

The Foundation for Women's Wellness

Newsletter

Dear Friends:

What comes to mind when you think of women's health? Breast cancer? Menopause? Pregnancy? Sure, those are important ones but the facts necessitate a much longer list. Heart disease, lung cancer, and colon cancer are among the top causes of death in women. As we age, sexual problems are just as much a health concern for women as for men, but the Viagra craze has done little for public awareness and medical attention to women's sexual concerns.

Women's health encompasses virtually every medical topic you can think of. It is why we at *the Foundation for Women's Wellness* share information with you about headaches, stress, and heart disease along side topics on menopause and pregnancy.

This past December, our friends Jane and David Walentas hosted a gathering where Dr. Marianne Legato, a leading cardiologist at Columbia University, spoke about the myriad ways that gender affects our health. Men also benefit from understanding what Dr. Legato calls "gender-specific medicine" also known as "sex-based biology." It is of vital importance to us all.

But women's health knowledge faces a double whammy. Research historically has not focused on women, and it also has ignored gender differences in studies involving both sexes. The Federal government first required that women be included in clinical research in 1990, and it took another seven years for the Food & Drug Administration to require inclusion of women in drug studies.

Because of these factors, we feel strongly about the need for increased funding for research and bringing new, balanced, quality health information directly to you.

We hope you find our newsletter and educational gatherings informative. Please contact me with your feedback at: sharon-cravitz@comcast.net.

Yours in good health,
Sharon Helfant Cravitz, Executive Director

Our utmost appreciation and thank you's to Beth Krugman and Marcia Helfant for their tireless and skilled editing of our newsletters.

Rebound Headaches: "A Silent Epidemic"

What Every Woman Should Know About Headaches

Headaches are America's most commonly reported pain and Americans have more headaches than people in any other country. Headaches are a very important women's health issue because, at every age, women suffer from all types of headaches more frequently than men, especially between the ages of 30 to 45. Women may also have an increase in headache frequency during the perimenopause years because of fluctuating hormones.

Headaches can be caused by many different factors including stress, bright light, loud noises, caffeine or nicotine withdrawal, or missing a meal. In women, headaches are often made worse by physiologic factors such as neural differences in the brain, greater sensitivity to drugs' effects, and differences in sex hormones and other naturally occurring pain-relief substances. Researchers also cite social conditioning as a possible cause for this gender disparity. Girls are more encouraged than boys to express feelings of discomfort.

For headache relief, most of us take aspirin, Tylenol, or Advil as instinctually as we treat a scratch with soapy water and a band-aid. Yet when headaches become a daily pain, the cause could be the very medicine you are taking for relief. This is known as the "rebound headache" – a headache that returns as soon as pain medicine wears off or continues, even mildly, when such

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Dietary Supplement Use

Considerations for Vitamins, Herbs & Nutrient Enhanced Foods

Over the past decade use of dietary supplements to prevent and treat illness has become mainstream Americana. More than half of all Americans reportedly take vitamins, herbal medicines, and fortified food products known as nutraceuticals. Women are more likely than men to use alternative therapies in general, including supplements. A recent study reported that highly-educated, white women are the main users of dietary supplements. Women are also the main decision-makers for family members in the healthcare arena, and they control most consumer health-related spending.

As consumer demand has grown, so has western medicine's acceptance of their use. Although medical research about herbs and vitamins in the United States historically has been scarce, recently the number of well-designed, large-scale medical research studies has increased. However, much like women's health research, attention to and funding for alternative medicine and dietary supplements is relatively new. To date, studies about the effectiveness of dietary supplements have shown mixed results. What is clear is that just like in all things medical, dietary supplements warrant certain considerations. *(continued on page 3)*

Women's Health FACTOIDS: *DID YOU KNOW?*

Depression is a Women's Health Issue. Prior to age 13, girls and boys suffer from depression at equal rates, but after age 13, more girls report feelings of depression. As adults, women are *two or three times* more likely than men to be affected by depression. Depression is associated with greater risk of heart disease and other illnesses including a reduction in the body's natural ability to fight disease.

