

Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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Hidden Food Sensitivities: How To Get Relief

Food sensitivities can cause chronic digestive, skin, mental, and autoimmune conditions, and are typically overlooked in today's healthcare system. But identifying and eliminating trigger foods can bring about dramatic improvement in health and well-being.



I once had a patient who was 76 years old when she came to see me for the first time. She wasn't suffering from arthritis, diabetes, or memory problems, and she wasn't overweight. At first glance, she appeared to be in good shape, if somewhat subdued and shy.

Her problem? Diarrhea, which she had been suffering from her whole life. At first, she was embarrassed by her predicament. As she became more comfortable and described how it had affected her life, she broke down in tears.

This patient had seen countless doctors, who had examined her and performed various tests. And every time, they told her nothing was wrong. Are you kidding?

There was one thing they never tested for — it didn't even cross their minds. What was it? Gluten sensitivity. Once this lady stopped eating gluten, her diarrhea disap-

peared and she was able to experience and enjoy a whole new life.

Gluten sensitivity isn't even on the radar in conventional medicine. In fact, there is debate about its existence, but it's very real and it affects many people.¹

In other cases, there may be more than one food or ingredient that is causing symptoms that an individual takes for granted. They may chalk it up to age. Or, it may be a symptom or collection of symptoms they've experienced for most or all of their lives, and they just assume, "That's the way it is."

Another of my patients suffered from depression and anxiety and always felt like he lacked the energy to keep up with his young children. He assumed that this was his destiny,

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE:
Cholesterol Myths
and Facts**

because his mother had suffered from the same symptoms.

It turned out that there was a hereditary component, but the inherited characteristics weren't depression, anxiety, or low energy. What he had inherited was a sensitivity to both gluten and dairy. And when he eliminated these foods from his diet, the symptoms disappeared. To my patient, it seemed like a miracle. In fact, the relief was the result of identifying the right dietary triggers of the problem.

Dr. Marlene's
NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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Don't Tolerate Symptoms

I've been telling you about these patients' experiences because they illustrate a vital point: You don't have to tolerate not feeling great.

Too often, people explain symptoms away as "getting older," not sleeping well last night, not getting enough exercise, not eating well enough, or a hectic schedule. Don't do this. Food sensitivities are more common that you might think. And correcting them often produces surprising benefits.

Keep in mind that identifying and dealing with food sensitivities doesn't replace the need to eat a low-carb diet of whole foods. Rather, it complements such a diet.

What Are Food Sensitivities?

Food sensitivities are not the same as food allergies, which produce immediate symptoms that can include hives, itchy skin, swelling, difficulty breathing, and anaphylactic shock. Reactions, which can range from mild to life-threatening, are a specific type of immune-system reaction. People who have food allergies are usually well aware of them.

Food sensitivities involve a different type of immune-system response. It can cause many different symptoms that generally don't appear immediately. Rather, symptoms are a delayed reaction that can occur up to several days after eating a trigger food. And the reactions can last a while.²

Even if you eat an offending food only every few days, one reaction can lead to the next. And symptoms can become chronic. Because there is a delayed reaction, it can be difficult to pinpoint

which food is the culprit, and sometimes there's more than one. So, sensitivities remain hidden.

Symptoms of Food Sensitivities

Food sensitivities cause inflammation and can trigger or contribute to many health conditions, from heartburn and psoriasis to brain fog, dementia, Parkinson's, and many others. Below are some symptoms that can occur, individually or in combination.

This is a snapshot; a more detailed list of symptoms appears in Volume 7, Issue 6, of this newsletter: *Food Sensitivities: Are They Hurting You?* I encourage you to check out that issue and others listed in *Related to This Topic* on page 5.

If you have symptoms that fall into two of these three categories, you are likely sensitive to gluten.

