



Got enough protein for optimum health?

Majority of adults FAIL to consume daily amounts—and their health SUFFERS

Aim for this magic number...from a variety of sources

Protein is an essential macronutrient.

Getting *enough* in your daily diet is critical for nearly every bodily function—from building strong muscles and bones to supporting digestion and more.

Plus, the older you get, the more important protein becomes—for your overall health and your quality of life.

Research shows that as you age, you naturally lose muscle mass, strength, and function. As a result, you may also lose mobility, hindering your independence.

In fact, reduced muscle strength and function can affect your gait (walking pattern). And, as I've written before, gait is the No. 1 predictor of longevity.

The good news is, you can counteract age-related muscle problems by eating enough protein.

Sounds simple, doesn't it?

But research shows that a whopping **41 percent** of adult women and **38 percent** of adult men DON'T consume the recommended daily allowance (RDA) for protein—and, consequently, their health suffers.¹

Not to mention, as we all know, RDAs are usually woefully low. Meaning many older adults don't even come CLOSE to consuming enough daily protein.

It takes 25 to 30 grams of protein at each meal to keep your body healthy, muscles strong, and your metabolism going.

Not only that, but a new study shows it's important to enjoy various sources of protein for optimum health (and optimum blood pressure levels).

So, let's take a closer look at this new research. Then, I'll tell you about some of the best sources of protein—and how many grams each provides to ensure you're getting enough.

Lower protein equals higher blood pressure?

First, let's talk about how protein may affect your blood pressure readings...

From 1997 to 2015, researchers in China gathered nutrition data from nearly 12,200 adults.² The researchers looked at what types of proteins the participants ate and how that influenced their blood pressures.

The researchers identified eight different types of protein:

- Eggs
- Fish
- Grains (both whole and refined)
- Legumes
- Poultry
- Red meat (both processed and unprocessed)

They gave each type of protein a score. Then, they added up each study participant's daily score.

Results showed that the people with higher protein scores (meaning they ate a *variety* of proteins) had better nutritional status—as expected.

But the researchers also found that the people who consumed at least four protein sources a day had an impressive 66 percent lower chance of developing high blood pressure (hypertension) compared to those who consumed two or fewer sources.

Why? Because not all proteins are created equal—at least, not in terms of how the body uses them.

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Proteins contain amino acids, which are vital for many body and brain functions—including blood pressure regulation.

But not all proteins contain every type of amino acid. This is especially true of plant proteins, which are referred to as “incomplete” proteins because they don’t contain as many amino acids as animal proteins do.

So, to ensure you get a full range of amino acids *and* reap full-body benefits, it’s important to diversify your protein sources.

Eggs and meat belly up to the table

Now, I do have reservations about one of the proteins the researchers included in their “protein score.” Specifically, **refined grains**.

There’s plenty of research showing these highly processed grains can have negative impacts on health. And I’ve concluded that the protein they supply is simply not enough to counteract those negative effects.

Plus, you don’t *need* refined grains when there are so many other good sources of protein readily available.

Another interesting and important aspect of the study was the inclusion of eggs and meat.

As you know, for many years, the U.S. government recommended eliminating eggs and meat from your diet to help reduce risk of heart disease and high blood pressure.

Of course, they were all *wrong*, all along. Now, finally, eggs have been miraculously rehabilitated as a healthy food.

In fact, a 2018 study of nearly 500,000 adults showed that people who routinely ate eggs had a lower risk of deaths from heart disease and strokes compared to those who didn’t eat eggs.³

Unfortunately, the same rehabilitation hasn’t been applied to meat. It

continues to be demonized—especially processed red meat.

But the new Chinese study (and others) show that red meat is *not* the problem it’s been made out to be for heart health and blood pressure. Especially when it’s included as part of a balanced diet that contains different sources of protein.

In fact, quite the opposite!

Eight high-protein foods to add to your diet today

The bottom line is that a balanced diet with a variety of nutrients—like protein—is vital for health.

And when it comes to protein, I’d like to let you in on a little secret: Calculating your daily “score” CAN be fun—and delicious. (Plus, you probably already enjoy many of these sources as part of the healthy Mediterranean diet.)