The Power of Walking Women. Physical activity is one part of reducing your risk of major diseases like type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Walking is reportedly the most popular form of exercise in women and older adults. Fast-paced walking for at least 30 minutes each day is associated with reduction in heart disease risk in diabetic women.

Calcium Supplements : Optimizing Effectiveness. Increasing your intake of calcium and vitamin D and exercise are important for bone health. However, *how* we take supplements is important for optimizing the prevention of osteoporosis.

- According to a recent report in *the New York Times*, experts recommend taking calcium supplements at intervals throughout the day instead of all at once because anything over 500 milligrams will not be efficiently absorbed.
- If you are taking biophosphonate medication such as Fosamax or Actonel, keep in mind that calcium supplements may inhibit their effectiveness if taken within 30 minutes of each other.

Keeping Your Bones Healthy — What NOT to Eat. Studies have shown that some dietary habits can cause calcium to secrete from your bones. Those include ingesting four or more cups of caffeinated coffee per day; consuming excessively high levels of protein, especially animal protein; or taking very high doses of Vitamin A.

The Pros and Cons of Daily Aspirin. Daily aspirin is often recommended for prevention of heart attack and stroke because of its anti-clumping effect on platelets. The downside is that even baby aspirin can markedly increase risk of gastrointestinal bleeding. Researchers currently are studying other forms of aspirin that still have the anti-clumping effect but are gentler on the stomach. For now, we recommend you consider your own and your family's heart health history when determining if daily aspirin is indicated.

Colon Cancer : A Worse Disease in Women than Men. Colon cancer is not only one of the most common cancers in women, but it also is worse for women than men. Usually when colon cancer appears in a woman, it is located further up in the colon than typically found in men. Screening tests like colonoscopy are vitally important, yet many women do not get such testing done for various reasons including underestimating the incidence of this form cancer in women.

Sleep Apnea Underdiagnosed in Women. Sleep apnea is when breathing stops for a short period of time during sleep. It is characterized by loud snoring, interrupted breathing, and significant fatigue during waking hours. Until recently, physicians thought sleep apnea was mostly a male disease, but new research finds more women are afflicted by this serious sleep disorder than previously thought. Sleep apnea is most common in obese or very overweight people. Risk increases after age 50.

Women Fight Infection Better than Men. Women's immune systems are better at fighting infections than are men's. Women are also less likely to reject tissue grafts or organ transplants. Part of the explanation for this is that women have more of the types of cells that help fight foreign substances that invade the body.

Flossing Extra Important During Menstruation and Pregnancy. At puberty, gum infection is *three times* more common in girls than boys. During menstruation and pregnancy, gums are especially susceptible to infection and bleeding. During these times, women should pay extra attention to daily flossing and brushing.

Golf Injury Prevention. Overuse is the most common cause of injury in golfers. Research has found that light stretching for about 10 minutes prior to play is associated with less injury than not stretching at all.

Women Main Consumers of Dietary Supplements

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Do your homework in assessing research findings.

American medical schools are now establishing courses and training programs in alternative medicine. In 1992, Congress created a small office of alternative health at the National Institutes of Health. In 1999, the office was upgraded to a grant-making entity called the "Center for Alternative and Complementary Medicine." This increase in stature and funding clears the way for more quality scientific research. However, it is important to know a study's source and assess potential bias or conflicts of interest. Examine a study's specifics and distinguish between hearsay and what is proven. Generalized reports in the mainstream media may not apply to you. We recommend you do your own homework if there is a particular study or substance you are considering. Going directly to the source can be done via the Internet or through your public library (see sources listed on page 4).

