

# Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS



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## Your 2023 Guide to Better Health:



**The most important steps to take to keep improving your health throughout the year and beyond.**

Happy New Year! I don't know if you make New Year's resolutions, a practice that began about 4,000 years ago in the era of the ancient Babylonians. Their resolutions were somewhat different from ours. They included affirming loyalty to their king and vowing to return borrowed farm equipment, which was essential for survival in their agrarian society.

We don't know if the ancients achieved those goals, but our recent rates of success have not been stellar. Not everyone makes New Year's resolutions, but among those who do, the success rate is not very high. Surveys show that about 90 percent of resolutions are abandoned within a few weeks — if not days.

I'm mentioning this because at the beginning of a year, many people resolve to improve their health. Losing weight, eating a healthier diet, and getting more exercise are some common objectives. But without a workable plan and a way to measure progress, such health

goals are not easy to achieve. Failure is common — but not inevitable.

I'm not saying that you should or shouldn't make New Year's resolutions. That's a personal choice. But I am assuming that you want to stay in good health and, ideally, get into even better shape.

Much of the health information we hear from today's many online and other media sources is about avoiding chronic conditions that are debilitating and life-threatening: heart disease, diabetes, dementia, and such. Of course, this is important — essential, in fact. But true well-being is more than just the absence of disease. It means having more vitality to do the things that matter to you — enjoying life.

With that in mind, I'm going to lay out the most important steps to take to achieve *better* health. By

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE:  
Your 2023 Guide  
to Better Health: Part 2**



working in this direction, you will kill two birds with one stone because you will also be reducing risk for today's most common chronic diseases.

There's a lot of ground to cover on this topic, so I'm breaking it down into two parts: the first part in this issue and the second part next month.

## Let's Be Realistic

The first thing to keep in mind is that it's virtually impossible to

achieve a general, sweeping goal such as "lose weight" or "eat a healthier diet" without knowing what practical steps you can take. And those steps need to be realistic for your personal situation.

As an example, you may know that it would be ideal to eat whole-some meals prepared from scratch in your own kitchen — with locally grown, organic vegetables and grass-fed, pasture-raised meat, following recipes with fresh herbs that produce delicious dishes.

If you're thinking, "Sounds great, but I don't have a personal chef," don't worry. I don't have one either.

The ideal meals could be unrealistic for a variety of reasons. Perhaps you work really long hours and/or take care of others in your household. Perhaps your schedule means that you're on the road much of the time and have to eat out a lot. Or maybe you don't know how to cook and don't have the time or inclination to learn.

These are all situations I've run into with my patients over the years. In each case, I spent some time to learn enough about their lives to come up with ways that they could realistically make better food choices. And their health improved.

In the diet section later in this issue and next month, I'm going to cover some different ways to deal with the types of challenges that I've described.

In addition to diet, I'm going to cover the other important factors that need to be addressed for better health. With each one, I encourage you to see how it may apply to your own circumstances. And aim to find practical things you can do — one step at a time — to resolve

any problems and develop new, healthier habits.

## A Common Health Block: Chronic Infections

Chronic infections are more common — and more dangerous — than you might think. And they must be treated as a first step.

Many of my new patients had endured a dental infection for some time, and the way this felt had become "normal" — until the infection was gone. And then, they had a new lease on life or at least were much more comfortable and able to resolve other health issues, such as high blood pressure or chronic inflammation.

Gum disease is a common malady. Healthy gums fit tightly around each tooth. Without optimal dental care on a daily basis, bacteria get under the gums and cause inflammation. This leads to pockets developing around teeth, and then more bacteria get in there and cause more inflammation and deeper pockets.

Eventually, this leads to destruction of the bone that supports teeth. And teeth become loose. It's the most common cause of tooth loss.

Meanwhile, the bacteria under the gums can spread to the brain, and inflammation can spread throughout your whole body. Because of this, gum disease can cause or contribute to high blood pressure, fatigue, low thyroid, high blood sugar, and brain fog. It also raises risk for heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, depression, growth of cancerous tumors, dementia, and severe symptoms of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.<sup>1</sup>

The traditional treatment is deep cleaning by a dentist. Another

Dr. Marlene's

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alternative is to follow a specific, proven protocol at home, using products available in any drug-store. It was developed by a dentist with whom I've worked, and I describe it in detail in an earlier issue of this newsletter (see *Related to This Topic* on page 6). But you

must follow that protocol exactly. Dental infections can also stem from a broken, cracked, or decayed tooth or root of a tooth. These can cause pain, other discomfort, and sometimes swelling. In such cases, there is no alternative to getting treatment from a dentist. You

won't get relief until you do. One word of caution: I don't recommend root canals, because they are notoriously prone to continually remaining infected. Extraction of an infected tooth is a healthier alternative, and an implant can replace it. Urinary tract infections are also common. They require treatment with antibiotics, under the care of a doctor. Chronic sinus infections may be treatable at home with a nasal rinse kit such as NeilMed. If you've had a sinus issue for a while, you can add 1-to-2 dropperfuls of liquid goldenseal to the saline rinse. The herb kills bacteria. Do this 2-to-3 times daily for a week to 10 days.

