

# Outlook on Lifestyle

## DR. GOTT



Peter Gott, M.D.

### Softening water increases sodium

By Peter H. Gott, M.D.

DEAR DR. GOTT — I'm on a low-sodium diet. What about drinking water treated by a water softener?

DEAR READER — The small amount of salt delivered by a water softener should not affect your health, even if you are on a low-sodium diet. However, to an extent, my blanket answer depends on your drinking water.

Water softeners work by exchanging "soft" salt (sodium) for "hard" salts (usually calcium) in the water. Therefore, the harder your water, the more sodium will replace calcium. If your drinking water is extremely hard and you must be meticulous about avoiding sodium, you may have to consider using the softened water for household chores, such as washing, and limit your drinking water to a non-salt variety. Ask your doctor about this. For the usual patient, softened water is harmless.

DEAR DR. GOTT — Our mother is constantly faking illness and refuses to eat a decent meal. She claims the doctor tells her she can't have this, can't eat that. (The doctor told me she could eat anything.) Everytime the doctor tells her to do something that is good for her, like eat or take walks, she does the opposite.

I've tried ignoring her and pleading with her, all to no avail. I don't think she'd see a therapist — or be honest with one if we forced her to go. She's 82, says she's tired all the time and says her mind is slow. What can we do?

DEAR READER — Detach with love. Your mother appears to be trying to exercise some control over her life. This often accompanies old age, when some people become somewhat grumpy, fussy and stubborn. Not everybody, mind you; just some. Your mother may fear illness and death; she certainly fears dependency. One way of being independent is to refuse

the advice and help offered by others. I think you would be more comfortable — and your relationship with your mother would improve — if you realized that you have little, if any, control over her behavior and attitudes. She has to take responsibility for her own acts and, at age 82, she has earned that right.

I'd approach the problem with a statement like: "Look, Mom, we kids love you and care a great deal about your health and happiness. We see you not eating nourishing meals, not following your doctor's advice, not taking care of yourself. We want you to know that although we disagree with your approach, we respect your choices. We've made available many resources to help you; when you are ready for help, these resources will be there. But we won't fuss at you to behave as we would like you to. Come on over to my house for Christmas dinner; I'll pick you up at 11."

If your mother is becoming senile and is totally unrealistic about her independence, you may have to consider taking legal responsibility for her. Talk to her doctor and lawyer about this. In the meantime, back off and see if she is more willing to cooperate when there is less pressure put on her.

DEAR DR. GOTT — When our son was in the Navy, he had 16 teeth filled. He developed symptoms of multiple sclerosis. Recently he had them replaced with non-mercury fillings and has improved, but he has colitis, is weak and has blood in his urine and stool. How can he get rid of the mercury in his system?

DEAR READER — Although some dentists believe that amalgam fillings made with mercury can cause mercury poisoning, the American Dental Association has not endorsed this view. Neurological disorders, including multiple sclerosis, are common in adults and, I am told by my dental consultants, no reputable studies have proven a relation between these diseases and tooth fillings.

Before dentists take pen in hand to write complaints to me, I reiterate that I'm not a dentist. The issue of mercury poisoning from fillings is being studied, but, so far, the ADA has promulgated guidelines only for the handling of mercury by dental personnel.

If you believe that your son has mercury poisoning, I suggest that he undergo a complete physical examination, including urine-and-blood mercury levels.

## DEAR MEG



Meg Whitcomb

### No advice can be the best advice

By Meg Whitcomb

DEAR MEG — Last summer you were kind enough to print my letter and advise me against getting involved with a married man. Now I want to thank you. I've just come back from visiting two friends from school. One is married with two young sons, the other is single and having an affair with a married man.

My married friend has a wonderfully positive attitude about life and is generous in spirit. Though it was a rainy day, it seemed the sun was shining throughout her house.

When I visited my single friend, everything seemed out of kilter. Even the pictures on her wall were crooked. She was very self-involved and interested only in talking about her problems with her lover. I felt like telling her she was settling for too little and that he belonged to his family, not her. I left thinking, "There but for the grace of God..."

Should I tell her she's wasting her time? The guy has no intention of getting a divorce, but she says she can't let go. — HAPPY AGAIN, MT. KISCO, N.Y.

DEAR HAPPY — Too many friendships founder on unwanted advice, dear. Your friend knows she's on a perilous path. She doesn't need you to tell her. The best you can do is be there when she needs you. I can guarantee it'll be soon.

DEAR MEG — Five years ago, I was raped and can't get over it, even though I've had counseling. I still have nightmares, and I'm starting to drink to avoid my fears.

What adds to the problem is the fact that my husband was always very rough and made sex seem almost like rape. I married him two years after the rape, and we were divorced a year later. Now I'm starting to hate men,

but I know this is irrational. I know all men aren't rapists and aren't insensitive like my ex. It's myself I'm worried about. — VICTIM, TEXAS

DEAR VICTIM — Get back into therapy. When you married your husband, you hadn't dealt with the devastating emotional effects of rape; you were a sitting duck for an insensitive man who only reinforced your feelings of helplessness and shame.

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