

Stroke Prevention and Recovery... Naturally!

Strokes are terrifying. When you have a stroke, a portion of your brain dies. This is a profound injury that can change mood, thoughts, memories, speech, perceptions – the very ideas we use to define ourselves and lend meaning to our lives. For those who have been through it themselves, or have seen friends and loved ones altered by its effects, it can seem insurmountable. It is the *third* leading cause of death in the United States, and is the *leading cause* of serious, long-term disability. African Americans and men have higher rates of stroke, but in women they are more deadly. In fact, strokes kill more than twice as many women as breast cancer.

Grim though this disease may be, there is good news. First, obtaining emergency care within the first few hours of a stroke can greatly reduce damage done. Second, with patience, hard work, and luck, many victims of strokes recover some – or all – of their lost abilities. Third, and perhaps most importantly, strokes are largely *preventable*.

In this *Terry Talks Nutrition*® I will share with you proven nutrient interventions to help you prevent strokes, or help you recover and prevent a recurrence of this dangerous problem.

Defining a Stroke

Strokes occur when blood vessels to the brain are either blocked by a clot, or burst. When this happens, the blood and oxygen flow to the brain is interrupted and the affected sections of the brain begin to die.

A “mini-stroke” or “warning stroke” is caused by a temporary blood clot, and for all appearances, seems just like a stroke. Known as a “Transient Ischemic Attack”, it can be the precursor to something more serious. It should definitely be taken very seriously.

Because a stroke is so dangerous and so serious, it’s something that, understandably, people fear. Even if you have no medical training, you can do a simple assessment for a stroke and possibly save someone’s life:

- Ask them to **TALK** – just speak a simple, coherent sentence. Ask them to repeat a phrase. Slurred or garbled language, or lack of ability to speak, is a classic sign of stroke. Call for emergency assistance.
- Ask them to close their eyes and **RAISE** both arms. Weakness in one arm, or difficulty in raising one arm is a sign of a stroke. Call for emergency assistance. Remember, the sooner you seek emergency care, the better the outcome.

Healthy Blood Pressure

Did you know that up to half of all strokes are related directly to high blood pressure?

Nutrients that reduce blood pressure also greatly reduce your risk for stroke, TIAs, and vascular problems following strokes.

Olive Leaf Extract (*Oleae europaea L.*)

By now, everyone has probably heard about the benefits of olive oil. A recent study made the connection between olive oil and stroke prevention, too. In fact, the study author considers olive oil to be “an inexpensive and easy way to help prevent it.”

In the course of the study, researchers noted how much olive oil was consumed by three different groups. They were divided into “no use”, “moderate use”, and “intensive use” – which meant that they used olive oil for cooking, as a dressing, or with bread.

The people in the “intensive use” group had a **41% percent lower risk of stroke** compared to those with no olive oil in their diet. When the researchers looked at oleic acid levels in the blood, those with the highest levels had a **73% reduced risk of stroke!**

And, while practitioners, dieticians, and scientists are still piecing together the reasons why olive oil is so beneficial, one of the phenolic compounds, *oleuropein*, is an important factor.

Oleuropein is found in olive oil, but leaves from the olive tree are a rich source as well. The fact that the leaf material can be standardized and made into a convenient source of this compound is a plus for

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Nutrition

Terry's Bottom Line

If you are looking to lower your blood pressure, I recommend a combination of Olive Leaf (*Oleae europaea L.*) and Hibiscus (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) Extracts taken daily.

If you are looking at getting your cholesterol levels into balance and reducing oxidation, I recommend taking 1,000 mg of standardized Indian Gooseberry (*Embllica officianalis*) Fruit Extract daily.

researchers, practitioners, and anyone who is interested in protecting their cardiovascular system.

Olive leaf extract has been shown to reduce blood pressure, which in turn, reduces the risk of stroke. In a clinical trial, administration of a special olive leaf extract lowered systolic pressure (the top number) by 11 points and diastolic pressure (the bottom number) by 5 points. Beyond direct effects on blood pressure, the extract reduced LDL cholesterol levels as well.

Researchers believe that the combination of olive leaf’s antioxidant activity (much more powerful than vitamin E) protects the walls of the blood vessels, and that it helps widen narrow blood vessels, acting as a mild vasodilator, so that blood flows more easily and with less effort by the heart.

While I’m a huge fan of olive oil in the diet, for anyone with concerns about blood pressure, cholesterol balance, and stroke, I’d recommend an extract of olive leaf

More...

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standardized to contain oleuropein. This will make the benefits consistent, and is easier to include in your daily regimen.

Hibiscus (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*)

Hibiscus is much more than a beautiful flower. In many places in the world it is brewed as a tea, and like so many natural foods, it has a medicinal value that researchers are just beginning to appreciate.

Clinical studies show a lot of promise for hibiscus for lowering blood pressure. In one study, participants with mildly elevated blood pressure consuming hibiscus tea experienced a 7 point drop in systolic blood pressure. Participants with higher blood pressure levels (over 129) had up to a 14-point drop! If you've ever struggled with elevated blood pressure, you know that these are amazing numbers.

