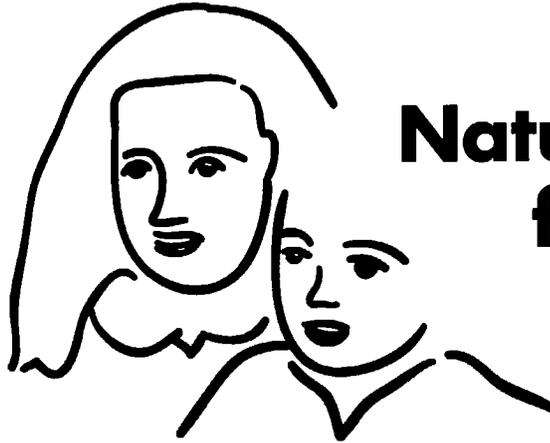


# Your Child's Health



## Natural treatments for cold and flu

by Angela Stengler, N.D.,  
and Mark Stengler, N.D.

Children have a remarkable potential for healing. Their pure, untarnished systems are not yet polluted by the toxins that disrupt the health of many adults. Children deserve safe, non-toxic, natural medicines to prevent and treat illness.

Children are our future, and as parents, we want them to maintain optimal health. By treating our children with natural medicines, we hope to instill in them the practice of using these same effective remedies throughout their lifetime.

One of the many benefits of natural therapies is that they allow parents to become proactive in their child's health care. Herbs, nutritional supplements, diet, homeopathy, and other natural therapies provide safe and effective complementary approaches to improve a child's health.

This health report focuses on the treatment and prevention of common infant and childhood conditions. We have found many of the recommended treatments in this health report to be as effective as, or superior to, conventional treatments for the same conditions. We have seen the results first-hand with the many children we have treated in our clinical practice, and with our own son.

Not all conditions can be covered in this brief health report, so we recommend consulting a licensed natural healthcare provider near you, or visiting your local health food store for more information.

**Q: What are the natural ways to treat or prevent children's colds?**

**A:** The common cold is a viral infection of the upper respiratory tract. Typical symptoms include a runny nose, head congestion, sneezing, sore throat, watery eyes, mild fever, and fatigue. Natural therapies may help abort a cold if it's treated in the beginning stages, or reduce the length and severity of symptoms if the cold is already underway. A healthy immune system can conquer a cold in two to four days. Following are non-toxic, natural therapies for your child:

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1. Increase rest. More sleep and rest are needed during an illness, including the common cold. Your child should stay at home from school so he or she can recover and avoid infecting others with the virus. (Most kids won't argue with this recommendation.)

2. Increase fluids. Dehydration makes one feel worse and impairs immune function. A child with a bad cold can get dehydrated more easily because of reduced appetite and thirst. Have your child drink eight ounces of purified water every two to three hours.

3. Avoid sugar and eat lightly. Restrict your child's intake of candy, fruit juices, or other beverages high in sugar. Sugar can impair immune function. If your child does drink fruit juice, dilute it heavily—half juice and half water. Studies have shown that concentrated sugar sources, including fructose, decrease the activity of white blood cells, which fight off viruses and microbes.

4. Soups and broths are excellent choices. They are soothing and easy to digest. Some studies have shown that chicken soup can help relieve cold symptoms. Whenever possible, prepare fresh, homemade soups and stews, to avoid additives and preservatives.

5. Supplement with children's echinacea. This herb enhances the activity of the immune system, thereby helping the body fight off the infecting cold virus. Echinacea can also help prevent a cold from developing into something more serious, such as bronchitis or pneumonia.

We recommend echinacea in a glycerin base. This is a non-alcohol form that tastes better. Some children like a berry-flavored echinacea, available at most health food stores. It is generally well-tolerated, and side effects are extremely rare. Older children have the option of using echinacea in a capsule form. Many

parents report good results from echinacea; after using it once, they keep a bottle on hand at home. However, this herb is not recommended for anyone who is allergic to daisies.

6. An echinacea/goldenseal combination is appropriate if your child has a lot of mucus in the sinuses, or develops a wet cough. Goldenseal specifically targets infections of the mucous membranes, especially because it has a drying effect on wet mucus. However, goldenseal should be used only for short periods of time, no longer than 10 days unless under the supervision of a physician.

**Q: Do you recommend any other natural compounds for a cold?**

A: Yes, astragalus is another immune-stimulating herb. It can be used by itself or in combination with other herbs, such as echinacea. Also, fresh peppermint tea is helpful when sinus headaches are involved with a cold.

Dosage for astragalus: Tincture—10 to 30 drops in water, diluted fruit juice, or straight in the mouth every two to three hours. This is generally similar to one capsule or one tablet.

• Supplemental vitamin C. This non-toxic vitamin has been shown in many studies to decrease the duration and severity of common cold symptoms, although in some studies it did not. Since it can effectively and safely rally white blood cells to fight off infections, increase your child's intake during a cold.

Dosage: 500 to 1,500mg daily during a cold.

**Note:** Cut back on the dosage if diarrhea starts to occur. If your child is sensitive to acidic foods, such as citrus fruit or tomatoes, consider using a non-acidic form of vitamin C, such as ester-C. Vitamin C is also available in various berry flavors to make it

more palatable for your child.

• Homeopathic cold remedies. Homeopathic remedies are highly diluted amounts of plant or mineral substances. They can effectively abort or treat a cold. You can give a single homeopathic compound that matches your child's symptoms (look it up in a book, find out at a health food store, or have a homeopathic practitioner prescribe it). You can also give your child a combination cold remedy, which contains the most commonly used compounds for a cold. If the homeopathic substance you need is in the formula, it can help improve your child's condition by activating the immune system. Take as directed on the container. Toxicity is not a concern with homeopathics, because they are so diluted. For infants, the homeopathic pellet or tablet can be dissolved in water and given by teaspoon.

**Q: Should I give my child all of the recommended herbs, dietary supplements, and homeopathics? How do I choose?**

A: You don't have to give your child all of the products mentioned for cold and flu. You can use one or all of these therapies combined. It depends on what you have access to and what you feel comfortable with. However, we do recommend you use at least one of the supplements to boost the immune system.

**Q: Is treatment for the flu the same as for a cold?**

A: The flu is similar to a cold, but with more severe symptoms. These may include body aches and fever, alternating chills and fever, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. If in doubt, consult a doctor to rule out a more serious condition. It is even more important to keep a child hydrated with fluids during the flu. Treatments

for cold and flu are similar, since you are trying to stimulate the immune system to eliminate the viral infection.

**Q: My child gets frequent colds every winter; it seems as though the symptoms are constant. Why is this happening?**

A: Two to four colds each winter are normal for a child. Getting an occasional cold actually helps the immune system to mature and “toughen up” against future infections. However, repeated or long-lasting colds may reflect a weak immune system. The most common reasons for this are allergies or nutritional deficiencies.

Food allergies or sensitivities involve reactions to certain foods. Allergy symptoms may include runny nose, watery eyes, and cough. When consumed repeatedly, allergy-producing foods can wear down the immune system, making a child more susceptible to infections such as colds. They also can produce mucous (e.g., sinus) and fluid (e.g., middle ear), which provide an ideal environment for a virus or bacteria to thrive in, leading to infection. Remember, we only “catch” colds when our immune system is susceptible. To identify your child’s food reactions, consult a naturopathic doctor for testing, or find out about the elimination/reintroduction diet.

Environmental allergens can also cause a “tired” immune system. An example is dust. A child allergic to dust will not have long-term improvement of his or her cold susceptibility until the dust is identified as a problem. Then the dust must be removed or the child must become desensitized to it.

In addition, nutritional deficiencies can make a child prone to colds. The immune system requires many vitamins, minerals, and essential fatty acids to work properly. We

recommend a children’s multivitamin and extra vitamin C (500 to 1,000mg daily in divided doses). Start with 250mg of vitamin C and slowly increase the dosage over time. This protects against diarrhea that can occur if too much vitamin C is taken. Vitamin C supplementation is especially important during the winter months, when consumption of vitamin C-rich fruit usually goes down, and the incidence of chronic colds goes up.

**Note:** If for some reason you cannot change your child’s diet, and the child is still getting chronic or repeated colds—even though he or she is taking vitamins—we recommend echinacea. For long-term use, give it to your child for four weeks on and one week off, repeating this cycle for the winter.

**Q: Why does my doctor prescribe antibiotics when my child has a cold?**

A: Good question. Over 100 different strains of virus cause the common cold. Antibiotics are only effective against bacterial infections. A doctor may prescribe antibiotics to prevent a secondary bacterial infection from occurring, or in a misguided effort to appease the parents. The problem with prescribing antibiotics for viral infections is twofold:

1. Many bacteria have become antibiotic-resistant because of the over-prescribing of antibiotics. So when an individual does actually need an antibiotic, it may not work. As a matter of fact, antibiotic-resistant bacteria are one of the leading causes of death in the world today.

2. Antibiotics wipe out the good bacteria, along with the bad, in the digestive tract. These good bacteria (flora) are part of the immune system. They help protect against infections and synthesize vitamins.

The chronic use of antibiotics can lead to frequent colds since they “weaken” the immune system’s response over time. This is another key reason why antibiotics should be prescribed with care.

**Q: Can my child take antibiotics and echinacea at the same time?**

A: Yes. There is no harmful interaction when the two are taken together. If antibiotics are needed, echinacea will provide immune-system support, so your child should recover more quickly.

**Q: I’ve heard that if antibiotics are used, an acidophilus supplement can replace the good bacteria that were destroyed.**

A: That’s absolutely true. A children’s acidophilus supplement should be given after antibiotics have been used. This will help replenish the good bacteria, such as acidophilus and bifidobacterium, that normally reside in the intestinal tract. Acidophilus supplements can prevent many health problems, such as digestive problems and candida (yeast) infections. It should be supplemented for six to eight weeks after using antibiotics. Be sure to keep the acidophilus refrigerated. Children’s acidophilus is also available in flavors such as strawberry.

**Q: What do you recommend when a child has a fever?**

A: A fever is the body’s attempt to stimulate the immune system to fight off invading microbes and recover from disease. Studies have shown that 102 degrees is the optimal temperature at which viruses and bacteria are eliminated. Illness will generally be shortened when you work with the fever rather than artificially lowering it with over-the-counter, fever-

reducing medications.

Medical attention is required when the fever is 104 degrees or higher, when it lasts more than 24 hours, or when it's accompanied by lethargy, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. Otherwise, consider the following guidelines:

- Increase your child's fluid intake, as you would for a cold. Purified water is best—eight ounces every one to two hours.
- Have your child eat lightly if he or she is hungry, and restrict sugar products (including fruit juices, unless they are diluted).
- Give immune-stimulating supplements, as discussed previously.
- Fresh yarrow tea can help a child break a sweat during a fever. A half-cup every hour can be helpful.
- Homeopathic fever remedies can gently ease a fever without suppressing it.
- Hydrotherapy can help the body recover from a fever. Alternating

hot and cold compresses to the chest and back can enhance immune response and break a fever.

**Q: What about the risk of seizures and brain damage from a high fever?**

A: Almost all cases of seizures and brain damage occur when a child is dehydrated from fever; this is why fluid intake is so important. Electrolyte drinks are good to have on hand, to make sure dehydration does not occur. If your child will not consume any liquids, or is having constant diarrhea or vomiting, he or she needs immediate medical attention to prevent dehydration and other complications.

**Editors Note:** This information was excerpted from *Your Child's Health: Natural Solutions to Common Ailments*, by Angela Stengler, N.D., and Mark Stengler, N.D., (Green Bay: IMPAKT Communication, Inc., 1999).

Angela Stengler, N.D., is a popular and respected naturopathic physician. Her expertise is in women's and children's health. Dr. Angela is a frequent guest of radio programs on issues involving women's health care and natural medicine. She received her Doctorate of Naturopathic Medicine, with extra training in obstetrics and pediatrics, from the National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Portland, Oregon. She is also co-author of *Menopause Relief, Build Strong Bones, and Natural Solutions for PMS*. She and her husband, Mark Stengler, N.D., have replied to thousands of questions about illness and natural medicine through The Natural Physician™ Fax Hotline. Health food stores across North America utilize this educational service.

