

Hormone Havoc

THERE ARE CERTAIN TIMES OF THE YEAR WHEN HORMONAL IMBALANCE CAN SEEM MORE CHALLENGING. IF YOUR HORMONES ARE MAKING YOU AS MOODY AS THE WINTER WEATHER, THEN HERE ARE SOME GREAT NATURAL REMEDIES TO HELP GET YOUR HORMONES AND YOUR DEVEANOUR BACK INTO BALANCE!

As with all things in life, nature provides us with everything we need to keep ourselves in good health and there are many options to seek out when it comes to hormone balance. In particular, there are a number of herbal extracts and nutritional supplements that can be of help, and let's not forget that diet can play a big part in your hormone puzzle too.

Approximately three out of every four menstruating women experience some form of PMS. It has been estimated that women affected by PMS experience almost 3000 days of severe symptoms. That's over eight years of a woman's life! Treatment of PMS can range from making lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise, to taking anti-depressants or hormone replacement therapy for more severe cases. The contraceptive pill is often used to control PMS; however, it is not suitable for all women, and this is where one unique oil could prove to be highly beneficial...

Krill oil

First things first, what are krill? Krill are tiny, shrimp-like crustaceans that live in the cool, pure waters of the Antarctic and measure approximately two inches. They form the most abundant living organism on the planet. Scientists believe the total weight of all the Antarctic krill is more than the total weight of all the people on Earth. In fact, only 0.0375 per cent of total krill in the Antarctic are fished annually.

We asked **Marianna Sulic**, Registered Nutritional Therapist at **Cleanmarine Krill Oil** to explain why krill oil is of nutritional value. Marianna said; "Krill oil is a powerful source of omega-3 and is considered to be the more potent and pure option to fish oil. Like humans, fish cannot make omega-3. Instead they must ingest it by eating krill and other algae and plankton sources. Therefore, by taking krill oil you know you are getting the fastest and purest delivery of omega-3 possible, surpassing

traditional, highly-processed fish oils."

Science in action...

One particular nutritional supplement, **Cleanmarine Krill Oil for Women**, which contains krill oil, rosemary oil, vitamin D3 and B-vitamins, was recently used in an exciting new Irish pilot study (to read this study, visit www.bit.ly/LPqj5q), which investigated its effectiveness at reducing the most common psychological and physical symptoms of PMS. This study was conducted over four months and involved Irish women who suffered from some or all of these symptoms; migraine, fatigue, insomnia, bloating, food cravings, skin outbreaks and forgetfulness. The results were very promising, as at the end of the three months there was an average of 69 per cent improvement in symptoms.

Who would think that a tiny sea creature could help so many women find relief from their PMS symptoms? And of course, experts are also suggesting that this omega-3 rich oil could equally help smooth over hormonal symptoms associated with the menopause.

Herbal extracts

When it comes to herbal extracts, you really need to know that the herbs you have selected are the right match for your symptoms, and that they won't interfere with any medications that you are already taking. So do seek the advice of a herbalist or your GP before embarking on a herbal regime. It's also worth just starting with one or two extracts and giving them at least two to three months to work, as some herbs can take time to have an effect; but it's worth the wait, as the results can be long-lasting. As with all herbs, make sure you buy the licensed herbal remedies (THRs) to ensure you are getting the correct dosage, based on many years of research.

We asked **Suzie Sawyer**, expert Nutritionist at **Schwabe Pharma**, who have an excellent range of herbal remedies, which herbs she would recommend for helping with hormonal balance. Here's what she told us about her three choices – agnus castus, St. John's wort and passion flower...

Agnus castus

Also called vitex, chaste berry or monk's pepper, agnus castus is a large shrub native to southern Europe, and is generally the herb of choice for premenstrual symptoms. It appears to have a balancing effect on the female sex hormones by working on the pituitary gland. This in turn reduces the production of follicle-stimulating hormone in the first half of the cycle and

increases luteinising hormone in the second half of the cycle. Therefore, the ratio of oestrogen to progesterone becomes more balanced.