Here are eight healthy foods to up your intake. (Bonus: They also provide a whole host of other important nutrients!)

Grass-fed and -finished meat (including organic poultry and lamb). These options contain around 8 grams of protein per ounce. Plus, they provide you with healthy fats and bioavailable minerals, such as iron and calcium. Meat is also a rich source of B vitamins, vitamins D and E, and amino acids.

My go-to option: A rack of lamb with homemade chimichurri sauce. Remember, lamb has the best nutritional profile of all meats. And for a homemade chimichurri recipe, refer to last month’s newsletter.

Eggs. Organic eggs contain 6 grams of protein each. And I consider them to be one of the healthiest foods on the planet. They’re great sources of essential minerals (like selenium), healthy fats, and complete proteins.

My go-to option: Huevos rancheros! This tasty dish features fried eggs (in grass-fed butter) on fresh, organic

corn tortillas, topped with salsa, beans/legumes, avocado, cheese, and more. (Tip: Spice up your salsa with fresh ingredients. I make mine with organic tomatoes, red onion, and a finely diced hot pepper—mixed with cilantro and lime juice.)

Cheese. Full-fat cheese (preferably organic) is a good source of protein, essential fats, calcium, B vitamins, phosphorus, and zinc.

My go-to option: Slices of cheddar, provolone, or mozzarella cheese provide 7 to 8 grams of protein each. You can make this healthy snack even more nutritious (and delicious) by enjoying a fresh charcuterie board full of smoked meats, cheeses, berries, and olives. Or—if you're in the mood for some comfort food, pair your favorite cheeses together to make a hearty grilled cheese sandwich. (You can find my go-to recipe for this in the January 2022 newsletter.)

Fish. Wild-caught fish and seafood provides ample protein (between 6 to 8 grams per ounce). It's also an excellent source of essential omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins B and D, calcium, iodine, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, and zinc.

My go-to option: I like to opt for fresh, wild-caught fish and seafood—especially during this time of year. In fact, I try to eat seafood several times a week. Even better? You can prepare seafood and fish lots of different ways—baked, grilled, steamed, and more.

One of my favorite recipes combines high-protein options to make a delicious New England seafood boil: shrimp (24 grams), lobster (28 grams), and clams (12 grams)

Lentils. Along with beans, lentils are an extremely healthy legume. Not only do they contain 18 grams of protein per cup, but they're also loaded with fiber, B vitamins, iron, magnesium, potassium, and zinc.

My go-to option. Lentils and other cooked beans can be added to curries,

salads, and soups. But I've recently become a fan of red lentil pasta.

Italians often add lentils and other legumes to their pasta for a protein and fiber boost. So, why not go straight to the source—and swap out unhealthy, white-flour pasta for healthy (and tasty) pasta made with red lentils? A 2-ounce serving of red lentil pasta has around 13 grams of protein—nearly *double* the amount in a serving of white flour pasta.

Nuts and seeds. These plant proteins are great sources of healthy fats and fiber—not to mention vitamin E, copper, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, and selenium.

Different types of nuts and seeds contain different levels of protein. For example, a handful of walnuts offer around 12 grams of protein... and a cup of Brazil nuts serves up a whopping 19 grams. Meanwhile, two tablespoons of chia seeds contain about 5 grams of protein.

My go-to option: Several handfuls of mixed nuts daily (un-salted and not honey roasted). Especially almonds, pecans, and walnuts. You can even mix them with small amounts of dried fruits. This is actually one of my favorite snacks because it's convenient—and highly satisfying. Leaving a bowl out on your counter takes up minimal space. And if you're on the go, you can keep your handfuls in zip-lock bags to keep you from feeling hungry between meals.

Yogurt. All yogurt offers protein—but plain, Greek-style versions have an impressive 22 grams per cup. Plus, yogurt is packed with probiotics, calcium, and B vitamins.

My go-to option: Plain, organic Greek or Icelandic yogurt is a versatile way to add healthy protein to any meal. I enjoy it for breakfast nearly every day, together with fresh berries and/or nuts. In fact, since incorporating it into my daily routine, I've lost about 30 pounds (and four or five notches on my belt)

without even thinking about it!

