Maximize Your Healthspan With Supplements

Jenny and May, the grandmothers of a friend of mine, both passed away in their late 80s. May's last 15 years were plagued with diabetes, heart disease, two fractures, and severe arthritis. She developed dementia, required assisted living and a wheelchair, and was in and out of the hospital as she slowly succumbed to cancer. Jenny, on the other hand, had pain in her hips and knees and some loss of vision but no serious health problems. She was active in her church, and she played bridge two weeks before passing away after a bout of pneumonia.

These women had similar lifespans, but their healthspans were markedly different. “Dying healthy” after a long life is the essence of an optimal healthspan. Genetics do play a role in whether or not you achieve this. Longevity tends to run in families, and some researchers believe aging is genetically programmed.

Factors you can control, however, have a far greater impact. As we discussed last month, the best-studied interventions are lifestyle changes. Starting today, you need to get serious about improving your diet, exercise, sleep, and stress level—and think hard about taking nutritional supplements that can bolster your healthspan.

1. Multivitamins

Telling Health & Healing readers to take a multivitamin is preaching to the choir, but it really should be the foundation of any supplement program. A comprehensive multi (more than a basic one-a-day) provides therapeutic doses of B-complex vitamins, which are required in cellular metabolism and protection of the vascular and nervous systems. Calcium boosts bone health, and zinc enhances immune function. Magnesium helps stave off cellular aging, and a high blood level of vitamin D lowers risk of age-related diseases.

Antioxidants are particularly important. Breathing oxygen, producing energy, replacing cells, and regenerating tissues: All these processes generate free radicals. Excessive oxidative stress damages DNA and other cellular components and results in genetic mutations and cell dysfunction. Robust doses of vitamins A, C, and E, beta-carotene, selenium, and other antioxidants help reduce oxidative stress.

2. Mitochondrial Support

Much of the current research on aging focuses on the mitochondria, the cells’ power plants where oxygen is burned, energy is produced, and most free radicals are formed. Mitochondria have their own unique DNA—which you inherit from your mother—that is also involved in cell signaling and mitochondrial biogenesis, or the creation of new mitochondria. Mutations of mitochondrial DNA are believed to be a driving force in aging.

Three supplements are particularly supportive of the mitochondria. Two are our old favorites, coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10) and L-carnitine. Both play central roles in energy production, and CoQ10 also serves as a free radical quencher. Supplemental CoQ10 and L-carnitine are backed by hundreds of controlled clinical trials showing their positive effects in cardiovascular and neurodegenerative disorders, fatigue, frailty, and more.

I’m also impressed by recent research on astaxanthin, a pink-hued carotenoid found in microalgae and continued on page 3
Dear Reader,

This month we celebrate Independence Day and the birth of a nation founded on the radical concept of individual rights and limited government. Yet the majority of Americans are concerned about the direction our country is heading. Surveys reveal that trust and confidence in government are at an all-time low.

As a physician, I am particularly troubled by government’s encroachment in health care. The drugs and therapies you use, the supplements you take, the coverage of your health insurance, the vaccinations your children receive: Decisions about these intensely personal matters should be yours and yours alone, made with the help of your doctor and other trusted medical professionals.

Today, government has insinuated itself into almost every aspect of health care. The doctor-patient relationship and personalized medicine play second fiddle to approved “clinical guidelines”—extensive lists of medications voted on by committees that are heavily influenced/compensated by the pharmaceutical industry. Most physicians follow lockstep, and patients, swayed by deceptive drug ads and convinced that doctor knows best, rarely ask questions.

Supplement companies aren’t allowed to make truthful claims about their products, while government mouthpieces issue bogus warnings about the dangers of supplements. Compounding pharmacies, which provide individualized dosages of the safest forms of medications, are under serious attack.

