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Editor's Letter



Wishing You the Best in 2021!

As we look upon the coming year, it is important to look back and take stock of everything we experienced in the past 12 months. We have all had to deal with tremendous number of changes, whether it be routine behaviours like going to work and school, or favorite activities we enjoyed with friends and family. Every one of us has been affected in some way—sadly, some of us more than others. But we also saw tremendous acts of love, generosity, and kindness, and we figured out how to make the best of this difficult situation. Today more than ever, we need to be thankful for the goodness in our lives, take care of ourselves, and do what we can to help one another.

I sincerely hope the worst is truly behind us, and the coming year will bring us all what we have been longing for: A “return to normal” in whatever form it takes, happy times with loved ones, and above all, good health!

We hope you enjoy this issue and that our featured articles will support you in living your best and flourishing throughout the year!

Sophia Golanowski, BCom, MBA
Editor-in-Chief

Flourish

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Editor-in-Chief

Sophia Golanowski

Graphic Designer

Cédric Primeau

Translation/Revision

Guillaume Landry • Pierre Paquette
Cédric Primeau • Nicole Raymond

Advertising Sales

Sophia Golanowski, BCom, MBA
1 800 268-9486 ext. 266
golanowskis@flourishbodyandmind.com

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Recipe Contributors

Kate D. Bunting • Megan Luder

Article Contributors



Heidi Fritz, MA, ND

A practicing naturopathic doctor since 2007, her areas of focus include women's health, children's health, chronic pain, and more.



Krysten DeSouza, ND

Krysten is a Mississauga naturopathic doctor, with a special interest in anxiety disorders and mental health.



Elena Zarifis, BSc (Hons), ND

A licensed naturopathic doctor in Oakville and Burlington, Ontario, with a special interest in gut, brain, thyroid, and overall hormone health.



Philip Rouchotas, MSc, ND

Well-known in the community as a naturopathic doctor, associate professor, and editor-in-chief of *Integrated Healthcare Practitioners*.



Melanie Kusznireckyj, BSc, ND

A naturopathic doctor, graduate from CCNM, dedicated to helping individuals live their best lives through mind-body connection.



Hye Kam, MFT

A licensed couple and family therapist in Montreal specializing in relationship challenges.



Guillaume Landry, MSc, Naturopath

A native of the Jura mountains of eastern France, he shares his passion for the wonders of nature and natural medicine.



Theresa Nicassio, PhD, Psychologist

Theresa is a wellness educator, radio host, and the award-winning author of *YUM: Plant-Based Recipes for a Gluten-Free Diet*.



Sarah Penney, ND, MSc

A graduate of the CCNM in Toronto, Sarah has a special interest in women's health, fertility, digestive concerns, pain management, and chronic disease.



Gordon Raza, BSc

As the supplement specialist for *Flourish*, Gord shares his unique perspective on natural health products, nutrition, and active living.

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Statin Side Effects

How to Reduce Them

by Dr. Krysten DeSouza, ND

It is no surprise to us that cardiovascular disease tops the list of killers in the world. Every one of us knows at least one other person in our families that has been affected by a heart condition. In 2013, Statistics Canada estimated this second-leading cause of death to affect more than 2.4 million Canadians. This number is expected to increase over the next few decades, as the effects of sedentary office jobs and unhealthy eating patterns take their toll.

Cardiovascular disease is a broad term that encompasses any disease affecting the heart and its blood vessels. This includes coronary artery disease, strokes, heart attacks, angina, and peripheral vascular disease.

Many of us are aware of the dangers of heart attacks and strokes. We learn the early warning signs and are versed on how to manage the symptoms in case of emergency. However, many of us are less knowledgeable on the topic of peripheral vascular disease (PVD), a silent and potentially life-threatening disease that affects much more than just the heart.

Peripheral vascular disease affects the blood vessels outside of the heart, such as the legs, arms, fingers, and toes. Similarly to other cardiovascular diseases, PVD involves the buildup of cholesterol along the walls of artery, a process known as atherosclerosis. This narrows the opening and restricts blood flow through the vessels. While you may think this is less harmful than a heart attack, restricting blood flow to the hands—or even the brain—can significantly reduce function if the blockage is even just to a small degree. Symptoms of developing PVD include:

- Painful cramping in legs and hips, even after minimal activity such as climbing stairs;
- Leg numbness and tingling;
- Coldness of the limbs, or a change in colour of the limbs;
- Hair loss, shiny skin, or slower nail growth on the limbs; and
- Erectile dysfunction.

It is important to note that many forms of PVD present with no symptoms. However, anyone with a family history of cardiovascular disease should undergo a full assessment by the age of 65. This assessment should include a test of all pulses in the arms and legs, bloodwork for cholesterol, and perhaps even diagnostic testing for cardiovascular efficiency (such as a stress test). Many medical doctors are quick to put their patients on cholesterol-lowering medications for preventative purposes, but are not always quick to explain the risks and side effects.

History of Statins

It is estimated that up to 90% of cardiovascular disease may be preventable. Research has long been focused on the development of drugs to help support heart function and prevent the buildup of artery-clogging factors. The most common class of medications are statins and include the drug names Lipitor®,



Crestor®, Lescol®, and Altoprev®. With the number of cardiovascular disease cases in the country, it is no surprise that Crestor ranks as the second most prescribed medication according to WebMD.

Back in the 1950s, cholesterol and atherosclerosis were new terms in the research world. Scientists began to investigate how cholesterol was made in the body and found that heart attacks were correlated with high levels of unhealthy LDL cholesterol and low levels of good HDL cholesterol. Other than what came in through the diet, cholesterol could be made by the liver to support the basic and essential hormone functions in the body.

When dietary needs for cholesterol are met, liver function is suppressed naturally to prevent an overflow of cholesterol. The particular enzyme involved in making cholesterol in the liver is known as HMG-CoA reductase. Researchers decided if there was to be a drug to reduce cholesterol, the best way to do it would be to inhibit this enzyme and suppress the liver's ability to make cholesterol: Thus began the production of statins.

After many years of research and animal testing, the first statin hit the shelves in the late 1970s. It was shown to reduce unhealthy LDL cholesterol without making any change to good HDL cholesterol. This definitely seemed like a win for the medical community. Today, statins have been tested in over 90,000 humans followed for five years. The results are consistent in lowering cholesterol and have increased the lifespan of over 30 million people. However, most of these people are on statins for much longer than five years, and little is known of its long-term effects. As naturopathic doctors, we see the medical benefit as well as the side effects and risks. It is important that we always consider these concerns when working with a patient on statins.



Muscle Pain

This could also be classified as weakness, numbness, and soreness in the muscles. It can range from mild discomfort to complete inability to perform daily tasks. This happens because the statin drugs cause small amounts of muscle breakdown in

a process called rhabdomyolysis. Your doctor will run bloodwork to check levels of creatine kinase, an enzyme released when muscle breaks down. If your levels are high, your doctor may consider switching you to another statin.

Liver Damage

As discussed, most cholesterol is made in the liver and the function of the statin drug is to decrease the production of cholesterol in the liver. This means the statin is directly targeting the liver, which can result in inflammation and damage. While this effect might be rare, your doctor should periodically check your liver enzymes and educate you on the signs of liver disease. These can include low appetite, changes in colour of urine and stool, pain in the upper abdomen, and yellowing of the eyes.



Increased Blood Sugar

A mild increase in blood sugar has been noted in patients taking statin medications. This effect may or may not be significant, depending on the individual's family and personal history. Caution should be taken in those currently being treated for diabetes, as medication doses may have to be adjusted for statin use.



How A Naturopathic Doctor Can Help

Nutrition

Very little medical support is given to the nutritional and preventative aspects of care, making thousands of patients reliable on medications with very little accountability in their day-to-day lives. As mentioned previously, the statin drug prevents the liver's ability to produce cholesterol: It does not change anything about the amount of cholesterol coming into the body, nor does it improve the liver's ability to detoxify the amount of cholesterol already existing in the body. A diet plan should be given to every person with high cholesterol, whether they are on medication or not. Many people think cholesterol only comes from eating fried and fatty foods, but our bodies are smarter than that. Cholesterol is essentially a storage form of fuel. Anything we consume in higher amounts than we are using gets stored in the body as fat. Drinking too much alcohol or consuming high amounts of refined carbohydrates and sugars are equally responsible for increasing cholesterol levels.

Exercise

This one goes without saying. Strengthening the heart includes a cardiovascular exercise plan and regular activity. Exercise supports circulation around the entire body, including the liver. This helps to eliminate toxins through the skin, bowels, and bladder, all while burning off excess toxins stored in our fat tissue.

Coenzyme Q₁₀

This antioxidant is present in the highest concentration in all muscles, and specifically the heart muscle. Statins are known to lower levels of CoQ₁₀, and this may even contribute to muscle pain and breakdown that results. A naturopathic doctor (ND) will assess all medications you are on and consider if CoQ₁₀ is a suitable addition to your treatment plan.

Turmeric

Atherosclerosis and cholesterol buildup are inflammatory processes. Turmeric is a powerful liver stimulant and anti-inflammatory compound. It can help support the digestive tract while its bitter properties strengthen the gallbladder-liver connection and expel bile for fat digestion.



Olive Oil

Who would have thought that consuming more fats would help to lower cholesterol? The truth is, we need cholesterol. Most of our hormones are derived from cholesterol, which means we need it to function every day. But we need the good kinds of oils in our diets to help us make the good kind of cholesterol. Olive oil is full of essential healthy fats that will stimulate our liver and help our bodies make more of the good cholesterol.



Vitamin B₁₂

Like everything else in the body, cholesterol has a specific set of steps for it to be made, and another set of steps for it to be broken down. Vitamin B₁₂ is an important step in the breakdown of cholesterol, and without it, the entire production line comes to a halt. It is interesting to note that vegans and vegetarians may end up with high cholesterol even though they don't eat meat. This is because their diets are often low in vitamin B₁₂, which can inhibit the body's ability to break down excess cholesterol. Get your B₁₂ levels checked; this one is an easy fix!