Mark Stengler, N.D. (The Natural Physician™), well-known naturopathic doctor, lecturer, and author, has helped thousands on the road to better health. He is a general family practitioner, specializing in natural medicine. He received his Doctorate of Naturopathic Medicine from the National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Portland, Oregon. Dr. Stengler is also a certified homeopath, nutritionist, master herbalist, and is currently completing his master's degree in acupuncture and Oriental medicine. He is the author of *The Natural Physician: Your Guide for Common Ailments, Drink Your Greens*, and co-author of *Menopause Relief, Build Strong Bones, and Natural Solutions for PMS*. He co-authors a monthly article for health food stores, *The Natural Physician Update™*, with his wife, Dr. Angela Stengler.

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# Cancer

## prevention and support

The "C" word—cancer—still strikes terror into the human heart. True, modern medicine has made impressive strides in cancer diagnosis and treatment. However, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, cancer is still the second leading cause of death in the United States. Approximately 124 people die of cancer per 100,000 population. In 1998, cancer claimed 541,532 human lives. The five-year survival rate for breast cancer has risen from 72 percent in 1940 to 96 percent in 2000 (*Cancer*. WebMD, 2001).

### What is cancer?

Cancer refers to more than 100 diseases that attack almost every area of the body. In a healthy person, cells divide, grow, and replace themselves in an orderly manner. When the genes that regulate this cellular division falter, cells start multiplying and spreading out of control. A mass of these uncontrolled cells is called a tumor. Tumors may be benign (harmless) or malignant (cancerous). Benign tumors eventually stop growing. Malignant tumors, on the other hand, crowd out healthy cells, disrupt bodily functions, deplete the body's stores of nutrients, and may metastasize (spread throughout the body).

### What causes cancer?

Heredity may influence cancer risk, but not by much. An estimated 5 to 10 percent of cancers are believed to be hereditary. The most common contributors to cancer are smoking, sun exposure, and diet.

Fortunately, the most common contributing factors are also those you control. If you already have cancer, changing these factors will improve your chances of complete recovery:

- **High-fat diet.** "There is enormous evidence linking dietary fat to a variety of cancers, particularly of the breast, colon, and prostate gland," says Daniel W. Nixon, associate director of cancer prevention and control at the Hollings Cancer Center in Charleston, South Carolina, and author of *The Cancer Recovery Eating Plan* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1996). According to a recent study, trans-fatty acids from partially hydrogenated vegetable oil may increase the risk of colon cancer (McKelvey W, et al: A second look at the relation between colorectal adenomas and consumption of foods containing partially hydrogenated oil. *Epidemiology* 11[4]:469-473, July 2000).

- **Alcohol intake.** Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health analyzed six long-term studies involving 320,000 women. They found that women who drank two to five alcoholic drinks a day had a 41 percent greater risk of developing breast cancer than nondrinkers. Even one drink a day increased breast cancer risk by nine percent (Smith-Warner SA, et al: Alcohol and breast cancer in women: a pooled analysis of cohort studies. *JAMA* 279[7]:535-540, February 18, 1998).

- **Physical inactivity.** In a study involving 25,624 women, researchers found the lowest risk of breast cancer among lean women who exercised at least four hours per week. It seemed to have the greatest benefit for premenopausal women rather than postmenopausal women (Thune I, et al: Physical activity and the risk of breast cancer. *New England Journal of Medicine* 336[18]:1269-1275, May 1, 1997).

- **Obesity.** A common by-product of physical inactivity, obesity is a risk factor for some cancers in its own right. Researchers found a link between postmenopausal weight gain and breast cancer mortality (Huang Z, et al: Dual effects of weight and weight gain on breast cancer risk. *JAMA* 278[17]:1407-1411, November 5, 1997).

### Cancer-fighting diet

At least 40 percent of cancer patients die of malnutrition. People with cancer face a triple threat: Their appetite is sluggish, so they're not eating enough; their body is using up more nutrients than ever; and their nutritional requirements have risen dramatically (Quillin P: *Beating Cancer With Nutrition*. Tulsa: Nutrition Times Press, 2001).

Following are the American Cancer Society's guidelines on diet and lifestyle. These recommendations can protect you against cancer, or can boost your recovery if you already have cancer:

- Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Eat other foods from plant sources, such as grain products or beans, several times each day.
- Avoid foods that are high in saturated fat or trans-fatty acids (found in most margarines and many types of snack foods and baked goods).
- Cut down on your intake of meat, especially high-fat meats.
- Be moderately active for 30 minutes or more at least four days a week.
- Stay within your healthy weight range.
- Drink little or no alcohol.

### Cancer-fighting nutrients

Following are just a handful of nutrients that have cancer-fighting properties:

- **Folic acid.** One recent study suggests that folic acid, a B vitamin, may cut the risk of breast cancer risk in women who drink moderately (Sellers TA, et al: Dietary folate intake, alcohol, and risk of breast cancer in prospective study of postmenopausal women. *Epidemiology* 12[4]:420-428, July 2001). However, Dr. Paolo Toniolo, professor of epidemiology at New York University Medical Center and a cancer researcher, says, "For those who drink too much, the benefits of folic acid are lost." The recommended dose is 400 mcg daily.

- **Coenzyme Q10.** CoQ10 is found in almost every living cell, especially in the cells' mitochondria (i.e., "energy factories"). Dietary CoQ10 may protect against breast cancer (Portakal O, et al: Coenzyme Q10 concentrations and antioxidant status in tissue of breast cancer patients. *Clin Biochem* 33[4]:279-284, June 2000). Recommended dose is 50 to 150 mg daily.

- **Vitamin C.** This nutrient may protect against the side effects of some anti-cancer drugs (Blasiak J, et al: Protective action of vitamin C against DNA damage induced by selenium-cisplatin conjugate. *Acta Biochim Pol* 48[1]:233-240, 2001). Recommended dose is 250 mg daily. Higher amounts may be indicated for cancer patients.

- **Omega-3 oils.** An essential fatty acid, omega-3s may protect against skin tumors (Liu G, et al: Omega 3 but not omega 6 fatty acids inhibit AP-1 activity transformation in JB6 cells. *Proc Natl acad Sci USA* 98[13]:7510-7515, June 19, 1998). For improved health, omega-3 oils should make up 1 to 2.5 percent of total daily calories.

"When the genes that regulate this cellular division falter, cells start multiplying and spreading out of control."

## “Green tea may protect against recurrence of breast cancer.”

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- **Carotenoids.** These nutrients turn to vitamin A in the body as needed. They include lutein, zeaxanthin, beta-cryptoxanthin, lycopene, alpha-carotene, and beta-carotene. A deficiency of carotenoids may increase breast cancer risk (Toniolo P, et al: Serum carotenoids and breast cancer. *Am J Epidemiol* 153[12]:1148-1150). A recommended dose for carotenoids has not yet been established.

- **Vitamin E.** Also known as alpha-tocopherol, vitamin E may be beneficial in treating skin cancer (Burke KE, et al: Effects of topical and oral vitamin E on pigmentation and skin cancer induced by ultraviolet radiation in Skh:2 hairless mice. *Nutr Cancer* 38[1]:87-97, 2000). “It has been demonstrated that the natural form of alpha-tocopherol is more bioavailable than is the synthetic compound in humans,” according to researcher Robert Acuff, Ph.D. (Acuff R: Vitamin E: Bioavailability and function of natural and synthetic forms. *Am J of Nat Med* 5[9], Nov 1998).

- **Selenium.** One study focused on the Zlatibor region in Serbia. This district has fewer deaths from cancer and cardiovascular disease than other regions in Serbia. Researchers found that the selenium content in the soil is much higher in Zlatibor (Maksimovic Z, et al: Selenium in the soil, grass, and human serum in the Zlatibor mountain area [Serbia]: geomedical aspects. *J Environ Pathol Toxicol Oncol* 17[3-4]:221-227, 1998).

Other potentially useful nutrients include N-acetyl-cysteine, niacin, L-carnitine, MGN3, IP6, and quercetin. All of these nutrients may be useful for both cancer treatment and cancer prevention.

### Cancer-fighting herbs

Following are just a few cancer-fighting plant medicines:

- **Garlic (*Allium sativum*).** Garlic has demonstrated anti-cancer properties, apparently due to its allyl sulfur components. It appears to depress nitrosamine formation, which has been implicated in cancer (Milner JA: Mechanisms by which garlic and allyl sulfur compounds suppress carcinogen bioactivation. Garlic and carcinogenesis. *Adv Exp Med Biol* 492:69-81, 2001).

- **Green tea (*Camellia sinensis*).** Green tea may protect against recurrence of breast cancer in its early stages (Inoue M, et al: Regular consumption of green tea and the risk of breast cancer recurrence: follow-up study from the Hospital-based Epidemiology Research Program at Aichi Cancer Center [HERPACC], Japan. 167[2]:175-182, 2001). It may also protect against skin cancer. In fact, some researchers advocate the inclusion of green tea in skin care products to protect against sun damage (Ahmad N, et al: Cutaneous photoprotection by green tea: a brief review. *Skin Pharmacol Appl Skin Physiol* 14[2]:69-76, March/April 2001).

- **Astragalus (*Astragali radix*).** Astragalus, an immune-system booster, was shown to exert an anti-cancer effect on mice with cancer (Kurashige S, et al: Effects of *astragali radix* extract on carcinogenesis, cytokin production, and cytotoxicity in mice treated with a carcinogen, N-butyl-N'-butanolnitrosamine. *Cancer Invest* 17[1]:30-35, 1999).

- **Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*).** An animal study suggests that echinacea may suppress spontaneously occurring leukemia. It appears to

work by enhancing nonspecific immune or cellular immune systems, or both (Hayashi I, et al: Effects of oral administration of *Echinacea purpurea* [American herb] on incidence of spontaneous leukemia caused by recombinant leukemia viruses in AKR/J mice. *Nihon Rinsho Meneki Gakkai Kaishi* 24[1]:10-20, February 2001).

- **Mistletoe (*Viscum album*).** Mistletoe may prolong the lives of individuals with cancer (Grossarth-Maticek R, et al: Use of Iscardor, an extract of European mistletoe (*Viscum album*) in cancer treatment: prospective non-randomized and randomized match-pair studies nested within a cohort study. *Alternative Therapies* 7[3]:57-66, 68-72, 74-76, May/June 2001).

- **Reishi, shiitake, and maitake mushrooms.** Polysaccharide-K (PSK), a specific glucan from these mushrooms, was shown to extend survival five years or beyond for people with cancers of the stomach, colon-rectum, esophagus, nasopharynx, lung, and certain types of breast cancer. Polysaccharide-P (PSP) was shown to improve quality of life, provide substantial relief, and enhance immune status in 70-90 percent of patients with cancers of the stomach, esophagus, lung, ovary, and cervix. The authors conclude, “Their extremely high tolerability, proven benefits to survival and quality of life, and compatibility with chemotherapy and radiation therapy makes them well-suited for cancer management regimes.” (Kidd PM: The use of mushroom glucans and proteoglycans in cancer. *Altern Med Rev* 5[1]:4-27, February 2000).

Other immune system supporting herbs include cat's claw (*Uncaria*, various species), Pau d'Arco, essiac detoxifying tea, and ginseng (*Panax ginseng* and *Eleutherococcus senticosus*). All these herbs may be useful for both cancer treatment and cancer prevention.

### **Pump up**

Exercise may not be a high priority for many cancer patients. However, physical activity can improve their outcome. Exercise improves immune function, lymph flow, and detoxification. It helps regulate blood sugar levels. It helps relieve both depression and anxiety—common

by-products of cancer. Physical activity has also been shown to improve tolerance to chemotherapy. Even a short daily walk can make an important difference.

