

Chapter 1

Healing Foods for Women and Men

In This Chapter

- ▶ Using foods to treat or minimize common health complaints
- ▶ Discovering important nutrients and the foods to find them in
- ▶ Trying out a variety of recipes for your health

If you eat, this chapter is for you. Every time you choose one food over another, you make a decision that affects your health. As a nutritionist, I've witnessed the deterioration in health that poor-quality, empty-calorie foods can cause. I've also seen that a change in diet can produce a sometimes dramatic turnaround in how a person feels. So why not take advantage of the healing properties of foods? This chapter tells you how to use certain foods to ameliorate or prevent some of the aches, pains, and health conditions common to men and women, and it provides you with some great recipes, too.

Recipes in This Chapter

- ▶ Puree of Green Soybean Soup
- ▶ Artichokes with Mediterranean Garlic Sauce
- ▶ Turkish Buckwheat Salad
- ▶ Hot Flash Fruit Compote
- ▶ Two-Fisted Tuna on Toast
- ▶ Quick and Easy Cajun Okra
- ▶ Don Juan's Oyster Stew



Healing Foods for Women

Anatomy books 100 years ago showed the male body in detail but delicately omitted illustration of the female form and its more private parts. The female body was thought of as a sort of lesser version of male physiology. Some physical complaints were assumed imaginary or simply emotional.

Yes, we've come a long way since these Victorian times. Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is now acknowledged as an identifiable medical condition with various protocols for treatment. The word "menopause" can now be mentioned in polite society, and it isn't the end of the world if people notice you

perspiring from a hot flash. There's also a new respect for subtle differences in female anatomy; for example, women's arteries are more delicate than men's, requiring special care during heart surgery.

However, these are recent advances, and we still don't have all the answers. Fortunately, you can do much to ensure your well-being by choosing the right foods to eat. This section shows you how nourishing foods can support female health.



As a woman, you need certain nutrients in particular for hormonal health and normal reproductive function. Table 1-1 lists a variety of nutrients and the foods you can find them in. This list gives you a wide range of choices for everyday good eating.

Table 1-1 Top Nutrients and Best Foods for Women	
<i>Nutrient</i>	<i>Best Foods</i>
B-complex	Meats, fish, and grains, such as brown rice and oats
Beta-carotene	Orange and dark green fruits and vegetables, such as butternut squash and collard greens, and organic liver
Boron (a trace mineral)	Apples, pears, dates, almonds, hazelnuts, broccoli, legumes, and honey
Calcium	Yogurt, kale, kidney beans, canned salmon and sardines with the bones, and chicken soup cooked with the bones
Choline	Egg yolks, organ meats, whole wheat, fish, and legumes
Copper	Organic liver, seafood, beans, and collards
Folic acid	Pork, organic liver, trout, yogurt, lentils, peas, avocado, asparagus, artichokes, beets, boysenberries, cantaloupe, and pistachios
Inositol	Whole grains, citrus, blackstrap molasses, fish, and legumes
Iodine	Seafood, seaweed, and iodized salt
Iron	Meats, fish, and grains, such as brown rice and oats
Lecithin	Egg yolks, organ meats, whole wheat, citrus, and nuts
Magnesium	Shrimp, halibut, whole grains, kale, lima beans, black-eyed peas, eggs, almonds, beets, plantains, bananas, and pumpkin and sunflower seeds
Niacin	Meats, poultry, fish, peanuts, brown rice, and dates
Phosphorus	Fish, meats, poultry, eggs, legumes, whole grains, and nuts
Potassium	Meats, whole grains, legumes, bananas, and sunflower seeds

Nutrient	Best Foods
Selenium	Brazil nuts, seafood, meats, eggs, whole grains, and sesame seeds
Vitamin A	Orange and dark green fruits and vegetables, such as butternut squash and collard greens, and organic liver
Vitamin B6	Meats, seafood, beans, peas, lentils, whole grains, and kale
Vitamin C	Sweet peppers, papaya, citrus, kiwi, alfalfa sprouts, and cantaloupe
Vitamin D	Fatty fish, such as salmon, sardines, and herring, and egg yolks
Vitamin E	Extra-virgin olive oil and other unrefined vegetable oils, whole grains, eggs, sweet potatoes, leafy green vegetables, nuts, and seeds

PMS-friendly foods

An estimated 97 percent of females have PMS at some point in life. For about 40 percent of these women, symptoms are significantly intense, and for about 5 percent, PMS disrupts their usual routines for a day or two each month. Yet simple remedies for various symptoms of PMS abound. You can use food to balance hormones and increase or diminish their production, thereby taming monthly woes.

As many as 150 symptoms of PMS have been identified, covering a range from sugar cravings and crying spells to migraines and backache. These symptoms are commonly grouped into various categories, each associated with specific nutritional deficiencies that probably developed over a period of many years. Each group of symptoms can be treated with specific dietary changes. Take a look at some of the most common problems.

Irritability, nervous tension, mood swings, and anxiety

Irritability, nervous tension, mood swings, and anxiety are all symptoms characteristic of estrogen dominance, which occurs when your body makes too much of this hormone in relation to progesterone.

Your body may be producing excess estrogen, but estrogen can accumulate in the system in several other diet-related ways. If your body is lacking B-complex vitamins, for example, the liver can't perform its normal function of inactivating excess estrogen. If you're lacking fiber, estrogen in the process of being excreted via the intestines can be reabsorbed back into the bloodstream. And estrogen in the food supply — in meats and dairy products from animals raised with supplemental hormones — can add to your own supply of estrogen. If you're suffering from PMS, make sure to eat these foods only if they're organic.



What's going on in there?

PMS is triggered by an imbalance in sex hormones. These hormones direct a woman's monthly menstrual cycle. In the first half of the month, estrogen output is on the rise, and then it rapidly declines at ovulation. Then progesterone production kicks in and increases in the days leading up to your period. However, output can vary, and too much or too little of a hormone at the wrong time can trigger PMS symptoms.

