

# health NEWS

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, MOTHER NATURE HOLDS THE KEY TO TREATING OUR AILMENTS

## GOOD THINGS, SMALL PACKAGES

Walnuts have claimed the distinction of most virtuous nut, according to *The Journal of Nutrition*. Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health found that women who ate walnuts twice weekly reduced their risk of type 2 diabetes by 24 percent. "Walnuts, like other tree nuts, are packed with beneficial nutrients such as unsaturated fats, fiber, plant protein, minerals, and antioxidants," explains lead researcher Frank Hu. "They're a rich source of omega-three fatty acids." Toss some into your breakfast cereal, salads, or even blend with basil, garlic, and olive oil for a fresh take on summer pesto. That's health in a nutshell!



## Here's the Rub

Before you char-grill your beef burgers, steaks, or chicken, sprinkle on rosemary, or rosemary extract (\$30.50, mountainroseherbs.com). The charred part contains potentially cancerous compounds known as HCAs (heterocyclic amines), but rosemary's antioxidants seem to block their formation, according to research from Kansas State University. Also try marinating with olive oil and citrus juices, or trimming off fat before grilling.

## WE HEART TURMERIC

According to the University of Tsukuba in Japan, turmeric is potentially as effective as moderate exercise at preventing aging and boosting heart health. "Turmeric has a potent anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effect," explains New York's Jeffrey Morrison, MD. "Curcumin is the component of turmeric responsible for anti-inflammatory effects. It has been found to make blood cells less sticky and less likely to form blood clots." Morrison suggests adding one teaspoon to scrambled eggs, chicken salad, and fish. The Butcher's Daughter in New York (thebutchersdaughter.com) mixes this bright yellow spice into their very popular juice called the Honey Bee.



## COMING CLEAN

So-called "organic" or "earth-friendly" dry cleaning may not be better for your health, or the environment. "No federal body has defined what these terms mean," says UCLA's Peter Sinzheimer, PhD, who warns of the chemical solvent perchloroethylene, or perc. "Perc is a hazardous air pollutant, and has adverse health effects such as reproductive toxicity, neurotoxicity, and cancer." The Environmental Protection Agency approves wet cleaning (detergent and water) and liquid CO<sub>2</sub> cleaning. The good old hand-wash, air-dry method works, too.

## An Apple a Day...

That daily apple might keep the skin doctor away, according to the University of Kentucky and China Medical University. Researchers found that quercitrin—a form of natural plant extract quercetin—helps protect skin from ultraviolet B (or burning) rays. "I don't suggest taking quercitrin as a daily supplement," insists lead researcher Zhuo Zhang, PhD. Rather, he recommends the following: "Eat whole apples with the peels on, since peels contain a large amount of quercitrin." Keep an eye out for sunscreens with apple peel extract.

74%  
of Americans  
desire a more  
natural approach  
to healthcare.

# changing direction

Concern only grew as her dizzy spells intensified. But where Western medicine failed to pinpoint her problem, could Eastern practices provide that panacea? **BY TATIANA BONCOMPAGNI**

I'D GONE FOR A RUN THAT DAY IN LATE SEPTEMBER, with the leaves falling at my feet and the wind lifting my hair as I made my usual five-mile trek around Central Park. At home I'd stripped to take a shower and, by chance, looked down at my breasts. One nipple was coated in a pale yellow paste that looked like dried milk, but I hadn't nursed in over a year. I gave myself a breast exam in the shower. I discovered lumps in both breasts I'd never felt before.

I managed to get dressed and cajole my youngest child, then two years old, into his stroller. We were halfway to his nursery school, on a wide stretch of Park Avenue sidewalk, when the world seemed to bob and shift. I felt as though I'd just stepped on land after spending an hour on a raft. I called it dizziness—but it was more like seasickness.

I went to my gynecologist. She gave me a breast exam, which caused little droplets of milk to flow out of both my nipples. "It's not bloody and it's coming out of both breasts," she said. That meant the discharge was most likely just milk, and indicative of something less scary than cancer such as a benign tumor on my pituitary gland or a thyroid imbalance. She drew blood to test for both conditions and referred me to a radiologist for a mammogram, to rule out anything in my breasts. "We want to cover all our bases," she said. "Don't worry."

I'd met with my gynecologist on a Friday. The following Monday, Hurricane Sandy hit and New York City shut down. My kids' schools were closed; my husband's office was without power. The seasickness intensified to the point that I couldn't eat, read, or speak without feeling like I was going to lose my balance—or consciousness. At the end of that week my blood work came back: It was fine. No tumor on my pituitary. No thyroid imbalance. I saw the radiologist the following week. There were two spots the doctor wanted to keep an eye on, but nothing to biopsy. As for the discharge, the radiologist's best guess was that I was simply still lactating. My mother sent me a link to an article online explaining the phenomenon, where hundreds of women had left comments. Apparently, I wasn't alone.

The feelings of imbalance persisted. I went to see my general practitioner, who felt my glands and asked me to stand and close my eyes. If I'd fallen over, it would have



Author Tatiana Boncompagni takes an Eastern approach to a health quandary.

