Spring Cleansing: Wise for Metabolism & Hormone Health

Increasing daylight and warmth brings about hormonal shifts in the natural world—which of course means lots of adorable baby animals like this little owlet I spied last Spring!

The shifting season thaws the ground and brings tender greens and sprouts—which creatures large and small nibble on as they begin to shed their heavy winter coats and fat layers.

Spring brings hormonal and metabolic shifts in us too. After the rich, sweet foods that come with winter festivities, we tend to want to lighten up as well.

Are you drawn to fresher foods and greens at this time of year? It's natural—greens play an important role in our body's detoxification processes.

The first plants of spring support nutritional detoxification and cleansing.

Arugula, dandelion, asparagus, artichoke, peas, and avocados are among the richest sources of chlorophyll, a molecule that binds with toxins like heavy metals and carries them out of the body.

These foods ease the body burden of modern chemicals we take in from skincare, cosmetics, pesticides, and artificial ingredients in foods.

They also help pave the way for healthy hormones and metabolism by lessening the secondary health effects of an over-taxed liver—things like hormonal imbalance, poor digestion, skin issues, night sweats, and disrupted sleep.

Our liver is crucial for filtering everything we take into our bodies—whether swallowed, inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

Your liver functions like a waste treatment plant.

Our livers filters our blood (at the amazing rate of 1.5 liters every minute) separating out nutrients, then doing its best to neutralize, re-package, and dispose of wastes, excess hormones, and toxins.

When wastes and toxins can't be eliminated, they accumulate and form a sort of sludge that congests the liver. This lessens your ability to fight off bacterial and viral pathogens, and contributes to gallstones when your liver is simply too sludgy to produce healthy bile.

When your liver is full, toxins are stored in the fatty layer under your skin as…"liver spots".

And, when your liver can't filter your blood as well, wastes accumulate there too. Picture a swamp versus a fresh, clear stream.

Healthy Liver Function Is the Underpinning of Hormone Balance

1. Your liver activates hormones. Thyroid hormone is a perfect example. Your liver is supposed to convert inactive T4 into active T3 that your cells need for energy and metabolism. A congested or even damaged liver that isn't converting properly can underlie thyroid symptoms such as low energy, cold hands, thinning hair, and weight gain.[ii]

2. Your liver deactivates and removes used hormones. If old hormones aren't broken down due to a sludgy-liver, excess cortisol and harmful estrogen by-products could be continuously cycling through your system, wreaking hormonal havoc because your liver, like a dirty air filter in your car, isn't clean enough to remove them.

For women especially, if your liver can't properly break down excess estrogen or testosterone, you may be dealing with estrogen dominance, irregular cycles, PCOS, cystic acne and have a higher risk of estrogen-related cancers.[iii]

In our practice, following lab testing, one of the first and most important steps in rebuilding hormone health and metabolism is nutritional support for healthy liver function.

Some indicators that nutritional cleansing could benefit your metabolism and hormones include:

1. You and your digestion are both sluggish after too many rich winter foods and treats, or you crave sweets after meals

2. The whites of your eyes are more yellow and appear bloodshot even when you're well-rested

3. You have night sweats or wake between 2 and 4 am, the time when your liver is working hardest to filter your blood

4. You have skin signs such as frequent itching, break-outs, or painful acne along your chin line

When choosing how to support your liver through purification, it's as important to know what to avoid as what can help.

Many "detox" products contain synthetic vitamins that don't come with the needed co-factors and co-enzymes that are present in real foods. These incomplete chemicals use up your body's vitamin and mineral reserves to assimilate, and can leave you depleted and dehydrated, ultimately doing more harm than good, and endangering your metabolism in the long-run.

Your body does best with clean, organic whole foods and whole-food supplements that provide adequate supplies of nutrients, *including* their natural co-enzymes and co-factors present in nature. Your body can select exactly what it needs from real foods, just like from a salad bar. A quick read of many "detox" products can tell you whether the ingredients are foods or industrial chemicals.

Your body needs synergistic foods, not antagonistic chemicals

For mild cleansing, begin simply: take a tip from nature and start by getting more fresh tender leafy greens, drink extra water to flush out wastes, and get moving outside on these brighter, longer days!

If you are considering nutritional cleansing, seek qualified support to guide you successfully through what *your body needs*, and to work through any challenges that may arise. This can't be over-stated, especially if you have multiple symptoms, are taking medication, or desire specific outcomes.

Dr. Kimberly Higney assists patients in looking and feeling their best by helping them reset their hormone health and metabolism through lifestyle. She has a private practice on the Seacoast of New Hampshire. For more information visit www.cardeaseacoast.com

[i] Riva MA, Riva E, Spicci M, et al. "The city of Hepar": Rituals, gastronomy, and politics at the origins of the modern names for the liver. Journal of hepatology. 2011;55(5):1132–1136.
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[iii] HV Thomas, TJ Key, DS Allen, et al. A prospective study of endogenous serum hormone concentrations and breast cancer risk in post-menopausal women on the island of Guernsey. British Journal of Cancer. 1997;76:401–405.