Patients are denied access to and insurance reimbursement for “unapproved” therapies, even if they’re safer, more effective, and less expensive than the standard of care. FDA bureaucrats have the power to make life-or-death decisions about who receives these treatments, more expensive than the standard of care. FDA bureaucrats have the power to make life-or-death decisions about who receives these treatments, and physicians who offer them are harassed by state medical boards. Nevertheless, government’s encroachment in health care is at an all-time low.

Children must show proof of vaccination before attending public schools, and exemptions for personal or religious reasons are under threat of elimination. Parents and others who question the necessity and safety of 49 doses of 16 vaccines before age six are shunned and ridiculed. Yet no one can deny the parallel rises of vaccine requirements and the increased incidence of childhood asthma, autism, ADHD, and allergies.

Let’s enjoy the fireworks, parades, and barbecues this 4th of July but also reflect on what Independence Day is really about—and what we can do restore our personal freedoms. To learn more, visit anh-usa.org.

To your health,
wildlife such as salmon, krill, shrimp, and lobster that eat it. Astaxanthin may be the most effective antioxidant ever discovered for protecting the mitochondria. It also has exceptional anti-inflammatory activity, crosses the blood-brain barrier, and has demonstrated benefits for the aging brain.

3. Anti-Inflammatories

Chronic inflammation goes hand-in-hand with oxidative stress, mitochondrial dysfunction, and aging. Most age-related diseases—as well as risk factors such as obesity, smoking, and poor diet—are marked by low-grade inflammation. Furthermore, senescent cells, which are old and no longer able to divide, secrete signaling molecules that further increase inflammation.

My two favorite natural anti-inflammatories are curcumin and omega-3 fatty acids. In addition to reducing systemic inflammation and relieving pain, curcumin also crosses the blood-brain barrier, boosts cognitive function, and helps clear amyloid-beta, the gunk that accumulates in the brains of patients with Alzheimer’s disease. More than 7,000 scientific papers have been published on curcumin.

You may think omega-3s are old news, but recent research reveals novel benefits, such as triggering the production of compounds called lipoxins and resolvins that mediate inflammation. And don’t forget the huge and growing number of studies showing omega-3s’ many therapeutic roles.

4. Calorie Restriction Mimics

Calorie restriction increases healthspan and lifespan in fruit flies, mice, monkeys, and likely in humans by turning on “survival genes.” These genes activate enzyme pathways that protect against oxidative stress, reduce inflammation, enhance cell survival, and stave off age-related disease. But who says you can’t have your cake and eat it too? A number of supplements mimic calorie restriction.

The best known is resveratrol, the “red wine pill” that stimulates SIRT1 longevity-related enzymes. Resveratrol may not get as much attention as it did years ago, but research continues to support its benefits. For example, in a 2014 clinical trial, older adults who took 200 mg of resveratrol daily for 26 weeks had significant decreases in body fat and hemoglobin A1C (a marker of blood sugar control) and improvements in tests of word recall.

Berberine, quercetin, Pycnogenol, grape seed extract, curcumin, and tea polyphenols also mimic caloric restriction and turn on other anti-aging pathways. We’ll discuss them in detail in upcoming issues.

And Many More...

I also want to call out molecular hydrogen (H2). This tiny molecule, which rapidly diffuses into tissues throughout the body, is a selective antioxidant that quenches the most destructive free radicals. It also stimulates the production of glutathione and other antioxidants and has positive effects on inflammation and cell signaling.

I’ve covered a lot of supplements, but by picking and choosing from these categories, you should be able to cover all the bases without breaking the bank. Actually, this is a pretty basic list.

Dozens of vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, amino acids, fatty acids, and other supplements promote health and longevity. Ray Kurzweil—the renowned futurist whose stated goal is to stay alive and healthy long enough to take advantage of breakthroughs in life extension, which he expects to materialize by 2029—says he takes 250 supplements daily! Now, that’s hardcore, even for a guy like me who takes handfuls every day.

