

# Men's Health and Wellness

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## Heart Disease

The number one cause of mortality in men in the United States, diseases of the heart and blood vessels require special attention and are best addressed through preventive strategies. All protocols should include:

- Bioflavonoid sources, from colorful berries such as Hawthorn, Blueberry, Bilberry, or Cranberry. These plant chemicals reduce the inflammation that leads to atherosclerosis, as well as helping to keep vessels dilated and pressure low
- Omega-3 fatty acids are also anti-inflammatory and reduce the risks of stroke and heart attack. Fatty fish such as Salmon, at least three times a week, plus Flax seeds, Walnuts, and plenty of green leafy plants are the best sources. At least 4 grams of omega-3 fats per day is ideal.

Heart disease is affected by three primary factors: the level of **inflammation** in the heart and vessels, blood **lipids** (fats), and blood **pressure**.

**Inflammation** can be addressed by adding the above anti-inflammatory strategies (bioflavonoids and omega-3 fatty acids), but also by ensuring that liver function is optimal and that native antioxidant systems are functioning at their best. Bitter herbs such as **Yarrow** and **Dandelion** are taken before meals, and tonics such as **Red Reishi** mushroom help rebalance liver metabolism and reduce the production of reactive intermediates that can contribute to inflammation in the vessels.

Blood **lipids** (LDL cholesterol and triglycerides) contribute to the creation of hard plaques on the inner lining of the vessels (the arterial intima). If inflammation is present, these fats can deposit themselves in the glass-smooth lining and contribute to heart attack and stroke. One of the best herbs for healthy blood lipids is **Garlic**, at the level of 2-3 cloves per day. Additionally, **Guggul** resin has beneficial effects.

**High blood pressure** can damage vessels, add more inflammation, and eventually affect kidneys, eyes, brain and heart. One can think of strategies to address high blood pressure in three basic patterns:

- **"Excess yang"**, or too much constitutional fire. This may be an individual who responds excessively to stress, reacts violently to obstacles in his path, and has qualities of anxiety and hyperstimulation. In these cases, blood pressure usually spikes with emotions, exhibits a rise in systolic pressure but a relatively stable diastolic, and may vary considerably during the day. Consider a formula with KavaKava and Scullcap to use in emergency situations, and a tonic tea blend that features gentle calmative nervines such as Linden, Scullcap, Motherwort.
- **"Liver heat"** affecting the heart and blood vessels. In these individuals, there isn't as much situational sensitivity, but there is a more constantly elevated pressure and bursts of anger or

intensity, typically associated with some liver congestion. The underlying issue is vascular inflammation (see above) generated by defective liver metabolism, ingestion of irritating substances, or both. Though good policy in all cases, these individuals benefit from particular attention to diet and a reduction in hot foods such as meats, refined grains, and heated oils. Additionally, bitter herbs, **Turmeric** and **Red Reishi** can be helpful in these cases.

- **“Trapped heat”** congests excess energy in the heart rather than letting it circulate freely. These individuals have red faces, large cores, but often skinny legs and arms that are cool to the touch and have little hair due to poor peripheral circulation. In these cases, opening the circulation and opening the emotional body are primary considerations. Aromatic antispasmodics such as **Crampbark** and **Valerian** can help, alongside diaphoretic herbs such as **Linden**, **Yarrow**, and even a little **Rose**.

Depending on the blood pressure reading you are dealing with, a short-term prescription to bring dangerously high levels down in the short term, while the tonic and dietary interventions go to work, can be very important. This can be managed by a conventional antihypertensive agent, or you can try the following tincture formula if there is no history of depression or deep depletion:

Rauwolfia serpentina, Viburnum opulus, Piper methysticum in equal parts. Take 3ml twice daily.

Use caution with the above formula. It works well, but should probably not be used for longer than 6 months or so and is contraindicated in depression.

## **Erectile dysfunction**

This condition is complex and can have a variety of factors coming to bear in the final presentation of ‘erectile dysfunction’. Most often, one should look to circulatory and liver congestion (use opening, **vasorelaxing** remedies such as Yohimbe, Valerian, Crampbark and/or **circulatory** enhancers such as Ginkgo), endocrine or hormonal deficiencies (including **adrenal** insufficiency – use Sarsaparilla, Rhodiola, Ginseng, Ashwagandha), and nervous system excess (use the relaxing **nervines**).