Conclusion

As with all health concerns, cholesterol management is an individual thing. Each person requires their own set of guidelines specific to their dietary, cultural, and lifestyle habits. Making these changes is not easy, but the beauty of natural medicine is that it works forever and teaches us so much more about our bodies.



Dr. Krysten DeSouza, ND

Krysten is a Mississauga naturopathic doctor, with a special interest in anxiety disorders and mental health. She believes in the power of the mind-body connection and that managing mental health should take a whole-body approach.

desouzanaturopathic.com

Visit our blog for the full article including references:
newrootsherbal.com/en/blog

The Beat Goes On...

We're closing in on the first anniversary of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2, causing COVID-19) washing up on our shores. The pandemic has thrust immune health and research to the forefront of wellness; however, this may have come at the expense of other health concerns including cardiovascular wellbeing.

Did You Know?

A research study conducted by prestigious Leeds University in England identified over 2,000 deaths in England and Wales directly due to heart disease and stroke during the peak pandemic months of March through April.

Scientists believe this may be due to people being reluctant to seek the help they required for fear of contracting COVID-19, or from not being referred for treatment.

https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2020-09/uol-toe092820.php

An article in *The Washington Post* reports a 27% increase in deaths from heart-related problems in Michigan, Illinois, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and New York. These statistics were drawn during the months of March, April, and May of 2020.

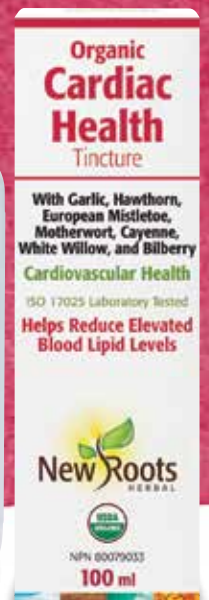
Heart disease is normally the leading cause of death in the United States; however, departments dedicated to heart, cancer, stroke, and other conditions reported fewer patients during this period.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/investigations/coronavirus-excess-deaths-heart>

According to Statistics Canada, heart disease ranks second only to cancer for cause of death in Canadians, numbering in excess of 50,000. This eclipses the combined total of the remaining eight in Canada's Top 10 list.

These are sobering thoughts to "take to heart"; however, it does stress the importance of leading a heart-healthy lifestyle, heading the advice of health-care professionals regarding supplements and medications, and seeking acute care when required.

WOMEN CAN DO ANYTHING MEN CAN DO. INCLUDING SUFFER FROM HEART DISEASE.



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PROUDLY 

Resolutions Worth Keeping!

by Dr. Theresa Nicassio, PhD, Psychologist



“Shoot for the Moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.”

—Les Brown

Ah! yes, New Year’s resolutions....

How is it that this well-intentioned cultural tradition has become so trivialized that it now primarily functions as a marketing tool and source of an annual round of chuckles and embarrassment?

Even worse: What I’ve discovered in my work as a psychologist is how much unnecessary suffering these “goals” can cause, resulting in self-deprecation and feelings of failure and despair after an exhilarating yet short-lived burst of hope and possibility thinking that the new year can bring.

The good news is that the problem is simply that most of us have not yet learned how to turn our hopes and dreams into reality.

Habit Change is Hard

There is no getting around the reality that changing well-worn habits is one of the most unnatural things for us to do as humans. In many ways, our brain is hardwired for efficiency. The more automated our thoughts and behaviours, the more efficient we have the capacity to be because our thoughts can be directed to doing other things.

The problem is that once the habituated processes are set in place, rewiring our inner landscape, along with our cognitive and behavioural patterns, requires monumental interventions. While such interventions are indeed possible using a few key tools, the insight required to restructure our neural pathways for lifestyle modification is more complex and time-consuming than most people realize.

Many of us have heard the saying that “it takes a month to create a new habit.” Given what we’ve learned the last couple of decades from the neurosciences, this is actually partly true because we’ve discovered that given the right conditions, with synaptogenesis, a stem cell can create a new synaptic pathway in about a month. However, to shift the neural infrastructure more robustly with new brain cells, it takes a stem cell about three to four months to mature. Capitalizing on both of these processes for habit changes is an end proposition that requires persistence. This is probably why so many gyms are packed the first month of the year with the attendance suddenly dropping in February,



when members start to feel that they have mastered the changes, not realizing they are only about a third of the way through the process of creating lasting habit change.

Overcoming Resolution Pitfalls

Clarify Your “Why”

Knowing that every cell in your body is accustomed to swimming with the tide, the only way you have any chance of turning against the direction of the tide is if you truly know why it’s worth the Herculean effort required for you to do so.

We have all heard heroic stories of mothers lifting cars to save their babies or of injured soldiers somehow travelling hundreds of miles in order to survive. These examples are wonderful teachers because they remind us that we are capable of far more than we realize when the task before us is something we believe is important.

When we are clear about why we want to do something, we are guided and inspired, even when hurdles make the process uncomfortable or even painful. Ultimately, if the desired change isn’t important enough for us at a core level, we won’t persist in following through with it.

You will be relieved to know that once you have genuinely aligned with your “why,” you are already 80% there. That said, there are a few more things you can do to help you move through the other 20% of the process more successfully.



Shuck the “Shoulds”

The first dangerous vortex that takes many folks down is the temptation to impose what I call “shoulds” on themselves. Of course, there are many other words that masquerade for these stern edicts that can look a lot like a parent or authoritarian boss like “need to,” “have to,” “ought to,” or “gotta,” etc. These “shoulds” take your power away because they distract you from your internal clear focus of “why,” to a stressful psychological process that is more likely to drain your spirit and motivation. The sunflower doesn’t grow and face the sun because it believes it should, but instead it is drawn upward and toward the light because it seeks to be nourished and grow.

The empowering solution to countering the seduction of the “shoulds” is to simply replace your “need to” or “have to” thoughts and words to “want to” that are consistent with your why. This tiny shift is a literal game-changer, as you will soon discover.

Aspirational Mindset

One of the other biggest pitfalls in the resolution process is the focus on goals. Remember when I mentioned earlier about feelings of failure and self-deprecation, well... (and I’m ducking right now as I write this because I know many of you will want to start throwing tomatoes at me when you read what I’m about to say!) it turns out that as innocent as they may seem, I’ve discovered that goal-setting paves an almost sure-fire pathway to disappointment and failure, if not despair at worst. One of the reasons this happens is because of the expectations that are embedded in goals.



When we set goals, we get part of the equation right by envisioning what it is we would like to create in our lives, but the mindset it creates is typically riddled with rigidity and judgement—both being discernment, motivation, and effectiveness kill-joys.

A simple alternative mindset that offers the freedom to dream big, while also offering greater flexibility and opportunities to pivot along the way, is shifting to an aspirational mindset.

When you embrace an aspirational mindset for habit change, you free yourself from getting too attached to the outcome, but instead can direct your energy to the processes that will help you move along in the direction of the vision that you'd like to create. Because you are grounded by your why, there's no need to fear that you will lose your will or general direction. The wounded soldier who runs for their life does not lose the clarity of their vision of staying alive if they end up heading up the hill or down in the valley—they just know they've got to keep moving out of harm's way.

Bundle of Sticks Technique

In the mid-1980s, I used to teach a course called “The Psychology of Personal and Academic Effectiveness” to undergraduate students. As part of the course, there was a textbook called *How to Study in College* by Dr. Walter Pauk that was filled with terrific hacks for more effective living. Included in his book was one of my favourite techniques to help with completing challenging tasks, called the “Bundle of Sticks Technique,” that is also a wonderful tool when faced with the task of following through with behaviour change.

As you think about your desired lifestyle change, instead of thinking about it in its totality, see if you can break that big oak into much smaller, more achievable “sticks” that each feels less overwhelming. Just as you would not dream of carrying a massive tree but could easily cart up small bundles of sticks up a mountain, parceling out different aspects (the smaller the better) of your new habit to focus on makes the process doable.

Final Thoughts

Deciding that you would like to honour yourself by changing one of your lifestyle habits can be a powerful and rewarding tool to care for yourself. That said, such a decision is not one to be taken lightly. Following through with New Year's resolutions requires reflection and clarity about your intentions, foresight, and adequate planning about the process in order to avoid the negative consequences of emotional suffering that all too often results. By following a few key principles, you can relish in the joy of successfully transforming your habits in ways that can potentially serve you for the rest of your life.



Theresa Nicassio, PhD, Psychologist

Theresa is a wellness educator, radio host, and the award-winning author of *YUM: Plant-Based Recipes for a Gluten-Free Diet*.

TheresaNicassio.com

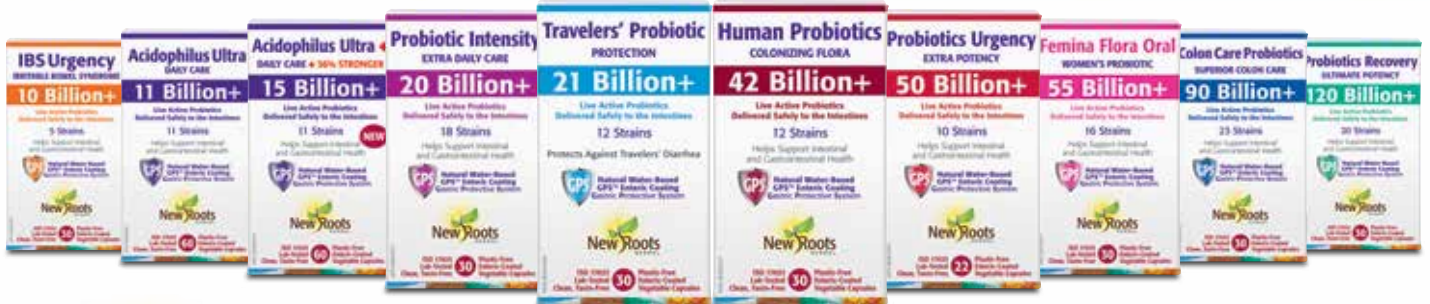


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PROUDLY

A Shoulder to Lean On

Support for Parents During a Pandemic

by Hye Kam, MFT



A few weeks into quarantine, someone on Facebook posted a YouTube video from a few years back with the comment: “This is now the reality for all of us.” It’s the BBC news clip where Professor Kelly is in his home office doing a live interview talking about North Korea, and his daughter comes marching playfully in while he is live on air, followed a few seconds later by her baby brother in a walker. Then the fantastic scene where the mother of the children comes sliding into the room and takes the children out. In the meantime, Professor Kelly tries to maintain a serious and professional posture...