### **Final thoughts**

If you were building an arsenal to fight a powerful army, you wouldn't collect just one weapon. You would gather a variety of weapons, each with its own strengths and specialties. When you consider cancer treatment options, think of building an arsenal of treatments. The more layers of offensive and defensive strategies you have on hand, the better your chances of complete remission.

Just as cancer is a complex illness, so is its treatment. While conventional therapies attack the cancer itself, nutritional, herbal, and other complementary treatments nourish and strengthen the body so it can cope with both the illness and the difficult treatments. With the guidance of a qualified healthcare professional, conventional and alternative therapies can be combined to produce the most beneficial results with the least toxicity.

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# Eye Health

## set your sights on healthy vision

A budding tulip in the spring. A small child running barefoot across the lawn. A clean, uncluttered beach. Clear vision gives us images we may hold in our hearts forever. Tragically, people stricken with age-related macular degeneration (ARMD) often lose that priceless gift.

ARMD is a leading cause of legal blindness in North America. It is the most common cause of visual impairment in people over age 50, and it destroys central vision, but not peripheral vision, in one out of three people over the age of 75. At least 1.7 million older adults suffer from ARMD. Younger people may also become victims of macular degeneration, but it is generally related to another form of disease.

Deterioration of the tissue in the small, central part of the retina, called the macula, is a hallmark of ARMD. Abnormal blood vessels may leak and cause scarring, which severely damages vision. The deterioration cannot be reversed, but it can be slowed down.

### Symptoms and treatments

Early symptoms of ARMD may be difficult to recognize. Often, a physician will notice the disease before the patient does. As the disease develops, parts of the retina and underlying area may deteriorate. These initial stages are referred to as "dry" ARMD. When the disease progresses, new blood vessels cause bleeding and scarring. This is called "wet" ARMD.

The early stages of ARMD are often difficult to recognize. Symptoms include:

- Difficulty reading;
- Distortion in one eye that makes straight lines appear wavy;
- Blurry vision;
- Grayness;
- Haziness; or
- A blind spot in the center of the visual field.

If “wet” ARMD is discovered early, laser surgery may be used to treat it. However, laser surgery only works about 50 percent of the time, and its effects may not last. An experimental approach involves surgically removing the troublesome blood vessels. However, the results are usually unsatisfactory.

### What causes ARMD?

Researchers still aren't certain of the exact causes of age-related macular degeneration. Some factors that have been implicated in the disease include:

- Heredity
- Age
- Long-term exposure to blue and ultra-violet light
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Excess weight
- Cigarette smoking

Also, low blood levels of vitamins A, C, and E, and certain minerals may increase the risk of ARMD. In addition, the condition seems to affect women more than men, people with light colored eyes more than those with dark colored eyes, and Caucasians more than African Americans.

### Nutrients at a glance

Like every other organ in your body, your eyes need a steady supply of nutrients. Following are some of the key eye-supporting vitamins and other natural compounds:

- **Carotenoids**, such as lutein and zeaxanthin, appear to reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration (ARMD).
- **Vitamin E** protects against free-radical damage to the eyes.
- **Vitamin C** may help reduce the risk of cataracts. Research suggests that long-term use of vitamin C may significantly reduce the development of cataracts.
- **Pyruvate**, an antioxidant, may protect against cataracts.
- **Fish or fish oil supplements** may bolster focus, color perception, and clarity of vision.

A recent study published in the journal *Ophthalmology* noted that increased use of thyroid hormones and antacids is associated with macular degeneration. Researchers also found a correlation between ARMD and an increased likelihood of arthritis.

### Diet and lifestyle

Age-related vision loss is not inevitable. Individuals can substantially reduce their risk of developing ARMD. No one is too young, or too old, to begin a prevention program. To lower your risk of ARMD, consider the following:

- **If you smoke, quit.** Researchers studied eye disease prevalence data in North America, Europe, and Australia. They concluded

that, apart from age, tobacco smoking was the only risk factor consistently linked to ARMD on these three continents.

- **Get regular eye exams.** When new blood vessels grow in and around the macula, laser photocoagulation can sometimes destroy them before they do any harm. Individuals between the ages of 40 and 65 should get eye exams every two to four years, and people 65 and over should have their eyes checked every one to two years.
- **Wear sunglasses.** They block ultraviolet light. Sunglasses can also help protect eyes from the brilliant glare of sun on snow.
- **Avoid modified dietary fats**, such as partially hydrogenated vegetable oil, which can be deposited in the retina.

“...apart from age, tobacco smoking was the only risk factor consistently linked to ARMD...”

## “Vitamin E appears to be particularly important for healthy vision.”

- **Cut down on saturated fat.** A study conducted by the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health in Australia found a connection between fat intake and eye health. Researchers reported that those who consumed low levels of saturated fat had a much lower risk of ARMD—either late or early stage—than those who consumed the highest amounts of saturated fats.
- **Eat more fish.** People who ate fish one to three times a month were found to have about half the risk of late-stage ARMD than those who ate fish less than once a month. Fish is rich in omega-3 oils, which are also present in the human retina.
- **Increase your intake of antioxidant vitamins and minerals.** You can do this by eating more fresh fruits and vegetables and other unprocessed, nutrient-rich foods. Carotenoids—specifically lutein and zeaxanthin—may stabilize failing vision. Researcher Stuart Richer, O.D., Ph.D., explains that lutein accumulates in the retina and prevents cells from dying off in the center. Lutein is converted to zeaxanthin, a substance that blocks blue and ultraviolet radiation. Foods rich in lutein and zeaxanthin include egg yolk, corn, orange pepper, kiwi, grapes, orange juice, zucchini, squash, and dark-green, leafy vegetables such as spinach. Vitamin E appears to be particularly important for healthy vision. In a French study, participants who had higher levels of this antioxidant were less

likely to develop early signs of age-related macular degeneration, compared with participants who had lower levels of vitamin E. The researchers concluded, “These results suggest that vitamin E may provide protection against [age-related] macular degeneration.” The authors of another study concluded that, “While lifestyle modifications such as smoking cessation, reduction of alcohol consumption, and the wearing of sunglasses may reduce the risk of ARMD, it is likely that consumption of specific dietary components can reduce that risk further.”

### Antioxidants and eye surgery

There are two popular surgeries available now to help people improve their vision. Both photoreactive keratotomy (PRK) and Laser-Assisted In Situ Keratomileusis (LASIK) are approved FDA procedures. These alternatives to wearing corrective lenses uses a computer-controlled laser to reshape the cornea.

A recent report in the *British Journal of Ophthalmology* (Vol 85 2001) demonstrated that supplementing with vitamins A and E improved the outcome of laser surgery to correct nearsightedness. Study participants took 25,000 IU of vitamin A and 230

### Herbs at a glance

Traditional and modern research suggest that the following herbs may promote clear vision:

- **Bilberry** (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) appears to protect against age-related macular degeneration (ARMD), cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma.
- **Eyebright** (*Euphrasia officinalis*) has been a popular remedy for eye ailments since the Middle Ages. Eyebright is especially recommended for hay fever sufferers. It may be beneficial when taken internally.
- **Ginkgo** (*Ginkgo biloba*) has been used to treat ARMD and diabetic retinopathy. It may protect the eyes by promoting blood circulation and protecting against free-radical damage.

mg of vitamin E daily. Following the procedure, individuals took the vitamin combination or a placebo.

“Vitamins A and E are antioxidants; their ability to protect against damage by free radicals may partially explain why they reduced adverse effects of the procedure,” explained naturopathic physician, writer, and educator Dr. Jeremy Appleton. “Vitamin A is also needed for visual function and for the growth and repair of epithelial tissue.”

### Final thoughts

ARMD is a frightening illness, especially because so many of us are at risk. Fortunately, researchers keep learning more about ARMD.

Undoubtedly, new and better approaches to prevention and treatment will one day become available. In the meantime, here are some steps we can take that will support clear vision as well as overall health:

- Stop smoking.
- Get regular eye exams.

- Wear sunglasses.
- Make smart dietary choices.
- Take supplements, such as antioxidants, vitamins and minerals.

Our lives are enriched with the images we see every day. We don't have to let those images fade.

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# Blood Sugar control—naturally

If you have diabetes, you have a problem with blood sugar control. It may be that your body doesn't produce any insulin, or it doesn't produce enough, or it doesn't use it properly. Insulin, a hormone released from the pancreas, is in charge of regulating blood sugar levels. The three primary categories of diabetes are:

- **Type 1**, or insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM), represents five percent of the diabetic population. It is now recognized as an autoimmune disease, in which the body's immune system turns on itself and destroys the insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas. Individuals with Type I diabetes must take insulin daily. Type I diabetes is also known as juvenile-onset diabetes.

- **Type II**, or non-insulin-dependent diabetes (NIDDM), affects 95 percent of individuals with diabetes. Unlike Type I, Type II diabetes typically affects middle-aged, overweight people. Type II diabetics may be able to control it through diet and exercise.

- **Gestational diabetes** is a form of diabetes that develops during pregnancy. This happens in one to three percent of all pregnancies. It can occur because hormones secreted during pregnancy can increase the body's resistance to insulin. Gestational diabetes typically disappears after childbirth. However, more than 50 percent of women who get gestational diabetes eventually develop NIDDM.

## Who's at risk?

Although diabetes can strike anyone at any age, the following populations appear to face a higher risk, according to the American Diabetes Association and the National Institutes of Health:

- Your risk of developing Type II, NIDDM diabetes increases with age. An estimated 11 percent of the United States population, ages 65 to 74, has Type II diabetes. About half of all new cases of diabetes occur in people older than 55.
- Eighty to 90 percent of Type II diabetics are overweight.
- A family history of diabetes is common among those with NIDDM.
- Women have a slightly higher prevalence of diabetes.
- African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans experience a higher rate of Type II diabetes.
- The Pima Indians of Arizona are known to have the highest rate of diabetes in the world. Over 50 percent of the 30- to 64-year-olds in that population suffers from diabetes.

Nearly 16 million Americans have diabetes. Annually, 625,000 new cases are diagnosed in the U.S. About 29,700 of those cases are Type I, or insulin-dependent diabetes.

### Symptoms of diabetes

How do you know if you have diabetes? Tell-tale symptoms can include excessive thirst and appetite, increased urination (sometimes as often as every hour), weight loss, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and blurred vision. Women with diabetes may experience frequent vaginal infections and possibly the cessation of menstruation. Men with diabetes may suffer from impotence. Frequent yeast infections are a symptom in both women and men.

People with Type II diabetes may have no symptoms for decades. Eventually, they are likely to experience any of the previously mentioned symptoms, plus recurring bladder, vaginal, and skin infections, irritability, and tingling or loss of sensation in the hands or feet, according to a *Mayo Clinic Health Letter*, February 1998.

### Implications of diabetes

By keeping their blood sugar under control with the appropriate medications, diet, and lifestyle measures, diabetics can dramatically reduce their risk of complications. A 10-year NIH study of Type I diabetics found that those who kept their blood sugar levels near normal reduced their risk of eye, kidney, and nerve damage by 50 to 70 percent.

However, out-of-control blood sugar levels increase the risk of blindness, heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, nerve malfunctions, slow wound-healing, and skin ulcers (Berkow R [ed]: *The Merck Manual of Medical Information*. Whitehouse Station: Merck & Co., Inc., 1997).

### Dietary changes

Diet is a cornerstone of health management for people with diabetes. Consider the following dietary recommendations (Austin S, Brown D, Lininger S, Jr.: Natural approaches for diabetes. *American Journal of Natural Medicine*™ 5[1]:8-14, January/February 1998):

- Focus on high-fiber foods such as legumes (beans and peas), vegetables, seeds, oats, and whole-grain products. High-fiber diets help protect against Type II diabetes.
- Reduce consumption of sugar.

Sugary foods raise blood sugar levels more than whole, unprocessed foods.

