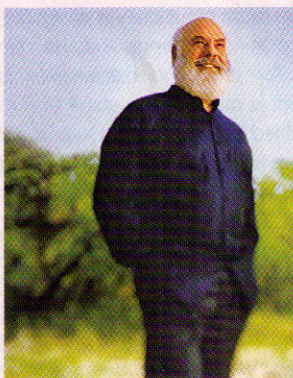


INTERVIEW: ANDREW WEIL

America's alternative-medicine guru on self-healing, aging gracefully, and the problem with modern medicine **By Jan Goodwin**

WEIL-BEING



Breathing exercises as effective as prescription drugs? Guided imagery and herbs dispensed as painkillers? Andrew Weil's approach to health and well-being has won him a following of millions and at the same time put the American medical establishment on red alert.

An advocate of nutritional supplements, meditation, yoga, and other mind-body remedies and regimens, Weil, thanks to his impeccable training and eclectic approach, is partly responsible for bringing these therapies from the margins to the mainstream. His method is to encourage people to blend conventional and alternative treatments. In managing diseases like cancer, for instance, he often subscribes to traditional modalities offset by therapies that reduce a drug's toxicity (and may also increase its effectiveness). The result is what he calls "integrative" medicine.

Not content simply to practice his healing arts, Weil has become a one-man industry. Widely known for his best-selling books, he now also offers DVDs, memory-sharpening kits, even dietary supplements and a line of cookware. But while his followers adore him, many in the medical profession are unnerved that one of their own, with excellent credentials—including a Harvard University medical degree, 15 years as an ethnopharmacology researcher at the Harvard Botanical Museum, and a stint at the National Institute of Mental Health—is going this unconventional route.

Catching up with this 65-year-old physician requires patience and persistence. But when Weil eventually touched down at his ranch in the Arizona high desert after a trip to India, DISCOVER was able to reach him on the phone. Engaging and articulate, Weil is not flustered by criticism or challenges from his medical peers. His approach continues to attract new followers, and more and more medical schools are launching their own programs in integrative health.

Why do some people experience spontaneous remissions and self-healing, while others don't?

It's important to look at the total spectrum of illness, ranging from minor colds and cuts to cancer. If you do that, you see that remission is the rule, rather than the exception. Most diseases end by themselves because the body has a healing system, an array of mechanisms designed to repair damage. With illnesses that involve more vital organs and more basic cellular processes, the chances of healing are less. I don't think they're ever zero, but they are less. Spontaneous remission is more likely with certain kinds of cancer, such as melanoma and renal cell carcinoma. These seem to be antigeni-