There have been so many parenting struggles since the beginning of the pandemic. Parents juggling children at home full-time while trying to work from home as well (the math does not work on that one!). Then, parents trying to homeschool their children with online-learning—oh! yes—and still working from home. The math on that one doesn’t work either. Then, a summer where most activities were not up and running... wonderful weather but, once again, a lot of responsibility on us parents!

Then, the fall confusion of whether we should send our children back to school or commit to homeschooling... this pandemic has been a chronic demand of stress on parents and has robbed us of our caregivers and support people—or otherwise known as supporters of our sanity! We haven’t been able to alternate playdates, have sleepovers at grandparents, etc.

And now with what seems to be months more of this, we parents need to pull together!

Here are two of my go-to strategies to help us make it through these tough and unusual times.

Fill Your Pot Daily

A wise woman told me years ago that “You can’t feed your family from an empty pot.” Those words have stuck with me over the many years of raising a family. As parents, we want to give everything to our children, and we sacrifice everything for them. Especially in these times where there is even more pressure on parents, it is an even bigger struggle to find time for ourselves. And yet, it is even more critical now to take care of ourselves so that we have “something in our pots to feed our families.” By this point, we are all getting a bit short-fused and cranky, possibly even feeling low ourselves. Our children are navigating their way through this pandemic and have lots of emotions that go with their experience. They turn to us to help them navigate their world of feelings. In order for us to do this, we need to have enough capacity to tend to their emotional needs.



Taking time for ourselves doesn't mean we are selfish or a neglectful parent; in fact, it is just the opposite. By doing this, we also model to our kids that it's OK to tend to our needs as well as the needs of others. Prioritizing self-care probably means having to let a few things slide to make time for this (the dishes can wait).

So, How Do You Fill Your Pot?

First, reflect on what recharges you in effective ways. This may also look differently than binge-watching Netflix (we all love that, but it may not be recharging in the way we need). It may mean a short walk alone, enjoying a cup of tea looking out the window, journaling, working on a puzzle, or doing a mindfulness exercise.

Then, place it strategically in your day. Waiting until the end of the day (after the kids go to bed and the dishes are done) is likely too taxing on your system. It may feel more supportive to put in one or two "rests" throughout the day. For example, taking 15 minutes in the middle of the day, and 15 minutes at the end of your workday before you pick up the kids or before they come home.

Emotional Connections: Choosing Quality over Quantity

Boundaries are hard right now. Everything happens at home! And when we have been home all together for endless days and endless hours, things start to blur together. There may be a lack of clarity as to when it is work time, home time, family time, chore time, etc. It all seems to be lumped together. We may have more quantity of time physically together in the home, but not quality connection time. And we may also think that since we've seen each other all day, we've spent time together. This isn't true. And a child's need for connection does not pause for a pandemic. Nurturing a secure connection with your kids will communicate love and importance to your children and have a side benefit of better behaviour.

Three Simple Steps Help Quality Connections

First, actively identify and mark different times and activities. Especially around quality connection time. This might look like naming things, such as family time, work time, date time, special us time, etc.

Then, take a moment to transition to each "time," and allow a few minutes to settle into each activity. The pandemic limits our ability to go out to places which may naturally mark the transition for us. Before we start our designated connection time, we might ask "is there anything we need before we start our special time together?"

Finally, tend to each "time" with the dedicated activity set for it. To get the most of connection time together, resist the temptation to multitask or allow yourself to be distracted or interrupted by your phone.



Final Words

I hope these suggestions support you and your family in getting through this pandemic with a little more caring and kindness.



Hye Kam, MFT

A licensed couple and family therapist in Montreal specializing in relationship challenges.

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Immune Support

Preventing Seasonal Cold and Flu

by Dr. Heidi Fritz MA, ND

Winter can be a beautiful time of year, especially if you enjoy activities involving fluffy snow and shimmering ice. Let's delve into some key natural strategies to keep your immune system healthy throughout the winter and help you continue to function at your best.

We hear it on a daily basis, but the role of hygiene deserves another important mention. Proper hand-washing entails lathering with soap for at least 20 seconds and is recommended before, during, and after preparing food; before eating food; before and after caring for someone who is sick; after using the bathroom; after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; as well as after other exposures such as animals or garbage. Hand sanitizers are not considered as effective as soap and water but still play a crucial role in public places. Adopting good hand-sanitization procedures alone has been shown to reduce the number of absentee days in school children.

From a diet-and-supplement perspective, it is fundamental to boost the intake of plant-based flavonoids and vitamin C, as well as to avoid or limit refined sugar. For instance, supplementing with a juice-powder concentrate extracted from fruits and vegetables for six months has been shown to reduce the number of days with moderate-to-severe cold symptoms by almost two days compared to a placebo drink. Similarly, supplementing with 500–1,000 mg vitamin C, with or without low-dose zinc, throughout the cold season has been shown to reduce the frequency of the cold, reduce the duration of runny nose symptoms by up to 27%, and speed up recovery time. Limiting your intake of refined sugar is important, because sugar and other refined carbohydrates have been shown to suppress the antibacterial (and presumably antiviral too) activity of immune cells such as neutrophils for up to five hours after consumption!

Supplements and Immune Health

Green Tea

An emerging natural agent with antiviral effects, green tea—consumed either as an extract in tablet form (equal to about 400 mg green tea catechins)—has been shown to reduce the incidence of the flu among health-care workers by 75%. In another study, green-tea extract was shown to reduce the total number of illnesses lasting two days or more by over 22%, reduce the total number of days with symptoms by over 35%, and increase the amount of antibody produced by immune cells. Another study found that consumption of green tea as a beverage, between one and five cups per day, reduced the incidence of the flu by between 40 and 50% in school-aged children.

Probiotics

Information on probiotics has exploded in the last few years. It is becoming well-recognized that probiotics can effectively reduce the incidence of upper respiratory tract infections. A review paper found that probiotic supplementation was able to significantly reduce the number of upper respiratory tract infections and reduce antibiotic prescription rates. Probiotics are thought to interact with immune cells that live in the gut, stimulating the production of secretory immunoglobulin A (IgA), which neutralizes viruses and bacteria in the gut and affects immune-cell function systemically throughout the body.



Vitamin D

Vitamin D is an important nutrient for modulating immune function. A randomized study found that vitamin D supplementation (1,200 IU) to school-aged children during the winter months resulted in a greater than 40% reduction in the incidence of influenza A. This was accompanied by a significant reduction in asthma attacks among children with a previous history of asthma. Vitamin D is especially important for Canadians, since the prevalence of borderline and even frank deficiency is high in Canada. To determine the most appropriate dose of vitamin D for you, a blood test costing about \$40 can be done through your family doctor or naturopathic doctor.



Echinacea

A popular immune-stimulating herb, echinacea has had its share of controversy involving its effectiveness. First of all, there is a respectable level of evidence indicating that echinacea can be effective. For instance, a 2007 study in *The Lancet*, a high-ranking medical journal, found that the “published evidence supports echinacea’s benefit in decreasing the incidence and duration of the common cold.” Use of echinacea was found to decrease the risk of developing the common cold by more than 40% and decreased the duration of the cold by 1.4 days. In another study, echinacea was able to reduce the total number of cold episodes, the total number of days with cold symptoms, and the need for pain-killer medications. When nasal swabs taken from the participants were tested, echinacea was found to inhibit virally confirmed colds.

When using herbal supplements, the quality of the product is of paramount importance. Depending on the way the herb has been grown, when it has been harvested, and how it is processed and extracted, the end product contains vastly differing chemical constituents. It has been pointed out that, when reviewing the studies of echinacea, there is in fact great variability with respect to the products used. Alkamides are the active molecules in echinacea; therefore, the effectiveness of the product depends on the quantity of these contained. A tincture (liquid alcohol solution) containing alkamides will result in a peculiar tingling sensation in the mouth on tasting it, and this can be a simple “taste test” as to the quality of the product. If your echinacea product doesn’t have this tingling effect, it may not be very effective.

One review paper looked at 22 studies; 19 for the treatment of the common cold, and 3 for the prevention of the common cold. This review found that echinacea was effective for treatment, but less so as a preventative. Since this review was published, other evidence has emerged also suggesting some effectiveness for echinacea when used preventatively; however, it is possible that it is most effective when used at the first signs of a cold (early treatment). Dosing also varies, with between 5 and 15 mL of a tincture commonly used for adults in studies.

Clearly, product quality, dosing, and timing of use are factors that make a big difference to the effectiveness of echinacea for the common cold.



Lifestyle Influences on Immune Health

Let’s take a closer look at lifestyle factors, namely the impact of stress—so prevalent, especially today. Although stress is commonly recognized as suppressing healthy immune function, it is not generally known how this happens or what can be done about it.

The stress response, also known as the general adaptation syndrome (GAS), consists of three stages. First is “fight-or-flight,” during which the body tries to defend itself from the immediate perceived threat. Epinephrine and cortisol are secreted by the adrenal glands to increase alertness, increase blood sugar levels, increase breathing rate and circulation, and direct blood flow to the heart and large muscle groups. Simultaneously, bodily functions not immediately necessary for survival are inhibited, such as digestion. If the threat or stressor persists, the second stage of the GAS, the resistance stage, ensues. During this stage, the body tries to maintain elevated cortisol output in order to adapt to the continued stressor. If this continues over a long period of time, the adrenal glands are no longer able to sustain adequate cortisol production, and the third stage of the GAS occurs: This is the exhaustion stage. A popular term to describe this is “adrenal fatigue,” and it has been termed “mild adrenocortical deficiency” by others.

