

Health and Wellness for Men

A discussion of some specific body systems:

Cardiovascular system – water, and a little fire

- Consists of the heart, arteries (supply), veins (return), and capillaries (transition).
- Essential for the well-being of every cell in the body – to ensure tissue oxygenation, blood perfusion, nutrient transport, and toxin removal.
- Governed by the heart, which is made of unique muscle tissue and is an incredible, tireless four-chambered pump.
- The blood vessels are made of complex, supple and multi-layered tissue that is sensitive and elastic.
- Capillaries distribute oxygen and nutrients at the cellular level, and are very responsive to signals from the nervous system. They participate in the stress response by reducing blood supply to the periphery of the body.

The cardiovascular system can be the area where many ‘symptoms’ of male imbalances manifest. This is partly due to the sensitivity of this area to chronic stress conditions.

Some potential imbalances that may develop in the heart and blood vessels:

- Congestion. This can be related to occlusion of the arteries (atherosclerosis) by plaques that form around injuries of the arterial wall. It can also occur as a result of chronic stress which constricts peripheral capillaries. This can often be coupled with:
 - Excess. Manifests most often as high blood pressure, high heart rate, strong pulse. This imbalance can be due to lack of exercise (as with any muscle, the heart works better when it is more ‘toned’, or exercised, and will not need to beat as hard or fast to move the same amount of blood), chronic stress response (again!), or it may simply be a fiery constitutional trait.
 - Deficiency. Sometimes the heart is weakened and unable to circulate the blood properly. Fluid can stagnate in the body (edema), causing further congestion that continues to weaken the heart.

Endocrine system – water and fire

- Includes all the glands of the body that manufacture a wide array of hormones and steroids; specifically, the adrenal glands and the testes are most involved in common male imbalances.
- Is deeply intertwined with the nervous system, acting to regulate most metabolic processes, growth and development, fertility, energy level, and vitality.
- The adrenal glands, perched above the kidneys, are considered the source of vital force in the human body by Chinese medicine, and are necessary to mobilize the stress response.

The endocrine system, and in particular the adrenal glands, deeply affects the whole person down to the smallest cell by ‘speeding up’ or ‘slowing down’ the consumption of nutrients and oxygen through the hormones it secretes. In today’s society, many men are constantly asked to ‘speed it up’. This can only be kept up for so long, until stimulants such as caffeine and tobacco are used to squeeze more out of the adrenal glands. Eventually, imbalances result:

- Deficiency. Hormones are at reduced levels, and the speed at which new ones can be produced is slowed. Energy levels and motivation are also lowered, which can begin to co-involve many other body systems, leading to depression, congestion in the cardiovascular system, or sexual deficiency. Testosterone

production itself may be low, either alongside adrenal insufficiency or alone, and this imbalance has a strong effect on potential fertility.

- Excess. There are conditions of metabolic excess, such as Grave's disease, but by and large deficiencies are more common. In certain cases excesses in other systems may be traced back to an elevation in testosterone production.

Genito-urinary system – water

- Includes the kidneys, bladder, urethra, testes, penis, seminal vesicles and prostate. There are also many major blood vessels (such as the penile artery) and numerous capillaries in this area, as well as nerve fibers and receptors.

- The urinary system removes liquid wastes from the body and regulates mineral balance. It is closely tied to the cardiovascular system.

- The male reproductive system produces sperm and seminal fluid. This combines with prostatic fluid during emission and ejaculation.

Closely tied to the endocrine system (of which it can be considered a part), the male reproductive system can be the focus of much of men's energy. This can cause a variety of imbalances, especially in today's society where sexual stimulation is everywhere:

- Congestion. The prostate may exhibit symptoms if this is the case, causing discomfort during lovemaking, difficult urination, and occasionally tumors in the area. Stagnation in the cardiovascular system can also cause congestion here, such as the occlusion of the penile artery in atherosclerosis.

- Excess. This can manifest as 'overexuberant' libido, and occasionally can be linked to skin problems (teenage acne, for example). There is usually a strong endocrine component in this case.

- Deficiency. Various areas of the reproductive system can be subject to deficiency, resulting in conditions such as impotence, infertility, or depressed libido. The circulatory and endocrine systems usually play a strong role in the reduction of vitality in this region.

Liver and metabolism – fire

- The liver acts as a complex 'filter' for nearly everything we absorb, modifying nutrients for easier absorption and eliminating toxins before they can cause damage.

