

Especially for Men

By Isla Burgess

So you are 60, give or take 10-15 years, your blood pressure is elevated, total cholesterol is on the high side, your girth is increasing, you are not quite as fit as you were, there are some changes in the flow and rate of your 'pee' and you have a few concerns about 'getting it up and keeping it there'.

Do any or all of these, sound like you? Read on....

This article will discuss the impact of diet, lifestyle and herbal medicine on these health issues, what you can do to help yourself and when to seek help.

The delivery system - your heart, arteries and veins

There are many reasons why a person develops elevated blood pressure or hypertension and **if the pressure reading is greater than 140/90 on three separate days, further health checks should be considered.**

There are foods and herbs that both help to restore normal function as well as being protective of the cardiovascular system.

- **Fish**

The person who said have everything in moderation except laughter, sex, vegetables and fish and those you can have in excess, had a point. If you are not having a fish meal 4 times a week for either lunch or dinner, or if you have several cardiovascular risk factors, then consider taking 3gms of fish oil containing Docosahexanoic acid (DHA) or Eicosapentanoic (EPA) acid, daily. These produce moment by moment, hormone-like chemicals called Prostaglandins (PG's) that dilate blood vessels, are anti-inflammatory and reduce the stickiness of platelets so there is less likelihood of a clot being formed in the blood.

- **Vegetables**

To be protective we need around 6-8 different vegetables daily and three fruits. These not only provide valuable fiber but a range of antioxidants (See article on Antioxidants). It is important that one of these be tomatoes, best cooked and in any form, even tomato sauce! They provide Lycopenes, a valuable antioxidant, much discussed in relation to the health of the prostate gland but more recently it has been shown to be beneficial for cardiovascular health.

- **Garlic**

The research on garlic and the myriad of preparations available is vast. It does appear that the allicin releasing preparations are more therapeutic on the cardiovascular system than the aged garlic preparations. They improve the blood /fat profile, lower blood pressure and have a similar effect on platelets as the fish oils do. I suggest having some fresh (3 almond sized cloves) daily. Chop the peeled garlic - don't crush it, into small pieces and swallow with water. If baked, it will still have some effect. Freeze dried garlic capsules would be the next most therapeutic if you don't want to eat it fresh.

- **Oils**

Nuts and seeds and avocado are the best and a little butter (1 teasp to a dsp) daily is better than margarine. The trans-fatty acids in the latter cause the cell membranes to become more rigid and less able to allow the 'to and fro' of cell nutrients. We want more polyunsaturated fatty acids (eg. fish oils) than saturated ones (butter) and more of these than trans-fatty acids (margarine, cooked oils).

- **Ginkgo *Ginkgo biloba***

Ginkgo has some impressive research behind it supporting a number of therapeutic actions. It causes vasodilation, improves blood flow to the head and to peripheral blood vessels (hands,

feet, penis, vagina) which will have some effect on lowering blood pressure and also it reduces clotting by acting on the platelets. It will potentiate some other medications.

NOTE

If you are on any medication that reduces blood clotting then speak with your health practitioner before using Ginkgo or high doses of garlic.

- **Hawthorn *Crataegus oxycanthus***

This is a safe and effective herb if used appropriately in a therapeutic dose but one that should be prescribed rather than self prescribed.

- **Exercise**

Dance, walk, run, go to the Gym, anything as long as it gets you on your feet and/or raises your heart rate and breathing. Do it at least 5 times a week for 20 -30 mins. If you want to reduce the increasing girth then it is best early in the morning to elevate your basic metabolic rate for the rest of the day.

The Cholesterol Debate...

About Cholesterol

The western world is obsessed with cholesterol.

A few facts and figures

- ◆ We do need cholesterol and we would be sexless, unhappy people if we didn't have it.
- ◆ Most of our total cholesterol is made in our bodies
- ◆ The liver puts cholesterol out in the bile and most of it is recycled from the intestines
- ◆ It is the comparative levels of high density lipoproteins (HDL) to low density lipoproteins (LDL), that are important.
- ◆ It is oxidized LDL that is the greatest problem as it can build up in the arteries.
- ◆ It is unclear how the damage in the arteries begins but one theory suggests that it may be damage due to free radical activity and it may be that the cholesterol deposits are the way the body heals these.
- ◆ Vitamin C and probably other anti-oxidants play a very important role in all of this.

What is suggested as desirable levels?

- ◆ LDL less than 100 mg/dL (2.6 mmol/L), for some 'at risk' people <70 mg/dL is (1.81mmol/L).
- ◆ ratio of total cholesterol to HDL of <5.1

Ways to reduce cholesterol

- ◆ pectin in apples and the algin in seaweed reduce the re-cycling of bile (and hence cholesterol) The apples are best cooked.
- ◆ decrease levels of saturated fat intake and meat in the diet
- ◆ increase garlic, garlic and more garlic!
- ◆ eat lots of globe artichoke hearts

The Excretory System - when it becomes difficult to 'pee'...

Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BHP) is caused by an enlarged prostate gland, which is like an anatomical donut around the urethra - the tube from the bladder to the penis through which you 'pee'. If you want to be among the men who do not gauge all public engagements by DFR (Distance From Restroom), do some exercise and practice Kegel exercises no matter what your age.

What else can you do?

- ◆ Saw Palmetto *Serenoa repens*

Most 'aware' men in the US take this. There is enough evidence to suggest that it reduces pressure because it reduces an enzyme called 5-alpha reductase, which in turn prevents an excess of dihydrotestosterone (DHT), one hormone thought to be implicated in BPH. It does appear to be as effective as Proscar (Finasteride).

- ◆ **Other factors - seeds**

These are important for everyone, a dozen almonds, two brazil nuts, lots of pumpkin kernels and sunflower seeds and 4 whole walnuts plus a few cranberries will be not only a delicious afternoon snack but will add vital nutrients.

- ◆ As mentioned above eat **tomatoes** in some cooked form daily.

- ◆ **Zinc** (found in red meats, shellfish/sardines, egg yolk, mushrooms, nuts, seeds) is also important .

If this is a problem for you and it is affecting your quality of life do have it checked out by your Doctor.

So what about 'getting it up and keeping it there'?

There was an old saying about 'Sowing your wild oats' that had an element of truth. Oatstraw does appear to have an effect on erectile function.

After hearing about the benefits of Oatstraw (*Avena sativa* - made by adding two handfuls of oatstraw to a litre of water and simmering for at least 20 mins), a student decided to try it out for himself and a couple of friends.

They bought a sack of it and drank 2-3 cups daily for a month.

John in his 40's with no problems, reported that sex was definitely better. Mike in his 50's and not admitting to any real problems said it made a real difference to his sex life and Ken in his 60's and using Viagra (it was getting a bit expensive as he was in a new relationship) said it really did work! Anecdotal but interesting!

Herbalists also consider herbs such as Damaiana *Turnera diffusa*, and Ginkgo *Ginkgo biloba*, best prescribed for this by a natural health practitioner.

What haven't I mentioned?

I realise that hair loss is of particular concern to many men in their second adulthood.

I haven't mentioned it because I don't think I have experienced anything that works. Sorry.

I am experimenting with a plant called Gotu Cola - I will keep you informed....

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