

stress

Daily traffic. Work deadlines. Family squabbles. Rebellious teenagers. Illness. Injury. All of these life experiences add up to big-time stress that can knock you off your feet, spin you around, and keep you dazed. Without some relief, you may feel as if each morning is the beginning of a new melodrama.

Poking fun at stress is one way to help you de-stress. But the truth is, that stress is no laughing matter. Whenever you're filled with tension and anxiety, your adrenal glands, located above your kidneys, pump out stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which give your body that burst of energy it needs to escape danger. Long-term stress causes chronically high levels of stress hormones, which can weaken your immune system, tax your heart and blood vessels, tire you out, and make you more susceptible to illness.

Fortunately, certain dietary and lifestyle changes can help relieve stress and release tension. For starters, get at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise three to five times a week to lift your spirits and melt away feelings of pressure and anxiety. Also, don't overlook weight lifting and brisk walking, as they can have similar effects.

Another tip for stress control: Limit your intake of caffeine, alcohol, high-fat foods, and sugar. Caffeine and alcohol can raise the levels of stress hormones in the blood and alter brain chemistry. Caffeine also causes nervousness, anxiety, and irritability. Moreover, when you replace nutritious foods with refined carbohydrates like sugar, you lower the amount of vitamins and minerals in your diet, depleting your body of essential nutrients that protect you from the dangers of stress.

Once you have made these changes, you can try a variety of nutritional supplements as added stress protection. Certain vitamins can build up your immune system to prevent stress-related illnesses. Others can boost your energy and lift your mood. Even some herbs can help to calm your nerves, increase stamina, and keep you mentally and physically strong in the midst of turmoil.

Vitamin C: What Happens

Vitamin C gives your immune system the fighting power it needs to prevent many stress-related health problems such as headaches, high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease, says C. Norman Shealy, M.D., Ph.D., founder of the American Holistic Medical Association and director of the Shealy Institute, an alternative medicine clinic in Springfield, Missouri.

What's more, vitamin C is required to manufacture stress hormones, which can flow excessively if you're stressed for a long time. After a while, your adrenal glands become exhausted from overwork, and your body's ability to produce stress hormones declines, says Ray Sahelian, M.D., a physician in Marina del Rey, California, and author of *Kava: The Miracle Antianxiety Herb*. Once this happens, you could experience excessive fatigue, low blood pressure, and low blood sugar. Supplementing with extra vitamin C is one step that you can take to keep your adrenal glands healthy.

When the going gets tough, take 3,000 milligrams of vitamin C in divided doses daily, says Dr. Shealy.

Welcome the B Family

The B-complex vitamins are a treasure trove of stress relief. They can give you more energy, strip away fatigue, make adrenal gland hormones, and manufacture brain chemicals responsible for keeping you alert and lifting your mood, says Dr. Sahelian. "The B vitamins work in concert with each other, and they play hundreds of biochemical roles in the body," he says.

The members of this close-knit family include thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, pantothenic acid, and vitamins B₆ and B₁₂. Pantothenic acid, in particular, plays a major role in the making of adrenal gland hormones and energy production, says Dr. Sahelian.

If you want to combat stress, check with a doctor or naturopath about taking a daily high-potency B-complex vitamin formula that includes 100 to 500 milligrams of pantothenic acid, 50 to 75 milligrams of vitamin B₆, and 500 micrograms of B₁₂, says Joseph E. Pizzorno Jr. N.D., president of Bastyr University in Bothell, Washington.

Ginseng: A Stress-Busting Powerhouse

Ginseng is considered the most notable medicinal herb used to restore vitality, boost energy, reduce fatigue, improve mental and physical perfor-

Food for Your Adrenal Glands

For a nutritional supplement that claims to zap fatigue, boost energy, and help you cope with stress, some people are turning to adrenal gland extracts.

