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MY ILOILO EXPERIENCE : THE BODY DOESN'T ALWAYS NEED MEDICINES TO HEAL ITSELF

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Our body was really excellently designed by God. In many instances, it is auto-fixing whatever is wrong with it, with no need for strong medicines.

I'm writing this en route to Yangon in Myanmar, where I was invited by its medical society to give a couple of talks. Up to last night, I thought I wouldn't push through with my trip.

It was partly my fault. I was in Iloilo City for our atherosclerosis congress, and for dinner, we had such a sumptuous variety of dishes. I couldn't resist the *kilawin* (raw fish in vinegar) and oysters, and had a bit too much.

Past midnight in the hotel, I started rushing to the toilet almost every hour with really watery diarrhea. I consumed all the bottled water in my fridge, including the sports drinks which, the label said, contain some electrolytes.

I was too weak to attend the conference the next day, and some Ilonggo friends got worried. Some offered to have anti-diarrheal medicines and antibiotics brought to my room, but I thought it would be better to flush out whatever it was that was irritating my gut, rather than stop the loose bowel movement (LBM), keep the bug in my gut and allow it to multiply.

Bananas

I lost count of how many trips I made to the toilet, but every time I did, I approximated the amount of fluid I lost and drank an equivalent amount —half part sports drink diluted with half part bottled water. (Thanks to Rixon and Christy for supplying them.) I also requested for bananas, and I probably out-ate any monkey that day.

I was still quite weak when I flew back to Manila last night. former health secretary Espie Cabral was on the same flight, and knowing what happened to me, and that I had forthcoming trip to Myanmar, she was worried, too.

I also saw another former health secretary, Dr. Paulyn Ubial, when I checked in at the Iloilo airport, but didn't have any energy left to engage her in friendly banter. She was probably wondering why I seemed so aloof. I hope she reads this, and understands!

I got home a little past 9 last night. After another trip to the toilet and a quick warm shower, I went straight to bed. I thought of my speaking commitment in Myanmar, and I decided that begging off at the literal last minute was not an option.

My sleep last night was one of my best in recent weeks. It was a solid eight hours, and no LBM woke me up.

When I woke up this morning, I felt so refreshed and revitalized, and I couldn't help but be amazed at how my body fixed itself with just a little hydration. Praise God indeed!

Our gut actually has healthy and unhealthy bacteria, or microbiata. A healthy gut needs these friendly microbes to function normally. They also combat whatever disease-causing microbes enter our gut.

This morning, I could imagine the friendly microbiata in my gut declaring victory over the intruding pathogenic microbes, and reclaiming their territory.

It doesn't only happen in our gut. Our body has built-in compensatory mechanisms, like the release of life-saving chemicals or hormones, to restore health. It also activates the production of antibodies by our immune system to ward off whatever can harm our body, such as viruses, bacteria, allergens or carcinogens.

If we have a strong immune system, our body's defenders can usually take care of itself. But beyond a certain point, "external reinforcement"" through drug therapy may already be needed. The astute physician knows at which point drug intervention is called for on top of supportive therapy.

Self-limiting

For example, most infec-

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tions, particularly in the respiratory tract, are viral—not bacterial—and are usually self-limiting. No antibiotics are needed, which many take at the slightest rise in body temperature or at the onset of coughing. The result is antibiotic resistance. When one really needs it due to a severe infection, the antibiotics don't work anymore.

Rather than rush into aggressive and potent medicinal treatments, which are usually saddled with side-effects, my classmate in medical school, Dr. Pocholo Calanoc, explains to our Viber group that we should strengthen and balance our immune system.

Pocholo and his colleagues in Taipei are into a novel field he describes as 21st century Integrative Medicine, which aims to help the body activate its natural capacity to prevent disease or restore health. His group may have a point that there are natural laws that determine health, and numerous techniques that enable one's body to preserve health in instances when the individual is well, or restore health when one is sick.

Dr. Alan Goldhamer, who heads a multidisciplinary health and wellness clinic in California, has a similar belief in the body's "balancing act," known medically as homeostasis. It literally means balance.

"The optimum state of function that we call health is spontaneously generated by the human organism when it is provided with the requirements of health," Dr. Goldhamer says.

He explains that requirements of health are classified into four general categories:

Diet—A plant-based diet of whole natural foods that meets one's individual nutritional needs;

Environment—Consisting of fresh air, pure water, and ample sunshine, and avoiding environmental stressors such as air and water pollution, and excess exposure to dust, pollen, chemicals and noise;

Activity—Remaining physically active appropriate for one's age by engaging in regular aerobic exercise and getting adequate rest and sleep; and,

Psychology—Engaging in productive activity even beyond retirement and developing the interpersonal social skills necessary for a successful and meaningful life.

When these requirements of health are adequately fulfilled, the self-healing mechanisms of the body remain active 24/7.

"Your body's ability to do this is only limited by your inherent constitution (genetics) and the amount of use and abuse that has taken place," Dr. Goldhamer adds.

To that I agree, and I plead guilty for the *kinilaw*- and oyster-induced gastroenteritis I just experienced. INQ