- All types of digestive and skin problems
- Mental disturbances, such as brain fog or depression, and neurological diseases
- Autoimmune disorders, such as Hashimoto's, rheumatoid arthritis and many others

Any of those symptoms and the ones below can result from sensitivities to gluten and/or other foods:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Fatigue | • Skin rashes |
| • Chronic congestion | • Headaches |
| • Joint pain | • Itching |
| • Other aches and pains | • Fluid retention |
| • Susceptibility to infections | • Weight gain |
| | • Weight loss (unintended) |

Symptoms of food sensitivities vary from one person to another, and can occur in different combinations.

Top Trigger Foods

These are the most common problematic foods, in order of prevalence. Gluten is most common, dairy is next, and so on.

Gluten



Dairy



Eggs



Soy



Corn



Although we eat many foods, I've found that five — the *Top Trigger Foods* above — are the most common causes of reactions.

Gluten and Alternatives

Gluten, a protein in wheat, rye, and barley, is the most common trigger of food sensitivities. Obvious sources include anything that is made with these grains, such as all baked goods, cereals, nutrition bars, and snacks that contain grain.

Oats don't naturally contain gluten. But if they aren't labelled "gluten-free," they may well be contaminated with gluten during the manufacturing process.

Gluten is also in breeding of fried foods and is used as a food additive in many sauces, soups, marinades, sausages, meatballs, meatloaf, and burgers. It will be listed as an ingredient on labels.

Alternatives: For the less obvious sources, in which gluten occurs in small amounts, you can buy gluten-free options. For the obvious sources, in which grain is the major ingredient, there are two ways to avoid gluten: choose gluten-free options of familiar foods such as breads, or avoid them completely.

The problem with gluten-free baked goods is that they are high in carbs, as are the regular versions of the same foods. In addition, gluten-free substitutes for grain, such as tapioca starch, may not be easily digested by your system, as they are unfamiliar foods for most people.

The simplest way to avoid gluten is to eat a diet rich in vegetables, some fruit, and protein from whole foods such as meat and fish. And there are tasty alternatives, such as zucchini noodles or other spiralized vegetables instead of pasta, or riced or mashed cauliflower. Avoiding gluten this way can make it easier to follow a low-carb diet.

That said, there are also ways to make popular dishes, such as pizza or pasta, without gluten. Good sources of gluten-free recipes, flours, and mixes for breads, cakes, pasta, and pizza crust include:

www.gfjules.com

www.bobsredmill.com

Dairy and Alternatives

Dairy products — notably low-fat or fat-free versions — have been recommended as healthy foods for decades. But this is a faulty notion because dairy foods aren't easily digested by most people. (And low-fat or fat-free versions of any food contribute to carb overload because they are often sweetened to compensate for the missing fat and to improve taste.)

Food sensitivities to dairy foods are typically a reaction to casein, one of two key proteins in milk and other foods made from milk. (Not nearly as many people react to whey, the other protein in milk.)

People whose ancestors came from Northern Europe are less likely to be sensitive to dairy. But most other adults don't tolerate it well, certainly not in large quantities that may be eaten today — a pint of ice cream, or more, for example.

Butter is an exception because

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.



it's just fat. It doesn't contain milk proteins that trigger reactions. And butter does not contain lactose, the natural milk sugar that can cause a different type of adverse reaction. (See *Lactose Intolerance* below.)

Alternatives: There are plenty of plant milks, yogurts made from plant milks, plant-based creamers, and cheeses made from plant sources such as cashew or almond milk. Ice cream labeled “keto” should be dairy-free.

Eggs and Alternatives

Sensitivity to eggs requires avoiding whole eggs, egg whites, and egg ingredients in packaged foods such as egg white, egg powder, egg solids, albumin (another word for egg whites), or ovalbumin (a protein in egg whites).

Eggs are in mayonnaise, many baked goods and frostings, some ice creams, some sauces, pastas, pan-cakes, and many other foods. Label reading is a must.

