

Food is medicine – your body is fuelled by what you eat

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As an audiologist working for over 20 years with patients who have Meniere's disease, I would like to congratulate nutritionist Laura Fisher for her very informative webinar organised by Anne Elias and the Meniere's support group, which was live on 8 September 2021.

My interest in nutrition and "alternative medicine" pre-dates my work as an audiologist. It goes back to my Uni days when I had the opportunity to participate in seminars and workshops based on the ideas of Rudolph Steiner, an Austrian philosopher who had an interesting vision of the human body, medicine, education and agriculture. Over the years, I continued studying different approaches such as functional and integrative medicine.

Unfortunately, nutrition and medicines are beyond the scope of my profession that I cannot really "practice what I preach" in my clinic. As an audiologist, when I attend to patients with Meniere's I can provide guidance to rehabilitate hearing, tinnitus and balance loss caused by the disease but cannot interfere in any medical intervention my patients may be following. Advice and guidance on nutrition and medical interventions are beyond my scope practice.

Laura's seminar last night brought to light my old beliefs that appropriate nutrition and lifestyle are the key to improve quality of life of those experiencing the symptoms of Meniere's disease. Laura, as well as many of my patients over the years, has demonstrated that changes in their lifestyle are far more effective than medicines, random salt restrictions, and surgical interventions, to control the unpleasant symptoms of Meniere's.

I believe that the role of a health professional is to guide their patients into the discovery of their own body function and dysfunction.

I do not suffer from Meniere's but have had other health issues of my own associated to my busy lifestyle. I've led a sedentary life, sitting down most of the day at my clinic, longing for "wine o'clock". I've never been big on processed food, but my diet lacked variety of fruit and vegetables. I had an urge to have two espresso coffees a day despite the burning sensation they caused in my stomach. My exercise routines were limited to a few bike rides a month, a short swim in summer and very short walks.

My digestive system has never been happy since I was a teenager, most likely due to my intake of predominantly acidic foods from childhood. I had a diagnosis of GORD (gastro-oesophageal reflux disease). I have always avoided medicine and doctors for that matter, but for the last few years I gave in to Esomeprazole (Nexium) to relief the unpleasant symptoms of stomach acidity and reflux. And yes, the pills are like magic! I could eat anything and not feel a thing. However, the more I read about the effects and side effects of this drug, the more I wanted to stop it, but it was so hard... I knew that this drug was inhibiting acid production in my stomach, so important to digestion and absorption of vitamins by the body. I knew that my level of vitamin B12 had been depleted by this drug. The consequence of lacking B12 in the medium to long term may lead to dementia. I was starting to forget names!

My own journey to recovery

When COVID hit for the second time, just by chance, I took the time to re-set my own body. On my way back from my holidays in Cape York, I stopped in Port Douglas when Sydney lockdown was

announced. I decided there and then to stay put. My body was in very bad shape after travelling for hours on bumpy roads and eating horrible camping food. I also had been suffering for over 6 months with bursitis on my right shoulder, right lower back pain and my right knee was so inflamed that I could hardly walk. I was starting to feel my age!

If I had followed conventional medical advice which I had received, I would be taking pain killers, anti-inflammatory drugs and having steroid injections on my shoulder and knee, but deep down I knew these were not the answer. I knew that inflammation is caused by an acidic body, which in my case was obvious since my teenage years. So, I took the chance, and as I moved to a self-contained apartment in Port Douglas with a fully functioning kitchen and an empty fridge and pantry, I decided to revise my eating habits and put into practice what I have studied for so long. I quit all the foods that I loved that were bad for my body and replaced them with fresh organic fruit, vegetables, eggs and meats. I paid special attention to maintaining an acidic/alkaline food balance. I also started yoga classes every morning and bike riding every day.

I continued to work remotely, attending to my patients in Sydney via telehealth, but my pace is now much slower. The results started to show in less than 6 weeks. I no longer need to take meds for GORD as my reflux and the inflammation in my shoulder and knee are completely gone. I also noticed that some of my finger joints that used to feel stiff and hurt from time to time are now completely flexible and pain free.

So, why is my story relevant to Meniere's disease? As we heard from Laura Fisher; to control the symptoms of Meniere's one needs to find the root cause and nutrition always plays an important role in body function. Food is medicine.

Of course, everybody is different and Meniere's symptoms, as we now know, have many different causes. They can be due to bacteria or viruses invading the inner ear spaces, or due to hormonal imbalance, genetics, autoimmune diseases etc...

The conventional medical approach aims to reduce the symptoms by ultimately destroying the organ of hearing and balance to stop vertigo attacks. Such approach does not sit right with me. There is certainly a place for medical intervention to temporarily relieve very severe attacks, but resolution of symptoms may only be achieved when individuals take control over their own bodies to learn what their triggers are.

From where I stand, appropriate nutrition, exercise and meditation are the basis for a happy healthy body. When things go wrong with our bodies it means that some aspects of life need reviewing.