



## Herbs for Bone Health, Vitality & Longevity!

### **Bone Health Summit 2022: *Osteoporosis, Osteopenia & Beyond***

We are delighted you participated in the Summit today. This document is an overview of the presentation made by Susan Williams, RH(AHG).

#### **Bone Health**

##### **Dairy, pros & cons**

For many, dairy is a nice way to get calcium into your diet. For others, not so much. Dairy can have sugars and fats that are not welcome. And some are dairy intolerant. Personally, I do great with fermented dairy, like yogurt or kefir, but not so well with milk or ice cream.

##### Non-dairy, foods and herbs

We'll start off our talk today about one of my favorite categories of herbs: Nutritive or Tonic herbs

What is a Nutritive Herb? Its an herb that contains high levels of a particular vitamin or mineral or that contains modest levels of several nutrients.

Today I want to talk about two of my all time favorites: Nettle or *Urtica dioica* and Oat Straw or *Avena Sativa*.

##### **Nettle**

I LOVE Nettle. It has been described as one of the most nutritious and safe herbal remedies around. And just one cup of "super infused" nettle tea can deliver a whopping 500 mg of highly bioavailable calcium! We'll come back to making a super infusion later and I'll demonstrate how easy that is to do.

In contrast, the calcium that comes from many calcium rich foods can be poorly absorbed because other compounds in those foods can block absorption.

Nettle also provides a healthy dose of magnesium, potassium & silica. It also supports alkalinity of the body.

I also love how readily available Nettle is for a water infusion, basically a tea, so if you can boil water, you can make a calcium rich remedy in a matter of minutes.

Dried or fresh Nettle can also be added to many other foods, like soups, stews, broths, casseroles. You can just sprinkle it in as you would any herb or any place where you might use kale or spinach. You'll just

want enough moisture content to reconstitute the Nettle during cooking. Be aware that fresh nettle does have a “sting” to it until it has been lightly cooked, dried or juiced.

The only consideration for this safe herb is that it does have a diuretic effect, which can be drying. And of course, as with all new things you’re adding to your diet, start slow, just a taste, see how you feel.

### **Oatstraw**

So let’s go on to my next herb. Oat straw. Yep. It’s from the same plant as where we get oatmeal. It’s just one of the forms of oats that can be used as food and medicine. Ounce for ounce, oat straw delivers four times more vitamins and minerals than oatmeal. AND it is almost as rich in calcium, magnesium, & iron as nettle. It also has B vitamins and silica.

Oat straw makes has a light, mild flavor and blends really well with other herbs like lemongrass, rose and mint. But it really shines when combined with nettle. This provides a blend that is a little less “green” while still providing that wonderful calcium boost.

I also include Oat Straw when I’m simmering broths. Just be sure to strain it out as the straw is not digestible.

Although not quite as mainstream as Nettle has become, however, Oat straw teas are available from a few organic tea providers.

OR with either of these herbs, you can buy the cut and sifted “loose” version of these, and many herbs from any reputable herb supplier.

I have included a few sources under the Resources section. calculator so you can easily determine how much calcium you’re regularly getting into your diet.

OK, so back to the super infusion. Bring 1-1/2 cup filtered water just to a boil. Put 1/3 cup of dried nettle in a French press and pour near boiling water over the herb. Just let it steep four hours to overnight, then press the herbs down. The tea can be rewarmed or drunk at room temp or over ice. That’s it. Easy peasey. If you have any leftover that you want to save, place in the refrigerator. Drink within a day or two.

### Vitamin D

One other little fun fact before we move on. You may have heard that Vitamin D is critical in calcium absorption and one way to add natural Vitamin d if you like and cook with mushrooms is to just take your fresh culinary mushroom, set them upside down on a plate and put them out in the sun for a few hours. These “suntanned” mushrooms will make Vitamin d that is easily absorbed when you cook and eat them. In one study, after “sunning” shitake mushrooms for 6 hours, the vitamin D content shot from 110 to 46,000 IU per 100 grams! I like Shitake mushrooms as they are relatively available in major grocery stores, they are great for prevention of viral and bacterial infections, good for cardiovascular health, liver support, and there are clinical trials going on for easing side effects of chemotherapy. However just for the Vitamin d, any culinary mushroom will do just fine!