One of the reasons for the blood pressure lowering ability of hibiscus is the presence of beneficial anthocyanins. In the case of hibiscus, anthocyanins work as natural angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors, moderating the activity of an enzyme that causes blood vessels to narrow and blood pressure to increase. This natural ACE inhibitor helps keep blood vessels relaxed and open and, therefore, blood pressure goes down.

For the most optimal effects, I'd stress using a standardized extract daily to get the most from hibiscus. Getting a combination of hibiscus and olive leaf extract is one of the best ways to naturally lower blood pressure levels, which in turn greatly decreases your chance of suffering a stroke.

Healthy Cholesterol Balance

Arteries become clogged or clotted for two reasons: oxidation and inflammation. When LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol becomes oxidized, it tends to get "stickier", forming clots in the arteries. This oxidation (and clotting) also sends signals to the body that trigger an inflammatory response. Left alone, this combination of conditions will damage arteries and continue to attract more LDL cholesterol to the clot. It can set up a spiral that is difficult to overcome, but one that needs the right natural ingredients to get your cholesterol levels back into balance.

Also, keep in mind that most serious cholesterol problems have far more to do with not having enough HDL ("good") cholesterol. After all, our bodies produce up to 1,000 mg of cholesterol a day, and we need cholesterol for many crucial processes. When cholesterol is not in balance, the odds of oxidation and inflammation are much greater.

So, while I don't believe that cholesterol is "the enemy" as we've been taught, I believe that a balance of HDL (high-density lipoprotein) that scavenges excess cholesterol, and LDL is important. And I believe that plant extracts can have tremendous benefits – *without* the dangers of statin drugs.

Indian Gooseberry (*Emblica officinalis*)

In terms of effectiveness, Indian Gooseberry, also known as "Amla", is excellent for getting your cholesterol levels into balance. Indian Gooseberry has been used in Ayurvedic practice for over 2,000 years. In fact, early Ayurvedic medical texts dating back to 200 to 400 BC considered it "one of the best rejuvenating herbs." Practitioners noted that it helped rebuild tissues throughout the body, reduce inflammation, strengthen vision, and make bones stronger. It has more recently been the subject of intensive research regarding cancer prevention, inhibiting cancer growth in human lung cancer cells, melanoma cells, and cervical cancer cells. One of the ways it can do this is simply through an intense antioxidant power. Indian Gooseberry has the ability to increase our levels of the enzyme glutathione-S-transferase (GST), which detoxifies carcinogens including ionizing radiation, carbon tetrachloride, and arsenic. It also boosts cancer-fighting NK (natural killer) cell activity and prevents DNA mutations caused by aluminum, lead, and chromium.

And these are just *some* of Indian Gooseberry's amazing benefits!

As for cholesterol balance, one clinical study showed that participants taking 500-1,000 mg of Indian Gooseberry before bedtime **increased HDL (good cholesterol) by 14%** and significantly **decreased LDL cholesterol by 21%**. Total serum cholesterol was reduced by 17% and triglyceride levels dropped by 24% within only *three months*.

These are all impressive numbers. Especially when you consider that raising HDL levels by even 1% can reduce your risk of heart disease by 2 to 3%, and make a *big* difference in your LDL cholesterol. Remember, the higher your HDL cholesterol, the better it is for your heart!

Indian Gooseberry also reduces inflammation – one of the primary causes of all disease, *especially* heart disease and stroke. On this count it is quite impressive: research shows that it can reduce levels of CRP (C-reactive protein) **by over 30%**. This marker of inflammation in the cardiovascular system is routinely measured to determine an individual's risk.

Traditionally, Indian Gooseberry – like so many traditional botanicals – was used as an ingredient in foods as well as being considered a healing herb. But I believe that getting a well-prepared, strong extract is key to getting the results you want faster. For that reason, I recommend an extract of Indian Gooseberry. This concentrated power will help you balance your cholesterol levels more effectively, which can help reduce the risk of stroke dramatically.

A Stroke is Not Inevitable

In the vast majority of cases, strokes are preventable. Eat a healthy diet, maintain your weight, avoid smoking, get regular physical activity, don't drink alcohol to excess, and use supplements to lower your risk. With a combination of clinically studied ingredients, you can help ease your blood pressure numbers back to where they should be, get your cholesterol levels in balance, and reduce your risk of stroke. It's so simple to incorporate these nutrients into your daily regimen – and definitely worth the time.

Finally, getting a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids should also be a part of any heart or brain health regimen. For more information about a whole food form of omega-3s bound to phospholipids, (and not triglycerides, like you'll find in fish oils), read my article, "Peptides, Phospholipids & Omega-3s." Protect your brain and protect your life!

When in doubt, always consult your physician or health care practitioner. This article is intended to provide you with information to maintain your health.

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