



Q My sister is a recovering alcoholic. Can you suggest dietary or nutritional changes that will support her and help to rebuild her health?

Name and address supplied

A You will probably be aware that many alcoholics suffer from years of serious malnourishment, which means any long-term recovery programme should include a comprehensive list of supplements to address the inevitable damage that has been done to tissues, organs and neurotransmitters in the brain.

The more common deficiencies resulting from chronic alcoholism include a lack of zinc, magnesium, vitamin C and vitamin B6. A qualified nutritionist will be able to help your sister to redress the balance and take the right nutrients in doses high enough to have the required therapeutic effect.

The good news is that, according to research, switching to a wholefood diet, which should include a high proportion of raw foods, helps to repair the damage to the body's tissues and also reduces cravings for alcohol and other stimulants.

When coffee, junk food and dairy products are replaced by lots of fruit and wholefoods (unprocessed, unrefined, no added nasties) for a period of at least six months, former alcoholics report that they actually find it easier to stay sober. Also, researchers have reported that, when good nutrition forms the foundation of any recovery programme from the outset, those who stick to a healthier eating plan for three years have an excellent chance of staying off the booze for good.

To help your sister find a qualified nutritionist who can advise on these important dietary changes and the supplements that can further boost her recovery, contact the British Association for Nutritional Therapy on 0870 606 1284. You may be charged for a referral list.

Q I believe you have mentioned that plant sterols are effective in

reducing high levels of cholesterol. Do you know if they are available in supplement form?

G Chaplin, Fife

A Plant sterols (or phytosterols) have been used to help lower high cholesterol levels since the 1950s, which is why both doctors and nutritionists recommend a diet high in fruits, vegetables and wholefoods to protect the heart.

The reason this works is that, unlike animal fats, plant fats (or sterols) have a similar molecular structure to cholesterol, but are utilised in the body in ways that support the whole cardiovascular system. Plant sterols work because they inhibit intestinal absorption of cholesterol. According to a study reported in *The American Journal of Medicine*, which reviewed 16 published trials that administered plant sterols to almost 600 people, total cholesterol was lowered by 10%, and LDL or "bad" cholesterol was lowered by 13%.

Both men and women who ate plant-sterol-enriched margarine reported cholesterol levels that lowered even further, with reductions of up to 18% in total cholesterol and 23% in bad cholesterol.

The African potato (which is not a potato at all, but a tuberous plant) contains high levels of plant sterols, and is now available in supplement form as Simba. This gelatine-free supplement costs £24.50 for 90 capsules, plus £2 p&p, from The Little Herbal Company (01484 685100); take two a day.

Q A blood test has confirmed that I have a *Helicobacter pylori* infection. Can you suggest a remedy that does not involve blasting the system with high doses of antibiotics?

I Glen, Lanarkshire

A Most stomach ulcers, we now know, are not caused by stress or bad diet, but

by the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*), which causes inflammation and pain when it burrows into the lining of the stomach and small intestine.

This organism survives the stomach's acid secretions by producing a compound called urease, which neutralises the acids so infection can take hold.

The best alternative remedy, if you want to avoid antibiotics, is mastic gum, which is produced from the resin of the Mediterranean tree *Platanus lenticea*. Laboratory tests suggest this single agent has the potency to kill off seven different strains of *H. pylori*. In addition, in 70% of ulcer patients who used it, the damaged tissue repaired itself so well, it was as though there had never been any infection or ulceration.

Preliminary studies also suggest that plant bioflavonoids can further help to inhibit the growth of *H. pylori*, so I would suggest using quercetin, one of the better known plant bioflavonoids available in supplement form, to be taken alongside the mastic gum.

Both of these supplements are available by mail order from Revital (0800 252875). Allergy Research Group's Mastic Gum costs £31.95 for 120 x 500mg capsules; take three a day. Solgar's Quercetin Complex costs £25.25 for 100 x 250mg capsules; take two a day with meals.

For more information on natural health, visit my website: www.whatareallyworks.co.uk

If you have any questions or tips, write to *What's the Alternative?*, *Style*, The Sunday Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E9B 1SE. We can only provide replies to published letters.

Before following any medical or dietary advice in this column, please consult your GP if you suffer from any health problems or special conditions, or are in doubt as to its suitability.