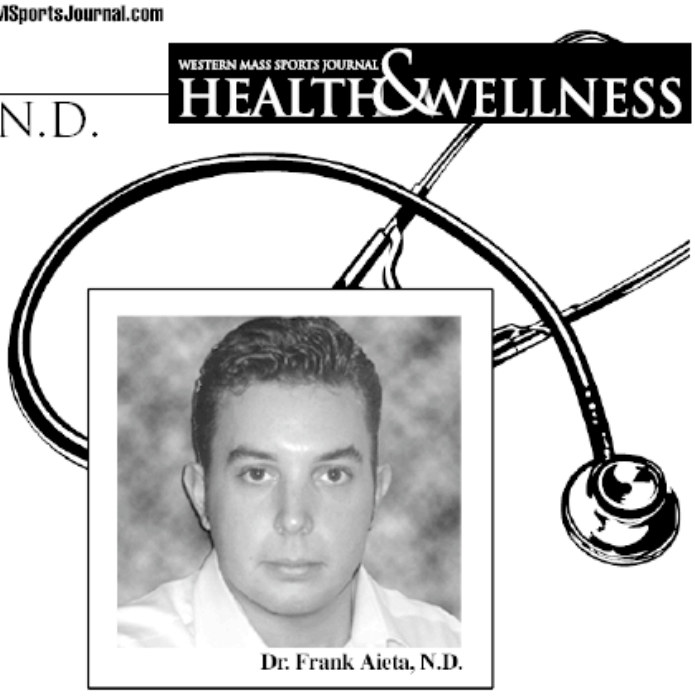
STAYING HEALTHY
WITH DR. AIETA, N.D.

FROM CARPAL TUNNEL TO POISON IVY



Dr. Frank Aieta, N.D.

Dear Dr. Aieta,

I was recently diagnosed with something called carpal tunnel syndrome. I work at a computer all day long and noticed numbness and tingling and pain in my wrist and fingers. I have been working at a computer for a number of years without a problem until now. I went to a doctor who specializes in this condition, and he said my only option was surgery to release some of the pressure on the nerve in my wrist.

Before I decide to do the surgery, is there anything natural that I could try first to help with this problem.

Debra C.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a very common problem and usually occurs in people who perform repetitive activities with a flexed or extended wrist. It is more commonly seen in women between the ages of 40 and 60, and a higher incidence is seen in pregnant women, women on oral contraceptives and menopausal women. So, knowing the patient's complete history is very important in terms of identifying a proper treatment plan, but I will offer some general recommendations.

One of the first things that I recommend to a patient with carpal tunnel is a trial of the vitamin B6 in conjunction with the other B-vitamins. A B6 deficiency has been shown to cause symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome, and clinically I have seen that using the vitamin supplement works in almost half the cases I treat. Since inflammation and swelling are present in carpal tunnel syndrome, a simple yet effective way to help reduce this is through something called contrast hydrotherapy. This consists of immersing the effected wrist in hot water for three minutes followed by cold for 30 seconds, repeated three to five times. This treatment increases local circulation, thereby decreasing swelling and pain.

I also recommend a trial of some natural anti-inflammatory herbs such as bromelain, boswellia and curcumin, in combination, for at least 10 days taken three to four times daily.

Finally, one of the best treatments I have found to relieve the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome is acupuncture. A study done in 1990 showed that a positive response was demonstrated in 35 of 36 patients with carpal tunnel syndrome after a series of acupuncture treatments. The interesting thing about this study was that 14 of the patients were previously treated unsuccessfully with surgery.

In my practice, I use a combination of all of these treatments with great success in addition to manual manipulation of wrist bones and having the patient do specific wrist stretching exercises, especially before repetitive activities. Actually, in all of the years I've been seeing carpal tunnel syndrome patients, I have been fortunate and never had to refer one for surgery.

Dear Dr. Aieta,

My son works for a landscaping company every summer, and every summer without fail he gets poison ivy. He is usually miserable for several weeks and, if it gets bad enough, he even has to take steroids for the itching and inflammation. Is there anything that he could do to lessen his reaction to it and reduce his symptoms, besides the steroids?

David L.

Poison ivy is actually a contact dermatitis that occurs when a person's skin comes into contact with the resin of the plant. Washing with rubbing alcohol within 15 minutes of contact will usually prevent the dermatitis (water alone does not work).

If rubbing alcohol is not available, beer or other beverages containing alcohol work just as well. In the case of your son, who may come into contact with it multiple times throughout the course of a day, it may be hard for him to keep washing his body in rubbing alcohol. For these people, I recommend a product called Stokogard; it's from Sweden and is available in most pharmacies for about $6. It is a cream that forms a barrier that the resin cannot penetrate, and it must be applied before exposure to the plant. It's said to be 95 percent effective against poison-ivy induced dermatitis and can last up to 10 hours between applications.

For patients who do end up getting poison ivy, the first thing I recommend is a homeopathic remedy called Rhus Tox. Homeopathic medicine is based on the concept of like curing like, so this treatment remedy is actually a highly diluted form of poison ivy. I find it to be very effective in many cases.

Rhus Tox can be taken orally up to four times a day until symptoms start to subside. For topical treatment, I have patients use an herbal-based lotion called calendula. It helps prevent infection, especially after scratching, and promotes quick healing.

Finally, many patients find relief from holding a blow dryer over their lesions. The heat helps dry the vesicles and temporarily relieves itching in some cases for up to eight hours.

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board certified and licensed Naturopathic Physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com, or visit www.DrAieta.com for additional information.

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