Individuals affected by adrenal fatigue or mild adrenocortical deficiency often suffer from lingering or recurrent respiratory tract infections. For example, this would include “the cold that doesn’t go away” with low-grade symptoms such as fatigue, sinus congestion, or sniffly nose that lasts for weeks, or the person who gets two to three colds or flus in quick succession. Either of these scenarios are characteristic of adrenal fatigue.

For individuals experiencing high levels of stress, so common in today’s hectic society, use of herbs and nutrients to support adrenal-gland function can be helpful in not only improving immune function, but also improving generalized fatigue and mood issues impacted by stress. Supplementation with extra B vitamins is important for supporting adrenal function, since the B vitamins are cofactors in the production of energy and are utilized at a higher rate when the body is under stress. For instance, one study found that administering cortisol to healthy young men decreased blood levels of the B vitamins between 13 and 24%!



Herbs that help support the body’s response to stress are called “adaptogens” and include ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), Siberian ginseng (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*), and rhodiola (*Rhodiola rosea*). Adaptogens act as cortisol regulators and have specifically been shown to increase cortisol production if low, or lower it if it’s elevated. On a larger scale, adaptogenic herbs help the body to handle stress by reducing the subjective perception of stress, fatigue, and anxiety, while improving mental and physical performance. Using adaptogenic herbs is thus an important way to ensure healthy immune function for individuals suffering from high levels or long duration of stress. If you are on medications, it is recommended that you consult with a naturopathic doctor prior to taking herbal supplements.

Conclusion

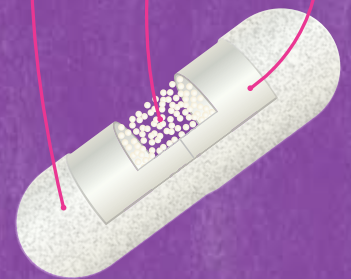
A combination strategy of diet, nutritional supplements such as probiotics, vitamin D, and green tea, as well as appropriate, good-quality herbs such as echinacea and adaptogens, can be an effective strategy to help you reduce your risk of cold and flu this winter.

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*Kuate, S.P., S. Bai, and A. Hossain. “In Vitro Comparative Study of the Survival of Probiotic Capsules in a Simulated Gastric Environment.” Data on file.



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L-Theanine

A Mental Health Hero

by Dr. Philip Rouchotas, MSc, ND,
and Dr. Heidi Fritz MA, ND



Theanine is an amino acid analogue of L-glutamate and L-glutamine and is found naturally occurring in green tea. Its chemical name is L-*gamma*-glutamylethylamide, or N⁵-ethyl-L-glutamine. Theanine is absorbed in the small intestine, and can be hydrolyzed to glutamate and ethylamine, or it can remain intact as theanine. Another fate of theanine is to be metabolized by glutamate decarboxylase to yield *gamma*-aminobutyric acid (GABA). Theanine can also cross the blood-brain barrier and have direct neurological effects. Theanine has long been regarded as the constituent of green tea responsible for calming effects, counteracting the stimulatory effects of caffeine.

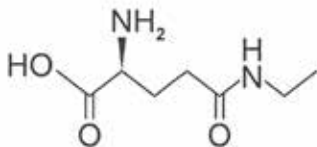
Clinical Evidence

In a landmark clinical trial, a “realistic dietary intake” of L-theanine was administered to healthy participants versus placebo, and they were subjected to electroencephalogram (EEG). Relative to placebo, EEG revealed that L-theanine increases the *alpha* waveband of brain frequency. This suggests L-theanine is relaxing without inducing drowsiness. This important paper promptly led to an impressive accumulation of clinical trials focused on L-theanine.

Clinical intervention trials have evaluated L-theanine for a wide array of indications. These include mental health including depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia; psychological and physiological stress responses; cognitive function; focus, attention, and concentration; alertness; and sleep quality. We were able to identify over 30 controlled human intervention trials of theanine for these various outcomes. Below, we summarize a selection of these human studies.

Ninety-three (93) boys with a diagnosis of ADD received 400 mg per day of L-theanine or placebo for six weeks. The main outcome measure was the use of a watch that tracked outcomes related to sleep quality. Boys receiving L-theanine experienced significantly better sleep percentage (time truly asleep) and sleep efficiency.

L-theanine



The impact of L-theanine was studied in 30 healthy people for its impact on stress, depression, anxiety, and sleep. Participants received 200 mg per day of L-theanine for four weeks. Regarding sleep, L-theanine achieved improved sleep latency, reduced sleep disturbance, and reduced use of sleep medication. Regarding cognitive function, L-theanine improved verbal fluency and executive function.

Twenty (20) individuals with a diagnosis of major depressive disorder received 250 mg per day of L-theanine added to prescription antidepressant therapy. L-Theanine improved sleep, mood, anxiety, and cognition. Regarding cognition, L-theanine improved response latency, error rate, verbal memory, and executive function.

Several studies have added L-theanine to prescription antipsychotic therapy for individuals with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Such studies use the Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS) as a means to determine treatment efficacy. One such study gave 400 mg per day of L-theanine for eight weeks. L-Theanine reduced anxiety and benefited positive symptoms, general psychopathology, and activation factor on the PANSS scale. Another study gave 250 mg per day of L-theanine to 17 individuals with schizophrenia. PANSS revealed positive symptoms and sleep were improved.

Lastly, 20 healthy individuals received 200 mg per day L-theanine, 160 mg per day of caffeine, or both. L-Theanine, with or without caffeine, was shown to improve attention.

Discussion

L-Theanine has a very rich history of safe use across a broad range of doses. Human studies typically administer 200–400 mg per day. L-Theanine has also demonstrated an excellent safety profile when combined with a wide array of prescription medications used in the realm of mental health, most notably antidepressants and antipsychotics. Our brief review of human studies of L-theanine highlights an important role across a broad range of common mental health concerns, including depression and anxiety, schizophrenia, sleep, and even a role in ADD for focus and concentration.

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Hacking Into Happiness

by Dr. Melanie Kuszniereckyj, BSc, ND

Have you ever heard this type of dialogue?

“I just want you to be happy.”

“I don’t feel happy.”

“You have to work at it. Just try to be happy.”

Seeing others in distress can make us feel sad; however, telling someone to be happy when they are not does not seem to work very well. In fact, trying to be happy is often a recipe for unhappiness! Psychology researchers have even put it to the test: People who were instructed to feel as happy as they can when listening to pleasant music felt lower mood than those who were exposed to the same pleasant music with no instruction.

The pursuit of happiness is a cultural phenomenon in Western culture, and debates exist whether this pursuit is doing more harm than good. On one extreme, using our will to be happy all the time does not seem to be a genuine approach to happiness. The mind and the body, although connected, can sometimes create conflicting directions. Think, for example, about an argument with a loved one; we know we care about the other person, yet we would like to be physically distant from that person? The feelings we experience, as part of our body awareness and sensations, may not overlap with our psychology. So, we may think we are happy, yet our body is telling us that we are not. We can override these impulses by understanding how to hack into our happiness so that the opposing chemical, cortisol (also known as the stress hormone), does not take over.

Plan Happy Times

Prioritizing and planning for moments and activities that genuinely create positive emotions have been one idea that has been studied by psychology researcher Dr. Lahnna Catalino. Dr. Catalino and her team have discovered the prioritizing happiness project, whereby we can predict happiness based on prioritizing happiness through setting and planning an itinerary of moments that create the happiness within us, versus monitoring the moment-to-moment emotional experience. One strategy for creating these moments is “situation selection,” where we base decisions on what matters most, what is meaningful, or what brings joy. Examples could be setting time each day for a meditation break, setting aside some time to start a new hobby, or creating a “home spa” day. This strategy consistently



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weaves enjoyable activities into our schedule, rather than expecting joy by waiting for the next happy event, which can sometimes feel like a roller coaster of highs and lows. An important point: It appears that judging our happiness is one of the fallbacks to experiencing happiness, meaning that overly analyzing whether we are happy may block us from feeling happy! This is one of the core features of living in the moment.

Neurotransmitters

How do we distinguish between a high versus genuine happiness in our body? One possible road map is to understand a basic box of our neurotransmitters. Why are these neurotransmitters important? They are the little messengers that link our nervous system to our body, that is, to our muscles, our glands, or to another nerve. I like to think of them as an orchestral symphony! Sometimes, one takes the lead and other times, they harmonize together.

- Dopamine is the **reward** hormone;
- Oxytocin is the **love** hormone;
- Serotonin is the **mood** hormone; and
- Endorphins are the **pain-stop** hormones.

Each of these hormones are naturally produced inside the body, and the following conditions may suggest how these compounds allow us to feel happy, rather than to think it.

Dopamine

This is the reward hormone for celebrating the little wins, completing a task, eating food, or the art of self-care. This neurotransmitter helps to create in us a sense of satisfaction. It is also implicated in motivation and attention; and it helps to regulate movement, learning, and emotional responses. Dopamine sparks curiosity, sensation-seeking behaviour, arousal, and goal-directed behaviour. Sleep deprivation has been demonstrated to downregulate dopamine and may contribute to diminished focus and attention. Foods that help boost dopamine are tyrosine-rich foods—like lentils, cheese, fish, and nuts—and magnesium-rich foods—such as seeds and whole grains. L-Theanine, found in tea, can also be helpful for dopamine balance.

Serotonin

Serotonin is the mood hormone empowered by meditation and yoga, sun exposure, or steady movement like walking in nature, running, or cycling. Scientific studies on mindfulness and other meditation techniques suggest that adopting these in your lifestyle may improve low-mood states.

Oxytocin

This is the love hormone created by hugging a family member, playing with a dog, nurturing a baby, holding someone's hand, giving a compliment, or having good conversations. Empathy appears to increase oxytocin, which in turn can stimulate generosity that may contribute to happiness. An article published in *Harvard Business Review* saliently points to the efficacy of leadership through positive conversation and



the impacts on oxytocin. Judith Glaser, the author of *Conversational Intelligence*, describes in the article that business managers are most successful when they offer a sense of inclusivity, listening, and open discussion; this mindful approach to conversations can literally impact our brain and body chemistry. Oxytocin is known as the cuddle hormone, as it is associated with bonding and love. It's no wonder that animals—and especially dogs—are used as “emotional support providers” in so many situations.