Alternatives: Similar products without eggs are usually available, such as egg-free mayonnaise. There are also “egg replacers,” but some are chock-full of chemical additives. One that doesn't contain chemicals is Bob's Red Mill Gluten Free Vegan Egg Replacer, a powder that contains only potato starch, tapioca flour, baking soda, and psyllium husk.

If you use egg replacers for breakfast, keep in mind that they won't have the protein content of real eggs. Have some fish or meat with those “eggs.”

For baking, you can also make an “egg” by mixing 1 tablespoon of ground flaxseed with 3 tablespoons of water and letting

it sit for 5 minutes, to thicken. Mixing water and chia seeds is another option. And if you need fluffy egg whites for meringue or a mousse, whip some aquafaba — the liquid in canned chickpeas.

Soy Foods and Alternatives

Soy foods include tofu and tempeh. These are traditionally eaten in very small amounts in Asian cultures, but we tend to eat them in much larger quantities. In addition, soy protein and flour are added to breads and many other processed foods, from nutrition bars to vegan burgers and other meat substitutes. Condiments, such as soy, tamari, and teriyaki sauces, and miso are other sources.

Soy beans naturally contain anti-nutrients: substances that the

human digestive system cannot break down and digest.⁴ Where a sensitivity to soy develops, it most often causes digestive upset. But sometimes, soy foods can also suppress the thyroid, especially if someone eats a lot of soy foods.

Soybean oil, which is just fat, doesn't trigger food sensitivities, as these are a reaction to proteins. (However, soybean oil is an inflammatory refined oil that I don't recommend.)

Alternatives: Meat or fish can replace tofu or tempeh. Where soy protein or soy flour is an ingredient in nutrition bars or other processed foods, look for similar products without soy. For protein powders, choose whey instead of soy. And soy milk can easily be replaced

Lactose Intolerance

This is a different type of reaction to dairy products. Lactose intolerance is not a food sensitivity. Rather, it's the lack of an enzyme — lactase — that is necessary to properly digest lactose, the natural sugar in milk. Without this enzyme, dairy products can cause gas, bloating, cramps, diarrhea, or — rarely — vomiting.

Babies naturally produce the lactase enzyme because mother's milk contains the same milk sugar as cow's milk. But once children are weaned off mother's milk, production of the enzyme decreases or gradually ceases.

Researchers have estimated that only about 35 percent of the world's population produces sufficient lactase to properly digest milk and other dairy foods after the age of 7 or 8.³ The rest of the world is naturally lactose intolerant.

Think of it this way: To survive, babies

must produce lactase to digest their mother's milk, so nature made sure this happened to preserve humanity. But way back when, cow's milk was not available in most of the world, so there was no need for lactase enzymes in later life.

The efficiency of dairy digestion evolved in regions where cow's milk was customarily consumed. And studies of different cultures show that people in Northern Europe and their descendants are more likely to produce adequate lactase enzymes and tolerate dairy products well.

Production of the lactase enzyme decreases with age. Milk that is “lactose free” contains lactase as an additive. Lactase can also be taken in supplements at the same time that dairy foods or beverages are consumed.



with other plant-based milks.

As an alternative to edamame, snow peas, cooked or raw, have a similar appearance and texture and make a tasty snack, side dish, or addition to salads.

Instead of soy or teriyaki sauce, try coconut aminos, a condiment that looks and tastes like soy sauce but is made from fermented coconut sap.

Corn and Alternatives

Corn oils and syrups are not particularly healthy, but they are not triggers of food sensitivities because they don't contain proteins. Other corn foods and ingredients do contain corn proteins and can trigger reactions. Corn, on or off the cobb, popcorn, and any other food or ingredient that contains the word "corn," as well as polenta, grits, maize, masa, and tortilla chips, are corn foods.

Alternatives: Other vegetables can replace fresh corn. For packaged foods, there are usually options without corn. If tortillas are a key part of your usual diet, look for ones made with almond, cassava, or chickpea flour instead of corn. Siete (www.sietefoods.com)

is one brand available in many supermarkets.