- The liver is, in many senses, the 'governor' of the body, ensuring proper metabolism of food after it is absorbed by the intestine, regulating sugar use (along with the pancreas), and detoxifying the system (along with the gallbladder).

- Chemicals are broken down in the liver in a two-step process, being first broken apart, then recombined into less harmful forms.

- The bile, secreted by the liver and gallbladder, serves the functions of increasing the absorption of beneficial fats and vitamins, and elimination of harmful by-products.

It is easy to see how exposed the liver is in today's environment. Our systems are vulnerable to the increased chemical loads we experience, from pharmaceuticals, to pesticides and chemical fertilizers, to food additives and preservatives. And, because of its importance in absorption and metabolism (on which all body systems depend), the liver always warrants consideration and attention:

- Congestion. Liver metabolism can get ‘backed up’ for a variety of reasons, from chemical exposure to toxins naturally present in food. When this happens, filtration of harmful chemicals in the blood happens more slowly, leading to complications such as ‘free radical’ damage, allergies, and skin eruptions. More often, there will be no apparent symptoms other than a subtly increased ‘stress level’ as the nervous system attempts to cope with the increased amount of irritants.
- Excess. Strangely enough, liver excess can show signs similar to those of congestion: allergies, skin conditions, and nervous system stress (which begins to affect other systems). This is partly because the liver works in a two-step process to metabolize chemicals: if the first step is overactive and outpaces the second step, many highly toxic ‘free radicals’ will escape back into the blood system, resulting in many of the same problems congestion, but from a more internal, constitutional source. This is true ‘liver fire’.
- Deficiency. After chronic exposure to such difficult, powerful substances as pharmaceuticals, alcohol, tobacco, and industrial chemicals; or after suffering viral infections such as hepatitis, the liver can suffer physical damage that can hamper its ability to detoxify the system. Often, the characteristic sign of liver deficiency is a yellowish complexion. Many of the initial symptoms will be similar to those mentioned above, but it is important to move quickly and whole-heartedly in these cases because of the crucial role the liver plays.

Nervous system – the fifth element

- The nervous system includes the central and peripheral nervous systems, referring to the brain and spinal column as ‘central’, and the remaining nerve fibers as ‘peripheral’.
- Consciously controlled nerves in the body are called ‘somatic’, and those that are regulated unconsciously are called ‘autonomic’. The autonomic nerves are further divided into the ‘parasympathetic’ and ‘sympathetic’ nervous systems.
- The parasympathetic nervous system is intertwined with all organs and tissues of the body, sending signals that stimulate relaxation, opening, digestion, rest and growth. It is an expression of ‘yin’ in the nervous system – and it also controls erection (which relates closely to relaxation).
- The sympathetic nervous system is equally enmeshed with all body systems, but it is much more ‘yang’, governing the stress response, adrenal activation, tissue constriction, and stimulation for ‘fight-or-flight’. Ejaculation and orgasm are sympathetic responses.

We cannot literally ‘feel’ our autonomic nervous systems – but subconsciously, it relays information from our internal organs constantly. Sometimes, this information is overwhelming, and we experience a ‘gut feeling’. More often, if organs are under stress, a low level of irritation may be present. Normally, the parasympathetic system keeps things moving smoothly, if it is strong and there is no nerve damage. Other times, however, the sympathetic system becomes activated too often:

- Excess. Constantly on edge. The sympathetic nervous system is activated over and over, and the body comes to rely on the stress response and resultant adrenaline rush. Needless to say, this cannot go on forever: it is important to identify *why* the excess is present: from an inherent constitutional trait, or liver congestion, or suppressed and unresolved emotions, or stressful work / home environments, or unreasonable expectations, etc.
- Deficiency. There can be two general manifestations of nervous system deficiency: the first is depression, which affects the entire being and nervous system; the second is nervous anxiety, often as a result of a deficiency in the parasympathetic, relaxing side of the autonomic system, which leaves the person again ‘on edge’, but for a different reason.

Digestive system – earth

- The digestive system stretches from the mouth to the colon, encompassing the esophagus, stomach, and the small and large intestines. Sometimes the liver / gallbladder / pancreas system will be included here.
- This system is essential for the initial breakdown of everything we ingest. It functions in close concert with the nervous system, the liver, and the endocrine system.
- The lower digestive tract is the host for a variety of beneficial bacteria that aid in digestion and elimination.