Endorphins

Endorphins are pain-stop hormones found through laughter, certain essential oils, chocolate, and exercise; it is thought to promote endorphin release. Lavender essential oil as aromatherapy has been demonstrated in a small study to help sleep disturbance in elderly patients with dementia, and it is thought that the compounds in lavender are responsible for this effect through the release of endorphins and serotonin. *beta*-Endorphins are natural peptide hormones and the “endogenous” or body-produced opioid. The molecule morphine, isolated from the opium poppy plant, is the most potent antipain compound, and the word “endorphin” is derived from the combination of “endogenous” and “morphine.” These chemicals bind to opioid receptors in the body that inhibit the pain signaling pathways. The role of *beta*-endorphins in mood states and happiness is still not fully understood; however, being mindful of these chemicals and their impacts on pain perception could be one theory behind hacking your happiness molecules.

The Bottom Line

The saying that happiness comes from within does have some truth! While life circumstance does play a role in happiness levels, it is not realistic nor a good predictor of overall happiness. We can return to happiness by understanding a little better what we can do to make ourselves feel happier, by tuning in to our body, and by listening to the little signals, keeping in mind that there is a natural rhythm and order to our psychophysiology. I encourage you to create these little moments and prioritize your happiness!



Dr. Melanie Kusznireckyj, BSc, ND

A naturopathic doctor, graduate from CCNM, dedicated to helping individuals live their best lives through mind-body connection.

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The Gut–Lung Microbiome Axis

A Bidirectional Immune Highway

by Dr. Elena Zarifis, BSc.(Hons), ND

By now, most of us have heard the word microbiome—the collection of trillions of functional bacteria of all different species found in many places throughout our bodies, such as our skin, gut, mouth, vagina, and lungs. Whether you are a health-care practitioner or just watching TV when a popular body-wash company commercial comes on—advertising about how their soap is good for your skin microbiome—one way or another, I’m sure you have heard it!

In research, health-care media, and health-care professions, a lot of emphasis is placed on our intestinal microbiome and its impact on our health—as there should be! Our gut microbiome plays so many roles in our health and affects a plethora of systems in our body: immunity, neurotransmitter production,

vitamin production, mood regulation, brain health, inflammation levels, iron status, biochemical pathways, etc.

Now, research is starting to build on the topic of the lung microbiome and the gut–lung axis. Let’s explore.

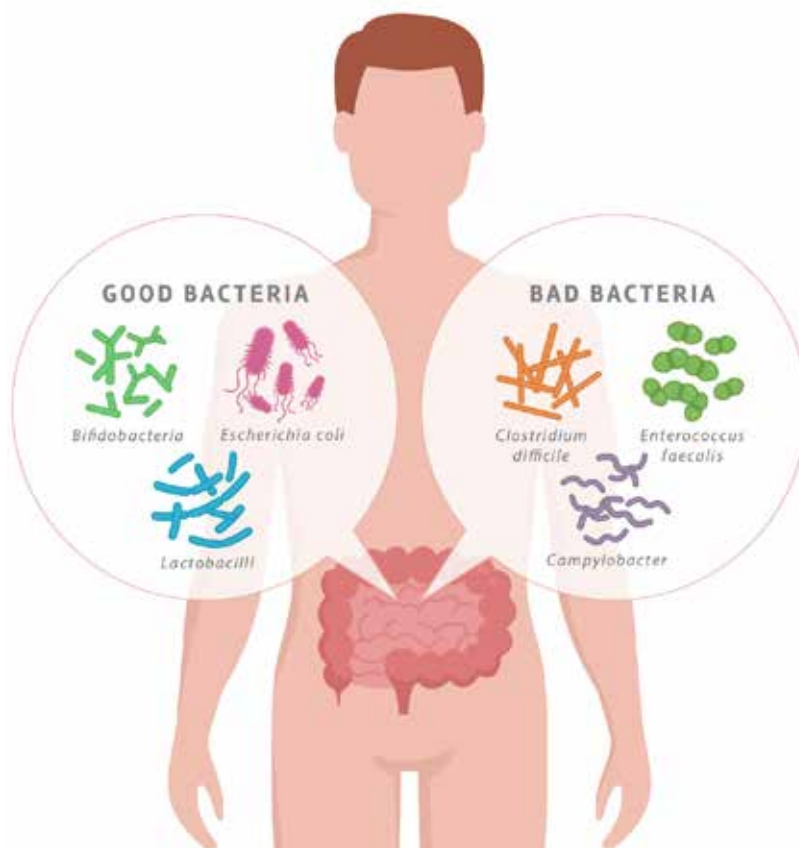
The human body is estimated to be colonized by around 38 trillion bacteria, with the colon housing the densest and most metabolically active populations of bacteria.



Having a diverse colony of bacteria has been shown to be paramount for optimal health overall, not just intestinal health.

Of particular interest for this article is that studies have linked having a reduced microbial diversity to having a predisposition to allergic airway diseases. Having reduced microbial diversity can be seen after antibiotic usage, in people who suffer multiple childhood episodes of moderate-severe diarrhea, and in cases of malnutrition, to provide a few examples.

Studies have also shown that this reduced intestinal microbial diversity leads to an increased risk of airway diseases such as asthma, and to an increased predisposition to pulmonary viral infections.



The gut microbiome is influenced through diet, stress, exercise, infections, medications, nutrition, digestive conditions, travel, environment, and more. All of these factors have potential for shifting the gut microbiome towards overgrowth of more harmful bacteria species than beneficial species, or vice versa (depending on the factor).

This outgrowth of harmful bacteria v. beneficial bacteria is termed dysbiosis and can have a negative impact on both gastrointestinal as well as overall health. Of particular interest for this article is the impact that dysbiosis has on our respiratory system.

The lung was previously thought to be a sterile environment, and we now know that this is not the case. In addition to being formed upon our first breaths as neonates, the lung microbiome is suggested to be partially

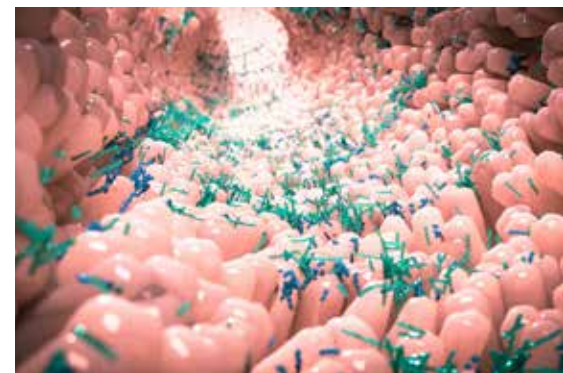
formed through breathing in bacterial colonies from our mouth during sleep, when the muscles and tissues in our mouth and throat relax, and our deep breathing during sleep transmits the microbes deeper into the bronchial tree.

This lung microbiome is dynamic and, throughout our life, is influenced by the gut microbiome, and vice versa. This bidirectional communication is termed the gut-lung axis and is gaining traction in the research world.

This gut-lung connection is portrayed well through data stating that 50% of patients suffering from inflammatory bowel disease and dysbiosis also have decreased lung function.

In addition to this, studies have shown that respiratory infections, like the influenza virus, can lead to altered gut microbiota and gastrointestinal issues.

This bidirectional loop between the gut and the lungs influencing each other's microbiome is primarily through the bacteria acting as signaling molecules. Our gut bacteria play a protective role against bacterial and viral pulmonary infections, by regulating our immune response through the stimulation of immune cells in lymph fluid and bone marrow.



The bacteria in the gut use signaling to stimulate immune cells, which then travel through the mesenteric lymph nodes in the gut, via lymph fluid, to lymph nodes in the respiratory system, where immunological information is passed on from gut to lung and vice versa.

There are also more direct ways that gut bacteria can influence lung bacteria. Although lymph nodes in the gut neutralize most bacteria, remaining surviving bacteria and bacterial fragments travel via the lymph system into systemic circulation, where they can then modulate the immune response in the lung. This process also occurs in the opposite direction from the lung to the gut.

We can now see how the lung and gut form part of our immune system, and how an inflammatory response or infection or dysbiosis in one of these organs may be mirrored in the other.

Another important factor in the modulation of the lung immune system through the gut microbiota is via short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs). Gut bacteria digest dietary fibres and produce metabolites called SCFAs, like butyrate and propionate, as a result. These SCFAs have multiple functions in our bodies: They provide fuel to our intestinal cells to help them thrive and function, serve as fuel for the mitochondria in our bodies to provide energy, strengthen the intestinal lining, and have anti-inflammatory effects in the gut and the respiratory system. Short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) strengthen the lining of our intestines through fortification of things called tight junctions—meaning they help to reduce intestinal permeability. Butyrate (an SCFA) also works

by stimulating anti-inflammatory signaling, which can suppress inflammation in the intestines and inflammation-related colon cancer.

These SCFAs elicit their effect on the immune system of the lung by way of travelling from the gut into the bloodstream, then into the bone marrow, where they stimulate a cascade that leads to enhanced metabolism of immune cells, and therefore enhanced activation of these specific immune cells that have antiviral activity in the lung.

Let's summarize all that dense information.

The connection between our gut and our lungs is intricate and bidirectional. An infection, a dysbiosis, or an inflammation in one environment mirrors in the other (e.g. irritable bowel disease [IBD] and dysbiosis are associated with reduced lung function, or the influenza virus causing gut dysbiosis and gastrointestinal issues). Bacteria and metabolites of bacteria (SCFAs) govern this connection. The communication between the lungs and the gut occurs through systemic circulation of blood or lymph flow, which contain SCFAs (which activate immune cells and are anti-inflammatory), immunological information, bacteria, and bacterial fragments.

Now, let's go over some (not all!) important factors to consider when trying to keep our guts healthy.

First and foremost: Follow nutritional advice, supplemental advice, lifestyle advice, etc. that is right for you and your body.



Online information—including this article—should only serve as a relative guide. Personalized and individualized care is crucial for your health, so make sure you see a naturopathic doctor (ND) to address your concerns.

A healthy, balanced diet full of whole foods, including lots and lots of vegetables of all kinds and all colours, is a critical foundational pillar in gut health.