If you love popcorn, break up rice cakes into small bits and season as you would popcorn.

How To Identify Food Sensitivities

An elimination diet is the gold standard for identifying food sensitivities. You eliminate only one food for 6 weeks, starting with gluten. If it has been triggering a reaction, it can take that long for your body to calm down and for you to see an improvement. If you cheat, you have to start the 6-week elimination period again because a small amount of an offending food can trigger a reaction.

If you feel better at the end of the 6-week period, continue to steer clear of gluten. If you can't tell, add the food back in and see if any symptoms show up. Sometimes, they are easier to notice starting up rather than slowly fading.

If gluten no longer causes a problem but you have additional symptoms, repeat the process with the next food on the list — dairy — for 6 weeks.

If that doesn't resolve things, repeat the process with eggs, then soy, then corn — eliminating one at a time for 6 weeks.

The process may seem arduous, but it could produce a dramatic improvement. If you already know you can't tolerate a certain food, don't eat it.

If you prefer to get tested for gluten sensitivity, I recommend these two stool tests, which are more accurate than blood tests. You can order them directly from EnteroLab www.enterolab.com:

- Gluten Sensitivity Stool Test (Fecal Anti-Gliadin IgA)
- Anti-Tissue Transglutaminase IgA Stool Test

You receive a test kit, collect your samples at home, and send them back in a package provided by the lab. EnteroLab also offers tests for other food sensitivities, but the above tests are the ones I most often recommend.

A Final Word

My low-carb way of eating is a basic diet for good health. Nothing replaces it. If you identify or already know you have food sensitivities, choose alternative foods that are not high in carbs.

All this does require some effort. But among my patients who have adopted a healthier way of eating, they have only one regret: that they didn't start sooner.

Related to This Topic

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

Related Topic	Volume	Issue	Title
Detailed Symptom Lists and More	7	6	Food Sensitivities: Are They Hurting You?
A Healthy Diet	7	1	My Low-Carb Diet — Fine-Tuned
Gluten	2	3	How Gluten Can Cause More Than 30 Health Conditions

Access these online by logging in to www.NaturalHealthConnections.com.

1 Roszkowska, A., et al. "Non-Celiac Gluten Sensitivity: A Review." *Medicina* (Kaunas). 2019 May 28;55(6):222.

2 Pasta, A., et al. "Food Intolerances, Food Allergies and IBS: Lights and Shadows." *Nutrients*. 2024 Jan 16;16(2):265.

3 Lukito, W., et al. "From 'lactose intolerance' to 'lactose nutrition'." *Asia Pac J Clin Nutr* 2015;24 (Suppl 1): S1-S8.

4 Yilmaz Tuncel, N., et al. "A Comprehensive Review of Antinutrients in Plant-Based Foods and Their Key Ingredients." *Nutr Bull*. 2025 Feb 3.

Staying Safe in Extreme Heat

Rising summer temperatures are increasing health risks, and it's easy to overlook just how dangerous extreme heat can be. More people die in this country from heat than from hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, cold temperatures, or any other weather-related event. And most of those deaths occur after age 45.

In a heatwave, the easiest way to protect yourself from heat illness is by being in an air-conditioned environment. I'm not suggesting that you should never go outdoors. But when you do, it's essential to understand your personal risks and heat tolerance and take precautions.

The ability to withstand heat gradually declines as we get older. And health conditions that diminish circulation reduce the ability to dissipate heat, increasing the risks of dangerous overheating. Such conditions include poor heart health, diabetes, excess body fat, and lack of regular physical activity.¹

Some medications also reduce heat tolerance. These include beta-blockers for high blood pressure, diuretics, antidepressants, and anticholinergics used to treat conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, overactive bladder, digestive disorders, and symptoms of Parkinson's disease.

On the flip side, doing regular aerobic exercise that makes you breathe hard and get sweaty improves heat tolerance.

