



self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

My Favorite Summertime Remedies

Although a longtime resident, I've had a tough time handling Tucson's excessive summer heat the longer I've lived there. Maybe it's planetary warming, ozone layer depletion, or that I'm simply getting older. With advancing age, skin thins and sweat glands produce less perspiration, making it harder to keep cool and increasing heat sensitivity. So now I escape the burning desert heat by heading north to Canada for the summer months. There I enjoy more leisure time, more outdoor activity, more hours of daylight, and more dining al fresco. Whether you're relaxing on a patio deck, beach towel, or picnic blanket, here's my advice for navigating the season's delights and minor inconveniences.

Backyards & Barbecues ▶ With the summer months and more people spending time outdoors, insects have a field day. To make **mosquitoes** buzz off, I use natural repellents containing geraniol, an herbal product. It's safer and almost as effective as the toxic chemical DEET. Note that mosquitoes are attracted to dark colors, especially blue, and are also fond of scented soaps, lotions, shampoos, perfumes, and colognes. If I do get bitten, I'll put Tiger Balm, a Chinese herbal salve, on the area.

If you have a close encounter with a **bee** or **wasp**, I recommend putting ice on the sting to reduce pain and swelling plus slow the spread of the venom. Scrape the bee's stinger out rather than pulling on it, then cover the bite with calamine lotion or a paste made from baking soda and water.

Outdoor **grilling** and dining are two joys of summer. I like tossing fish or veggies from my garden on my gas grill for supper. But barbecuing red meat, poultry, or fish can produce cancer-causing compounds known as heterocyclic amines if you blacken them. Avoid that, and marinate flesh foods beforehand with antioxidant-rich ingredients like citrus juice, turmeric,

ginger, and garlic to reduce the formation of carcinogens almost completely. (One-half cup of marinade is needed for every pound of food.) For additional cancer protection, I would also advise never eating charred meat and not inhaling the smoke from animal fat after it drips onto hot charcoal while you are barbecuing.

Sand & Surf ▶ The sun's warmth is very inviting, but when you overdo it, cool a **sunburn** with aloe vera gel. Applying aloe to inflamed skin can lessen the "ouch" and encourage healing. Soaring temperatures can also affect skin in ways that go beyond burning or tanning. The scorching heat can cause sweat glands to overreact, become plugged up with moisture, and produce an excess of *Staphylococcus* bacteria, resulting in **prickly heat**. This heat rash, which tends to occur on areas such as the inner thighs, elbow creases, under the arms, or beneath the breasts, may settle down as your body gets acclimated to hot weather, but my top choices to soothe the itching or prickly feeling are aloe gel or calendula lotion.

The season's sticky weather also encourages the growth of fungi that cause **athlete's foot** and thrive in damp places like swimming pools, showers, and locker rooms. To treat the itchy areas around the toes or soles of the feet, I suggest applying tea tree oil or grapefruit seed extract, two natural remedies with antifungal properties.

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TIPS

FOR LIVING WELL

■ **Green** exercise, or ecotherapy, may beat the blues. British experts found that a half-hour walk in a park eased depression and raised self-esteem, but strolling in a mall increased tension.

■ Foods that **drop** on the floor need more time than the "five-second rule" to be contaminated by bacteria. Tests found that wet foods like apple slices were safe to eat after 30 seconds; dry foods like cereal were fine after 60.

■ Eating an apple **peel** a day keeps the doctor away. Research suggests the skin is the top source of the fruit's cancer-protective compounds. (Select organic apples to avoid agricultural residues.)

■ Men, **control** your mid-section. Bigger waists may mean higher PSA levels and a greater risk for erectile dysfunction.

■ **Motivational** interviewing may help to make lifestyle changes. Counselors ask questions and people come up with their own solutions to potential obstacles. It helped women to lose weight and keep it off.

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Fish, Vitamin D May Preserve Eyesight

Eating fish and getting enough vitamin D can reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the most common cause of blindness after age 60. In a recent study, older people who ate more than two servings of fish a week were 39 percent less likely to have advanced AMD than those who ate less than a serving a month. The omega-3 fatty acids in oily fish may protect the eyes by improving blood vessel function and reducing inflammation. In another study, people with the highest blood levels of vitamin D had a 40 percent lower risk of early AMD than those with the lowest levels. Like omega-3s, vitamin D may have anti-inflammatory effects. (*Archives of Ophthalmology*, May 2007)

Comment ▶ These findings offer one more reason to eat fish regularly and take at least 1,000 IU a day of vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol).

