

N A T U R A L M A X W O M E N S ' L I N E

FEMININE HEALTH

By Dr. Paul Barney, MD

A woman has never had so many options to find personal growth as a wife, mother, and career

leader. Stress is a by-product of an active life and can be good or bad depending on how it is managed.

A modern woman's body needs help to balance stress levels, maintain consistent energy levels, and strong physical health. For the first time, women can take charge of their health with wholesome foods, proper exercise, and natural supplements specifically designed to support a healthy and active lifestyle.

The most basic support a woman should choose is a multi-vitamin and mineral formula, preferably one that has been formulated to meet her specific dietary needs.

Multi-Vitamin and mineral formula -

Although vitamin deficiencies are rare in the United States, mounting evidence shows intakes of nutrients above the RDAs provide a measure of protection from certain diseases in some people. Some vitamins such as folic acid and other B-complex vitamins are crucial to a woman's healthy reproductive system and vascular health. Vitamin E in the form of natural mixed tocopherols are important antioxidants that have been shown to also offer protection for the heart when taken in larger than RDA recommendations. Vitamin C and the other fat soluble vitamins such as A, natural beta carotene, and vitamin D when combined with vitamin E provide strong antioxidant support for a healthy body.

Minerals are also important for good feminine health: Calcium to protect a healthy skeletal structure and delay the onset of osteoporosis after menopause, Iron to replenish the blood after menses; and complementary minerals such as magnesium, zinc, selenium, copper, manganese, chromium, and molybdenum are all important to maintain women's health.

A woman's body also has some unique requirements dealing with reproductive organs and cycles that can change over a life span and might

benefit from some specialized formulations to maintain proper balance.

PreMenstrual Syndrome (PMS) -

PMS has been the subject of jokes, but to the women who suffer the symptoms of water retention, breast tenderness, irritability, cramps, and mood swings it is no laughing matter. In several studies, a correlation between prolactin sensitivity and lack of prostaglandin E1 was noted. Black currant oil, borage oil, and evening primrose oil contain gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), an essential fatty acid precursor to prostaglandin E1 found to be effective in increasing prostaglandin levels. It is important to take a multi-vitamin that provides the magnesium, zinc, niacin, and vitamin C necessary to convert the GLA to prostaglandin E1. Other historical herbs found to help with PMS are wild yam, chaste berry, dong quai, and blessed thistle.

A formula with a base of supporting herbs such as Kava Kava, chamomile and fennel to promote relaxed muscles, as well as dandelion and alfalfa to support normal cellular water levels may also help.

Healthy Breast Tissue -

Because women's breasts are closely connected to the reproductive cycle, they have a tendency to change. For some the changes are not noticeable, for others they are dramatic. Healthy breast maintenance should include a monthly self-exam. Nutritionally, substances that can help support

healthy breast tissue are isoflavones such as genistein, Gamma Linolenic Acid (GLA) from black currant oil, Indole-3-Carbinol, Broccoli for sulforaphanes, centella asiatica, saw palmetto, and lycopene.

Genistein is the most extensively researched isoflavone and is found in most soy products. Asian cultures where soy is a staple in the diet show how beneficial it is to women's health. Genistein binds to the same receptor sites as estrogen and can help balance and protect. Controlling estrogen levels is important as women age.

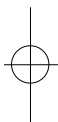
Gamma Linolenic Acid (GLA) from black currant oil can help balance prolactin activity. It is a precursor to prostaglandin E1, a hormone-like substance that helps keep the body on an even keel.

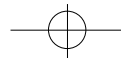
An exciting new isolate, Indole-3-Carbinol, found in all cruciferous vegetables (cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts), is a compound that shows promise by altering endogenous estrogen metabolism thus promoting healthy breast tissue by dietary means. Cruciferous vegetables like broccoli also contain compounds called sulforaphanes that have been identified as impacting breast tissue in a positive way. Studies show that people should increase their intake of green vegetables for added nutritive support.

Lycopene is a valuable carotenoid found in tomatoes and tomato products. Carotenoids are important antioxidants exerting protective action on certain cells. Lycopene has been found to be the most efficient carotenoid singlet oxygen quencher when compared to beta carotene and alpha tocopherol.

Centella Asiatica in a guaranteed potency is intended to support normal oxygenation of the blood, important to healthy tissue throughout the body.

These special ingredients should also be supported with a good multi-vitamin and a healthy diet rich in vegetables, low in fats and sugars, and of





course, a good exercise program to help oxygenate the blood.

Dealing with Menopause -

Rather than looking at menopause as an aging state, it should be looked at as a natural process that frees the mature woman from childbearing and moves her into the wise woman stage where she can fulfill herself in many other ways. Unfortunately, our western diet is nutritionally poor, especially in soy isoflavones. As your body transitions, you may feel unpleasant effects of the change. Increasing your intake of soy products can have a beneficial effect on long-term health.