I can't emphasize enough how vital it is to treat infections. They will stop you from experiencing a sense of well-being, and they are a true health hazard.

I can't emphasize enough how vital it is to treat infections. They will stop you from experiencing a sense of well-being, and they are a true health hazard.

When you cut your finger, you can see the injury, feel the pain, put a bandage on it, and observe how it heals. You can't see or necessarily feel damage inside your body.

For example, high blood pressure is referred to as a silent killer precisely because it is invisible; it doesn't generally produce symptoms. But health markers — results of the routine tests during check-ups — enable you to "see" some of the inner workings of your body.

If you were to cut your finger, you wouldn't leave the cut exposed to dirt and irritation as you go about your day. But many people ignore signs that injury is occurring inside their bodies.

I've summarized the most important indicators to monitor in the

## Health Markers to Track

These health markers (except for blood pressure) are tested with a blood sample taken by your doctor. Those in the first group are routinely tested during annual check-ups. Those in the second group are more likely to be done only on people with diabetes, heart disease, or other ills, not on healthy people. But you can request them, as they will give you important insights into the inner workings of your body.

The target numbers are those I recommend for optimal health. They are stricter than "normal," which is not an optimal state.

### Routine Tests for Healthy People

Test	Optimal Level	What it Indicates
Blood Pressure	Under 120/80 mm Hg	Risk for heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and other disorders.
Fasting Blood Sugar	85–92 mg/dL	Level of blood sugar after an overnight fast.
HDL ("good") Cholesterol	Over 50 mg/dL	The combination of these two numbers indicates risk for plaque deposits in arteries. If your HDL is low and triglycerides are high, arterial plaque is more likely to develop.
Triglycerides	Under 100 mg/dL	
Vitamin D	Between 30 and 50 ng/mL	Vitamin D is essential for controlling inflammation and blood sugar, keeping bones and muscles healthy, and overall good health.

### Additional Recommended Tests

Test	Optimal Level	What it Indicates
Fasting Insulin	Under 6 mIU/L	Level of insulin. Elevated insulin is an early sign of metabolic malfunction that leads to diabetes and obesity. High insulin promotes fat storage, especially in the belly, where it generates dangerous inflammation.
A1C	Under 5.5%	Average level of blood sugar in the past 3 months.
C-Reactive Protein (CRP)	Under 1 mg/dL	Level of inflammation, which can be high due to an infection or harmful chronic inflammation.

By repeating these tests at your next check-up, you will be able to see if there is improvement as a result of changes you have made.



*Health Markers to Track* chart on page 3. I haven't included optimal levels of total cholesterol and "bad" LDL cholesterol, which are part of routine testing, because by themselves, these are not the most reliable indicators of health risk. For a more detailed explanation of cholesterol, I encourage you to read Volume 1, Issue 4, of this newsletter: *When Statin Drugs Can Harm You More than Cholesterol*.

## What to Measure at Home

If you know you have high blood pressure, please do monitor it at home, whether or not you are taking any blood-pressure medication. And keep a record of your readings.

Do this as well if you suddenly discover your blood pressure is high when your doctor checks it. Blood pressure can be artificially high in a medical office, and home testing can give a more accurate

picture. And home testing will show the effects of medications and any diet and lifestyle changes.

Less than half of patients who need to monitor their blood pressure at home actually do so. And those who do are more likely to have lower blood pressure.<sup>2</sup>

When blood sugar is elevated, it's vital to monitor it at home, with or without diabetes. The best way is with a continuous blood-sugar monitor, which uses a skin sensor connected to a phone app to show your blood-sugar level at any time. Studies show that continuous monitoring can help to control blood sugar better than finger-prick tests,<sup>3</sup> and it can show you how stress, food, sleep, and exercise influence your blood sugar.

## The Big Diet Problem

Before I delve into the specifics of the diet I recommend, I want to reiterate that I recognize that we

## What to Look for on Food Labels

The serving size and total carbs are the key facts to check.

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
<b>Serving size</b>	<b>2/3 cup (55g)</b>
Amount per serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>230</b>
% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat</b> 8g	<b>10%</b>
Saturated Fat 1g	<b>5%</b>
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	<b>0%</b>
Sodium 100mg	<b>7%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 37g	<b>13%</b>
Dietary Fiber 5g	<b>14%</b>
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	<b>20%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	<b>10%</b>

don't live in an ideal world where preparing ideal meals is always possible. But before I cover ways to overcome challenges, let's look at what an optimal diet is.

The underlying diet problem for most Americans is an overload of carbs. This leads to elevated insulin, which promotes fat storage and chronic inflammation and contributes to high blood pressure, high blood sugar, and a variety of other ills. These include diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, brain fog, and greater likelihood of cognitive impairment, dementia, neurological diseases, and even cancer.