Your hormone production may be off for many reasons, including taking birth control pills, gynecological problems such as endometriosis or fibroids, multiple childbirths, lack of exercise,

stress, and simply being over age 30. However, it's also more than likely that what you're eating is affecting your cycle.

Normal hormone production depends upon having a ready supply of certain vitamins, minerals, and, yes, fats — both essential fatty acids and saturated fats. When you consume saturated fats, such as those found in butter and animal foods, your body converts them into reproductive hormones. This is why women who diet or exercise themselves into a state of extremely low body fat stop having their periods, a medical condition known as *amenorrhea*.



Organic produce is also highly recommended. Regular produce may be sprayed with pesticides that mimic estrogen. While the body quickly metabolizes natural estrogens, the synthetic estrogen-like compounds that are byproducts of pesticides tend to accumulate in body tissue. These can be potent at even low levels, especially when several are present. Such compounds can upset your own hormone balance.

The emotional symptoms of PMS can also be triggered by rapid drops in blood sugar, as well as low levels of *endorphins*, brain chemicals that make you feel that all is right with the world. To help stabilize your blood sugar, eat a natural foods diet and give yourself sufficient protein. Such foods also provide B-complex vitamins, minerals, and fiber, and these ingredients are free of added hormones.



Go out of your way to eat foods that contain these nutrients: B complex, choline, inositol, magnesium, vitamin B6, vitamin C, and zinc. (Table 1-1, earlier in this chapter, lists foods that are high in these nutrients.) Foods that contain phyto-estrogens also help tame emotions. Puree of Green Soybean Soup is a delicious way to increase your intake. (The later section “Munching your way through menopause” explains phytohormones.) Flavonoids also help balance hormones.

Puree of Green Soybean Soup

In this soup, the mild flavor of fresh soybeans combines well with the more familiar taste of lima beans. Soybeans supply phyto-estrogens that help balance hormones, while lima beans, which are exceptionally high in magnesium, help quell PMS emotions. This soup makes a refreshing and slightly tart starter course.

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour, 20 minutes

Yield: 6 servings

2 cups fresh lima beans, or 1 cup dried lima beans

1 quart filtered water

2 cups green soybeans, removed from pod

2½ cups chicken broth

1 teaspoon lemon juice

½ cup buttermilk

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Seasoned Japanese rice crackers (optional)

- 1 Put the lima beans in a medium saucepan, and add water to cover. Cover the pan and simmer until tender, 15 to 20 minutes if using fresh beans, and 45 minutes to 1 hour if using dried beans.
- 2 In the meantime, bring 1 quart water to a boil. Add the soybeans, lower heat to simmer, and cook, covered, until tender, about 10 to 15 minutes.
- 3 Drain both pots of beans. Put the beans in a food processor and puree, adding some of the chicken broth if needed to facilitate the pureeing.
- 4 Put the pureed beans, remaining chicken broth, and lemon juice in a medium saucepan. Heat the soup on low heat for 10 minutes, until it just simmers. Remove from heat.
- 5 Stir in the buttermilk. Season to taste with sea salt and pepper. Pour into preheated individual soup bowls, and, if desired, serve with seasoned Japanese rice crackers.



Cravings for carbohydrates

In the five or ten days before you begin your period, you may be especially hungry for breads of all kinds, chocolate cake, and any cookie you lay eyes on. Elevated insulin levels may be the cause. Insulin is the hormone that enables your body to store sugar in your cells for ready energy later. Excess

insulin causes your cells to rapidly absorb the sugar. Once this sugar is inside the cells, your blood sugar drops, sometimes suddenly if you've eaten a lot of sugar quickly. You feel fatigued, dizzy, shaky, and faint, and have a headache. This is the moment you decide that you can't live without lemon meringue pie.



When you crave sweets or carbs, have healthy ones, such as a couple of whole-grain crackers topped with nut butter, so that you give your system some protein and fat along with the carbs. This combination helps steady blood sugar and even helps prevent weight gain. Also, sometimes a craving for sweets masks a craving for protein. Give yourself a little chicken breast and some vegetables and then take note of whether you still have a strong urge for pie.

For carbohydrate cravings, focus on foods that contain these nutrients: B complex, magnesium, omega-3 essential fatty acids, and vitamin E. For foods that contain these nutrients, refer to Table 1-1, earlier in this chapter.

Fluid retention, swelling with associated weight gain, and breast tenderness

Forty percent of women with PMS experience some bloating. Reproductive hormones that are out of balance can hamper the kidneys' ability to manage sodium and fluid levels in the body. You can end up with swollen hands and feet or difficulty cinching your belt. High insulin levels and vitamin B6 deficiency can also cause fluid retention.



To reduce bloating, minimize your intake (or completely avoid) salt and concentrated sweets, including refined white sugar, honey, and maple syrup, as well as foods made with these. Increase foods rich in potassium, such as bananas, and take advantage of the diuretic properties of certain foods, such as parsley.



These three nutrients are especially helpful: magnesium, omega-6 essential fatty acids, and vitamin B6. (To find the foods you need, refer to Table 1-1, earlier in this chapter.)

Feeling blue and depression

In this group of symptoms related to depression, other possible complaints can include weepiness, confusion, insomnia, and forgetfulness. Such problems are again the result of hormone imbalance — in this case, a predominance of progesterone, which can act as a depressant. Low levels of certain neurotransmitters in the central nervous system and low blood sugar can also cause these problems.



Like your mother said, eat breakfast and regularly scheduled meals to keep your blood sugar steady. You also need these special nutrients to help decrease depression, plus phyto-estrogens and flavonoids: B complex, essential fatty acids, magnesium, and potassium. (For tips on what to eat, flip ahead to the section “Munching your way through menopause,” or turn back to the food list in Table 1-1.)