- Reduce consumption of animal products. The incidence of Type II diabetes is significantly lower among vegetarians. Also, meat and dairy products are high in saturated fats, and diabetics face an increased risk of heart disease. Animal products also provide a glut of protein. By restricting protein intake, people with diabetes can protect their kidneys.

- Eat more fish. According to some studies, the omega-3 essential fatty acids in fish promote glucose tolerance, reduce high triglycerides, and support balanced cholesterol levels in people with diabetes.

Fish oil supplements show promise in protecting against nerve-damage and reducing serum triglyceride levels in people with diabetes (Friedberg CE, Janssen MJ, Heine RJ, Grobbee DE: Fish oil and glycemic control in diabetes: a meta-analysis. *Diabetes Care* 21[4]:494-500, April 1998).

### Necessity of exercise

Consistent physical activity is as important as diet in controlling blood sugar levels. If you are susceptible to Type II diabetes, you may never develop it if you exercise regularly. If you already have Type II diabetes, physical activity may decrease or eliminate your need for insulin. The standard recommendation is at least three days a week, for 20 minutes a day.

Exercise promotes health in the following ways:

- It helps control weight. Excess body fat increases the risk of diabetes, while appropriate weight loss can significantly improve diabetics' health.
- Physical activity uses up sugar, thereby reducing high blood glucose levels.
- It makes cells more sensitive to

**“If you are susceptible to Type II diabetes, you may never develop it if you exercise regularly.”**

“A magnesium shortage may be involved in insulin resistance, making it more difficult for the body’s cells to use glucose.”

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insulin. That means it can transport glucose into the cells, instead of leaving it in the bloodstream.

- Exercise increases blood flow, thereby improving circulation. Diabetics are especially susceptible to poor circulation.
- It increases energy levels. Extreme fatigue is a common symptom of diabetes.
- Physical activity promotes cardiovascular health.

**Note:** People with diabetes need to get a complete physical before starting an exercise program. Because of the potential for diabetic complications, a healthcare professional should check for any signs of heart, eye, kidney, or nerve disease. If they exist, the diabetic may have to alter the type and intensity of the activity. In addition, people with Type I diabetes need to be aware that hypoglycemia—dangerously low blood sugar levels—may occur during exercise. Long periods of exercise are more likely to induce hypoglycemia than exercise of moderate duration.

### Supplements for blood sugar control

Diabetes is a serious, potentially life-threatening condition, and requires professional medical care. Self-medication is strongly discouraged. However, specific natural compounds may promote balanced blood sugar levels and help mitigate the side effects and complications of diabetes. Ask your physician about the following:

- **Chromium** has been shown to improve glucose tolerance, apparently by increasing the cells’ sensitivity to insulin (Gaby AR, Wright JV: Diabetes. In: Nutritional Therapy in Medical Practice: *Reference Manual and Study Guide*. Wright/Gaby Seminars, 1996).
- **Magnesium** deficiency is com-

mon among diabetics because they tend to excrete it through the urine. A magnesium shortage may be involved in insulin resistance, making it more difficult for the body’s cells to use glucose. Research indicates that magnesium supplements can help reverse the problem (Eibl NL, Schnack CJ, Kopp H-P, *et al*: Hypomagnesemia in type II diabetes: effect of a 3-month replacement therapy. *Diabetes Care* 18:188, 1995).

- **Zinc** levels are generally lower than normal in people with diabetes. Zinc supplements may be used to promote healthy blood sugar levels and immune function.
- **Vitamins C and E** both reduce glycosylation. Glycosylation refers to how much sugar attaches abnormally to proteins. Excessive glycosylation is typically associated with poorly controlled diabetes.
- **Vitamin B<sub>6</sub>** deficiencies are common among diabetics, especially those with nerve damage. Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> supplements promote glucose tolerance in pregnant women with gestational diabetes (Coelingh HJT, Schreurs WHP: Improvement of oral glucose tolerance in gestational diabetes by pyridoxine. *Brit Med J* 3:13-15, 1975).
- **Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>** can be taken orally, intravenously, or by injection. It has been shown to reduce diabetes-related nerve damage (Yamane K, Usui T, Yamamoto T, *et al*: Clinical efficacy of intra-

venous plus oral mecobalamin in patients with peripheral neuropathy using vibration perception thresholds as an indicator of improvement. *Curr Ther Res* 56:656-670 [review], 1995).

- ***Gymnema sylvestre***, an herbal extract, helps the pancreas produce insulin in Type II diabetes. It also promotes insulin’s ability to reduce blood sugar levels in Type I diabetes (Shanmugasundaram ERB, Rajeswari G, Baskaran K, *et al*: Use of *Gymnema sylvestre* extract in the control of blood glucose insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus. *J Ethnopharmacol* 30:281-294, 1990).
- **Asian ginseng** appears to promote the release of insulin from the pancreas and increase the number of insulin receptors. One study found that 200 mg of ginseng extract daily improved blood sugar control and energy in Type II diabetes (Sotaniemi EA, Haapakoski E, Rautio A: Ginseng therapy in non-insulin-dependent diabetic patients. *Diabetes Care* 18:1373-1375, 1995).
- **Alpha-lipoic acid** has been shown to enhance insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance. In one study, Type II diabetics took 600 mg of alpha-lipoic acid orally. After four weeks of supplementation, their insulin sensitivity increased by about 30 percent, and their oral glucose tolerance also improved (Jacob S, Henriksen EJ, Ruus P, Rett K, *et al*: The radical scavenger alpha-lipoic acid

enhances insulin sensitivity in patients with NIDDM: a placebo-controlled trial. *Diabetes* 45:1024-1029, 1996).

- **Fenugreek seeds** have been shown, in laboratory studies, to decrease fasting and after-meal levels of blood glucose, total cholesterol, and triglycerides (Ribes G, *et al*: Effect of fenugreek seeds on endocrine pancreatic secretions in dogs. *Ann Nutr Metab* 28:37-43, 1984).

### Final thoughts

Although diabetes is a serious, incurable condition, advances in medicine are making it easier to monitor blood sugar levels, to customize treatment plans, and to catch potential complications early. Whether the diabetes is Type I, Type II, or gestational, blood sugar control is the key to long-term health and vitality.

As with most illnesses, a diabetic's day-to-day choices have an enormous impact on blood sugar balance and overall health. By working with a qual-

ified healthcare professional, eating a diet high in fiber and complex carbohydrates and low in sugar and animal foods, reducing body fat if overweight, getting the appropriate amount of physical activity, and taking specific, doctor-approved supplements, a person with diabetes can live a full and robust life.

There is no cure for diabetes, but there are proven approaches for extending both the quantity and quality of a diabetic's life.

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# Irritable Bowel Syndrome

## natural relief is available

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a disorder of the gastrointestinal tract. IBS makes it difficult to pass feces through the large and/or small intestine. It accounts for the majority of referrals to gastroenterologists, doctors who specialize in intestinal disorders. The condition is characterized by pain, bloating, cramping, gas, constipation, and/or diarrhea. Approximately 22 percent of the United States population have suffered from irritable bowel syndrome. IBS seems to afflict women twice as often as men. However, this may be due to the fact that women are more likely to seek treatment than men.

IBS is a mysterious ailment because, while its symptoms are very real, the bowel itself appears to be normal. The causes of IBS are still unknown. Because it is biologically not fully understood how IBS occurs, it is difficult to treat.

### Symptoms of IBS

Irritable bowel symptoms span the gamut of digestive complaints, as well as some psychological difficulties. According to the *Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine* by Michael Murray, N.D., and Joseph Pizzorno, N.D., the following symptoms are the most characteristic of the illness:

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- Abdominal pain or distension;
- Painful bowel movements;
- Constipation or diarrhea (often alternating);
- Sleep disturbances;
- Mucus or undigested food in the stool;
- Dyspeptic symptoms (gas, nausea, anorexia); and/or
- Anxiety or depression.

It is important to note that the symptoms of IBS may reflect other conditions. For example, IBS symptoms can mirror those of Crohn's disease, lactose intolerance, and even cancer. An accurate diagnosis is critical. If you feel you may have IBS, visit your doctor to discuss your options. Author and homeopathic expert Dana Ullman also recommends professional medical treatment if you are experiencing excessive vomiting, dehydration, bloody or tar-like stools, or vomiting during the course of a viral respiratory condition.

### The mental health angle

IBS patients are certainly not imagining their symptoms. However, some physicians suspect that the condition's origin could be psychological. Studies show that patients with IBS frequently suffer from mental or emotional problems, such as depression or anxiety. Some patients have also reported that symptoms worsen during times of stress.

In one study, researchers explored the role of emotional abuse in women with irritable bowel syndrome and irritable bowel disease. They found that women with IBS had a significantly greater incidence of emotional abuse,

self-blame, and self-silencing. Another study featured in the *Journal of Gastroenterology (Suppl A:47-49 March 1999)* found a link between emotional stress and the inflammation associated with IBS. In this study, researchers found that patients with IBS are more likely to have a history of stressful life events.

Researchers report that individuals with IBS suffer more frequently from sleep disturbances (*Dig Dis Sci 45(5) March 2000*). Furthermore, IBS symptoms can worsen following a poor night's sleep.

Considering the correlation between psychological disorders, IBS, and insomnia, this research reinforces the importance of addressing emotional and mental health issues for IBS patients.

### Dietary and infectious culprits

While psychological problems may contribute to IBS, its origins can also be purely physical, stemming from food sensitivity or infection. A sensitivity to one or more types of food can cause IBS. Common foods implicated in IBS include wheat, corn, dairy products, coffee, tea, or citrus fruits. Fatty foods, alcohol, or chocolate can aggravate IBS symptoms, such as reflux.

Gas, which is a frequent complaint of IBS patients, can be caused by foods such as beans, cabbage, lentils, apples, raisins, and grapes. Excessive soluble fiber may also aggravate symptoms.

Infection, which creates a weakened immune system, may contribute to IBS. According to a study featured in the *American Journal of Gastroenterology (Vol 95 No 8, August 2000)* there is an association between *Helicobacter pylori*

infection and IBS patients with dyspepsia (i.e., upset stomach).

In addition, experts suggest that candidiasis (yeast overgrowth caused by a weakened immune system or antibiotic use) may contribute to IBS. By wiping out the healthy bacteria that prevent candida from spreading, antibiotics can quietly promote IBS. Also, oral contraceptives can cause hormonal shifts, creating a favorable environment for yeast overgrowth. If candidiasis does take hold, it increases the likelihood of food allergies, which can then lead to IBS.

### The role of diet

IBS is a serious condition and should be evaluated by a qualified physician. However, individuals with IBS can participate in their own treatment and recovery by paying close attention to what they eat.

It is important for individuals to identify and eliminate foods to which they may be sensitive. By eliminating foods that induce or worsen symptoms, IBS patients can begin to improve their condition. To begin, patients should work with their health-care provider to develop an elimination diet to determine food sensitivities. By limiting their diet, and then slowly adding and subtracting foods they suspect may be causing the symptoms, IBS patients can more easily identify, and eliminate, which foods aggravate their IBS symptoms.

Increasing dietary fiber may benefit those who suffer from constipation. Clinical studies have shown mixed results, possibly because most studies use dietary fiber from wheat bran. Many people are allergic to wheat, and food allergies are known to aggravate (if not cause) IBS. Other high-fiber grains, such as rice bran, oat bran, or psyllium seed, may be better alternatives. Increasing fruits and vegetables may also help. Eliminate refined sugar (including alcohol).

“Some patients have also reported that symptoms worsen during times of stress.”

## “Artichoke leaf extract may have potential as a therapeutic agent for IBS.”

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Excessive sugar consumption interferes with intestinal function. Caffeine can also exacerbate symptoms.

### Treatment options

Many physicians now recognize the importance of treating psychological factors related to IBS. In many cases, this kind of treatment results in better clinical outcomes for IBS patients. As one study points out, psychological or psychiatric intervention can be an important part of a comprehensive approach that includes education and reassurance. Counseling is often helpful for IBS patients.