Our Natural Cooling System

Good circulation is key to our ability to cool down and withstand

heat. Here's how it works: In a hot environment, the heart pumps more blood toward our skin, which is why we get flushed when we're hot.

When we sweat and the sweat evaporates, we cool down a bit and the blood near the skin cools. As that cooler blood circulates back toward the heart, it has a cooling effect on our internal organs. This cycle repeats.

Poor circulation reduces the effectiveness of our natural cooling system. And people who do not regularly do exercise that makes them sweat will not sweat as easily in hot weather, so it's harder for heat to escape through the skin.

Keep in mind that in a hot, dry climate, sweat can evaporate before you notice it, and you may not realize that you're getting dehydrated.

What To Do

People of all ages need to take precautions in extreme heat to stay hydrated and avoid overheating. But it's also important to recognize individual risks.

If you have any health conditions I mentioned or take any medications that reduce heat tolerance, be extra vigilant. As I said earlier, I'm not suggesting that you never go outdoors. In fact, being outside in hot weather for short periods — perhaps 15 or 20 minutes in the shade — helps your body adjust to the heat.

That said, be aware of how the heat is affecting you when outdoors. If you start to feel lightheaded, dizzy, tired, confused, or get a headache, recognize that

these are signs of dehydration. Other signs include urinating less often or having dark urine.

Ideally, you should drink enough water to prevent such symptoms. But if you experience any of these, be sure to drink more for several hours. To rehydrate properly, drink water bit by bit, like a drip. Gulping a large quantity at once will make you run to the bathroom rather than properly hydrating your body. And get into a cool environment.

For more detailed tips on staying cool, hydrated, safe in the sun, and free of tick bites, I encourage you to check out two earlier issues of this newsletter: Volume 6, Issue 6, page 9: *How to Avoid Summer Pitfalls*, and Volume 7, Issue 6, page 8: *Summer Safety Tips*.



Should You Take Electrolytes?

Whenever you drink more than 1 or 2 glasses of water at a time, add electrolytes to prevent depleting minerals. And if you drink plenty of water but still feel thirsty, that's another sign you need electrolytes — add them to your water bottle.

Many electrolyte powders are effervescent and come in different flavors. Look for one that is sweetened with stevia, rather than sugar.

¹ Deshayes, T.A., et al. "Regular physical activity across the lifespan to build resilience against rising global temperatures." *EBioMedicine*. 2023 Oct;96:104793.

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...

Like 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 for Less Stress and Better Health

Ashwagandha is one of my favorite herbs because it helps us weather stressful situations and prevent or alleviate many ills.

The use of ashwagandha originated thousands of years ago in Ayurveda, an Eastern healing system. Rather than treating symptoms as Western medicine does, Ayurveda — and ashwagandha — help restore internal balance. As a result, ashwagandha can both calm and revitalize, depending upon individual needs at a given time.

In recent years, the herb's popularity in the West has grown dramatically, as has scientific interest. There are over 1,950 studies and scientific articles about ashwagandha in our National Library of Medicine database (PubMed).

Reducing Harm From Stress

Stress taxes all our internal systems. One key marker of stress is cortisol, our fight-or-flight hormone.

Cortisol is essential to help us muster our resources to deal with short-lived, dangerous situations, such as being chased by a tiger in ancient times. But, today's stress is too often more subtle and ongoing — difficult bosses, tight schedules, daily traffic jams, bad news from around the world, and so on.

Such situations can keep cortisol elevated, contributing to elevated inflammation, high blood pressure, weight gain, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, depression, anxiety, mental decline, and other health conditions.

I've had many stressed patients who experienced improvement from ashwagandha, and I'm not the only one. Studies with nearly 700 stressed people looked at the effects of taking the herb for anywhere from 30 to 112 days. They found that levels of cortisol dropped by up to 32 percent, without adverse side effects. And levels of anxiety decreased.¹

Keep in mind that the herb has a cumulative effect that develops more slowly than drugs, but its health-enhancing effects have never been produced by drugs.