Weak Link Established Between Multivitamins and Prostate Cancer

Overconsuming multivitamins may increase a man's risk of dying from prostate cancer. In a study that tracked nearly 300,000 men aged 50 to 71 for five years, scientists found no link between multivitamin use and early or localized prostate cancer. But they did find that taking more than seven multivitamins a week raised the risk of advanced prostate cancer by about 30 percent and doubled the risk of fatal prostate cancer. (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, May 16, 2007)

Comment ▶ The overall data from this study show no relationship between multivitamin use and prostate cancer, and the evidence in the high-consumption group is weak. Other factors, including a family history of prostate cancer, raised the risk in this group, suggesting that multivitamin use may not be the culprit.

Strength Training Helps Rejuvenate Older Muscles

Regular strength training may be a fountain of youth for skeletal muscles at the cellular level. Scientists took thigh-muscle samples from 25 healthy, active people aged 65 and older and 26 younger persons both before and after half of the older group completed an hour-long series of 12 resistance exercises twice a week for six months. Researchers found that the older crowd's muscle tissue underwent dramatic changes that improved functioning of the mitochondria, the cells' energy centers, and restored a youthful look to muscles. (*PLoS One*, May 23, 2007)

Comment ▶ Resistance exercise increases muscle strength and size, but now comes intriguing evidence of its powerful effect at the cellular level, where it can partially reverse the changes associated with aging after just six months.

Eating Tomatoes May Not Benefit Prostate Health

Contrary to most research, a new report suggests that eating foods rich in lycopene (like tomatoes) and other carotenoids may not prevent prostate cancer. In the controversial study, more than 1,500 men aged 55 to 74 were followed for up to eight years using blood tests, diet and lifestyle questionnaires, and routine exams. Researchers found no evidence that lycopene helps prevent prostate cancer and observed a link between an increased risk of aggressive forms of the disease and men with the highest blood levels of beta-carotene, another carotenoid. (*Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers & Prevention*, May 2007)

Comment ▶ This is a poorly designed study, and researchers measured carotenoid levels in the blood, rather than in the diet. The results are contradicted by large, well-conducted studies reviewed by the FDA, which allows the health claim on tomato products that consuming them may reduce the risk of prostate cancer.

Spending Too Much Time on the Internet?

I'm often online to check on health news, but for some people, Internet overuse can pose threats to emotional and physical well-being. In a 2006 survey of some 2,500 adults by Stanford University researchers, a surprising number of Americans showed addictive symptoms associated with Internet use: 14 percent reported it was hard to stay away for several days at a time, 9 percent tried to conceal their Internet habits from loved ones or employers, and 6 percent acknowledged their use had caused relationships to suffer. Other researchers say physical symptoms of computer addiction can include dry eyes, carpal tunnel syndrome, migraines, back pain, and sleep disturbances.

While Internet addiction has yet to earn the status of a disorder in the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual, I think it's a real phenomenon. People can have specific addictions to cyberporn, online gambling, chat rooms, web surfing, interactive games, and even eBay.

If your time in cyberspace is creating real-world problems for you or loved ones, here are tips for cutting back. Set reasonable time limits for use, and write in your calendar when you'll let yourself go online and when you won't. Replace some of your online activities with their real-world equivalents: For instance, call a friend rather than emailing her, or shop at an actual store rather than browsing online. If you're using the Internet to escape from depression, anxiety, or relationship issues, get counseling to address the underlying problem. There are also support groups for Internet addicts; just watch the time you spend in online groups! For more, see *netaddiction.com* or *Caught in the Net* by Kimberly Young, PhD (Wiley, 2001).



Andrew Weil, MD

A Bad Bet

More than one million young people aged 14 to 22 use Internet gambling sites on a monthly basis, report University of Pennsylvania researchers.

My Favorite Summertime Remedies continued from page 1

I love cooling off in the water, so I take steps to avoid **swimmer's ear**. But you don't need to be practicing your crawl stroke or diving off a dock to get it. Although more common in summer or in humid climates, this painful and itchy infection can occur year-round if moisture gets trapped in the outer ear after showering or bathing, or when the ear canal gets clogged with wax. My all-time favorite remedy to ward off swimmer's ear is to mix equal parts white vinegar and rubbing alcohol in a dropper bottle. I place a few squirts in each ear after I take a dip.