Don't exclude high-carbohydrate or starchy vegetables: Avoiding starchy or high-carbohydrate vegetables means you are starving out very important beneficial bacteria that thrive on these types of vegetables and their fibres. These beneficial bacteria produce the very important SCFAs that we discussed upon digestion of these fibres.

Work with an ND to ensure your diet is right for you, your goals, and your body.

Stress has a negative impact on the diversity and balance of our microbiome, so stress management is paramount in gut health. Your ND can help!

Avoiding foods that can create dysbiosis and inflammation, like sugars, artificial sweeteners, refined foods, processed foods, simple refined grains, and other inflammatory foods that you identify as triggers for your body (work with your ND to identify these).

Prebiotic food sources (if your system is ready to handle them—they may aggravate some conditions) feed the healthy bacteria in your gut. Some sources include whole ginger root, onions, raw garlic, and under-ripe bananas.



If it is right for you, probiotic food sources or supplements introduce beneficial bacteria to your gut. Again, work with your ND, because these can be aggravating to some issues if used incorrectly.



Dr. Elena Zarifis, BSc.(Hons), ND

A licensed naturopathic doctor in Oakville and Burlington, Ontario, with a special interest in gut, brain, thyroid, and overall hormone health.

drelenaznd.com

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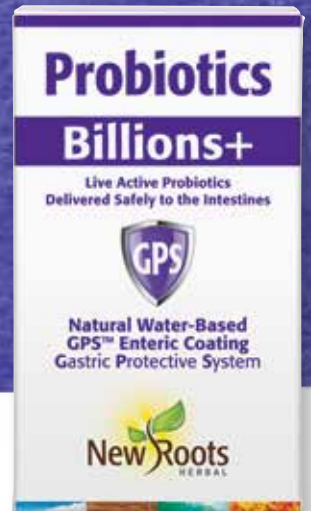
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Gentle Detox?

You've Got It!

by Guillaume Landry, MSc, Naturopath



Although your body has its own way of detoxing naturally, it can always use a helping hand now and again, especially after the postfestive season. The main way our body cleanses itself is through the key excretory organs: the liver, intestines, kidneys, lungs, and skin. To have a successful and lasting detox, we need to support these workhorse organs on a daily basis through basic but oh-so-effective nutritional and lifestyle choices.



Get Moving

As my biology teacher used to say, life is all about movement! Exercise is synonymous with detoxification, because as we breathe more deeply and—above all—sweat, we eliminate a phenomenal amount of toxins. Physical activity also encourages better blood and lymph circulation, and can help clear our minds, which leads to better detoxification and possibly our next brilliant idea! The simple act of walking awakens a lot of activity in your natural detoxification: It stimulates your intestines, leading to bowel movements, and increases your need to hydrate, which helps your kidneys do their cleansing job. Hormones released

during physical activity also help detoxify; norepinephrine and dopamine contribute to fat metabolism, where most toxins are stored. Endorphins, produced more in cardio workouts, provide that sweet postexercise feeling of wellbeing. A walk around the block, a workout from the internet, snowshoeing, ice skating, or even an impromptu dance-off in the living room... whatever it takes, as long as you keep moving!

Breathe

Yes, breathing is a major part of detoxification. Practice with deep breath-ins—starting from the abdomen and ending just under the clavicles—and follow with very long breath-outs. This is beneficial on two levels: it allows you to eliminate a maximum of CO₂, a major source of oxidative stress, and to reconnect with the present moment. Maximizing incoming oxygen supplies nourishment to our cells' small



energy factories—the very concentrated mitochondria inside our organ cells that are in charge of detoxification. On top of all that, the back-and-forth motion of the rib cage delicately compresses the intestines, liver, and kidneys, further stimulating the detoxification process. Lastly, good breathing plays a major role in managing stress and improving sleep. Want the secret to longevity? Keep breathing!

Simplify

If we look at food in the detox process, the solution is easy: Eat local, simple, unprocessed food, as much as possible, and organic if feasible. Fruits, vegetables, good vegetable oils, bread from the local bakery—ideally sourdough bread—legumes, and protein sources cooked with love are all at the top of the food list! If you need a few pointers, refer to Canada’s food guide or the principles of the Mediterranean diet, which are among the most beneficial for good health. Following these simple steps can be a powerful daily detoxification tool, as impactful—or more—as detoxifying with botanicals and nutraceuticals.

In regards to fluid intake, drink still water that’s either at room temperature or lukewarm. Forget coffee, alcohol, juices, energy drinks, etc., and drink at least one litre per day of water with a low mineral content (less than 500 mg of minerals per litre) and with a pH in the neutral range (a pH of 6.5–7.5). After a heavy, sweaty, workout session, choose a highly mineralized water to compensate for losses.

Finally, in terms of lifestyle, dare to disconnect... at least once in a while. Forget about technology, social media, or video games, and favour reading a good book or even playing a few games in the park with your children; when was the last time you made an imaginary animal out of leaves, twigs, or snowballs? Returning to simplicity is retuning to good health!

Rock-a-bye Baby...

Unless you excel in mindfulness meditation, there’s really only one time when the body is at its most relaxed to do its repair work, and that’s at night. While we sleep, our body is hard at work; it revitalizes, deals with toxins treatment, and repairs body tissues. All the while, our mind is at rest, helping limit the toxic effects of chronic stress. An adage to keep in mind to improve the quality of sleep is “A king’s breakfast, a prince’s lunch, and a pauper’s supper.” That’s because at night, free from its digestive tasks, the body can devote itself entirely to doing its detoxification job. Finally, as much as possible, spend your night in the dark, disconnected from technology and in a room that is neither too hot nor too cold.





Pamper Yourself

Has your liver taken a hit? Put some heat on it! Yes, literally! Use this simple but very effective method: Apply a hot water bottle for 20–30 minutes in the evening before going to sleep. This will help your liver function, especially to detoxify. Stressed and tired? Plunge into a hot bath to relax your muscles and open your skin's pores; this helps eliminate toxins from your system. A sauna or Turkish bath is also an excellent hydrotherapy option for detoxification, but be careful to follow instructions! For all these options, don't forget to rinse yourself off after with cold (or cool) water, starting from the extremities. Feeling tense, or even electrified? Take advantage of nature's negative electrons to balance the overflow of electromagnetism that your body has stored. Forests, mountains, riverbanks, and parks are havens of serenity, as their negative ion-charged atmosphere reinforces the body's oxygenation. The air after the rain is also a good source of serenity if you can't get out to the park. Feeling stuck? A physio or osteo session can help put the pieces back in place, which releases the innervation of the internal organs. The result: Better-working detox organs.

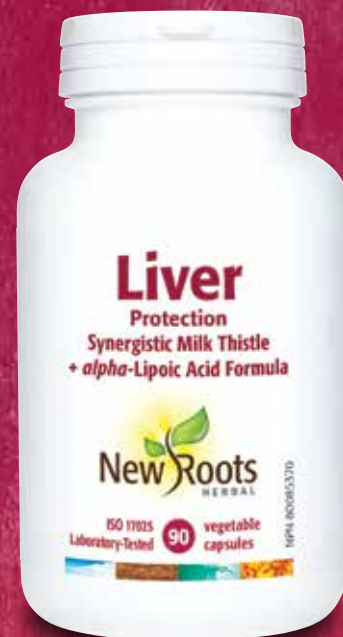
Strayed a Little Too Far?

If you feel you've overdone the "indulging" and underdone the "self-care," a natural health product can help. Look for formulas that include detoxifying herbs such as milk thistle, black radish, artichoke, burdock, dandelion, and beet. As for nutraceuticals, *alpha*-lipoic acid and *N*-acetyl-cysteine (NAC), as well as B-complex vitamins are the most appropriate to help the body's detoxification process. Probiotics and fibre may be considered for people who need an intestinal boost.

On that note, I'll leave you with a quote from Romain Gary that's quite apropos: "Renewal has always, first and foremost, been a return to the source."

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DOES YOUR LIVER
NEED SOME TLC?



- Synergistic formula containing milk thistle and *alpha*-lipoic acid
- Supports liver function
- Helps relieve digestive disturbances / dyspepsia



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To ensure these products are right for you,
always read and follow label directions.



Osteoporosis

Building Better Bones

by Dr. Sarah Penney, ND, MSc

The most common condition of the bones, by far, is osteoporosis. As you likely know, osteoporosis is characterized by a decreased bone mass and deterioration of the bone tissues. You can think of your bones like a bridge over a body of water: They are both supported by a fine crosshatched matrix that keeps them strong. If there is any compromise to this structure of the bridge, it is likely to break due to stress. Thus, osteoporosis or loss of bone density is a problem because it can lead to an increased risk of fracture. The most common areas of fracture are the spine, the wrist, and—most dangerously—the hip.

Osteoporosis does not happen overnight; it has actually been termed the “silent thief” because we can lose bone mass for years with no symptoms.

Similarly, it often takes time to build bone back up with treatment. Fractures from osteoporosis are more common than heart attack, stroke, and breast cancer combined—at least one in three women and one in five men will suffer from an osteoporotic fracture during their lifetime. The yearly estimated cost for the Canadian health-care system for the treatment of these fractures is roughly 2.3 billion dollars. Risk factors include age over 65, low body weight, history of smoking, high alcohol intake (three or more alcoholic drinks per day for women), diabetes, and medications like steroids, sleeping pills, and some antidepressants.

Hormones and Bone Health

Bone health is a great balancing act throughout life. It is dependent on two different types of cells called osteoblasts and osteoclasts—osteoblasts help build bone, while osteoclasts break it down. Before the age of about 30 years old, bone production is greater than bone loss, but you can probably guess this changes rapidly as we age.



normal

osteoporosis

An interesting observation is that postmenopausal women account for 80 percent of all cases of osteoporosis. The major reason that this shift happens in the body after menopause is a drop in estradiol, the most potent form of our estrogen. This hormone is important because it is thought to stimulate bone formation by osteoblasts.