Treating menstrual problems with food

Even if you have virtually no troubling symptoms of PMS, other medical problems can occur once menstruation begins. Like many women, you may experience abdominal cramping for the first few days of your cycle. Your menstrual flow may be particularly heavy or especially light. In these cases, a change in diet can greatly improve how you feel.

Cramps and lower back pain

Cramps are a very common part of the package when you start having menstrual difficulties. Along with abdominal cramping, you may also feel pain in the inner thighs and lower back. In more severe cases, women also experience nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and heavy bleeding.

These symptoms can be caused by an imbalance in a particular group of hormone-like compounds called *prostaglandins*. One sort of prostaglandin promotes expansion of blood vessels and muscles. Another sort, the Series II prostaglandin, promotes contraction. When Series II prostaglandins dominate, cramping can result as blood vessels within the uterus and the muscles surrounding the uterus contract. Sodium and fluid retention also do their share in causing menstrual pain.



Red meat and dairy foods promote the production of Series II prostaglandins. These foods contain arachidonic acid, which converts to the Series II prostaglandins. Beef contains the most arachidonic acid, lamb and pork somewhat less, and chicken and turkey the least of all. If you want to include meat in your meals but are suffering from menstrual cramping, eat poultry rather than beef. If your cramps persist, go vegetarian for a few days before you start your period and during it.



Choose protein sources such as fish, beans, and whole grains rather than red meat. Avoid milk products and processed cheese, which are high in sodium (sodium promotes fluid retention and adds to your discomfort). Use nondairy nut and soy milks instead. Eat fresh fruits and vegetables for fiber. Avoid refined sugar.

Be sure to eat sufficient amounts of the following nutrients, found in the foods listed in Table 1-1 earlier in this chapter: calcium, magnesium, and omega-6 essential fatty acids.

Heavy menstrual flow and related anemia

If your menstrual flow is infrequent or sporadic, you may experience heavy menstrual bleeding at times, which in turn may lead to anemia and iron deficiency, leaving you tired and pale. Besides iron, other important nutrients are vitamin C and the flavonoids, both of which help strengthen fragile capillary walls and thus prevent excess bleeding. You may also benefit from including flaxseed and flaxseed oil in your meals. Research shows that flaxseed can act as a menstrual regulator, restoring normal timing of the menstrual cycle.

To replenish your blood supply, you need the following nutrients: B complex, copper, iron, vitamin A, and vitamin C. (See Table 1-1 earlier in this chapter for recommended foods that contain these nutrients.)



Anemia can be a serious medical condition. If fatigue and pallor persist, consult a physician.

Eating for two

There's no better time to begin eating quality foods than during pregnancy, when what you eat also affects another's life. The first eight weeks of pregnancy are especially critical, when your baby's kidneys, heart, lungs, eyes, and mouth are beginning to form.

Begin by following these guidelines:

- ✔ **You need protein, essential fatty acids, and complex carbohydrates.** Eat natural, unrefined, and unprocessed foods, including grains, beans, eggs, nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables, and meats, poultry, and fish as free of toxins as possible. Organic foods should be the rule rather than the exception.
- ✔ **Eat several small meals throughout the day.** Large meals can be more difficult to digest.
- ✔ **Avoid caffeine, sugar, and drugs.** Caffeine is found in sodas, teas, and chocolate. Eliminate all alcohol, tobacco products, and any over-the-counter drugs (other than those prescribed by a physician) or illegal drugs. If you use these, a miscarriage or a birth defect in your child can result.

Getting the right amount of calories

When you're pregnant, you need about 300 more calories a day than you're used to. This is what a growing baby requires. Of course, the extra calories should not come from candy, chips, pizza, or ice cream. Increase your protein intake significantly to at least 100 grams a day, well beyond the usual recommendation of 65 grams daily. Protein is the building block of body tissue.



Most women gain between 20 and 40 pounds during pregnancy. If, by your fourth month, you have already gained 30 pounds, you may need to cut back on your eating. But never, under any circumstances, go on a low-calorie diet when you're carrying a child. Your baby could have a low birth weight and be weaker and more susceptible to disease. Delayed physical and mental development can also result, and such a diet can leave you exhausted and unhealthy.



Always consult with your doctor before making radical changes in your diet while pregnant and before taking nutrient and herbal supplements.

Getting enough calcium

During pregnancy, you need about 1,000 milligrams a day of calcium, but most prenatal vitamin supplements contain only up to 25 percent of that. You'll probably need to take a supplement, as well as eat calcium-rich foods, including organic yogurt and other dairy products, almonds, and blackstrap molasses.



To increase your absorption of calcium, be sure to consume foods that supply vitamin D, such as fatty fish and egg yolks. Alternatively, get 15 minutes of sun exposure each day. Your body can use sunlight to manufacture vitamin D.

Feasting on folic acid

Folic acid helps prevent birth defects, especially those that affect the brain, spine, and nervous system. It also plays an essential role in the formation of DNA and RNA, the genetic material that controls cell division and replication and promotes the production of oxygen-carrying red blood cells. If you're pregnant or nursing, you need about 800 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid a day (1 microgram is one millionth of a gram). Fortunately, nature provides some delicious sources, which are listed in Table 1-1 earlier in this chapter.

You may also need to take a supplement, especially if you used an oral contraceptive before becoming pregnant, which can deplete folic acid.

Artichokes with Mediterranean Garlic Sauce

Artichokes, an excellent choice of folic acid as well as other B vitamins, contain a wide variety of other nutrients important for female health — calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium, and some zinc. Even slowly nibbling one of these thistles at the end of an anxious day can be quite soothing.