I'm picky about where I swim, so I won't go in or around **chlorinated pools**, which I consider toxic. If you must use one, wear goggles to avoid eye irritation and rinse off when you get out. One recent study found that swimming instructors and other people who spend a lot of time around chlorinated pools up their odds for respiratory problems, likely from inhaling chlorine byproducts (*European Respiratory Journal*, April 2007).

One significant ocean hazard is a **jellyfish** sting. Put hot water or white vinegar on the area as soon as possible to inactivate the stinging cells. Wash the area with saltwater, not fresh, which may worsen pain. Dry the area, then apply aloe.

When you're spending time on the water, ginger can help say *Bon Voyage* to **seasickness**, and it can also ease mild queasiness during a road trip or flight. The spice is as effective

as Dramamine, yet it won't make you groggy as that drug does. A half-hour before traveling, take two to four capsules (a total of 1,000 to 2,000 mg) of powdered ginger or eat 2 or 3 candied slices to keep nausea at bay. Another drug-free option I've used with great success when my stomach sends out a distress signal is an acupressure wristband called Sea-Band that presses on the P6 point inside the forearm and above the wrist. 📱

My herbal travel kit. When I go away, I typically pack these four trusted natural remedies to treat some common ailments.

Tea tree oil. This natural disinfectant smells like eucalyptus and comes in handy to quell skin infections or, when diluted, to wash and clean wounds.

Arnica. I apply tincture of arnica as a liniment for bruises, sprains, sore muscles, and swollen joints, and I would also take homeopathic preparations (tiny tablets) at 30X potency of this daisy derivative to keep inflammation and pain from a fall or injury in check.

Astragalus. If I feel a cold coming on, I'll turn to this immune-boosting Chinese herb. I take 500 mg three or four times a day.

Aloe. The plant's clear gel is a quick-acting balm for sunburns and kitchen or campfire burns. It also soothes minor cuts, scrapes, and scratches.

3 Cutting-Edge Treatments for Depression

Depression is sometimes called the common cold of mental disorders, and no wonder: In any given year, nearly 15 million US adults (or 7 percent of the population) experience clinical depression, though not all are diagnosed. Prescription antidepressant drugs are the most common treatment, but let me tell you about three new approaches with fewer side effects that can reduce symptoms significantly or even ward off depression altogether.

① Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy

One of the most troubling aspects of depression is that it tends to recur. At least 50 percent of those who experience a first episode of depression will suffer from it again. After a second or third episode, the risk of recurrence jumps to between 80 and 90 percent. To prevent such relapses, many patients end up staying on antidepressants indefinitely. But a trio of British and Canadian researchers has developed a drug-free therapy that's been shown to reduce recurrence.

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) combines mindfulness meditation, which involves remaining aware of thoughts and bodily sensations without judging them, and cognitive therapy, a form of psychotherapy that helps people see the connection between their thoughts and feelings. In people who have been depressed before, even mild sadness can trigger an excessive amount of negative thinking. These individuals may brood over questions like “What’s wrong with me?” or “Why can’t I just pull myself together?” But rather than helping, thinking this way makes people feel worse and may lead to another bout of full-blown depression.

In MBCT, patients learn to accept undesired feelings as they *come and go* instead of trying to push them away, and mindfulness practice helps people to focus on the present moment rather than dwelling on past regrets or future worries. In a 2000 study of 145 people with a history of recurrent depression, about half participated in an eight-week MBCT program that included attending weekly classes and doing 45 minutes of mindfulness exercises each day at home; the other half skipped the program. A year later, researchers found MBCT cut the risk of relapse by *half* in those with three or more previous episodes of depression. Another study in 2004 produced similar results.

University of Toronto psychotherapist Zindel Segal, PhD, one of the developers of MBCT, acknowledges that taking the time to do the mindfulness exercises requires motivation (that’s why the program isn’t meant for those who are currently depressed). But he also says participants like doing something to nourish themselves: “In the midst of a busy life, you can access moments of quiet and stillness by tuning into your breathing and your body.” Segal and his colleagues outline the MBCT program in a new book, *The Mindful Way Through Depression* (Guilford Press, 2007), which includes a CD of guided meditations by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD.

My take ▶ Using mindfulness training to help depression is a novel strategy in the West, though meditation has long been used for this purpose in Eastern cultures. I’d love to see this sensible therapy gain professional support.

