that if I only see a patient when she is in pain, and only comes to me for my ability to relieve her of that pain, then I will be seeing her again; and she will be more uncomfortable the next time. And she’ll be asking me, “Isn’t there anything else you can do?”

However, when a similar patient comes and listens to what she can be doing to support her body in healing, and then goes home and makes small changes in her life, then I know those changes will have profound results. I know that the next time I see her she will not only feel better, but look better. She will be moving in direction health and vitality, and will be saying “I feel better now than I did 20 years ago!”

The irony of all of this is that my suggestions are eminently doable. There are many people, a growing number, who have significant reactions to eating gluten. Their symptoms are varied, and often leave other doctors stymied. I tell those people to take gluten out of their diet for two weeks. Those who want to feel better do it. (And with all the gluten-free products on the market these days, it’s not hard.) When I see them again, they can’t believe the difference in how they feel. Their energy has increased. Their pain has largely gone away. It’s not a miracle. It’s diet.

Eliminating processed foods and chemically-treated foods can make a major difference, too. Many of us have sensitivities which develop into illnesses. The easiest way to treat them is through prevention.

Another suggestion I often make is that people re-connect with family, friends and “something greater” outside themselves, even if it’s Nature. Relationships, especially as we grow older, are essential to our health and well-being. Facebook updates are a quick fix, but they are no substitute for investing meaningful time with people you care about. Nothing in nature thrives in isolation. That goes for people, too.

And while you’re out with friends in Nature, take a walk. Exercise doesn’t have to mean an hour in the gym. A brisk walk around a few blocks is great.

My favorite final suggestion is to sleep. Enough. And regularly. You know how much sleep you need to feel refreshed and awake. Chances are it’s more than five. Getting the sleep you need will make the hours you’re awake more productive; and will give your body the time it needs to do its work behind the scenes.

The bottom line is: *you can choose how healthy you want to be. Make good choices.*