

FAQs from our readers provide important tips

Written by PHILIP S. CHUA, M.D., FACS, FPCS
Friday, 03 December 2010 09:40



Q: My blood pressure has been normal for more than six months, do I have to continue taking my blood pressure pills?

A: There are some exceptions where high blood pressure has turned normal after low-salt diet and exercise but, in general, once a hypertensive, always a hypertensive, meaning high blood pressure is for life. So, yes, you have to continue taking your blood pressure pills for life. Dieting and daily exercise are helpful in maintaining, not only in helping control blood pressure but also in aiding in the treatment of diabetes and in prevention of heart attack and stroke.

Q: I am only 36, otherwise healthy, and already having problem with sex. Can Viagra help? Is it safe to take?

A: Male erectile dysfunction (inability to have effective erection for successful sex) is not uncommon in young men, even in their 20s, due to stress and/or some psychological problems. It is, of course, more prevalent among those who are in their sixties and older. Depending on the cause of the problem, chances are “anti-impotent” pills, like Viagra, Cialis, Levitra, can help, even among most diabetics. But any of these “sex pills” should not be taken by men who are on any nitrite heart pills, like nitroglycerine sublingual or oral, Imdur, etc., because severe drop in blood pressure can occur. You must first consult your physician before taking any of these pills.

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Q: In a previous column, you stated that dieting (and even teaching sex) starts in the crib. Isn't this ridiculous?

A: No, it is not. On the surface, without knowing the medical rationale for my recommendation, it might sound ridiculous. But the idea is to begin teaching discipline during the child's infancy, where habits start to develop as the baby's brain develops. Believe it or not, what our infants learn in the crib will be part of their "personality" as they grow into toddlers, teenagers, and become adults. If we give the baby the bottle every time it cries, the baby will expect to get fed anytime it wants, regardless of the recommended proper and safe feeding schedule. As a consequence, the baby develops into a demanding person lacking in discipline (even about sex) and self-control, and has a higher risk for obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart attack and stroke. A discipline in feeding/eating is a fundamental part of developing a healthy lifestyle. The ridiculous and irresponsible (may even be described as stupid) parental behavior is when we do not discipline our kids and do not teach them how to live a healthy lifestyle that will boost their immunity from diseases and allow them to have the greatest productivity and longevity possible. What I will consider ridiculous is when we, who know better today, do not discipline and preemptively protect our children and allow them to die a premature death.

Q: I have been trying to lose weight for years, and practically do not eat, and yet I have not succeeded. Why?

A: We maintain our body weight and body mass by burning the calories we take in. In simple terms, calorie output must be equal to (the same as) calorie intake. If we eat more calories than we burn, there will be excess calories remaining in our body, which translates to a weight gain. When one does not eat, one will lose weight, guaranteed. This was what happened to ALL the prisoners of all wars (World War I, Korean, Vietnam, etc.), no exception. I cited this popular medical fact because of your statement that said you "practically do not eat." Besides calorie control by dieting, physical exercise is most valuable. Drinking a tall glass of water (hot or cold) before each meal and staying away from carbo (rice, bread, soft drinks, cookies, ice cream, etc.) are a part of an effective strategy to weight management. I suggest you weigh yourself naked once a week to monitor your progress. This has been found to be a good incentive in weight control.

Q: Since natural is healthier, can I stop taking my insulin shot and take ampalaya pills instead since you said ampalaya pills lower blood sugar?

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A: An emphatic “NO!” That would be dangerous. People have died from doing exactly just that. When one has insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM), his/her body needs insulin to metabolize glucose (sugar) properly. None of the diabetic pills will help, much less ampalaya pills. This substance from ampalaya (bitter melon) has been found to lower blood sugar among diabetics who are NOT insulin-dependent, but its potency is not enough to control the blood sugar by itself in 99 percent of the cases. Mild diabetes, which responds somewhat to dieting and exercise might be helped by ampalaya pills in controlling blood sugar level in this specific scenario. But not with ampalaya pills alone and by itself. Before stopping any medications or taking new medications, it is prudent to consult your physician.

Q: Is it true that eating the burned part of BBQ pork is unhealthy?

A: Yes, that's true. Eating the burned (charcoal-black) part of any food (pork, beef, fish, etc.) has been linked to cancer of the pancreas. And eating red meat in general is associated with a higher risk of developing cancer of the colon, breast, prostate, etc. The healthier alternatives are fish and white meat of chicken, minus the skin which is loaded in cholesterol.

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