It isn't that carbs are bad. They are part and parcel of most plant foods. It's habitually eating *too many* carbs, over a period of years, that leads to health problems. In fact, a study of more than 135,000 people in North America and Europe found that eating fat is not harmful, but a high-carb diet increases risk of death.<sup>4</sup>

## About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt's passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others and by her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20.

A competitive cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from fatigue and chest pain for another 15 years, despite doing everything that conventional, Western medical doctors told her to do.

And then, the tide turned. A physician trained in naturopathic healing recommended a whole-food vitamin E supplement. A week after starting the supplement regimen, her energy began to return, and the pain began to disappear.

Dr. Marlene is a Doctor of Oriental Medicine, has a Master's degree and is board-certified in Nutrition, and is board-certified in Functional Medicine. She is certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol™, a groundbreaking method of addressing Alzheimer's disease, and is a Proficiency Diplomate in the Shoemaker CIRS protocol for treatment of mold-related illness. She is the author of *Smart Blood Sugar* and *The Blood Pressure Solution*, and co-author of *The Perfect Sleep Solution*. After 31 years in private clinical practice, she now focuses on writing and educating health professionals and consumers to reach more people and positively impact their health.



Most American adults today have a metabolism that has already been damaged by carb overload. The way to reverse this is to eat a diet that is lower in carbs and includes a healthy balance of different foods.

## A Realistic Diet for Better Health

My low-carb diet doesn't exclude any food. It only limits the quantity of carbs from those foods that we typically overeat, listed in the *Low-Carb Diet Snapshot* below. The foods I list cause carb overload. It's difficult to stop eating them and it's easy to overindulge.

This doesn't mean that you can't eat bread, pasta, pizza, chips, cake, fruit, or any other food I've listed in the snapshot. You can — as long as you count the total carbs and don't exceed 60 grams of total carbs per day and 30 grams per meal. But you count carbs only from the foods I've listed, not everything else you eat.

You can eat unlimited amounts of other vegetables — anything other than potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, beans, or peas. In fact, all the other vegetables should fill the biggest part of your plate. Fish and meat contain no carbs. Eggs, nuts, and seeds contain minimal amounts of carbs, which you don't need to count.

## Healthy Diet Shortcuts

Studies show that home-cooked meals are healthiest.<sup>5</sup> And I've always recommended preparing food with fresh ingredients and avoiding foods that come in packages. But what if you're not a cook or don't have time? Take some shortcuts. For example, buy cooked meals made with fresh ingredients, ready to heat

in a pan or microwave. My favorite ones are made by Kevin's Natural Foods, found in many supermarkets and online at [www.kevinsnaturalfoods.com](http://www.kevinsnaturalfoods.com). They're cooked in a way that preserves nutrients, they contain no harmful additives, and they're tasty.

If you choose pre-cooked meals and find that you need more food for a meal, add vegetables. Frozen or pre-cut ones ready to microwave or steam are easy to prepare. Good snacks include a small handful of nuts or vegetables dipped in hummus.

I'll be giving you more details and tips about diet next month but this can get you started.

## Medications: Pros and Cons

Many patients have initially come to see me because they had been prescribed drugs for blood pressure, blood sugar, or other ills, and they didn't want to keep taking them for the rest of their lives.

By following my diet and other recommendations, many of those patients eliminated their need for medications, or for insulin in the case of some type 2 diabetics. In other cases, they significantly reduced their need for the number or dosage of drugs.

As you probably know, I am a big proponent of doing everything you can to heal your body naturally. But in some situations, there is

## Low-Carb Diet Snapshot

### There are only 4 rules:

#### 1. Count total carbs only in these foods:

**Grains and all foods made from them:** Grains include corn, wheat, rye, rice, and oats. Foods made from these include oatmeal, other cereals, pasta, pizza crust, breads, cookies, cakes, pastries, and breakfast and nutrition bars made from grains.

**Snacks:** Candy, all types of potato and corn chips, pretzels, and other snacks made from grains, such as popcorn and rice cakes.

**Fruit:** Fresh, frozen, or canned fruit.

**Starchy vegetables and legumes:** Potatoes, sweet potatoes, beans, peas, and corn.

**Drinks:** All drinks that contain natural or added sugar, honey, or agave nectar, including milk, fruit juices and smoothies, sodas, energy drinks, and sweetened teas and coffees. (There's no need to count carbs in drinks sweetened only with stevia, xylitol, or monk fruit.)

#### 2. Eat no more than 60 grams per day of total carbs from the foods above. And don't eat more than 30 grams of total carbs in any single meal or snack.

