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Addressing Swollen Veins

Varicose veins and spider veins—two types of chronic venous insufficiency (CVI)—are more common in women than men.

Horse chestnut seed extract was approved by the German Commission E for treatment of CVI, varicose veins, hemorrhoids and edema, and research reviews suggest it is a safe and efficacious short-term treatment for CVI.¹ Scottish researchers report 50 mg/twice daily of horse chestnut seed extract (as Aesculaforce®, from Bioforce) reduces ankle and lower leg swelling in CVI patients, a majority of whom rated the intervention as “good” or “very good.”²

Horse chestnut seed extract (600 mg/d) was also compared in an open study of 40 CVI patients to the efficacy of **French maritime pine bark extract** (360 mg/d as Pycnogenol®, from Natural Health Science).³ Both interventions reduced lower limb circumference and improved symptoms, with pine bark showing a greater impact.

A newer entry to the U.S. market is the flavonoid **disomin**, derived from sweet orange and used in Europe for years as a treatment for vascular health and to reduce inflammation. Research on the diosmin product DiosVein™, from Berg Imports, has found the extract could improve the severity and pain of acute hemorrhoids,⁴ while Indian researchers found it could relieve symptoms associated with pregnancy-related hemorrhoids.⁵

whom Promensil supplementation decreased the rate of menopausal symptoms and triglyceride levels.¹⁵ Another multicenter, double blind study found intervention with Promensil reduced the number of hot flashes more rapidly than placebo, though there was no difference at the end of the study in reduction of mean daily hot flashes.¹⁶

“While Promensil was not as good as estrogen at stopping hot flashes, it is better than placebo and works with very few side effects,” said Lila Nachtigall, M.D., director of the Women’s Wellness Program at the New York University Medical Center; Nachtigall has conducted studies using Promensil for menopausal symptoms. “In addition, studies have shown that it doesn’t increase breast density or endometrial lining, suggesting its safety profile. So if a woman is determined not to take estrogen, we can use something like Promensil first.”

Another phytoestrogenic compound is **soy isoflavones**, which have been studied for their ability to relieve climacteric complaints because of the low reported frequency of hot flashes in Asian cultures, where soy consumption is more prevalent.¹⁷ Soy isoflavone treatment reduced hot flashes by 44 percent in a six-month Brazilian study,¹⁸ and had similar effects in an Italian study when soy isoflavones were given orally (50 mg/d or 75 mg/d) or transdermally (12 mg/d).¹⁹ Specialty formulas of isoflavones have also proven beneficial. For example, an Italian study involving 177 postmenopausal women experiencing five or more hot flashes per day found 50 mg/d of genistin and daidzin (as SoySelect®, from Indena) reduced severity and incidence of hot flashes in only two weeks, and to a greater degree than placebo after six weeks.²⁰ Further research found SoySelect had synergistic effects in reducing hot flashes when combined with HRT.²¹

Red clover and soy are not the only source of phytoestrogens studied for their impact on menopausal symptoms. Another source of phytoestrogens is **Polygonum cuspidatum**, an herb used in traditional

Chinese medicine; its estrogenic effects are attributed to its **resveratrol** content. In a study of a standardized extract of trans-resveratrol from *Polygonum cuspidatum* (as Protokin®, from InterHealth Nutraceuticals), researchers found the extract improved menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, mood swings and bone strength.²²

Specialty formulas may also positively impact menopausal symptoms. Researchers from Samsung Cheil Hospital, Korea, performed a double blind study on a phytochemical formula that includes Shanzhiside methyl ester, *Cynanchum wilfordii* and *Phlomis umbrosa* (as EstroG-100™, from JLM Marketing); a total of 47 postmenopausal women were included in the study. After three months, there was a significant improvement in hot flashes and vaginal dryness in the EstroG-100 group.

