

# HOLISTIC HEALTH NOTEBOOK

## A new approach to high blood pressure



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**D**id you know that February is American Heart Month? You should not be surprised, considering that Valentine's Day is in the middle of this month. Last week we talked about creative ways to celebrate, including stuffing organic produce into a red velvet box and presenting it to your loved one.

If she was not impressed by this practical expression of your sentiments, let's try again. Perhaps she would like a bottle of L-arginine?

Even the American Heart Association, a stolid scientific body that views nutrition with a bit of suspicion unless it is backed by years of double blind studies, agrees that nutrition is a first defense against heart disease. They agree with me

that many servings of fresh vegetables are protective of the heart, so let's get working on that.

An amino acid may play a key role in heart health, however, but before we talk about arginine, let's talk about nitric oxide (NO). NO may be the key to lowering the risk of a heart attack or stroke. Inadequate nitric oxide in the blood vessels can diminish the vascular-protection qualities of statins. L-arginine is the body's building block of NO; adequate L-arginine must be present for proper NO production.

Adding L-arginine supplementation to statin drug therapy can increase vascular nitric oxide production. But even without the drug, L-arginine significantly improves blood flow. L-arginine relaxes the vascular tissues, allowing for greater blood per-

fusion throughout the body.

Healthy vascular endothelial cells are critical to cardiovascular health. The vascular endothelium (skin on the inside of the blood vessel) acts not only as a barrier but also regulates blood vessel activity. Nitric oxide diffuses from endothelial cells into underlying smooth muscle, causing relaxation, which results in vasodilation.

L-arginine then plays a role in lowering blood pressure. With proper NO release, blood platelets become less sticky, helping to maintain supple, flexible arteries.

L-arginine doesn't have a long shelf life, so taking a time-release form provides long-term blood levels. And the really good news for men is that time-released L-arginine may help resolve issues of erectile dysfunction. ■

— Carol Simontacchi is the owner of the Island Nutrition Center on Sanibel. She can be reached at 472-4499 or on the Web at [www.islandnutritioncenter.meta-ehealth.com](http://www.islandnutritioncenter.meta-ehealth.com).




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Dr. O'Neil currently serves as Medical Director for Brookdale Senior Living where he oversees and provides professional evaluation for the company's healthcare initiatives, like Optimum Life. He has practiced and taught geriatric medicine for over 27 years.

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