A similar hormone, called testosterone, can help protect bone density in men. Men are also at risk of developing osteoporosis, but they tend to do so 5 to 10 years later than women, since testosterone levels do not fall abruptly the way estrogen does in women. It is estimated that osteoporosis will cause half of all women over age 50 to suffer a fracture of the hip, wrist, or vertebra due to osteoporosis.

Getting the most bang for your buck when it comes to bone production is easiest before the age of 30, when bone is rapidly deposited, providing a solid foundation to protect against future fractures. Although bone develops at a slower rate after this age, it is never too late to start improving your bone health. Many complex factors can influence bone loss including genetics, low levels of activity, and hormonal changes, as discussed. Research has also identified early use of oral contraceptives as a concern for bone development. Adolescents who use hormonal birth control before they have had their menstrual cycle for three years may be stunting development of peak bone density at this age. This is because even a low dose of ethinyl estradiol, found in birth-control pills, inhibits the body's own release of estrogen, which can change hormone levels and prevent the accrual of bone mass. Malnutrition due to eating disorders is also a concern in this age group and can lead to stunted bone mass development.



Measuring Bone Density

Detecting osteoporosis is the first step to prevention of fractures and proper treatment. This is done using a DXA scan (also called a bone scan), which is a special type of X-ray that can detect how dense a bone is. The way it works is like shining a light through a curtain—if lots of light ends up on the other side, then the curtain is thin. If a large amount of X-rays shine through the bone, the density is either classed as osteopenia (the beginning stages of osteoporosis) or osteoporosis. Screening generally starts at the age of 50 and should be done every five years.

Regardless of your bone density, it is still a great idea to be proactive about your bone health at any age. Here are a few key steps you can take to prevent or treat osteoporosis naturally.

Build Your Bones

Keep Moving

Several types of exercise are recommended for osteoporosis. The main form is classified as weight-bearing exercise, which is any exercise in which you are moving against the force of gravity. This type of exercise helps to build muscle, which in turn pulls on bone and stimulates growth through activation of osteoblasts. Examples of this could be walking, jogging, dancing, or stair-climbing. The recommended amount of weight-bearing exercise for treatment and prevention of bone loss is 30 minutes most days of the week. Stretching can be equally important, and it can help maintain mobility and decrease pain in those with osteoporosis.

Perfect Your Balance

Balance is important when we age, to prevent falls which could lead to serious fractures if you have osteoporosis. Exercising can help build core muscles, which stabilize us and help us recover from stumbles. Tai chi is one type of exercise that has been shown to help with balance and can help slow bone loss in the lumbar spine and hip. A simple trick you could try to work on your balance is standing on one leg while you are brushing your teeth at night to test your balance. Make sure you always have something nearby to steady you in case you lose your balance when challenging yourself.



Calcium, Calcium, Calcium

This mineral is used by osteoblasts to build new bone. The healthiest and safest level of calcium consumption is somewhat controversial, and it is possible to get your daily requirements through food even if you don't eat dairy. General recommendations state that anyone under 50 years of age should consume 1,000 mg of calcium per day, and 1,200 mg for those who are over 50 years of age. There is a chance of getting too much calcium as well—anything over 2,500 mg per day can affect kidney function and deplete the body of other minerals like zinc, magnesium, and iron.

I usually assess each patient's diet to see how much calcium they are already getting, and I suggest a low-dose supplement and dietary changes if needed.

What type of calcium should you choose? When selecting a calcium supplement, the form of calcium you choose is important, and so is the amount of elemental calcium it contains. This is the form of calcium that we actually absorb. Calcium citrate is a common form found in drugstores that does not usually cause digestive upset, but it does not contain much elemental calcium. Calcium carbonate is another form you may see that has more elemental calcium than calcium citrate, but it may cause gas or constipation. Calcium phosphate is less common, but is available in some products; it has as much elemental calcium as calcium carbonate, but is better absorbed and does not cause any digestive upset. It is the most expensive form of calcium. It is important not to take any calcium supplement at the same meal as medications, as the calcium may decrease the absorption of many medications. Taking calcium with iron will also decrease absorption.

The Sunshine Vitamin

Vitamin D is a close second to calcium when it comes to importance for bone health. Vitamin D is actually converted to a hormone called calcitriol, which helps us absorb calcium from our diet or supplements and may stimulate bone growth. Talk to your doctor about measuring your vitamin D levels and finding out what dosage is best for you.



Vitamin K

We are now discovering that this fat-soluble vitamin has many hats, playing a role in blood clotting, cellular growth, and even bone health. Some research has shown that vitamin K can help stimulate bone growth and prevent fractures in subjects with osteoporosis. Just like vitamin D, this vitamin may help increase our body's absorption of calcium and provide more building blocks for our bones. Increase your intake of dark leafy greens as a rich source of vitamin K.

Conclusion

If you have been diagnosed with low bone density or are looking to help support your bone health at any point, booking an appointment with a naturopathic doctor is a great way to get started in the right direction.



Dr. Sarah Penney, ND, MSc

A graduate of the CCNM in Toronto, Sarah has a special interest in women's health, fertility, digestive concerns, pain management, and chronic disease.

completenaturalhealth.ca

*Visit our blog for the full article including references:
newrootsherbal.com/en/blog*



The Gravity of the Situation

It seems like osteoporosis has been typecast as a gender-related disease. The same way men are carefully monitored for cardiovascular disease, women get the lion's share of attention for skeletal wellbeing. It even seems like a bone scan is a "rite of passage" for women turning 50.

Let's share a few stats Canadian men should take note of. One in five men will suffer an osteoporosis-related fracture, along with accounting for twenty-five percent of hip fractures. Gentlemen, you may want to have a closer look at that calcium supplement perched on the breakfast nook!

Here's another interesting fact reported by the Canadian Space Agency: One of the major health hurdles for long-term space missions is the threat of severe bone loss in astronauts due to lack of gravity. Astronauts lose between one and two percent bone mass while in orbit. The lesson to be learned for all of us is the correlation between weight-bearing exercise and healthy bones. Harnessing gravity to help stave off osteoporosis can simply start with a daily walk.

Bone strength and balance also go hand in hand, so don't be shy to bust out a "Karate Kid" pose now and then, or try putting on your winter boots while balancing on one foot. Let's not forget skiing and skating—after all, we are Canadian!

Be safe and have a great winter, eh!

Truth, Lies, and Probiotics

Everything You Need to Know about Probiotics to Make a Smart Choice

by Gordon Raza, BSc

Enteric-Coated v. Delayed Release

Probiotics benefit health in many ways, but only if they survive harsh gastric conditions to reach the intestines, where they work their magic.

Formulated from natural ingredients, enteric-coated capsules deliver scientifically-proven protection for probiotics. Studies demonstrate these capsules deliver 100% of promised probiotics safely through stomach acid to the intestines.

“Delayed-release capsules,” also marketed as “acid resistant,” have been proven inadequate for protection from stomach acids. Research have shown these capsules rupture or leak in stomach acid in less than 30 minutes, leading to the destruction of 80% to 99% of a capsule’s contents.

Only enteric-coated probiotic capsules ensure 100% of probiotic cells survive harmful stomach acids. Given the data, the choice is clear: Choose enteric coating.

Refrigeration v. Shelf-Stable

Some probiotic species may be sturdier than others; however, all probiotics are proven to benefit from refrigeration.

This is definitely the case for many valuable and delicate *Lactobacilli* and *Bifidobacteria* species, which perish within six to thirty days at room temperature. This means “shelf-stable probiotics” can’t be relied on to deliver the real broad-spectrum benefits they advertise.

Refrigeration, starting at manufacturing and all the way through to the retail refrigerator, is the only way to preserve the integrity of your multistrain probiotics.

Delivering CFU Count

What is a CFU count? It stands for “colony-forming unit”—the number of live, active probiotic cells per capsule. To have an impact on your health, probiotics need to stay alive. A probiotic capsule must protect its valuable contents from stomach acid in order for probiotics to successfully colonize within your intestines.

Probiotics are beneficial for your health; unfortunately, many manufacturers do not deliver on the promise of well-researched science for probiotics.

It’s simple to claim a large live count at time of production; delivering them alive and viable is a different tale. Die-off is inevitable, and if they are not properly protected, they are not capable of giving you their full health benefits.

With scientifically proven enteric-coated capsules and refrigeration, the live count of probiotics matches the label claim—all delivered to your intestines for maximum benefit. Every time.

Not Convinced? See the Studies Yourself

More proof at probiotics.newrootsherbal.com

Nothing Protects Like Enteric Coating*

Only enteric-coated probiotics were able to resist degradation by harsh stomach acids. Nonenteric-coated probiotics were almost completely destroyed.

Millette, M., et al. "Gastrointestinal survival of bacteria in commercial probiotic products." *International Journal of Probiotics & Prebiotics*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2013): 149–156.

Nonenteric-coated capsules of probiotics disintegrated within 5 minutes of exposure to simulated gastric fluid. Enteric-coated capsules did not disintegrate after 60 minutes of exposure to simulated gastric fluid. This study suggests that oral delivery systems intended for intestine colonization such as probiotics should be enteric-coated to ensure maximum benefits for customers.

Kuaté, S., et al. "Viability of probiotics in non-enteric-coated vegetarian capsules." *NHP Research Notes*, No. 2 (2018): 1–7.

Enteric coating significantly improves survival of the probiotic, *Bifidobacterium longum*, in simulated gastrointestinal conditions.

Yasmin, I., et al. "Development of whey protein concentrate-pectin-alginate based delivery system to improve survival of *Bifidobacteria longum* BL-05 in simulated gastrointestinal conditions." *Probiotics Antimicrobial Proteins*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2019): 413–426.

Most probiotics in oral forms did not provide any protection to strains against acidic conditions unless protected by enteric coating.

Caillard, R., and N. Lapointe. "In vitro gastric survival of commercially available probiotic strains and oral dosage forms." *International Journal of Pharmaceutics*, Vol. 519, No. 1-2 (2017): 125–127.

Keep them Cool... Keep them Alive!*

The survival of probiotics is strongly dependent on storage temperature. Significant viability loss occurs at room temperature compared to refrigerated storage. *Bifidobacterium lactis* Bb-12 showed the highest mortality at 20 °C (24 h) storage [...].