#### 3. Eat every 3 hours or before you get hungry.

#### 4. Eat some fat with every meal and snack.

Track carbs: Use a website such as [www.myfitnesspal.com](http://www.myfitnesspal.com) or [www.carbmanager.com](http://www.carbmanager.com) or an app from either of these or similar sites. Note the serving size and how many servings you eat.



also a place for medications.

Here's an example: An A1C level (a measure of blood sugar during the past three months) over 6.5% is an indicator of type 2 diabetes. This means that internal damage has been occurring for some time and will continue to occur if blood sugar is not reduced.

A healthy diet, exercise, restful sleep, and stress management can all help to lower blood sugar. But it will take some time and effort. A medication can help to reduce internal damage by lowering blood sugar in the meantime.

Today's chronic diseases don't suddenly strike. They develop over many years — around 20 years in the case of type 2 diabetes, for example. So, you can't expect that damaging process to be instantly reversed.

Medications can be a helpful stop-gap measure while you make diet and lifestyle changes.

Medication Caution

Different types of medications can deplete vital nutrients. These are some common ones:

- Metformin, the most prescribed drug for diabetes, depletes vitamin B12. Your doctor can check your B12 levels with a blood test, and if it's low you can take a B12 supplement.
- Diuretics can deplete calcium, magnesium, potassium, zinc, and/or vitamin B1, depending on the drug. Take a multivitamin or mineral supplement.
- Statins, for lowering cholesterol, deplete CoQ10. Take a CoQ10 supplement.
- Bile acid sequestrants, another category of drugs for lowering cholesterol, can deplete vitamins A, D, and K. Take a multivitamin and extra vitamin D and vitamin K2.

If you routinely take any medication, check with your pharmacist or doctor about possible nutrient depletions and how to prevent or correct these.

Getting Started

If you have dental or other infections, treating these is the first step. Otherwise, the inflammation from the infection will block the benefits of your efforts. And then, if you haven't had a check-up for a while, get one and take a look at your health markers.

As a next step, take an inventory of your current diet. Use one of the websites I mentioned in the *Low-Carb Diet Snapshot* on page 5 and track the total carbs from the foods and drinks I listed in that section. This will help you see where carb overload is coming from in your current diet, and where improvements can be made.


In next month's issue, I'll give you some more diet tips, best types of exercise, ways to overcome challenges, tips to improve sleep and reduce stress, helpful supplements, and more ways to enhance your health. I'll also include a checklist to help you put all the pieces together, one step at a time.

### Related to This Topic

These are some earlier issues of this newsletter that address related topics:

Related Topic	Volume	Issue	Title
Teeth and Gums	3	10	The 5 Simple Steps to Healthy Teeth and Gums
Cholesterol	1	4	When Statin Drugs Can Harm You More than Cholesterol
Blood Pressure	2	9	4 Steps to Healthy Blood Pressure
Blood Sugar	5	6	New Blood Sugar Dangers: What to Do
Insulin	4	10	Insulin: The Overlooked Health Marker (page 8)
Diabetes	5	12	Top 20 Diabetes Questions Answered
Healthy Carbs	3	6	The Diabetic's Guide to Eating Carbs
Healthy Fat	4	11	Healthy Fats: Deadly Myths and Life-Saving Facts
Healthy Meat	3	2	The Diabetic's Guide to Eating Meat
Diabetes	2	4	Type 2 Diabetes: The Roadmap to Recovery

Access these online by logging in to [www.NaturalHealthConnections.com](http://www.NaturalHealthConnections.com).



1 Zemedikun, D.T., et al. "Burden of chronic diseases associated with periodontal diseases: a retrospective cohort study using UK primary care data." *BMJ Open*. 2021 Dec 19;11(12):e048296.

2 Springer, M.V., et al. "Prevalence and Frequency of Self-measured Blood Pressure Monitoring in US Adults Aged 50–80 Years." *JAMA Netw Open*. 2022 Sep 1;5(9):e2231772.

3 Janapala, R.N., et al. "Continuous Glucose Monitoring Versus Self-monitoring of Blood Glucose in Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus: A Systematic Review with Meta-analysis." *Cureus*. 2019 Sep; 11(9): e5634.

4 Dehghan, M., et al. "Associations of fats and carbohydrate intake with cardiovascular disease and mortality in 18 countries from five continents (PURE): a prospective cohort study." *Lancet*. 2017 Nov 4;390(10107):2050-2062.

5 Wolfson, J.A., et al. "More frequent cooking at home is associated with higher Healthy Eating Index–2015 score." *Public Health Nutr*. 2020 Sep;23(13):2384-2394.



# Vicki wanted to lose weight, but she hated exercise – so how the heck did she **drop 32 pounds** in two months?

If you're having trouble losing 15 pounds or more, just see what happened to Vicki...

**L**ike most of us hitting middle age, Vicki started packing on a few extra pounds each year. Her weight crept up so gradually she hardly noticed. But eventually, Vicki, her husband, and her doctor became concerned. As you might imagine, Vicki's self-esteem took a big hit.

