

Interview with Keyvan Golestaneh M.A., L.Ac. (Part 1)

Practitioner of Chinese medicine and structural bodywork, healer, yoga teacher, psychotherapist, and anthropological critic

What is holistic natural medicine? Is it able to replace “conventional” medicine? Is it enough for our needs?

Keyvan Golestaneh: Natural medicine has a very long history; it isn't new. There are some forms, such as Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine, which go back approximately 5,000 years, and in Western naturopathic tradition going, which go back about 150 years. Basically, we can define it as the use of natural means to treat disease and prevent illness. But more importantly, these systems point to a possible approach that would not treat symptoms or cure disease. In modern times, it typically refers to the use of herbal remedies and dietary recommendations, as well as homeopathic medication, as well as the use of modalities like massage used individually or in conjunction with each other. I use it in a broader sense to also include exercise, lifestyle changes, energetic techniques, and even mind- and consciousness-altering practices. Disciplines like psychotherapy can be included as part of this larger approach that I take.

So natural medicine becomes truly holistic or whole when it treats the whole person, when the mind, body, emotions, and spirit are not considered separately from each other and from the non-human environment. It assumes a different view of nature and the human body, one that has an innate intelligence functioning as a whole. Nature self-organizes itself. This has radical

implications for how we look at disease, illness, social and psychological problems. Understanding how this self-organizing intelligence works enables us to affect it in order to create the conditions for health. We would no longer focus on disease but on facilitating change, transformation and creating health and wellness.

Biomedicine or conventional medicine (sometimes referred to as allopathy) separates the mind, body, and emotions. As part of a scientific endeavor, biomedicine takes an analytic quantitative approach. It views human beings as complex material biological object, which can be isolated and reduced into parts and physiological, genetic, and chemical processes. Biomedicine is very different from, for example, the Asian medicinal paradigm (acupuncture being one modality), which models humans in terms of qualities, elements and energetic relationships. Each has a very different model of nature and the body. Biomedicine treats disease and the symptoms of disease, not the causes. A truly holistic approach would also treat the causes of illness as well as looking at the context in which it occurs.

One of the great strengths of conventional biomedicine is its ability to treat emergencies: heart surgery, appendicitis, broken bones, as well as its use of technology for diagnosis. It has a very sophisticated understanding of physio-chemical processes and working parts of the body, but not the whole in itself: its connection (interdependence) to

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the social, non-human environment and non-material realm. Holistic natural approaches have proven themselves more effective than conventional medicine in the prevention of illness and treatment of chronic health problems. Because the focus of some systems of natural holistic medicine is on what health is as opposed to disease they are better suited to educating people in how to create health and therefore prevent disease and illness.

You are interested in helping people learn to live a healthier life and about natural ways to heal. But there are many people that don't know or really accept an approach other than conventional Western medicine and pharmaceutical drugs.

KG: The approach to health and healing I am talking about doesn't completely replace the conventional medicine, although in many cases it is more effective. For some people it will complement conventional medicine, what I call biomedicine. In most cases, natural remedies and methods can replace pharmaceutical and technologically-based medicine, except in extreme cases and where diseases has progressed to an advance stage. In most areas of the United States, Canada and Western Europe, it is now possible to find the expertise and resources, like natural products, needed for a natural holistic approach.

The principle point I want to make is that a truly effective "whole" or "integral" medicine must be based on any accurate understanding of natural laws of life and how to create health, not just treat disease. To accomplish this, medicine must also be oriented towards education. If people live in a healthful manner and, especially, maintained a diet appropriate to their body, they wouldn't have to turn to medication in the first place. In most cases, the health problems that are currently treated by pharmaceutical drugs can be prevented or treated naturally through dietary means,

lifestyle changes, and natural-based supplements and herbal medicine. It's really a matter of education and transforming how the medical system works.

We should also understand that if a person who has the resources cannot make the appropriate changes to create health for themselves, then it is likely that they either do not want to do so or that there are emotional and psychological factors preventing them from doing so. This is truly "Pro-Life!"