Optimize your diet, improve your health

As you can see, there are a lot of delicious ways to boost your protein intake...and your health.


Of course, one of the main reasons older adults don't eat enough protein is because our appetite tends to shrink with age. And protein can fill you up fast.

But the foods I just discussed are a simple and often stealthy way to add protein to your diet—while still leaving plenty of stomach space for other healthy foods.

Remember, it's important to aim for 25 to 30 grams of protein at each meal—or 75 to 90 grams daily—to stay strong and healthy well into your golden years...and beyond!

So, get creative. Start meal planning around the delicious protein sources I outlined here. Then, experiment with different varieties and flavors.

Who knows, you might just find a new favorite dish (or two or three)!

For added inspiration, search my archives for some of my favorite recipes. Like my classic New England seafood boil I mention above, turkey mole tacos, and more! You can also poke around the internet or family cookbooks for fresh ideas. 

Cozzi Family Farm Market & Gifts

If you're in the New England area or simply passing through, please consider stopping by this local farm co-op in picturesque Rockport, Massachusetts. My daughter and her husband offer a locally grown market. You can find **fresh, free-range organic eggs** and other foods, baked goods, homemade kitchenware, arts and crafts, and more. Details, directions, and updates are posted here: [facebook.com/CozziFamilyFarmMarketandGifts/](https://www.facebook.com/CozziFamilyFarmMarketandGifts/).

Here's the inside scoop on the "Dirty Dozen" and "Clean Fifteen"

Knowing THIS can make all the difference for your diet and health!

Around this time each year, I share with you the "dirtiest" and "cleanest" fruits and vegetables for your health.

And I always reference the Environmental Working Group (EWG)'s annual "Dirty Dozen" and "Clean Fifteen" lists.

These lists reveal the types of produce that are most and least likely to be poisoned with pesticides—as shown in scientific tests.

But let me be clear: That doesn't mean certain types of produce are "good" or "bad" for you.

Whether you choose an apple or an artichoke, a carrot or a cantaloupe, you're going to get plenty of health benefits. (That's why I always encourage you to eat a *variety* of fruits and vegetables as part of a balanced diet.)

Sadly, however, not all of this produce is *grown* in the healthiest way—and that's where the "clean" and "dirty" designations come in...

We know that a significant amount of conventionally grown produce is doused in toxic, chemical pesticides.

And numerous studies link these chemicals to cancer, metabolic issues like obesity and Type II diabetes, nervous-system problems, reproductive issues, and other serious health concerns.

This month, just in time for the summer harvest, I'd like to tell you more about what's behind the Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen lists...and where the information comes from.

Then, I'll share my *simple but effective tips* to ensure your fruits and vegetables are as healthy and toxin-free as possible.

What's in the name?

Just as we should always consider our food sources, we should also carefully consider the sources of *information* about foods.

According to the EWG website, the group has issued its Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen reports every year since 2004 (and I've been publishing them since *Insiders' Cures* debuted in 2012).

The reports are based on information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA)'s Pesticide Data Program.

USDA scientists gather conventionally grown fruits and vegetables. They wash, scrub, and peel them as consumers would. Then, the scientists test the produce for pesticide residues.

The EWG uses that data to rank the 46 fruits and vegetables that are the most and least contaminated with pesticides. But because the USDA doesn't test all 46 types of produce every year, EWG uses 10 years' worth of testing data to compare and compose its annual list.

For example, strawberries haven't been tested by the USDA since 2016, according to the EWG—even though these berries are consistently the most contaminated with pesticides when they're not grown organically. That's because, unlike other fruits, the seeds of the strawberry are on the surface—which creates pores that trap pesticides and other contaminants inside.

Typically, the testing results remain fairly consistent for various fruits and vegetables year to year. But the overall *amounts* of pesticides found on produce is increasing.

In fact, the EWG reports that this year, more than *70 percent* of non-organic produce grown in the United States contains pesticide residues—even after the produce is washed!¹

(Which is why I recommend washing your fruits and vegetables to remove dirt and other contaminants...but *not* as a way to protect you from toxins).