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 20 minutes, plus time to cool

Yield: 2 servings

2 medium globe artichokes

1 quart filtered water

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

3 cloves garlic, 1 clove minced

2 tablespoons commercial mayonnaise,
preferably free of hydrogenated oil

2 tablespoons plain yogurt

1 teaspoon lemon juice

- 1 Snap off the artichoke's tough outer leaves. Using a paring knife, cut off the stem and trim the bottom to an even round shape with a flat base. Cut 1 inch from the top of the remaining leaves.
- 2 Sit the artichokes upright in a medium saucepan. Add the water, vinegar, and 2 cloves unminced garlic.
- 3 Cook, covered, on medium heat for 20 minutes or until a leaf can be easily pulled out. Remove from heat and let cool to room temperature.
- 4 In the meantime, combine the mayonnaise, yogurt, lemon juice, and one clove minced garlic in a small bowl; whisk until well blended.
- 5 Remove the artichokes from the cooking liquid and drain well. Place each artichoke on a serving plate. Dip each artichoke leaf into the sauce and relax while you enjoy the slow-paced ceremony of artichoke eating.



Fiber

The female hormone progesterone, essential for providing an environment in which the fetus can thrive, has a tendency to relax the bowel muscles during pregnancy, which can result in constipation. Don't take a laxative. Instead, rely on prune juice and high-fiber foods. Consult a doctor if that doesn't work.



A wide range of foods contain fiber: apples, barley, beans, bean sprouts, berries, broccoli, brown rice, buckwheat, carrots, corn, kale, lentils, mangoes, oats, okra, papaya, pears, peas, popcorn, prunes, and whole wheat.

Essential fatty acids (EFAs)

Essential fatty acids, or EFAs, are the kind of fats that are good for you. They're critical for the normal formation of membranes, the outer part of every cell in the body. The brain of a growing fetus also requires EFAs, as they make up about 60 percent of brain tissue. The estimated optimal daily doses are 9 grams of omega-6 fatty acids and 6 grams of omega-3 fatty acids. A diet high in plant foods, including nuts, seeds, and unrefined vegetable oils, can provide what you need. Taking 1 to 2 tablespoons a day of flaxseed oil, especially high in the omega-3 fatty acids, is another good way to increase your intake.



As you increase your intake of EFAs, be sure to also increase your intake of antioxidants.

Iodine

Pregnancy requires at least 175 micrograms of iodine a day. (Take a look at the list in Table 1-1, earlier in this chapter, for food sources.) You can eat sea food and seaweed to obtain this. During pregnancy, limit your salt intake to 1 teaspoon a day.

Iron

The requirement for iron during pregnancy is 30 milligrams a day. Foods that contain iron include beets, blackstrap molasses, clams, legumes, liver, nuts, oysters, raisins, seaweed, and seeds.

Avoid drinking coffee and tea, caffeinated and decaffeinated, which increase urination and flush iron out of the system.

Magnesium

The recommendation for magnesium is about 350 milligrams a day. All green vegetables contain magnesium. (For specific suggestions, refer to Table 1-1, earlier in this chapter.)

Zinc

During pregnancy, you require 15 milligrams of zinc daily. Oysters are far and away the richest source of zinc. Enjoy these cooked. You can find other foods that contain zinc in Table 1-1.

Medicinals for morning sickness

Ginger works as well for morning sickness as it does for seasickness. Grate a half-inch of ginger root into a cup filled with boiling water. Steep for 5 minutes before drinking. Have this

tea every morning before breakfast. Eating little snacks throughout the day can also help a queasy stomach.



Foods to avoid during pregnancy

Certain foods that are relatively harmless when you're not pregnant can pose serious dangers to your body when you are. Stay away from foods that may carry various bacteria or parasites, such as

- ✓ Raw fish, including sushi and seviche
- ✓ Runny eggs
- ✓ Pâtés and soft cheeses such as blue cheese
- ✓ Unpasteurized milk, cheese, and juice



Also avoid cabbage, chilies, garlic, onions, red peppers, and other spicy or gas-forming foods if you're already sensitive to them.

In general, stay away from all herbal teas. Many can interfere with pregnancy.

After the baby arrives

Mother's milk is far superior nutritionally to baby formula. Of course, some of everything you eat or take into your body goes into your breast milk, and eventually into your baby. So if you're nursing, watch what you eat. It's a good idea to continue avoiding the foods, chemicals, and other substances that were dangerous for your fetus.

As a nursing mother, you also need to increase your calorie intake by about 500 calories a day compared to your pre-pregnancy calorie intake. And certain nutrients are especially important — all the B vitamins, including niacin, riboflavin, and thiamin, as well as calcium, iodine, and essential fatty acids.

Munching your way through menopause

Women who enter menopause with adequate reserves of vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients pass through this transition with fewer symptoms than do women who reach midlife physically depleted and poorly nourished. Even if menopause is years away, you'll thank yourself later if you improve your eating habits now.

Symptoms of menopause are most dramatic during the year or two leading up to menopause, the phase called *perimenopause*. As in PMS, symptoms are the result of hormone imbalances. You may have abnormally high levels of estrogen as compared with progesterone or vice versa. Symptoms such as irritability, anxiety, depression, and “menopausal rage” can occur. Lowered estrogen levels can also affect memory. In addition, the body’s ability to regulate temperature may go on the fritz like a broken thermostat, triggering hot flashes.

Food is a powerful tool for dampening and even preventing these annoyances. And what you decide not to eat is just as important.

Vitamins E, A, C, and the Bs

Vitamin E, taken in through diet or as a supplement, is one of the most important vitamins for menopause. (Be sure to take the natural form.) The B vitamins and vitamins A and C, as well as a variety of minerals, are also essential. (You can find their food sources in Table 1-1, earlier in this chapter.)

Phyto-estrogens and flavonoids

Natural foods also provide other active compounds that recent research is showing are vital for your health. These include flavonoids and the group of compounds called *phyto-estrogens*, which function like hormones and help balance your own.