Can you give us some key suggestions for creating a healthy life?

KG: Well, that could take up the whole interview, but I could point to what I consider some of the most important areas: diet, stress, mental, and spiritual health.

First, in order to remain healthy and prevent diseases, diet and proper nutrition are of PRIMARY importance. We are a FOOD BODY. I cannot over state this. No other single human activity affects people and their health as much as what we eat. Excluding geography, socio-cultural, and economic factors, for the most part we can control our diet. Most health problems and illness

can be avoided and/or treated directly through dietary means. Given the opportunity and means the body will self-correct (heal) itself; the correct diet help facilitate that process.

Most disease develops because of the body's incapacity to function properly. The body becomes overwhelmed from over-stimulation, toxicity, stress and enervation and starts to break down. This can be avoided by preventing toxic buildup and overstimulation of the nervous system. Even genetic predispositions to particular diseases can be prevented through the right diet. Diet also directly affects our emotional life and mental health, which in turn affects how we feel about our world. This shows how the mind, body and psyche are intimately connected and part of a

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greater feedback loop.

Stress (both mental and physical) is the other key factor that affects our health. People underestimate the impact of stress. Stress can be both internally generated, or outwardly initiated. In either case it has the same impact depending on how a person responds to it. All sorts of activities come into play here, like sleep and relationships. If stress can't be avoided, then people should find ways to effectively manage it.

We also must consider the spiritual dimension. What transcends the individual person (the “transpersonal”), the non-material realm, is what gives life meaning. It is the context within which humans exist. It is our connection to each other and the greater universe. (This is what “religion” is supposed to provide.) This dimension can also be felt, it is not just a psychic and mental connection. People do not exist in isolation and without this connection life becomes dis-eased. So maintaining a connection to the “transpersonal” is also key to health and wellbeing.

These are the keys to a healthy life: if they are considered and taken into account in how we live our lives, then most health and even social problems can be prevented or at least lessened to a great extent.

Could you say more about diet and its effect on the body. What should we keep in mind? How do we know what are the right foods to eat?

KG: There are many diets promoted in our society. People no longer grow up with a diet passed down to them from a long cultural tradition—past generations. In my experience, it's important to know that no single diet fits all people, even though there are many diet trends, fashions, and books available that claim otherwise. How can every diet on the market be correct? That's logically and scientifically impossible. The reason I believe you find people claiming that one diet

works so well for them and others do not is exactly because different people have different needs. We have different body types, genetic backgrounds, different metabolisms—all of which mean we require different diets. There may not be one diet good for everyone, but there are basic principles we can all follow that apply to everyone. First, you have to have a good balance between proteins, carbohydrates, and fats (the macronutrients). The proportions will vary from one person to another depending on their metabolism. When this balance is individually selected and maintained, our body functions optimally.

Many people in the United States overemphasize protein and carbohydrates and think that all fats are “bad.” This is an example of how society and popular culture influence our beliefs and behavior. It is also an example of how the mainstream medical establishment misleads the public based on the authority it has acquired. The public has been educated through schools, mainstream popular media (which dominates most Western culture), and government institutions into thinking that “fat” is bad and that we need a lot of protein to be healthy. That is scientifically inaccurate, and the belief is perpetuated through cultural habits and economic factors.

The foods we eat also need to be easily processed and the waste eliminated in order to prevent toxic buildup in the body. (Remember what I said about toxicity and disease?) Processed foods are very popular in so-called “developed” economic systems. Unfortunately, much of the world is moving in this direction. Processed foods have little nutritional value and cannot be easily metabolized by the body, which results in toxic build-up.

Another key factor in health is the pH levels (the balance between acid and alkaline in the body). Many of the foods people eat create a highly acidic internal environment. High acidic pH levels interfere with cel-

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lular function and further toxic buildup. This is especially true if one eats de-natured or processed foods. To use a mechanical analogy: just as a oil or air filter in a car or home needs to be cleaned or changed on a regular basis, so too does the body need to be cleansed on a regular basis. A cleansing process naturally occurs in the body as long as it is not interfered with. In order not to interfere with that process we need to consume bio-available whole foods, which makes digestion, assimilation and elimination easier. Water is a natural cleanser and hydrates the body. It's VERY important, since the body is over 70% water! Unfortunately, most people don't realize the importance of drinking enough natural water.