References


Dear Dr. Whitaker

Q I’ve been taking baby aspirin for years. I’ve been using enteric coated but now I am hearing that regular is better. I would appreciate your opinion on this. — Steven, Buena Park, CA

A Some studies suggest that enteric coating—meant to shield against aspirin’s well-known gastrointestinal (GI) toxicity—may inhibit the absorption of low-dose aspirin and potentially hinder its blood-clotting and other cardioprotective effects. Provided you don’t have a history of GI problems and it doesn’t upset your stomach, I suggest you switch to regular uncoated low-dose (81 mg) aspirin, taken daily with a meal and a glass of water. Low-dose aspirin isn’t for everyone, but it does have benefits. In addition to protecting against heart attacks and strokes, it’s also associated with a 20 percent reduced risk of dying from cancer. Be aware that ibuprofen—and likely other NSAIDs—block aspirin’s protective effects and, if possible, should be avoided or taken several hours before or after aspirin.

Q Could you recommend any supplements or natural treatments for migraines? Two or three times a month I get such a horrible headache that I am unable to work or even leave my house. They sometimes last for two days. I worry I am taking too much pain medication. Any help would be appreciated. — L.D., via email

A Hyperbaric oxygen therapy and intravenous magnesium can provide relief, but I don’t know of any supplements that stop a full-blown migraine. However, several nutrients and herbs have been shown to reduce migraine frequency and severity. They include feverfew 100–200 mg, butterbur 100–200 mg, coenzyme Q10 200–300 mg, vitamin B2 (riboflavin) 400 mg, and magnesium 500 mg. I suggest trying these one at a time, taken daily with meals, for at least a month to see if they work for you. Given the severity of your headaches, you may want to talk to your doctor about a prescription for a low-dose beta-blocker. These drugs, which block the actions of stress hormones, dramatically reduce the incidence of migraines in some people.

Q Since my husband retired, he has been taking fairly long naps almost every afternoon. He does not have any serious health problems, but I am worried something is going on. Should I be concerned? — K.C.B., via email

A Unless your husband is feeling lethargic and out of it all day or not sleeping well at night, a daily nap is perfectly fine. Studies link regular napping with improved markers of stress, inflammation, and immune function, and better mood, attention, and reaction time. A 15–30 minute catnap can be as reenergizing as a cup of coffee, and a 60–90 minute snooze puts you into deeper regenerative stages of sleep. Sleeping too long during the day may leave you feeling groggy or keep you up at night. If that’s the case, he may want to shorten the duration of his naps. Otherwise, sweet dreams!

From My Blog

Make Iced Tea Your Go-To Summer Beverage

It’s refreshing on a hot summer day, it hydrates you, the small amount of caffeine offers a little kick—and it’s a healthy option to juice and sodas. In addition, tea is brimming with antioxidant-rich polyphenols that increase insulin sensitivity and protect against cardiovascular disease. A recent study found that regular consumption of both green and black tea reduced risk of heart attack and stroke by 10–20 percent. Bottled iced tea may have these same benefits, but Snapple and many other popular brands also contain a lot of sugar and calories. Opt for unsweetened bottled iced tea or brew your own. If you’re a “sweet tea” fan—like many of us from the South are—nix the sugar and add your own natural sweetener like stevia, xylitol, or monk fruit extract.

Read more Q&As online at drwhitaker.com/featured-questions-and-answers. Send your own questions to drwhitakerquestions@drwhitaker.com.
Works for Me...

Bumps and Bruises My daughter-in-law keeps a tube of arnica in the medicine cabinet and rubs it on her kids’ “owies.” It always makes them feel better, so I tried it on myself. It really works for bumps and bruises. — P.L., Austin, TX

Arnica montana is a homeopathic remedy that, applied topically, reduces aches, pain, and swelling from sprains, strains, bruises, and the like. We’ve recommended and used arnica at the clinic for years. It’s widely available in drugstores and online. Note: Do not use on broken skin.

