When thinking about men's health, I always think of the scene in Monty Python and the Holy Grail in which a knight has a limb cut off and is bleeding everywhere, and shouts out to the opposing knight, "It's only a scratch, come back and fight!"

As a teacher in all aspects of herbalism, I literally have only one or two males in each of the three classes I teach at present. That is, three men out of 76 students. 95% of my clients are women, ranging from small children to women in their 70s. 99% of my students in the colleges where I teach are female. Is there something wrong with this picture?

From time immemorial, men have been unfortunately 'programmed' to keep going no matter what. There is no stopping to tend to wounds on the 'battlefield'. You must keep going until either the enemy or you are dead. Like the old Samurai saying, "Even if his head is cut off, a Samurai does not stop until all his enemies are dead."

Men have not been programmed to take care of their health, especially when they leave the care of their mothers. The good old Aussie adage, "She'll be right, mate!" springs to mind. Fortunately, however, things are changing to some degree and there seems to be more awareness and focus on health for men. However, there are certain areas of men's health that should be addressed as a matter of urgency. Prevention is better than cure, and I believe that taking herbs and supplements to avoid disease states or dysfunctional systems is prudent. One of the most important aspects of men's health is the male reproductive system. Men are reluctant to speak about what is ailing them, especially when it comes to sexual dysfunction. No man wants to admit that his libido is waning, or that he "can't get it up". In older men prostate cancer is common yet seldom acknowledged or checked. I think this is because of a generational conditioning where sexual issues were not discussed and intimacy was not a high priority. The mind-body connection is a major factor here and I see a definite link between ailments and disease of the male reproductive system and the lack of discourse between men on these topics. I also feel that there is a lack of communication between men and their partners regarding sensuality and sexuality. While I am sure that there is a lot of talk about the physical side of sex, I suspect that deep intimacy may not be the topic foremost in discussion.

For men there is a lot of 'performance' pressure, although again this is slowly changing. However, old habits die hard and the focus on giving your partner an orgasm or being Mr Super Stud creates a great deal of psychological pressure which can subtly affect the male psyche. Stress also has a high impact which can severely hinder both libido and erectile function, as well as general health. Poor health can be attributed to bad diet, too much coffee, alcohol, cigarettes, preservatives, toxins from body-care products, recreational drugs, etc.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Tantra and Tao the practice of sexual conservation, known as Liu Fang Ching, is deemed to nurture the spirit and is credited with contributing to extraordinary feats of strength as well as enhanced mental clarity. Conserving the jing or "essence" is considered to be very important. It is seen as the Life Force, not as easily generated as other body fluids and therefore crucial that it be preserved. In fact, according to TCM, sexual conservation is intricately related to longevity and the anti-aging process. Tantra is a Sanskrit word derived from the root tan, meaning "to expand". The Tantric path teaches us to embrace and unify the ordinary, the erotic and the sacred dimensions of life, all of which have their roots in spirit. The beauty and wisdom of Tantra is that it embraces sexuality as a doorway to the "ecstatic mind of great bliss". At the peak of orgasm we pierce through the illusion of fragmentation and separation, glimpsing the unity and interconnectedness of all beings. Through "the other" (our partner) we fall in love with life.

The practice of ejaculation control is not widely understood in the West but is considered very important in Tantra and Tao. Preserving the seminal fluid by not ejaculating helps to strengthen the body and improve health. Most men are probably groaning at this point and asking, "What do you mean? Surely this is the natural result of orgasm!" I say, don't knock it until you try it. With practice, you can make love for longer, feel better and you also become capable of multiple orgasms. It allows you greater control over your sexuality and, most importantly, strengthens your bladder and reduces the possibility of prostate enlargement and/or cancer.

Another practice that is helpful is urine retention. This involves using the pelvic floor muscles and the bladder to stop and start the flow of urine while urinating. This strengthens the bladder and is the first step in controlling ejaculation.

Another important factor in TCM is strong kidney yang essence or energy. More on this later.

Including these practices in our daily lives will not only aid our general wellbeing but also enhance our love-making and prevent unwanted disease states. I will now look at the different disease states and their appropriate herbal remedies.

**Low Libido** - This can be due to a myriad of factors, including poor diet, too much stress (which affects the adrenal glands and, in turn, affects the kidneys), lack of desire for your current partner, lack of energy, and low Kidney Yang Essence. Recommended herbs include any of the aphrodisiacs, kidney yang or adaptogens.

**Erectile Dysfunction** - Again, stress, too much coffee (which affects the kidneys), taking recreational drugs (which affect the kidneys and adrenals), performance anxiety, tiredness, lack of energy (which can be due to poor diet), and low zinc levels. Recommended herbs include circulatory tonics, Kidney Yang Tonics, aphrodisiacs.

**Enlarged Prostate** - This can occur in later life, but I believe it can be averted using herbal remedies taken in advance, plus Tantric or Taoist sexual practices. I believe that an enlarged prostate is partially due to reckless waste of jing in men's youth, like overdrawing your account at the Life Essence Bank. Sunflower seeds and pepitas are rich in zinc which will help.

Recommended herbs are horsetail (Equisetum arvense), saw palmetto (Serenoa repens, Sabal serrulata), scruffy pea (Psoralea corylifolia), small willow herb (Epilobium parviflorum) and xian mao (Curculigo orchioides).
ADAPTOGENIC HERBS AND TONICS

Sarsaparilla (Smilax officinalis) - Increases testosterone.
Siberian Ginseng (Eleutherococcus senticosus) - An adaptogen, stimulant and tonic.
Withania Root (Withania somnifera) - According to Ayurveda (which calls it Ashwagandha) it "gives the strength of a horse." It is an adaptogen, aphrodisiac and tonic.
Xian Mao (Curculigo orchidodes) - Reproductive restorative.

KIDNEY YANG TONICS

Cnidium (Cnidium monnieri) - Strengthens yang, is an aphrodisiac and is used for treating impotence and infertility.
Eucommia (Eucommia ulmoides) - Kidney yang tonic, anti-impotence, aphrodisiac, urogenital astringent and vasodilator. Also helps to reduce lumbago and strengthens sinews, bones and cartilage.
Gokshura (Tricholobium terrestris) A kidney tonic, increases testosterone, is anti-impotence and is used in body-building formulas to strengthen muscle growth.

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WEB REFERENCES

www.seaofchi.com/ftp.html
www.caldwellclinic.com/glossary.htm
www.innerself.com/Sex_Talk/antarctic_keys.htm

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NHVL has a copy of Dipaukna's DVD, The Herbalist, to give away. If you would like to enter the competition, send an envelope with your name, address and telephone number on the back to:

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