

Well - we just wrapped up Black History Month and Heart Health Month, and I felt the need to share because I am a health and wellness coach and the Executive Director of the African American Wellness Project a non-profit founded by my dad to address health disparities in the Black community.

Statistics show that Black women suffer from stress and certain health conditions at a higher rate than other races and even more alarming, cardiovascular diseases kill nearly 50,000 Black women annually!

It is no wonder...we are mothers, wives, caregivers, short order cooks, uber drivers, entrepreneurs, partners, psychologists, cheerleaders, bosses and so much more.

And you know who is going through a lot right now? LITERALLY EVERYONE.

Like everyone else, I have been going through it and it has felt like a never ending journey!

Research also shows that most are just now starting to feel the full effects of the pandemic: mentally, emotionally and physically, so I know I'm not alone.

Well, I will be 55 in August and it is safe to say that I've been to almost every doctor imaginable for different reasons the past couple of years.

I have learned A LOT and I thought that I was and armed and ready for battle, because I come from a family whose father is a doctor and stepmom is a nurse practitioner and they are truly the best.

Within the last year, I have been to - in no particular order – a primary care doctor, the dentist, the optometrist, the ophthalmologist, urgent care, the emergency room, the podiatrist, the rheumatologist, dermatologist, physical therapist, an acupuncturist, and a natural path.

Oh, can't forget I am little crazy due to all of the above. so therapist as well.

I have also had two COVID vaccines, the booster, a shingles vaccine, a flu shot, a mammogram, monthly shots to prevent any future deterioration for my arthritis which also requires monthly blood work and a colonoscopy.

And so, the journey began. It's like when one thing left, another came - but what I started to realize was what always remained was stress.

You see, I also have a family with two teenagers and a dog for the first time in my life, three very jobs that require me to manage different teams, be present, uplift and motivate.

They say real flex is encouraging and motivating people when you are going through stuff yourself and I have been...while health coaching clients on their own journeys and cheering on and managing my various teams and my kids to greatness.

But, let me get back to the purpose of my article and take you down the windy road along my wellness, or perhaps, unwellness journey.

- Podiatrist: First there was persistent pain at the bottom of my foot for about a year which caused me to walk with a limp for months while I ignored it. I finally went to a Podiatrist for cortisone shots to relieve the pain oh and so I could wear 2 shoes. Thankfully with some changes to my diet that I teach my clients every day the pain went away.
- Ophthalmologist: Next up, I developed eye twitching. Some was caused by stress and some was caused by eye overuse because I am constantly on the computer, phone or my laptop for work and everything else in between it seems. I now need reading glasses which of course I can never seem to find when I need them.
- ER doctor: I ended up in the emergency room due to severe allergic reaction...let's just say caused by sheer vanity purposes. And of course it was on a weekend. Unfortunately, the doctor on duty prescribed a medication that was no longer in existence, and it took me two days to figure this out during which time my eyes got significantly worse and the only thing that saved me from possibility going blind was my sister who gave me some of her eye drops - that happened to work.
- Physical Therapist: Then I developed severe neck and back and shoulder pain, which I have somewhat self-diagnosed from wearing extremely heavy braids in my hair last summer, and also again a dose of stress, which led to tendinitis in my left shoulder. Thanks to my son's friend's dad who saw I was in pain and is a physical therapist, I am now able to lift my left arm above my head again.
- Dermatologist: And out of the blue, I developed psoriasis before the holidays which got significantly worse as Christmas approached and eventually led to scalp psoriasis. Due to the time period of occurrence and availability of doctors, it took me two months to get an appointment for actual diagnosis and treatment. I went twice to the only available dermatologist — who was looking up my symptoms and treatment on the internet literally in front of me and then wanted to do a biopsy on my scalp. Then finally to another who I was referred to but who wasn't available until just a couple of weeks ago who knew what he was doing. I now know that the psoriasis was caused by another medication I was taking because of course, all medications have side effects.
- Natural path: My good friend with some auto immune issues recommended that I see a natural path for nutrition response testing and treatment. Let's just say it is a VERY interesting process, but she is the truth and I'm now on a regimen of natural vitamins to get my adrenals aligned and stress down among other things.

- Dentist: Let's not forget the dentist, since I am somewhat addicted to getting my teeth cleaned. And, also because I have been going through the Invisalign process for as long as I have had kids (it seems) due to rotating dentists at the dental practice during the pandemic and beyond.

- Acupuncturist: And finally I recently made the decision to start going back to my Acupuncturist on a regular basis to improve my circulation, my back and neck issues, my mood, and my attitude. He is world renowned and I've only been back for a few weeks and I can feel the difference because it always starts from the inside out, right? Who cares that I have to drive almost an hour each way to see him.

SO, here I am writing this with my reading glasses with the tangled granny string, natural eyelashes, vitamin sorter, greasy hair, Invisalign case with no Invisalign - since I have seemed to misplace the trays once again and heated neck pillow, turning my wounds into wisdom.

Following are the 10 things I learned on this long and windy path back to optimal health.

1. Read everything carefully and do your pre-registration before you go.
2. Inquire about costs and health insurance coverage beforehand.
3. Research your doctor.
4. Urgent care is better than the emergency room, if it is not in fact an emergency.
5. Be your own advocate and fight for your health and good healthcare.
6. Always get a second opinion.
7. Read the instructions of all medications clearly.
8. Ask for samples at the doctor's office.
9. Find a doctor whose schedule and location gel with yours.

\*now this is an important one because I remember at one point when my kids were babies I was taking them to the pediatrician at 6am because that's the only time she would take well visit appointments!!

10. Protect your peace, your health, and your heart.

Yes, Heart Health Month and Black History Month are coming to a close and I just returned from Cabo because I decided the above list of doctors weren't enough and I needed to take my passport, my prayers and my pain to the 5 very best doctors in the world: sunlight, rest, peace, good friends and the ocean and what I realized while away is that YOU must protect your own health and your own heart at all costs because no one is coming to save you. But yourself.