Diabetes Dr. Whitaker, you are literally an answer to my prayers. I’ve had diabetes for more than 25 years. About a month ago, I saw a video where you discussed how the mini-fast with exercise program is the best way for diabetics to exercise. As a registered nurse, a lightbulb went off. It made perfect sense! In the first three days I tried it, my AM fasting sugars were 98–100 and I lost 1.5 pounds. (I also added cinnamon to my nighttime regimen.) It’s been a month and I’m down six pounds and my blood sugar levels have stabilized. No medicine has ever made this much of an improvement!! Thank you so much. You are a REAL doctor and I’d love to visit your clinic soon. — Josette B., via email

The mini-fast with exercise (no food from bedtime until noon the next day and exercising in the morning in this fasting state) is my number-one recommendation for weight loss and blood sugar control. It has worked for countless patients and subscribers, and if you’ve been looking for a solution for permanent weight loss, this is it. For details, read my book, The Mini-Fast Diet, available online, in bookstores, or by calling 800-810-6655.

Unwanted Hair You asked about other suggestions for removing unwanted hair. I’m having great success with a small, electrical device called Finishing Touch. It only costs about $13 and it really works! — Sally P., Rockaway, NY

This small, battery-operated device—about the size of a mascara wand—is actually a tiny electric razor with a light. It has pretty good reviews online and appears to be an effective and inexpensive option for hair removal. Thanks for the tip, Sally!

Have a Health Tip to share? Send it to worksforme@drwhitaker.com. Read more tips at drwhitaker.com/works-for-me.

Healing Tip

Did you know that mindfully and purposefully chewing your food—as opposed to scarfing it down without a second thought—results in better digestion and weight control? In a recent study, people who chewed each bite 40 times versus 15 times consumed 12 percent fewer calories.

Like my Facebook page at facebook.com/WhitakerMD to receive daily healing tips and join the conversation.

Monthly Health Quiz

Mosquitoes: True or False?
A) Mosquitoes are the deadliest creatures on earth.
B) Only female mosquitoes bite.
C) Your attractiveness to mosquitoes is partially determined by your size.
D) Mosquitoes can “smell” you up to 50 feet away.

Answer:
• Mosquitoes are attracted by heat, movement, and carbon dioxide emissions that can be sensed up to 50 feet away.
• Mosquito bites produce an immune response, and infected individuals can transmit the virus to a new host.
• Most mosquitoes are of no concern; only those that carry diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, or登革热 warrant worry. The mosquito feelers, or mandibles, are what deliver the bite.

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Notable Quote

“Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labor in freedom.”

— Albert Einstein

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Standing upright frees up our hands to use tools and has helped make humans the dominant species on the planet. But our backs pay a price.

The human spine bears a tremendous amount of weight, which compresses and stresses the vertebrae and protective disks. The lumbar curve helps maintain our center of gravity but places excessive pressure on the lower back. Staying erect, and walking in particular, are complex feats of muscle activity. No wonder vertebral compression fractures, spinal misalignment, herniated and bulging disks, arthritis of the spinal column, and muscle aches and spasms are so common.

Sitting for much of the day, as most of us do, makes matters worse, and poor posture further stresses the spine and the core muscles that support it. Inactivity leads to atrophy of these muscles (back, abdomen, pelvis, and hips), and excess weight, especially belly fat, compounds the problem. A lifetime of wear and tear also factors in. Some degree of disk degeneration and spinal stenosis, or narrowing of the spinal canal, affect most people over age 50.

Eighty percent of Americans have experienced back pain, and we collectively spend more than $100 billion per year seeking relief. Let’s take a look at what’s out there.

**Pros and Cons of Painkillers**

Over-the-counter painkillers such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Motrin), and naproxen (Aleve) are usually first on the list. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) do help, and occasional use may be warranted, but their side effects are no joke. Long-term use—10 days or more—of therapeutic doses is associated with gastrointestinal ulceration and bleeding and increased risk of cardiovascular disease, kidney problems, and death.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is considered to be an option, but a recent study found it was ineffective for back pain. Furthermore, with higher doses, liver toxicity is a serious concern.