② Therapeutic Lifestyle Change (TLC)

University of Kansas psychologist Steve Ilardi, PhD, suggests depression results from the mismatch between the modern world and human organisms designed to function well in a Stone Age environment. For 99 percent of the time that humans have existed, they lived in hunter-gatherer cultures, he notes, and many aspects of this ancient way of life are associated with antidepressant effects. Our ancestors were physically active, got lots of sunshine, slept after nightfall, lived in tight communities, and consumed lots of omega-3 fatty acids from wild game and fish. “We were never designed for the sedentary, indoor, socially isolated, poorly nourished, sleep-deprived reality of modern life,” asserts Ilardi.

He and his colleagues developed the Therapeutic Lifestyle Change program so depressed individuals could reclaim the mood-boosting elements of Stone Age life while keeping their cars and computers. The program combines group therapy with six lifestyle changes, each of which has previously been shown to reduce depressive symptoms:

1 Omega-3s. Take 1,000 mg of the omega-3 fatty acid EPA per day, the most studied dose for combating depression, plus a multivitamin. Many brands of fish oil contain only about 200 mg of EPA per capsule, so check labels.

2 Aerobic exercise. Get 30 minutes of aerobic activity (like brisk walking) at least three times a week to release the body’s “feel good” endorphins.

3 Light exposure. Get 30 minutes of daily exposure to sunlight to help regulate the circadian rhythms that govern sleep, energy, and hormone levels. (You can use sunscreen, but skip the sunglasses, says Ilardi.) Alternatively, sit in front of a special light box that simulates natural sunlight.

4 Social connection. Social support acts as a buffer against depression, so schedule at least two social activities a week, and limit time with people who bring you down.

5 Adequate sleep. Because chronic sleep loss increases the risk for depression, aim for eight hours of shut-eye a night. Dim lights an hour before bedtime, and go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day.

6 Anti-rumination strategies. Rumination is a tendency to dwell on negative thoughts. Because this occurs most often when alone, avoid extended periods by yourself. If you find yourself ruminating, call a friend or do something pleasant.

The initial results from this 14-week program have been impressive. In an ongoing study of about 80 men and women with depression, 74 percent of the TLC group recovered fully or had a sizable reduction in symptoms, compared to only 16 percent of a control group treated mainly with antidepressants or psychotherapy. For more, visit psych.ku.edu/TLC.

My take ▶ Whether our ancestors had an antidepressant lifestyle or not, it seems like a great idea to combine these six natural measures for easing depression.

③ The Estrogen Connection

Women are twice as likely as men to experience depression, but only between puberty and menopause. Depression can occur in some women who are more sensitive to the natural

fluctuations in estrogen levels, suggest Karen Miller, PhD, a neuropsychologist at UCLA Medical Center, and Steven Rogers, PhD, a psychologist at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. Their new book, *The Estrogen-Depression Connection* (New Harbinger, 2007), looks at mood changes at various stages of a woman's life.

During puberty, rapid changes in estrogen levels can make adolescent girls more prone to depression. In women with PMS, the decrease in estrogen and increase in progesterone during the final phase of the menstrual cycle can be linked to depression, irritability, and anxiety. When women give birth, the estrogen levels that have built up during pregnancy drop dramatically, helping to explain why some 10 to 20 percent of new mothers develop postpartum depression.

The menopausal transition, when estrogen levels also fall sharply, is another time of increased vulnerability. Miller tells me that women who have a history of PMS, depression, or postpartum depression are at greater risk for depression during this time. Plus, research suggests "the change" can bring on depression in women with no history of the disorder: Scientists followed 231 premenopausal women for up to eight years and found the transition between perimenopause and

menopause was associated with a five-fold increase in depression risk (*Archives of General Psychiatry*, April 2006).

There's no "one size fits all" treatment for menopause-related depression. If a woman has no family history of breast cancer and is having significant menopausal symptoms like hot flashes, Miller advises her patients to consider hormone replacement therapy (HRT). For women at increased risk of breast cancer or who don't want to use HRT, she might suggest taking an SSRI antidepressant. As for herbal remedies, a recent review concluded St. John's wort (most trials used 900 mg a day) and black cohosh (typically 40 mg a day) seem most useful in alleviating symptoms of depression during menopause (*Menopause*, May/June 2007).