Vicki tried to lose weight by depriving herself of all her favorite foods. She forced herself to eat boring salads and tasteless frozen diet meals. And she exercised like crazy (even though she hated it). But the extra pounds just wouldn't budge.

That's when a friend suggested Vicki try **Smash-It!** This nutrient-infused slimming shake was developed by Primal Labs – a leader in nutritional supplementation.

In the first month alone, Vicki lost 3.5 inches from her belly and 2 inches from her waist, hips, and thighs. And when you hear Vicki tell the story, you'll see why she feels like a different person. "I have so much energy. Oh my gosh, my co-workers noticed within two weeks I was dropping weight," she said. "I was walking around with a big smile on my face."

**It's easy to see why Vicki had a big smile. She lost 18 pounds in just 30 days merely by substituting one meal a day with Smash-It! But she wasn't done...**

In the second month, Vicki lost an additional 2.5 inches off her belly and waist, and 1.75 inches off her hips. **In only two months, Vicki lost a grand total of 32 pounds!**

What's more, Vicki lost all this weight with only minimal exercise. Which just shows you proper nutrition is 90% of successful weight loss. Because if you're eating the wrong foods, you can't exercise enough to get rid of unwanted fat.

And that's the secret of **Smash-It!**, the delicious meal-in-a-glass that works better than any diet or weight loss program.

**Smash-It!** has been scientifically formulated to fix the #1 reason most people can't lose weight: **TOXIC FAT CELLS**. Most people get stuck with unwanted pounds, not because of *too much* fat, but rather because of too much of the *WRONG* kind of fat.

This was proven in a landmark study at Temple University. Researchers studied fat cells of overweight people and found them to be toxic, inflamed, and unhealthy. Worse yet, these toxic fat cells "affect blood pressure, blood sugar, triglycerides, and cholesterol," according to *Future Medicine*.

Fortunately, a delicious **Smash-It!** meal replacement shake is an amazing improvement over any meal replacement, protein supplement, or "nutrition shake" you may have tried. In fact, by drinking a daily **Smash-It!** shake, you can:

1. FIX those toxic fat cells for good...
2. FIRE UP your metabolism and supercharge your health...
3. TAKE INCHES AND POUNDS OFF your hips, thighs, and waist, giving you the body you've been dreaming of...

*Discover everything  
you will get with  
Smash-It! on the  
next page!*



# Here's What You'll Find in Smash-It!

First, you'll get 21 grams of **quality protein** in a proprietary Quadsourc Blend. This includes whey and pea protein, and even cranberry seed protein to help boost your metabolism and give you the nutrition you need.

Next, a patented *Spectra Blend* contains 29 of nature's most powerful, health-boosting fruit, vegetable, spice, and herbal extracts, including green tea, turmeric, broccoli, bilberry, cinnamon, blueberry, acerola, and many more.

You'd have to eat several servings of fruits and vegetables to get the **antioxidant power** you'll find in *Spectra Blend*. As you know, antioxidants fight the free radical damage that comes with aging. Plus, they increase nitric oxide production to support healthy blood pressure levels and brain function.

In **Smash-It!**, you'll also get:

- ✓ 3 grams of gut-healthy **fiber**, including oat fiber, xanthan gum, and blue agave inulin to help support healthy lipid levels
- ✓ 8 special **enzymes** to help you better digest your food
- ✓ 6 special **probiotics** — "friendly" bacterial strains to support regularity and immune function
- ✓ Biotin and chromium to help maintain healthy blood sugar levels
- ✓ Vitamins A, C, E, B, and D for more health benefits, including support for bone and brain health, as well as healthy blood pressure
- ✓ L-leucine, an amino acid that helps minimize the loss of lean muscle tissue — something to guard against as you age (and when losing weight)
- ✓ And many more vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients to maintain your good health

But what about fat? You know you need fat to feel full and satisfied, so you won't be tempted by unhealthy carbs and sweets. But it has to be *good* fat, not the bad fats typically found in fast and processed foods.



Well, **Smash-It!** contains the absolute **best kind of fat** — medium chain triglycerides found in coconut oil that your body easily burns for energy. And as an added bonus, these fats help support cognitive health.

What's more, the Primal Health team knew that if it didn't taste great, you wouldn't drink it. So, **Smash-It!** comes in rich chocolate, strawberry, and vanilla caramel flavors. It's sweetened with monk fruit that's actually sweeter than sugar. **Smash-It!** contains just one gram of sugar per serving. Compare that to Ensure, with its unhealthy 15 grams of sugar.

With **Smash-It!**, you can **safely and easily melt off up to 15 pounds in just one month**. And enjoy all these benefits in just 30 seconds a day — with minimal exercise and NO impossible-to-maintain diet. What's not to love?

And no worries... Try **Smash-It!** completely risk-free with a no-questions-asked 100% money-back guarantee.