Usually, in men over 40, circulation is the main issue at play (not coincidentally, this can be an issue for women too). A large amount of blood is necessary for the proper function of erectile tissue in the penis.

The second pattern at play is hyper-reliance on the activation of the sympathetic nervous system – basically, conditions of chronic stress. In these cases adaptogens and nervines are the primary treatment, though attention to circulation is always warranted.

**Damiana** is a fantastic herb that, with its bitter, spicy, and minty flavor acts both as a nervine and a circulatory enhancer. **Cocoa** is another – euphoriant, relaxant, and protective to the vasculature. A cup of tea made with a teaspoon of Damiana, a tablespoon of cocoa, and a teaspoon of honey is delicious and quite effective.

## Infertility

Somewhere over 20% of couples who cannot conceive have male infertility to blame. There are some important mechanical considerations involving spermatogenesis to consider first: temperature is very important and restrictive clothing and hot tubs should be strictly avoided. Beyond that, endocrine tonics, adaptogens, and specific herbs that improve the quality of prostatic fluid, increase sperm counts, and improve sperm motility are good additions to a protocol. Since hormonal considerations can be at the root of these issues, one must also consider the liver and the appropriate production of sex hormone binding globulin and the metabolism (breakdown) of male sex hormones themselves. Try adrenal tonics (Ashwagandha, Ginseng, Sarsaparilla) and Schizandra, an excellent hormonal rebalancer that also works on liver and adrenal function. And consider Maca (Lepidium), well researched as an agent to increase sperm counts and motility.

## Prostate issues

**Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).** This condition is a result of the swelling and enlargement of the prostate gland, due to infection or to other unclear causes, and subsequent constriction of the urethra. It can cause symptoms such as dribbling urine, poor flow and difficult urination, painful lovemaking / ejaculation, even ineffective ejaculation and infertility. It is an expression of congestion in the genitourinary system, and responds to **specific treatment** designed to unblock that area (saw palmetto, Pygeum africanum, nettle root and seed, pumpkin seeds), as well as more general **'moving' herbs** (yarrow, e.g.) for symptomatic relief. Sources of beta-sitosterol seem to be able to reduce inflammation in the prostate; here again we see the use of herbs such as nettle root and Northern willow herb (*Epilobium parviflorum*).

**Prostate cancer.** This condition is often linked to similar congestion of the male reproductive system, and should be treated similarly to BPH except for the addition of **liver- and immune-supportive remedies** (milk thistle, red reishi, chaga mushroom, turmeric). Very often prostatic cancers are slow-growing and present little risk of metastasis, so any man contemplating surgery for this condition should weigh the risks of permanent damage, impotence, and infertility against the benefits.

## Sports injuries

Exercise is obviously vital for a variety of issues affecting men's health. So, if there is an injury, the lack of exercise can have unwanted ripple effects! Some basic remedies in the home medicine chest can get the athlete back out again.

Also caused by simple overexertion ("weekend warrior syndrome"), most sports injuries include tendonitis, sprains, and muscular strains. If muscles are involved, I prefer massage and movement. For

tendons and ligaments, a combination regimen of rest, ice, Horsechestnut tincture as an external liniment, and a combination formula of Horsechestnut, Gotu Kola, and Solomon's Seal internally works quite well. If there is nerve pain, characterized by burning and a feeling of radiation, or "travelling", oil of St. Johnswort is very effective applied externally, perhaps even combined with the tincture as a liniment.

## **Materia Medica for Men's Health and Wellness:**

### **Ginseng** (*Panax ginseng*, *Panax quinquefolius*)

This 'king of tonics' has been used for millennia as a general tonic for vitality and reproductive health. It is a diminutive woodland plant, old and wise, a true gift of the forest!

#### **System energetics affected**

Endocrine deficiency, Reproductive deficiency

Also Liver and Digestive deficiency, and general congestion

#### **Specifics**

Korean *Panax ginseng* is much more stimulating and fiery. Use with caution in cases of severe deficiency, as it may be too jarring, or when there are excesses manifesting elsewhere in the body.

