

“Discovery Stress-Relieving Foods and Herbs”

Webinar Questions Answered by Victoria Retelny, RDN

Please note that these are brief answers to complex questions and are not meant as medical advice. Please seek medical advice from your personal healthcare professional for more complete information.

- Does cortisol raise or lower blood glucose, does cortisol raise or lower insulin? **Cortisol raises blood glucose because it releases stored glucose for energy to take care of the immediate stressor(s). Chronic high cortisol levels can lead to hyperglycemia and T2DM. In turn, cortisol lowers insulin levels by impairing its secretion, therefore decreasing circulating insulin levels in the blood.**
- Always nervous to try things like ashwagandha because I have thyroid dx (graves), do you have any experience with that? **I would be cautious with herbal remedies, in general, when the thyroid function is compromised (either hyper or hypo), as adaptogenic herbs can affect hormones levels in the body and may be contraindicated for thyroid function. There have been reports that it can elevate thyroid functions causing hyperthyroidism.**
- How common is liver damage with ashwagandha use? **According to Consumerlab.com, it's rare that ashwagandha adversely affects the liver, but there have been a few cases in Iceland and a couple in the US with people reporting elevated liver enzymes and injury after taking supplements for 2 – 12 weeks, but it hasn't been shown to lead to liver damage.**
- How do you help your patients find reliable supplements? How do you ensure they are safe and include the beneficial ingredients? Do you use Consumer Lab to recommend specific brands? Any other resources? **Supplements are challenging because they are not regulated by the FDA, therefore, I reinforce the importance of checking labels for third-party verifications (USP, UL, CL and NSF). The NIH Office of Dietary Supplements has a variety of great resources for health professionals, too.**
- Are there any major drug interactions with these herbs you presented today? **Yes, all herbal remedies may affect hormone levels, blood sugar and blood pressure, therefore for patients on blood thinners (Warfarin, Coumadin, etc.), diabetes medications (metformin, etc.) and birth control or fertility medications, I advise them not to use herbal remedies.**
- What are the validated stress outcomes measurements used in the ashwagandha studies? **Outcomes were measured using the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A), Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale -21 (DASS-21), and hormonal changes in cortisol, dehydroepiandrosterone-sulphate (DHEA-S), and testosterone.**
- Is there a good way to mix the ashwagandha into foods get the best effect? **I am not sure if adding ashwagandha to food provide the best effects, but you can add ashwagandha powders or liquid tincture to smoothies, coffee, or soups or broths.**
- Are there any adaptogenic herbs that should not be taken in conjunction with anti-depressants? **Since adaptogenic herbs affect the HPA-axis, I recommend that my patients talk with their mental health**

provider before starting an herbal remedy as there can be contraindications with specific medications, especially anti-depressants.

- Is there any website/reference available that discusses or indicates the contraindication of herbs with prescribed medications, or do you need to research each one individually? **The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health Website's "Herbs at a Glance" is a comprehensive site that offers extensive information on various herbs.**
- What are your recommendations with red wine and cancer (particularly breast cancer) in regard to the Mediterranean diet recommendations? **Red wine contains the potent polyphenol, resveratrol, which has been shown to help fend off ROS and oxidative damage in the cells, however with breast cancer, the risk goes up with alcohol intake, in general. The Mediterranean Diet does make room for a glass of red wine with a meal, however, high risk patients or those who have breast cancer should consult with their oncologist before including red wine in her regular routine.**
- I am not fluent in red wines, what types should we recommend? Does it matter if sweet or dry? **There is type of red wine called Sardinian Cannonau, which has been coined the "Blue Zones Wine". It's made from garnet red ganache grapes, and it supposed to have 2 to 3 times the flavonoids as other wines. Dry red wine is a good bet and as always advise moderation (1 - 5 oz. glass a day for women and 2 - 5 oz. glasses a day for men).**
- For nut allergy patients - what can they choose as a similar nutrient bouquet **For patients with nuts allergies, I recommend soy nuts or peanuts.**
- What amount of apple cider vinegar is needed to be beneficial? **I've seen 1 – 2 Tbsp a day (diluted in water or after a meal) as the recommended amount for health benefits.**
- What are your thoughts on Sea Moss? **Not much, but there are medicinal benefits to sea greens, in general.**
- How much research is there for Rhodiola and health span? **Rhodiola research is limited to smaller studies, but has shown promise on depression, anxiety, physical and mental fatigue and athletic performance.**
- How many times a week is it safe to drink Mushroom Coffee? **There's not a lot of research on Mushroom Coffee out there yet. I advise my patients to practice moderation and since it's lower in caffeine than regular coffee, you may be able to drink more than 400 mg, but be aware that the medicinal mushroom amount can vary in coffee.**
- In terms of fluid consumption, is 50% of body weight based on kg body weight? **No, it's ½ body weight (in pounds) in ounces from fluids, primarily water.**
- What form of magnesium supplementation would you recommend? Such as Mg oxide, citrate, or chloride? **Mg citrate is supposed to be the most bioavailable form.**