These extracts fall into a category called glandular supplements because they come from the glands of animals such as cows and pigs, on the assumption that what helps them will help you. Advocates of these products claim that adrenal gland extracts can put life back into your own adrenal glands, which have become tired out from pumping so much stress hormone during long periods of stress.

At first glance, it seems sensible to assume that an adrenal booster can do some good. Doctors know that unless we have a healthy pair of adrenal glands, we're more prone to infections and stress-related illnesses. When you're under a lot of stress, your glands need all the help they can get.

The results aren't certain, however. "It's believed that adrenal extracts can help people who are under a great deal of stress or who have chronic fatigue, but very little research has been done to prove their effectiveness, and dosages aren't standardized across the board," says C. Norman Shealy, M.D., Ph.D., founder of the American Holistic Medical Association and director of the Shealy Institute, an alternative medicine clinic in Springfield, Missouri. He notes that some people could benefit, however.

To find the right dosage, you may need to try products with various potencies and qualities, according to Joseph E. Pizzorno Jr., N.D., president of Bastyr University in Bothell, Washington. "I suggest taking one-third of the recommended dosage on the label and slowly increasing it every two days unless you notice any signs of irritability, restlessness, or insomnia," he says. "If you experience any of these symptoms, simply reduce your dosage until they go away. Over time, you should notice an increase in energy and better resistance to stress." If you don't feel better in two to three weeks, the supplements are probably not working for you.

mance, and protect the body from the negative effects of stress. With ginseng, your initial reaction to stress is likely to be less intense. It's often referred to as a tonic for the adrenal glands because it tones and maintains their overall health.

You can find different varieties of the herb, including Siberian ginseng, Asian ginseng, and American ginseng. Asian ginseng is the most widely used for medicinal purposes. They all have similar properties, although Asian ginseng is more of a stimulant than its Siberian cousin, says Dr. Pizzorno. Thus, if you're acutely stressed or recovering from a long illness, Asian ginseng would be the way to go.

In one study, nurses who had switched from day shift to night shift were given either Asian ginseng or an inactive substance (placebo). Their competence, mood, and general well-being were rated. This study showed that the nurses who took the ginseng were more competent, upbeat, and alert than those who didn't take the herb.

Because potency varies, as does the concentration of active ingredients, you'll need to adjust the amount you take depending on which product you buy. You can take 1,000 to 2,000 milligrams one to three times a day if you choose a high-quality crude Asian ginseng root, says Dr. Pizzorno. If you take an extract standardized to 5 to 7 percent ginsenosides, take 100 milligrams one to three times a day.

If you're taking Siberian ginseng root, says Dr. Pizzorno, you probably should take somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 milligrams a day in divided doses. If you take the extract, take 100 to 200 milligrams of a product that is standardized to 0.8 percent eleutherosides three times a day. Because everyone's response to ginseng is different, start off with the lower dosage and increase it over time, he suggests.

Women taking Asian ginseng may experience breast tenderness. You can simply reduce the dose or discontinue use to make the symptoms go away, says Dr. Pizzorno.

Cool Out with Kava Kava

This time-honored herb, which has soared in popularity as the best natural stress buster, can calm your nerves and help you unwind. Not only that, it's fast-acting, so you may see the effects in as little as 30 to 60 minutes.

Kava can actually preempt stress if you take it prior to an expected stressful situation. It's also a post-stress soother: You can take it to relax tense muscles and wind yourself down after an especially stressful day. You'll feel at peace and maybe even a little euphoric, says Dr. Sahelian.

The secret behind kava is its anxiety-reducing effect on your brain, says

Dr. Sahelian. It contains a group of chemicals called kavalactones that are responsible for its anti-anxiety effects. Animal studies show that kavalactones act on the limbic system, the part of the brain that is the center of emotions.

What's more, kava isn't addictive, it won't lose its effectiveness over time, and your mind will remain alert and sharp even when you take it during the day.

