Tieraona Low Dog, MD: EMPOWERING women's health

Interviewed & written by MayCay Beeler

She is a Modern Day Medicine Woman. A champion of women s health. Dr.T ieraona Low Dog is a breath of fresh air in the stiflingly stressfulw orldof21s tC enturyw omandom.

At a time when women are reaching new heights and feeling exhaustion in the process, we can become depleted and despondent. As the world s designated caregivers, we are experts at nurturing others, yet often fall short when it comes to ourselves. And that can spell disaster in managing one s personal healthcare. But we can spell healthier words in the vocabulary of our bodies and souls; we can learn better and do better through the wisdom of physicians like Tieraona Low Dog. A doctor whose expertise is the female well being, Low Dog offers solid evidence-based guidance in complementary and alternative therapies for keeping girls, daughters, women, mothers, and grandmothers at the top of their game health-wise throughev eryphas eoflife.

T he biggest health challenge is trying to live a balanced life. I don't mean a life with no ups and downs - but one thatis res ilientd uringc hange.

And Dr. Low Dog should know. With a full plate of varied and impressive life experiences, she knows resiliency well. The good doctor with the unusual name, *L ike a coyote, a dog low to the groundone that crouches while hunting. It indicates a scout,* is an accomplished physician with a list of honors and distinctions so long it will make you blearyey ed. This clinician and educator, with over 25 years of studying natural medicine under her belt, has been involved in national health policy and regulatory issues for more than a decade. She was appointed by President Bill Clinton to serve on the White House Commission of Complementary and Alternative Medicine, and has served as a member of the Advisory Council for the National Institutes of Health National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Low Dog has been named *Time Magazine s* Innovator in Complementary and Alternative Medicine . Just a taste of the many career highlights that have taken flight from her roots in the deserts outhwest.

I have spent most of my life in New Mexico – the home of my heart. I love the people, the architecture, the clothing, the mountains. There is no sky like the sky in New Mexico. There is something magical about northern New Mexico ... mystical, haunting, beautiful. I feel at my best when I am in my desert mountains amongst the towering pines and quaking aspen. It is here that I am able to hear my own voice most clearly.

A voice that is now heard far and wide boasting the benefits of the roles complementary and alternative medicine play in women s health. An internationally known speaker, Low Dog is a familiar face on television, and, as an author, has 30 publications to her credit. She opened and ran a successful integrative medical clinic in Albuquerque, NM before joining the faculty of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona where she currently serves as the Director of the

Fellowship.

T he division between conventional and traditional medicine is as artificial as the division between science and nature. They can be woven together in a fashion that meets our physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. This is the foundation upon which integrative medicine is built.

And the foundation upon which her passion to empower women s health standss trong.

The statuesque beauty of Lakota/ Comanche and Anglo-American descent says that long before she went to medical school, she was deeply influenced by her exposure to the medicines of the Lakota, Navajo, Oklahoma nations, as well as those of the Mexican/ Spanish in the desert southwest. Low Dog says there are important lessons to be learned herein volving the conceptofbalance .

W hile there is no such thing as "Native American" medicine just like there is no European medicined ifferent tribes had different healing systems. They all have the concept that imbalance can lead to disease and/or suffering. And the imbalance generally stems from not living in accordance with nature or God's laws. Harmony is essential to well-being. I believe that there is much truth to this philosophical stance, though, I also do not believe that every person that gets cancer is imbalanced. Lightening strikes the good person, as wellas t heb ad.

Low Dog s areas of expertise are extensive, covering disciplines from all over the world. Martial arts have been a passion since she was a teenager. It opened the doorway to Eastern philosophy,acup unctureandherbalmedicine.

I went to massage school in my early 20s, and was blessed to witness the miracle of new life when I apprenticed as a midwife. I believe that all of these experiences led to the philosophical approach that I have towards health, illness and healing today. Put quite simply, I believe the body has an amazing capacity for self-healing if we give it what it needs andd on td ot oomuc ht oget init sw ay.

I believe that there are multiple causes of illness and disease and that there are also multiple paths to healing. This is why I practice and teach Integrative Medicine. At its foundation, Integrative Medicine is about a different way of being with a patient. It is about listening carefully to her story and as the story unfolds, connections are made, insights gained, and the foundation for healing laid. Two women transitioning through menopause may view treatment options very differently. One chooses to take hormones because she believes it makes her feel strong and looking young. Another may say that every time she swallows the pills, she feels it is feeding a breast cancer. Each woman has a unique set of experiences and beliefs that informs her decisions. The skilled practitioner elicits, honors and validates her experience and beliefs – weighing them carefully while crafting a cohesive and effective treatmentp lan.