Just like Vicki, now YOU can start shedding those unwanted pounds. Imagine looking and feeling years younger... Fitting into your skinny clothes again... Sounds amazing, doesn't it? Say hello to your new life.

**TRY IT TODAY! Smash-It! Nutrient-Infused Slimming Shake**  
**GetSmash-It.com/NHC3**

For Faster Service, call 1-888-309-0629  
Monday-Friday 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. CST • Saturday-Sunday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. CST



# Ashwagandha Relieves Stress and Rejuvenates



The herb ashwagandha has been used for thousands of years in Ayurvedic medicine, the ancient healing system of India. To get a sense of its value, it's helpful to understand a bit about Ayurveda and how it differs from the way Western medicine approaches health — or rather, disease.

Today's Western medicine addresses symptoms. Something hurts? Take a pain killer. Feeling anxious because your schedule is stressing you out? Take an anti-anxiety drug. Can't sleep? Take a sleeping pill. Short on energy? Take a stimulant.

Ayurvedic medicine takes a different view: that health and wellness come from internal balance and harmony. And Ayurvedic remedies help to restore balance.

A healthy diet, regular exercise, restorative sleep, and stress management are all essential parts of balance. At the same time, herbs are effective tools.

In Ayurveda, ashwagandha is one of the most important herbs. And while it won't replace all the other aspects of life that contribute to balance — or imbalance — it has some proven benefits that can help you deal with daily life.

## How It Works

Scientists who have analyzed Ayurvedic medicine in recent years have described ashwagandha as an

herb that “promotes a youthful state of physical and mental health and expands happiness.” And they've called it a “rejuvenator.”<sup>1</sup>

Rejuvenation is not a goal of medications or other conventional medical treatments today. And while you would probably know if you felt rejuvenated, there is no objective measure of this in Western science. However, human studies show that ashwagandha has a variety of benefits that contribute to well-being and can help to bring about a rejuvenated state.

## Human Studies

Researchers at SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, New York, and the Yale School of Public Health in New Haven, Connecticut, reviewed human trials conducted with more than 400 people. They concluded that ashwagandha is effective in reducing stress and anxiety.

These researchers examined earlier studies that used a variety of ashwagandha extracts. They found that the herb could relieve stress and anxiety just as well as anti-anxiety medications but without addiction or other harmful side effects of the drugs.<sup>2</sup>

Other research has examined how ashwagandha affects the internal mechanisms that are damaged by stress. When we experience stress, levels of cortisol, the fight-or-flight hormone, rise, and various

internal changes lead to damage. Ashwagandha helps to reduce harmful stress-induced changes.

Benefits include less anxiety or feeling of stress, better sleep, less fatigue, better heart function, enhanced endurance, improved hormonal balance, less inflammation, better memory, less joint pain, less belly fat, and, among people who have difficulty controlling their appetite, fewer cravings.<sup>3</sup>

Ashwagandha is classified as an “adaptogen” because it helps the human body to adapt to stressful situations and restore internal balance. This prevents or reduces internal damage caused by stress and enhances the way a person feels and functions in many ways.

## How to Benefit

Ashwagandha supplements typically contain extracts of the herb that vary in strength and composition. Due to the differences, it isn't possible to recommend a fixed dosage for all products, but there's a simple way to address this.

Some supplements contain patented forms of ashwagandha that have been tested in human trials, in specific dosages. One of these is KSM-66; the tested dosage is 300 mg, twice daily. Another patented form is Sensoril; tested dosages include 150 mg to 250 mg, twice daily, for joint pain and inflammation and 500 mg, twice daily, for other benefits.

While the herb can be very helpful, it works best with a nutritious diet, some exercise, and adequate sleep.

1 Singh, N., et al. “An overview on ashwagandha: a Rasayana (rejuvenator) of Ayurveda.” *Afr J Tradit Complement Altern Med*. 2011;8(5 Suppl):208-213. 2 Pratte, M.A., et al. “An Alternative Treatment for Anxiety: A Systematic Review of Human Trial Results Reported for the Ayurvedic Herb Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*).” *J Altern Complement Med*. 2014 Dec 1; 20(12): 901-908. 3 Salve, J., et al. “Adaptogenic and Anxiolytic Effects of Ashwagandha Root Extract in Healthy Adults: A Double-blind, Randomized, Placebo-controlled Clinical Study.” *Cureus*. 2019 Dec; 11(12): e6466.

# Why We Get Sick in Cold Weather

What is it about winter that makes colds and flu so common? Do these bugs take a vacation during summer months?

In fact, cold and flu bugs are around all year long. And we know that COVID viruses don't go on vacation either, but COVID infections increase in winter.

There are some plausible theories about why this is so. We spend more time indoors, making it easier for bugs to spread. Levels of vitamin D, which enhances our resistance to infection, drop in winter because we don't get as much sun. But there's more to the story.

New research has found that when our nose gets cold, a vital part of our immune defenses shuts down.<sup>1</sup> Let me explain.