Dr. Sahelian suggests taking one capsule that contains between 40 and 70 milligrams of kavalactones two or three times a day. Start with the lower dosage first to determine whether you feel any of the soothing effects, he says. If you don't feel any stress relief in two to three hours, you can take another capsule.

depression

The ups and downs of everyday life can often leave you feeling blue. When your low spirits turn into a never-ending state of sadness, however, you may have depression. While you may not be able to tell the difference between feeling blue and being depressed, a doctor usually can.

In fact, a diagnosis of depression needs to be made by a doctor. There are many possible signs, ranging from sleeplessness and irritability to feelings of guilt or thoughts of suicide. Whether or not you have these symptoms, though, you should seek professional help if you have a blue mood that lasts more than two weeks.

Many doctors prescribe medication for depression, and if you're already taking medication, you shouldn't take supplements without talking to your doctor. Often, dietary and lifestyle changes can help lift your mood, says C. Norman Shealy, M.D., Ph.D., founder of the American Holistic Medical Association and director of the Shealy Institute, a holistic and alternative medicine clinic in Springfield, Missouri. In fact, just 20 minutes of aerobic exercise five days a week can put that pep back in your step, says Dr. Shealy.

Studies show that any kind of exercise prompts the release of mood-enhancing brain chemicals called endorphins that help restore your sense of well-being. Also if you avoid caffeine, alcohol, sugar, and refined carbohydrates (found in cakes and white bread, for instance), you'll prevent brain chemical imbalances that are known to cause depression.

Some natural antidepressant supplements might also be helpful. Certain vitamins can cheer you up by helping to create and stabilize a variety of brain chemicals responsible for mental and emotional health.

Pump Up Some Essential Vitamins

The most common deficiencies in people who are depressed are the B-complex vitamins and vitamin C, says Dr. Shealy.

The B vitamins help energize brain cells and manufacture important chemicals to keep your moods high. Vitamin B₆, for example, plays a starring role in the making of serotonin, a brain chemical that has a direct impact on your moods, emotions, appetite, and sleep patterns. Too little serotonin, and you'll walk around feeling down in the dumps.

What's more, B-complex vitamins enhance communication between brain cells so that other important brain chemicals can work in concert to keep things running smoothly, says Ray Sahelian, M.D., a physician in Marina del Rey, California, and author of *The New Memory Boosters: Natural Supplements That Enhance Your Mind, Memory, and Mood*.

Another B vitamin that has been linked to depression is folate, the naturally occurring form of folic acid. In fact, depression is considered the most common symptom of a folate deficiency.

Harvard Medical School researchers reviewed the literature on depression and found that as many as 38 percent of adults diagnosed with depression had low levels of folate in their blood. Other research shows that low vitamin B₁₂ levels are common in elderly people with depression and that folic acid and B₁₂ work together to boost low spirits, says Dr. Shealy. Vitamin B₁₂ also helps metabolize other mood-elevating brain chemicals and keep nerve tissue healthy.

Another vitamin that's just as important in maintaining high spirits is vitamin C. Low levels can leave you feeling gloomy, says Dr. Sahelian. Vitamin C helps manufacture serotonin and two other essential brain-related chemicals, dopamine and norepinephrine, which lift your mood, keep you alert, and sustain your sex drive.

For mild to moderate depression, you may want to take a high-potency multivitamin/mineral supplement daily after talking to your doctor, says Dr. Shealy. He also suggests 100 milligrams each of thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and B₆, along with 400 micrograms of folic acid, 100 micrograms of B₁₂, and 2,000 milligrams of vitamin C in divided doses daily.

Help from St. John

If you haven't heard by now, St. John's wort is the quintessential herb of choice for mild to moderate depression. In fact, it is one of the most researched natural antidepressants around. The herb's active ingredients include hypericin, flavonoids, and other compounds that work in unison to raise serotonin levels in the brain, says Jennifer Brett, N.D., a natur-

opathic doctor at the Wilton Naturopathic Center in Stratford, Connecticut.