Then there are narcotic or opioid drugs. American doctors are way too cavalier about prescribing these highly addictive medications for chronic pain. I know they’re trying to help their patients, and everyone thinks, “It could never happen to me.” But the fastest-growing group of people who are addicted to these heroin-like drugs are men and women ages 50–69.

Corticosteroids are also used for back pain. Typically administered by epidural injection into the space between the vertebrae and the spinal cord, steroids reduce inflammation and sometimes provide profound relief. Other times, however, they don’t work at all. Either way, effects are temporary. And there’s a limit to how often they can be used.

**MRIs: Gateway to Surgery**

Your doctor may also recommend an MRI or CT scan. I suggest waiting until you’ve given conservative treatment a chance to work. All sorts of irregularities show up on these imaging tests, even in healthy, pain-free individuals, and in many cases there’s little correlation between MRI findings and symptoms.

Nevertheless, an “abnormal” MRI can put you on the fast track to surgery. This is great for hospitals and orthopedic surgeons, because spinal surgery is a major source of revenue—complex surgeries involving decompression and spinal fusion cost upwards of $100,000! But it’s not necessarily good for patients. In addition to the potential risk of bleeding, infection, and other complications of any surgery, at least 20 percent of patients continue to have pain. This is so common that it has a name: “failed back surgery syndrome.”

There is certainly a place for MRIs and CTs, but the way they’re used now funnels far too many patients into unnecessary procedures. In a study conducted earlier this year, patients who had surgery for disk problems were no better off two years later than those who had physical therapy and other noninvasive therapies.

At Whitaker Wellness, we don’t waste our patients’ time and money on superfluous diagnostics. Instead, we focus on treatment with therapies that have helped thousands of patients reduce or eliminate back pain. Here are some of the most effective, along with comments from a few of our patients.
Acupuncture is one of the best-studied alternative therapies for pain relief. After 10 months of lower back pain, which woke me at night and made it impossible to find a comfortable position during the day, I took a friend’s advice and tried acupuncture. I was nervous about the needles, but it really helps. I am not completely pain-free yet, but acupuncture provides tremendous relief. — E.D., CA

Stem Cell Therapy harnesses your body’s own stem cells—the ultimate regenerative mechanism. In November, I had stem cell therapy for chronic back and hip pain. Before treatment, by early afternoon my lower back would begin to ache and continued to get worse as the day went on. I no longer have pain in my lower back or hips, even when I have a busy day! — L.P., NE

Topical DMSO and NSAIDs rubbed into problem areas deliver pain-relieving and anti-inflammatory compounds right where they’re needed. I use DMSO on my lower back almost every day. My wife dislikes the smell but she does not complain because she knows how much it helps me. — Max, GA; I love the topical NSAID Dr. Whitaker prescribed. It is a terrific painkiller, but it does not have the side effects of oral drugs. — Rob, LA

Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP), isolated from your own blood, jumpstarts the healing process and rapidly relieves inflammation. I am so grateful to have found PRP. The pain is almost gone, and I had forgotten how wonderful it is to get a good night’s sleep—my energy and vitality are back. PRP is amazing! — Christine, TX

High-Intensity Laser directs high-energy wavelengths of light that stimulate tissue repair deep into damaged areas. I was playing a lot of golf, and the torqueing motion did a number on my lower back. After several laser treatments at Whitaker Wellness, I’m back on top of my game. — Jay, CA

Prolotherapy is an injection therapy that strengthens the ligaments that hold the vertebrae in place, resulting in better alignment and taking pressure off the nerves. I tweaked my lower back in an intensive exercise class and had pain shooting down my leg. I went to Dr. Whitaker’s clinic for prolotherapy, and over a couple of weeks the pain resolved and never returned. — Louise, CA

