

HEDGEROW HERBALS

The quarterly newsletter from your local herbalist - Julie Dore
Articles, news, recipes and tips for a healthy you

Winter

FREE

Welcome to the winter edition which includes information on health for your heart, healthy New Year resolutions and advice on giving up smoking



Making and breaking. That's the pattern with new year resolutions. But if you are serious about improving your health, here are some suggestions of lifestyle resolutions for you to make and

keep.

DIET

1 Hemp Seed oil, *Cannabis sativa* (yes, it's perfectly legal!) is a complete source of three essential fatty acids, omega 3, 6, & 9! Although cooking breaks it down & neutralises its benefits, this lovely nutty flavoured oil makes a delicious salad dressing. You can also add it to soups or porridge. Alternatively, try the hulled seeds which can be added to almost anything from a Bolognese sauce to a crumble topping. Either way, aim to include a tablespoon everyday in your diet.

2 Snacks –there's only one healthy option, nuts and seeds. Make your own mix to taste from organic nuts and seeds and benefit from the many essential minerals and oils they contain. These help control blood fats, protect arteries and strengthen cell membranes. Add dried fruit (especially blueberries-yummy!) and whole nuts to make a dip-into-mix for the desk. Or chop

up nuts to sprinkle on yogurts, porridge & ice cream etc. My favourite mix is pumpkin, sunflower and sesame seeds with brazils, almonds and walnuts.

3 Replace that mid-morning or afternoon chocolate bar, cake or biscuit with a piece of fruit. Choose a variety of colours for your fruit to ensure maximum health benefits.

4 Substitute at least one cup of coffee **and** one cup of tea per day with a healthy alternative. Try Rooibos (redbush) tea which is packed with antioxidants and you can add milk to get a slightly smoky but very palatable tea. Dr Stuart's are the best herbal teas to buy or check out Hedgerow Herbal organic blends! (See website www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk)

5 Add spices to your food (instead of salt) - they not only taste good but many have medicinal properties as well.

Cinnamon – aids digestion, reduces wind, improves circulation and helps reduce blood sugar levels

Turmeric – a powerful anti-inflammatory used to reduce joint pain, ease IBS & boost the immune system (it may even help prevent Alzheimer's)

Black pepper – contains chemicals that help the body absorb nutrients so you'll be getting the most out of everything you eat

EXERCISE

There's no need to spend a fortune on a gym membership. There are much simpler and longer lasting ways to get more exercise.

- ✓ Never use a lift
- ✓ Park the car as far from the supermarket entrance as you can
- ✓ Get off one stop early on the bus and walk the rest of the way
- ✓ Don't Park and then Ride the bus but Park and bike into town. Most of the Park and Ride car parks have bike racks or lockable sheds to store your bike

Remember, don't punish yourself with crash diets and intensive elimination regimes. Those few extra pounds put on during the Christmas season will disappear once you start eating and moving about normally again. Crash diets only make the body react as if it were conserving reserves for a famine and it becomes even more efficient at laying down fat!

Valentine's Day – hearts and flowers



Hawthorn *Crataegus oxyacanthus*- the heart herb

The shops are filled with a million red hearts and even more soppy, cutesie, cuddly toys not to mention the over-priced flowers but what you should really do for Valentine's Day is to love your heart – that faithful, tireless pump the size of your fist.

Our hearts pump on average 36,000 litres of blood around our body's everyday and never take a holiday. In an average lifetime they beat 2,500 million times. Your heart is an amazing four chambered pump with its association to love a consequence of the very noticeable effect our emotions can have on both our actual and perceived heart beat.

If you feel your heart in your chest, or listen to it through a stethoscope, you hear two sounds, lub-dub. These sounds are the two sets of valves snapping shut as first blood passes from the top chambers (atria) to the muscular lower chambers (ventricles) and then is pumped around the lungs or body. If you feel you pulse there is just one beat, which represents the valves of the ventricles shutting, i.e. the pulse of blood being pumped into your arteries. Blood pressure is a measure of the pressure in the arteries both between beats (the diastolic or resting pressure) and as the heart contracts (the systolic). A high pressure, especially the resting pressure, puts greater strain on the arteries and can be a cause of strokes (a vessel in the brain bursts). If you do not suffer from diabetes or high cholesterol then your blood pressure should not go above 140/85 at rest, (otherwise it should be lower).

Coronary heart disease does not relate to the heart itself but to the narrowing of the arteries around the heart. Narrowing means less blood to the heart so that it cannot work efficiently (angina pain is a sign of this) and blockage leads to muscle death in the affected area, i.e. a heart attack or myocardial infarction. The first signs of heart disease can already be present in the arteries of teenagers. Our modern diet, coupled with lack of exercise makes heart disease one of the top causes of death in the West and medications have only a minimal effect. One trial compared a group that took blood pressure and cholesterol lowering drugs with a group that did not. Those using the drugs showed a 35% reduction in blood pressure and cholesterol BUT developed twice as much heart disease as the control group. Diet and lifestyle can reduce cholesterol by up to 30%. A patient of mine had total levels of 8.5 which reduced to 5.4 over 2 months with a combination of dietary changes, exercise, herbs and, most importantly, giving up smoking. If your levels are such that you have to take statins do ensure you get annual liver function tests as the drug can adversely affect the liver. Also consider taking a liver protective herb e.g. Milk thistle or Artichoke. You may experience tiredness and lack of energy as statins also block the body's production of co-enzyme Q10. This important substance is vital for

effective energy production in cells. You can take it as a supplement to combat this effect (the drug companies did consider adding it to statin drugs but decided the cost wasn't worth it!!).

