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CONTRA COSTA TIMES

DR. DONOHUE: FOR YOUR GOOD HEALTH

B-12 may help soothe burning soles

Q: I am an elderly woman, and my burning soles keep me awake at night. My doctor told me to take 1,000 micrograms of vitamin B-12 to overcome a deficiency that he feels is responsible. I see that 2.4 micrograms is the recommended daily B-12 dose. If my body is not absorbing the vitamin, how will taking such a huge dose help? It just doesn't make sense to me.

A: A shortage of B-12 causes anemia -- too few red blood cells. Here, the anemia is a special kind: pernicious anemia. Pernicious anemia has symptoms common to all anemias. The affected person is drained of energy and pants for air when engaged in even minor physical exertion.

Pernicious anemia also affects nerve tissues, and the symptoms of nerve involvement are many. In some people it takes the form of burning feet. Others complain of numb or tingling feet. Often, walking degenerates into stumbling because of nerve impairment.

Most often the B-12 deficiency springs not from a lack of the vitamin but from an inability of the body to absorb it. The stomach makes a substance called intrinsic factor. Intrinsic factor takes vitamin B-12 by the hand and

leads it across the wall of the intestines so it can be transported to the bone marrow for manufacturing red blood cells. It also enters nerves to keep them healthy.

The recommended daily allowance for vitamin B-12 is 2.4 micrograms. A microgram is smaller than a speck of dust. Huge doses of vitamin B-12 can penetrate the intestinal wall without intrinsic factor. That's why your doctor has you taking such a huge dose, 400 times the recommended dose.

Most doctors in this part of the world favor injecting the vitamin into muscles. The injection assures them that the vitamin successfully bypasses the absorption problem and is delivered to body locations where it is needed.

An aside to readers: Burning feet is a common symptom. B-12 deficiency is an uncommon cause of it.

Q: I constantly clench my teeth. I have to wear a mouth guard at night. Lately my jaw has been clicking when I chew. Do you have any solutions?

A Teeth clenching is bruxism. The constant contraction of jaw and face muscles causes constant rubbing of upper and lower teeth against each other. Bruxism also leads to jaw joint problems -- the clicking you describe.

A dentist is the person you need to see. While you are waiting to see one, try this: Sit in a comfortable chair and try to relax. Lightly close the lips. Let the jaw drop a bit but maintain the lightly closed lips. Repeat the routine over and over. It might bring relaxation to the jaw muscles and an end to bruxism. Go to the dentist whether this ritual works or not.

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