My take ▶ I'd suggest taking the herbs mentioned above (plus fish oil) for depressed mood during menopause before turning to HRT or antidepressants. If you opt for HRT, I'd go with 17-beta estradiol, a bioidentical hormone sold as Estrace, Climara, and Vivelle. If you also need supplemental progesterone to protect against endometrial cancer, I prefer oral micronized progesterone, a plant derivative sold as the prescription drug Prometrium. Use these hormones for a limited period (say, a year), not indefinitely. 📖

Choosing the Best Sunscreen: A Refresher Course

In a recent poll, nearly one-third of US adults admitted they don't use sunscreen while more than 70 percent of people applied it incorrectly—not before sun exposure but only once outdoors. To use sunscreen wisely and simplify shopping, follow these three steps.

Get enough protection. Choose a "broad-spectrum" sunscreen that safeguards against ultraviolet A and B (UVA and UVB) radiation. UVB rays contribute to cataracts and cause sunburn by damaging the outer layer of skin involved in basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas. UVA rays penetrate deeper, where they contribute to wrinkling and sagging skin as well as melanoma.

Sun protection factor (SPF) refers to a product's ability to block UVB radiation only; there's not yet a rating system for UVA protection. If you're fair skinned or have a history of skin cancer, then every bit of sun protection helps, says Diane Berson, MD, a New York-based dermatologist, "but with a higher SPF number, the incremental increase is less." (SPF 15 protects against 93 percent of all UV rays; 30 blocks out roughly 4 percent

more.) I use SPF 30 products, a good idea since people typically apply too little sunscreen anyway.

Analyze ingredients. Sunblocks, like those made with the minerals zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, physically reflect the sun's UVA and UVB rays, while sunscreens with chemicals like avobenzone (Parsol 1789) or ecamsule (Mexoryl SX) absorb them and offer mostly UVA protection. "Both products are good," says Dr. Berson, "it's about preference."

I prefer products with microfine zinc oxide (Z-Cote), an active ingredient that's transparent with a light texture. It offers extensive UVA and UVB protection, and its micron particles sit on the skin's surface; smaller nanoparticles may penetrate it.

More plant-based substances including green tea, soy, feverfew, and lycopene are turning up in sunscreens. These may have some anti-inflammatory and even antioxidant benefits to further protect against sun damage, says Dr. Berson. Other natural ingredients such as aloe or chamomile might help soothe sun-exposed skin or make products smell better, but they are not solar shields.

Maximize the coating. The more sunscreen you put on, the more protection you'll get, says Zoe Draelos, MD, a dermatologist in High Point, North Carolina. She recommends lotions or creams (rather than sprays, gels, or powders) to get the thickest application possible. Lotions may also be best for dry or sensitive skin.

Gels are a good choice for oily skin, but may feel goeey. And sprays might work well on hairy areas. But the fine mist can miss areas, making for an uneven application. Stick sunscreens can cover hard-to-reach spots around the eyes and mouth. Powder sunscreens might easily fall off, since there's little to stick them to skin.

Whatever form you prefer, apply one ounce of the sunscreen at least 20 minutes before heading outdoors, thickly coating those easy-to-miss places on the hands, feet, neck, ears, and backs of the knees. While expiration dates on sunscreens are not required, older ingredients may lose effectiveness or irritate skin. 📖

For more information on specific ingredients found in sunscreens, visit epa.gov/sunwise/doc/sunscreen.pdf.

Smart Solutions for Six Meatless Eating Blunders

I stopped eating meat in the 1970s and was a lacto-vegetarian for 15 years, meaning I still consumed dairy products, although in small quantities. By the mid-1980s, I became convinced that fish was healthy and began to include it in my diet, but my meals are still mainly plant-based. When people switch to a vegetarian or vegan diet (the latter includes no animal products) or just decrease their meat consumption, I've seen and heard about many blunders. Here are six common mistakes that people make and simple ways to avoid these dietary pitfalls.