Ferdousi, R., et al. "Evaluation of probiotic survivability in yogurt exposed to cold chain interruption." *Iranian Journal of Pharmaceutical Research*, Vol. 12, Suppl. (2013): 139–144.

Survival of *Lactobacillus* strains during storage is inversely related to the storage temperature. Survival rates were as low as 2% after 2 months of storage at 15 °C.

Gardiner, G.E., et al. "Comparative survival rates of human-derived probiotic *Lactobacillus paracasei* and *L. salivarius* strains during heat treatment and spray drying." *Applied and Environmental Microbiology*, Vol. 66, No. 6 (2000): 2605–2612.

Higher temperature conditions induced lower survival of *Bifidobacteria*.

Abe, F., et al. "Effects of storage temperature and water activity on the survival of *bifidobacteria* in powder form." *International Journal of Dairy Technology*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (2009): 234–239.

Storage temperature affected viability: Greater viability was observed at lower temperature.

Astesana, D.M., et al. "Development and storage studies of high density macrocapsules containing *Lactobacillus* spp. strains as nutritional supplement in young calves." *Revista Argentina de Microbiología*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2018): 398–407.

Storage temperature (refrigeration) was the most important factor which determines microorganisms survival.

Abd-El-Gawad, I.A., et al. "Spray drying of lactic acid cultures II: the effect of culture conditions and storage on microorganisms survival." *Egyptian Journal of Dairy Science*, Vol. 17 (1989): 273–281.

Multiple Strains, Multiple Benefits*

Multistrain probiotics appear to show greater efficacy than single strains.

Chapman, C.M., et al. "Health benefits of probiotics: are mixtures more effective than single strains?" *European Journal of Nutrition*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2011): 1–17.

The multispecies preparations displayed significantly greater inhibition of gastrointestinal pathogens.

Chapman, C.M., et al. "In vitro evaluation of single and multi-strain probiotics: inter-species inhibition between probiotic strains, and inhibition of pathogens." *Anaerobe*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2012): 405–413.

Multispecies probiotics were superior in treating antibiotic-associated diarrhea in children.

Timmerman, H.M., et al. "Monostrain, multistrain and multispecies probiotics—A comparison of functionality and efficacy." *International Journal of Food Microbiology*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (2004): 219–233.

*The abstracts above are copied under fair use and the original postings can be found on the web by searching the reference cited below each.



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PROUDLY 

Creamy Cashew Coconut Basmati Bowl

Flourish Original Recipe

This savoury vegetarian dish is full of protein, fibre, vitamins, and minerals.

Ingredients

- 3 cups spinach, chopped
- 400 ml organic coconut cream
- 1½ cups cashews, finely diced
- ½ cup green onions, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, diced
- 2 tbsp. New Roots Herbal's Heart Smart Olive Oil
- 1 tbsp. butter
- 1 tbsp. New Roots Herbal's Fermented Turmeric
- 1 tsp. Hungarian paprika
- 1 tsp. chili flakes
- ½ tsp. Himalayan or sea salt
- ½ tsp. pepper, freshly ground
- Juice of one mandarin

Instructions

Sauté garlic, onions, and spinach for several minutes in the olive oil. Add remaining ingredients; stir and simmer for about 20 minutes. Serve with basmati rice.

This recipe yields plenty enough for four. Just add some Sriracha for a little extra kick.





Slow-Cooker Tofu Biryani

Ingredients

- 1 block extra firm tofu, cut into small cubes
- 2 potatoes, sliced
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- 1 onion, sliced
- 6 mushrooms, quartered
- ½ head of cauliflower, in florets
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 4 cloves
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 cardamom pod
- 2 cups vegetable broth
- 1 cup basmati rice
- 4 tbsp. yellow curry paste
- 1 tbsp. coconut oil
- 1 tbsp. fermented ginger (I use New Roots Herbal)
- ½ tsp. caraway seeds or cumin seeds
- Handful fresh mint
- Handful fresh coriander
- Fresh lemon juice for topping
- Plain coconut milk yogurt for topping

Instructions

Drain and press your tofu for 10–15 minutes by wrapping the tofu in clean towels and placing a heavy object on top. Wash the rice and keep to one side.

In a saucepan over medium heat, warm 1 tbsp. of coconut oil. Add the bay leaves, cloves, and caraway seeds, and fry for 1 minute. Add in the onion, garlic, and curry paste, and cook for 2 minutes, until it starts to caramelize.

Then, add the potatoes, mushrooms, and cauliflower, and cook for 2 minutes. Finally, add the tomatoes, rice, mint, coriander, and cardamom pod, and simmer for 3–4 minutes. Turn the heat off.

Cut the tofu into small cubes and lightly spray or grease the bottom of your slow cooker. Transfer everything to the slow cooker, including the tofu, and add the vegetable broth and fermented ginger.

Cook on low for 4–6 hours or on high for 2–3 hours.

Serve with fresh lemon juice and a spoonful of coconut milk yogurt, with a little bit of fresh mint.



Kate D. Bunting

British-Canadian healthy-living and food blogger at "Kate & Zest," vegan, world traveller... and pretty fancy.
kateandzest.com

Chocolate Banana Maca Muffins

Superfoods and chocolate in the same recipe usually means I can have two in a row and not feel so bad, right? This muffin is made with fermented maca, an adaptogen that has powerful effects on our energy and mood, while promoting the balance of hormones and boosting reproductive health.

Ingredients

- 3 very ripe bananas
- 1 organic free-range egg or ¼ cup applesauce
- 1½ cups Anita's Gluten Free Baking Flour
- ½ cup Wholesome brand organic brown sugar with molasses
- ½ cup chocolate chips or nut of choice
- ¼ cup organic Dutch cocoa powder
- ¼ cup coconut oil or grass-fed butter
- 1 tsp. New Root Herbal's Fermented Maca
- 1 tsp. baking soda (no aluminum)
- ½ tsp. organic cinnamon
- ½ tsp. sea or rock salt
- ¼ tsp. organic allspice

Instructions

Preheat the oven to 350 °F (175 °C). In a small pot, add the coconut oil or grass-fed butter and heat until it becomes liquid. Begin to mash three bananas together with a fork until you get a smooth and creamy consistency.

Add the melted coconut oil as well as the egg or applesauce, and begin blending together. Add the sugar, cinnamon, allspice, maca, and salt, and continue blending.

Lastly; begin sifting the flour and cacao into the bowl, and mix until completely together. Add in your chocolate chips and nuts such as walnut, macadamia, or pecan if desired!

Place in the oven for 30–35 minutes.



Megan Luder, CNP

A Certified Nutritional Practitioner who is passionate about creating and educating on the health benefits of nutrient-dense whole food!



AskGord



With a milestone birthday coming up, I've started noticing more fine lines. I was wondering: Does collagen work as well they say?

It's been gaining popularity over the last few years: Collagen is the most abundant protein throughout the body. In supplement forms, it's generally of marine, bovine, or poultry origin. When hydrolyzed (broken down into smaller pieces called peptides), they're more easily absorbed and work well for skin-cell renewal.

Look for a collagen product with a Health Canada-allocated Natural Product Number (NPN) on the label. Certain collagens have been clinically studied, with proven effectiveness reducing wrinkles or smoothing skin; choose the one that best suits your needs.

Collagen can also help reduce joint pain associated with osteoarthritis, so you can feel as good as you look.

I can't seem to shed my "quarantine fifteen." Any advice on how to lose some weight without going to an extreme diet plan?

When it comes to dieting, I say No Weigh! Losing weight is difficult. Adopting long-term healthy habits will have more benefits. Consider having steel-cut oats with low-fat yogurt for breakfast: You benefit from a healthy meal with a low glycemic index. You also have passed on a quick fix with some hidden sugar that will leave you hungry within a couple of hours. Regarding the need to start "working out," get active on your own terms. Start with a twenty-minute brisk walk; head out for ten minutes, then turn around and come back. Not only are you getting some cardio, but you're also not sitting and snacking while watching TV. If you feel sluggish, add some fibre to get your system moving; most Canadians don't get nearly enough. You can also try some green tea or ginseng for a boost of energy. Let the way you feel and how your clothes fit encourage you.

Be well, my friend.

You have a question you would like answered about your health and supplements? Gord would be happy to answer them! We could even feature them in this page if others could benefit from the information.

Reach out to him at [facebook.com/newrootsherbal](https://www.facebook.com/newrootsherbal) or call 1 800 268-9486 ext. 237

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Medicinal Mushrooms for Better Health

Naturopath Dr. Anne Hussain explores the benefits of five of the leading medicinal mushrooms for their role in immunity, inflammation, cognition, and beyond. She also discusses their potential for adjunctive use with conventional therapies.



Alcohol-Free Edible Mushroom Martinis!

See you at the crossroads of healthy dining and innovative cuisine with our edible mushroom martini recipes.



Kick Off 2021 With a Fresh Look

Pamper yourself with a facial featuring certified organic Goji Seed Oil for a fresh, clean look and feel.



Men's Health?

Pardon the skepticism, but does it exist? Male life expectancy falls five years short of women. Men are also notorious for shrugging off signs and symptoms of physical and emotional health concerns. There's some tough sledding ahead to bridge the wellness gap.

Truth is that women account for the majority of health-food- and supplement-purchasing decisions and consumption. In addition, according to *Mobile Health News*, women are 200% more likely to use health and fitness apps. With gym closures and restrictions on team sports, let us know what you're doing to stay fit and keep healthy!

Visit us at flourishbodyandmind.com/mens_health. We'll choose one guy who is keeping active and set him up with an awesome gift basket! Deadline is February 28, 2021.

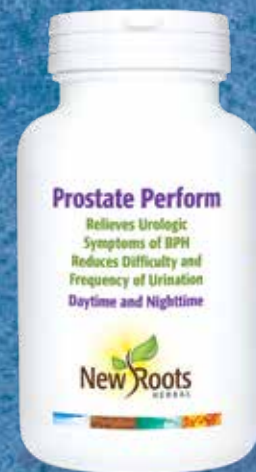
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