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ASK THE DOCTOR

Answers to Your Health Questions

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Growing Older, Feeling Better

It wasn't all that long ago that a man became officially old when he turned 65. The milestone meant his working days were done, and with any luck he might get four to five years before illness and infirmity set in. It was simply expected and accepted that the older a man got, the sicker he got.

Fortunately, today a man who is 65 is just as likely to be found hiking in the hills, running in a marathon, or even starting a new career rather than rocking in that proverbial front porch rocker. Things are changing, men in general believe they can live longer but more importantly they are starting to realize that quality of life is even more important than quantity.

Eating healthy, exercising, and getting rid of bad habits (like smoking) can add years to anyone's life. Aging research is confirming the simple fact that these measures can help prevent and delay heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and Alzheimer's disease – the major causes of disability and death in men over 50.

Obviously clean living from early on is preferable to 60 years of bad habits. But it's also true that it's never too late for men to make changes that will lead them toward optimal health. And one of the easiest and most effective ways men can improve their health is with the addition of high quality nutritional supplements.

In this issue of *Ask the Doctor*, we'll talk about specific dietary supplements that have been scientifically shown to improve the health of men over 50, prevent the diseases that often strike at this crucial time in men's lives, and actually slow the aging process.

Q. I just turned 50 and I'd like to begin taking nutritional supplements, but they seem so confusing. Where should I begin?

A. Lots of people feel the same way. There are literally hundreds of nutritional supplements on health food store shelves and figuring out what to get can be challenging.

Without doubt the best foundation supplement is a high quality multivitamin. Research is repeatedly finding that even very healthy men who take daily multivitamins can significantly improve their health.^{1,2} In fact, an article published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) recommends that all adult Americans take a vitamin supplement.³ Look for solid doses of vitamins and especially minerals. Multivitamins designed to be taken once a day are often deficient in calcium, magnesium, and potassium. Also, multivitamins should supplement your daily diet so it makes sense to take them with your meals.

The only mineral a man should avoid is a

supplemental iron. Iron should only be in multivitamin formulas for women prior to menopause. Men over fifty get all the iron they need from food and too much iron can cause health problems.⁴

Look for men's multivitamins that contain lycopene in the formula. Lycopene is the pigment that makes tomatoes red. The redder the tomato, the more lycopene is present. Numerous studies have shown that when men have high lycopene levels in their blood, they have a much lower risk of heart disease, age-related macular degeneration (a leading cause of vision loss) and prostate cancer.^{5,6} Other important considerations are antioxidant blends, especially fruit and tea derived extracts; and ginseng for energy and stamina. In fact, years of research have shown that the foods a man chooses to eat (or not to eat) can have a profound impact on the health of his prostate gland. Because of this close nutritional link, prostate cancer may be the most preventable type of non-smoking related cancers.^{7,8}

Q. Aside from taking a quality multivitamin for general health, what nutritional supplements prevent and treat prostate cancer?

A. Although much has been written about supportive nutrients for the prostate gland, here are six vital and all-natural nutrients that not only can prevent prostate cancer from developing but may also help in fighting it.

Calcium D-Glucarate

When men are exposed to excess levels of hormones, their risk of prostate cancer increases.⁹ A natural substance found in fruits and vegetables called calcium D-glucarate (or CDG) helps men’s built-in detoxification systems get rid of these harmful excess hormones.^{10,11}

Selenium

This antioxidant has powerful effects on the prostate gland.¹² In a clinical study, involving 974 men, researchers found that selenium supplementation cut the rate of prostate cancer by 63 percent!¹³

All men should make selenium as part of their daily supplement regime.

Green Tea

Green tea is the most widely consumed liquid in the world, after water. Men in China and Japan have been drinking it for centuries. They also have very low rates of prostate cancer. Research has discovered that a potent plant substance in green tea called epigallocatechin gallate, or EGCG, can stop the growth of prostate cancer cells.^{14,15}

Again, a very significant nutrient that should be consumed daily.

Maitake Mushroom

For many years, maitake mushrooms, or dancing mushrooms, have been linked to good health in those who consume them. That’s because maitake contains an important immune boosting compound called D-fraction. A recent study showed that maitake D-fraction destroyed 95 percent of human prostate cancer cells in lab experiments.¹⁶

Lycopene

Promising preliminary reports demonstrate that lycopene can actually kill prostate cancer cells, so there has been a marked increase in lycopene and prostate cancer research.^{5,6}

Q. What exactly happens to men's hormones as they get older?

A. Just as women experience significant hormonal changes with age, so do men. In fact, the term andropause has been used to describe men’s mid-life changes. Similar to menopause

in women (where the decline of estrogen causes a myriad of symptoms), andropause in men signals the slow decline of testosterone, the chief sex hormone.¹⁷ While estrogen levels decline faster and more abruptly in women than testosterone levels do in men, testosterone decline can cause a number of unpleasant symptoms. These include abdominal weight gain, hair loss, reduced energy and sex drive, heart disease, and prostate enlargement. Whether a man labels these age-related changes as andropause or just the consequences of aging, most men will unfortunately experience some or all of them.^{17,18}

Q. So, is there a supplement that can give me the hormone level of a 20 year old?

A. Perhaps not a twenty year old, but,there is a nutrient that can help the testosterone in a man over 50 "behave" more like a younger man’s testosterone.

