Holistic Help for Hemochromatosis

A Guide to the Use of Diet and Supplements In Healing from Iron Overload

Dr. Eric Lewis, ND

www.HemochromatosisHelp.com
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A Note about Safe Use of Nutritional Supplements

As a professionally trained naturopathic doctor, I have spent years studying the use of nutritional supplements, and here is what I have learned: above all else, the highest priority is safety and efficacy. Will this supplement or remedy harm in any way? Is it manufactured properly and safely? Will it help, or is it a waste of money?

If you are unsure of the safety or efficacy of a remedy or supplement for hemochromatosis, do not use it. There are a lot of scams out there—people taking advantage and cutting corners with less than pristine ingredients and less than truthful claims not backed by any scientific evidence.

Having stated my concerns regarding safety and efficacy, the evidence shows that there are some great tools (diet, nutritional supplements, and herbal remedies) that may help improve the health of an individual with hemochromatosis.

You should always check with your doctor prior to starting any supplement, diet, or exercise routine. They know your specific circumstances best. One size does not fit all.

Follow your doctor’s care plan, and do not be afraid to ask questions. Whether using medications directly for hemochromatosis or for other health concerns, please make sure there are no interactions between your medications and supplements.
A Note about Hemochromatosis Research Studies

The vast majority of research done on iron absorption is about increasing iron in populations of deficiency, such as in anemia or children in developing nations. Therefore, much of the nutritional research was not designed with individuals with iron overload in mind. We have to leave room for interpretation and realize not everything is yet known. I have done my best to synthesize what research is available and draw the best conclusions I can based on what is currently understood.

There is a lot about diet and hemochromatosis we do not yet know, and many questions that remain to be answered. The information in this book is based on what we do know as of now. As new studies come out and new information is learned, I plan to update this book and the website to reflect the new understanding.

A Note about Terminology Used in this Book

The terminology used to describe the condition and the treatment of hemochromatosis varies depending on where you are in the world. For consistency’s sake, I have chosen to use the US terminology. For example, I will refer to “phlebotomy” instead of “venesection,” and I am going to use the spelling “hemochromatosis” and not “haemochromatosis.”

In addition, this book has been specifically written for patients with Type I Hereditary Hemochromatosis. If you have a different type of iron overload, these suggestions may work for you as well, but you will want to do your research and double check. For the sake of simplicity and so you don’t have to read the words “Type I Hereditary Hemochromatosis” over and over, from here on I am going to refer to the condition as “hemochromatosis.”
Introduction

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Millions of people from all over the world suffer, often unaware and often in silence, from a genetic condition called hemochromatosis or iron overload disorder. Some estimates show 1 in 9 people of Northern European descent are carriers of the genetic mutation that can cause this disease. For something so common, one might think that everyone would have heard of this condition, that it would be part of routine blood testing done by physicians, and that people with the condition would have a great support network and understanding by their doctors, friends, and community.

And yet, in reality, hemochromatosis is frequently misdiagnosed by doctors or not diagnosed at all, so people often suffer for longer than they need to, feeling alone in their deteriorating health. Many times their friends and family members have never even heard of the condition, leading to feelings of being an outsider with a strange condition no one can pronounce.

Let me share some of the stories that hemochromatosis patients have shared with me. As you listen to their voices, you may find these stories are similar to your own.

About four years ago I started getting pains in various joints in my legs. By the age of 43 I was the proud owner of my own walking stick and spending entire weeks unable to walk at all. This was humiliating, especially as my vision of myself is of a fairly athletic guy.

I tried to hide the damage being crippled was doing to my pride and self-belief. It also affected my wife who not only had to put
up with the moods but was watching the man she married disintegrate in front of her.

Life continued like this for the next three years. My weight ballooned as I could not exercise, and I resigned myself to being in constant pain. Two months ago I woke up one morning feeling very dizzy, so I forced myself to see a doctor. To my great fortune this doctor ordered a blood test to check my iron levels and liver function.

Bingo! He said, “You have the signs of hemochromatosis” and further tests on my liver, spleen, and pancreas and a second blood test confirmed that my internal organs were twice their normal size due to excessive iron.

The relief of knowing that there was a cause of all the pain, the mood swings, the frustration, the chronic fatigue, the useless creature I had become is impossible to describe.

