

# Rx G&T

by Jeff Goldberg

Today, I will do my part to fight Covid-19 by drinking gin and tonics. I will not drink Lysol and do not have plans to liberate anything without a mask and gloves on. Those are just plain, bad ideas. Using hydroxychloroquine to treat Covid-19 is probably a bad idea, too. Yet, despite Trump's ardent endorsement, I haven't lost hope in the old malaria remedy, yet.

Which is why I'm drinking gin and tonics. Lots of gin and tonics. I'm usually a sundowner who doesn't start drinking before sunset. But, under the circumstances, I'm only waiting until the sun is over the yardarm. The old nautical term refers to the hour when the sun shows above the foreyard of a ship—usually about 11 in the morning—and the sailors would get their first rum ration of the day.

Trump has called hydroxychloroquine a “game changer,” with “strong, powerful signs” that it works against Covid-19. So confident in its benefits is he, in fact, that he authorized the purchase and stockpiling of 29 million pills of the stuff. And why not? “They're not expensive,” he explained at a daily briefing. “It doesn't kill people. What do you have to lose?”

Unfortunately, the facts have not matched up to these lofty expectations. The side effects of hydroxychloroquine include difficulty breathing, which isn't good if you've got viral pneumonia from Covid-19, and heart failure, which isn't good, period. A recent Veterans Administration study found that Covid-19 patients taking hydroxychloroquine were over twice as likely to die as those who did not take the drug. And, hydroxychloroquine can kill people or, at least its close relative, chloroquine can. A Phoenix-area man and his wife found out the hard way when they tried to self-medicate for Covid-19 by taking chloroquine, which is usually used to clean fish tanks at aquariums. He died, she nearly did.

Despite these set-backs, however, researchers dutifully continue to investigate hydroxychloroquine against Covid-19, because it works so marvelously well against malaria. The medicine's anti-

inflammatory properties relieve fever and pain; it quiets the out-of-control immune responses that can lead to severe anemia in malaria (as well as the deadly cytokine storm characteristic of end-stage Covid-19); and it acts as a preventative by killing the bugs that cause malaria. (That's why you're supposed to start taking your hydroxychloroquine before traveling to swampy, mosquito-infested locales. When you can travel anywhere again, that is.

None of this is surprising, really. Hydroxychloroquine is a synthetic form of quinine, which has been used to fight malaria ever since the first British colonialist donned a pith helmet and walked out in the tropical noonday sun.

But, quinine, which comes from the bark of the cinchona tree, is very bitter and the ingenious Brits discovered that the medicine went down easier if you mixed it with a spoonful of sugar and a glassful of gin and soda water. The soda and sugar have since been replaced by tonic. G&Ts stopped the Anglos from getting ill and eased the lot of those whose thankless job it was to govern uncivilized savages.

So, I'm marking my days in quarantine by drinking gin and tonics. It may not be the game-changer Trump has promised, but it's as good a palliative as anything short of morphine. Drinking G&Ts every day may not keep Covid-19 away, but at least it blots out Trump's moronic pronouncements for a while. I'm no doctor, but I advise taking as needed. What have you got to lose?