1 Overloading on dairy and refined carbohydrates. When replacing meat, many people will fall into the trap of substituting it with processed or familiar foods, like white sugar, white bread, and dairy. Wendy Kohatsu, MD, an integrative physician at Oregon Health and Science University and a culinary student, calls this the “cheese pizza and Coke vegetarian diet.” Eating this way provides too much fat and too many refined foods and artificial ingredients. And swapping meat for more dairy foods isn't the healthiest approach: Dairy products are a poor source of iron, can inhibit its absorption, and are a major contributor to saturated fat intake, explains Brenda Davis, RD, author of *The New Becoming Vegetarian* (Book Publishing Company, 2003) and *Becoming Vegan* (2000). **The solution** ▶ To optimize nutrition and cut back on meat, eat a whole foods diet of legumes, whole grains, seeds, nuts, fruits, and vegetables. Replace meat mostly with legumes (including whole soy foods) and substitute calcium-rich vegetables for some dairy. To boost calcium, I eat sardines (with bones), along with plant foods such as sesame seeds, collards, and broccoli. But there are also many fortified foods on the market, such as calcium-enriched orange juice and tofu. And be creative. It's easy to rotate a handful of the same meals, but you may miss out on essential nutrients. Davis suggests trying at least one new recipe a week and joining a vegetarian group or organizing vegetarian potlucks.

2 Skimping on fruits and vegetables. I don't think most people include enough produce in their diet, whether they eat meat or not. **The solution** ▶ Davis recommends vegetarians and vegans (and mostly meatless eaters, too) strive for nine or more daily servings of fruits and vegetables, one to three servings of legumes, three or more servings of whole grains, and one or more servings of nuts or seeds. And make sure more than half your plate is filled with a rainbow of colorful produce to maximize phytonutrients. A lack of these essential plant-based nutrients has been linked to many chronic diseases, including cancer and diabetes, and each color has unique health benefits.

3 Believing the protein myth. Many people believe meat is the best source of protein, but sufficient protein can be obtained from plants alone. And contrary to popular belief, complementary amino acids in protein foods do not need to be consumed at the same meal for the body to use them. **The solution** ▶ Vegetarians and vegans can easily obtain my

recommended 80 to 120 grams of protein daily by following the guidelines above and going for variety. For example, for 50 grams of protein you would have to drink 6 cups of cow's milk, consume 9 eggs, or eat 1.25 cups of tofu, says Davis.

4 Relying too much on soy products for protein. I'm a big fan of soy foods, but urge you to choose them wisely. Fractionated soy products, such as meat analogues based on soy protein isolate, lack nutrients that are abundant in whole soy foods. **The solution** ▶ Look for whole soy foods such as edamame, soy nuts, soy milk, miso, and tempeh.

5 Omitting essential nutrients. Reducing or eliminating meat might result in some dietary shortfalls. Since purslane is the only vegetable containing omega-3 fatty acids, vegetarians and vegans are at a significant disadvantage in getting these essential fats as well as enough vitamin B-12 and zinc. And since heme iron is more readily absorbed from red meat than plant sources, the recommended intake of iron for vegetarians is nearly twice that for non-vegetarians. **The solution** ▶ I recommend taking a multivitamin-multimineral supplement for insurance and an omega-3 fatty acid supplement if you're not eating oily fish at least twice a week. Although fish oil at a dose of 1 to 2 grams a day is the best supplement, people avoiding fish-based products can use Neuromins DHA, which is extracted from organically grown microalgae. (Vegans can break the gelatin capsule to get the oil.) The dose needed is lower, since this supplement lacks EPA—another essential omega-3. Take 400 to 600 mg a day of Neuromins DHA and rely on dietary sources of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), a precursor fatty acid, for EPA. A daily handful of walnuts or a tablespoon of freshly ground flaxseed is a good food source of ALA. (Watch for new products made from algae that provide both EPA and DHA.)

Vegetarians should also supplement with vitamin B-12 at a dose of at least 10 mcg daily or 1,000 mcg once a week, says Davis. A good multivitamin will have 50 mcg. If you're looking for an individual B-12 supplement, try Spray for Life.

To get enough iron without eating meat, I suggest cooking in iron pots and consuming iron-rich foods such as blackstrap molasses, cocoa, and leafy greens. Increasing intake of vitamin C when consuming high-iron foods will also boost the mineral's absorption. Many iron-rich foods also tend to be high in zinc. Make sure to get 8 to 15 mg of zinc a day.

6 Sprinkling bran on everything. Bran offers a great way to increase the fiber content of omnivorous diets, but “too much of it can be a huge mistake for vegetarians and vegans, who likely already get sufficient fiber,” says Davis. Wheat bran, not wheat germ, is a highly concentrated source of phytates (a form of phosphorous in plants) that can significantly impair the absorption of minerals that meatless eaters may already be lacking, such as iron and zinc. **The solution** ▶ A little bran as part of a well-balanced diet is fine, but avoid regularly adding it to meals. Legumes are also high in phytates, but should not be avoided. 📺

My wife gets gas after eating soy products. Are some soy foods better than others in this regard?