Studies show that St. John's wort is just as effective for mild to moderate depression as the widely prescribed antidepressant drugs imipramine (Tofranil), fluoxetine (Prozac), sertraline (Zoloft), and paroxetine (Paxil), says Dr. Shealy.

While it's not understood exactly how the herb increases serotonin levels, researchers speculate that the underlying mechanism is probably similar to that of the prescription drugs, says Dr. Brett. St. John's wort may inhibit an enzyme that breaks down serotonin molecules and other brain chemicals, or it may increase the action of serotonin at the nerve endings in the brain. The serotonin is available so that your brain can further utilize it to regulate your moods and emotions more effectively, she says.

The advantage of St. John's wort over the prescription antidepressants is that it's associated with very few side effects. Some people do get mild stomach irritation, and others have reported sun sensitivity and insomnia. If you are pregnant, check with your doctor before taking this or any other supplement. If you are already taking antidepressant medication, you should also talk to your doctor before taking St. John's wort.

Dr. Shealy suggests taking one 300-milligram tablet or capsule three times a day with meals if you have mild to moderate depression. For maximum effectiveness, buy a standardized extract containing 0.3 percent hypericin, he says. If you don't feel better after four to six weeks, it's unlikely to help, he adds.

Some Good from Ginkgo

Although it's not as strong as St. John's wort, ginkgo can be used as a mild antidepressant. Ginkgo greatly improves blood flow, mental alertness, and memory, and—as a by-product—relieves depression, says Dr. Sahelian. "Poor blood circulation to the brain can cause the brain to malfunction, which can lead to imbalances in serotonin levels and other neurotransmitters that regulate moods and emotional stability."

In one study, 40 patients, ages 51 to 78, were given either 80 milligrams of ginkgo extract or an inactive pill (placebo) three times a day in addition to their antidepressant medication. After eight weeks, researchers found that those who took the ginkgo showed more improvement than those who took the placebo.

If you're over age 50 and have mild to moderate depression, take one 40-milligram capsule of ginkgo three times a day, says Dr. Shealy. Choose capsules or tablets that contain 24 percent ginkgo flavoglycosides for maximum strength.

Brain Chemicals in a Pill

Another natural supplement that might have the edge over antidepressant prescription drugs is 5-HTP. This is a natural compound produced by the body from tryptophan, an amino acid found in many foods. It's also a precursor of serotonin, which means that more serotonin is produced when 5-HTP is present.

When you take 5-HTP in supplement form, it's absorbed in your gastrointestinal tract and then journeys to your brain, where it's converted into serotonin, says Dr. Sahelian.

If you've been diagnosed with depression and you have a doctor's approval, you can take 50 milligrams of 5-HTP late in the evening, says Dr. Sahelian. But he doesn't advise taking larger amounts. Any dosage over 50 milligrams can cause vivid dreams, nightmares, and nausea, Dr. Sahelian points out.

HIV and AIDS

For some people living with HIV or AIDS, the breakthroughs in research and treatment have literally written a new lease on life. Having life-saving drugs is only part of that new lease, however. People also need to make the most of a drug's healing properties and enhance their quality of life. It's here that supplements can be most useful.

AIDS is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which is found in infected blood, semen, or vaginal fluids. The most common way that people contract HIV is by engaging in unprotected sex—that is, having sex with an infected partner without using a condom to block transmission of the virus. People who use intravenous drugs can be exposed by sharing HIV-infected needles. It can also be spread through transfusions of contaminated blood, platelets, or plasma.

Once HIV enters the body, it attacks the immune system and sets out to destroy white blood cells called T cells, which help battle infection. The virus uses the genetic material of the T cells to reproduce itself, and as these cells die off, new HIV particles are released into the bloodstream to infect other white blood cells. The end result is a severely weakened immune system that can't fight off opportunistic illnesses such as skin and fungal infections, pneumonia, and some cancers.