Phyto-estrogens

Phytohormones, popularly called phyto-estrogens, are found in dozens of plant foods. They work to help balance hormones and, as a result, help prevent symptoms of PMS and menopause that stem from the dramatic rise and fall of hormones. In some cultures, such plant foods may contribute as much as 50 percent of caloric intake. According to a 1990 study in the *British Journal of Medicine*, intake of phyto-estrogens at this level could potentially diminish menopause symptoms.



Soybeans contain especially potent phyto-estrogen, but many everyday vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, and nuts exhibit some estrogenic activity. Add these to your shopping list:

- ✓ **Flavorings:** Licorice, anise, and garlic
- ✓ **Fruit:** Apples, cherries, citrus, and pomegranates
- ✓ **Legumes:** Chickpeas, red beans, soybeans, and split peas
- ✓ **Oils:** Extra-virgin olive oil, cold-pressed oils, and flaxseed oil
- ✓ **Seeds:** Sesame seeds and flaxseed
- ✓ **Vegetables:** Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, fennel, onions, parsley, potatoes, and radishes
- ✓ **Whole grains:** Barley, corn, oats, rice, rye, and wheat

Flavonoids

Flavonoids are a group of vitamin-like compounds with a chemical structure and activity similar to estrogen. Flavonoids help minimize estrogen highs and lows. Good sources of flavonoids include apples, lemons, onions green and black tea, and dark beer. (**Note:** Flavonoids are found in the pulp and pith of fruits and vegetables, so to get this nutrient, you need to eat these foods in their whole form.)

Buckwheat, which contains flavonoids, makes a good salad. In the following recipe, it substitutes for bulghur wheat in the traditional Middle Eastern dish tabbouli.

Turkish Buckwheat Salad

Buckwheat groats supply iron, niacin, and thiamin, nutrients that help you feel energized. Buckwheat is a source of flavonoids that help balance hormones.

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 15 minutes, plus at least 1 hour to blend flavors

Yield: 4 large servings

2 cups unfiltered water

1 cup unroasted whole buckwheat groats

2 scallions, chopped

1 bunch fresh parsley, stems removed and leaves chopped (1 cup)

2 sprigs fresh mint, stems removed and leaves chopped

1 teaspoon ground cumin

3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

- 1 In a large saucepan, bring the water to boil over high heat.
- 2 Stir in the buckwheat groats and immediately lower heat to simmer. Cook, covered, for 15 minutes, or until all the water has been absorbed. Remove from heat and set aside.
- 3 Spoon the cooked buckwheat into a large bowl. Add the scallions, parsley, mint, cumin, lemon juice, oil, and salt and pepper.
- 4 Gently toss salad ingredients together until well blended. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour to blend flavors. Serve as a side dish with grilled meats, such as lamb chops, and a cucumber-yogurt salad.



Healing foods for menopausal symptoms

Menopause involves far more than changes in hormone production. It is a shift in body chemistry that affects the adrenal glands, the nervous system, the skeleton, and the brain. You need to nourish your body with sustaining foods as your body adjusts. Foods that contain phyto-estrogens are especially important to include in your meals. Many symptoms of menopause are triggered by rapid changes in estrogen levels, and these phyto-nutrients help you avoid the extremes.



As your period becomes more irregular during perimenopause, you may experience PMS even if you didn't when you were younger. You may also experience heavy menstrual bleeding. Follow the dietary advice given earlier in this chapter for these conditions.

Hot flashes

If it suddenly feels like you're living in the tropics, you're having a *hot flash*. A small burst of heat begins in the chest area and quickly expands to the face and arms. You sweat and then feel quite chilled as the perspiration evaporates and your body temperature quickly drops. You may also feel some anxiety.

These special nutrients help with hot flashes: magnesium, selenium, and vitamin E. Vitamin E is considered the prime menopause nutrient, and selenium works with vitamin E to maximize its effectiveness. (Refer to Table 1-1 for food sources.) Flavonoids and phyto-estrogens are also important nutrients, because they both help balance hormones.

With all that sweating, hot flashes can leave you thirsty and depleted of minerals such as magnesium, potassium, and sodium, which you lose through the skin when you perspire. The same is true for *night sweats*, surges of heat that wake you from your sleep.



Avoid stimulating and warming foods such as caffeinated coffee and tea, chocolate, spicy foods, and alcoholic beverages, including beer. A large dose of sugar, such as a slice of pecan pie, can also bring on a flash.

Hot Flash Fruit Compote

Having a hot flash triggers your body to perspire in an effort to cool down. In the process of sweating, you lose fluids and several important minerals — magnesium, potassium, and sodium. At breakfast, replenish what you've lost with plenty of fresh filtered water and a mineral-rich fruit and nut compote. This recipe is a good place to start. Select from the following ingredients, making sure to include some juicy chunks of melon!

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: None

Yield: 4 servings

4 cups diced fruit (apricots, bananas, black currants, cantaloupe, cherries, dates, guava, honeydew melon, kiwi, mango, papaya, and/or pears)

3 tablespoons pumpkin seeds

3 tablespoons nuts (almonds, cashews, and/or pistachios)

Sea salt (optional)

2 tablespoons yogurt (optional)

Unsulphured blackstrap molasses (optional)

Chopped fresh mint leaves (optional)

- 1 Put the fruit in a bowl and combine with the seeds and nuts.
- 2 Sprinkle the combination with a pinch of sea salt, if desired, and stir.
- 3 Spoon fruit mixture into individual serving bowls, and, if desired, top with yogurt and molasses and a sprig of mint. Dig in!



Fatigue

Fatigue is the most commonly reported symptom of menopause. Hot flashes can be draining. Anemia due to heavy bleeding may also cause fatigue, and iron-rich foods are needed. These special nutrients help reduce fatigue: B complex vitamins, iron, and vitamin C. (Refer to Table 1-1 for a list of food sources.)