Our nose is a major defender against bugs. When the nose detects pathogens, cells in the nasal cavity release a bug-killing army of substances that bind with the

bugs and kill them. "Extracellular vesicles" — EVs for short — is the technical name of these bug killers.

The release of EVs is quick and dramatic. It's as though a virus poked a hornet's nest, and suddenly that virus gets engulfed and destroyed by a swarm of killers. The "hornets" in this case are good guys; they block bugs from getting into your body and stop you from getting sick.

Here's the problem the new study discovered: When you breathe in cold air, the temperature in your nose drops. And this numbs the EVs — the good guys that kill bugs. So, the defenses are down, making it easier for bugs to get past your nose and into your system. And you get sick.

## What to Do

When you go outside and breathe in cold air, wearing warm clothes won't keep your nasal cavity



warm. But a mask will. A mask is like a sweater for your nasal cavity, keeping your EV defense system ready to launch. And if you breathe in any viruses or bacteria, the EVs can literally surround and kill them. In addition, a mask makes it more difficult for bugs to get into your nose in the first place.

We don't live in a perfect world, so I can't guarantee that you'll never get sick. However, the nose is the first part of your defenses against airborne pathogens, so keeping it in fighting shape is a vital step.

# Spices Boost Gut Health

We've heard a lot about beneficial gut bacteria enhancing our health. We need a wide variety of those microscopic organisms — what scientists call "gut diversity." This strengthens our immune system, improves our digestion, helps our brains to work well, and supports a healthy mood.

One way to enhance the health of our gut microorganisms is to eat fermented foods, such as sauerkraut, cultured yogurt, and pickles. In addition, a recent study found that adding herbs and spices to food can significantly enhance the diversity and health of our gut.<sup>2</sup>

Researchers tested gut bacteria after people ate an average American diet with different amounts of

spices, including cinnamon, ginger, cumin, turmeric, rosemary, oregano, basil, and thyme. And they found that eating between  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons daily enriched the variety of gut microbes and reduced inflammation in the gut.

Cinnamon and ginger can spice up herbal teas and coffee. Different combinations of the other spices can be added to salad dressings and used to season meat, poultry, fish, and vegetables. Seasoning this way makes healthy and delicious go hand in hand.



1 Huang, D., et al. "Cold exposure impairs extracellular vesicle swarm-mediated nasal antiviral immunity." *J Allergy Clin Immunol*. 2022 Nov 28;S0091-6749(22)01423-3. 2 Petersen, K.S., et al "Herbs and Spices Modulate Gut Bacterial Composition in Adults At Risk for Cardiovascular Disease: Results of a Pre-Specified Exploratory Analysis from a Randomized, Crossover, Controlled-Feeding Study." *J Nutr*. 2022 Sep 2;152(11):2461-2470.

# Hearing Aids Preserve Mental Function

For anyone who has difficulty hearing, using a hearing aid can not only make communication easier, it can also protect mental function. That's the finding of a research review that analyzed studies of nearly 127,000 people who were tracked for 2 to 25 years.

The research shows that some improvement in mental performance is a short-term benefit of hearing aids. And in the longer term, hearing aids lower the odds of mental decline and dementia.<sup>1</sup>

Impaired hearing reduces stimulation of the brain, causing brain deterioration; it makes people feel left out of conversations and isolated; it can cause stress in

relationships; and it can double the risk for accidents.

## Lower Costs

Medicare and most private insurance plans don't cover the costs of hearing aids, although they likely cover the cost of an ear exam.

Until last fall, hearing aids could not be sold without a prescription and cost up to several thousand dollars. Now, lower-cost, over-the-counter versions are available, due to a change in the FDA rules that regulate hearing aids.

Previously, you may have seen ads for products to amplify hearing but these are not hearing aids. They are designed to amplify

sound beyond a natural degree, helping hunters to hear the sounds of animals at a distance or private investigators to snoop on conversations without being seen. They are called "sound amplifiers," and unlike hearing aids, they are not regulated by the FDA.

Over-the-counter hearing aids are designed for people with mild to moderate hearing loss. Costs range from around \$100 to nearly \$1,000.

Before using these, it's a good idea to have a doctor check for any other ear problems, especially if you have ear pain or discomfort, dizziness, sudden hearing loss, excessive ear wax, or a feeling that something is in your ear when nothing is there.

## Exercise Outwits Genes

A study of identical twins in Washington State has added to the evidence that regardless of our genes, our lifestyle is the biggest driver of health or unwellness. That's because what we do — or don't do — affects how our genes are expressed or activated.

You could think of genes as a computer that is capable of a thousand different functions, some helpful and others harmful. Which keys we press or don't press, by the way we live our lives, determines whether the result is more helpful or harmful.

In this study, researchers examined genes, health, and exercise habits of 70 pairs of identical twins. Exercise is known to influence 7,000 genes.