If counseling does not help, doctors can prescribe a variety of drugs aimed at relieving symptoms. Laxatives, antidiarrheal medicines, antidepressants, and antispasmodics are common prescriptions. While beneficial for some, each drug is associated with some side effects. Laxative products containing phenolphthalein have been recalled because they have been linked to cancer.

Over-the-counter and natural stimulant laxatives may contain senna (*Cassia spp.*), Aloe vera, rhubarb (*Rheum spp.*), buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*), cascara (*Cascara sagrada*), or castor oil (*Ricinus communis*). These may cause chronic digestive complaints if misused over a period of years. In addition, many laxative products can cause painful cramping.

People with IBS may choose to take a more comprehensive natural approach to treating their condition. Certain herbs contain volatile oils that relieve intestinal gas, improve intestinal tissue tone, and ease intestinal spasms. Specific herbs successfully used to treat IBS symptoms in scientific studies include:

- **Chamomile** (*Matricaria recutita*) and/or **Valerian** (*Valeriana officinalis*) to help with insomnia associated with IBS;

- **Coriander** (*Coriandrum sativum*) to help settle the stomach;
- **Catnip** (*Nepeta cataria*) for indigestion and heartburn;
- **Fennel** (*Foeniculum vulgare*) to help expel gas;
- **Ginger** (*Zingiber officinale*) to help calm the stomach, ease nausea, and help with indigestion;
- **Peppermint** (*Mentha piperita*) to calm the intestines and ease other symptoms of IBS.

“Several clinical studies have demonstrated that enteric-coated peppermint oil is quite effective in reducing the abdominal symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome,” explained Dr. Murray in *The Healing Power of Herbs*. Peppermint oil helps to calm the smooth muscle within the intestinal tract, which then eases IBS symptoms. Dr. Murray recommends one to two enteric-coated capsules (0.2 ml of peppermint oil per capsule) three times daily between meals.

Peppermint oil is considered safe, however in rare cases when taken orally, heartburn or slowing of the pulse can occur. If the oil is not enteric-coated, the oil may release prematurely and is more likely to cause heartburn.

According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Vo 280, No 18 1998), individually tailored traditional Chinese medicines have also been used successfully to treat IBS.

In addition to the previously mentioned herbs, a recent study featured

in *Phytotherapy Research* (Vol 15 2001), described the effectiveness of artichoke leaf (*Cynara scolymus L.*) in the treatment of IBS. The study, which was conducted in Germany, included 553 patients. The article in *Phytotherapy Research* described the results from a sub-group of 279 patients with three of five IBS symptoms including:

1. abdominal pain
2. bloating
3. gas
4. cramps
5. constipation

After six weeks of treatment, there was a significant reduction in symptoms with 84 percent of both patients and physicians rating the overall effectiveness of the extract as good or excellent. According to the researchers, “Artichoke leaf extract may have potential as a therapeutic agent for IBS.”

Always check with your physician before taking herbs or supplements for a specific illness.

In addition to these effective herbal extracts, experts suggest that people who are susceptible to IBS symptoms:

- should eat slowly
- don’t overeat,
- eat whole, natural foods that do not contain additives, colorings, or preservatives.

### Physical activity helps

Experts also agree that it may help to start moving. Although exercise may not sound appealing to a person with IBS, it can provide great

benefits. Physical activity has been shown to reduce stress and improve sleep, two critical factors in IBS.

"I'd recommend getting involved in a stress-management program that appeals to you, such as medita-

tion, biofeedback, or yoga or some other form of moderate exercise," recommended botanical expert James Duke, Ph.D.

While IBS is a frustrating, sometimes even debilitating condition, it can be

overcome. Individuals with IBS can take control and actively participate in their recovery by making sound dietary choices, being physically active, and using herbs to help ease the symptoms.

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# Weight Loss

## natural solutions for permanent results

by Dena Nishek

If you're struggling with your weight, you are not alone. The 1999–2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found that 64 percent of U.S. adults are overweight or obese. And despite the \$30 billion a year people spend trying to lose or maintain their weight, Americans aren't getting any slimmer. The number of overweight and obese adults in the United States continues to increase steadily.

Unfortunately, when dieters do lose weight, they almost always gain it back, according to a 13-member panel of obesity, metabolic, and other experts convened by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Studies show one year after dieting, 66 percent of people regain their weight; after five years, 97 percent. However, there's no reason why you can't be a long-term weight-loss success story.

### Drawbacks of yo-yo dieting

Yo-yo dieting isn't just frustrating—it's dangerous. Research indicates frequent, rapid weight changes lead to a higher death rate and may increase coronary artery disease risk. Each time you lose weight and gain it back, your arteries become more clogged with cholesterol buildup, or plaque. High cholesterol contributes to atherosclerosis, high blood pressure, and heart attacks.

Yo-yo dieting also makes permanent weight loss more difficult. Extreme calorie deprivation slows the rate at which you burn calories. When you eat normally again, your body "hoards" fat, and you end up heavier and unhealthier than ever.

Staying fat isn't the answer, either. Health risks associated with obesity include diabetes, post-surgical complications, hypertension, delayed wound-healing, high cholesterol and triglycerides, as well as increased risks of infection, gallstones, stroke, heart attack, psychological stress, osteoarthritis, and early death. In addition, excess body fat can cause shortness of breath, back pain, complications in childbirth, and even job and social discrimination.

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## Lifelong weight management

Because of the dangers associated with excess body weight—and the dismal success of most weight-loss programs—many experts are beginning to shift their focus. They now recognize there is no single solution to this multifaceted health condition.

Myriad factors contribute to weight problems: unstable blood sugar levels, genetics, age, childhood obesity, inactivity, high-fat diet, and medical problems. Researchers are trying to better understand obesity so they can develop more effective strategies for treating it.

For now, we must accept there is no “magic bullet.” Instead, we need to develop a comprehensive strategy that includes a balanced diet, consistent exercise, and intelligent supplementation. Our day-to-day choices will make far more difference to our weight and overall health than any other single factor. And no one can make these choices for us.

### Where to start?

Reducing body fat can be difficult, but the guidelines are fairly simple:

- **Eat at least three meals a day.** If you skip a meal, your appetite will increase and your energy and blood sugar levels will decrease.
- **When you're hungry, snack on healthful foods,** such as fruit, carrots or other vegetables, or unsalted pretzels.
- **Emphasize fresh, unprocessed, plant-based foods.** Low-fat,

nutrient-dense foods are your best dietary choices. These include fresh fruits, vegetables, legumes (beans and peas), and whole grains.

- **Limit your fat intake.** Fat satisfies your hunger quickly, but its low bulk may lead you to consume excess calories before you feel satisfied.
- **Feed the body when it's hungry, and stop eating when you're full.** Learn to understand your hunger signals, and to distinguish between physical and emotional hunger.
- **Drink six to eight glasses of water daily.** While you're losing weight, toxins stored in the fat tissue are released into your bloodstream. Drinking plenty of pure water makes it easier for your liver and kidneys to cope. Water also helps you feel full.
- **Consider taking a multivitamin/mineral formula.** Because you are reducing your calorie intake, you may also be reducing your nutrient intake. A high-quality multi can help fill any dietary gaps.

Nutritional deficiencies are not only hard on your health, they're hard on your weight-loss program. Nutritionist and author Patrick Quillin, Ph.D., R.D., C.N.S., says addressing nutritional imbalances is the key to controlling the appetite. Quillin writes, “A number of binge eaters are deficient in some nutrients, and they devour everything in sight in their hunger for that nutrient” (*Nature's Impact* 1998 Feb/Mar).

“A normal body mass index falls between 18.5 and 24.9. BMI is an accurate indicator of body composition unless you are very muscular or very lean.”

## The “right” fats

Fats aren't all bad. In fact, physician and author Julian Whitaker, M.D., believes weight problems result from fat imbalances. He recommends eating fewer saturated fats and more essential fatty acids (EFAs).

EFAs are important components of hormone-like compounds that help control blood pressure and other vital functions. Good sources of EFAs include flaxseed oil, nuts, fish oil, evening primrose oil, black currant oil, and borage oil.

Just as we need some fat in our diet, we also need some body fat. We depend on fat to store energy, cushion and support vital organs, and balance internal temperature.

Body mass index (BMI) correlates with body fat. The relation between fatness and BMI differs with age and gender, though. For example, women are more likely to have a higher percentage of body fat than men for the same BMI. To calculate your BMI, divide your weight in pounds by your height in inches, squared, then multiply by 703. Too much math? There are numerous BMI calculators available online, including [www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/](http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/). A BMI between 18.5 and 25.9 is considered normal, 25 to 29.9 is overweight, greater than 30 is obese.

### Role of supplements

Diet and exercise are the cornerstones of healthy, permanent weight loss. Liquid meals, diet pills, and special combinations of foods aren't going to do the work for you.

However, certain natural compounds—in the context of reduced calorie intake and consistent physical activity—can help you win your battle of the bulge. Consider the following:

- **5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP)**—a form of tryptophan—is used for appetite control. It appears to

## “Glucomannan is currently used in many weight-loss formulas because of its ability to suppress carbohydrate cravings.”

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work by increasing serotonin levels in the brain. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that influences mood and appetite.

- **Brewer's yeast** reduces the craving for sweets. It provides a wealth of B vitamins and chromium—nutrients known to balance blood sugar levels.
- **Calcium**, specifically from dairy sources, also plays a role in weight control by helping regulate energy metabolism. Clinical and epidemiological data indicate people whose diets include more calcium are less likely to become obese. Dairy sources are more effective than supplements (*J Am Coll Nutr* 2002 Apr;21[2]).
- **Chromium** increases insulin sensitivity, which leads to better blood sugar balance and weight control. Most people eat less than the U.S. National Academy of Science's recommended 50 to 200 mcg of chromium daily.  
In one study, overweight African-American women took either 600 g of niacin-bound chromium or placebo for two months while engaging in a modest diet and exercise program. Those taking chromium lost a significant amount of fat and preserved muscle (*Diabetes, Obesity and Metabolism* 1999;1[6]). Greater muscle mass means greater fat-burning activity.
- **Conjugated linoleic acid (CLA)**—an omega-6 essential fatty acid—has been shown to help the body burn fat for energy and block fat storage. In a pilot study at the University of Wisconsin's Food Research Institute, subjects experienced a 20 percent reduction in body fat and an increase in lean muscle after three months of treatment with CLA.
- **Ephedra** (*Ephedra sinica*), or Ma huang, suppresses appetite and

speeds up metabolism with its adrenalinelike qualities. When combined with caffeine, in a six-month trial, researchers found the ephedra and kola nut combination promoted body weight and fat loss without significant adverse effects (*Int J Obes Relat Metab Disord* 2002 May;36[5]). However, ephedra can cause serious side effects if misused. Ephedra can raise blood pressure or trigger a cardiac arrhythmia. Don't use this herb if you have heart disease, high blood pressure, glaucoma, diabetes, or if you are pregnant or nursing. Consult with a health care provider for a safe dose.

- **Fiber supplements**, such as psyllium or pectin, slow digestion so the feeling of fullness lasts. Dietary fiber also helps balance blood sugar and promotes insulin's effectiveness. In addition, the body uses high-fiber foods for energy instead of storing them as fat.

Although the American Heart Association recommends 20 to 35 g of fiber per day, the typical American diet provides only about 10 g daily.

- **Glucomannan** is a high-fiber herb that helps normalize blood sugar levels and promotes a feeling of fullness (*Med Hypotheses* 2002 Jun;58[6]). In *Nature's Phen-Fen* (Woodland Publishing, 1997), author Rita Elkins, M.H., says glucomannan is a good weight-loss aid because it can expand to about 50 times its original volume when combined with water. Glucomannan is currently used in

many weight-loss formulas because of its ability to suppress carbohydrate cravings. In addition, it promotes bowel elimination and absorbs intestinal toxins.

