

I felt perfectly fine when I arrived for my late January appointment for my annual “prevention” physical. Never mind I hadn’t BEEN annually for several years. I was there-----prevent away! My physical exam yielded nothing abnormal but an unwanted few additional pounds that laying off carbs and red vino (okay, not laying off, but DECREASING) could easily (okay, not so easily at MY age) manage. I happily extended my arm to enable the blood draws that would prove my good health in the year 2009.

A couple of weeks after my appointment I received a letter from my primary physician to make an appointment to discuss my abnormal lab results. My total cholesterol had increased by about 80 points. Yikes! In addition, I was also noted to be “slightly vitamin D-deficient”. My physician recommended a very low dose of a popular cholesterol drug and in fairness to him; I must admit he did advise me of alternative treatments as it seems that my “good” or “healthy” cholesterol, HDL is at the upper end of the count (a very GOOD thing). Onto the Vitamin D deficiency-*let’s just get the count up there quickly and put you on a mega dose for a few weeks*, was basically the gist of **that** discussion. I was fine with both plans and the scheduled visit eight weeks thereafter to check the results of the medication regimen.

I went about my work and home life feeling oddly different almost from the first day I took my new drugs. After about two weeks I had a severe bout of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (NVD is the medical vernacular) accompanied by extreme abdominal pain and some muscle pain as well. I was convinced that I had the flu even though weeks earlier I had dutifully gotten a flu shot. Damn! Uncharacteristically, I took to my bed and curled up in a fetal position when I wasn’t racing to the bathroom to puke or poop. Sorry. Oddly enough, within six hours my symptoms disappeared. I surmised I did not have the flu-not even a twenty-four hour variety! What then? Food-poisoning? Perhaps. I recovered though I still had an occasional stomach pang and every so often I’d get a wave of nausea that would last a few minutes. I chose not to think about it—just motor on.

Exactly one week later, the day before I was scheduled to fly out of town for business, I had another bout. Same experience, except the acute symptoms continued for about twelve hours. By the next day at noon, I felt I was okay to travel even though the occasional stomach pains and waves of nausea were occurring more frequently. THIS time, after researching the side effects of the cholesterol drugs and Vitamin D, I decided to stop taking the medications. I broke the news to the MD when he saw me for the abdominal pain. He was not convinced my issues were med related though I repeatedly and emphatically reminded him I felt perfect January 25 and all the days prior to that, the day before I started taking the new drugs or (D-day as I came to note it).It was a Friday this day of my visit, and my doctor ordered an abdominal ultrasound *just to be sure...*

I was in no hurry to get the ultrasound----*how are we ever going to control the costs of health care?* Though there was an opening for the following Monday morning I chose to book it for a week from the next Friday. I figured by then everything might be resolved and I wouldn’t even need it.

The following Thursday, less than a week after I saw the doctor, I had another episode. This time the abdominal pain reminded me of labor pains. I began to think maybe something really *was* wrong with me (I was going to the place my mother usually goes---could I have a cancer that suddenly was causing

this symphony of symptoms?). I called the radiology department to see if they could move my ultrasound up a week. Fortunately, I guess, they had an opening the following day, Friday. After jelling my abdomen and viewing all the organs within by applying not so gentle pressure and requiring breath-holding that made me conscious I must not be doing enough aerobically, the tech informed me everything was fine after the radiologist read my report. The tech did not want me worrying unnecessarily over the weekend. The tech, you see, risked getting caught at “violating procedure” (the doctor should tell the patient) rather than let an anxious patient remain that way or worse for a few more days. Thank you tech!

I saw my MD that Monday. “Well yes, this does mean most abdominal organs are okay but there might be other causes and we can do some other tests such as an endoscopy” he noted. My reply: a simple “yuk and no”. “Let’s give this a couple more weeks” I said, rather than asked. We both agreed to look up the half life of Vitamin D because the doctor was skeptical it could remain in my system for so long. THAT was easy---googling Vitamin D half life yielded many results which indicated that it could stay in one’s system and wreck the living hell out of it, as in my case, for a month to eight weeks! I forwarded the information to my doctor and was once more convinced I knew the culprit and it was an innocent looking green capsule. Several days later, I happily reported I was “back to my old self”, meaning that aside from a few joint aches I felt perfectly healthy. When I see my doctor next week, I will forgo any other testing and I am pretty sure he will at last reluctantly concur that good intentions to raise my Vitamin D level resulted in a six week span of ruling out conditions nonexistent.

What’s the lesson here? For me, I’ll stay away from prescription Vitamin D---I wonder--- is there a connection between all the stories in newspapers and on the airwaves about Vitamin D deficiency and the fact that drug companies are pushing it’s use in mega doses available in prescription-only form? Actually, I don’t wonder at all---I am convinced there is a direct correlation, health care cynic that I am. I’ll get my D somehow; more sunshine, smaller, reasonable doses daily. I’m on the hunt for an alternative cholesterol treatment as well---red-rice extract seems acceptable even to the mainstream medical community. I’ve always thought of myself as a great health care advocate---for my patients, for my husband during a crisis, and for my son throughout his treatments for epilepsy. I was NOT the best advocate for myself. Before popping another pill, no matter how benign and innocent it may sound, I will do my research. I hope anyone who reads this will do the same.