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Natural Healing

With Dr. Mark Stengler

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DEEPER CURES FROM AMERICA'S TOP NATURAL PHYSICIAN

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THE MIRACLE OF MAGNESIUM

One patient had muscle cramps. Another had headaches. And a third had an irregular heartbeat. These were vastly different medical conditions, and yet the solution that I recommended for each patient was the same—*magnesium*. It helped each of these patients—and did so quickly.

Few nutrients possess the remarkable and diverse benefits of magnesium. It is the fourth most abundant mineral in cells after calcium, phosphorus and potassium. Magnesium is found in our bones...muscles...blood...and other tissues. It is needed by the body for energy production...fat and protein synthesis...muscle relaxation...nervous system function...and calcium metabolism.

According to US Department of Agriculture data, two out of every three Americans don't meet average daily intake requirements for magnesium, which are 300 milligrams (mg) to 420 mg daily for adults. In addition, many people have a magnesium deficiency due to stress...genetics...or a medication, such as a diuretic (usually taken to control blood pressure). As a consequence, these people face an increased risk for health problems. Maintaining adequate levels of magnesium can help reduce muscle cramps, stabilize blood sugar, lower the risk for heart disease, ease migraine headaches, strengthen bones and slow the aging process.

Consider one of my patients, Robert, who limped into my clinic. He

was suffering from painful leg-muscle spasms that woke him at night and plagued him during the day. Muscle spasms often are related to low magnesium. Since magnesium relaxes muscles, I started Robert on an intravenous (IV) drip of *magnesium sulfate*. Within an hour, the pain in his leg eased. I had Robert begin taking a daily magnesium supplement, which helped to reduce subsequent leg-muscle spasms.

Magnesium is so important that it is sometimes hyped as a miracle cure. *Truth:* Boosting magnesium levels can lead to recoveries that seem almost miraculous. *Here's how magnesium could help you...*

- **Muscle strength.** In addition to cramp relief, magnesium has many other muscle-related benefits. The reason that people often say that they feel an increase in energy after starting to take magnesium supplements is that the mineral is involved in the body's production of energy, most of which occurs in muscle cells. In a study conducted at the University of Palermo, Italy, researchers found that seniors with the highest levels of magnesium had the greatest muscle strength, including better grip strength, lower-leg muscle power, knee-extension torque and ankle strength. People with low magnesium levels had poor muscle function and strength.

- **Bone health.** Almost two-thirds of the body's magnesium is found in bone, where it works with calcium to provide structural support. Researchers

at Yale University gave girls ages eight to 14 either magnesium or a placebo twice daily for one year. *Result:* The girls who took magnesium developed much stronger bones compared with girls who took a placebo.

- **Stress buster.** Many people manifest stress physically by tensing the muscles of their back and shoulders, leading to tightness. Because magnesium is such a good muscle relaxant, it often can help ease muscle tension. Magnesium also stimulates the body's production of the calming brain chemical *gamma amino butyric acid* (GABA), so it also helps people to mentally relax.

- **Heart benefits.** Magnesium helps relax blood vessel walls, which reduces blood pressure. Magnesium sulfate is sometimes administered via IV in the hospital to reduce the risk for arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat). It also eases heart palpitations. Magnesium can help other heart problems, such as cardiomyopathy, a condition in which the heart fails to pump blood adequately. *There's more:* Doctors at Harvard Medical School report that high levels of magnesium were associated with a significantly lower risk for sudden cardiac death, which causes about half of all deaths from coronary artery disease. The study found that people with the highest blood levels of magnesium were 77%

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less likely to suffer sudden death from cardiac arrest.

- **Diabetes.** Magnesium deficiency is common among people with type 2 diabetes. Earlier this year, German researchers conducted a study in which they gave magnesium supplements to overweight, prediabetic men and women. Those taking magnesium had a significant reduction in fasting blood sugar, better insulin resistance and lower blood pressure compared with those given a placebo.

- **Neuropathic pain.** Soaking in a bath with Epsom salts, which are granules of magnesium sulfate, is a well-known way to ease aches and pains. But I believe that magnesium's role in relieving severe pain has been barely tapped. In one study, British doctors used IV magnesium to treat people with *postherpetic neuralgia*, intense pain after a shingles (herpes zoster) outbreak. Pain was significantly reduced after just 30 minutes of receiving magnesium. Another study found that a onetime IV dose of 500 mg to 1,000 mg of magnesium sulfate eliminated nerve pain related to metastases in cancer patients. In my own practice, I find that a combination of IV and oral magnesium eases nerve pain.

- **Asthma.** Magnesium can block the bronchial reactivity common in asthma

attacks. In one study, doctors from Brazil reported that supplements of magnesium glycinate decreased bronchial reactivity by 30%. When taken in supplement form, *magnesium glycinate* is a well-absorbed and well-tolerated type of magnesium. In the study, subjects became more resistant to common asthmatic triggers (such as cold air and allergens) and were able to reduce their asthma medication by almost 40%. I have found similar results with my patients.

- **Headaches.** Several studies have shown that supplementing with magnesium can reduce the frequency of migraine headaches. IV magnesium sulfate also has been found to relieve the pain of cluster headaches in people with low blood levels of magnesium. Research has found that magnesium levels affect serotonin receptors and other brain chemicals that affect headache.

- **Antiaging.** Magnesium also might help keep you younger. Studies show that magnesium is required to maintain *telomeres*, the protective tips of chromosomes (which contain your genes). Researchers have found that magnesium-deficient cells have an abnormal shortening of their telomeres, which is strongly associated with rapid aging.

MY ADVICE

Many foods contain magnesium, although most people don't get enough magnesium from their diet. Foods rich in magnesium include green vegetables, such as spinach and dark-leaf lettuce. The green color of vegetables comes from *chlorophyll*, which contains magnesium. Other excellent sources of magnesium are halibut, almonds, cashews, whole grains, pumpkin seeds and lentils.

I recommend that my patients have their magnesium levels checked. This can be done with a red blood cell magnesium test, which is not part of a regular blood test so you will have to ask for it.

Based on the results of this test, I find that most patients do need to supplement with magnesium. I usually recommend that these adults (both men and women) eat foods high in magnesium and take 200 mg of magnesium glycinate two or three times a day. Most multi-vitamins don't contain that amount, but many calcium-magnesium formulas do.

Magnesium of any kind can have a laxative effect if you take too much. If you have kidney problems, speak with your doctor before taking magnesium because the mineral could exacerbate kidney disease. ■ ■