Weight gain

With menopause, you may develop a rounded belly, due to changes in your output of reproductive hormones. It's in the lower abdominal tissue that you make some of your postmenopausal estrogen as production in your ovaries diminishes. Gaining about 5 to 10 pounds at menopause is normal. Fluid retention can also lead to a temporary increase in weight.

Resist going on a crash diet, which will rob you of needed vitamins and minerals. Instead, have moderate portions of whole foods. And avoid refined sugar, which is all calories and no nutrients.

Memory

Research has shown that estrogen improves verbal recall and the ability to acquire and remember newly associated thoughts. Estrogenic foods, essential fatty acids, antioxidants, lecithin, B complex vitamins, and the minerals potassium, magnesium, phosphorus, selenium, and boron all promote mental alertness. (Refer to Table 1-1 for a list of food sources.) In addition, maintaining stable blood sugar levels, getting sufficient rest, and exercising regularly to increase your oxygen supply can help.

Mood swings, irritability, depression

Follow the nutrient and food recommendations given for these symptoms earlier in this chapter under the sections on irritability and depression. Phyto-estrogens can also help balance hormones and steady mood swings. Avoid refined and processed foods, caffeine, and alcohol.

Sexual problems

While sexuality certainly continues post-menopause, there's no denying that as your supply of reproductive hormones declines, your sexual energy can alter and diminish. Vaginal tissue also goes through changes. However, the right diet can help you restore a once-vital sex life.

First, make a special effort to avoid symptom triggers such as caffeine, white sugar, and nutrient-depleted refined foods. Then boost your intake of whole foods, such as seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, seafood, nuts, and seeds. These foods supply nutrients that maintain vaginal health, keep tissues firm through the manufacture of collagen, and increase sexual response.



These nutrients help maintain healthy vaginal tissue: copper, essential fatty acids, vitamin A, vitamin B6, vitamin C, and vitamin E. The following nutrients help you maintain vaginal lubrication and sexual vitality: folic acid, niacin, and zinc.

Menopause and degenerative disease

Although you often hear osteoporosis and heart disease lumped together with the symptoms of menopause, these degenerative diseases aren't inevitable consequences of passing through the change-of-life. Lowered hormone levels can be a risk factor, and the likelihood of developing these diseases can increase as you pass middle age, but eating the right foods is a good way to help prevent these diseases.

Healing Foods for Men

Some health issues unique to men — like enlarged prostate, prostate cancer, impotency, and faltering libido — can be affected by diet. The recommended way of eating for all these conditions is the same. Build meals based on natural, unrefined, and unprocessed whole foods. Avoid added hormones and toxins. Enjoy a wide variety of ingredients, from meats, poultry, and seafood to fruits of the field.



Many of the same nutrients listed for women (refer to Table 1-1 earlier in this chapter) are also recommended for various aspects of male reproductive health. Table 1-2 lists nutrients men especially need and the foods that contain them.

<i>Nutrient</i>	<i>Best Foods</i>
B1 (thiamin)	Pork, duck, lobster, egg yolks, pinto beans, potatoes, beans, grapes, and pistachios
B6 (pyridoxine)	Beef, chicken, tuna, brown rice, navy beans, broccoli, mangoes, walnuts, and sunflower seeds
Essential fatty acids	Unrefined vegetable oils, flaxseed, walnuts, organic eggs, and fatty fish, such as sardines, tuna, and salmon
Folic acid	Beef, chicken, trout, beans and lentils, whole grains, asparagus, beets, avocados, boysenberries, and pistachios
Manganese	Clams, bass, trout, lima beans, beans and lentils, whole grains, okra, pineapple, bananas, hazelnuts, almonds, and maple syrup
Magnesium	Shrimp, oysters, halibut, egg yolks, beans, whole grains, figs, plantains, avocados, Brazil nuts, cashews, walnuts, and seeds
PABA	Organ meats, whole wheat, yogurt, blackstrap molasses, and kale
Selenium	Brazil nuts, shellfish, tuna, herring, chicken breast, beef, lamb, whole wheat, carrots, cabbage, and mushrooms
Vitamin A	Liver, eggs, sweet potatoes, carrots, winter squash, and cantaloupe
Vitamin C	Citrus, cantaloupe, strawberries, broccoli, and green peppers
Vitamin E	Unrefined oils, eggs, whole wheat, organ meats, sweet potatoes, kale, and cabbage
Zinc	Oysters and other shellfish, sardines, beef, lamb, mushrooms, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, and cheese

Prostate problems

The prostate is a small, walnut-shaped gland that sits at the base of the bladder. Its job is to produce part of the fluid that makes semen. With the first contractions of orgasm, prostatic fluid begins to flow. The gland also metabolizes the male hormone, testosterone.

There was a time when no one thought much about the prostate gland. But now that prostate tumors are the most commonly diagnosed form of cancer in men (excluding skin cancer) and the second leading cause of death among males, prostate disease is a common concern.

Enlarged prostate

About 60 percent of all men between 40 and 59 years of age have *benign prostatic hyperplasia* (BPH), or an enlarged prostate. The incidence has increased tremendously in the last few decades. Depending upon what portion of the prostate becomes enlarged, the gland can place pressure on the bladder, causing typical BPH symptoms. At first, a man may find he needs to urinate more frequently. Then, as BPH progresses, symptoms can include greater urgency of urination, increased frequency, especially at night, and difficulty completely emptying the bladder.

To combat BPH, you need to take advantage of several nutrients. (Refer to Table 1-2 for foods that contain these nutrients.)

- ✓ **Vitamin B6 and zinc:** Both play a role in the complexity of processes and chemical reactions that lead to hormone balance.
- ✓ **Vitamin E and selenium:** Both are essential nutrients for prostate health.
- ✓ **Essential fatty acids:** These acids have been used clinically to successfully reduce symptoms of BPH. Eat the equivalent of 1 teaspoon of essential fatty acids or 4 grams a day. Avoid processed and hydrogenated oils, and lower your intake of saturated fats.