In many pairs of twins, the study found that the health of one twin was quite different from the other. And in these situations, those who regularly exercised for 150 minutes per week were significantly healthier than their inactive twins.<sup>2</sup>

Health markers included waist size, which is an indicator of chronic inflammation and risk for diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic conditions.

## How Weighted Blankets Improve Sleep

Weighted blankets have been gaining popularity as a way to calm anxiety and improve sleep. Now, a new study has found one way in which they work.

Researchers in Sweden compared melatonin levels in people who slept with light blankets and weighted ones. Melatonin is a hormone we secrete at night to help us asleep.

The study found that weighted blankets led to higher levels of melatonin. Although this may not fully explain why the blankets can be beneficial, it gives us a clue.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier studies have found that weighted blankets, when used for a month or more by psychiatric patients, eased insomnia. Other research has suggested that the pressure of a weighted blanket may enhance sleep by calming the nervous system. And it may stimulate production of oxytocin, sometimes called a "love hormone," which lowers stress and fosters pleasant feelings.



1 Yeo, B.S.Y., et al. "Association of Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants With Cognitive Decline and Dementia: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis." *JAMA Neurol.* 2022 Dec 5. 2 Duncan, G.E., et al. "Epigenome-wide association study of physical activity and physiological parameters in discordant monozygotic twins." *Sci Rep.* 2022 Nov 23;12(1):20166. 3 Meth, E.M.S., et al. "A weighted blanket increases pre-sleep salivary concentrations of melatonin in young, healthy adults." *J Sleep Res.* 2022 Oct 3:e13743.



# Q&A

**Q: I feel dizzy while walking and even sitting. I've seen a few doctors and almost everything has been ruled out except some blood-pressure problem that I don't understand. — Anne E.**

**A:** Dizziness can be a symptom of many things, including high or low blood pressure. Ruling out possible causes is the right approach. But once a likely trigger or contributing factor is identified, it needs to be addressed.

I would recommend that you go back to the doctor who indicated a blood-pressure problem, get a clarification of what it is, and then work on getting it resolved. In today's healthcare system, doctors are often overworked and pressed for time, but if you ask for a more complete explanation of the problem, they will typically provide it.

I realize that it can be difficult to grasp medical information, especially when it concerns your own health. That's why it's a good idea to take a companion with you when you see your doctor — someone to keep track of the information and perhaps ask some questions to get things clarified.

I would address the blood-pressure issue first. And then, if the dizziness continues, keep working with one or more doctors to look into other possible causes. The solution to complex or persisting issues is to keep testing and searching, and then address any other factors that are

found. But first, I would work on the blood-pressure problem.

**Q: I take methimazole for my thyroid. Is there something natural I can take to replace the prescription? — Kevin R.**

**A:** Methimazole is used to treat an overactive thyroid, also known as hyperthyroidism. The drug prevents the thyroid gland from producing too much thyroid hormone. Hyperthyroidism can be deadly, causing a continuously high heart rate and loss of muscle mass in the heart, which can lead to heart failure.

There isn't a single natural substance that can replace methimazole. However, by working closely with an experienced functional medicine doctor, you can explore which factors stir up your personal condition and find ways to correct those.

Functional medicine identifies and addresses the underlying causes of health conditions. It's practiced by a variety of health professionals who are licensed by their state and have undergone specialized training. Some are medical doctors.

I'm trained in functional medicine but I don't prescribe drugs. When seeking to transition to a non-drug approach, it's vital to work with a prescribing physician to lower dosages as needed.

There are herbs that work like your medication, but the herbs are not as strong and need to be customized for each individual. People who have their condition mostly under control might be able to use herbs instead of drugs, but this can change over time. That's why it's essential to work very closely with a doctor.

The most common cause of hyperthyroidism is Graves' disease. This is an autoimmune condition that causes the thyroid to go into overdrive and produce too much thyroid hormone. The flu is a common trigger, so avoiding it is an important step. Not all the triggers of such an immune-system reaction are known, and they are unique to each individual.

Other, less common triggers of hyperthyroidism include thyroiditis, which is an inflammation of the thyroid gland; noncancerous lumps in thyroid nodules; a non-cancerous tumor in the pituitary gland; and too much iodine. And sometimes, taking too much of a medication to correct a low thyroid can lead to an overactive thyroid.

Bottom line: unraveling hyperthyroidism takes some detective work by an experienced health professional and a customized approach. You can learn more about functional medicine and practitioners around the country at [www.ifm.org](http://www.ifm.org).

## Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to [drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com](mailto:drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com). Please include your first name and the initial of your last name. Although she cannot answer each question directly, Dr. Marlene will select a few in each newsletter and will address other questions and concerns in articles in future issues. Answers are intended for educational purposes only and should not be viewed as medical advice. If you need help with your subscription or have questions about Primal Health supplements, email [support@primalhealthlp.com](mailto:support@primalhealthlp.com) or call 877-300-7849.