# Vitality & Longevity!

Feeling sluggish, lacking vitality or have immune deficiency? Adaptogens may be the answer! Here are a few popular ones.

## Adaptogens

One of my other favorite categories of herbs is adaptogens. Which quite literally help us adapt to the stresses of everyday life. And we all know that unfettered, continued stress has a damaging impact on our health and vitality. Within adaptogenic herbs, there are basically 3 categories of herb: Stimulating, Balancing and Calming.

We'll start with stimulating adaptogens. As a general rule, if using these, it is best to take them in the morning so as not to interfere with sleep. And start with a low dose to see just how your body will respond. We all are different.

And you will also want to balance them against any caffeinated plants. And no, although coffee can be stimulating, it is not an adaptogen. Caffeine does not modulate stress hormones or have the same benefits. And it can actually end up depleting overall vitality.

So as usual, check in with your health care team as stimulating adaptogens can irritate anxiety, insomnia, hypertension, heart palpitations in some people and they may interact with some medications. And don't use during pregnancy unless under professional supervision.

## Ginseng (stimulating)

Ginseng use has a LONG history. It has been used for over 2000 years in China. One fun thing about this Root is that it is basically shaped like a human body, and having benefits for the whole body is what its touted for.

It can be great for sluggishness, lack of vitality, libido issues. Or when you just feel old. Ginseng has other benefits too, which is why it has been overused. It protects the liver from toxins, may balance blood sugar, aid in depression.

True Ginseng comes in three forms:

Asian White Ginseng, Panax ginseng, which is the crude root

Asian Red Ginseng, the specially cured root that has a reddish tone and is more warming and stimulating

American Ginseng, which is also used as a crude root, tends to be more popular for women and has a slightly gentler action.

In the 80s/90s, ginseng gained fame as an "energy herb" and many companies worked to put the word "ginseng" into many products; things like:

"Siberian Ginseng" which is really Eleuthero, which we'll talk about in a minute

"Indian Ginseng" which is actually Ashwaghandha, which we will ALSO talk about in a minute

"Brazilian" Ginseng" which is Suma, and so on.

Thank goodness the American Herbal Products Association put an end to calling anything that isn't of the Panax family can no longer be labeled as Ginseng.

And a fun story that I recently learned is that American Ginseng became one of the first post-revolutionary war exported trade products. In 1718, a Jesuit priest discovered American Ginseng in the Appalachian Mountains. As China had so overharvested Ginseng, it quickly became a popular and highly desired Post-Revolutionary Trade. And what a trade. The US was averaging 140,000 pounds a year! With the record being 600,000 pounds in 1824!! Daniel Boone was even in on the action, and it is said that Ginseng is where his family fortune originated, not furs and pelts.

Ginseng roots can take up to 50 years to mature, so as wonderful and powerful as Ginseng is, it can be expensive, and it is still overharvested. So be aware of adulterated or poor quality products where the price seems too good to be true.

Ginseng is available by capsule or tincture or dried root.

Stimulating adaptogens can aggravate anxiety, insomnia, hypertension, and heart palpitations in some.

#### **Eleuthero** (stimulating)

Eleuthero is one of the best researched adaptogens around. It's a favorite for reducing stress and increasing energy. A study of 5,000 people in the 1990s showed that Eleuthero significantly improved the response to physical and mental stressors. People taking this herb showed better performance, health, and vitality.

Additionally, Eleuthero improved immune function, lifted depression, protected the liver and improved overall health.

It is readily available in capsule, tincture, and dried root forms. Considerations when trying this herb, high doses (4-6mg) may raise blood pressure, while moderate doses have a more modulating effect. So again, more is not necessarily better.

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#### **Ashwagandha** (calming and balancing)

Known for its ability to nourish nerves, relieve anxiety and stress, Ashwagandha is highly revered in Ayurvedic medicine. Regular use is said to strengthen vital force and make you "strong like a horse." It is an exceptional anti-inflammatory adaptogen making it useful for dealing with chronic pain.

Ashwagandha is somewhat unique in that it has energy increasing effects AND it is a popular sleep aid. The species name *somnifera* means "sleep inducing."

