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PROFILE

Thinking, Lifestyle and Attitude

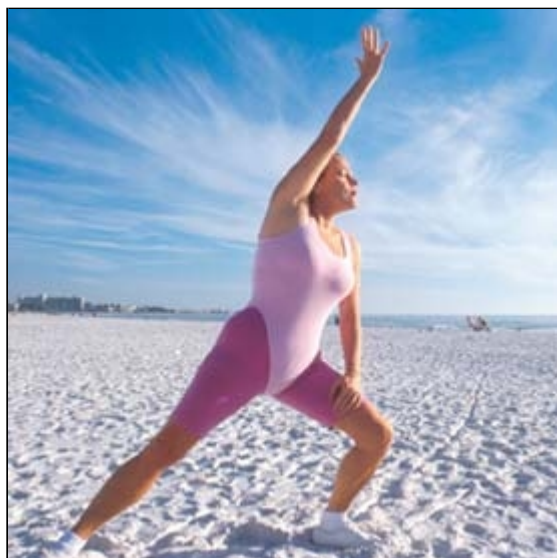
The true components of living

People who stopped by their local health food store in Sarasota, Florida during the mid-1990s were likely to come away with more than just the latest multivitamin or protein bar. They'd probably leave with a better understanding of why they didn't feel well and what they could do to feel better, compliments of the proprietor, Nancy Burrell. With two masters degrees—one in medical library science and one in public health—and 10 years experience as a medical librarian, Nancy was already a walking encyclopedia when she bought her first store in 1991. If you had three minutes to spare, there was a good chance that Nancy could have an impact on your life.

"People came in who didn't feel well and they wanted something quick," she recalls. "I'd ask them if they ate breakfast—and they rarely had—and then I'd ask them if they were under stress—and they usually were." For breakfast, Nancy recommended oatmeal, and for stress, a good multivitamin high in B complex and extra Vitamin C.

Though the 70-hour work weeks and the strain of managing two stores (she opened a second location in 1997) and seven staff members eventually proved too draining, Nancy still dedicates herself to improving the health of those around her. In what she calls a late-life career change, this 52-year-old now works as a counselor in a substance-abuse clinic. She has completed her course-work and, in April, she'll take the Florida exam to become a licensed mental health counselor.

In both manifestations of her professional life—first as a store owner and now as a counselor—Nancy hasn't just relied on her advanced degrees and voracious reading habits to know what makes good health sense. She's also been able to draw on her own experience in emotional and physical healing for greater insight into dealing with health issues.



In 1984 Nancy was almost dead from nearly 20 years of alcoholism. Having lost the ability to read and write, she ended up hospitalized.

A recovery program that stresses adherence to spiritual principles helped save her life. In it she learned to accept responsibility for her past, ask for help from others and extend help to others. With sobriety came a newfound sense of social responsibility, as well as a second chance to take control of her body. After all, if she could stop drinking, she could also lose weight, regain her energy and tame her debilitating premenstrual syndrome (PMS).

"I was in such bad shape when I started work at the health food store that I was afraid I wouldn't be able to stay awake for my whole shift," she recalls. "And, my premenstrual syndrome was so bad that I seriously contemplated spending two weeks a month at a hotel to spare my family."

Early salvation came in the form of chromium picolinate. Recommended by the previous store owner, this mineral soon stabilized Nancy's blood sugar, which had been the culprit behind her dips in energy and cravings for sugar. Next

came a good multivitamin. Nancy chose Life Extension Mix. "I had amazing results... I could stay awake, I wasn't so hungry all the time and I didn't have anymore mood swings," she says. "I always carried it in my store."

Her own personal improvement gave her even more impetus to share her findings with her clientele. And soon she began seeing

results among her regular customers. "People would come in to get put on a good regimen," she says. "And when they'd come back a month later, you could tell the difference. Their complexion would be better, and their eyes and hair would be shinier. I really believe you can tell who takes vitamins and who doesn't."

Over time, Nancy has carefully calibrated her own health regime to provide maximum benefit for minimum cost-that requires a strong link between whatever she takes for vitamins and supplements and whatever she eats. For example, Nancy worries that the current popularity of high-protein/low-carbohydrate diets is a recipe for bone loss in women. "If you eat too much protein it doesn't matter how many calcium supplements you take because the protein interferes with the proper absorption of calcium," she says. She's also particular about the form of calcium she takes, preferring calcium citrate to the gluconate, carbonate or oyster shell varieties, which are hard for the body to absorb. "I came out fine in my last bone density check," she says. "And that's amazing considering that I drank so much and smoked for 25 years."