No remedy can help if the digestive system is affected. If there are signs of imbalance, we should consider adding helpful digestives to the formula to ensure proper absorption and nourishment. In addition, many men can divert much stress and energy from the nervous to the digestive system, again as part of the stress response:

- Excess. This imbalance can relate to increased stomach acid production, heartburn, ulcers, and a variety of generally ‘fiery’ upper-digestive manifestations. In the intestine, inflammatory conditions may result. There is often a nervous system connection in both of these cases.
- Deficiency. Incomplete digestion can cause gassiness, bloating, loose stools, and may be associated with food allergies and sensitivities. Usually deficiency in the lower intestine is best approached by working on the liver; upper digestive deficiency is helped by the aromatic digestive herbs.

Common conditions affecting men:

Stress. This most common male (and human) condition is at the root of many health imbalances. Unfortunately, men are traditionally asked to endure long periods of stress, which is fine if there is some form of release. Nowadays, unfortunately, this is not often the case. The resultant cascade of chronic imbalance can be very debilitating. Stress will manifest initially as nervous system excess, but after long-term exposure it results primarily in adrenal deficiency, circulatory congestion, and finally nervous system deficiency. At this point, the entire being will suffer – inflammation will increase and the resulting damage will exacerbate the original problems in a vicious circle. Use: **nervines** (oats, scullcap, blue vervain), **adaptogens** (licorice, rhodiola, ginseng), **adrenal tonics** (ginseng, licorice, ashwagandha) and most importantly, an adequately intense **exercise program!**

Atherosclerosis. Also known as ‘hardening of the arteries’, this condition stems from damage to the blood vessel walls, usually as a result of increased levels of toxins in the body (liver congestion). It leads to further congestion in the circulatory system (cholesterol build-up has a role here, although it is not really *causative*), and can have fatal complications if ignored. It can be linked to deficiencies in the peripheral circulatory system, including the genital area. Another factor that seems complicit: increased blood sugar, which is becoming an important concern in the “diabetes epidemic” (a.k.a. “sugar-and-no-exercise epidemic”). Use: **cholesterol-lowering** plants (garlic, fenugreek, guggul), **cholagogues** (dandelion, Oregon grape root, burdock, yellowdock, milk thistle), and **tonics for the cardiovascular system** (hawthorn, motherwort).

High blood pressure (HBP). It seems men have consistently higher blood pressures than women do. It is unclear whether this is a constitutional trait, or a result of the cultural roles and expectations associated with men; I suspect it is a combination of both. This excess of the cardiovascular system is best approached by toning the heart muscle both literally and figuratively: through better **exercise**, **cardio-tonic herbs** (hawthorn, coleus), **diaphoretics** (yarrow, linden) and **antispasmodics** (valerian, crampbark) but also through emotional support and the ability to release feelings that many men suppress, overburdening the heart, mind and spirit. What is buried deep and left un-addressed? This may take long-term counseling and lots of “digging” – conversely, with some good and gentle herbs, suppressed feelings begin to resurface. The whole is a single, complex pattern: you can intervene at many different levels. In severe cases where there is no history of depression, rauwolfia (snakeroot, sarpagandha) can be used for 2 weeks to jump-start the treatment.

Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). This condition is a result of the swelling and enlargement of the prostate gland, due to infection or to other unclear causes, and subsequent constriction of the urethra. It can cause symptoms such as dribbling urine, poor flow and difficult urination, painful lovemaking / ejaculation, even ineffective ejaculation and infertility. It is an expression of congestion in the genito-urinary system, and responds to **specific treatment** designed to unblock that area (saw palmetto, pygeum africanum, nettle root and seed, pumpkin seeds), as well as more general **‘moving’ herbs** (yarrow, e.g.). **Prostate cancer.** This condition is often linked to similar congestion of the male reproductive system, and should be treated similarly to BPH except for the addition of **liver- and immune-supportive remedies** (milk thistle, red reishi, chaga mushroom). Very often prostatic cancers are slow-growing and present little risk of metastasis, so any man contemplating surgery for this condition should weigh the risks of permanent damage, impotence, and infertility against the benefits.

Adrenal insufficiency. Fatigue. This deficiency of the endocrine system is common enough to warrant its own ‘condition’. It is implicated in a variety of other imbalances as well (HBP, depression, low libido, impotence, infertility), and comes as a result of repeatedly unrewarded stress responses. Rest is usually indicated, followed by remedies that support and gently encourage adrenal function (rather than stimulants which will only squeeze one last drop from a dry sponge). I favor Rhodiola as an excellent, short-term re-builder, coupled with Astragalus if there has been illness or if immune function is obviously low. Ashwagandha is invaluable in the cases of *yin* deficiency that result in insomnia. Licorice helps counteract inflammatory conditions (useful in chronic fatigue with joint pain, and if a viral infection is implicated). It is always a good idea to support the liver and digestive systems here as well, for proper nourishment and recovery.