If you don't like soy, taking a soy concentrate rich in the isoflavones Genistein and Daidzein can help. These soy isoflavones bind to the same receptor sites as estrogen and may help balance fluctuating hormones. Diosgenin from wild yam also has nutritional benefits that help maintain normal nervous system function.

DHEA, a hormone that is naturally secreted by the adrenal glands, declines with age. If your health practitioner finds you low in DHEA, a low dose of 25mg per day may prove beneficial.

A little additional B6 may also help metabolize proteins and amino acids, and assist in the manufacture of red blood cells, antibodies, hormones and enzymes.

There are other herbs used historically by women that may help ease the passage into what, for many women, is the most productive time of their life. Black and blue cohosh are popular women's herbs used historically by native Americans. Dong Quai has long been used by millions of women in China and the world to support normal, healthy blood function. Vitex, also called Chaste Berry, is another popular woman's herb with long historical use. Lemon Balm and Motherwort helps support relaxed uterine muscle. A nutritional formula combining these herbs could help ease the transition.

Don't worry, be happy -

Let's face it, life has its ups and downs, and occasionally, we need a little something to help maintain normalcy. A combination formula including a guaranteed potency 0.3% hypericin from St. John's Wort helps balance mood swings. St. John's Wort, in randomized double-blind placebo-controlled trials, was found to be beneficial in supporting neuroimmunological systems and neural transmitters that maintain healthy brain function and nervous system during times of stress by increasing blood flow to stressed tissue.

Also important to a mind balancing formula are the B-complex vitamins. Unfortunately, these water soluble vitamins are the first to go when we are under stress and it is important to replenish the body to support a healthy frame of mind.

Other ingredients that may be beneficial are Kava Kava to support normal, relaxed muscles, Wild Yams for diosgenin, gotu kola and ginkgo biloba for increased oxygen circulation, and the amino acids L-tyrosine and L-phenylalanine to maintain norepinephrine levels in the brain. For some, the addition of as little as 8 mg of DHEA will also prove beneficial.

Rest support -

With the hectic lifestyles undertaken by busy women these days, getting the proper rest is important to maintain good energy levels during the day as well as a pleasant, unstressed frame of mind.

Piper methysticum, an indigenous Polynesian vine of the pepper family that grows throughout the Pacific islands, produces a substance called kava kava that has been used in ceremonies by the natives for thousands of years. It relaxes the muscles and in combination with a European herb, valerian root, can help promote restful sleep.

Urinary Tract Health -

Problems with urinary tract may be prevalent at one time or another in 20% of all women. Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are more prevalent in women because of the proximity of the urethra to the anus where E. coli proliferates.

In the late 1970s, scientists demonstrated that E. coli bacteria attach to bladder tissues by receptors located at the appendages called pili. Although it was originally thought the acid in cranberries was responsible for promoting urinary tract health, recent research shows the pH of the urine does not change. Researchers Sobota and Schmidt found unidentified substances in cranberry that appear to interfere with normal binding of E. coli to epithelial cells and later published evidence of the anti-adherence activity of cranberry on nonurinary bacterial isolate. (see the August 1997 NutraGuide for the full story).

Useful support herbs are cranberry extract, propolis and astragalus, uva ursi, marshmallow, parsley, chlorophyll and cornsilk, buchu and aloe.

Uva Ursi, an herb common to our Northwestern forests was largely ignored by European herbalists until the 13th century when Marco Polo reported Chinese physicians using it for kidney and urinary tract health. The actions of uva ursi's phytochemicals support this age-old use.

Propolis, a tree resin the bees use to protect their hive from contamination, was used by Hippocrates, the father of medicine in Greece two thousand years ago. It has been found to have an antibacterial activity against a range of Gram-positive bacteria and may help support immune system health.

Astragalus, a tonic herb long used in China also showed activity against Gram-negative enterobacteria and Gram-positive Staphylococcus.

Buchu and marshmallow, as well as parsley, chlorophyll, and cornsilk are supportive herbs that nourish the kidneys and promote healthy bladder function.

Healthy skin -

The dangers of exposure to the sun are well-known and continually increasing. Protecting against the damage of sun and its aging potential is important to all women. A wide variety of mixed carotenoids are important for the maintenance of the epithelial tissue which makes up skin and the mucous membranes.

Natural mixed tocopherols are also important to healthy skin. Most vitamin E supplements contain only the alpha form. Gamma tocopherols combat cell damaging particles and provide potent antioxidant activity in fighting nitrogen oxides.

A good skin supplement should also include the highly absorbable silica from horsetail, oatstraw, and colloidal hydrophilic silica gel since silica is involved in the formation of collagen critical to good skin, nails, and hair.

Essential fatty acids found in black currant oil and lecithin are important to good cell function and have a desirable effect on the skin.

Quality of life is no longer an option for many of today's busy women, it is a requirement. Regular exercise, eating the right foods, and selecting advanced supplements designed for women can go a long way to insure that today's woman can be all she wants to be. After all, it's a woman's world. ■

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