Serious interactions have been found between prescription drugs and dietary supplements. An array of emerging research is finding significant interactions between many popular dietary supplements and prescription drugs. One study found that st. john's wort compromises the cancer drug gleevec, potentially increasing a patient's risk of cancer relapse. St. john's wort can also affect drugs used to treat depression, birth control, and anti-rejection drugs for transplanted organs. Another study found that ginkgo biloba, taken for memory improvement, might lead to spontaneous bleeding if it's combined with blood-thinning drugs. The popular supplement ginseng can increase the stimulant effects of caffeine and can also lower blood sugar levels, causing problems for diabetics. Even seemingly innocuous calcium-fortified orange juice has been found to interfere with antibiotics. Knowledge of such interactions is an important consideration to be aware of when taking any kind of medication concurrent with dietary supplements.

More is not better. Mega-doses of any substance can have serious health consequences. There are many well-documented health problems from taking too much of a supplement or taking it for too long. Pay attention to recommended daily doses for your age and gender. If you are considering mega-dosing we recommend talking to your healthcare provider to assess risks and benefits. If you decide to proceed, you might want to consider how much the body can absorb at any one time and limit your duration of high dose intake.

"Research is finding significant interactions between many popular dietary supplements and prescription drugs."

Make sure to tell your healthcare provider about all dietary supplements you are taking. Most people do not inform their physician of alternative medicine treatments they are using. As discussed earlier, drug interactions including those that occur between and among dietary supplements and traditional medications can be very serious. Many vitamins and herbs can also affect the accuracy of medical tests and cause problems during surgical procedures.

No vitamin supplement can take the place of a healthy lifestyle. The ill effects of unhealthy habits like smoking, drugs, excessive alcohol, lack of activity, poor diets, and ongoing stress cannot be ameliorated by any kind of supplement. Dietary supplements cannot replace healthy eating. A balanced diet not only supplies nutrients that most people need, but also supplies ones that science has not yet identified and therefore cannot be found in supplements.

What is in the bottle does not always match what is on the label. Because supplements are regulated as foods rather than as drugs, laws overseeing them are less strict. As a result, there is a great deal of variance in the quality and quantity of ingredients. There are reports of inaccurate labeling where supplements do not actually contain what they claim to, or they contain higher or lower doses of active ingredients. There is also greater risk of supplements being contaminated because until there are ample reports of unsafe reactions, the government cannot remove a product from the market, issue warnings, or take action against a manufacturer or distributor.

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Rebound Headaches More Likely In Women

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medicines are taken. Pain relieving drugs include over-the-counter analgesics commonly known as aspirin, Tylenol, Advil, Motrin, and the like. Dr. Stephen Silberstein, director of the Jefferson Headache Center in Philadelphia, and a leading headache expert, states that "...over-the-counter medication overuse is one of the leading causes of chronic daily headache...and most people are not even aware of this. It is a silent epidemic." Women over age 30 are *four times more likely* than men to suffer from this syndrome.

It does not take much medicinal use to start this rebound headache cycle. A recent study found that as little as five doses a week disturbs the body's natural pain defense system and may trigger rebound headaches. Another study on rats found that serotonin, a pain suppressing neurotransmitter, is less readily absorbed when Tylenol is taken constantly over two weeks. When drug intake was stopped, this effect was reversed. Most rebound headaches are cured by discontinuing headache relief drugs. Full recovery may take up to several months.

The most common type of headache is the "tension headache." It may last from a few hours to a few days, and the pain is usually mild or moderate. When a tension headache lasts for more than 15 days a month, it is called a "chronic tension-type headache."

Moderate and episodic use of over-the-counter analgesics is safe, effective, and appropriate for most women. Just be aware of how long and how often you are taking such drugs, and consult your healthcare provider if you are suffering from chronic headaches. Nonpharmacologic headache treatment and prevention includes getting enough sleep; reducing and managing stress; maintaining a healthy and adequate diet throughout the day; exercising regularly; restricting caffeine; stopping smoking; and identifying and minimizing your own personal triggers.

