



# the tree of life

BY JOANNE PIZZINO, MD, MPH MEDICAL CO-EDITOR

## myth: “I just have to live with these symptoms/diagnoses/medications/etc.

**A**s noted in this issue, our hidden and obvious beliefs about health and healing can greatly affect our ability to live with vitality and well-being. Our definitions of what actually constitutes “health” are so varied by our own experiences and opinions that not even professionals in the field of healing agree on what being healthy, in fact, is. As we look forward to a new year, this is a great opportunity to look under the hood at the engine that drives our attitudes and knowledge about what creates the vibrant state of fitness we all desire.

On the path to achieving board-certification in Integrative Medicine, I learned that it is necessary to climb outside my box and question every assumption that could be a barrier to achieving the wellness requested by the patients who seek my help. Many of these notions were actually taught to me as medical care dogma in my formal medical school training. Yet, as I became bold enough to inquire about these ideas more deeply, I found truths that bore little resemblance to the “cookbook treatments” of recommended guidelines. Add to this that the body of medical knowledge is growing more rapidly than virtually any professional can encompass, and we have a constantly moving target for that state of vigorous well-being.

The following ideas about root causes and optimal treatments show us some of this evolution from conventional health care practice (“CHCP”) to Integrative Medicine wisdom (“IMw”). Check out the list to see if you or a loved one might have unexpected options instead of just having to put up with common symptoms and disease labels. Could you learn to turn on your own innate healing ability without being chained to a pharmacy for the rest of your life? Read on to test your own health beliefs for new opportunities.

**CONVENTIONAL HEALTH CARE PRACTICE (CHCP):** *Treating hormonal problems to lab values resolves symptoms. For instance, a normal lab value for TSH means thyroid medication is sufficient.*

**INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE WISDOM (IMw):** A large percentage of thyroid disease is actually autoimmune disease simply showing up in the thyroid first. This is a whole-body condition and must address the immune system to resolve symptoms such as fatigue, weight gain, hair loss, depression, etc.

**CHCP:** *Pain syndromes such as fibromyalgia, arthritis, and peripheral neuropathy must be treated with nerve pills (e.g., Lyrica or Cymbalta), or pain medications.*

**IMw:** Many painful chronic conditions, including degenerative joint diseases, post-herpetic neuralgia, headaches, etc., are related to underlying triggers of inflammation that is system-wide. This can be perpetuated by hidden infections, toxins, acid-base inequity, and other fundamental imbalances. When these are corrected, pain improves, even without treating the specific painful site.

**CHCP:** *Mental health conditions are separate from the body and only respond to medications and psychotherapy.*

**IMw:** The brain, which generates our mental state, is an intimate part of the body and subject to the same conditions that affect the body. Inflammation, toxins, nutrient deficiencies, and specific gene patterns can all affect mental health. Treating these underlying causes can correct moods, memory, and thinking without antidepressants, anxiety pills, etc.

**CHCP:** *There is nothing that can be done to prevent or treat memory loss or dementia.*

**IMw:** Did you know that 30-50 percent of people diagnosed with depression will go on to have dementia? This is because both states can be caused by inflammation of the brain. Especially in the early stages of mild cognitive impairment (intermittent thinking or memory problems), treating the inflammation can prevent further degeneration.

**CHCP:** *As long as you keep taking your medications, you don't have to worry about high blood pressure, allergies, insomnia, reflux, diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome, erectile dysfunction, etc.*

**IMw:** When a medication must be taken to keep symptoms or lab values under control, the fundamental healing properties of the body have not been activated. Medications that must be used frequently are like cutting the wires to the alarm system. Instead of treating the effect with suppression, engage the innate wisdom of your own body to stabilize itself. Work with an Integrative Medicine health professional to correct root causes. Most often, this regulates many essential mechanisms simultaneously, not only improving symptoms, but also preventing many dreaded diseases. ❦

---

Joanne Pizzino, MD, MPH, is board-certified in both Preventive Medicine and Integrative Medicine. Her practice, Whole Health Solutions, is located at 1350 SE Maynard Road, Suite 201, Cary, NC 27511. For more information, visit her website ([www.whole-health-solutions.com](http://www.whole-health-solutions.com)) and see Health Links on the website to learn about therapies referenced. Or call to schedule a consultation: (919) 651-0820.