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The Health-Washed Line Between Foods and Natural Health Product Labels

As consumers, we read, we consider, we buy. But what happens when the labels that guide us are not as meaningful as we believe? As lawyer Geneviève Eliany points out, there is an increasing blur between foods and natural health products that's caused by large-scale marketing and branding initiatives, called "health-washing" or "nutriwashing."

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Fish Oils and Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Whether you're an omega-3 believer or are merely curious about their health benefits, this concise guide and research summary by Dr. Jason Marr will rightfully hook you into considering fish oils as part of your supplementation regimen.

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Alkalizing Your Diet—Deliciously

Maybe you've heard about the disease-fighting properties of an alkaline diet but aren't sure where to start. You won't want to miss these tips and tasty recipes by holistic nutritionist Eden Elizabeth. Bon appétit!

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Portrait of an Artist

Canadian artist Jeff Molloy has a story to tell of his journey through a diagnosis of a rare and usually fatal form of cancer to the beauty of recovery. Here, he shares what he has discovered about life and health with writer Alexis Costello.

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A Passionate Plea for the Honeybee

Colony collapse disorder was once considered a mystery—but that mystery is now being unfurled. Find out which factors are hurting our common pollinators and how you can help protect them. EMF expert Milt Bowling reports in.

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Chinese Medicine for Autoimmune Disorders

by Chun-Kai Wang,
DrTCM, R.Ac

Autoimmune conditions are a very interesting class of diseases, because in some way they go against the core understanding of western medical science. Historically, the discovery of germs as a major cause of diseases led to the belief that the origin of illness had tangible proof in the form of external threats, that is, microorganisms. And by eliminating such agents, disease could be cured.

This quickly led to the development of the germ theory, a theory that today, while acknowledged to have faults, continues to direct the thinking model of doctors in their view of disease—being a result of something “foreign.” Autoimmune conditions, however, have scientists scratching their heads, because attempts in finding a foreign agent as a cause of this class of diseases has thus far proved fruitless.

The TCM view

Traditional Chinese medicine has long recognized foreign agents as a cause of disease, but was also aware their cause represented only a subset of conditions. While autoimmunity wasn't a term used in Chinese medicine, it can be grouped into another major class of conditions that we call “internal damage,” essentially systemic conditions from today's medical point of view.



Autoimmune conditions are indeed none other than systemic ailments, in my opinion. A look at the list of autoimmunity disorders will reveal that essentially every single part of the human body can be involved. My clinical experience also says the same thing. When patients come in with a specific “disease,” they usually have multiple other co-existing problems that are not any less severe than their main concern.

Chinese medicine deals with autoimmunity very differently from western medicine. To us, there is nothing foreign; it's simply the body itself in an unbalanced state due to various reasons. In western medicine, because no foreign agent has been identified to be a definitive cause of autoimmunity, the foreign label is placed for the time being on the immune system itself, which becomes the main target of drug therapy. Yet the irony is that true foreign agents like bacteria and viruses can be eradicated, but our own immunity cannot—or else the patient dies. And therefore, scientists are

still fixated on finding the “real” (and foreign) cause of the autoimmune response.

While steroids and at times immunosuppressants are currently the main and frequently only type of drugs used by modern medicine for autoimmunity, similar methods in Chinese medicine through roughly herbal equivalents constitute only one of many routes of treatment in our tradition. The reason is that autoimmunity is far more than just an inflammatory response. For Chinese medicine, the goal is not only to curb the inflammation but, more importantly, to stabilize and regulate our immunity so inflammation does not even happen. In essence, the body is the real problem, not the immunity—and not foreign agents either.

Chinese medicine treats autoimmune conditions by using steroid-like and/or anti-inflammatory herbs only when we perceive there is “heat-evil,” which is not the same as “inflammation.” In clinical reality, many people who are said to have inflammation do

not have what we call heat-evil. So what do they have? Below I give three common examples of patients whose “pattern” is often seen in chronic long-standing autoimmune conditions. (To understand what patterns are, please read “The Science behind Traditional Chinese Medicine,” *Health Action* summer 2014 print issue.)