Impotence. This condition is complex and can have a variety of factors coming to bear in the final presentation of ‘erectile dysfunction’. Most often, one should look to circulatory and liver congestion (use opening, **vasorelaxing** remedies such as Yohimbe, Valerian, Crampbark and/or **circulatory** enhancers such as Ginkgo), endocrine or hormonal deficiencies (including **adrenal** insufficiency – use Sarsaparilla, Rhodiola, Ginseng, Ashwagandha), and nervous system excess (use the relaxing **nervines**). Other times, environmental / situational factors can come into play – but these can be gently addressed by relaxing the nervous system.

Infertility. This is primarily a result of either mechanical problems, such as constrictive clothing or overheated testes, internal deficiencies in the reproductive and endocrine systems, or issues with the liver processing sex hormones properly. Any or all of the following deficiencies may be present: decreased sperm production, decreased seminal or prostatic fluid production, or constriction of the urethra by the prostate during ejaculation. These imbalances in the glandular systems can be coupled with liver congestion or excess and the concomitant nervous system flare-ups that will continue to deplete adrenal reserves.

Rebuilding and **balancing** remedies are in order here: adrenal tonics (Ashwagandha, Ginseng, Sarsaparilla) and Schizandra, an excellent hormonal rebalancer that also works on liver and adrenal function.

Urinary tract and yeast infections. Candida and UTIs can often exist inside men without causing symptoms. However, if a man’s sexual partner has a genito-urinary infection, it is likely he has it as well and could continue passing it back if left untreated. Anti-infective and anti-fungal protocols should be used for both partners, and the man should practice good genital hygiene including penis soaks, a few times a day, in a warm, strong tea of barberry root, comfrey and plantain. Soak for 10 to 15 minutes, completely retracting the foreskin, in addition to any internal protocol you may be using to address the underlying infection.

Materia Medica for Men's Health and Wellness:

Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*, *Panax quinquefolius*)

This 'king of tonics' has been used for millennia as a general tonic for vitality and reproductive health. It is a diminutive woodland plant, old and wise, a true gift of the forest!

System energetics affected

Endocrine deficiency, Reproductive deficiency

Also Liver and Digestive deficiency, and general congestion

Specifics

Korean *Panax ginseng* is much more stimulating and fiery. Use with caution in cases of severe deficiency, as it may be too jarring, or when there are excesses manifesting elsewhere in the body. American *Panax quinquefolius* does not have these detriments.

Administration

For medicinal purposes, ginseng is taken in relatively high doses, usually 2-5 grams daily of the whole root, or as a decoction of the powder. Alcohol extracts are useful as well, in ½ to 1 tsp. doses.

Rhodiola (*Rhodiola rosea*)

Powerful, but gentle, adaptogenic and stimulating tonic. It re-enlivens depleted and sluggish constitutions, counteracts fatigue and depression, and enhances immunity.

System energetics affected

Endocrine deficiency, Nervous system deficiency

Specifics

Excellent for safely supporting endurance and stamina. Use for two to four week bursts.

Administration

Alcohol tincture, 60 to 90 drops before lunchtime (for a typical 180lb male; can be higher / more often if the person is heavier).

Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*)

A premier tonic for the circulatory system, to increase blood flow to the peripheral capillaries and improve oxygenation of all tissue. An invaluable remedy for circulatory congestion and impotence.

System energetics affected

Circulatory congestion, Nervous deficiency

Specifics

Impotence, cold hands and feet. Helpful as well in cases of memory / cognitive impairment in the elderly.

Administration

Standardized extract is the preferred choice for this relatively modern remedy. Although the ancient Chinese used the male nuts, we use the leaves. They make a good tea, but standard therapy uses an extract marked at 24% flavo-glycosides, 60 milligrams, twice daily.

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)

This is another excellent root and endocrine tonic for men. It comes to us through the rich Ayurvedic tradition of the Indian subcontinent. It is especially useful for tonifying the reproductive systems of those who also have weak nerves. Also, one of my favorite non-sedating tonics for insomnia.

System energetics affected

Endocrine deficiency, nervous deficiency.

Specifics

Anxiety, depression, coupled with adrenal / reproductive imbalance.