Cooking is a very popular topic. What about how we prepare or cook our food?

KG: People are very concerned with taste and because of many people's lifestyle, speed and ease of cooking have become very important. What most people don't realize is that taste is acquired, not pre-given or pre-determined. Our bodies often crave certain tastes and foods because they have adapted to them and because of internal physiological imbalances people crave certain tastes and textures. Our body is essentially an adaptive organism. That is how we became what we are as a species. Just as we've adapted to certain foods (because of culture, geography, and history), people can also un-adapt or re-adapt to other, more healthy foods.

Most people think that cooking foods is necessary in order to eat and digest, but that isn't the case. We are the ONLY species that cooks its own food! So what does that say? It doesn't mean that we are better than other species. Cooking food is an acquired cultural habit and taste—an example of adaptation. There is a downside to cooked foods. All chemical reactions in the body depend on enzymes. Digestion, for example,

cannot occur without enzymes. Processed and de-natured foods have little or no enzymes. When foods are cooked over 104 degrees, the enzymes are destroyed. Cooking also creates toxins. We can only get enzymes from uncooked and unprocessed foods if we take a supplement, so it's better to include raw foods in our diet. Cooking foods also depletes them of many essential vitamins and minerals. But if you are used to a mostly cooked diet it takes time to adapt to uncooked foods.

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What about meat and animal products?

KG: Eating too many cooked animal products isn't healthy for a number of reasons: it increases acidity (pH) in the body, they have high levels of saturated fat, and they can contribute too much protein in a diet. Red meat in particular has high levels of iron and the iron oxidizes in the body. It's just like metal that will rust. The body will rust and age faster. If a person is set on eating meat, one option is to eat raw animal products, but you have to know the source and quality, which is not always easy to do. Most people also think that you can only obtain protein from animal products, and that's really not true. You can find your protein requirement from specific vegetable products (hemp seeds and micro-algae are among the best examples).

Another factor meat eaters should consider is the social and ethical dimension of meat eating. Is it really necessary to kill so many animals for nutrition if you can live on non-animal foods? And what about the ecological and social dimensions of meat based diets? I recommend a vegetable-sourced diet.

People should change their diet, and while this can take a lot of time, it will ultimately save time and money in the long run, than people don't have to spend so much money on health problems, including doctors, therapies, medications, laxatives, and stimulants for more energy.

What is your opinion about nutritional supplements (vitamins, minerals, enzymes, etc.)? This industry is growing quiet rapidly.

KG: It is preferable to obtain one's nutrition from the foods one eats, but this isn't always possible in today's world, especially given environmental depletion. Much of the soil in the United States and Europe has been depleted of minerals. Minerals are often under emphasized in nutrition. Fertilizers are still the norm in agriculture, which can further deplete over-cultivated soil. Organic food is of course preferable, but even if you can find it, nourishing supplements are sometimes necessary because of the lack of minerals or specific deficiencies in the body. In some cases, we may need to supplement our diet even for everyday nutritional needs. It is best to consult a professional

about what supplements we actually do need, rather than following what advertisements recommend. If you choose to take vitamins, you should take whole food-based ones and not the synthetic supplements.

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So-called “natural” supplements aren't as bio-available (absorbable by the body). The body has to be able to use what it takes in. Whole food-based supplements are more bio-available. In many cases, you are literally throwing your money away by taking non food-based vitamins and mineral supplements. When it comes to mineral supplementation, ionic solutions are more easily absorbed by the body.

You should always take the things you really need and not be misled by “hip” advertisements, popular media and health fads—including those from the so-called “green” health industry. For that, you need the advice of professionals and specialists. The health food and supplement industry has become compromised through misleading information and economics or marketing.

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