There is a growing belief that other factors apart from cholesterol and blood pressure influence our risk of heart disease. These include high levels in the blood of sugar or triglycerides (another type of fat directly linked to a fatty meal like fish and chips) and high levels of an amino acid called homocysteine. High levels of the latter are linked to insufficient folic acid, B6 & B12, smoking and inactivity and are connected with certain conditions such as psoriasis, lupus, hypothyroidism and kidney disease.

To keep blood pressure low and minimise plaque deposits in the arteries we should do the following:

- ✓ Eat a diet low in saturated fats, salt and refined sugars
- ✓ Eat soluble fibre e.g. oats and whole grains as they help the body eliminate cholesterol
- ✓ Eat at least five fruits and vegetable portions a day preferably of different colours
- ✓ Take regular exercise

Other important measures for heart health are:

- ✓ Quit smoking (see below)
- ✓ Increase essential fatty acids in the diet i.e. omega 3 and 6
- ✓ Keep body fat below 30% for women and 20% for men (*this does vary with age but as part of your herbal health check this can be measured and monitored*)

Herbs for a Healthy Heart

If you are having your blood pressure regularly checked (to be deemed to have high blood pressure you should have had high three readings taken over a period of several weeks) and want to try herbs to control it you should only do so under the supervision of a medical herbalist (will have letters NIMH or CPP after name). They will have been trained to measure your BP accurately. As with conventional treatment a diuretic maybe the simple solution. Dandelion leaf is very effective, does not irritate the kidneys, and as it is a rich source of potassium, does not deplete this important mineral (itself vital for heart

muscle function). Dandelion root increases bile flow and, as bile is made from cholesterol, this is a way to eliminate it. If stress or tension are contributing factors herbs like cramp bark (which relaxes the type of muscle in the artery walls) can be very successful. It can be combined with valerian which is very calming. Lime flowers are good both for nervous tension and as a prophylactic against arteriosclerosis.



Lime flowers *Tilia euporea*

The one herb that deservedly has the name "tonic to the heart" is hawthorn. This common hedgerow bush is an important heart tonic and a general relaxant and antioxidant. Actions include:

- improves blood flow in the coronary arteries and opens up the arteries to all tissues of the body
- can reduce high blood pressure
- gives relief from the cramping pains of angina pectoris
- conditions the heart muscle and reduces arrhythmias
- slows heart rate down if too high and decreases force of contraction if it is too strong - but also increases it when it is too weak
- mildly sedating-so good for stress
- aids the lowering of cholesterol

It is non-toxic, has no side effects and can be taken for long periods in conjunction with other medications. There is evidence to suggest it increases the effect of cardio-active drugs. It is the perfect herb for the ageing heart. I would recommend its use by everyone as they get older to protect and support the ageing heart. It is one of the main ingredients in Hedgerow Herbals 'Golden Oldies' tea blend.

Another important medicinal plant for the cardiovascular system (and NOT I hasten to add an ingredient in the tea!) is

GARLIC. Taken fresh (or in a capsule) it lowers blood cholesterol and improves the HDL: LDL ratio and helps to prevent arteriosclerosis. It also reduces the blood's clotting potential thereby decreasing the risk of clots.

So instead of Valentine flowers get yourself a plait of garlic and a bunch of hawthorn and give your heart some love!

Planning to Give Up Smoking?

Add herbal medicine to the list of things to help you succeed in kicking the habit for good.

The trouble with smoking is the addiction is both physical and psychological making it doubly difficult to quit.

It is physical addiction to the nicotine that causes withdrawal symptoms including cravings, hunger, sleeping difficulties, mood swings, poor concentration and the infamous irritability. Herbalists can help you deal with these by combining a number of herbs individually tailored to treat symptoms of your withdrawal. Herbs such as skullcap, valerian and oats reduce anxiety, irritability, and increase nervous energy and will help you through those first few difficult weeks. Your body needs support to deal with the change and herbs gently and safely assist in this process aiding sleep and readjusting metabolism to avoid weight gain. Any small trace of nicotine in the blood will trigger the desire for more so herbs that increase its elimination from the body are used e.g. milk thistle and dandelion root.



Milk thistle *Silybum marianus*

Lobelia contains a chemical similar to, but less potent than, nicotine and is used to help manage the cravings. The traditional method is to add a few drops onto your tongue and then have a cigarette. Once you get the dose right for you the act of smoking will trigger a bout of nausea. Everyone is different so gradually increase the dose until the effect is felt. NB This herb can only be taken under the direction of a registered herbalist.

The habitual nature of smoking means it is important to find something else to do and avoid the situations that made you smoke. Exercise helps as it increases the body's natural endorphins making you feel good. Why not try swimming or cycling as you cannot easily smoke and do these at the same time!? Have something to snack but not sweets! Instead try sugar free gum, raw vegetables, or nuts and raisins. Eating almonds is said to lower cholesterol, something smoking would have increased - a double benefit. Liquorice is given to people dealing with stressful situations so chewing on a natural liquorice stick is a good herbal substitute for lighting up.

(PS for women it is better to give up in the first half of your cycle when your hormone levels are highest - sorry chaps your hormones do not give you any help at all!)

GOOD LUCK, and remember no matter how many attempts you make it will be worth it once you succeed - so keep on trying!

Visit the Hedgerow Herbals website www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk.

For advice, comments or topics you would like to see in future newsletters contact **Julie Dore (MNIMH MCPP)** at

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