

HOUSE Calls

Practicing family physicians from the UNC Department of Family Medicine have teamed up with *The Carrboro Citizen* to bring you a weekly feature responding to your questions about health and medicine. Send your questions or comments to yourhealth@unc.edu

This week we respond to questions about antibiotics and sodium in medicines.

Dear HOUSE Calls,

I went to my doctor yesterday with a cough, hoarse throat and aching. I asked for an antibiotic, but I was told it was a virus and would get better without one. I got hoarser throughout the day and called back for an antibiotic, but the doctor advised me to return for another visit. Why won't doctors give us what we know our bodies need?

From what you tell us, it sounds like you probably had a viral infection. However, this should be a two-way conversation. We usually talk with patients about the fact that viral infections do not respond to antibiotics

and that antibiotics can cause common nuisance side effects (yeast infections and diarrhea), skin rashes and even life-threatening reactions. We had a patient in the hospital recently who, even after one dose of the antibiotic Septra, nearly died and had to go on a ventilator. It is also important to understand that excessive antibiotic use leads to antibiotic resistance in the community and in the person taking the antibiotics. It is possible that your infection is bacterial. However, such infections are viral 95 percent to 99 percent of the time. Most authorities recommend waiting for seven days or more to see if you recover. We should not tell people, "You don't need an antibiotic, the end." Rather, we should discuss what else

you can do to feel better. Most doctors say for you to call back if you are not better in five to seven days.

Dear HOUSE Calls,

I'm taking medication that has a high sodium content (1,500 mg/dose). To avoid getting too much sodium, I've tried to cut almost all sodium out of my diet. My blood pressure is OK right now, but high blood pressure runs in my family, so I'm worried about taking this medication long term. Can you recommend any foods, supplements or life-style changes that can counteract the negative affects of the sodium?

This is a great question. We would start with asking what the medicine is and why you are taking it. How important

is it, and is there a suitable substitute? Some medicines – such as some laxatives, antacids and common anti-inflammatory medicines – have a large amount of sodium. You're doing the right thing to try to cut down on sodium. More sodium intake increases your chance of developing high blood pressure. To answer your question, start with the simple things. Get rid of the salt shaker in your home and don't use it when you go out to eat. Speaking of going out to eat, many restaurants cook with a lot of sodium. Many processed and canned foods also have a lot of sodium. Look for low-sodium alternatives and read the labels. You may also want to review with your doctor alternatives to the high-sodium medicine you are taking.

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