Administration

Alcohol tincture, ¼ to ½ tsp. two or three times a day.

Sarsaparilla (*Smilax officinalis*)

What an excellent, enlivening and tasty tonic! It is a shame that original, true 'root' beers are so hard to find these days: we could all benefit from the body-wide boost this herb can bring. It seems to have a special affinity, however, to a man's endocrine and reproductive systems.

System energetics affected

Endocrine deficiency, Reproductive deficiency, Liver congestion, Digestive deficiency

Specifics

Look for digestive system weakness to be present as well. Often, this will manifest in the Spring as the body switches gears and readies itself for the working season ahead.

Administration

Light decoction, covered, for 30 or more minutes. Combines well with birch bark, dandelion root and eleuthero for a tasty 'root beer'. Take in the spring and fall for renewed vigor.

Muira Puama (*Liriosma ovata*)

Also known as 'potency wood', this tropical bark has shown remarkable potential for treating impotence and general reproductive issues. It increases stamina, fertility, and potency.

System energetics affected

Reproductive deficiency

Specifics

Some warn against long-term use of this herb, although it seems perfectly safe. It is never a bad idea to provide additional liver support!

Administration

Decoction or alcohol tincture, as needed.

Damiana (*Turnera aphrodisiaca*)

This herb has a long history of use as a relaxant and an aphrodisiac. It is excellent at releasing tension and letting the mind and body slip into 'something more comfortable'.

System energetics affected

Nervous excess, Reproductive deficiency

Specifics

Combine with rose extract or chocolate for extra power.

Administration

Infusion with honey, alcohol tincture with honey, as needed.

Yohimbe (*Pausinystalia yohimba*)

A powerful hypnotic, Yohimbe can have profound effects on the consciousness. In small doses, it is a strong circulatory stimulant and nervous system relaxant, which makes it a great choice for impotence. Use with caution.

System energetics affected

Nervous excess, circulatory congestion and deficiency

Specifics

Can be hallucinogenic, and trance-inducing in higher doses.

Administration

Alcohol extract, ½ teaspoon per dose.

Saw Palmetto (*Sereona repens*)

This remarkable berry has proven more effective than any conventional treatment for prostatic infection, enlargement, and cancer. In many milder cases it can relieve symptoms and underlying causes completely.

System energetics affected

Reproductive congestion, Reproductive deficiency

Specifics

The prostate - and to a certain extent the testes and testosterone metabolism

Administration

Because of its flavor and difficulty in extraction, the standardized extract is recommended, usually at 90 milligrams a day.

Pumpkin seeds (*Cucurbita pepo*)

A great snack that is also an excellent remedy for male reproductive congestion. Use raw, or roasted, by themselves or on salads and bread.

System energetics affected

Reproductive congestion, Reproductive deficiency

Specifics

Use alongside Saw Palmetto to address prostate enlargement and congestion. A good idea as a dietary addition for any man over 40.

Administration

Eaten whole.

Nettle root (*Urtica dioica*)

This part of the nettle has incredible decongesting power for the male reproductive system. It shown its martial energy here by effectively helping to clear out prostatic blockage.

System energetics affected

Genito-urinary congestion

Specifics

Combine with Saw Palmetto and pumpkin seeds for prostate issues.

Administration

Light decoction, 8 to 16 oz daily.

Hawthorn (*Crataegus species*)

The leaves, flowers and berries of this tree, also known as the White Thorn, are the best heart tonics available, bar none. The entire circulatory system shows benefit when this herb is administered over long periods. It should always be the first consideration for high blood pressure at its initial stages. And, more subtly, it has the power to begin addressing deep emotional wounds, or long-unexpressed sentiments that may 'weigh heavily on the heart'.

System energetics affected

Cardiovascular excess, deficiency, or congestion.

Specifics

For high blood pressure, combine in a formula with nervous system relaxants, such as linden blossoms, and removers of general congestion, such as yarrow.

Administration

Infusion, 8oz twice daily; or jam, 1-2 TBS daily; or alcohol extract, ½ tsp twice daily.

Oat tops (*Avena sativa*)

In today's world, we all need something soothing and nourishing. The milky tops of oats, right before they mature and set seed, have proven to be just such a remedy: it tones the whole of the nervous system, improving its efficiency and gently and subtly relaxing it. It is an excellent addition to any tonic tea blend for men, who so often have over-stimulated nervous systems.

