Hepatitis C: Is There a Supplement for That?

January 14, 2019 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

The very first hepatitis C-related article that I wrote was about complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). That was more than 20 years ago. The article brought together two passions: CAM and hepatitis C. My interest in herbs and supplements began in the 1970's, long before I was a registered nurse or had hepatitis C. I was convinced that some of the secrets of health could be found in plants. After all, the Chinese and indigenous healers passed along ancient formulas long before western medicine was established.

Over the years, research and my appreciation for the incredible way the liver functions, caused me to question herbs and supplements. I practice other forms of non-Western medicine, such as meditation, acupressure and positive thinking, but now I only use supplements that are prescribed. I still drink ginger tea if my stomach is upset, or nurse a cold with chamomile. However, you will not see me consuming copious amounts of vitamin C, echinacea or garlic to ward off a cold. (To find what CAM strategies may work, click here.)

Why? Here are the main reasons:

- The evidence showing the health value of many supplements is not convincing or robust.
- The quality of many supplements sold in the United States is unreliable.
- I think the liver works really well when it processes what it is supposed to, which to say only what is necessary, and adding a bunch of supplements doesn't make sense.

At this point, I may sound preachy and full of myself. I suspect that if you are a devoted supplement user, you aren't even reading this by now. However, if you are still with me at this point, I hope you will hear me out.

The reason why I am writing about this today is because I found out that a friend of mine has destroyed the myelin sheath on his nerves. His doctor suspects it was caused by too much vitamin B, which my friend was taking in dramatically high doses to combat stress. He is in tremendous pain. This very healthy, strong man can barely walk, the pain is so intense.

His pain is fresh in my mind, so here is my pitch for why I wish people would carefully evaluate their supplement use…

I believe that many Americans such as myself, use supplements for problems that may be better fixed in other ways, such as with regular physical activity, healthy eating, good quality sleep and stress reduction. We look for the quick fix. Ancient healers didn't hand out herbs like our doctors prescribe medication today. They treated the entire person in relationship to their community. They used spiritual practices to support healing. Health was a commitment.

Using ancient medicines to treat modern problems is tricky. Stress is a modern problem for which many of us seek relief. But taking B vitamins to counteract stress won't work nearly as well as going for a walk and breathing in some fresh air and giving thanks for two legs to carry us. Vitamins aren't a substitute for a healthy diet or sleeping well. Neither is drinking organic wine and beer if you drink too much alcohol.

The bottom line: always, always talk to your doctor before taking vitamins, minerals and other supplements. If these are prescribed, be sure you purchase them from a reliable source, preferably with the guidance of laboratory evidence. Most vendors get their supplements from the same sources, so you don't need to buy expensive vitamins and minerals. Most major drugstore brands are reliable. My friend used expensive vitamins from a source that was found to have inconsistent dosages.

I know that supplements are attractive. I am easily swayed by those one-line quick fix headlines telling me that such and such was found to help x, y and z. But, I look at the evidence first. At this stage, the only vitamin I take is D, and even that I suspect may be unnecessary. However, my doctor prescribed it, and after all, she has a license to practice medicine, whereas I do not. She is the expert, and I pay her for her advice.

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http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/blog/hepatitis-c-supplement