Ashwagandha blends well in decocted teas like chai and blends well with cocoa. The powdered form can be simmered in any "fatty milk" (not necessarily cow's milk) is also available in tincture form.

Ashwagandha is considered generally safe. Watch for rare drug-herb interactions. Don't use during pregnancy without professional supervision. If allergic to nightshade plants (i.e. potatoes, tomatoes) approach a little cautiously as it is in the same family

## Other

### Bitters

By and large we aren't always drawn to bitter tastes. And for good reason. Most poisonous plants have a bitter and acrid taste. Which is especially useful with infants as they tend to "mouth" most things as they explore the world. And the reaction to a bitter taste actually starts in the womb. When something sweet is innocuously injected into amniotic fluid, the baby sucks and swallows. When something bitter is injected, they clamp down their mouth and stop swallowing.

As we grow older, the bitter tastebuds that babies are born with, except those on the tongue, disappear, which is why adults are able to enjoy things like bitter greens, coffee and spicy foods. Bitter herbs have been used to enhance digestion and elimination for thousands of years. How it works is the bitter taste stimulates the vagus nerve, which in turn increases salivation, which stimulates the release of stomach acid and pancreatic enzymes, enhancing the release of bile and increasing gastric motility and lower esophageal sphincter tone. Whew. So basically, bitter tells the brain, which in turn tells the digestive system, "Get Ready! Something's Coming Down and We Need to Deal With It!"

A favorite and highly available classic bitter is Dandelion. The whole plant is useful. You can have the greens and flowers in salad and the root used fresh or dried as tea. The scientific name *Taraxacum* is actually an old word for "bitter herb." So putting some bitters greens into your first course salad is a great, easy way to "get the party started."

Or taking a little bitters tincture or spray 10-15 minutes before a meal can be really useful in helping the process and reducing bloating or gas after the meal. Tincture can be taken as a dropperful under the tongue or in a little sparkling or plain filtered water, as preferred.

As we have heard several other conference presenters attest, equally important to the quality and type of foods you ingest, is whether or not you're actually digesting it and having the vitamins and nutrients available.

And as we age, digestion naturally slows down so considering a "bitter boost" before the main meal of the day is a great way to jump start the digestion process.

### Medicinal Mushroom – Reishi

Reishi is often called the "mushroom of immortality" and is the top seller in the medicinal mushrooms category of dietary supplements. According to Dr. Christopher Hobbs, one of the nation's leading mycology experts, Reishi:

- Benefits the heart
- Helps regulate cholesterol
- Good for blood pressure
- Good for blood sugar management
- Retards viral growth
- Reduces inflammation and free radicals
- Activates immune function
- Inhibits tumor growth

- Relieves pain
- Protects the liver
- Relieves symptoms of anxiety, insomnia & depression
- Improves cognition function
- Improves energy
- Benefits the lungs & respiratory tract

The cooked, dried & finely powdered fruiting body can be take once or twice daily in a tea. Can also be taken as a capsule or slices of the dried fruiting body can be simmered in broths or soups.

If interested in Mushrooms, Paul Stamet’s 2019 Documentary Fantastic Fungi on Netflix may not only change how you see Mushrooms, it may also change how you see our relationship with the world. His work is extraordinary.

## Resources

There are a lot of great books on herbal medicine. Here a few of my favorites that I find high really accessible and useful:

- De La Foret *Alchemy of Herbs: Transform Everyday Ingredients Into Foods & Remedies That Heal* Hay House Inc 2017
- Groves, Maria Noel *Body Into Balance: An Herbal Guide to Holistic Self Care* Storey Publishing 2016
- Hobbs, Christopher *Christopher Hobbs’s Medicinal Mushrooms: The Essential Guide* Storey Publishing 2020
- Low Dog MD, Tieraona *Healthy At Home: Get Well & Stay Well Without Prescriptions* National Geographic Society 2014

There are also many places to buy quality, organic herbs and supplements. These are a few places I shop:

- MountainRoseHerbs.com
- GaiaHerbs.com
- HerbPharm.com
- TraditionalMedicinals.com
- HostDefense.com (Paul Stamet’s Mushroom supplements)

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