Supplements such as curcumin, boswellia, omega-3 fatty acids, UC-II (type II collagen), bromelain, astaxanthin, and ginger work on inflammation pathways to safely reduce pain. I have been using Meriva (curcumin) twice a day for back pain and it has greatly reduced the issue. — Steve, CA; Since I began taking krill oil, I have noticed a huge difference in my back pain and range of motion. — Julie, CA

Chiropractic is a popular manipulative therapy for back pain that many swear by. I hurt my back trying to corral my three-year-old during a cross-country flight, but an exercise injury a few days later was the straw that broke the camel’s back (pun intended). For the next month, I went to my chiropractor twice a week. Slowly but surely, the pain diminished, and I was able to resume the active lifestyle I’m used to. — Liz, CA

Core Strengthening Exercises help stabilize the spine and are perhaps the single best way to prevent back pain. I credit CrossFit training with ending years of chronic lower back pain. I have tried many therapies, but this has provided lasting relief. — Connie, CA
Innovations in Wellness Medicine

Garlic for Blood Pressure and Cardiovascular Health

If you’re interested in lowering your blood pressure and improving your cardiovascular health in a safe, easy, and tasty manner, look no further than garlic. This savory and pungent herb has been employed for millennia in a wide range of medicinal uses. Scientific studies have demonstrated garlic’s blood-thinning, cholesterol-reducing, and blood pressure-lowering effects, making it particularly beneficial for cardiovascular health. In a 2015 meta-analysis of seven clinical trials, garlic supplements were compared to placebo for treating patients with hypertension. Garlic lowered blood pressure by an average of 6.71/4.79 mmHg systolic/diastolic.

Garlic’s cardioprotective properties stem from its sulfur compounds, particularly allicin. To reap the many health benefits of garlic, incorporate a clove or two into your daily diet (be sure to chop or crush it to release the active ingredients). Or look for a high-quality garlic supplement online or in health food stores and use as directed.

Nicotinamide for Prevention of Skin Cancer

If you’re prone to skin cancer, join the crowd. Five million Americans are treated for this condition every year. But there’s some good news. Australian researchers recently discovered that an inexpensive vitamin dramatically reduces the risk of developing non-melanoma skin cancer. They enrolled 386 people, average age 66, who had a history of two or more basal or squamous cell carcinomas. Half of them took 500 mg of nicotinamide (a form of vitamin B3) twice a day and the other half took a placebo. When they were reevaluated after one year, those who took nicotinamide were 23 percent less likely to have developed new skin cancers compared to the placebo group. They also had a 20 percent reduced risk of actinic keratosis, precancerous lesions that can turn into cancer.

Nicotinamide, also called niacinamide and a relative of niacin, is used to treat acne, arthritis, memory loss, and schizophrenia as well. The suggested dose for preventing skin cancer is 500 mg twice a day, taken with food. Although nicotinamide does not cause niacin’s infamous flushing, some people do experience nausea when taking this supplement. It can be ordered by calling 800-810-6655.

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Coming In Future Issues:

- What Works for Neuropathy
- Berberine: Beyond Blood Sugar
- What You Need to Know About Melatonin

Did You Know?

- Dehydration hampers attention and increases driving errors.
- Drinking green tea or lemon juice helps tame garlic breath.
- Babies in homes with pet dogs have healthier gut bacteria and are less prone to asthma and allergies.
- High heels are a common cause of not only foot pain but also ankle, knee, and back problems.
- A Picasso painting recently sold for $179.4 million.
- Entree salads often have more calories than a burger and fries.
- Chamomile tea reduces risk of thyroid cancer.
- Vanilla is America’s favorite ice cream flavor; mint chocolate chip is a distant second.
- Harvard researchers found that meditation dramatically reduced symptoms of serious bowel disorders.
- A Mediterranean diet with extra olive oil or nuts improved cognitive function in older people.
- A large waist is a significant risk factor for diabetes, heart disease, and premature death.