And the data gets even more shocking when you look at pesticide levels in specific types of fruits and vegetables...

Hundreds of different pesticides in a single piece of produce

The EWG reports that many samples of the fruits and vegetables tested by the USDA contained *multiple* pesticides, including fungicides and insecticides. More specifically...

- The highest levels of multiple pesticides—from an astounding 103 different chemicals—were found in **collards, kale, and mustard greens**.
- **Hot peppers and bell peppers** weren't far behind, at 101 different pesticides per sample.
- **Spinach** had nearly twice as many pesticides by weight compared to any other crop tested.
- More than 90 percent of the **strawberries, apples, cherries, spinach, nectarines, and grapes** tested were found to have residues of at least two different kinds of pesticides.

Of course, higher amounts of pesticides are extremely unhealthy. But being exposed to *multiple* different pesticides, even at lower levels, is dangerous.

This type of pesticide exposure is called “super additive”—meaning each pesticide has more of a health impact when combined with other pesticides, compared to acting in isolation.

This super-additive effect can also be called “toxic soup.” And I have personal experience with it as an expert witness in forensic pathology and toxicology...

Beware of brewing a toxic soup

During my courtroom testimonies, I’ve learned that the pesticide industry rejects the “toxic soup” argument of harm caused by exposure to multiple chemicals. Instead, the lawyers and judges typically insist on limiting evidence to health impacts of individual pesticides, with exposures considered only one-at-a-time.

But in the real world, if workers on a large-scale industrial farm or golf course are exposed to one pesticide, they’re exposed to at least a *dozen* different ones (including herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides).

Meaning they’re exposed to the super-additive effects of “toxic soups” in their working environments. And *that* can result in even *more* serious health concerns.

Similarly, consumers may be exposed to multiple pesticides by simply preparing food.

In fact, you could literally make a toxic soup by combining supposedly healthy vegetables doused in pesticides!

How can you protect yourself and your family?

So, how can you avoid exposure to pesticides—and help eliminate the likelihood of making “toxic soup?”

The answer is NOT to eat fewer fruits and vegetables—which are rich in the antioxidants, phytonutrients, natural fibers, minerals, and vitamins needed for optimal health.

You’d think everyone would know this. But a CNN report said that a pesticide industry representative, CropLife America, actually claimed the Dirty Dozen list scares people away from eating any produce.²

In response, Alexis Temkin, a toxicologist at the EWG, said the study (done by another industry group, the Alliance for Food and Farming), “actually shows that just over half of people surveyed said the Dirty Dozen list made them more likely to buy fruits and vegetables.”

Temkin added: “Only about one in six said our report would make them less likely to buy produce.”

Hmm. Seems like the American public isn’t as easily influenced by misinformation as the pesticide industry thinks they are...

Instead, more people are increasingly turning to **organic** produce, which by U.S. law can’t be grown with chemical pesticides, insecticides, or fertilizers (or genetically modified seeds, for that matter, which require the use of pesticides).

(In an upcoming issue of *Insiders’ Cures*, I’ll be digging into more details about the cultivation of organic foods. I’ll also share some good news about the growing number of local, organic farms. So, stay tuned!)

And that’s a great solution! But I also understand that not everyone can afford to eat organic produce all of the time.

That leads me to the Clean Fifteen list—and other effective tips for guarding against pesticides...

Some conventional produce gets a green light

According to the EWG, nearly 70 percent of the Clean Fifteen foods on this year’s list have no detectable pesticide residues. And less than 5 percent have residues of two or more pesticides.

That’s mainly because many of the fruits and vegetables on the list have hard skins or husks that protect the part you actually eat from the pesticides sprayed during the growing process.

That includes avocados, which top this year’s Clean Fifteen list. (See the full list in the sidebar below.)

This once-neglected fruit (called an “alligator pear” and other unappealing names) is a great source of nutrients, including healthy essential fats. It also makes a great summer dip called guacamole—or topping to huevos rancheros (see page 2).

Of course, you could achieve the same pesticide-free effects by removing the skins of produce on the Dirty Dozen list (for example, nectarines).