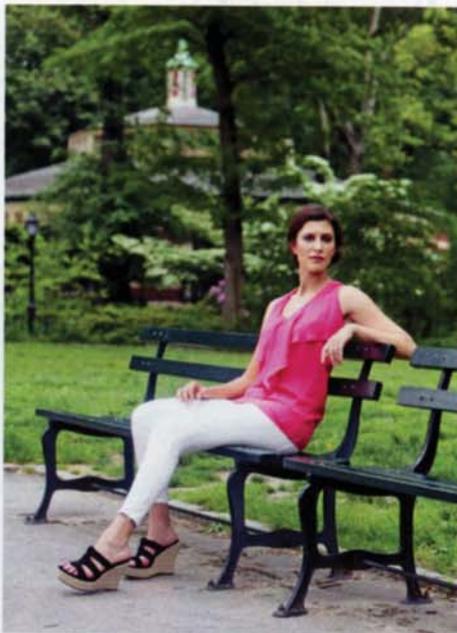
been a sign of a possible brain tumor. I didn't fall, but he still referred me to a neurologist, as well as a cardiologist and an ear, nose, and throat doctor. "Most likely, it's just stress," he said. He wrote me a prescription for Xanax.

Over the next two weeks, I saw all of the doctors. The ear, nose, and throat expert gave me a hearing test, while the cardiologist administered an EKG and a prescription for seasickness pills. The neurologist hooked my head to a series of electrodes and told me I had the best brain waves he'd seen in a long time. Still, he wanted an MRI. My neurologist called with the results, and I was fine. Except, that is, for the dizziness.

**WESTERN MEDICINE COULD OFFER** no diagnosis. Could Eastern? Some experts, including Alison J. Kay, PhD, certainly believe so. Kay, a holistic life coach, India-trained yoga instructor, and energy healer, is also author of *What if There's Nothing Wrong?*, a new book offering observations about how we live in the west versus the "subtle energy practices" she encountered while living and teaching in Asia. Her general thesis is that much of the diseases that plague our culture—obesity, chronic illnesses, and depression—are caused by our misunderstanding of the world. We focus on what is physical and tangible, and disregard what we can't see. "The world is a bunch of energy soup," says Kay. "It isn't about the physical anymore. Many people go to doctors with various complaints, and the Western doctors don't have the tools, nor training, nor paradigm with which to understand these new phenomena."

I described my symptoms—the still-lactating breasts, the dizziness. Kay told me that in Hindu belief, the breasts, as well as the lungs, correspond with the heart chakra, which is the seat of self-love, nurturing, unity, and compassion. "Chakra" means "wheel," or "turning" in Sanskrit, and infers the idea that corresponding energies (self-love, for example) should turn the wheel, allowing energy (prana) to flow throughout the body. If energy stagnates in a chakra, our bodies become weak and prone to disease.

Kay honed in on the issues with my breasts, and told me about a client with breast cancer she was treating in her practice, which blends



**"The world is an energy soup. Western doctors have neither the tools nor training to understand the phenomena."**

energy healing and coaching. Over the course of many sessions her client began to talk about long-buried feelings. She had never felt nurtured as a child, and now that she finds herself married to man who gives her little support, she feels unloved as an adult.

Silently, I started to cry. I had a rough childhood. I take care of three kids and a husband who gives most of his best to his business and friends. I spend my days in quiet desperation for someone to put me first—and yet I feel untrusting whenever anyone tries to get close. We hit a nerve.

"You could get medication, you could get radiation, you could get something cut off, but you will never get to the root," said Kay.

**THE NEXT DAY I CALLED DR. JEFFREY A. Morrison**, the founder of the Morrison Center in New York City. Dr. Morrison, while focusing on my seasickness, posited that it may be caused by a malfunction in my central nervous system. He advised an anti-inflammatory eating plan, fish oil supplements high in DHA, and regular consumption of green tea, which contains the amino acid theanine.

He also suggested I try craniosacral therapy, a massage discipline where a therapist supports a patient's head and permits them to reach a deep state of relaxation. It allows the therapist to essentially "interface" with the central nervous system. The technique can sometimes allow for a somato emotional release of trauma, or suppressed emotions, stored in the body. When it works, patients are left bawling like babies on the table. "The crying is a happy release of stored tension," says Dr. Morrison.

"Can't I just go see a therapist?" I asked. "Conversational therapy is good for trauma that we know about, but when we don't know what it is, this can put the mind into a calm state," Dr. Morrison explained.

I reached out to Dr. Ann Marie Chiasson, a specialist in energy medicine who teaches at Dr. Andrew Weil's Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine. Chiasson zeroed in on my central

nervous system and told me she "would send me running for craniosacral therapy." She taught me relaxing breathing techniques, including shaking out my arms and legs to dislodge energy and lying on the floor while rotating my legs in and out to help my autonomic nervous system move out of the state of fight-or-flight that arose with my cancer scare. "That was a shock to you," Dr. Chiasson said. "Your energy body and nervous system moved out of balance."

Then came homework: belly breathing, exercises, and a push to see a craniosacral therapist. She believes I can feel like myself again and that I'll feel a sort of "clunk" when it comes to pass.

Kay's client with breast cancer is on the road to recovery. I believe I will be restored to great health, too. I'm interacting with friends without putting on a show, and time with my husband and kids is more enjoyable. I've resumed yoga, and I'm drinking green tea, which calms and energizes all at once.

I recognize that this is not an end-game situation. I am on a lifelong journey to find balance, peace, and wellness. That said, I do believe my little heart chakra is whirring again. ●