A study at the Fred Hutchinson Center in Seattle found that men who ate three servings of cruciferous vegetables—broccoli, cauliflower, or Brussels sprouts—every day had a 48 percent lower risk of prostate cancer.¹⁹ It seems a cruciferous plant chemical called diindolylmethane (DIM) that’s formed when broccoli is eaten, is the substance responsible for this impressive prostate cancer prevention. Since eating broccoli for breakfast, lunch, and dinner would be challenging researchers tried to extract DIM from these vegetables and make into a nutritional supplement. After many years of research, scientists finally discovered a stable, all natural, and absorbable form of DIM.²⁰ The secret of DIM’s prostate cancer prevention is its ability to metabolize estrogen.²⁰ While estrogen is generally thought of as a "female" hormone, a precise ratio of testosterone-to-estrogen is needed to maintain a man’s healthy sexual response, effective sexual function (erection of the penis and intercourse), strong bones and muscles, viable sperm, and a well-functioning prostate gland. As men enter their 50s, this ratio begins to change.¹⁸

When men take DIM, however, their estrogen metabolism improves, testosterone metabolism accelerates, and the unwanted conversion of testosterone into estrogen is eliminated. This results in higher testosterone levels, similar to those seen in young men. As a result, DIM may speed weight loss, reduce prostate gland enlargement (benign prostatic hyperplasia or BPH), and help men over 50 feel stronger and leaner.²⁰

I find a number of my patients who have learned about the benefits of cruciferous vegetables take a supplement on the market containing indole-3-carbinol (I3C), a precursor to DIM. However, I3C is unstable and requires activation in the stomach to be converted into DIM. This means I3C must be taken at much higher dosages and can undergo unpredictable and undesirable chemical reactions in your stomach and colon. DIM is by far the preferred supplement and the one I always recommend.

HEALTH FACT:

No man has the power to stop the passage of time. But every man has the power to make aging more healthy and less harmful. Research conducted on men who live to be 100 and beyond, has determined that those who reach extreme old age do so by avoiding ill health, rather than by enduring it.

Q. What is saw palmetto? Does it reduce symptoms of Benign Prostate Hyperplasia (BPH)?

A. Yes it does and very effectively, too. Saw palmetto is a small palm tree native to Florida and North Carolina. The tree’s dark red berries contain many beneficial compounds. Nutritional supplements that contain saw palmetto are highly effective in the treatment of BPH.¹²

The prostate gland is about the size of a walnut and is located below the bladder and in front of the rectum. It wraps around the upper part of the urethra and its primary job is the production and storage of semen, the milky fluid that nourishes sperm. BPH is one of the most common health conditions in older men. Half of all men aged 40-60 and more than 90 percent in men over 80 have BPH.²² BPH causes the prostate gland to enlarge, putting pressure on the urethra.

The end result of BPH is pressure on the urethra causing men to have:

1. trouble starting or maintaining a stream of urine,
2. trouble emptying their bladders
3. frequent trips to bathrooms (to urinate) even
4. waking up during the night to urinate (nocturia).
5. They may also have episodes of uncontrollable dribbling or complete loss of urine.

BPH is caused by the conversion of estrogen to a very potent form of testosterone called, dihydrotestosterone (or DHT). When prostate

cells are exposed to DHT, they multiply in number and get much larger causing the prostate gland to enlarge and put pressure on the urethra.²²

BPH rarely improves. It most often remains the same for years or gets gradually worse. The need to continually urinate, interrupted sleep, dribbling, and loss of urine can significantly interfere with a man’s quality of life. Prescription medications that have been developed to treat BPH are only partially effective. And surgical removal of the prostate gland may result in even more persistent urinary incontinence and the inability to achieve an erection (ED).²²

However, saw palmetto berry extract relieves the symptoms of BPH by inhibiting the production of DHT. And, in study after study after study, saw palmetto caused none of the side effects that happen with prostate surgery or medications.²¹

Q. There seem to be plenty of ads for supplements that claim they will make men into Sexual Superheroes. Is there an "honest" nutritional supplement to help me sexually?

