

# Patients really deserve non-medical talk

**DR. GOTT**



PETER GOTT, M.D.

**DEAR DR. GOTT:** I don't understand why doctors insist on using highly technical words, such as "angiomas," when discussing health problems with their patients. This kind of word is frightening and confusing to the average person. Why can't physicians diagnose in "plain words"?

**DEAR READER:** Fancy medical words are a form of shorthand for doctors. It's often easier to talk in \$64 phrases than to take the time to explain things. For example, angiomas means "a diseased state of the blood vessels with formation of multiple angioma," which means that the diseased vessels tend to congregate in discrete collections, causing tumor-like growths.

In my limited definition, 12 words were required to explain "angiomas." Therefore, it's quicker for doctors to use the shorter term.

Of course, as you pointed out, the use of technical words can be a catastrophe when a physician attempts to explain a disease to a patient. In this circumstance, the practitioner owes the patient the courtesy of an understandable explanation. Most good doctors have developed skills in doing this. However, some physicians insist on mouthing technical phrases that are unintelligible to anybody but a medical-school professor. These physicians need to be re-educated by their patients.

I advise patients — my own included — to stop the music when an explanation becomes a medical lecture. In other words, stop the discussion and ask the doctor to restate the information in understandable language. This technique improves doctors' manners. Also, by asking questions, the patient encourages an adult give-and-take dialogue, which helps equalize the doctor-parent/patient-child relation.

Above all, patients should not feel intimidated by the doctor's language; the practitioner may simply be slipping into jargon by force of habit. Remember, you have hired the doctor to perform a service; part of this service is to provide useful information that makes sense.

**DEAR DR. GOTT:** Are there any serious reactions to taking Vasotec for one's blood pressure?

**DEAR READER:** Vasotec (enalapril) is one of a new class of drugs, called "angiotensin-converting-enzyme inhibitors," that block the formation of angiotensin II, the hormone causing high blood pressure. The medicine is extremely useful and surprisingly free of side effects. Some patients may occasionally experience headache, dizziness, fatigue, diarrhea, cough, palpitations, insomnia or muscle cramps.

In rare instances, Vasotec may diminish kidney function and increase blood potassium. Most of these side effects disappear with either time or an adjustment of dose. In my experience, Vasotec is effective and well-tolerated by patients.

**DEAR DR. GOTT:** What can you tell me about alopecia? I'm currently on Medrol for polymyalgia rheumatica and estraderm/provera for osteoporosis. I've suffered 30 to 40 percent hair loss over the past nine months. I'm told these drugs can

cause hair loss but cannot obtain additional information about alopecia.

**DEAR READER:** Alopecia (hair loss) has many causes, some of which include scalp infection, fever and chronic illness, cancer, mechanical trauma (such as burns and freezing), poor nutrition (including anorexia nervosa and crash dieting), psoriasis and other skin diseases, stress, glandular disorders (especially of the thyroid gland), poisoning (particularly vitamin A and arsenic), pregnancy, and male-pattern baldness (a genetic, age-related hair loss in men).

Alopecia is also a side effect of many drugs. Aside from the hair loss universally experienced by cancer patients during chemotherapy, a surprising number of commonly used medicines cause alopecia; these include anti-convulsants, anti-depressants, beta-blockers, calcium-channel blockers, oral contraceptives, anti-Parkinson agents, drugs for gout and anti-arthritis.

As you can see, alopecia is difficult to diagnose because of its many causes. In your case, hair loss could be caused by your medicines or by polymyalgia, a disease characterized by arterial inflammation and muscle-/joint stiffness.

I urge you to see a dermatologist. Such a specialist will be able to sort out the causes of your problem and suggest appropriate therapy.

To give you more information, I am sending you a free copy of my Health Report "Eczema and Psoriasis."

**DEAR DR. GOTT:** Would you please discuss episodic reverse peristalsis of the esophagus?

**DEAR READER:** Without rhythmic and coordinated muscle movements, many of the body's organs would not function. These peristaltic

waves are not under conscious control; they propel food through the intestinal tract, urine from the kidneys and ova down the Fallopian tubes.

As a result of certain diseases — notably those affecting nerve impulses to muscular organs — peristalsis may be impaired. Scleroderma, an autoimmune affliction of unknown cause that often affects the esophagus, is such a disease. Other ailments, too, will disrupt the muscular contractions that permit us to swallow.

Rather than causing "reverse peristalsis" (when the contractions move in the opposite direction), these diseases cause disorganized, sudden contractions that may seem to be traveling backward. Hence, people may have difficulty swallowing because the peristaltic waves are not coordinated; this is somewhat analogous to a 10-speed bicycle with a chain that keeps slipping on the sprocket.

Peristaltic abnormalities of the esophagus can be identified during a barium swallow when, under a flour-

scope, the muscular waves of swallowing can be seen to be uncoordinated, appearing even to work in reverse.

Treatment for the disorder is difficult. However, medicine to reduce muscle spasm will often suppress inappropriate peristalsis, permitting patients to swallow more normally without the "lump in the throat" sensations or indigestion that often accompany disorders of esophageal motility. I believe that patients with peristaltic problems should be under the care of gastroenterologists.

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## ASK KATHY:

Dear Kathy

Are there health benefits to weight reduction other than the obvious benefit of improved appearance?

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KATHY HAJAS  
Diet Center Counselor

ance and your self-image, but you also improve your total health. If you are overweight and would like to improve the quality of your life, call Diet Center today.

## Vinegar conquers crust on chrome

### POLLY'S POINTERS



POLLY FISHER

**DEAR POLLY —** The chrome faucets on my bathroom sink are getting a crusty white lime buildup, especially around the faucet handles and in hard-to-reach places. Is there an easy way to clean these areas? — P.L.E.

**DEAR P.L.E. —** Help is at hand in the humble but hard-working form of an ordinary toothbrush and an inexpensive bottle of white vinegar. If wiping with a vinegar-soaked sponge doesn't do the job (and those tiny places certainly are hard to reach!), saturate a cloth or paper towel with vinegar and lay it over the crusty places for a few minutes. Then attack with your toothbrush (not, of course, with the one you use to brush your teeth; an old one that you're no longer

using for dental care will do). If you still can't clean the faucets, let the deposits soak longer with more vinegar. It should soften the thickest mineral buildup so you can scrub it away with the brush.

I'm sending you a copy of my newsletter "Cleaning Sinks, Tubs and Tile," which should help you do dozens of kitchen and bathroom cleaning tasks — everything from getting rust stains out of the bathtub to maintaining your septic system, including a couple of homemade drain cleaners that are safe for your plumbing.

**DEAR POLLY —** I keep an art gum eraser in my sewing drawer to rub the threads out of ripped-out stitches. I also keep a rattail file to sharpen the seam ripper. An emery board will sharpen your sewing machine needle in an emergency until you can get new ones — use the fine side of the emery board.

Here's a recipe for stir-fried zucchini: Cut about 6 slices of bacon into 1/4-inch pieces, place in a skillet and fry until about halfway done. Drain grease, then continue to fry until

there's a little more grease. Add 1 medium chopped onion, 1/2 medium zucchini (shredded), and 1 diced, ripe tomato. Stir-fry until vegetables are tender and bacon is cooked through. A couple of shakes of a no-salt seasoning mixture may be added when the vegetables are added to the bacon. — VERENE

**DEAR VERENE —** Sounds tasty. Don't forget, though, that although no salt is added, there is quite a bit of sodium in the bacon. — POLLY

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