

## A Hypochondriac's Guide to Healthy Living

I own a 20-pound pillow. Yes, for sleeping.

Not everyone can make this claim, or would want to. The reason for its impressive weight is because it's a water-pillow, designed for gullible geezers like me who think it may help an aching neck. Oddly, I think it might.

I impulsively purchased the pillow while at the chiropractor one day – there was a display in the lobby. Besides making my neck feel better - I think - I also maintain hopes of being invited to a pillow fight someday where I can bring my own. One swing would pretty much end it.

I don't remember a water pillow being an option back in the 1970's when I owned a waterbed. I was in college and bought one partly because it was trendy, and partly because I thought it might improve my odds of someday no longer being my bed's sole occupant.

Instead, I learned three lessons: 1) Having a waterbed did not improve my love life, 2) There are few things more unsettling than waking up in a shallow pool of warm water, and 3) Never startle a cat that is sitting on a waterbed. Those last two lessons may be related.

I began going to a massage therapist for similar reasons as visiting the chiropractor; the hope that nagging aches and pains might magically disappear. It occurred to me last week that my recent visits to a new masseuse incremented by one the number of grown women who have seen me naked. I can still count them all (including my mother) on one hand, a testament to the negligible attraction of waterbeds for college-aged women.

Like everyone else, I swore years ago that I wouldn't let aches and pains be my primary topic of conversation when I became older, but it has happened to me. Exponentially worse, I'm actually interested in hearing about other peoples' ailments, and what they're doing about them.

It could be because I have a nagging fear – now that something different seems to hurt every day – that I may have an obscure ailment that I might be able to diagnose just by listening to others' complaints. I also listen intently to drug

companies' TV commercials for the same reason. When the ad is over, I ask LuAnn (my RN spouse), "what disease does that treat, and do you think I might have it?"

I can somehow watch a 60-second drug commercial to the end and not be able to determine what it's for. The only commercial I'm sure about features the woman doing the talking on a bed. The 30 seconds it takes to recite the required list of side-effects seems to be identical for every drug; nausea, constipation, diarrhea, drowsiness, pain, rash, dizziness, death. For stiffness lasting more than four hours, see your doctor.

I somehow already exhibit many of these symptoms although I don't take any prescription drugs. That may be a good reason to take them; I'm already experiencing the side-effects.

Unfortunately, I have a new doctor who has a very irritating habit of not recommending any vaccines, drugs or treatments that don't have documented and clear-cut benefits. By my way of thinking he could at least be pretending to treat my imaginary diseases with imaginary drugs.

In case you're wondering, I'm not a hypochondriac; I'm just abnormally anxious about my health.

My knowledge of the existence of germs and microbes is not helping. The thought that there are living creatures on every surface I touch that have the sole purpose in life of making me sick is making me crazy. Oh, by the way, they're invisible.

Anyway, all the new drugs out there are confusing; I guess I'll take the commercials' advice and ask my doctor if they are right for me. And maybe also my financial planner – those things ain't cheap.

*Writer's Group member Dave Parsons doesn't cover his computer keyboard with Kleenex yet, but he fears that day is coming.*