American *Panax quinquefolius* does not have these detriments.

#### **Administration**

For medicinal purposes, ginseng is taken in relatively high doses, usually 2-5 grams daily of the whole root, or as a decoction of the powder. Alcohol extracts are useful as well, in ½ to 1 tsp. doses.

### **Rhodiola** (*Rhodiola rosea*)

Powerful, but gentle, adaptogenic and stimulating tonic. It re-enlivens depleted and sluggish constitutions, counteracts fatigue and depression, and enhances immunity.

#### **System energetics affected**

Endocrine deficiency, Nervous system deficiency

**Specifics**

Excellent for safely supporting endurance and stamina. Use for two to four week bursts.

**Administration**

Alcohol tincture, 60 to 90 drops before lunchtime (for a typical 180lb male; can be higher / more often if the person is heavier).

**Ginkgo** (*Ginkgo biloba*)

A premier tonic for the circulatory system, to increase blood flow to the peripheral capillaries and improve oxygenation of all tissue. An invaluable remedy for circulatory congestion and impotence.

**System energetics affected**

Circulatory congestion, Nervous deficiency

**Specifics**

Impotence, cold hands and feet. Helpful as well in cases of memory / cognitive impairment in the elderly. Recent research highlights its effectiveness in cases of anxiety and poor focus.

**Administration**

Standardized extract is the preferred choice for this relatively modern remedy. Although the ancient Chinese used the male nuts, we use the leaves. They make a good tea, but standard therapy uses and extract marked at 24% flavo-glycosides, 60 milligrams, two to four times daily. Even higher doses may be employed in the more *yang*, large male with anxiety disturbances.

**Ashwagandha** (*Withania somnifera*)

This is another excellent root and endocrine tonic for men. It comes to us through the rich Ayurvedic tradition of the Indian subcontinent. It is especially useful for tonifying the reproductive systems of those who also have weak nerves. Also, one of my favorite non-sedating tonics for insomnia.

**System energetics affected**

Endocrine deficiency, nervous deficiency.

**Specifics**

Anxiety, depression, insomnia coupled with adrenal / reproductive imbalance.

**Administration**

Alcohol tincture, ¼ to ½ tsp. two or three times a day.

Root powder, perhaps mixed with milk. ½ to 1 TBS twice daily.

**Sarsaparilla** (*Smilax officinalis*)

What an excellent, enlivening and tasty tonic! It is a shame that original, true 'root' beers are so hard to find these days: we could all benefit from the body-wide boost this herb can bring. It seems to have a special affinity, however, to a man's endocrine and reproductive systems, especially if there is also skin inflammation (psoriasis, eczema, chronic rashes, acne).

**System energetics affected**

Endocrine deficiency, Reproductive deficiency, Liver congestion/Digestive deficiency with skin eruptions

**Specifics**

Look for digestive system weakness to be present as well. Often, this will manifest in the Spring as the body switches gears and readies itself for the working season ahead.

**Administration**

Light decoction, covered, for 30 or more minutes. Combines well with birch bark , dandelion root and eleuthero for a tasty 'root beer'. Take in the spring and fall for renewed vigor.

The tincture can be blended as part of an overall formula, or taken alone at doses of ½ tsp. twice daily.

**Muir Puama** (*Liriosma ovata* / *Ptychopetalum olacoides*)

Also known as 'potency wood', this tropical bark has shown remarkable potential for treating impotence and general reproductive issues. It increases stamina, fertility, and potency.

**System energetics affected**

Reproductive deficiency, general sluggishness without adrenal deficiency, muscular debility

### **Specifics**

Some warn against long-term use of this herb, although it seems perfectly safe. It is never a bad idea to provide additional liver support! No alkaloidal substances have been identified.

### **Administration**

Decoction or alcohol tincture, as needed. Try 1 full teaspoon of the tincture in a little water.

### **Maca** (*Lepidium meyenii*)

The root tuber of a South American plant that usually grows at altitude in the Andes, it's traditionally been used to enhance male fertility as well as an excellent source of digestible starches and proteins – very nutritive.