- **Green tea** can help enhance calorie burning. Researchers found that when subjects took green tea, they burned 4 percent more calories in a 24-hour period compared with caffeine or placebo. Plus, more of these were fat calories (*Am J Clin Nutr* 2000 Nov;72[5]).
- **Hydroxycitric acid (HCA)**—isolated from the fruit of the Malabar tamarind (*Garcinia cambogia*)—may help block fat production and reduce hunger. Research is inconclusive, but some animal studies indicate HCA may help suppress appetite (*Mol Cell Biochem* 2002 Sep;238[1-2]).
- **Kelp** may jump-start your metabolism. It is rich in iodine, which is essential for proper thyroid function. The thyroid gland helps regulate weight.
- **L-carnitine** is an important addition to thermogenic (fat-burning) formulas because it helps improve the use of fat as an energy source.
- **Pyruvate** is a natural compound that promotes not only weight loss, but fat loss. In a six-week clinical trial, overweight men and women taking 6 g of pyruvate daily lost significantly more weight and fat than those taking placebo. All participants exercised for about an hour three times a week (*Nutrition* 1999 May;15[5]).

## Physical activity is essential

Consistent exercise promotes body fat loss in three ways:

1. Food in, energy out. Even if you continued eating exactly as you do now and started exercising at least four times a week, you would lose 30 pounds in a year.
2. Afterburn. Your basal metabolic rate is heightened for four to 24 hours after vigorous physical activity.
3. Increased lean body mass. Muscle burns more calories than any other part of the body. When you have more lean muscle mass, you use fat as fuel more efficiently.

Your exercise program should include stretching, toning/strengthening, and aerobic workouts. Of these three, aerobic exercise yields the most fat-burning clout. For optimal cardiovascular (and fat-burning) benefits, your aerobic program should bring your heart rate up to 60 percent to

80 percent of your maximum for 30 minutes at least three times a week. To determine that rate, subtract your age from 220, then calculate 60 percent to 80 percent of that figure (Berkow R [ed]: *The Merck Manual of Medical Information*. Merck Research Laboratories, 1997).

Besides weight control, regular exercise reduces your risk of diabetes, osteoporosis, and heart disease; increases stamina, strength, and flexibility; relieves pain; improves mood; increases mental sharpness; improves quality of sleep; and may increase longevity. Before beginning an exercise program, consult a health care professional.

### Take it slow

You've heard it before, and it's true: You didn't put the weight on overnight, and you're not going to lose it overnight. The Mayo Clinic recommends women lose one pound a week; two pounds a week for men.

(Because of their higher metabolic rate, it's easier for men to lose weight more quickly.) If you lose about one pound of fatty tissue a week, you'll lose 52 pounds in a year. You may feel like you're spinning your wheels, but slow, gradual weight loss is more likely to be permanent.

Consider supplements to help burn fat and meet your nutrient needs as you develop healthier eating habits and become more physically active. Eventually, you'll find you don't even miss those fatty and sweet foods; you'll actually enjoy nutritious meals. And you may even start looking forward to exercise.

Don't worry if you backslide once in a while. As physician and author Dean Ornish, M.D., notes, "It's not all-or-nothing. Change a little, get lesser results; change a lot, and the difference in how you feel is dramatic."

Dena Nishek is a freelance writer and editor specializing in natural health care topics.

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# Prostate Health

## natural program provides relief

Most men are likely to ignore their prostate until it gives them trouble. Unfortunately, in modern Western society, the majority of prostates are trouble-makers to some degree. Many men are susceptible to benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), also known as enlarged prostate.

The prostate gland, located just below the bladder, is approximately the size of a walnut. It wraps around the urethra (i.e., the canal that carries urine out of the bladder). The prostate generates seminal fluid, which is essential for the survival of sperm. This important gland also lubricates the urethra to prevent infection and promote sperm flow.

Because the prostate is so close to the urethra, urinary difficulties are typically the key symptoms of BPH and other prostate problems, such as prostatitis and prostate cancer. Prostate disease can be serious, and it is vital to consult a physician for an accurate diagnosis.

### **Age is a primary risk factor**

As a man gets older, the cells in his prostate are more likely to multiply, increasing the size of the gland. At the age of 30, a man has only a 10 percent chance of having detectable BPH. In contrast, BPH affects more than 50 percent of 60-year-old men, and more than 90 percent of men over the age of 85.

If left untreated, BPH can eventually squeeze the urethra and block the flow of urine. This obstruction can lead to blood in the urine—a potentially life-threatening condition known as uremia. Also, urine may stagnate in the bladder, increasing the risk of infection and kidney stone formation. Prolonged obstruction can even damage the kidneys. That's why it's so important to obtain a proper diagnosis and treatment plan from a trained healthcare professional.

### Symptoms and side effects

BPH is characterized by the following symptoms: difficulty in starting to urinate, increased urinary frequency, nighttime trips to the bathroom, and reduced force and volume of urination. Sleep deprivation is common among men with BPH.

BPH symptoms are bad enough, but conventional medical treatments aren't always a picnic either. For example, many prostate medications are costly and can cause impotence, decreased libido, breast tenderness and enlargement, and hypersensitivity reactions, such as lip swelling or skin rashes.

Transurethral resection (TURP), a surgical treatment for BPH, has been widely used since the 1940s. During this procedure, a special instrument is passed through the urethra to scrape away part of the inside of the prostate. The purpose is to carve out a larger channel, allowing a more forceful stream of urine. Recovery usually takes six to eight weeks.

Unfortunately, TURP has a 25 percent rate of complications. These include bleeding, infection, impotence, and incontinence. In addition, surgery and anesthesia always carry some risk, especially in elderly patients who may have other health conditions.

### Saw palmetto for BPH

BPH is not inevitable. In addition to dietary and lifestyle factors, specific nutrients and herbs can help reduce the risk of developing an enlarged prostate.

The most widely used plant extract for BPH symptoms is saw palmetto

berry (*Serenoa repens*). Several clinical trials have shown that saw palmetto berry extract is an effective, safe alternative treatment for BPH. Saw palmetto berry extract reduces inflammation and stops the prostate cells from multiplying—the action responsible for BPH.

Saw palmetto berry extract was the focus of a meta-analysis published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* (280[18]:1604-1609, November 11, 1998). The researchers reviewed 18 randomized, controlled trials involving 2,939 men. They concluded, "...the evidence suggests that *S repens* improves urologic symptoms and flow measures. Compared with finasteride (i.e., popular BPH medication), *S repens* produced similar improvement in urinary tract symptoms and urinary flow and was associated with fewer adverse treatment events (i.e., side effects)."

Choose a saw palmetto supplement that is standardized for its content of health-promoting fatty acids and sterols. Standardization ensures consistency, potency, and purity.

Other herbs shown to relieve BPH symptoms include pygeum, flower pollen extract, and stinging nettle.

### Interview with an expert

Mitchell Ghen, D.O., Ph.D., is an osteopathic physician with a doctorate in anti-aging medicine. He is an international speaker and writer on holistic health issues. Dr. Ghen has medical practices in South Carolina (Biogenesis Clinic) and Atlanta, GA (Millenium Health Care Clinic). He also hosts his own radio show.

### Q: How does BPH develop?

A: When a man ages, his testosterone levels typically decrease, and his levels of estrogen, luteinizing hormone (LH), follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), and prolactin all increase. LH, FSH, and prolactin are pituitary-gland hormones that lead to increased testosterone levels in the prostate. Once that occurs, an enzyme called 5-alpha-reductase converts the testosterone to dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a more potent and destructive version of this hormone. DHT leads to the development of BPH. The higher levels of estrogen frequently found in older men are thought to block the clearance of DHT from the prostate gland.

### Q: How does saw palmetto berry extract help in cases of BPH?

A: Saw palmetto berry extract blocks the activity of 5-alpha-reductase. In this way, it interferes with the conversion of testosterone into DHT, thereby protecting the prostate gland from enlargement.

### Q: How soon can an individual expect to see results when taking a saw palmetto supplement?

A: That depends on the person. Usually, men start to experience relief from their symptoms within 10 days. It may take a month or two to experience the full effect of saw palmetto berry extract.

### Q: Which symptoms are relieved first?

A: One of the key symptoms of BPH is frequent trips to the bathroom. That's because the enlargement is keeping the urine in the bladder. The

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“Sleep deprivation is common among men with BPH.”

“I like to add vitamin D, zinc...and a beta-carotene-related nutrient called lycopene.”

bladder only has one job: to store urine. When it gets enlarged, the nerves in the bladder tell the brain, “It’s time to go to the bathroom.”

Saw palmetto berry extract helps relieve the “It’s-time-to-go-to-the-bathroom” panic. By shrinking the prostate even a little bit, men can empty the bladder more completely, which means it takes longer to refill. That means, of course, fewer trips to the bathroom.

Saw palmetto berry extract also helps men sleep through the night, because they don’t have to get up as often to go to the bathroom. In addition, saw palmetto seems to strengthen the stream of urine, and reduce the inflammation of BPH.

**Q: How safe is saw palmetto berry extract?**

A: I have found saw palmetto berry to be a very safe extract. As far as I know, there have been no reported cases of toxicity. Of course, an herb can always have some toxicity, and I would not recommend doubling, tripling, or quadrupling the dosage to treat the symptoms of BPH.

If a man is not getting results from a dosage of one capsule three times daily, he should speak to his health-

care practitioner or alternative medical physician. If they deem it necessary, the patient may be told to increase the dosage slightly. However, there is a point where he’ll start to experience side effects if he uses too much of it.

**Q: What are some of your other recommendations for treating an enlarged prostate?**

A: Saw palmetto berry extract is certainly a mainstay treatment for BPH. But I don’t believe in relying on a single therapy. I like to add vitamin D, zinc—which is very heavily concentrated in the prostate—and a beta-carotene-related nutrient called lycopene. Lycopene is available in foods such as tomatoes and/or tomato products, or in supplemental form.

*Pygeum africanum* is another useful herb. Some studies show that the combination of pygeum and saw palmetto berry leads to better results than either one used alone. Pumpkin seed oil seems to take the swelling out of an enlarged prostate. *Uva ursi* is an

herb that helps the bladder relax; it’s a tonic for emptying the bladder. I have also found that flaxseed oil helps relieve some of the inflammation that can occur in the prostate.

**Q: Can these herbs and nutrients be taken together or with prescription prostate medications?**

A: For the most part, the answer is yes. However, if you’re taking a 5-alpha-reductase inhibitor like finasteride, then I would be very cautious about taking saw palmetto at the same time. Before you do anything like that, discuss it with your family practitioner or urologist. If you’re on medication, I recommend vitamin D, zinc, and lycopene for a synergistic effect.

**Summary**

The ideal men’s health program includes a balanced diet and consistent exercise. Research has confirmed that diet and lifestyle negatively or positively influence health. Here are 10 general lifestyle and dietary guidelines to follow for optimum male health:

1. See your physician for regular check-ups. If you suspect you may have a problem, get help early.
2. Reduce or eliminate intake of beer and other alcoholic drinks. They negatively affect male health, especially the prostate gland.
3. Limit exposure to dietary and environmental toxins. Read food labels and avoid preservatives, additives, and artificial ingredients. Pesticides have also been linked to prostate problems and other illnesses.

**BPH, prostate cancer, and prostatitis**

Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) is a non-cancerous growth of the prostate gland and should not be confused with prostate cancer. There appears to be no connection between these two disorders, but they exhibit similar symptoms. For this reason, it is important to rule out prostate cancer via a proper diagnosis. As with any type of cancer, early diagnosis of prostate cancer is vitally important.

Prostatitis is inflammation of the prostate gland and is more common among younger men. Conventional medical treatment of prostatitis usually includes antibiotics. In Europe, flower pollen extract is the most common treatment for prostatitis.