Assessing Nutritional Supplements

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Certain herbs are important to avoid if you are pregnant or trying to become. Herbal remedies can have adverse effects on reproduction in both men and women. Research has found st. john's wort, echinacea purpurpa, and ginkgo biloba can affect both eggs and sperm. During pregnancy, certain herbs can cause birth defects. Talk to your healthcare provider before taking any herbal supplements while pregnant.

SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

- **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA):** www.fda.gov
- **FDA's Safety Information and Adverse Reporting Program:** www.fda.gov/medwatch
- **The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH):** www.nccam.nih.gov
- **Office of Dietary Supplements at the National Institutes of Health:** www.dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov. Select "health information"
- **Complementary and Alternative Medicine on PubMed (CAM on PubMed):** www.nlm.nih.gov/nccam/camonpubmed.html. This is a database developed by NCCAM (see above) and the National Library of Medicine. It offers citations, abstracts, and links to full text articles in scientifically-based, peer-reviewed journals on complementary and alternative medicine.
- **"The Health Professional's Guide to Popular Dietary Supplements, 2nd edition."** This book is designed for health-care professionals. It contains comprehensive listings of vitamins, minerals and herbal supplements including dosage information, efficacy of medical claims, advisories, drug and supplement interactions, food sources, and other research, safety and reference material. It should be noted that there is some degree of bias in favor of supplement use by the book's publisher, the American Dietetic Association.

Foundation for Women's Wellness News

Dear Friends:

I want to express a special thank you to those who responded to my letter earlier this year asking for your support. The Foundation for Women's Wellness, founded by my youngest daughter Ellen Nachtigall Biben and me, cannot continue to do the important work of supporting critical research and education of women's health issues without your support and involvement.

Your generous contributions this year will be used for our first research grant to a chosen study in cardiovascular disease, cancer, or hormones' roles in stage-of-life or disease. We are very excited about the impact this support will have in improving women's lives by advancing medical knowledge. Your support also enables us to create a website that will provide information about women's health and continue our Student Research Stipend Award (see below) as well as ongoing research and educational efforts.

My sincere thanks also to Jane and David Walentas and Jody Gottfried Arnhold for so generously hosting educational gatherings to benefit the Foundation and bring physician-researchers directly to women.

All my best,

Lila

Lila Nachtigall, MD
Chairwoman and Co-Founder, The Foundation for Women's Wellness

Student Research Stipend Award 2003 / 2004 Recipients

Each year, FWW supports young research associates working on important women's health research. In 2003 and 2004, awards went to:

Laura Perlman, Princeton University. Laura studied cardiovascular disease and clot formation. She wrote to us: "I cannot stress enough that the [award] which the Foundation for Women's Wellness presented has given me a unique, important, and enjoyable experience. Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in such pertinent and needed research."

Noaman Vaidya, Tufts University Medical School. Studied insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes, and clotting in women with polycystic ovary syndrome. Noaman wrote to us: "I thank your organization for its support of my research project on polycystic ovary syndrome. The [award] has allowed me to lay the groundwork for what will be an interesting and critical project [in women's health]."

Sarabeth Broder-Fingert, New York University Medical School. Studied treatments for polycystic ovary syndrome.

FWW Research

Clotting & Hormone Replacement Therapy

FWW's co-founder Lila Nachtigall, MD and FWW's Scientific Review Board Chair, Rob Flaumenhaft, MD, PhD are conducting a study to examine the clotting incidence in women taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

This is an important area for further research since the HRT trial of the National Institutes of Health's Women's Health Initiative study was halted, in part, because of a significant increase in clotting among women taking HRT.

Doctors Nachtigall and Flaumenhaft have screened women for clotting risk factors. For women deemed to be at risk of clotting, HRT is not prescribed. For those that are not deemed high risk, HRT in pill or patch forms are given. The latter group is being monitored for increases in clotting formation.

The results of this study will appear in an upcoming FWW newsletter.