But the health benefits of some fruits and vegetables (such as apples and tomatoes) are actually *enhanced*

The 2022 “Dirty Dozen” List

ranked by most contaminated with pesticides

1. Strawberries
2. Spinach
3. Kale, collard, and mustard greens
4. Nectarines
5. Apples
6. Grapes
7. Bell and hot peppers
8. Cherries
9. Peaches
10. Pears
11. Celery
12. Tomatoes

The 2022 “Clean Fifteen” List

ranked by least contaminated with pesticides

1. Avocados
2. Sweet corn (non-GMO)
3. Pineapple
4. Onions
5. Papaya (non-GMO)
6. Sweet peas (frozen)
7. Asparagus
8. Honeydew melon
9. Kiwi
10. Cabbage
11. Mushrooms
12. Cantaloupe
13. Mangoes
14. Watermelon
15. Sweet potatoes

by eating the skin or peels, where nutrients are more concentrated.

In those cases, your best bet is to choose organic versions.

But you can also help guard against pesticides with two other simple steps:

Buy local. When you shop at your local farmers' market and buy directly from the grower, you know *what* you're getting, *where* it's coming from, and *who* is growing it.


Plus, many times, the food may be organically grown but not bear the

USDA certified organic seal. That's because food grown and sold for consumption locally (within 50 miles) is exempt from federal regulations that favor big food and industrialized agriculture.

Buy in season. Prices are lower when fruits and vegetables are in season and more plentiful—even when they're certified organic. Buying in bulk and then freezing, canning, or pickling organic fruits and vegetables preserves the nutrients—and saves you money.

Whichever option you choose, it's a

good idea to keep copies of the Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen lists handy. In these days of factory farming, they're essential protection against toxic chemicals...and a simple way to help maintain your health.

And remember, research shows you only need to eat *three* servings of vegetables and *two* servings of fruit per day for optimal health benefits. That works out to only about two and a half cups of healthy, toxin-free produce daily! 

Are low-sodium recommendations really worth their salt?

The medical myth that just won't go away

For decades, doctors and mainstream medicine have recommended lowering sodium (salt) intake.

The conventional “wisdom” is that most Americans need to consume *less salt*.

Indeed, the advice to avoid salt is so common that it almost *goes without saying*. BUT, as I have pointed out for years, it also *goes without science*!

This is particularly perplexing because, as you know, some medical myths about diet and nutrition (that were all wrong, all along) have finally been replaced by the science.

Like the mainstream's bad advice to avoid dietary cholesterol and essential fats...not to mention cutting out healthy foods like whole dairy, eggs, and even certain kinds of seafood.

Plus, as I revealed in April's newsletter—and on page 2 of this issue—the “anti-red meat” crusade is flat-out flawed.

Yet, the anti-salt myth persists *despite* studies showing it's just as misguided as these other medical myths.

So, let's talk about it. Then, I'll tell you all about the health *benefits* of salt... and how you can *effectively* manage your consumption.

The real science on sodium

The theory behind low-salt recommendations is that consuming too much sodium can raise your blood pressure—and thus increase your risk of heart disease.

But I've reported on research showing the exact opposite.

Some studies have found that lowering salt intake can actually *increase* blood pressure...and even **BOOST** your risk of diabetes (the leading cause of heart disease).

And the science continues to speak loudly. In fact, brand-new results from the largest clinical trial to date, which looked at low-sodium diets, found that eating less salt *doesn't* reduce mortality or hospital trips in older people with heart failure.¹

These results were SO CONVINCING...that the study was stopped *halfway through the process*.

The scientists had enough data to publish the results in the prestigious U.K. medical journal *The Lancet* without going any further.

This study included 806 patients from 26 medical centers in Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and New Zealand. The patients were an average age of 67 years, and all had been diagnosed with chronic heart failure.

The study participants were split into two groups. One group ate a low-sodium diet. They also received nutritional and behavioral counseling. The other group received counseling, but ate whatever they wanted.

The first group consumed an average of 2,286 mg of sodium per day at the beginning of the study. After a year, that number dropped to an average of 1,658 mg a day.

