

Women's Health With Dr. Nitu Bajekal

About Nitu Bajekal

- Consultant Gynaecologist in London, UK
- Works both on the NHS and in private practice
- Trained in laparoscopic, robotic and hysteroscopic surgery
- Specialises in colposcopy and vulval problems
- Director, Women for Women's Health
- Has a keen interest in nutrition modification and lifestyle medicine
- Fellow, Royal College of Gynaecology

Lifestyle medicine

- Is about looking at the patient as a whole. Based on the premise that nutrition and lifestyle have a huge impact on well-being.
- Includes consideration of what medical professionals have to offer for the patient's well-being.
 - Medical professionals should collaborate to fulfill their duty of care.
 - Osteopathic and chiropractic practice standards include recognition of the contribution of other medical professionals.

Nutrition modification

- Plant-based diet impacts health positively. People have very little knowledge of what they can do to alleviate symptoms and help themselves.
- Veganism is a lifestyle which considers ethical and environmental aspects.

Pain

- Get patients' history (eg. diet, bowel movement, stories of tripping or falling, etc.) to know the likelihood of what is causing the pain.

- Examine through palpation (i.e. identify areas that feel rigid/painful) then make referrals to appropriate medical professionals/specialists.

- Women are schooled to believe that pain is normal – that periods are often very heavy when they just started, or towards menopause. While this may not necessarily be abnormal, pain must be taken seriously – could be from cancer or from internal inflammation, etc.

Conditions affecting women

Health conditions	Description
Adenomyosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A condition in which the inner lining of the uterus (the endometrium) breaks through the muscle wall of the uterus (the myometrium). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can cause painful periods, or chronic pain. - Can be picked up by MRI scan or during hysterectomy - Affects between 10 to 20% of women
Chronic pelvic pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can range from the psychological aspects of pain such as stress and previous trauma to real physical conditions like endometriosis, adenomyosis, etc. • Can last between 12 weeks to several years • Retrospective diagnosis requires detailed information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gynaecological history - Medical history - Social history - Personal history • Some women may need very small procedures to address the pain.
Endometriosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the tissue that normally grows inside the uterus grows outside and causes pain. • Women with endometriosis are susceptible to ovarian cancer. • Eating whole food, plant-based diet is best for the sufferers
Fibroids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benign growths on the uterus. One in two women have them. • Most of the time women do not have symptoms from them. Need not be treated if they are not causing problems. • Can undergo necrosis or degeneration. • 75% of women, on postmortem examination, will have fibroids. • Depending on their location, timing and behaviour, fibroids can cause the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heavy bleeding - Pregnant looking belly (big fibroids that push their way out) - Pain - Fertility issues <p>Types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subserous: grows on the outside of the uterus - Intramural: grows in the wall of the uterus

Health conditions	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submucosal: grows just underneath the uterine lining and can crowd into the uterine cavity - Pedunculated: grows on small stalks inside or outside the uterus
Heavy menstrual period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The root cause of the bleeding should be ascertained before prescribing medication or surgical procedure • Remedies may include – removal of the womb lining; or removal of the Mirena coil.
Hysterectomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surgical procedure to remove the uterus where accompanying organs such as ovaries, cervix and fallopian tubes are often removed at the same time. • Should not be taken lightly because the blood supply to the ovaries is disturbed with this procedure. • Causes menopause 2-3 years earlier than normal (implies increased risk of osteoporosis because of hormone fluctuation) • Should only be recommended when all conservative options have failed. It is life-saving in many patients, and is life quality changing. • Hysterectomy with ovarian conservation can cause early menopause. • The removal of ovaries reduces the risk of ovarian cancer.
Menopause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average age of occurrence is 51 • Average age of menarche is getting lower because of improved nutrition and increased intake of foods containing excessive hormones (injected hormones) • Early menopausal symptoms (hot flushes/night sweats)may be associated with hysterectomy. • Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is mainly for menopause. It can be in a form of tablet, patch, gel, or implant. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HRT is prescribed for some women where diet and exercise are not enough. - It is also recommended for post-menopausal women ages 65-70 who are having hot flushes. Investigate the causes – could range from overweight, diabetes, hypertension, side effects of drugs, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advise them to wear loose clothing, avoid central heating, have cool showers, avoid iPads, etc. ▪ Be alarmed when women who have never been on HRT are still having hot flushes. This is indicative of another condition. - HRT can be taken for no longer than 2 to 5 years. Women who choose to prolong HRT have increased risk of breast cancer.