System energetics affected

Nervous system deficiency and excess

Specifics

Excellent in many cases, but most suited for those exposed to chronic stress, especially from outside chemical sources (alcohol, tobacco, drugs, preservatives, pesticides, industrial contaminants, etc...) and in cases of physical nerve damage.

Administration

Tea is best. Use a strong, overnight infusion of 1oz dry tops to 16 oz water.

Red Reishi (*Ganoderma lucidum*, *G. tsugae*)

If Ginseng is the root of kings, this is the mushroom of kings. Prized for its longevity-enhancing power, it is anti-tumor, anti-allergy, revitalizing to the system, and stimulating to immunity. My theory is that part of its strength comes from its strong affinity to the liver, where its metabolism tonifies and normalizes this overworked organ.

System energetics affected

Liver congestion, excess, and deficiency

Specifics

Prostate cancer and other tumors. Seasonal allergies. Hepatitis. HIV.

Administration

Alcohol extract combined with strong decoction. Start with small doses – 10 drops or so – and work up to ¼ tsp 2 or 3 times daily.

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

The 'herb of Achilles', Yarrow has a long reputation as a warrior's ally. Indeed, every man who works outdoors should become familiar with its ability to instantly stop wounds from bleeding with its astringent action, while it disinfects, too! Internally, Yarrow is a great mover of congestion, diverting stagnant fluids and blood and promoting a healthy, detoxifying sweat.

System energetics affected

Genito-urinary congestion, cardiovascular excess

Specifics

Relieves the painful need to urinate that accompanies prostate swelling. Also, a good fever-reducer.

Administration

Apply the chewed leaves and flowers directly to wounds. Warm infusion for genito-urinary complaints and fever, ¼ oz per 16oz water.

Therapeutic considerations for Men's protocols:

While men enjoy a disproportionate share of benefits in today's society when compared to women, they are also subject to an ever-increasing amount of stress. In addition, as their role as 'providers' and 'controllers' is coming more in question, men are suffering a crisis of identity and place, which only adds to the general level of stress.

When crafting a protocol for a man, I find that aside from specific issues that may be present, it is always a good idea to follow these principles:

- Tonify the liver. Without it, everything else becomes more susceptible to imbalance. Men have fewer detoxification avenues open to them (notably, no menstruation), and the liver often needs a little love. The liver's role in metabolizing hormones and clearing pro-inflammatory compounds from the system makes it a central player in a wide range of degenerative conditions.
- Strengthen and soothe the nervous system and the adrenal glands. This comes as a result of the increased amount of stress at the root of so many imbalances. Again, stress is closely linked to chronic inflammation.
- Attempt to dissipate any congestion, be it of the reproductive or circulatory systems. Men tend to suppress many things, for whatever reasons (to be strong, because they 'don't matter', etc...). Suppression only leads to blockage, which needs to be gently melted away. This can take time – but it's well worth going slow, as this provides the longest-lasting changes.

In general, it may be hard for some men to acknowledge their need for love, nourishment, and connection – after all, isn't America all about the 'individual' and 'making it on your own'? Allowing this realization to come, gently, as part of a nourishing herbal protocol can be the most therapeutic change of all.

This can be helped along by adding other healing modalities to the mix, especially ones that involve touch or physical experiences, such as massage, acupressure, healing baths and aromatherapy. Interaction and support from a loving friend and companion are also extremely valuable, establishing connections that will nourish body, mind and spirit with Vital Force and a sense of belonging. Exercise, for the many reasons mentioned, is extremely important and the key to maintaining an uncongested system in which chi flows smoothly (Kegel exercises can be an invaluable addition here). And, of course, dietary consideration must always be at the forefront of any protocol, avoiding animal fats and excessive starches for cardiovascular conditions, eating plenty of green, leafy vegetables for liver and endocrine imbalances, and adding foods such as tomato paste and black cherry juice for prostate problems. In general, to support adequate detoxification and vigor, the diet should be fairly simple, including many steamed vegetables, some whole grains, and high-quality protein from organic chicken and fatty fish (salmon, for example).

If we can help the men we know to live full, joyous, loving, meaningful, hard-working lives, we will be that much closer to conquering the sometimes paralyzing fear that has wreaked so much havoc in the world through the hearts and minds of this culture's men. Our allies, the plants, are ever willing to show us the trail into the woods – and, fortunately, they can be as stubbornly good-natured in that call as we men can be in our own lives. So even if it's only a tasty Sarsaparilla brew in the springtime, we should work hard to build links between men and nature again, to bring a blossoming of beauty back into hearts that may have become hardened.