The second group consumed an average of 2,119 mg of sodium daily when the study began. After a year, that number decreased slightly to an average of 2,073 mg a day.

(For comparison, the American Heart

Association recommends consuming no more than 2,300 mg of sodium a day—and ideally, less than 1,500 mg a day.)²

During the course of the study, 15 percent of the first group and 17 percent of the second group were hospitalized or died due to a cardiac event.

Statistically speaking, that's basically the same. Meaning there was *no difference* in cardiovascular-related incidences no matter how much sodium the study participants consumed.

What salt can do for you

This study, and others before it, shows that the truth about salt and sodium is more complicated than simple-minded advice to cut, cut, cut.

And as the science catches up, some of the misconceptions are being unwound.

Sodium is a mineral that's naturally present in salt and some healthy foods. It's even considered an *essential* nutrient because the body *needs* it for nerve and muscle function, to maintain the proper balance of water and minerals, and to manage blood pressure.

Low-sodium diets have been shown in experimental laboratory studies to increase the rate of atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries. This can in turn lead to high blood pressure and heart disease.

But, as I mentioned earlier, for the vast number of people whose blood pressure is in the normal range, some scientific evidence has shown that lowering salt intake is just as likely to *increase* blood pressure as it is to *reduce* it (or to have no effect at all).

Not to mention, when you cut back inappropriately on an essential mineral like sodium, it may trigger physiologic processes and hormones that can stress the cardiovascular system.

One of those hormones is insulin, which is why some studies show that

low-salt diets can increase your risk of obesity (insulin is stored in fat) and Type II diabetes.

Individual salt needs can vary

The bottom line is that we all need to consume salt. The healthiest ways to do so depend on the sources—and on your individual body and needs. As always, there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution.

Some people can handle plenty of salt with no effect on their blood pressure. Their kidneys simply eliminate extra salt and other excess electrolytes.

Other people may be more salt-sensitive. Their kidneys may kick into overdrive to help regulate fluid and electrolytes—which may result in increased blood pressure.

Unfortunately, there's no test to determine if you're salt sensitive. But there *is* a way to help ensure you don't consume excess salt—no matter what your body type may be.

How? Get your salt from natural, whole food sources—and NOT from unhealthy, highly processed foods.

It really is *that* simple. (No, you don't have to rely on medical myths and broad, unfounded claims from so-called “nutrition experts.”)

Of course, this recommendation is important for all essential nutrients. But here's why it's particularly vital for salt and sodium...

How to get sodium naturally—and safely

There are a variety of foods that are good sources of sodium, including:

- Meat
- Eggs
- Dairy
- Fruits (like apples, avocados, bananas, melons, pineapple, and pears)
- Vegetables (like beets, celery, carrots, tomatoes, and spinach)

But, sadly, many people get most

of their sodium from junk or snack foods—which are processed with *added* salt.

As you know, I believe there's no place in a healthy diet for these ultra-processed, fake foods. Not only because of their high sodium content, but also because they're often loaded with added sugars and chemical ingredients.

And buyer beware: Even regular table salt may be full of toxins.

Refined salt is often chemically treated to improve its appearance and shelf life. Some of the artificial ingredients found in refined table salt include ferro-cyanide, ammonium, and aluminum compounds (doesn't sound good, does it?).

By contrast, unrefined sea salt contains not only sodium, but other essential minerals like magnesium, calcium, and potassium. And because it doesn't have to be processed like table salt, it's usually toxin-free.

So, my advice is to get your essential sodium intake *naturally* from foods

The iodine conundrum

One of the unintended consequences of the relentless campaign to reduce salt intake is a growing deficiency in iodine.

This essential mineral is key for thyroid and hormone function. It's particularly important for fetal and infant development—which is a big reason why, for decades, iodine has been added to refined table salt.

But, as I mentioned above, unhealthy chemicals may also be added to table salt. So, while eating less refined salt lowers your levels of iodine, it also helps keep you safe from toxins.

The good news is that iodized salt is not the only way to add this essential mineral to your diet. Iodine is naturally found in seaweed and animal proteins, including fish and seafood. Full-fat dairy, eggs, beef, and poultry are also great sources.

and a moderate use of sea salt.