### **System energetics affected**

Reproductive deficiency

### **Specifics**

Reduced sperm counts, reduced sperm motility, esp. in men with undernourished constitutions

### **Administration**

About 3 grams daily of powdered root, as part of bliss balls or mixed with raw milk or coconut milk.

### **Damiana** (*Turnera aphrodisiaca*)

This herb has a long history of use as a relaxant and an aphrodisiac. It is excellent at releasing tension and letting the mind and body slip into 'something more comfortable'.

### **System energetics affected**

Nervous excess, Reproductive deficiency

### **Specifics**

Combine with rose extract or chocolate for extra power.

### **Administration**

Infusion with honey, alcohol tincture with honey, as needed.

### **Yohimbe** (*Pausinystalia yohimba*)

A powerful hypnotic, Yohimbe can have profound effects on the consciousness. In small doses, it is a strong circulatory stimulant and nervous system relaxant, which makes it a great choice for impotence. Use with caution.

**System energetics affected**

Nervous excess, circulatory congestion and deficiency

**Specifics**

Can be hallucinogenic, and trance-inducing in higher doses. Use extreme caution in cases of hypertension, especially if conventional medication is also being administered (it can reduce the body's ability to downregulate adrenal hormone production, as well as reduce the vasoconstrictive and inhibitory effects of serotonin).

**Administration**

Alcohol extract, ½ teaspoon per dose.

**Saw Palmetto** (*Sereona repens*)

This remarkable berry has proven effective for prostatic infection, enlargement, and cancer. In many milder cases it can relieve symptoms and underlying causes completely, especially if part of a well-crafted formula.

**System energetics affected**

Reproductive congestion, Reproductive deficiency

**Specifics**

The prostate - and to a certain extent the testes and testosterone metabolism

**Administration**

Because of its flavor and difficulty in extraction, the standardized extract is recommended, usually at 90 milligrams a day.

**Northern Willow Herb** (*Epilobium parviflorum*)

This rich source of beta-sitosterol (the plant version of cholesterol) is an excellent local weed that reduces prostatic and urinary inflammation through the modulation of male hormones.

**System energetics affected**

Urinary and reproductive congestion and inflammation

**Specifics**

Prostatitis (infection), benign prostatic hyperplasia (enlargement)

**Administration**

The tincture is taken at doses of ½ to 1 teaspoon three times a day.

**Pumpkin seeds** (*Cucurbita pepo*)



A great snack that is also an excellent remedy for male reproductive congestion. Use raw, or roasted, by themselves or on salads and bread.

### **System energetics affected**

Reproductive congestion, Reproductive deficiency

### **Specifics**

Use alongside Saw Palmetto to address prostate enlargement and congestion. A good idea as a dietary addition for any man over 40.

### **Administration**

Eaten whole.

## **Nettle root** (*Urtica dioica*)

This part of the nettle has incredible decongesting power for the male reproductive system. It shown its martial energy here by effectively helping to clear out prostatic blockage.

### **System energetics affected**

Genito-urinary congestion

### **Specifics**

Combine with Saw Palmetto and pumpkin seeds for prostate issues.

### **Administration**

Light decoction, 8 to 16 oz daily.

## **Hawthorn** (*Crataegus species*)

The leaves, flowers and berries of this tree, also known as the White Thorn, are the best heart tonics available, bar none. The entire circulatory system shows benefit when this herb is administered over long periods. It should always be the first consideration for high blood pressure at its initial stages. And, more subtly, it has the power to begin addressing deep emotional wounds, or long-unexpressed sentiments that may 'weigh heavily on the heart'.

### **System energetics affected**

Cardiovascular excess, deficiency, or congestion.

### **Specifics**

For high blood pressure, combine in a formula with nervous system relaxants, such as linden blossoms, and removers of general congestion, such as yarrow.

### **Administration**

Infusion, 8oz twice daily; or jam, 1-2 TBS daily; or alcohol extract, ½ tsp twice daily.

## **Red Reishi** (*Ganoderma lucidum*, *G. tsugae*)

If Ginseng is the root of kings, this is the mushroom of kings. Prized for its longevity-enhancing power, it is anti-tumor, anti-allergy, revitalizing to the system, and stimulating to immunity. My theory is that part of its strength comes from its strong affinity to the liver, where its metabolism tonifies and normalizes this overworked organ.