Today, there are several antiviral drugs and nutritional supplements that you can take in combination to slow the progression of the disease. The antiviral drugs include AZT, DDC, and DDI. These, as well as drugs called protease inhibitors, can reduce the amount of virus in your body and prevent opportunistic illnesses. Anyone taking these drugs, however, will attest that they can cause many unpleasant side effects.

Supplementing your drug regimen with antioxidants such as vitamin E, lipoic acid, and selenium and some herbs can inhibit replication of the virus while meeting your body's basic nutritional needs. Herbs such as licorice, turmeric, and St. John's wort have antiviral properties that can help suppress the virus. And the amino acid carnitine can bol-

ster immunity, help the antioxidants do a better job, and prevent drug toxicity. Of course, you shouldn't start using any of these supplements without your doctor's advice.

Antioxidants to the Rescue

Several studies have shown that people who have HIV and AIDS are deficient in many antioxidant vitamins and minerals. To understand why these shortages occur, you have to look at the way the antiviral drugs work and also consider the behavior of virus itself, says Brad Lichtenstein, N.D., a naturopathic doctor and clinic supervisor of the HIV immune clinic at Bastyr University in Bothell, Washington. He recommends a number of nutritional supplements to hinder the progression of HIV to AIDS.

Vitamin E. Of all the antioxidants that may help stop the virus in its tracks, research shows that vitamin E has the most consistent and best results. In one study, HIV-positive men with the highest levels of vitamin E in their blood were 34 percent less likely to develop AIDS than men who had the lowest levels of the vitamin.

Vitamin E's antioxidant power prevents cell damage caused by HIV, so it inhibits the replication of the virus, says Susan Kowalsky, N.D., a naturopathic doctor in Norwich, Vermont. What's more, vitamin E can help stimulate production of red blood cells in bone marrow, which comes to a screeching halt if you're taking the drug AZT. Dr. Lichtenstein suggests taking 400 to 1,000 international units (IU) of vitamin E daily. Make sure you take d-alpha tocopherol, the natural form of vitamin E, he says.

Vitamin A and beta-carotene. Low levels of vitamin A and beta-carotene are associated with a decrease in T cells, says Dr. Lichtenstein, and supplementation will aid in the growth and reproduction of these immune cells.

Research shows that when vitamin A levels are low, T-cell counts also take a beating. People who are HIV-positive but also have normal levels of vitamin A will be more likely to have a higher count of T cells. Despite this, though, people with HIV should not automatically load up on vitamin A. The problem is that when vitamin A is taken in very high doses, it may speed the replication of the virus rather than slow it down. Alternative practitioners pay close attention to the amount that's given. Vitamin A has

been shown to slow the progression of HIV to AIDS when taken in moderate doses of 10,000 to 20,000 IU daily.

To get around the risk of accelerating virus replication, practitioners often prefer to recommend beta-carotene rather than vitamin A, says Dr. Lichtenstein. Beta-carotene converts to vitamin A in the body, so you'll get the same benefit. In one study, researchers gave 30 milligrams (50,000 IU) of beta-carotene to participants twice daily for four weeks, followed by six weeks without treatment. The total counts of several essential blood factors were measured at the beginning of the study, at the end of four weeks, and finally, six weeks later. Researchers found that one of the significant blood factors—the immunity-boosting lymphocytes—increased by 66 percent as long as people continued to take the beta-carotene supplements.

Dr. Kowalsky recommends taking 50,000 to 200,000 IU of beta-carotene.

Selenium. Levels of this antioxidant usually dip dangerously low in people with HIV and AIDS. But we all need it, because selenium helps maintain a strong immune system. It's very effective at protecting the body from free radicals, the free-roaming, unstable molecules that can damage cells, weaken immunity, and lead to various infections and diseases.

What's more, selenium works closely with vitamin E to produce the antibodies that fight infection. It also raises levels of glutathione, a vital and powerful antioxidant produced in the liver that detoxifies bacteria and other harmful substances. Glutathione helps maintain red blood cells and protects white blood cells from harmful viral attacks; it has been shown to help slow the progression of HIV into full-blown AIDS.

