

Outlook on Lifestyle

DR. GOTT



Peter Gott, M.D.

Be cautious about medication

By Peter H. Gott, M.D.

DEAR DR. GOTT — Are over-the-counter medications for asthma harmful in any way?

DEAR READER — Any medicine can be harmful if it is taken in excessive amounts or used by a person who is allergic to it.

Over-the-counter asthma medicine comes in two forms: pills and spray.

The pills contain low doses of bronchial-relaxing drugs, such as ephedrine and theophylline. Some have small amounts of phenobarbital, which can be habit-forming.

The spray contain epinephrine (adrenalin). This compound can cause irritability, nervousness and a rise in blood pressure.

Therefore, the answer to your question is "yes" — these medications can be harmful in some cases. However, there is little chance of trouble if the patient reads the manufacturer's recommendations and warnings and uses the medicine only as directed by the manufacturer.

DEAR DR. GOTT — I'll be 91 soon and am so tired all the time. Is this from poor circulation?

DEAR READER — Some fatigue among the elderly is due simply to old age. However, older people do tend to develop a variety of ailments and diseases. You should see a doctor for a full checkup. You might have anemia, diabetes, high blood pressure, thyroid deficiency or heart disease — all common causes of fatigue in patients over 80. If there is no physical cause for your tiredness, the doctor may be able to suggest activities or special physical exercises to help perk you up.

Most people over age 60 have some degree of poor circulation. However, this by itself is unlikely to cause your loss of energy.

DEAR DR. GOTT — Six years ago I had cancer of the prostate and my testicles were removed. I've been taking diethylstilbestrol (2 milligrams) daily since then. My doctor is very evasive when I question him about possible harmful side effects. Do I have anything to worry about?

DEAR READER — Diethylstilbestrol (DES) is a synthetic female hormone that is often given to men with prostatic cancer to retard growth of the tumor or prevent recurrences. It is an effective medicine, but it does have side effects. These include breast swelling, nausea, vomiting, fluid retention and ankle swelling, an increased tendency to develop blood clots in veins, diabetes, skin rashes, depression, impotence and loss of sexual desire.

Although this list of side effects seems to indicate that DES is dangerous, the hazards of not taking it may outweigh this danger.

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Polly's Pointers

Soothe a sunburn with cider vinegar

By Polly Fisher

DEAR POLLY — My grandmother used to soothe our sunburns with a homemade concoction that included vinegar. I can't remember the ingredients, however. Do you know of any herbal remedies for sunburn? — G.B.

DEAR G.B. — Of course, any serious sunburn should be treated by a doctor. But for very minor redness caused by prolonged exposure to the sun, you can try cooling the fire with a mixture of 2 tablespoons cider vinegar in ¼ cup water.

Another old-time remedy is to bathe the sunburn with strong tea. Remember, these are not medical remedies, but can be soothing to slightly irritated skin. — POLLY

DEAR POLLY — I bought some garlic powder that became as hard as a brick. I put it in the microwave for a few seconds and it softened. — W.M.

DEAR POLLY — I learned a neat trick at my fraternity house several years ago that I now use in the lounge at my office.

If you have a coffeepot with burnt coffee crust on the bottom, pour in about ¼ cup table salt and drop in a handful of ice cubes. Swish the salt and ice around the coffeepot until the crust is removed. It won't scorch your pot and saves you some scraping and soaking. — DAVE

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Jack: I don't know. Why?
Carol: He wanted to see the barn dance.

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