When asked about examples of alternative medicine treatment plans that she has witnessed that significantly improving a patient's health, Low Dog responds, *T here are too many. Like the person who comes in on blood pressure and cholesterol medications and can go off them all after changing their diet, eliminating salt, adding magnesium, drinking hibiscus tea, doing meditation and losing weight. Or a close friend who had lung cancer (never smoked) and went through chemotherapy and still was told she had a high probability of recurrence. During her chemo and after she went on an anti-inflammatory diet, she took appropriate supplements, and started getting some energy work done as part of her healing.T hat was 3 years ago and there is no sign of recurrence and she looks and feels better than she has in 20 years. Or the 5 year old with horrible eczema and allergies who was 80% better once she eliminated all dairy in the diet, started on some digestive enzymes and took probiotics. The change wasd ramatic.*

May you never be in need of dramatic change. May you know only optimal health and balance. To help you achieve this, Dr. Low Dog offers the following guidelines for navigating the phasesoflife:

C hildren/Teens *Teach children at a young age to love wholesome foods – the palate is trained early. Make food funand enjo yable so that they will grow having a healthy relationship with it. Give them a multivitamin, fish oil and vitamin D. These fill in the gaps. Children need time to play. Don t structure all their time. It is okay to be bored sometimes. This is when imagination often springs into being. Take them outside often. Children need sun. Let them dig in the dirt. Play with puppies. Teach your children out of love, not anger. Let them fall. There is strength learning early that you can get back up. With freedom*

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comes responsibility. Make sure you give them the right dose of both. Eat dinner together. Foster conversation. Listen to their stories. Have dates with your teens. Nurture and nourish their bodies and their spirits. They need sleep – encourageit .

P regnancy*M ake sure to take a prenatal vitamin if you are sexually active. You need to have folic acid, and other nutrients, onboard at the time of conception to prevent birth defects and help ensure a healthy pregnancy. Make sure you get enough vitamin D and fish oil, especially in the last trimester. Eat healthy foods. A Mediterranean style diet is a good model. Get extra sleep. Keep a journal. Write letters to your unborn child. Give them to your child on his or her 18th birthday. Find a doula to accompany you on your birth journey. They are a gift. Trust in the process. You cand ot his.*

Menopause *If you survived puberty, you can get through menopause. Just think of how much more you know now. Eat miso soup. Wear layers. Get extra sleep. Maintain a healthy weight. Take your multivitamin, vitamin D and fish oil. Practice deep regular breathing – it has been shown to help hot flashes. If you feel that hormone therapy would help, talk to your health care provider about transdermal estrogen and natural progesterone. Only you can know what isright fory ou.*

Aging *Life is not a sprint; it is a marathon. Plan accordingly. Keep your mind sharp. Read books, take a cooking class, or learn a new language. Move your body. Go for long walks. Eat a wholesome diet. Leave the table before you are full. Use dietary supplements and medications wisely. Maintain relationships. Be a good friend. Be merciful with yourself and others. Do good whenever possible. Leave the Earth a betterp lace.*

So what is the biggest health challenge women face today? Again, Dr. Low Dog says, it s all about trying to live abalancedlife.

Eat wholesome foods and stay off the junk. Exercise regularly, even if that is walking 30 minutes per day. Maintain a healthy weight and make time regularly to give thanks for the blessings in our lives. Living a balanced life also means being educated about the risk factors for diseasew hich are primarily diet and lifestyleand being proactive in reducing our risk. Women tell me they are too busy to exercise, too busy to cook, too busy to make time for themselves. If you think you are too busy to do the things that will stack the odds in your favor for reducing your risk of diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers, I would say you need to stop and re-evaluate. Life is always aboutp rioritiesa nd perception.

What is the most common mistake women make in managing their health care? Dr. Low Dog says it s not being proactive, but you already knew that nowdidn ty ou?

Y our health care provider is your partner in managing your health. You are the leader. You are responsible. Read up about any health conditions you have. Ask questions. Find a clinician you can talk with. Know your options. Takec harge.

And finally, in closing, the most important piece of advice Dr. Low Dog can offerw omenregarding health care:

Do not take care of yourself because it will make you a better wife, mother, employer, employee. Take care of yourself because you are no less than a child of God - you are precious. You arew orthcaringfor .

Visit Dr. Tieraona Low Dog's official webs iteatwww .drlowdog.com.

MayCay Beeler is a free lance journalist, award-winning TV personality, and professional pilot. She has worked as on-camera talent for TV Network affiliates ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, and Cable News. As a champion of flying, she has set world aviation records. Visit her web site at www.maycaybeeler.com

Dr. Low Dog will be the guest speaker at the Natural Triad/Wake Forest University School of Medicine Seminar Series on June 3. Her topic will be: Life in the Balance - Strategies for Optimal Health. Please see ad on page 23 for time and location.