Consult a physician to determine your nutritional deficiencies and find out how much selenium you should take.

Vitamin C. Like selenium, vitamin C can boost glutathione levels when taken in moderate doses, says Dr. Kowalsky. Research has shown that it inhibits replication of HIV in test tubes. Although there's not much evidence to indicate that vitamin C can do the same in humans, it's still considered a powerful antioxidant that possesses antiviral properties.

"We know that vitamin C stimulates and strengthens different aspects of the immune system," says Dr. Kowalsky. "It inhibits viruses and even cancer, so it's worthwhile to take it as a treatment for HIV and AIDS."

There is some concern, however, that doses of vitamin C greater than 1,000 milligrams taken three times a day may damage lymphocyte function. As a precaution, Dr. Kowalsky recommends starting with 500 milligrams

three times a day and working your way up to three 1,000-milligram doses. To determine your tolerance, consult a naturopathic doctor.

Lipoic acid. This vitamin-like antioxidant is in a class by itself. Research shows that it can block the reproduction of HIV by reducing the activity of an enzyme called reverse transcriptase, which is responsible for manufacturing the virus from the genetic material of bloodborne cells.

“Lipoic acid can help treat HIV- and AIDS-related nerve damage,” says Dr. Lichtenstein. “It can minimize the virus’s attack on the brain and help the brain maintain its cognitive function. It reduces free radicals and removes toxic minerals from the body. It also raises levels of glutathione, vitamin C, and vitamin E, so people feel a lot better.” This supplement is available in health food stores. Dr. Lichtenstein recommends 200 milligrams three times a day with food.

Help from B to Z(inc)

Along with getting additional antioxidants, people with HIV and AIDS can use help from zinc and some B vitamins, with your doctor’s approval. Here’s why.

The B vitamins. A deficiency of vitamin B₆ weakens the immune system. “It can lead to nerve damage and an impaired antibody response and affect how you metabolize amino acids,” says Dr. Lichtenstein.

Low levels of vitamin B₁₂ can cause nerve damage in the arms and legs. When you don’t have enough vitamin B₁₂, you can also lose some muscle control and ease of motion, says Dr. Lichtenstein. Supplementation can prevent nerve damage, rid the body of toxins that can cause tissue damage, and stop the virus from replicating.

Dr. Lichtenstein suggests taking 500 milligrams of vitamin B₆ twice a day and 1,000 micrograms of B₁₂ once a day.

Zinc. By itself, zinc plays a vital role in maintaining a strong immune system. Unfortunately, it’s scarce in people with HIV and AIDS. In studies of those taking AZT who also supplemented with zinc, researchers found that the supplement helped reduce the risk of other infections. What’s more, zinc has been shown to increase the number of immunity-boosting T cells as well as blood levels of an important immune-system-regulating hormone called thymulin.

Not all experts agree on how much zinc to take. “Half of the studies say that you can take more than 35 milligrams, while others say you should

take less,” says Dr. Lichtenstein. “We recommend taking no more than 30 milligrams daily.”

Deploying a Tough Herbal Defense

As part of an HIV and AIDS treatment plan, there is a variety of botanical medicines that have been shown to slow the spread of the virus in the body.

Licorice. Much attention is being given to licorice root as a potential additional treatment for HIV infection. Research shows that the herb’s active ingredients, glycyrrhizin and glycyrrhetic acid, can prevent a number of processes involved in viral replication, such as the virus’s ability to penetrate cells and alter their genetic material.

Both compounds stimulate the release of the immune system chemical interferon, says Dr. Kowalsky. Interferon is your body’s built-in virus fighter. It attaches to cell surfaces and prevents viral DNA and RNA from reproducing, she says. Shortly thereafter, white blood cells called macrophages and natural killer cells are summoned to the scene to mount an even stronger defense against the virus.