Pattern A: Damp heat

In this pattern, patients get an autoimmune inflammatory response because they have what TCM calls “damp heat.” Damp heat describes a person's health to be in a state akin to being confined in a garbage can while the sun shines hard on it. The waste material, or damp heat, inside slowly ferments in its own juice and as the sun increases the internal temperature, noxious gases accumulate inside the garbage container.

When people are in this disease state, or have this pattern, other than the “inflammation” that is going on, they also experience other symptoms and signs that point to the systemic

influence of the inflammation.

They may frequently get teary eyes and conjunctival inflammation and pain. Their nose might be plugged or have yellowish discharge in the morning. The mouth often tastes weird and difficult to describe yet makes the orals very uncomfortable. They may have bad breath despite brushing their teeth often. Digestive issues such as acid reflux or uncomfortable simmering sensations of the stomach may also be a complaint. At times there may be nausea or diarrhea where the stools smell like rotten compost and are wet, sticky and slimy. They might be prone to frequent urinary tract infections, with yellowish urine that may burn or smell like ammonia. In other instances, skin rashes and boils frequently occur.

Diseases that frequently present with this pattern include Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, psoriasis and lupus (SLE).

Pattern B: Internal coldness

Despite autoimmunity to be an inflammatory response, many patients actually have issues related to low temperatures. In TCM, this is a pattern where the person's body is consumed by an intangible energetic force called "cold-evil," as a result of congenital constitution, lifestyle, diet, among other causes.

This pattern occurs in relation to the decline of the body's warming function. Patients often complain of chills, sometimes even during the summer and, of course, worst in the winter. Stomach pain and diarrhea occur frequently but,

at times, constipation as well. Their limbs are especially sensitive to low temperatures, with the legs being the worst. A quick look often reveals poor circulation and evidence of varicosity, big or small, in the lower limbs. In the worst scenario, their joints and fingers will hurt, be swollen or even turn purplish.

Females are often troubled by menstrual cramps, menstrual cycle abnormalities and, in certain cases, infertility. While females tend to get this pattern more than males, there are still significant numbers of males. For them, sexual and urological functions are often hampered, and many also suffer from chronic hernia-like pain that gets worse with low temperatures or over-sex.

Diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, gout, Raynaud's syndrome and Takayasu's vasculitis (and other types of vasculitis) frequently present in this way.

Pattern C: Deficiency

This pattern is used to describe a patient whose body is "deficient," or "empty." The proper nutrition that the body needs is absent, usually not because of malnutrition but often as a result of poor absorption, circulation and recycling. This often arises from extended periods of over-fatigue (mental and/or physical), frequently unknown to the patient until the body's symptoms become intolerable.

Deficient patients are often fatigued easily, but at times they are also restless and agitated. Their face looks dark and they speak in a low tone. On the other hand, certain individuals can look unusually vibrant, jittery and unable

to calm down; however, their speech usually lacks stability. Such patients may also experience rapid heart rates and often hear their own heart beat, a disturbing phenomenon that renders sleep almost impossible. Episodes of feverishness and sweating may accompany as a result. The mouth feels dry, and they drink more than usual to alleviate thirst but to no avail. The arms and legs may feel weak and are unable to withstand physical work for extended periods before fatigue sets in. They find it impossible to rest, making them even more drowsy.

Sjogren's syndrome, Hashimoto's thyroiditis and Grave's disease are common examples.

The above highlights only some of the common patterns seen in select autoimmune conditions, but is definitely not

an exhaustive list. What readers should understand is that treatment of autoimmune conditions with Chinese medicine does not mean treatment for indefinite or perpetual lengths of time as is usually the case in western medicine—and frequently immediate relapse once drugs are stopped. When the body has been stabilized and balanced to a certain degree by Chinese medicine, patients can usually go safely off treatment for quite extended periods without suffering from relapse. 🍵

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