

optimal health after 50 takes planning

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Do you have an entire cupboard full of nutritional and herbal supplements, many of which you no longer take? Do you get several newsletters a month hoping one of them will help you solve your chronic health problems? Are you taking an increasing number of prescriptions, or supplements, and feel like you are just chasing symptoms? Are you concerned about the amount of money you spend and how effective your solutions may or may not be? Are you fearful of what your health might be like in your later years?

Do you realize that the symptoms you are trying to treat today are big predictors of your future health status—just like your diet and lifestyle—and that planning for your future requires that you also consider a health care plan along with a financial plan. Just like financial planning is something that the vast majority of people need help with, your health care should be entrusted to people with the expertise to help you. It isn't something most people should undertake without at least some form of professional guidance.

While no one can predict the future with any certainty, your current health status can be predictive of those things you might or might not deal with in the future.

For example,

- If you have acid reflux and are taking medication, are you addressing the underlying reason for this acid reflux and are you addressing the intestinal bacterial imbalances that happen when acid blocking medication is taken for a length of time? Did you know that not addressing this can have significant effects on your immune system?
- Are you aware that arthritis can be the result of impaired digestive function and that addressing this can sometimes make a remarkable difference in the amount of arthritic pain you experience? Did you know that many of the over the counter, and some of the prescription medications, you take for the arthritis pain impact digestive function and can thus be increasing the underlying problems and your pain?
- Did you know that research has linked high blood pressure and undiagnosed sleep apnea with a deficiency in vitamin D? Did you know that sunscreen, which is important for skin cancer prevention, is blocking 80-90% of your body's ability to make vitamin D?
- If your cholesterol is to a level that has become concerning to you or your health care provider, are you also addressing the underlying issue which is likely inflammation or a rising fasting blood sugar level?
- Are you tired beyond what sleep can restore and taking a medication for anxiety or depression? Did you realize that often times treating the underlying causes of the fatigue can result in a significant improvement in the anxiety or depression?

- What about the fact that research has linked restless leg syndrome to a low level of the stored form of iron in the body and that this should be addressed first?

Those little nagging symptoms that you ignore, those problems that seem managed but not gone, can be indicators of underlying conditions that when treated result in the elimination of the symptoms and better overall health. After all, do you want to simply manage your symptoms, or do you want to assure you have optimal health as you progress into and through your elder years?

Planning for your future is more than financial planning for your retirement. All the best fiscal planning can fall apart with poor health or health care costs that you didn't or couldn't anticipate.

Many of you are taking responsibility for your own health in new and exciting ways—but trying to do it alone. You are doing internet research, reading books, following the advice of friends, reading newsletters that come in the mail, watching infomercials and Oprah Winfrey, and generally attempting to navigate the realm of natural medicine or alternative health care options on your own. You often times have to rely on the advice of people who simply have some product to sell you and you are choosing how to spend your money strictly on the testimonials of other people. In part, many of you are doing this because you want different solutions and your current health care provider isn't trained in nutrition, herbal medicine, or the many other complementary or alternative therapies, and therefore isn't prepared to guide you. Sometimes this method of self search works, and sometimes it doesn't. Chasing the cures to symptoms often times leaves the underlying root cause undiscovered, and you only feel better for a while. **There are many great resources out there, but ultimately, you need your own individualized plan!**

When it comes to your future and the realm of natural medicine, whatever form it takes, you need to be entrusting your health care to someone with the expertise to help you. You should be considering your health as a whole—you are more than your individual symptoms, those symptoms arise based upon underlying causes that need to be addressed and the status of your future health can be influenced by what you take care of today! If you don't treat what lies underneath, you aren't doing all that you can to provide for your future.

Health care and health promotion is a big industry in this country and when we consider natural medicine, the potential for health improvement is significant—but so is the money you can spend. Americans spend more than 20 billion dollars a year on nutritional supplements, herbal medicine, and other over the counter "natural remedies". Most of this money is spent by people who are trying to improve their health without the guidance of a professional or without personalized attention. Ultimately, you may be spending a lot of money on health promotion or self treatment that if you had some guidance, you could actually take less, spend less in the long run, and have it be more effective.

More importantly, it is an issue of treating the underlying root causes of what is ailing you so that you can impact your long term health more effectively, reduce your health care costs, and live a

healthier life as you age. Your health is your future and just like you need a financial plan, you also need an overall plan to optimize your health.

So, where to turn? There are many different options. My recommendation is that you find a licensed health care provider to assist you who is knowledgeable about the full range of options and can work with you and your other health care providers. One such option is a Naturopathic Physician. Naturopathic Physicians can be an excellent way for you to begin to navigate the vast realm of natural medicine options while also being fully qualified to help deal with your conventional medical diagnosis's and treatments. Naturopathic physicians are unique because we are trained in the vast array of natural medicine options, and we have a guiding philosophy the means we address you as a whole person, not a collection of symptoms.

Naturopathic physicians are licensed physicians, who receive a 4 year post graduate medical education and are the most fully trained practitioners in the United States when it comes to vast realm of natural medicine. A naturopathic physician practices with a philosophy that centers on finding the underlying root causes of illness and employs treatment methods that support your whole health picture with the goal of optimizing your health on all fronts, while also being versed in conventional therapeutics and the need to consider any pharmaceuticals you are currently taking or might require based upon your current health status. As a general principle, naturopathic physicians don't treat symptoms, they solve underlying health problems which result in the elimination of symptoms whenever possible. Additionally, naturopathic physicians work with many other types of health care providers, from medical doctors, to acupuncturists, to physical therapists, chiropractors, massage therapists, and the list goes on. Ultimately, your team is working together, in a planned way.

For more information about naturopathic medicine or naturopathic physicians in general, I encourage you to go to www.naturopath.org or go to MTND.org for the list of naturopathic physicians in Montana.

Dr. Christine White is a naturopathic physician practicing in the Missoula. Her clinic, Black Bear Naturopathic Clinic, PC can be reached at 542-2147 or you can go to her website at www.blackbearnaturopaths.com. Dr. White treats a vast array on people and illnesses, and works actively with patients to unearth the root cause of their health issues to assure they have the best, most optimal health possible as they age.