Another study using a combination of *Salvia officinalis* (sage) and *Medicago sativa* (alfalfa) in 30 menopausal women with hot flashes found the combination therapy completely alleviated hot flashes and night sweating in 20 women and reduced symptoms in the remainder; the researchers attributed the results to a slight antidopaminergic action, positively affecting neurotransmitters.²³ “Lower levels of estrogen in the blood trigger the release of a regulating factor from the hypothalamus to encourage more hormone production from the ovaries,” explained Eileen Sheets, managing director at Bioforce. “Because the hypothalamus acts as the control center for temperature regulation, you can attribute many of the physical symptoms that occur during menopause to the imbalance in that control mechanism as it struggles with its different tasks.”

The use of adaptogens may also assist in menopausal support, as studies on the proprietary formula Femenessence™ from Natural Health International have shown the ability of its active compounds (*Lepidium peruvianum* Chacon, as Maca-GO™) to help balance levels of LH, FSH, estrogen and progesterone. “Maca-GO primarily works

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through adaptogenic properties that stimulate the hypothalamus to induce the body to create a healthy, balanced hormonal state for optimal health," said James Frame, director of operations with Natural Health. "Therefore, it works differently on each woman depending on what stage of life she is at, her own personal biological make-up and individual health."

Two studies presented at the NAMS 2006 Annual Congress examined Femenessence's impact on peri- and postmenopausal women. In the first trial, which included 21 peri-menopausal women aged 42 to 52, researchers provided active treatment (2,000 mg/d of Maca-GO) for two months and assessed hormonal changes and menopausal symptoms.²⁴ Intervention alleviated symptoms including hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings and decreased libido, and significantly increased FSH, LH, estrogen and progesterone levels. The second trial included 100 postmenopausal women who received placebo or 2,000 mg/d of Maca-GO for two months; a parallel study was conducted on ovariectomized rats to assess antidepressive and anxiolytic effects.²⁶ In the women, active intervention significantly increased estrogen and reduced FSH levels, and alleviated menopausal symptoms. The animal arm showed Maca-GO had an antidepressant-like and sedative effect in the ovariectomized rats, with no anxiolytic activity in control animals.

"Femenessence is different because it actually improves levels of all the key hormones," Frame said. "Unlike estrogen, progesterone and LH, which all decrease production during menopause, a woman's production of FSH dramatically increases. This increase in FSH is related to many of the adverse symptoms experienced during this stage of life. Femenessence induces physiological harmony through an increase in estrogen, progesterone and LH, while reducing FSH in postmenopausal women as well as contributing to lower cholesterol,

increased bone density and helping to substantially alleviate menopausal symptoms including depression and stress."

Tie On a Pink Ribbon

Another condition intrinsically linked with women's health is breast cancer. While not exclusively the domain of women, breast cancer incidence has increased to approximately one in eight women in the United States; every three minutes, a woman in the United States is diagnosed with breast cancer. The National Cancer Institute (NCI) recently estimated that, based on current rates, 13.2 percent of women born today will be diagnosed with breast cancer at some time in their lives.

"The key is to not just offer supplements for breast health but to educate the consumer on how all their lifestyle choices impact their health and their family's health," said Stephen Hennessy, co-founder of Ribbon Nutrition. Among the keys to breast cancer prevention he noted were using natural, chemical-free personal care items and household cleansers; avoiding environmental toxins and unnecessary radiation; and selecting high quality, natural and organic foods and dietary supplements.

Among the powerful foods for breast cancer prevention is **green tea**. One meta-analysis of 13 studies reported green tea consumption lowered the risk of breast cancer significantly,²⁶ while another reported consumption of five or more cups of green tea per day could prevent both breast cancer development and recurrence.²⁷ The active polyphenols in green tea, specifically **epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG)**, have been shown to arrest the breast cancer cell cycle in vitro, delaying tumor incidence.²⁸ It also has the ability to induce apoptosis in breast cancer cells without damaging normal breast epithelial cells.²⁹

Phytoestrogens also have been studied for their impact on breast cancer. For example, a range of animal and epidemiological studies suggests dietary