Fermented soy products like tempeh or miso should not cause as much gas as other soy foods. Soybeans contain oligosaccharides, complex sugars that can't be fully digested by the body. As these sugars break down in the digestive tract, they can cause flatulence. Since oligosaccharides are heat stable, standard food manufacturing will not break them down. But when soy products are fermented, the sugars are partially broken down, so they are easier to digest and cause less gas.

Start with small amounts of fermented soy products, then gradually increase servings of other soy foods over time, allowing your digestive system to adapt. Taking a probiotic supplement can also make digestion of these foods more efficient. Another option is Beano, a supplement that contains alpha-galactosidase, an enzyme that breaks down oligosaccharides, which helps reduce flatulence. This can be taken in addition to a probiotic.

Can milk thistle interfere with my chemotherapy treatments?

No. This herb has liver-protective properties, and I often recommend it to cancer patients receiving chemotherapy agents that are toxic to the liver or kidneys. For those on chemotherapy agents that aren't toxic to these organs, there's no need for it. Milk thistle contains compounds that prevent harmful toxins from entering healthy cells. These potent antioxidant compounds, called silymarins, fight free radicals and, unlike known conventional medications, promote the regeneration of damaged liver cells. What's more, milk thistle may even have anti-cancer effects of its own: Lab studies found silymarins reduced the growth of breast, prostate, and cervical cancer cells. Such findings may help explain preliminary evidence that milk thistle may increase the effectiveness of certain chemotherapy drugs, such as doxorubicin, cisplatin, and carboplatin.

Although earlier test-tube studies suggested milk thistle may inhibit liver enzymes (cytochrome P450) that break down certain drugs and supplements, increasing the chance of side effects, recent clinical studies do not support this. Milk thistle is quite safe, rarely causing adverse reactions. The usual dose is 150 to 200 mg three times daily with meals; choose products with a silymarin content of 70 to 80 percent. One brand is Thisilyn by Nature's Way.

Are there differences in the amount and type of fatty acids found in wild and farmed salmon?

Yes, farmed salmon can be much lower in omega-3 fatty acids than wild salmon. While all salmon is rich in these healthy fats, research suggests the fat from farmed salmon contains about 35 percent less omega-3s than wild salmon, because salmon farmers often don't provide dietary sources of omega-3s, such as algae and other simple forms of plant life found in the diets of wild salmon. However, farmed salmon tends to have a higher overall fat content, so it retains higher levels of PCBs and over 100 other pollutants

linked to brain damage and cancer. For more on the nutritional content and safety of particular fish, visit seafoodsafefood.com or alaskaseafood.org.

Is it better to install a water filtration system for the whole house or just the kitchen?

It depends where you live. You can request a copy of the annual water quality report from your local water department, and you should also have your water tested by a private laboratory. The kinds and levels of contaminants found can help determine the type of water filtration system you need. For example, if only chlorine or lead levels are high, a simple point-of-use (POU) system, like a kitchen faucet mount or shower filter, may be sufficient. But if your water contains elevated levels of several contaminants, a point-of-entry (POE) system may be best; this whole-house system is typically installed after the water meter and filters all of the water entering the house. Some people with POE systems also use a POU unit in the kitchen to ensure the removal of lead that may

Ask Dr. Weil continued on next page

MY TAKE ON Spirulina

Spirulina, a microorganism that gives lakes and ponds their blue-green color, is one of several types of algae that are farmed, dried, and sold as dietary supplements. Manufacturers of these products claim that consuming algae can prevent cancer and heart disease, control weight gain, boost immunity, and treat a slew of ailments, including allergies, gastrointestinal problems, and depression. Although spirulina and other blue-green algae, which are available as dark green powders or in tablet or capsule form, contain small amounts of protein and some vitamins and minerals, there is no good evidence to suggest these health claims are true and research shows these supplements may even be harmful. Spirulina is not generally considered toxic; however, there is good evidence for naturally occurring neurotoxins and liver toxins in related blue-green algae, including a species called *Aphanizomenon flos-aquae* (also known as AFA or Klamath Blue Green Algae), which is widely marketed as a health-promoting supplement.