Health conditions	Description
Osteoporosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very prevalent in the Western hemisphere and in India where a range of dairy products are regularly consumed. • People in Southeast Asia do not suffer osteoporosis. • It was non-existent until animal protein was introduced in people's diet in high quantities. • Risk factors include – smoking, high animal protein diet, high fat diet, immobilisation, not getting enough sunlight, prolonged use of steroids and Warfarin. • Menopause is a trigger for osteoporosis and sarcopenia. • Remedy includes weight-bearing exercise and healthy diet. • One in 3 women will die from hip fracture, which is osteoporotic-related.
Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a lifestyle condition, dependent upon diet and exercise. • Clinical symptoms include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Physical) acne, increased facial hair, irregular or no menstrual periods, heavy periods, loss of hair on the head, poor fertility. - (Psychological) anxiety, sleep deprivation • Women with PCOS are on a bad diet. Half of them are overweight. • Pill is not implicated in PCOS. It is one of the medications that can be recommended to patients with irregular menstrual periods, while they are getting onto a diet that reverses their health condition. • Cysts are detected by an ultrasound scan (appear like a pearl necklace arranged just under the ovary) between 2 and 9 millimeters in diameter. They never grow to any size and do not cause any pain. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They are empty egg follicles that have not responded to the brain • There is a direct correlation between PCOS and diabetes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insulin resistance happens when the cells are unable to use insulin effectively, leading to high blood sugar. Insulin resistance then leads to PCOS. • Healthy diet and exercise can help normalise hormones of women with polycystic ovaries. • Ovarian drilling is performed on polycystic ovaries to normalise the hormones / restore hormonal balance and achieve pregnancy.
Post-surgery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different people react differently to post-surgery. • Can leave several scar tissue in patients. Some patients with several surgeries performed on them can be spotless inside and are completely healthy.
Prolapse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all women with prolapse need treatment. • Yoga, pilates, and weight loss are among the remedies that can

Health conditions	Description
	<p>help improve the symptoms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Causes of prolapse include – difficult vaginal deliveries, menopause, family history, overweight, connective tissue disorders, etc.
Vulvodynia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonly affects Type A personalities – high achievers with eating disorders; and young women • Occurs without identifiable cause • Symptoms include vulvar burning, soreness, irritation (those affected experience pain when sitting down; or during sexual intercourse) • Remedy may range from cognitive behavioural therapy to medications like Gabapentin and tricyclic antidepressants like Nortriptyline. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce the amount of toxic chemicals that come in contact with the skin which can trigger symptoms such as feminine wipes, sanitary pads, washing powders, perfumed toiletries etc. - Tampons are chemical-laden. It is recommended to use biodegradable type like Mooncup.

Oestrogen

- Soy is a phytoestrogen which means oestrogen from a plant.
- There are many plant foods that are rich in natural oestrogens such as edamame beans, kidney beans, flax seeds, cereals, chick peas, etc. Phytoestrogens are safe to consume by women with breast cancer.
- Excess oestrogens are excreted from the body.
- The leading source of oestrogen that contaminates sea and lake waters is animal manure (rich in injected oestrogen) which can be accumulated by fishes consumed by people.
- Oestrogen has a deleterious effect on the uterus. When there is too much of it several health risks are attributed to its presence. Endometriosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome, and all types of cancers are oestrogen-linked. These conditions increase with obesity.
- Obesity increases oestrogen because the body fat is a source of steroids, and steroids are then diverted into cortisol, oestrogen, progesterone, and testosterone. Women under the age of 35 suffering from either womb cancer, endometrial cancer, or polycystic ovarian syndrome tend to be overweight/obese. Their increased chances of suffering the said conditions are attributed to the high levels of oestrogen that float around in their body.

- Obesity also impacts on arthritis, heart diseases, diabetes, hypertension, among others. It causes more health issues than malnourishment.
- Too much intake of processed food, junk food, and animal protein causes obesity. Everybody should focus towards a whole food, plant –based diet.
- The common approach to measuring obesity is the BMI which is not the best tool but is a useful one.

Nutrition

- Encourage patients to change diets by citing what they should eat rather than what they should not eat.
- Drink 2 cups of hibiscus tea daily. This is equal to the required daily dose of antihypertensives.
- Take vitamin D at least 3-4 times a week especially in the winter months, and Vitamin B12 supplement.
- Alcohol: to get a beneficial effect from anthocyanins and antioxidants would require the equivalent of 16 bottles of red wine. This would possibly be good for the heart, but you would die of cirrhosis of the liver. The same benefits for the heart can be obtained by eating a bunch of red grapes.
- Diabetics can eat fruits and vegetables in large quantities. The more colourful the vegetables the better. Recommended amount for adults is a handful comprised of one apple, 2 plums, 2 satsumas; or a big salad with hummus and chick peas. For children, 2 slices of apple will suffice.
- People get 90% of their Vitamin D from sunlight, which is the best source. Vitamin D is also present in mushrooms, and increases by exposing them to sunlight.
- Sources of calcium include seaweeds and dried figs.
- “Blue Zones” are places in the world with people who have unusual longevity. Their regular diet is comprised of beans, lentils, pulses, and a range of food rich in fibre. The latter is for good bowel health. Animal protein lacks fibre.
- Claims that chocolates are good for the health are false. Eat chocolates mindfully.
- Avoid animal protein. It causes obesity, arthritis, osteoporosis, and a range of chronic illnesses. People can get all the protein they need from plants.
- Processed meat is a Type-1 carcinogen. Indulge in moderation.