Recent studies show that the herb saw palmetto can significantly improve the urinary difficulties associated with BPH and is useful in the prevention of BPH. Other herbal treatments include flower pollen, prescribed in Europe, and ginseng, which is used in China.



Pumpkin seeds are an excellent source of zinc, essential fatty acids, and certain amino acids, all helpful in reducing symptoms of BPH. However, these aren't the pumpkin seeds you find in the kind of pumpkin you carve and put a candle in for Halloween. Rather, they're long, flat, and dark green. They're sold in natural-food stores and in Latin markets, where they're called *pepitas*.

Two-Fisted Tuna on Toast

Fish is an excellent source of essential fatty acids. An easy-to-make fish sandwich for lunch is a great way to increase your intake. Choose a fatty fish such as tuna, salmon, or sardines, which gives you an extra dose of healing omega-3 essential fatty acids, important for prostate health.

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 2 minutes for the toast

Yield: 1 hefty sandwich

1 6-ounce can tuna, packed in water

2 slices tomato

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup diced onion

4 anchovies

1 tablespoon red wine or balsamic vinegar

Freshly grated pepper to taste

2 slices crusty whole-grain bread, toasted

- 1 In a small bowl, mix together the tuna, onion, and red wine or vinegar.
- 2 Lay the two pieces of toast on a work surface. Cover one slice with the tomato slices and spread the tuna mixture on top. Arrange the anchovies on the tuna. Season with pepper. Top with the second piece of toast.
- 3 With a sharp knife, cut the sandwich in half. Wolf down with potato salad and a glass of fruit juice mixed with club soda.



Healing foods for prostatitis

In prostatitis, the prostate gland is infected due to a urinary infection, a blood-borne infection, or venereal disease. If you have this condition, avoid spicy foods and refrain from caffeine, alcohol, and cigarettes, all of which are potential irritants of the prostate gland. Also avoid sugar.

Contaminants that can upset hormone balance

Pesticides and other contaminants present in food, some products, and the environment break down into compounds that behave like hormones. These substances include dioxin, polyhalogenated biphenyls, hexachlorobenzene, dibenzofurans, and diethylstilboestrol (DES). Such compounds may contribute to hormone imbalance in males. In one animal

study, DES caused prostate changes similar to benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), or enlarged prostate. These are good reasons to eat only organic foods. And remember, nutrients such as carotenes, flavonoids, chlorophyll, magnesium, calcium, selenium, and zinc, as well as fiber, support the body's ability to rid itself of these contaminants.

Book VI
Natural
Health

Protective nutrients for prostate cancer

Age, family history, and race affect your risk of prostate cancer. African-American men have an especially high rate. Prostate cancer is related to diet in only about 10 to 20 percent of cases. However, recent research is discovering some nutrients that may be beneficial in lowering your risk.

- ✔ **Lycopene:** A phyto-nutrient found in tomatoes, lycopene is associated with a lower risk of aggressive prostate cancer.
- ✔ **Selenium:** An antioxidant, selenium is almost as effective as vitamin E in reducing the risk of prostate cancer. This mineral may block cell damage as well as protect the prostate from environmental carcinogens. (Nearly half the selenium a man carries in his body is in the testes and seminal ducts adjacent to the prostate gland.) Unfortunately, selenium deficiency is common. In addition, men lose selenium in their semen.
- ✔ **Vitamin D:** This vitamin appears to inhibit the spread of cancer. Sunlight allows the body to synthesize this important nutrient.
- ✔ **Vitamin E:** Taking a daily supplement of 400 IU of this antioxidant can help reduce the incidence of prostate cancer.



Regular consumption of red meat and dairy products is a risk factor. The Japanese, who consume a low-fat fish and vegetable diet, have the lowest incidence of prostate cancer in the industrialized world.

Quick and Easy Cajun Okra

You may stay away from okra because of its odd, slightly slimy texture, but that texture is just the reason you should be eating okra more than once every five years. In this recipe, the okra is cooked with tantalizing Cajun spices. Enjoy this dish with red beans and rice.

Preparation time: 5 minutes

Cooking time: 20 minutes

Yield: 4 servings

½ pound young okra, stems removed and cut into 1-inch lengths if the pods are large

1 tablespoon prepared Cajun Creole Seasoning

1 teaspoon unsalted, organic butter

Salt to taste

- 1 Fill a medium pot with water to about 1 inch from the top. Bring to a boil, and add the okra.
- 2 Simmer, covered, on medium-low heat until okra is tender, about 10 minutes. Drain the okra when it's sufficiently tender.
- 3 Meanwhile, in a saucepan, melt the butter. Add the seasoning, and heat over low heat for 1 minute to develop seasoning flavors. Add the okra. Using a wooden spoon, toss the okra in the seasoned butter to evenly coat. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes to combine flavors. Salt to taste, and serve.

Tip: *Spice Hunter is one brand of seasoning that makes Cajun Creole Seasoning.*



Nourishing your sexuality

What you eat affects your sexual and reproductive anatomy just as much as any other part of your body. Problems such as impotence and lack of interest in sex can be brought on, in part, by poor food choices. The pituitary and testes produce sex hormones, and even the adrenals produce small amounts. These glands require specific nutrients to function properly. A change to eating healthier foods that supply certain vitamins, minerals, and healing fats can often help correct these conditions.

Erectile dysfunction (impotence)

The inability to achieve or maintain a full erection is known by the medical term *erectile dysfunction* (ED). If you've ever experienced ED, you're not alone. An estimated 30 million men in the United States — the majority over age 65 — have some degree of ED. (No, ED doesn't affect sexual drive or the ability to achieve orgasm.) Medications, stress, emotional problems, infection, and anatomical abnormalities can cause ED. In addition, certain medical conditions are often part of the picture (see the sidebar "Causes of erectile dysfunction").