Better yet? If you avoid processed Frankenfoods, you likely won't

have to worry about excess sodium consumption in the first place.

Now, that's a dietary recommendation

that's actually worth its salt. 

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Personal anecdote of the month: My own drug independence

In honor of the July 4th holiday, I'd like to share how I achieved my own type of independence three years ago...

Independence from drugs and other dangerous medications big pharma pushes.

Here's how I did it...

It all started with a doctor I could trust.

I have a fantastic primary care/internal medicine physician who has been taking care of my family—first my in-laws, then myself and my own family—for 40 years and counting.

He's open-minded, keeps up with the science, and respects his patients' wishes and concerns. He listens and pays attention.

Throughout the years, we have discussed my concerns about statin drugs and the cholesterol/heart disease hypothesis. He has listened and read the scientific articles I've brought him (including some I've published myself).

We've discussed concerns about contamination of generic blood pressure drugs (like Losartan and the related class of drugs from China). We've never even considered the disastrous ACE inhibitors like Lisinopril.

But, of course, issues like high cholesterol and high blood pressure present a dilemma for honest, well-meaning, diligent doctors, just as they do for patients.

Certainly, true high blood pressure (that's not resulting from the anxiety of being in the doctor's office) does need to be managed.

Same with high blood sugar.

And as wonderful as metformin is for lowering blood sugar (probably by acting both inside the gastrointestinal [GI] tract and within the bloodstream),

it interferes with vitamin B12 absorption.

(Insufficient vitamin B causes peripheral neuropathy. This typically creates ongoing numbness, pain, or weakness in the hands and feet. And, ironically, high blood sugar also causes it. So, if you're taking metformin for high blood sugar, you can end up between the devil and the deep blue sea. Another drug dilemma, even for the best of drugs.)

Then, between one thing and another, I experienced an episode of persistent GI bleeding the weekend of July 4, 2019.

I've written before about how July is like a perfect storm of lapses in hospital practice, so I wasn't about to go into the hospital for bleeding that weekend.

Instead, I hooked myself up to a blood pressure monitor to make sure it didn't drop to dangerous levels from blood loss. Fortunately, I stayed in the normal range.

I also stopped taking all prescription drugs—because who knows if they were contributing to my GI bleeding.

I did continue taking my own Smart Science dietary supplement formulations that are right for me.

My bleeding soon stopped, and I continued to stay completely off prescription drugs for blood pressure and blood sugar. (I concentrated on taking my own formulations instead.)

The next time I saw my doctor, he reported my laboratory values were all completely normal (although there continued to be discussions about cholesterol, despite our concerns about statin drugs).

Fast forward to several months ago, I developed some stress-related health concerns (like so many people with all of the disruptions caused by COVID and

other issues) together with the sudden deaths of very close family members.

My blood pressure went up a little (for my age), so I took just one half of a single dose of an old-standby generic blood pressure drug. But my blood pressure plummeted to 100/70 mmHg—which was way too low. So, I quickly stopped that experiment.

Then, I went to see my wonderful doctor. I told him about my experiences.

He was respectful, but as a modern practicing physician, he was concerned about me not taking any of the standard prescriptions. (No blood pressure drugs, no blood sugar drugs, no statins.)

I told him I was managing my conditions through diet, weight loss (35 pounds down), and carefully following the science on botanical remedies, vitamins, and minerals. He then took a full battery of blood tests.

Every single reading was normal. Normal hemoglobin A1C (long-term measure of blood sugar). Normal liver tests. Normal kidney tests. Sufficient vitamin B and D levels.

And my "bad" cholesterol was a historic low, at 107—the biggest surprise of all!

Now, I don't advise anyone to stop taking any prescription drug cold turkey. But I do offer the following...

Be careful about drugs. Be diligent, ask questions, and enlist the help of an experienced health professional before you tweak your regimen. It may be extra work, but in my view, it's worth it.

After all, with the right diet, lifestyle, dietary supplements, and professional guidance, you too may be able to declare your own type of health independence this July 4th—and beyond.