- Do you discuss concerns with case reports of organ toxicity with your patients when recommending these supplements? Tricky to outweigh the pros/con with supplementation. **Yes, I let them know the risks involved in supplementation and advise them to research the products they are using.**
- What strains/brands (if able to mention) of probiotics would you recommend for stress? **It tough to target one specific strain of probiotic for stress as just as nutrients, probiotics can have a synergistic effect on the overall health of the microbiome and gut brain axis.**
- Does Reishi stick out as especially evidence-based for helping with stress compared to other mushrooms? **Yes, Reishi mushrooms have a vast body of evidence for their adaptogenic properties. As I mentioned, it's known as the "Mushroom of Immortality" and been revered for centuries in Eastern medicine for its stress-relieving properties, among other health benefits.**
- Please comment on the use of herbs/etc. for chronic illness/autoimmune diseases like thyroid, diabetes, HTN vs healthy persons vs acute illness? **Herbs are contraindicated for people with thyroid disease, diabetes and HTN as they can interfere with medications.**
- Is magnesium supplementation safe for most people or do you recommend blood tests to determine need? **It's always a good idea to have a baseline blood test to determine if there are suboptimal nutrient levels before recommending a supplement.**
- Is it best to take the probiotic supplement before bed so that there is less or no stomach acid present? **I have not heard this to be the case.**
- Are the positive effects the same for fresh herbal teas? Fresh holy basil leaves for instance. **Yes, but the dosages vary based on the form of the herb and the condition it's needed for.**
- Do you know of any specific brands that you like that have 1-2 g/day of EPA + DHA for depression? **I recommend the brand, Nordic Naturals.**
- Regarding intake of fatty fish, why do you think research is consistently positive for eating fatty fish but research about fish oil pills with EPA and DHA is consistently pointing toward its ineffectiveness? **When it comes to nutrients whole food is the first line of defense. It's tough to determine what's in a supplement, absorption rates, etc.**
- Can all the DRIs for the mentioned nutrients/supplements be found on Consumerlab.com? **Yes. You have to have a membership to access the research side of the site, though.**
- Which herb/supplement would you suggest if you only take one? **That's a tough question, but most likely ashwagandha would be my first choice for stress-relieving support.**
- Is morning exercise better, hormonally, to promote stress release, reduction of depression, reduction in cortisol? **Cortisol levels are typically higher in the morning than in the evening, but stress levels can vary throughout the day. I think movement throughout the day is beneficial for managing stress.**

- What is the Best Vitamin D Level in a Fasting Blood Test? **50 nmol (20 ng/mL) or above are considered normal. Too high is not good (over 50 ng/mL) can cause health problems.**
- Is Matcha recommended to drink less servings than loose leaf? **Matcha powder serving sizes is about 1 teaspoon of powder to 2 ounces of hot water, but it's got the same health benefits as other green teas. I recommend using them interchangeably to maximize the health benefits of all green teas.**