More Benefits

A recent review of available ashwagandha studies found that in addition to reducing stress and anxiety, the herb can help improve sleep, reducing the time it takes to fall asleep and improving the overall quality and quantity of sleep. It can also help you overcome jet lag, and is sometimes combined with melatonin for better sleep.

Ashwagandha also helps reduce insulin resistance and contributes to healthier levels of insulin and blood sugar. In this way, it helps reduce risk for diabetes or improve management of the disease, and it can help with weight loss.

Other effects include lower levels of inflammation and improved memory and other mental functions. And for those following a regular fitness regimen, the herb can enhance the results of aerobic



exercise and strength training and ease recovery.²

In men, ashwagandha can increase testosterone and enhance fertility. In postmenopausal women, a 24-week study found that the herb can reduce bone loss, inflammation, and other menopausal symptoms due to loss of estrogen, and improve the health of blood vessels.³

What To Look for in Ashwagandha Supplements

I recommend choosing a product that contains a patented form of the herb that has been tested in human trials.

One such form is called KSM-66. A 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. The name of the patented ingredient may appear on the front of a supplement bottle or in the Supplement Facts on the back.

1 Della Porta, M., et al. "Effects of Withania somnifera on Cortisol Levels in Stressed Human Subjects: A Systematic Review." *Nutrients* 2023 Dec 5;15(24):5015.

2 Sprengel, M., et al. *Withania somnifera* (Ashwagandha) supplementation: a review of its mechanisms, health benefits, and role in sports performance." *Nutr Metab (Lond)*. 2025 Feb 5;22:9.

3 Pingali, U., et al. "Ashwagandha and Shatavari Extracts Dose-Dependently Reduce Menopause Symptoms, Vascular Dysfunction, and Bone Resorption in Postmenopausal Women: A Randomized, Double-Blind, Placebo-Controlled Study." *J Menopausal Med*. 2025 Apr;31(1):21-34.

Heart Rate Variability: Valuable Health Marker

Heart rate variability (HRV) is getting more attention because it is one of the health markers that can be tracked with smartwatches, smart rings, and newer fitness bands. Before these digital devices were invented, only your doctor could check your HRV with an electrocardiogram.¹

HRV is not the same thing as heart rate, which you can check by putting your finger on your pulse. So, what is it?

As your heart beats, there are miniscule variations (in milliseconds) in the timing from one beat to the next. HRV varies in different situations, depending on how physically active you are and your emotional state.

You can see your HRV in a smartphone health app connected to your wearable device. If needed, you can search online for detailed instructions for your device.

What Controls HRV?

The autonomic nervous system controls basic functions such as heart

rate, breathing, digestion, and blood pressure. And it controls HRV.

One part of the autonomic nervous system, the sympathetic nervous system, enables you to muster resources to be active and deal with challenges, including your fight-or-flight response. The other part, the parasympathetic nervous system, calms things down and enables you to rest and recover.

A higher HRV is good because it indicates that your nervous system is more responsive, adaptive, and agile, and that you can rest more deeply and effectively at night.

Lower HRV indicates more health risks. It's found in people who are inactive, have higher stress levels, body fat, or blood sugar, or diabetes or heart disease.

Supplements Can Help

Ashwagandha reduces stress and, when taken twice daily for a few months, helps raise HRV and reduce fatigue.² (See page 9 for more details about the herb.)

HRV Numbers

HRV decreases (gets worse) with age in most people. However, HRV levels in athletes who stay in shape in later years can be as high as HRV in healthy 20-year-olds.

These are some average HRV numbers at different ages:

Ages	Average HRV in milliseconds
18–25	62–85
26–35	55–75
36–45	50–70
46–55	45–65
56–65	42–62
66+	40–60

What To Aim For

You want HRV that is better than average — higher. Getting regular aerobic exercise that raises your heart rate is an essential step. In addition, eat a low-carb diet, get good sleep, and manage stress.