4. If you smoke, quit. Don't smoke or chew tobacco.
5. Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables and add more fiber to your diet.
6. Exercise regularly. Physical activity is critical to overall health and well-being.
7. Limit intake of sugar and saturated fats, while increasing polyunsaturated fats such as olive, flax, and fish oils.
8. Reduce negative stress in your life.
9. Have a positive mental attitude. Smile often and laugh when you can.
10. Take a multivitamin/mineral supplement designed for men. Add a male health formula featuring the ingredients mentioned.

Men have unique nutritional needs. The most successful health program includes a healthful diet, regular exercise, a positive mental attitude, and nutritional supplements for added insurance.

There's no question that life can be challenging. Protecting and enhancing your health gives you an edge. Utilizing a comprehensive health program tips the scales in your favor, giving you the natural advantage you need to live life with vitality.

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# PMS Relief

## Nutrients and herbs can help

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is not a one-size-fits-all condition. One woman may experience bloating, breast tenderness, food cravings, and weight gain, while another may suffer from migraine headaches, fatigue, mood swings, and irritability.

"The symptoms of PMS leave many women feeling out of control and unable to cope with the normal stresses and difficulties of daily life," states Mary P. Evans, M.D., an obstetrician/gynecologist at Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN.

### The roots of PMS

So far, we can't pinpoint a single cause for PMS. However, one popular theory suggests an imbalance of the estrogen-progesterone ratio. In other words, when a woman has too much estrogen and not enough progesterone in her system, she may be more vulnerable to PMS (Pelton R: Natural products can ease PMS. *Medical Tribune*, January 6, 2000).

PMS and other menstrual irregularities share a common denominator: an insufficient production of progesterone during the second phase of the woman's cycle, called the luteal phase. As a result, estrogen controls the second half of the menstrual cycle. This is called a luteal phase defect.

Another common factor in menstrual difficulties, including PMS, involves the pituitary gland. The pituitary detects elevated estrogen levels, and lets the ovaries know they can start producing less of it.

When the pituitary gland generates too much of a hormone called prolactin, luteal phase defects may result. Prolactin does serve an important purpose: It promotes milk production for nursing mothers. But too much of it can lead to an imbalance in the female sex hormones.

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Excess estrogen may trigger a hormonal imbalance. How does a woman get too much estrogen? Possibilities include oral contraceptives, estrogen replacement therapy, and foreign estrogens from food (such as red meat and chicken). Alcohol consumption, lack of physical activity, not enough dietary fiber, and too much dietary fat may also increase estrogen levels.

PMS symptoms may become worse after pregnancy, hysterectomy, tubal ligation, ovarian surgery, or changes in oral contraceptives. Age is another key factor. As a woman gets older, she experiences hormonal changes that can also exacerbate PMS.

### Diagnosing PMS

Almost 75 percent of premenopausal women experience some degree of PMS (Komaroff AL [ed]: *Harvard Medical School Family Health Guide*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999). At least five percent of premenopausal women suffer from severe PMS. This can damage women's lives and relationships.

How do you know if PMS is responsible for your particular symptoms? To determine whether she has PMS, a woman needs to keep a daily calendar to track when her symptoms occur for at least three consecutive months. PMS symptoms usually develop 14 days before a woman's menstrual period, disappear during the first 14 days of her cycle, and recur monthly. However, the appearance of symptoms can differ dramatically from woman to woman. The timing of symptoms can help a woman and her healthcare provider diagnose PMS. Currently, there are no

lab tests for PMS (PMS: Advances in diagnosis and treatment. *Mayo Clinic Health Oasis*, September 26, 1996).

**Caution:** Symptoms such as fatigue, abdominal bloating, headaches, nausea, depression, and memory problems may be caused by other health conditions. It's critical to consult a qualified healthcare practitioner about any chronic or recurring symptoms.

"By recording symptoms and taking a careful history, we can distinguish PMS from other disorders," Dr. Evans notes.

### The scourge of food cravings

Food cravings are a common and well-known hallmark of PMS. Often, the cravings are for sweets, dairy products, or salty foods (PMS relief: minimize symptoms with nutrition. *Women's Health Alert*, 2000).

However, naturopathic physician and author Tori Hudson, N.D., claims that these are the very foods that worsen PMS symptoms. A high intake of dairy products can increase anxiety and irritability, she says, and salty foods may increase bloating. Large quantities of refined sugar may promote the urinary excretion of magnesium, which could lead to fluid retention.

Furthermore, PMS-related food cravings can also make it much more difficult for overweight women to make important dietary changes that could help them lose weight. That's one more good reason to resist those cravings (Cross GB, *et al*: Changes in nutrient intake during the menstrual cycle of overweight women with premenstrual syndrome. *Br J Nutr* 85[4]:475-482, April 2001).

### Eat better, relieve symptoms

The following dietary guidelines have been shown to help relieve PMS symptoms (DeMarco C: *Take Charge of Your Body: Women's Health Advisor, Revised Sixth Edition*. Winlaw: Well Woman Press, 1997):

- Cut out any refined sugar, salt, caffeine, or alcohol for two weeks before your menstrual period.
- Plan small, frequent meals to keep blood sugar levels in balance.
- Eat a high-fiber, low-fat diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, fish, and chicken.
- Stay away from junk food, fatty foods, and excessive dairy products.

### Conventional treatments

Typically, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are used to relieve the pain associated with PMS. Common side effects of NSAIDs include diarrhea, nausea, and gas. Prolonged or excessive use of NSAIDs may lead to peptic ulcers.

Oral contraceptives may be prescribed to balance hormones. Although birth control pills can help, they are associated with nausea and cramps.

Antidepressants are also used to control PMS-related mood swings. Side effects of many antidepressants include headache, anxiety, and nausea (Stengler A, Stengler M: *Natural Solutions for PMS*. Green Bay: IMPAKT Communications, 1998).

### PMS-quelling compounds

Several nutrients have been shown to relieve common symptoms of PMS.

- **Calcium supplements** relieved emotional, behavioral, and physical premenstrual symptoms in a double-blind study of 466 women (Pearlstein T, *et al*: Non-antidepressant treatment of

"Almost 75 percent of premenopausal women experience some degree of PMS."

## “Several nutrients have been shown to relieve common symptoms of PMS.”

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premenstrual syndrome. *J Clin Psychiatry* 61[Suppl 12]:22-27, 2000). Recommended dose is 1,200 mg daily.

- **Magnesium** reduces fluid retention (Walker AF, *et al*: Magnesium supplementation alleviates premenstrual symptoms of fluid retention. *J Women's Health* 7[9]:1157-1165, November 1998). Recommended dose is 300 mg daily.
- **Vitamin B<sub>6</sub>** may help treat premenstrual depression (Wyatt KM, *et al*: Efficacy of vitamin B<sub>6</sub> in the treatment of premenstrual syndrome: Systematic review. *BMJ* 318[7195]:1375-1381, May 22, 1999). Recommended dose is 50 mg daily. B<sub>6</sub> is most effective when taken with other B vitamins in the proper ratio.
- **Vitamin E** has been found to reduce PMS-related breast tenderness, nervous tension, headache, fatigue, depression, and insomnia (London RS, *et al*: Efficacy of alpha-tocopherol in the treatment of premenstrual syndrome. *J Reprod Med* 32[6]:400-404, June 1987). Recommended dose is 400 IU daily.
- **Essential fatty acid** abnormalities are often found in women with PMS (Murray M, Pizzorno J: *Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine, Revised 2nd Edition*. Rocklin: Prima Publishing, 1998). Evening primrose oil, flaxseed oil, fish, and fish oil all provide essential fatty acids. Women participating in an Australian study reported that evening primrose oil helped relieve PMS symptoms. The active ingredient in evening primrose oil is gamma linolenic acid (GLA). According to the American Botanical Council, the dose is 3 grams daily.

### PMS-pummeling plants

Certain herbs may also relieve PMS symptoms. Check the product labels for recommended doses:

- **Black cohosh** (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) balances hormones and can help alleviate PMS symptoms (McKenna DJ, *et al*: Black cohosh: efficacy, safety, and use in clinical and preclinical applications. *Alternative Therapies* 7[3]:93-100, May/June 2001).
- **Dong quai** (*Angelica sinensis*) helps balance female hormones and has been shown to reduce cramping and breast tenderness (Hardy ML: Herbs of special interest to women. *J Am Pharm Assoc* 40[2]:234-242, March/April 2000).
- **Ginkgo** (*Ginkgo biloba*) relieves water retention and breast tenderness (Tamborini A, Taurelle R: Value of standardized *Ginkgo biloba* extract [Egb 761] in the management of premenstrual syndrome. *Rev Fr Gynecol Obstet* 88[7-9]:447-457, July/September 1993).

### The promise of chasteberry

Chasteberry (*Vitex agnus-castus*) is a particularly effective herb for PMS. It appears to relieve PMS symptoms by influencing the secretion of hormones in the hypothalamus and pituitary gland. *Vitex* also reduces high levels of prolactin, which can cause breast tenderness. It indirectly promotes the ideal ratio of estrogen and progesterone. Chasteberry is approved in Germany for the treatment of menstrual disorders, including PMS (Berger D, *et al*: Efficacy of *Vitex agnus-castus* L. extract Ze 440 in patients with premenstrual syndrome [PMS]. *Arch*

*Gynecol Obstet* 264[3]:150-153, November 2000).

A recent double-blind study compared the effectiveness of chasteberry versus a placebo. The study monitored 170 women, mean age of 36, over three consecutive months. After three months, 52 percent of the women reported decreased irritability, mood swings, anger, headache, breast fullness, and bloating. Only 24 percent of the placebo group reported improvements (Schellenberg R: Treatment for the premenstrual syndrome with agnus-castus extract: prospective, randomized, placebo controlled study. *BMJ* 322 [7279]:134-137, January 20, 2001).

### Adjusting the estrogen/progesterone ratio

Natural progesterone therapy is based on the theory that PMS symptoms result from an elevated estrogen/progesterone balance. Natural progesterone is believed to correct that imbalance.

It's important to distinguish between natural progesterone and synthetic "progestins."

Natural progesterone is available through injections, vaginal and rectal suppositories, subcutaneous (i.e., under the skin) pellets, and transdermal creams. The best progesterone creams contain 400 mg of natural progesterone per ounce.

Progesterone is a powerful hormone. Consult a qualified healthcare professional to find out if natural progesterone is right for you, how to use it properly, and how to choose the most beneficial product.

### Work out PMS

If you're suffering from PMS, physical activity may be the last thing you want to do. But it's also one of the best. Consistent exercise relieves PMS-related stress and floods the brain with "feel-good" chemicals called endorphins.

Apparently, aerobic exercise reduces PMS symptoms more effectively than weight-lifting or calisthenics. "Aerobic" refers to a significant, temporary increase in

respiration and heart rate. Aerobic activities include brisk walking, running, bicycling, roller-blading, aerobic dance, swimming, or cross-country skiing.

Besides releasing endorphins, physical activity appears to relieve PMS symptoms by:

- 1) reducing estrogen levels;
- 2) stabilizing blood sugar levels;
- 3) reducing catecholamines, neurotransmitters associated with stress.

People who exercise consistently usually find that they can concentrate better, feel more emotionally stable, and experience less pain, water retention, hostility, fear, guilt, and sadness—no matter what day of the month.

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# Energize Me!

## safe, effective ways to step up your stamina

by Maura Hearden

Do you spend your mornings hitting the snooze button on the alarm clock, and your afternoons joking about the joys of artificial stimulants? Do you fantasize about vacations that allow you to do nothing but sleep, eat, and sleep some more? Far too many Americans spend the majority of their adulthood feeling mildly to severely pooped. It's time we get a handle on this situation so we can feel good and enjoy our lives.