In a study, 16 HIV-positive participants received 150 to 225 milligrams of pure glycyrrhizin, daily for three to seven years. At the end of the study, researchers discovered that not one person who received the licorice developed AIDS or showed any signs of deterioration in their immune systems. Among those in a similar group who didn’t receive the herb, two participants developed AIDS.

In another study, researchers gave 10 HIV-positive patients 150 to 225 milligrams of glycyrrhizin daily. After two years, not one had developed AIDS. Of the participants in the control group—people who took no supplements—three developed AIDS. “Licorice is definitely antiviral,” says Dr. Kowalsky.

Under a doctor’s supervision, you can take a daily dose of 1,500 milligrams of pure powdered licorice root that contains 5 percent glycyrrhetic acid, says Dr. Kowalsky. There are reasons to be cautious, however. If you take high daily doses of powdered licorice root, which comes in capsules, or of glycyrrhizin for more than four to six weeks, the supplements may cause sodium and water retention, potassium depletion, and high blood pressure. Don’t take licorice if you have high blood pressure or kidney problems.

Turmeric. Another herb that research shows can halt HIV replication in a variety of ways is turmeric, the spice that gives curry its pungent flavor. The active ingredient in this versatile antiviral herb is curcumin, which has a yellow pigment that gives turmeric its color.

Curcumin is an antioxidant that is 300 times more powerful than vitamin E. "Curcumin's antioxidant properties will protect your DNA from the ravages of the virus. It's also antimicrobial, so it will help prevent the many opportunistic illnesses associated with HIV and AIDS," says Dr. Kowalsky.

In a study at Harvard Medical School, researchers showed that turmeric prevented the reproduction of HIV by blocking a specific gene that activates the virus and causes it to spread. Another study showed that it can inhibit some of the steps that lead to the reproduction of HIV.

A group of 18 HIV-positive participants with T-cell counts ranging from 5 to 615 took an average of 2,000 milligrams of curcumin daily in a preliminary study. Researchers saw an increase in their T-cell counts compared with a control group that didn't take any curcumin. There's ongoing work in even larger studies that may tell us more about curcumin's effect on HIV. If your doctor is familiar with the benefits of turmeric, he may prescribe 2,000 milligrams daily, taken in 500-milligram doses four times a day.

St. John's wort. This herb, well-known for its use in treating mild to moderate depression, is also being studied to find out whether it can slow the progression of HIV to AIDS. The herb contains two antiviral compounds that have been shown in animal studies and in test tubes to inhibit the reproduction of HIV.

In a study, 18 HIV-positive participants were given two milligrams of hypericin, a substance found in St. John's wort, through weekly injections and oral supplements. Sixteen of the patients showed an increase in T-cell counts during the 40 months that they were observed. Only 2 of the 16 developed opportunistic infections during the study; the rest remained healthy.

Although St. John's wort looks promising, researchers must continue to study the herb to determine its effectiveness. Currently, it must be taken in very large doses in order to slow the spread of HIV in the body. Taken in such massive doses, however, it can cause severe sun sensitivity, cautions Dr. Lichtenstein.

The Case for Carnitine

Carnitine is a vital nutrient that's related to the B vitamins but is often referred to as an amino acid. Its main function is to transport fat to cells,

where they are turned into energy. What's more, carnitine increases the effectiveness of the antioxidant vitamins E and C. It has also been shown to boost immune function, and it can help prevent side effects of AZT.

If you have HIV or AIDS, talk to your doctor about taking this supplement. If you don't supplement with carnitine, your health could be in jeopardy, says Dr. Lichtenstein. "Carnitine prevents key white blood cells from dying. It prevents the nerve damage associated with AIDS. It can prevent wasting syndrome, which is a breakdown in muscle and other body tissues that's marked by weight loss, weakness, fever, diarrhea, and an increase in cholesterol."

In a study, researchers gave AIDS patients who were being treated with AZT 6,000 milligrams of carnitine daily. By the end of the study, the participants showed a significant increase in white blood cell counts.