A. It is very disturbing and frankly unethical to see the borage of infomercials promoting sexual enhancement supplements that really accomplish very little. Fortunately, there are honest supplements with scientific validity that can enhance men’s sexual health.

Sexual intimacy is an important, complex, and lifelong need. It makes us feel better physically and mentally and adds to our sense of security, belonging, and self-esteem. But just like other changes that happen to men as they get older, sexual response often changes as well. Declining testosterone levels, changes in blood flow to the penis, certain medications that older men are prescribed, and the presence of diabetes or heart disease can all affect men’s ability to engage in sexual activity.²³

When men have a chronic inability in obtaining and/or maintaining an erection, it’s called erectile dysfunction (ED). While ED is not an inevitable part of getting older, it does occur more frequently with age. About 5 percent of 40-year-old men have ED, but more than 23 percent of 65-year-old men have difficulty maintaining erections.²³

The development of prescription medications like Viagra™ (sildenafil citrate), Levitra® (vardenafil HCl), and Cialis® (tadalafil), has revolutionized ED treatment. When a man is sexually stimulated, these medicines help the penis fill with enough blood to cause an erection.

Like all medicines, these prescription drugs can cause some side effects, including headache, muscle aches, flushing of the face, and upset stomach, and stuffy and runny nose.²⁴ But because Viagra, Levitra, and Cialis are prescription medications, they requires a visit to a licensed healthcare practitioner. For many men, telling anyone (even a professional) that they are having trouble getting or keeping an erection is simply too embarrassing. Prescription medicines for ED are also fairly expensive and many older men do not have prescription drug health insurance.

These reasons may explain that while an estimated 30 million men in the United States—10 percent of the male population—experience chronic ED, as few as 5 percent of men with chronic ED seek treatment.²³

Not every man can take these medications, either. Men who use nitrate drugs, often used to control chest pain (also known as angina), should not take Viagra, Levitra, or Cialis. This combination can cause their blood pressure to drop to an unsafe or life-threatening level. Men with serious liver and kidney problems who take prescription ED drugs must be monitored closely for possible serious side effects.²⁴

The good news is there is a nutritional supplement that’s formulated with natural herbs that target male sexual organs. This unique blend of maca, yohimbe, rhodiola, horny goat weed, panax ginseng, and tongkat ali is developed specifically to increase sexual desire, improve sexual function and boost the male libido. These herbs have a long history of use in traditional cultures, and now science is proving that they reinvigorate sexual drive and improve sexual satisfaction.

Maca has been used in the high Andes in Peru for about five thousand years, where it grows at about 10,000 feet.^{25,26} Even Spanish explorers and settlers to the new world thought maca may have had properties that enhance fertility in animals and humans.²⁶

Scientists have begun to study the libido enhancing properties of maca. In a double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical study of maca extract, men showed improved sexual desire after eight weeks of use, independent of serum testosterone and estradiol levels.²⁷ In another study, controlled research showed maca

doubled libido and sexual potency.²⁸

Rhodiola has been traditionally used in Scandinavia and Russia for centuries to increase physical endurance, work productivity, longevity resistance to high altitude sickness, and for a variety of other uses.²⁹ To this day, a bouquet of rhodiola roots is still given to couples prior to marriage as a folk custom to ensure fertility and the birth of healthy children.²⁹

Rhodiola (Rhodiola rosea) is an adaptogen, helping the endocrine system adapt to environmental stresses.³⁰ High stress is not conducive to sexual performance. In a clinical trial, rhodiola improved energy levels in 64 percent of participants.³¹

Yohimbe (or yohimbine) is derived from the bark of an African tree, Pausinystalia yohimbe. It has been used for over 70 years to treat erectile dysfunction and is known to support microvascular health in men.^{32,33} Horny goat weed, panax ginseng, and tongkat ali also help increase libido and improve sexual function.^{34,35,36}

While other nutritional supplements sold to improve sexual stamina often make outrageous claims, reputable manufacturers rely on science and results to sell their products.

An important note

Most often sexual problems are simply part of the aging process. They can also be signs of serious health problems. If you don’t see improvements after using scientifically tested nutritional supplements, you should see your healthcare practitioner.

Conclusion

No man has the power to stop the passage of time. But every man has the power to make aging a healthier and enjoyable journey. Research conducted on men who live to be 100 and beyond, has determined that those who reach extreme old age do so by avoiding ill health, rather than by enduring it.²⁷ As I like to remind my patients, “Age is not determined by years, but by function.” And it’s never too late for men to detour around the major illnesses of getting older. With good nutrition, healthy habits, and high quality nutritional supplements, the best years of a man’s life can absolutely and positively be those he spends in his 70s, 80s and even his 90s.

