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Doctor DeMarco Answers Your Questions

By Carolyn DeMarco, M.D.
Well Woman Press, 2000. \$19.95
ISBN 0-9694766-4-7
Order direct: 1-877-871-9361

Carolyn DeMarco, M.D., has long been a progressive force in healthcare and an early advocate for patients adopting a take-charge attitude when it comes to their health. This proactive stance is reflected in the accumulated knowledge she shares in her most recent book, *Doctor DeMarco Answers Your Questions*.

The oldest of nine children in an Italian-Canadian family, Carolyn DeMarco received her medical degree from the University of Toronto in 1972. She soon helped pioneer the natural-child-birth movement and the training of lay midwives. Dr. DeMarco currently maintains a part-time medical practice in Toronto, writing and speaking regularly about alternative medicine with an emphasis on women's health issues. Her first book, *Take Charge of Your Body: Women's Health Advisor*, was acclaimed as one of the best resources for women's



health published in Canada.

In DeMarco's latest effort, the topics are based on questions that she encountered while touring Canada. Subjects are grouped in several sections:

alternative medicine; natural remedies for common health problems; special topics; diet and supplements; cancer; women's health; and gift suggestions. Topics range from acne, asthma, breast cancer and chronic fatigue to trauma, tryptophan, ulcers and yeast infections.

The book is very specific, presenting answers to patients' questions. For example, the one under the heading

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"Diet Key to Managing Irritable Bowel Syndrome" reads: "I'm 29 years old, and have been suffering from severe cramps and diarrhea for about three years. This usually occurs within minutes after eating any meal, spicy or not. I went to a family doctor and she just shrugged it off

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as irritable bowel syndrome. I eat well and take supplements. Could birth control pills be causing my problem?"

Dr. DeMarco doesn't think birth control pills are a common cause of the described symptoms. She suggests that the young woman find a gastroenterologist to do a complete set of investigations confirming an IBS diagnosis and then seek out a naturopath to supervise her care. DeMarco also advises that diet is key to managing your health. She recommends Elaine Gotschall's book, *Breaking the Vicious Cycle*, and provides a list of supplements and herbs.

DeMarco writes in a concise, yet not dumbed-down, style. A perfect example is the way in which, in the opening section, she quickly takes care of alternative medicine critics by comparing alternative to conventional medicine: "The two types of medicine do have something in common. Neither is strictly based on science and both make use of the placebo effect. The placebo effect is the positive effect brought about when both patient and doctor believe that a treatment will work. It is thought to comprise at least 40% of any treatment."

DeMarco goes on to discuss present-day practices in alternative medicine. These include aromatherapy, chiropractic, naturopathy, herbology, homeopathy, acupuncture and therapeutic touch.

DeMarco mentions many different researchers and clinicians, along with brief discussions of studies that back up her recommendations. In the section entitled "Coenzyme Q10 Essential for Treatment of Heart Disease," she describes how cardiologist and researcher Dr. Peter Langsjoen ranks the discovery of CoQ10, which is involved in the production of energy at the cellular level, as one of the "biggest advances of this century." Langsjoen asserts that his research refutes the common belief that a stiffening of the heart muscle is irreversible. DeMarco discusses some other CoQ10 findings, and then gives us details on

dosages, different forms and additional applications, such as in the treatment of chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia. "CoQ10 is one of the top six prescriptions written in Japan," she says. "If we pay attention to the Japanese experience, we will improve the health of many chronically ill patients and reduce health costs as well."

DeMarco focuses on a variety of women's health issues, such as mammograms, menopause and endometriosis, a condition affecting a growing number of women. In the section "Endo Underdiagnosed and Difficult to Treat," she updates us on this condition, which involves uterine endometrial tissue growing in abnormal locations. She states: "Endometriosis may be the result of an autoimmune disease. ... Recent evidence has shown that the immune system of endometriosis patients is depressed. This includes dysfunction of T-cells, B-cells and natural killer cells."

DeMarco credits Mary Lou Ballweg, founder of the Endometriosis Association, for bringing to light evidence of a link between "radiation exposure and organochlorine exposure in the development of endometriosis." Ballweg found that in the mid-1960s NASA conducted a long-term study of the effects of ionizing radiation on monkeys: Endometriosis developed in 53% of the exposed monkeys. Dioxin, PCBs and furan are also implicated as possible causes. For more information, DeMarco recommends readers contact the Endometriosis Association.

Doctor DeMarco Answers Your Questions is a practical, well-indexed guide. The book shows DeMarco's commitment to making information accessible to everyone. As the publisher notes on the cover, "Information is power." And this is clearly an important part of DeMarco's health mission. ■

—GRACE VISCONTI

Grace Visconti is a shiatsu therapist, graphic designer and freelance writer living in Alberta, Canada.