- Individual diet should be made up of 80-90% carbohydrates and less animal protein and dairy products. The latter doubles the risk of osteoporosis in women and has a deleterious effect on the kidneys.
- It is better to take whole milk (with higher fat content) than skimmed milk. Eliminating the milk fat in skimmed milk brings the protein casein to the forefront, which is linked to breast cancer development.
- Evidence does not show any health benefits from the Atkins diet (low-carbohydrate/high-protein). People who have lived long survived on a high-carbohydrate diet. While the significant reduction in the consumption of cakes, biscuits, and white bread can help lose weight, the protein content of the Atkins diet puts a huge load on the kidneys and heart.
- Regular consumption of eggs and chicken increases the risk of prostate cancer. Eating tomatoes prevents the latter.
- PolyChlorinated Biphenyls¹ (PCBs) and mercury can be accumulated by consuming larger than recommended portions of fish, especially salmon.
- People who do not know how to cook may look for good sites on the internet that showcase simple yet healthy recipes.
- Juicing whole food throws the fibre away. Juicing with the fibre is a way of getting sufficient nutrients into the body.
 - Sip fruit juice or smoothies over 30 minutes to produce/stimulate salivary amylase.
- Beans and pulses cause painful gas when combined with animal proteins.
- Bodybuilding requires protein intake for muscle growth. The source of protein should all be plant-based.

In a nutshell: what to take / to avoid

Diet rich in vegetables, fruits, beans and grains can help prevent all cases of cancer, inflammatory conditions, and manage existing health conditions to not cause further problems.

What to take	What to avoid
Vegetables – the more colourful the better	High-sugar foods
Handful of fruits	Animal protein, red meat
Plant-based protein	Saturated and trans fats

¹Some PCBs share a structural similarity and toxic mode of action with dioxin.^[5] Other toxic effects such as endocrine disruption (notably blocking of thyroid system functioning) and neurotoxicity are known. PCBs cause cancer in animals and are probable human carcinogens. Many rivers and other sites are contaminated with PCBs, and there have been contaminations of food supplies with the substances. (source – Wikipedia)

What to take	What to avoid
Phytoestrogen-rich foods	Alcohol
Beans, grains	Dairy
Handful of nuts and seeds, unsalted	Fruit juices, increase blood sugar rapidly
2 litres of water	Smoking
Exercise 3-4 times a week	

High-intensity interval training (HIIT)

- Basically involves increasing a person’s heart rate for very short periods, depending on the person’s fitness. May range from running, climbing stairs, walking, cycling, or standing up and sitting down.
- Best for obese people, doing it as part of their daily life. The intensity of the HIIT must be appropriate for the fitness of the person.
- Also recommended as treatment for sufferers of polycystic ovarian syndrome. Not for menopausal hot flushes as doing high intensity intervals make the symptoms worse.

Women for Women’s Health

- Is a service established for purposes of educating and empowering women to make health choices through proper nutrition, exercise, and balanced lifestyle to combat major chronic health conditions such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and osteoporosis, etc.
- Based on the premise that eating sensibly and in smaller amounts, living a good life doing charity works, and sleeping well are among the more important considerations in living a healthy life.

Other relevant notes

- Hyperventilation/overbreathing increases the CO₂ load on the body which reduces its ability to handle pain².
- Inflammatory foods tend to be of animal origin, containing Nerve Growth Factor (NGF). These are foods not ideal for humans. For instance, cow’s milk is meant for a small calf to grow into a 300-kilogram cow.
- Inflammatory foods block the arteries and tissues. The range encompasses animal protein, sugar, additives, oil, dairy, artificial sweeteners, etc.

Women suffering from inflammatory disorders may choose to focus on plant-based, whole foods.

²See also Leon Chaitow broadcast/recording “Respiratory Disorders”

- The lower the food is in the food chain, the lower the dose of chemicals people ingest. The higher the food up in the food chain the more chemicals are accumulated and the doses are multiplied.
- The vagina and vulva have self-cleaning capability. Lukewarm water will suffice. Avoid using soaps as they can kill the good bacteria. When the latter is gone, there will be no mechanism to stop entry of bacteria such as E. Coli and Group B Streptococcus into the system. Menopausal women who lack oestrogen are specifically vulnerable because they have very thin vaginal lining which can be easily penetrated by bacteria.
- The combined oral contraceptive pill, if taken for more than 12 years, increases one's risk of breast cancer very minimally. Taking the pill for 5 years reduces by half one's risk of ovarian cancer and womb cancer. The reduced risk remains after stopping the pill.
 - In the Western world, the risk for breast cancer is between one in 8 to one in 12 while in mainland China, it is one in 100,000.
- The progesterone component of hormone replacement or the progesterone pill itself causes increased risk for breast cancer and other breast problems.