Studies also show that magnesium supplements can help to relieve stress and increase HRV. In a study of heart failure patients, 300 mg daily of magnesium citrate was an effective dose, even if participants didn't manifest a deficiency.

Build Strength in One Hour Per Week

A recent study investigated how much strength training was necessary to significantly increase strength. And, it turns out, it isn't all that much.

Led by researchers at CUNY Lehman College in the Bronx, N.Y., the study found that strength training for 30 minutes, twice per week for 8 weeks, significantly boosted muscle strength and endurance.³

However, what you do in those 30 minutes is criti-

cal. In the study, each workout consisted of 9 exercises that worked — and challenged — all the major muscle groups, using popular gym equipment.

To do this type of workout, I suggest going to a gym and, to get started, ask a trainer to show you a routine that will work all your major muscle groups. Many gyms offer inexpensive memberships and may include a complimentary orientation session.

1 Li, K., et al. "Heart Rate Variability Measurement through a Smart Wearable Device: Another Breakthrough for Personal Health Monitoring?" *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2023 Dec 6;20(24):7146.
2 Smith, S.J., et al. "Exploring the efficacy and safety of a novel standardized ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) root extract (Witholytin®) in adults experiencing high stress and fatigue in a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial." *J Psychopharmacol*. 2023 Sep 23;37(11):1091–1104. 3 Hermann, T., et al. "Without Fail: Muscular Adaptations in Single Set Resistance Training Performed to Failure or with Repetitions-in-Reserve." *Med Sci Sports Exerc*. 2025 April 18. doi: 10.1249/MSS.0000000000003728.

Snooze Button Pitfall

Snooze buttons have been a feature of old-style alarm clocks for decades, and they're getting more attention with the use of smartphone alarms. But is snoozing for a few more minutes after the alarm goes off a good idea?



To answer that question, researchers at Harvard Medical School analyzed data from more than 21,000 people around the world. They found that nearly half used the snooze button 80 percent of the time, mostly on weekdays, and heavy users slept an average of 20 more minutes between snooze alarms.

People in the United State, Germany, and Sweden used snooze buttons the most; those in Japan and Australia used them the least.

Snoozing isn't a good strategy, it turns out, because it disrupts a very important stage of sleep. In the hours just before waking up, you're in a deep, restorative sleep. After you hit the snooze button and go back to sleep, you get only light sleep between alarms. So, the quality of your sleep decreases.¹

Instead of snoozing, set your alarm for the latest possible time you need to get up. And then, just get up — without snoozing.



Get Social, Live Longer

Socializing is really good for your health. Studies have been showing this for some time, and the latest one, led by the University of California, San Francisco, found that all types of socializing extend life.

The study analyzed data on 2,268 people who were at least 60 years old. Researchers used questionnaires and blood tests to compile data about lifestyle, health, and social activities. And during the next four years — the length of the study — those who were most socially active were least likely to die.²

Beneficial activities included spending time with family or friends, being involved in community arts activities, taking courses, attending meetings of local organizations, being part of hobby groups, and others.

Among the many options, these activities were most beneficial in terms of reducing risk of death:

- Charity work
- Doing things with grandchildren
- Participating in sports clubs or social clubs

Being physically active was also helpful. But the social connection played an additional, key role in a longer life, even among people with chronic diseases.

FDA News: What To Know

You may have seen some news about the FDA phasing out artificial food coloring and looking at revising the list of other approved food additives. This could make you think that you don't need to pay as much attention to ingredient lists on food labels. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security.

While I'm glad to see movement in the direction of eliminating some chemical food additives, we have a long way to go. There are more than 10,000 additives that can be used in our food. And even when an ingredient is banned, it takes time before it ceases to appear in products on store shelves.

Bottom line: You should know what you're eating. That means reading lists of ingredients in

packaged and take-out foods and avoiding artificial additives.