To keep your heart and arteries healthy (which is necessary for sexual potency) and to reduce your risk of diseases or conditions that can cause ED, watch what you eat. Follow this way of eating to keep it all in tip-top condition:

- ✔ **Follow a heart-healthy diet.** A heart-healthy diet can normalize cholesterol levels, help prevent hypertension, and keep the vascular system healthy.
- ✔ **Avoid refined white sugar.** When eating sweets such as desserts, have only small portions. Eat regular meals, and when having a carbohydrate, also eat some protein — for example, apple pie and cheese.
- ✔ **Limit alcoholic beverages.** A small amount of alcohol stimulates blood flow, but alcohol also acts as a depressant and can be a downer. Caffeine can also interfere with performance.
- ✔ **Avoid estrogens and growth hormones in meat.** These hormones may interfere with your own hormone balance and reproductive health. Eat only meats that are free of hormone residues.

Take advantage of the special nutrients for potency. All the antioxidants — beta-carotene, selenium, vitamin C, and vitamin E — protect cells from free radical damage and help prevent tissues in the testes from degeneration. Zinc and the B vitamins are essential for the production of testosterone. Magnesium helps reverse hardening of the arteries in the penis. And manganese is typically low in body tissues of men who are impotent. (Refer to Table 1-2 for a list of the top food sources for these nutrients.)

Feeding your libido

Sexual drive, or libido, requires one nutrient in particular — zinc. If you want to boost your reserve, you'd best like oysters. These crustaceans are by far the most concentrated food source of zinc. While crab is a good source of zinc (3 ounces supply 5 milligrams), six medium oysters contain an extraordinary 76 milligrams! Oysters have long been used as an aphrodisiac, and now you know why!



Zinc and the mineral copper need to be kept in balance. Oysters also contain some copper, as well as small amounts of calcium and phosphorus, all minerals that increase the effectiveness of zinc.

Don Juan's Oyster Stew

To get your daily dose of zinc, try this recipe for oyster stew. It's delicious because it's buttery, the way oyster stew used to be. If you care only about what the oysters can do for you and you're watching your fat intake, skip the cream and make it just with milk.

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 10 minutes

Yield: 4 servings

2 dozen fresh, shucked oysters

2 tablespoons organic, unsalted butter

1 cup oyster liquor or clam juice

½ teaspoon grated onion, or ½ cup sliced
cooked celery

1 ½ cups milk, preferably without added
hormones and organic

½ cup cream, preferably without added
hormones and organic

Paprika, for garnish

- 1 Fill the lower portion of a double boiler with water and bring to a boil, making sure that the top pan doesn't touch the water. Put the oysters, 1 tablespoon butter, oyster liquor, and onion in the top half. Stir briskly and constantly until oysters are just beginning to curl, about 1 minute.
- 2 Add the milk and cream and continue stirring briskly just until it comes to a boil. Remove the double boiler from the heat, making sure not to allow the stew to continue boiling.
- 3 Pour the oyster stew into warmed individual soup bowls, dividing the oysters evenly.
- 4 Serve the stew piping hot, and garnish each serving with some of the remaining butter and a dash of paprika.

Tip: If you get a sense of accomplishment from shucking your own oysters, buy them in the shell, which should be undamaged and shut tight. Or have someone at your fish store shuck the oysters and make sure that he or she also gives you the juice from the oysters (the oyster liquor). Or buy oysters that are shucked, packaged, and marked with a "sell by" date.



Causes of erectile dysfunction

Normal sexual function depends upon having healthy arteries and nerves. Diseases that cause damage to these in the trunk of the body and limbs can also do harm in the genital area. Forty percent of men diagnosed with diabetes also experience some degree of impotency. High blood sugar levels, which occur in diabetes, limit the amount of oxygen the blood is able to transport to body cells. Sexual difficulties can result, especially because tissues in the penis need more oxygen than usual during sexual intercourse. In advanced diabetes, nerve damage occurs, which can affect sexual activity.

The arteries in the penis are vulnerable to atherosclerosis, or narrowing of the arteries,

preventing enough blood from entering the penis to cause sufficient hardness. Vascular disease can interfere with the delivery of oxygen and nutrients to cells. Hypertension, high total cholesterol, and low levels of HDL cholesterol are also risk factors for impotency.

Smokers, as compared with nonsmokers, are twice as likely to be impotent. Smoke injures arteries and disrupts blood flow. So if you smoke, quit!

Remember: Medications that promise to improve erection can't function if the blood vessels themselves are nonresponsive due to degenerative disease.

Book VI
Natural
Health

Nutrients for sperm production

Eggs are full of nutrients needed to launch new life, so it should be no surprise that sperm, too, are packed with vitamins and minerals. Sperm contains calcium, magnesium, zinc, sulfur, vitamin B12, vitamin C, and inositol, part of the B complex of vitamins. Whole grains, legumes, nuts, meats, liver, shellfish, and citrus are sources.



Zinc, in particular is essential for the production of sperm. Low levels can result in sperm that are infertile.

If you'd rather take a nap

Besides desire, sex requires energy. If you've been overstressed and aren't eating particularly nourishing foods, you risk adrenal exhaustion. Your body's stress coping mechanisms say, "No more." The adrenals cut back on energy production and insist that you rest. When these glands become exhausted, you're less likely to participate in your normal activities, including sex. Help your adrenals revive by staying away from sugar and caffeine. Increase your intake of foods that supply B vitamins and vitamin C.

You may also lack the desire and strength for sex if your thyroid gland isn't receiving essential nutrients. Your thyroid controls the rate at which you convert food to energy. A sluggish thyroid, or hypothyroidism, can also dampen desire. Foods that contain iodine, B vitamins, and especially thiamin, plus vitamin E are required.



Enjoy all sorts of seafood, whole grains, nuts, and unrefined oils to maintain your zest for life.