Nancy turns to daily enzymes to help with food digestion and uses acidophilous and a probiotic supplement to maintain intestinal flora. She also takes supplemental fiber with every meal as extra protection against colon cancer. "No one gets enough fiber," she notes. "So, now I check the labels on everything and buy things with the highest fiber content."

She treated her premenstrual syndrome with progesterone cream, eventually adding DHEA and black cohosh extract to form her own three-pronged hormone program. She takes melatonin, not only as a powerful antioxidant and youth enhancer, but also to counteract insomnia and the risk of breast cancer. Kava-kava and valerian root to help keep her stress level to a minimum, and she takes CoQ10 for its potent antioxidant effect and heart support.

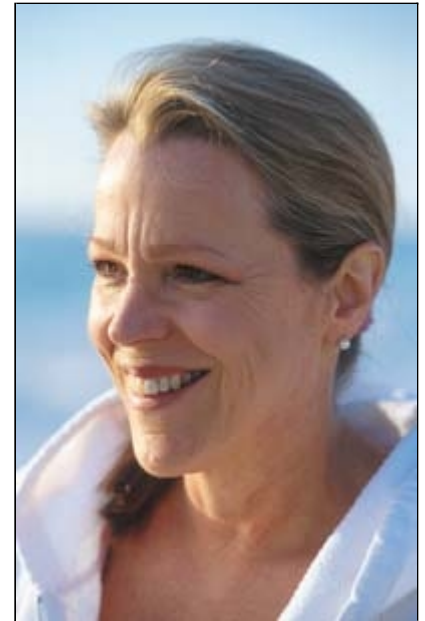
Ginkgo biloba is on Nancy's list as a must for maintaining memory and high brain function. "If I don't take it for some reason, I can tell the difference within a week," she says. "I start to forget little things." Nancy points out that living in the hot Florida sun requires some special care. She uses bilberry extract viva drops for eye health, noting the high rate of macular degeneration in the sunshine state. (She is also a stickler for sunscreen and uses Rejuvenex to help prevent sun damage.)

If she experiences an afternoon lull, she'll turn to a good American or Korean ginseng for a pickup. And she tries to get off to a good start to the day with a high fiber bar or a bowl of oatmeal (not instant)-rich in carbohydrates. "It's very important for women to get the right kind of carbohydrates in the morning to raise our serotonin levels so we don't get cranky and irritable," she says. "It's like preventive medicine for us."

Throughout the day, Nancy is careful to keep her purse stocked with a piece of fruit or peanut butter crackers to keep small hunger pangs from leading to binges. Lunch is typically salad, vegetables and chicken, and it tends to be her largest meal of the day. Dinner is usually something light, such as a low-carbohydrate ice cream snack. Though she still enjoys a cup of coffee, her sugar-consuming days are definitely over. "Sugar is just one molecule away from alcohol, so I stay away from it," she explains. "But it's also hard to metabolize, which takes a toll on your body and makes it age."

Noting that studies show consumption of green food can reduce the risk of joint pain and arthritis, Nancy tries to get plenty of things like alfalfa, spirulina or barley in her supplement diet, especially on days when she hasn't been able to eat enough vegetables.

Exercise is an important lifestyle component, though Nancy is quick to admit that she isn't a fitness fanatic. She shuns high-impact aerobic workouts in favor of a daily program of breathing and stretching that combines aspects of yoga with held stretch exercises. "It makes me feel more alert," she says. "Breathing right is incredibly important-if you don't get enough oxygen to your muscles and you're under stress, you are more prone to injury." She also works out on her mini trampoline, which she finds especially good for her circulation and lymphatic system. ("It's great to have no stress on your spine.") Swimming, walking and biking round out her exercise program. "I like to do things that don't involve sweating or pounding," she says.



But staying healthy isn't just a matter of "pills" and leg lifts. As Nancy points out, it comes down to your thinking, your lifestyle and your attitude. "I was a very sick alcoholic and, honestly, it's a miracle I survived," she says. "Now, as silly as it sounds, I think it's my duty to be happy-and I am. At the core of my being, I'm grateful just to be alive-I know I've been saved." -Twig Mowat

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