

This drug can cause low blood pressure

DR. GOTT



PETER GOTT, M.D.

DEAR DR. GOTT: I've been diagnosed with orthostatic hypotension. My doctor put me on Indocin, which upset my stomach and gave me severe headaches. Dexedrine also upset my stomach, made me nervous, and I couldn't sleep. Is there anything else to try?

DEAR READER: Orthostatic hypotension is an unusual condition marked by excessively low blood

pressure when a person is in an upright position.

Ordinarily, when we sit or stand, monitoring nerves in our blood vessels are stimulated to raise blood pressure against the force of gravity. This prevents the blood from rushing downward out of the brain and making us faint. In explaining this to patients, I often use a plumbing analogy: They're not getting enough steam heat to the third floor.

The most common cause of orthostatic hypotension is medicine that is used to treat hypertension; the drug may work so well that the blood pressure falls too far and "orthostatic symptoms" appear. The "cure" is simple: reduce the dose of medicine to allow the blood pressure to rise.

Orthostatic hypotension, itself a symptom not a disease, can also be

caused by fluid loss (hemorrhage or excessive sweating), nerve disorders

(neuropathy or spinal injury) and some degenerative afflictions (such as amyloidosis).

Treatment obviously depends on the underlying cause, which must be corrected — for example, administering fluids or blood transfusions. If the cause cannot be corrected, doctors usually manage the condition by prescribing special elastic stockings (to prevent pooling of blood in the legs), increasing dietary salt (to promote a blood pressure rise) or giving medicine (such as ephedrine) to increase the blood pressure.

Indocin works by causing salt retention by the kidneys, producing a rise in blood pressure. I'm not aware that Dexedrine, a central nervous system stimulant, is especially helpful. If your doctor is unable to solve your problem, I suggest you ask for a consultation with a vascular specialist.

DEAR DR. GOTT: What is con-

tained in the pull-apart kind of capsules that hold vitamins, herbs and medicines? If I take one of these capsules, I have abdominal swelling and diarrhea. Yet if I pull the capsules apart and empty the contents into water, I don't suffer any consequences. This doesn't make any sense to me.

DEAR READER: Most capsule coverings are made of gelatin, a common protein. I've never heard of anyone being allergic to gelatin but, I suppose, you could be sensitive to dyes or other compounds in the coating. Ask your pharmacist to look up the names of the companies that manufacture the various capsules you take. Then write them and request information about what goes into their gelatin coatings. This may solve your problem.

DEAR DR. GOTT: At 22, I was diagnosed with an underactive thyroid. I've been taking 25 micrograms of

Cytomel a day for the past 40 years. Also, about 15 years ago, I had a hysterectomy and have been taking 0.625 Ogen a day. Now I've read a report saying it is not necessary to take estrogen after age 60. In fact, it does no good whatever. What's your opinion?

DEAR READER: You seem to be receiving appropriate treatment (Cytomel) for your thyroid condition. The question of estrogen therapy (Ogen) is more complex.

If, at the time of your hysterectomy, your ovaries were removed, you would have experienced "surgical menopause," unless you were given supplemental hormone pills.

The ovaries are the main source of estrogen in women and menopause will occur at any age when they are removed. The symptoms are the same in women who reach the age when their ovaries stop producing estrogen.

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