If you're at a prepared-food counter in a supermarket and you don't see lists of ingredients, ask the people behind the counter. They should have such lists for each dish. If they don't, you may want to consider another store.

Better yet, walk away from the prepared food section. Head for the produce, meat, and fish sections and fill your basket or cart with good food you can cook at home.

Keep in mind that food packaging is another common source of toxins, especially if it's plastic or paper that's coated to be waterproof. If you didn't read *Beware of Plastics* on page 10 of last month's newsletter, I encourage you to take a look at it.

1 Robbins, R., et al. "Snooze alarm use in a global population of smartphone users." *Sci Rep.* 2025 May 19;15(1):16942. 2 Abugroun, A., et al. "Low Social Engagement and Risk of Death in Older Adults." *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2025 May 21.

Q&A

Q: Years ago, I had my gallbladder removed. Now, I'm wondering if it's bad not to have a gallbladder. Are there supplements I should be taking to compensate?

— *Alison B.*

A: It depends on how you're doing. Your body can adapt to not having a gallbladder, and for many people it may not be a problem.

I've found that there's a common misconception that the gallbladder makes bile, which is necessary to break down and digest fats. But it doesn't.

The liver makes bile and the gallbladder stores it. When you eat some fat, the gallbladder releases some bile and the fat is broken down.

After a gallbladder is removed, the liver keeps producing bile. But there's no storage "tank" because the liver can't store anything. So, the bile continually drips into the digestive system; it isn't timed to be released when you eat fat.

If there isn't enough bile in the digestive system when you eat fatty food, it can cause discomfort and slow down the passage of food through your digestive tract. If this is happening, a supplement of bile salts will help you digest fat. Take a serving of bile salts with any meal that contains some fat.

I recommend taking bile salts for four-to-six weeks, and then stop and see how it goes, because your body stores some of it. Some people find that they don't feel as

well if they take bile salts for too long. If symptoms appear again, take the bile salts for another four-to-six weeks and see how it goes.

With or without a gallbladder, if the liver produces sludgy bile ("sludgy" is actually a scientific term), this can cause burping, belching, nausea, and sometimes, constipation. Sludgy bile is what causes gallstones. And the symptoms can continue after a gallbladder is removed, because the liver produces the sludge.

The remedy is to eat plenty of dark, leafy green vegetables such as spinach, kale, beet greens, collard greens, and such. They can be eaten cooked or raw; as long as they are dark green and leafy, they will help to thin bile. Supplements of betaine, taken per product directions, can also help thin bile.

Q: I have arthritis and started taking a supplement with boswellia and white willow bark a few days ago. I haven't experienced any relief, but I start to get gassy after I take the supplements. What should I do? — *Josh W.*

A: Both of these herbs can be very helpful, but they don't produce a sudden effect like drugs do. Although the herbs are effective, they have a gentler action that takes longer to kick in.

The gas could stem from taking the supplements on an empty stomach. Always take them with food.

Boswellia can take at least 30 days to start producing effects, and about three months to deliver the full benefits. Taking it with fatty food will increase absorption.

In addition to reducing pain,

boswellia can reduce inflammation and stiffness and protect cartilage. The benefits can sometimes last after people stop taking boswellia.

White willow bark is sometimes considered to be nature's aspirin, but this isn't accurate. Aspirin is a chemical substance that is similar to salicin, which is only one component in the herb. Compared to the herb, aspirin contains a very high dose of that one ingredient, which is why it can cause stomach bleeding.

White willow bark doesn't cause bleeding. It contains smaller amounts of a combination of substances that work together in a gentler way, and it takes time for the effects to manifest. I would give it at least five weeks to see how it works for you.

You may also like these earlier issues of this newsletter that describe more ways to get relief from arthritis: Volume 2, Issue 5, *The 90-Day Program To Relieve Arthritis*, and Volume 7, Issue 8, *Rheumatoid Arthritis: Triggers and Natural Remedies*.

Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to 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 or call 877-300-7849.