The Eisenhower Wellness Institute

Empowering Women to Achieve Optimal Health

Annamaria Douglas and Hessam Mahdavi, MD

Just over a year ago, Annamaria Douglas began to notice feelings of lightheadedness.

"I'd bend over to blow-dry my hair and feel spacey," she recalls. At the time, Annamaria, 57, was working as the manager of the primary care practice of Hessam Mahdavi, MD, who practices at the Eisenhower Wellness Institute at the George and Julia Argyros Health Center in La Quinta. Board certified in Internal Medicine, he has extensive training in nutrition, integrative medicine and hormonal management issues for both women and men.

"Dr. Mahdavi would periodically have his clinical staff practice performing tests," Annamaria relates. "This particular week, we all had blood glucose tests, and Dr. Mahdavi talked to us about why monitoring blood sugar is important for women, especially as we reach mid-life."

This serendipitous blood sugar reading revealed that Annamaria was pre-diabetic.

"I was in total denial and insisted that the test must be wrong," she recalls. So Dr. Mahdavi had her drink two glasses of water and repeat the test 30 minutes later. Her blood sugar reading was even higher.

Dr. Mahdavi urged Annamaria to have a more extensive evaluation to get a more complete picture of her health.

"I hadn't had blood work done in two years," she admits.

Annamaria underwent a comprehensive integrative medicine consultation and assessment at the Eisenhower Wellness Institute, one of several specialized consultations offered at this innovative center that provides an individualized approach to health and wellness (see sidebar). Her tests revealed that she not only was borderline diabetic but also had high levels of inflammation in her body. At 160 pounds, she was overweight for her height, when her ideal weight was 120 pounds.

"I was tired all the time, cranky and had no motivation to do anything," Annamaria says. "My joints and lower back ached, especially in the morning. I really had let myself go."

"All these symptoms are related, and not uncommon in women at mid-life," explains Dr. Mahdavi. "To effectively treat these patients and help them improve their health, it's important to look at the patient as a whole.

"When someone comes in with elevated blood sugar, for example, we not only look at that but also cholesterol, blood pressure and lifestyle," he continues. "We want to know what each person is about, if there's stress at work and home, what they eat, how they sleep, their level of physical activity. It all directly affects their blood sugar and weight.

"Inflammation in the body is also a key component affecting health," he says, referring to the levels of C-reactive protein (CRP) in a person's blood. CRP is a normal protein that appears in higher amounts when there's inflammation somewhere in the body, and it can be an indicator of such conditions as heart disease, autoimmune disorders, arthritis or chronic stress.

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—Dr. Mahdavi

"We also look at various hormones," Dr. Mahdavi says, referring not only to reproductive hormones such as estrogen, progesterone and testosterone but also other key hormones such as thyroid (which affects metabolism) and cortisol (the "stress" hormone). All are critical to the function of virtually every system in the body.

"They all work together but must be in balance," he adds, noting that when there is too little or too much, it can have negative health effects. "This means that we have to look at the big picture, not just an isolated symptom such as high blood sugar."

It also means that treatment must be tailored to the individual patient.

"Not everyone benefits from the same approach," Dr. Mahdavi says.

In Annamaria's case, he recommended an anti-inflammation diet that eliminated sugar, dairy and wheat gluten, and included regular exercise and supplements to help manage food cravings and reduce inflammation.

"It wasn't easy to make these changes, but hearing that I was borderline diabetic scared me," she says. "I didn't want to start losing fingers and toes, or having to take insulin. I wanted to be around for a long time — not dead at 60 from something I could prevent."

Annamaria's motivation and willpower have paid off.

"The changes I made have changed my life," she says. "I feel so much better, and have more energy than ever. My last blood test showed that all inflammation is gone and I'm no longer in the pre-diabetic range — and that was achieved with no medication. My knees and back don't ache in the morning. And I've lost 38 pounds and kept it off for more than a year — I'm back into a size 4," she adds.

"Most of all, I feel a sense of empowerment," she continues. "I did it — I took control of my life. Being a mother, wife and grandmother, I spent my whole life taking care of someone else. And I was proof that when you do that, you tend to let yourself go because you're so focused on everyone else. But when you put yourself first, you can make yourself feel and look better. Dr. Mahdavi was a great coach."

"If a patient is motivated and wants to make changes and have a good quality of life, there are a lot of options out there," Dr. Mahdavi says, explaining that integrative medicine offers additional "tools" and choices. "We take a more holistic approach, take the time to get to the root causes of a patient's symptoms, and incorporate lifestyle changes including good eating habits, stress management and exercise."

"There's no such thing as a quick fix or magic bullet," he adds. "Integrative medicine isn't just about taking a few supplements or vitamins. It's about making changes for life. When patients are ready to do that, we're here to help them."

About the Eisenhower Wellness Institute

"Empowerment — that's the most important word to describe what we do here," says Patricia Avila, MD, Medical Director of the Eisenhower Wellness Institute. "We want to help women and men detect disease before it's symptomatic, get to the root causes of symptoms when they do occur, and suggest evidence-based lifestyle modifications that make a difference. "

"For people who want to learn about their health risks and what they can do to manage them, and participate in a supportive program that will help them achieve their wellness goals, we offer a wealth of options that empower them to do so," she adds.

These include an array of screenings:

- **Lifestyle Program for Weight Management** is an evidenced-based weight management program designed to provide long-term results for optimum success. The multi-specialty, inter-disciplinary program includes nutrition, exercise physiology, stress management, behavioral modification, and acupuncture. Individual and group programs are personalized and targeted to meet each individual's need.
- **The Executive Physical Program** provides a comprehensive four-hour health evaluation including preventive assessments, screenings tests and recommendations tailored to the individual
- **The Memory Assessment and Cognitive Fitness (MACF) Program** focuses on early detection and prevention of dementia, using cutting-edge research and technology
- **Integrative Medicine** provides consultation, assessment and recommendations blending conventional Western medicine with evidence-based complementary therapies — a best-of-both-worlds approach to treating the whole person
- **A Sports Medicine Consultation** addresses the unique issues surrounding athletic performance and injury, focusing on healing and a return to optimal functionality

Eisenhower Wellness Institute exams are not covered by insurance. For pricing information or to schedule an appointment, call the Eisenhower George and Julia Argyros Health Center at 760-610-7360.

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