Persistent fatigue can be caused by myriad physical and emotional problems. It accompanies almost every disease from the common cold to AIDS, and can be a physical manifestation of depression, emotional stress, and anxiety. Even allergies can make us feel tired. Illnesses must, of course, be treated by a health care professional and are beyond the scope of this article. But what about those of us who are not sick and still feel worn out by our fast-paced lifestyles? Chances are this lack of energy can be traced to poor blood sugar metabolism, stressed-out adrenal glands, or toxic overload.

### **The highs and lows of blood sugar**

The body's principal energy source is glucose, a sugar made from digested carbohydrates. The amount of glucose in the bloodstream is called your blood sugar level. Protein builds muscle, bone, and other body tissues, thus influencing metabolism and providing back-up sources of energy. Basically, carbohydrates provide quick energy and protein provides stamina.

For the body to maintain optimum energy, it must maintain healthy blood sugar levels. These levels are controlled by two hormones: glucagon, which releases sugar, fat, and proteins from your cells for readily available fuel; and insulin, which takes sugar out of your bloodstream and stores it as fat to be burned for fuel later if needed. Glucagon is released when you eat protein. Insulin is released when you eat carbohydrates. Eating too much or too little of either will throw your blood sugar off balance and make you feel tired. But that's not all ...

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Carbohydrates come in two varieties—simple and complex. Simple carbs, such as cane sugar, white flour, and the refined carbs contained in junk foods, are metabolized very quickly and flood your bloodstream with large amounts of glucose all at once. When this happens, the body panics, secreting enough insulin to store it all as fat, and blood sugar levels plunge. You get a quick high and then a severe low, not to mention some extra rolls around the middle.

Complex carbs, such as those found in whole grains, nuts, seeds, fruits, legumes, and yogurt, are metabolized more slowly and enter the bloodstream without causing such a severe reaction.

Skipping meals, eating junk foods, and/or severely limiting portions will starve your body of nutrients and cause low energy levels. The most recent research supports a diet made up of 30 percent fat, 30 percent protein, and 40 percent complex carbohydrates. This will keep your blood sugar balanced and ensure proper nutrition.

### A quick note about fat

In addition to their crucial role in proper nervous system function, healthy skin, and hormonal health, fats are used to store energy. The most important fats are the essential fatty acids, omega-3 and omega-6, found in fish, nuts, and seeds. Many nutritional experts, including John Winterdyk, Ph.D., and Karen Jensen, N.D., the authors of *The Complete Athlete: Integrating Fitness, Nutrition, and Natural Health* (Alive Books, 1998), say even animal fats, such as those found in red meat and butter, are necessary for good health (but should be eaten in moderation). The only fats to avoid altogether are those that have been chemically altered, such as hydrogenated oils. Margarine and so-called “fat-free” foods contain

harmful trans-fatty acids that have been linked with cancer and unhealthy cholesterol levels (*Atherosclerosis* 1994;106, *Brit J Urol* 1990;65).

### Adrenal burnout

Adrenal burnout and proper blood sugar levels are closely related issues. Your adrenal glands are the two tiny, triangular-shaped entities just above your kidneys. They help your body cope with physical and emotional stress—whether it’s good or bad, sudden or prolonged—by secreting adrenaline and other stress hormones.

Adrenal glands are tough, but not invincible. If you live under constant physical and/or emotional stress, they will become fatigued and cease to function properly, leaving you feeling tired all the time. Unfortunately, behaviors such as skipping meals, eating junk food, neglecting exercise or over-exercising, depriving oneself of sleep, and using stimulants (caffeine, nicotine, sugar, etc.) to work through fatigue, comprise an average day’s routine for many Americans. These behaviors put your adrenals in a constant state of alert, which will lead to exhaustion. Now here’s the good news: weary adrenals can be nursed back to health.

Allopathic medicine does not recognize adrenal dysfunction until the adrenal glands are 80 percent to 90 percent dysfunctional (a condition known as Addison’s Disease), but our bodies can feel adrenal fatigue long before then. Don’t wait until your adrenals are almost shot to do something about it. *Tired of Being Tired* (Berkeley Pub Group, 2002) by Jesse Lynn Hanley, M.D., and Nancy Deville provides some excellent diagnostic tools and healing strategies.

Hanley emphasizes that one of the best ways to combat adrenal fatigue is to regulate your blood sugar. Skipping meals or limiting portions causes your blood sugar levels to

drop. The adrenals interpret this as an emergency situation and secrete the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol. Adrenaline releases emergency energy from sugar stored in your liver and muscles while cortisol breaks down your own muscle mass to be transformed into additional emergency sugar. This causes a temporary sugar overload, triggering insulin secretion. Insulin stores the sugar as fat. During this process, you experience a blood sugar roller coaster of highs and lows that are both tiring and fattening.

According to Hanley, mild adrenal problems can be counteracted by simply eating three healthy, balanced meals per day. If this change is not sufficient, try spreading the same amount of food over six small meals per day. Nutritional supplements are also important for restoring tired adrenal glands.

### Energizing supplements

Many vitamins and minerals are necessary to sustain optimum energy levels, so your best bet is to start with a good multivitamin mineral supplement, ask a health care professional to help pinpoint your specific health issues (blood sugar metabolism, etc.) and vitamin/mineral deficiencies, then fill in the gaps with additional supplements. The following is a summary of some of the most widely used energy-enhancers:

**Adrenal glandulars.** Available in pill form, these nutrient-rich supplements derived from animal adrenal glands enhance adrenal health by facilitating hormone production. Because adrenal glandulars simply stimulate your body’s natural hormone production, they avoid the risks of steroid and adrenaline products. Oral adrenal extracts have been in use since at least 1931 (*Science* 1931;74).

**Astragalus** (*Astragalus membranaceus*). Among its many uses listed in *Prescription for Nutritional Healing* (Avery Penguin Putnam, 2000) by Phyllis A. Balch, C.N.C., and James F. Balch, M.D., this herb aids adrenal gland function and increases metabolism and energy.

**B vitamins.** B vitamins are stress-fighters. They help with fat metabolism and energy production, and they soothe the nerves by promoting nervous system health. Because B vitamins are more effective when taken together, health care practitioners often recommend a B complex.

**Chromium.** This mineral is crucial for blood sugar, carbohydrate, and amino acid metabolism, as well as fat synthesis and maintenance of overall energy levels.

**Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10).** CoQ10 is a natural component found in every cell of the body. It is central to energy production, blood sugar metabolism, and is a powerful antioxidant. At least one study found a positive correlation between CoQ10 levels in muscles and exercise capacity and marathon performance (*Mol Cell Biochem* 1996;156).

**Free-form amino acids.** Amino acids are the tissue-building components of proteins. Carnitine is a particularly important amino acid, which improves stamina and energy metabolism in the muscles.

**Ephedra** (*Ephedra sinica*). A natural form of ephedrine and popular stimulant, ephedra should be used with caution. It does not address underlying causes for fatigue and may produce negative side effects such as irritability, nightmares, and jittery feelings. Do NOT use this supplement if you suffer from panic attacks, glaucoma, heart disease, or high blood pressure, or if you are taking monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitor drugs.

**Sarsaparilla** (*Smilax officinalis*). This popular herbal energy booster may

improve stamina and minimize lactic acid build-up in muscle tissues, thus helping to avoid sore muscles after strenuous workouts.

**Schizandra** (*Schizandra chinensis*). This Chinese herb may reduce fatigue, increase endurance, sharpen senses, and improve the overall strength and performance of athletes.

**Siberian ginseng.** (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*). This herb can support adrenal and thyroid function, hormone production, and sugar metabolism. Avoid this product if you have hypoglycemia, high blood pressure, or a heart disorder (*Econ Med Plant Res* 1985;1).

**Spirulina.** This microalgae is a food resource that produces 20 times as much energy-enhancing protein as soybeans.

**Vitamins C and E.** Many clinical studies have proven the great antioxidant value of both of these vitamins. Vitamin C may protect against exercise-induced muscle damage (*Eur J Appl Physiol* 1993;67).

**Western licorice root** (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) that has been deglycyrrhizinated (DGL) and Chinese licorice (*Glycyrrhiza uralensis*). Winterdyk and Jensen recommend these herbs for detoxifying, regulating blood sugar, strengthening adrenals, and building muscle.

### Sleep and exercise

Adequate sleep and exercise are essential to energy levels. Sleep deprivation results in poor judgment, impaired productivity and creativity, and depressed emotions, while inactivity causes muscle deterioration and a sluggish metabolism.

Your body requires sleep to repair the wear and tear it sustains during busy waking hours. For example, Hanley says the stage of sleep called Rapid Eye Movement (REM), which occurs during the seventh hour of sleep, is the time for the brain to repair itself and sort information

gathered throughout the day. In addition, human growth hormone (HGH) is released primarily at night to facilitate muscle and bone repair. Michael T. Murray, N.D., and Joseph E. Pizzorno, N.D., editors of the *Textbook of Natural Medicine* (Churchill Livingstone, 1999), say most adults require seven to nine hours of sleep per night.

The release of HGH is also stimulated during periods of moderate exercise, such as walking, swimming, or playing sports. Because it accelerates tissue repair and fat burning, HGH produces energy. Conversely, when we hold still for extended periods of time, we begin to lose muscle mass. Just three days of bed rest is enough to start this process of decline.

Too much exercise can also be a danger. Over-exercise (consistently exercising to the point of exhaustion) stimulates the release of the hormone, dihydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), which builds muscle, but

### SPECIAL NOTICE FOR WOMEN

Many women suffer from iron deficiencies or hypothyroidism (low thyroid function), both of which cause fatigue. Speak with a health care professional to properly diagnose these conditions. Too much iron and overstimulated thyroid glands are also hazardous to your health.

Many people with mild hypothyroidism are never diagnosed because laboratory tests are notoriously difficult to interpret. Michael T. Murray, N.D., and Joseph E. Pizzorno, N.D., editors of the *Textbook of Natural Medicine* (Churchill Livingstone, 1999), advise looking at the total picture drawn by blood tests, basal body temperature, and symptomatic evidence.

also stimulates cortisol release, which attacks muscle. Young athletes seem to get away with over-exercising because the DHEA counteracts the cortisol, but as we age DHEA levels drop and the adrenal glands begin to burn out. Eventually, people who over-exercise will feel tired and gain weight, even if they're exercising more than ever.

### **Toxins drain energy**

Our environment is saturated with toxins including air and water pollution, household cleansers, and food preservatives. Environmental toxins have been linked with a host of diseases including chronic fatigue, cancer, and neurological disorders. Absorbing environmental toxins can also make us feel tired.

There are many good detoxifying regimens to choose from, depending on the type and severity of your condition. They usually include some kind of fasting (abstinence from certain foods and drinks) and supplements

that support the liver, kidneys, and bowels, which are the body's natural detoxifying agents. They also include antioxidants, natural agents that neutralize free radicals (toxic substances that attack cells).

Fruits and vegetables are wonderful sources of antioxidants, plus they provide fiber, which binds with toxins and pulls them out of your system. Plenty of purified water also is essential to help your kidneys flush toxins from your body.

### **Putting the energy package together**

In summary, if you're consistently feeling tired and you know you do not suffer from any specific illness, try the following advice:

1. Make sure you are eating three healthy meals a day, consisting of 30 percent proteins, 30 percent fats, and 40 percent complex carbohydrates.

2. Avoid energy-drainers such as caffeine, nicotine, sugar, and junk foods.
3. Drink at least eight cups of purified water daily.
4. Make sure you receive a minimum of seven hours of sleep per night.
5. Exercise moderately for two to four hours per week. Work until you feel energized, not exhausted.
6. Take a good multivitamin and mineral supplement and antioxidant daily.
7. Ask a natural health care professional to help you identify and address specific vitamin and mineral deficiencies and health issues with additional supplements.
8. Try a good detoxifying regimen.

**Maura Hearden**, assistant editor for HealthSmart Today, has been a natural health writer for more than five years. She holds a M.F.A. from the University of Florida, Gainesville, and is pursuing a Ph.D. in theology at the University of Marquette, Wisc.

## COMPLIMENTS OF



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