BOTTOM LINE Some people tell me that blue-green algae supplements boost their energy levels and give them mental clarity, but I'm very concerned about their potential toxicity and recommend not using them. If you feel you must use algae, avoid blue-green varieties, and opt for *green* algae, such as chlorella, from a different family of organisms that does not contain toxins. 📺

corrode from pipes *after* water enters the home. The nonprofit group NSF International (nsf.org) provides lists of certified filters and distillers, as well as information about water testing.

Do you recommend taking cat's claw to relieve arthritis pain?

I don't usually recommend cat's claw (*Uncaria tomentosa* and *U. guianensis*) for arthritis pain. This medicinal herb, derived from a large woody vine with claw-shaped thorns that grows in South and Central America, has historically been used for a variety of health problems, including arthritis, but there is limited evidence for its effectiveness. One small preliminary study showed a modest benefit to painful joints using 60 mg a day of a highly purified extract from *U. tomentosa* in patients with rheumatoid arthritis who also took the prescription drugs sulfasalazine or hydroxychloroquine (*Journal of Rheumatology*, April 2002). And early research suggests the herb

may reduce pain from knee osteoarthritis, but I would like to see more evidence. Few side effects have been reported, but cat's claw may cause abdominal pain and diarrhea. Women who are pregnant, trying to conceive, or breastfeeding should avoid the herb.

Supplements I often recommend to relieve arthritis pain include a daily antioxidant regimen, which includes vitamins C and E, mixed carotenoids, and selenium, or a good multivitamin; and at least 1,000 IU of vitamin D. You may also want to take a fish oil supplement at a dose of 3 to 6 grams a day. There's some evidence that fish oils, which are rich in omega-3 fats, help reduce joint tenderness and morning stiffness. You can also try Zyflamend, an herbal product from New Chapter, which contains turmeric and other anti-inflammatory herbs. In addition, I often recommend taking 1,500 mg of glucosamine daily (with or without 1,200 mg of chondroitin) to help treat osteoarthritis; take on an empty stomach in two to three divided doses.

Can you suggest some natural remedies for interstitial cystitis?

Several self-care approaches may provide relief from this chronic inflammatory condition of the bladder, which most commonly affects women. Symptoms may include intense pelvic pain, discomfort during sexual intercourse, and a frequent and oftentimes urgent need to urinate.

My first recommendation is to eliminate bladder irritants such as caffeine, acidic foods (citrus fruits, vinegar), artificial sweeteners, spicy foods, and chocolate from your diet. Since not everyone will be affected by the same foods, I suggest you eliminate one food at a time to find out how it may influence your symptoms. Avoid alcohol and tobacco, as these can also bother the bladder. Drinking one to two cups of unsweetened cranberry juice a day (diluted with water or sparkling water) or taking a daily 400 mg capsule of cranberry extract can prevent bacteria from adhering to the bladder wall. The herb uva ursi (400 to 800 mg per day) can help with inflammation of the urinary tract, but is for short-term use only and should not be used with cranberry products. (Cranberries tend to make the urine more acidic, and uva ursi is less effective if the urine has too much acid in it.)

Because stress can worsen symptoms, I recommend practicing a relaxation technique such as breath work, meditation, or guided imagery. And maintain a 24-hour "bladder diary" to record frequency of urination and possible symptom triggers. Finally, work closely with your physician and seek support from family, friends, or groups such as the Interstitial Cystitis Association (ichelp.org).

Send your health questions or "My Take" topics to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing, 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Good for You!

Nutty Date Cookies

These vegan-friendly cookies, created by Brenda Davis, RD, are sweetened with dates and absolutely delicious.

PREPARATION

Cook dates in boiling water until soft. Drain, then mash them in a bowl and cool slightly. Stir in banana or apple, lemon juice, vanilla, oil, and flaxseed. In a separate bowl, mix flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Pour the flour mixture into the fruit mixture and stir until just blended. Do not overmix. Fold in walnuts. Preheat oven to 350°F. Drop dough by the teaspoonful onto an oiled nonstick baking sheet. Bake for 15 minutes, or until golden brown on the bottom. *Makes 2 dozen cookies.*

Source: brendadavisrd.com

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups dates, packed
- 3/4 cup water
- 1 cup mashed banana or grated apple
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup oil (expeller-pressed canola or high-oleic versions of sunflower or safflower oil)
- 2 tablespoons ground flaxseed
- 2/3 cup whole wheat flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup walnuts, halves or chopped

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