This herb helps to smooth out menstrual irregularities, certainly within three cycles. In addition, agnus castus helps to reduce the production of the hormone prolactin, which aids milk production during pregnancy. This will, therefore, reduce breast tenderness premenstrually. Research has also shown that agnus castus may reduce the build-up of the



MAGNESIUM FIGHTS CRAVINGS

Health pioneers **BetterYou**, whose own best-selling magnesium range has won numerous industry awards, say that the health properties of magnesium are widespread. **Andrew Thomas**, Founder and Managing Director at **BetterYou**, said: "Women's monthly rises in oestrogen volumes commonly cause sugar cravings and insulin imbalance, which are both major contributors to PMS. By increasing magnesium intake you can help to relieve PMS-related symptoms such as headaches, cramping, bloating, dizziness, sugar cravings and low energy levels."

Andrew is certainly on to something, and this might explain the link between premenstrual cravings for chocolate, as chocolate with high cocoa solids contains high levels of magnesium, and according to research magnesium is at its lowest around the time of menstruation. So reaching for the Green and Blacks might not be for emotional reasons; your body is actually cleverly looking for a way to top-up on magnesium!

A diet review from 1997 found that women suffering from PMS were following diets that were 275 per cent higher in refined sugar and 77 per cent lower in magnesium. Andrew comments; "We find the link between magnesium and reduced PMS symptoms fascinating, and call for further studies to look into this potential new area for magnesium use."

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womb lining, thereby potentially moderating menstrual flow. Agnus castus needs to be taken throughout the month, not just during the second half of the cycle, and can be effective very quickly.

St John's wort

St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) was so called because it was named after St John the Baptist, as it was traditionally collected on St John's Day, which is June 24th. It is one of the most thoroughly researched, natural anti-depressants, and therefore very useful when battling the monthly low moods. St John's wort extract is chemically complex, which means its mode of action is not clearly understood. However, St John's wort appears to work in the same way as certain prescribed medication, in that it helps to retain more serotonin, the neurotransmitter responsible for mood, in the system.

However, its mode of action is much gentler; therefore potential side-effects are reduced. Around 70 per cent of serotonin is actually produced in the gut and not the brain, therefore those with digestive disorders are often low in serotonin and suffer from low moods.

St John's wort does interact with a number of pharmaceutical drugs, most specifically the contraceptive pill, as it reduces the effectiveness, therefore the two cannot be used together. It is also important to look for an extract containing a



minimum of 250mg of the plant extract.

Passion flower

Passion flower (*Passiflora incarnata* L.) was known by the early herbalists as a 'nerve debility tonic', since it was prescribed to help combat the stresses and strains of modern living. Indeed, increased anxiety is one of the more common symptoms of PMS. Passion flower contains alkaloids, which are considered to be the main active ingredients and are mildly sedative, helping the body to relax and become better able to cope with stress.

Passion flower seems to be more effective when taken over a period of a month. However, since sleep may also be disrupted as part of PMS, taking some passion flower before bedtime seems to be effective in aiding a restful night, and tends to work quickly. If taking in tablet form, always look for around 400-450mg per tablet, and it should not be used over a long period of time. Symptoms should certainly have improved after one month of continuous usage. In addition, although there is no clinical data available for taking passion flower alongside other pharmaceutical sedatives, it would seem prudent not to use both at the same time.

Try These!

From BetterYou

■ Magnesium Flakes

From Schwabe Pharma

■ PremHerb ■ KarmaMood ■ RelaxHerb

From Cleanmarine

■ Krill Oil for Women

Read this book!

■ *Premenstrual Syndrome: The Essential Guide* published by Need2Know Books.

Healthy living for healthy hormones

It's all good and well taking a few supplements to help smooth over your hormonal hiccups, but you'll get the most long-term benefits if you also focus on making a few dietary and lifestyle changes too. For more information about what to change, what to eat, what to avoid and how to piece it all together, then check out the book *Premenstrual Syndrome: The Essential Guide*, which contains all the relevant nutrition and lifestyle info, recipes and health tips for achieving a life with happy hormones!