

## Don't Get Sick

By: Betsy Bearden

Good health is everything. How many times have you heard someone say, "I can't afford to get sick"? Today, that statement could not be truer. Higher health care costs and declining coverage, higher co-pays and out of pocket expenses are enough to make anyone want to stay well. But the fact is, trying to stay well, and actually doing it are two very different things, especially as we age.

Recent technology, research in pharmaceuticals, and rising hospital costs, can practically scare anyone back into a false sense of wellness. More and more people forego tests to determine what causes their aches and pains and in many cases tests that could find and prevent serious illness or disease. Routine screening for preventive care that once was covered at 100% is slowly disappearing. I don't know the answer to our health care situation, and I don't have time for someone to "pass a bill to see what's in it" as far as my health care is concerned, do you?

Normally, I am a healthy person, but for some reason, this has just been a bad year. We all have them. I had an ultrasound in May for something strange going on in my throat. I waited a week to get the results back from that. Then I was told I needed a CT scan. Two weeks later, I had the CT scan. *Three* weeks after having the CT scan, I was told I had a sinus infection and was put on antibiotics. Although the CT scan confirmed I did not have a cancerous mass in my throat, I still have something strange going on in my throat! Meanwhile the CT scan revealed another issue non-related to the original problem. I was referred to a vascular surgeon. Tell me, does any of this stuff sound vaguely familiar to any of *you*? I'm betting that it does.

I had actually seen this vascular surgeon about six years ago when I was experiencing an episode of something that felt like someone was snapping a rubber band on top of my right foot. Yes, it was painful. He never did figure out what was causing the snappy thing on top of my foot. I reminded him of that when I saw him again the other day. He asked me whatever became of the snappy thing on top of my foot. I told him I went to a chiropractor, and they fixed it. Silence ...

He proceeded to check the pulse in my neck and then he moved to my legs. He looked up at me and said, "*Blue* toe nails?" I told him I had gone to a pool party and I wanted my toenails to match the pretty blue pool water. He laughed and said, "What did you go as? A mermaid?" To which I dragged out a dryly responded, "Nnoooo."

But I digress. He apologized for the long wait, and said he was going to schedule an ultrasound. As he was leaving, he turned and said, "A chiropractor fixed it." Then he mumbled, shrugged his shoulders, and left.

The ultrasound was performed in his office. His technician informed me that the doctor gave all his technicians permission to tell patients what they saw during an ultrasound. She stated that in her professional opinion, it looked to be a moderate blockage in my neck and will most likely need to be checked every six months. The blockage cannot be reversed, but diet and exercise (those two words again!) will certainly help to slow the advancement. I was also told to take a low-dose aspirin every day. She added that I probably wouldn't need immediate surgery because it was a moderate blockage, and besides that, I was too young! Well, that's what I've been trying to tell everyone all along!

Do you know why I think this is happening to me? I'll tell you: it is from lack of exercise and poorer food choices. There is a balance—you exercise, you lose weight, get in shape, and you make healthier food choices to maintain that balance. Conversely, no exercise=weight gain=poorer food choices=poorer overall health and well-being.

My husband and I used to set goals to participate in local charitable 5Ks. Steven ran The Peachtree for 15 consecutive years, and I walked it for three. It's been three years since our last "Peachtree" or local 5K. Speaking strictly for myself, too much work, lack of commitment to exercise, and a sedentary lifestyle will sneak up and bite you on the rear before you know it. Okay, we do kayak, so at least that's something!

Going to doctors is not something I want to become a routine part of my life. Wellness checkups are enough! The day is coming when we will be able to monitor our health through home testing. The technology is already available for several at home tests that screen for certain illnesses. I wouldn't be at all surprised if someday, upon birth, we will be given bar codes or have ports installed on our bodies. Then we could just plug in or scan ourselves to check our vitals and the information would be transmitted via cyberspace to our doctor's offices.

\*Cryogenics may some day be an answer to our continued good health and longevity. What if we could freeze our umbilical cord content at birth and have access to our own stem cells in the event of serious illness, or for organ replacements? The stem cells in our own cord blood might be able to save our lives. Future generations may be able to realize an indeterminable life span. Science fiction? Guess again. This is all happening, *right now*, as scientific research and technology continue to evolve.

\*\*Genetic testing already exists that allows us to "look" into the future and see what conditions we may be predisposed to such as certain cancers, heart disease, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease, and more. Furthermore, scientists have discovered that we ourselves may be able to alter our own genetic makeup somewhat through our environment, eating habits, and exercise. Pretty amazing stuff! So, if we have *some* control over our genetic

makeup that helps us get healthier, then it is it truly possible to cause the reverse.  
Welcome to the future.

I eventually needed to have a carotid endarterectomy on my left carotid artery. As I said earlier, there is not stopping it once it gets started. Prevention is the key to avoiding this. Keep your cholesterol down, exercise, and eat a healthy diet, and enjoy the life you have been given. Don't get sick!

Now, for some much-needed exercise ....

*Resources:*

\* <http://drhaiden.com/a-new-vision-2/its-in-the-genes/>

\* <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/id/QAA326607>

Betsy Bearden is a certified, published writer, and author of Normal People Eat Tofu, Too. She has worked as a volunteer chef and cooking class instructor and as a reporter for The Paulding Neighbor Newspaper. You can reach her at [betsybearden@bellsouth.net](mailto:betsybearden@bellsouth.net) or visit her website at [www.creativewrites.net](http://www.creativewrites.net).