

*the dark side of*  
**Preventive Medicine**

A few decades ago, preventive medicine was embraced by a small minority on the fringes of the general healthcare environment, where the focus was primarily on good nutrition, natural herbal support and exercise. Now, the phrase “preventive medicine” has become a trendy healthcare marketing approach that is used by everyone from corporate HMO's to the neighborhood acupuncturist. It's interesting to watch as a simple, natural concept suddenly becomes popularized and morphs into a much more complex creature. Part of this seems to be the buzz of the latest health fad, which includes the unspoken assumption that preventive medicine is good. Who would argue with that? Hmmmm... I wonder. Listening, internally and to others, it seems clear there is a dark side to preventive medicine.

By “dark side” I mean the unseen, unexplored, unconscious aspect of anything. It does not inherently mean bad, negative or wrong, only unknown. One of Carl Jung's great contributions to our emotional understanding focused on the shadow side of our lives, selves and personality as a way toward wholeness. Without exploring the unseen aspects, we can't have a realistic picture.

This can be challenging as there are numerous obstacles and much resistance to exploring the dark side of anything. The unknown may feel inherently scary: the deepest forest, unknown ocean depths, the far side of the moon. Yet, although challenging, exploring the dark side can be very useful toward insight and understanding about balance and harmony in our bodies, daily lives and world. A Taoist might explore this by asking: What is the natural way of preventive medicine?

Sitting with this reveals many qualities like: self care, nourishment and healing. These can include paying attention to subtle signs and symptoms before they progress into major disease. For example, awareness of the initial stages of a cold (scratchy throat, runny nose, achy joints) can prompt responses like more rest, no dairy and an herbal cold remedy. These actions attend to the cold in early stages, rather than ignoring it and then needing antibiotics for a sinus infection, bronchitis or pneumonia.

This preventive medicine approach supports the natural capacity of the body to deal with colds at simple, initial stages before they progress to more serious symptoms and impact. Sometimes, though, a curious twist can occur when the mind, brain or thinking jumps in with:

*Well, even better to prevent the cold from  
happening entirely.*

Something about the shift in approach, while still within the idea of prevention, includes implications that may be quite detrimental to better health. Why?

Preventing colds from happening ignores the natural functions of the body. The immune system operates by exposure to foreign (outside the body) cells, identifying, marking and destroying them and keeping a profile for future reference. Without the ongoing challenges of simple colds, the immune system does not engage, learn and grow with ongoing and constant changes in the natural environment. If this continues over time, the body's ability to respond weakens and becomes very susceptible to simple exposures that may produce serious or even deadly results.

Even though the rational brain knows this to be true, there still remains a desire, urge, craving to prevent the common cold. Why?

Sitting with this phenomenon over three decades of personal and professional practice leads me to explore the dark, unseen side of this preventive approach. Initially, many story details arise.

*I can't afford to be sick. I don't have time. I have to be at work or lose my job. My kids need me to... I don't have health insurance. Being sick proves I don't know how to take care of myself.*  
The list is long.

The details are many and vary with each person. A common quality is *fear*. Whether or not we are aware of the fear an almost immediate response is to attempt to control things. Most of these fears have many roots and tendrils that connect with a lifetime of colds, illness and weakness - all experiences we typically try to avoid, and ultimately control. Control jumps in as a

survival mechanism. If I can control this and this and this, then *that* won't happen. Or, *this* will happen. And so, the preventive medicine approach. Prevent a cold from happening and all of the unexplored fears won't have to be experienced.

But, what about cancer? Shouldn't we try to prevent cancer from occurring? Well, yes... and no. The immune system responds to abnormal cell growth like it does to cold viruses. A healthy and vibrant immune system is targeting and getting rid of abnormal cells as you read this article. Our big fear of cancer is the malignant tumor diagnosis and all its implications. Before that stage, the natural function of the body deals with it at simpler levels, *without us even knowing it occurs*.

Preventing cancer is a huge priority these days. However, if fear and control are the underlying energies, they significantly reduce the body's natural ability to deal with abnormal cells before they manifest tumors.

This is where the dark side of preventive medicine can be detrimental. Whether it is medications, vaccines, supplements, herbs, diet or exercise, if these are driven by underlying fear and control, the desire for better health is sabotaged.

Operating from fear constricts our natural ability to live life fully. Fear stimulates the sympathetic nervous system response of fight or flight. It can be very useful as a short term response to a life-threatening situation: a tiger chasing you in the jungle. As an ongoing response to colds, cancer or life it is a constant drain on all systems that subverts the body's natural abilities to respond to anything that arises. Left unchecked, the constant intensity of life lived by the sympathetic nervous response will actually create disease.

The deeper roots of fear and control are not limited to colds and cancer. They extend to many aspects of our lives, limiting our natural, full vibrancy. My kayak adventures make this clear on every journey. It is very obvious trying to control the boat, the water, the weather. Ha ha Ha! The time and energy spent in fear are useless and even detrimental to being able to respond to what arises when needed: to capsizing or strong winds, the eagle soaring or a beautiful sunrise over the water.

Awareness of fear, with a little grounding and processing, can easily transform into respect. We can learn respect for the process of the common cold and also respect for the body's natural way to respond. Respect for cancer, too. And respect for the river, jobs, relationships, etc.

Awareness of control, with a little grounding and processing, can easily transform into influence. Control may become a gateway to learn how we can influence the natural healing process with the common cold, cancer, the river, jobs, relationships or anything else in our lives.

Respect and influence seem to have much less charge, much less effort, stress and striving compared to fear and control. That subtle difference may feel like *ease*, which is the counterpart to dis-ease. Cultivating ease by noticing the impact of fear and control may be a very useful way to approach preventive medicine.

Preventive medicine is not bad. Exploring the dark side allows us to find a natural balance in our approach and what we do to support good health. It may be that the details don't change much; nutrition, supplements, exercise, yet relaxing the underlying fear, control or whatever can allow these approaches to be more effective. Balance. Harmony. These allow our bodies to function in their natural capacity to deal with things as they arise, whether colds or abnormal cells.

Transformation of fear into respect, control into influence can ripple throughout our bodies and daily lives. And then, seemingly spontaneously, life begins feeling fuller, more free, vibrant. Less dis-ease. More... laughter.