### **System energetics affected**

Liver congestion, excess, and deficiency

### **Specifics**

Prostate cancer and other tumors. Seasonal allergies. Hepatitis. HIV.

### **Administration**

Alcohol extract combined with strong decoction. Start with small doses – 10 drops or so – and work up to ¼ tsp 2 or 3 times daily.

## **Yarrow** (*Achillea millefolium*)

The 'herb of Achilles', Yarrow has a long reputation as a warrior's ally. Indeed, every man who works outdoors should become familiar with its ability to instantly stop wounds from bleeding with its astringent action, while it disinfects, too! Internally, Yarrow is a great mover of congestion, diverting stagnant fluids and blood and promoting a healthy, detoxifying sweat.

### **System energetics affected**

Genito-urinary congestion, cardiovascular excess

### **Specifics**

Relieves the painful need to urinate that accompanies prostate swelling. Also, a good fever-reducer.

### **Administration**

Apply the chewed leaves and flowers directly to wounds. Warm infusion for genito-urinary complaints and fever, ¼ oz per 16oz water.

## Therapeutic considerations for Men's protocols:

While men enjoy a disproportionate share of benefits in today's society when compared to women, they are also subject to an ever-increasing amount of stress. In addition, as their role as 'providers' and 'controllers' is coming more in question, men are suffering a crisis of identity and place, which only adds to the general level of stress.

When crafting a protocol for a man, I find that aside from specific issues that may be present, it is always a good idea to follow these principles:

- Tonify the liver. Without it, everything else becomes more susceptible to imbalance. Men have fewer detoxification avenues open to them (notably, no menstruation), and the liver often needs a little love. The liver's role in metabolizing hormones and clearing pro-inflammatory compounds from the system makes it a central player in a wide range of degenerative conditions.
- Strengthen and soothe the nervous system and the adrenal glands. This comes as a result of the increased amount of stress at the root of so many imbalances. Again, stress is closely linked to chronic inflammation.
- Attempt to dissipate any congestion, be it of the reproductive or circulatory systems. Men tend to suppress many things, for whatever reasons (to be strong, because they 'don't matter', etc...). Suppression only leads to blockage, which needs to be gently melted away. This can take time – but it's well worth going slow, as this provides the longest-lasting changes. Take, for example, the "trapped heat" syndrome: warm at the core, red-faced even, but with cold hands and feet, and a rising blood pressure. This profile, all too often seen, can be ameliorated by opening the peripheral circulation with herbal vasodilators, good exercise, and plenty of love and affection.

In general, it may be hard for some men to acknowledge their need for love, nourishment, and connection – after all, isn't America all about the 'individual' and 'making it on your own'? Allowing this realization to come, gently, as part of a nourishing herbal protocol can be the most therapeutic change of all.

This can be helped along by adding other healing modalities to the mix, especially ones that involve touch or physical experiences, such as massage, acupuncture, healing baths and aromatherapy. Interaction and support from a loving friend and companion are also extremely valuable, establishing connections that will nourish body, mind and spirit with Vital Force and a sense of belonging. Exercise, for the many reasons mentioned, is extremely important and the key to maintaining an uncongested system in which chi flows smoothly (Kegel exercises can be an invaluable addition here). And, of course, dietary consideration must always be at the forefront of any protocol, avoiding animal fats and

excessive starches for cardiovascular conditions, eating plenty of green, leafy vegetables for liver and endocrine imbalances, and adding foods such as tomato paste and black cherry juice for prostate problems. In general, to support adequate detoxification and vigor, the diet should be fairly simple, including many steamed vegetables, some whole grains, and high-quality protein from organic chicken and fatty fish (salmon, for example).

If we can help the men we know to live full, joyous, loving, meaningful, hard-working lives, we will be that much closer to conquering the sometimes paralyzing fear that has wreaked so much havoc in the world through the hearts and minds of this culture's men. Our allies, the plants, are ever willing to show us the trail into the woods – and, fortunately, they can be as stubbornly good-natured in that call as we men can be in our own lives. So even if it's only a tasty Sarsaparilla brew in the springtime, we should work hard to build links between men and nature again, to bring a blossoming of beauty back into hearts that may have become hardened.