I have discovered that I am not alone but hundreds of thousands of British, Irish, and Scandinavian people (and people with ancestors from these areas) are suffering the symptoms but not being diagnosed. If you know anyone who has symptoms similar to mine, drag them to a doctor and get them tested. It could save their life.

– Andy R, 46-year-old male, Hong Kong via the United Kingdom

When I was 21, I was very overweight and no matter what I did, my weight wouldn’t budge. The weight piled on in a short space of time. I went to a doctor who did all the tests and she mentioned to me that she thought I had hemochromatosis as my iron levels were high. The next time I went in, I asked again about it and a different doctor said, “No, you don’t have it, your iron levels aren’t high enough.” Translation...I’m too lazy to test for it!! So...roll on a few years. I was in with a new doctor, she tested me, and about two weeks later she texted me to say that I have hemochromatosis and she explained my levels. I was petrified.
I would like to find a way to control this through diet and healthy living, without giving up too much. I have found a good balance and am currently training for a half Ironman race...because, I am an Ironwoman :)

– Rachel M, 26-year-old female, Germany via Ireland

Those affected by hemochromatosis are men and women, young and old, from literally around the globe. The symptoms may be vague and missed or dismissed by doctors, sometimes for decades. The information available is confusing and sparse. It is hard to know where to turn to for help.

However, I want you to know something. You are not alone.

My Story

Hemochromatosis can be scary, lonely, and intimidating. I know this firsthand.

In my mid-30s, I was a healthy guy. I had a wife, a baby, a thriving naturopathic medical practice, a home, and hobbies. I was doing everything “right” in regards to my health—eating well, exercising, taking vitamins and supplements—but something just was not right.

I was fatigued but I could not sleep. My joints ached. I was experiencing foggy thinking. At first I blamed it on being a new parent, on being too busy, on anything I could think to blame it on. But deep down I suspected something else was wrong.

Even though I was a doctor, and a naturopathic doctor at that (which means I am supposed to think outside the conventional medical box), I did not immediately think of hemochromatosis. When doing some routine bloodwork, I added on an iron panel as an afterthought. Imagine my shock when it came back with serum iron 20 points over the upper limit of normal, along with a very elevated transferrin saturation percentage!

My wife and I stared at each other (she is a naturopathic doctor, too), and we both wondered, “Could this be hemochromatosis?”
Hemochromatosis was something we had learned about in medical school. There was a lecture here, a lecture there, a test question about being cautious about supplementing iron, but that was about it. We never saw patients with this condition (or so we thought). It did not seem to be something “real” that actually happened to people.

To investigate the root cause of my elevated iron levels, I did the genetic test and found out I was a heterozygous carrier of the C282Y gene mutation, meaning I carry one copy of the HFE mutation. I immediately got to work, seeking out information about how to approach hemochromatosis with not only conventional therapies but also using tools of diet, supplements, and holistic medicine.

I was shocked at the lack of information, the conflicting information, and the confusing information I found. Here I was, an educated naturopathic doctor who understood biochemistry and medical science, and I was confused. I started to imagine what it must be like for people who have this condition but who are not trained to understand medicine. How much more confused, overwhelmed, and lost must they feel?

**HemochromatosisHelp.com is Born**

It was out of this realization that the website HemochromatosisHelp.com (and now this book) was born. I realized that as I went on my personal journey to learn how to be healthy with hemochromatosis, I could share what I learned with others on the same path.

Many of you (or your concerned friends and family members) have found my website over the years and have asked a common question: “What can I do with diet and supplements to help my hemochromatosis?” I’ve realized there is a lack of clear information out there to help empower people with iron overload to take charge and to learn how to live a healthier life with hemochromatosis.

This book is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to all things hemochromatosis. There are many excellent books already written on the who, what, and why of hemochromatosis. I am instead first going to set the stage by talking about how hemochromatosis and iron impact our bodies and then use evidence-based medicine and holistic understanding to
explain how to think about and benefit from diet and nutritional supplementation for hemochromatosis.

My hope is that I can provide a unique perspective by being both an expert in natural medicine and a patient with the condition. My goal is to try and make this all make sense.

So let’s get started!
Thank you for reading the introduction to Holistic Help for Hemochromatosis.

If you enjoyed this sample and wish to read more, the full book is available for purchase at:

www.MyHemochromatosisHelp.com

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