

Capillary fragility is a tough problem with many solutions

Dear Dr. Meinig:

At the slightest bump I get black and blue. I have to wear long sleeve dresses or blouses all the time as I'm afraid people will think my husband beats me. My doctor hasn't been any help.

W.T.

Dear W.T.:

This condition is caused by a weakness of outer walls of blood vessels and capillaries. The blood flows from the heart into large blood vessels, but these channels decrease to smaller and smaller size until they become minute, hairlike capillaries.

The outer walls of the capillaries are designed to be strong enough to contain the blood flow and at the same time permeable in order to allow the transference of nutrients to our tissues.

When, as in your case, pressure from a slight bump causes these tiny vessels to rupture, the blood escapes into the surrounding tissue. The bluish black color you see is the blood that has accumulated under the skin.

Your condition is called capillary fragility or sometimes capillary permeability. Most frequently it is caused by nutritional or metabolic factors but may also be the result of an assortment of diseases, infections, bacterial toxins, drugs or chemicals. An example of a few are diabetic retinitis, rheumatoid arthritis, spontaneous abortion, bleeding gums and nosebleeds.

Commonly used medical textbooks unfortunately carry very little information on this subject. That is probably why your doctor has avoided your question. It isn't because information does not exist. As long ago as 1956, some 63 papers had been published in medical journals dealing with these matters.

The first work on the subject was submitted in 1935 by Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, the discoverer of vitamin C. In 1936 he reported that substances present in lemon juice and paprika had beneficial effects on capillary fragility. He called it vitamin P. The California Fruit Growers Exchange quickly followed up with their own research and from 1947 to 1952, the Southern Bioresearch La-



Dr. George

By George Meinig, DDS

boratories did more extensive studies.

For a variety of reasons, treatment of capillary fragility was plagued with success and failure. The use of vitamin C to treat bleeding gums received quite a bit of attention. While sometimes successful, for the most part, it failed because the inflammation of the gums (gingivitis) was usually caused by the irritation of tartar deposits that accumulate in the gum crevices.

Dr. Szent-Gyorgyi's vitamin P, now known as bioflavonoids, in a test of 2,065 hospital patients, achieved 85 percent success rate treating capillary fragility. When others using a synthetic form of vitamin P reported poor results, the treatment lost favor for some period of time.

Bioflavonoids are really part of the vitamin C complex so it makes sense for them to be taken together. Only a few companies put up vitamin C with bioflavonoids but each is available separately.

Patients I have seen with your symptoms have not been successful in reducing them with vitamin C alone, but usually have been impressed when they added bioflavonoids with the c on a three to four times a day basis.

The vitamin C and bioflavonoids have proved to be of a tremendous help, but in themselves sometimes fail to solve the capillary fragility problem. Patients with this condition must realize that to prevent the breakdown of strength of the outer walls of blood vessels one needs the presence of all nutrients. Other key supplements that have been advocated to help are rutin, calcium, choline, and oil soluble chlorophyll.