

Success Forum



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Have you ever heard of oxalates? A friend posted a photo of this book on Facebook, saying that when he took most of the oxalates out of his diet, he felt so much better. I knew of oxalates, but had never tied them to any of my “issues.” I bought the book and put it in the queue. Then a client I had not seen in awhile came into the club. She felt terrible. She had been working on her “gut health” but to no avail. After looking at the products she was using and a 3-day food diary, I grabbed this book and started reading. Unknowingly, I believe she was poisoning herself with toxic superfoods, fiber and other “healthy” food choices.

I made a list of all the little stuff that I deal with on a daily basis. Could these be oxalate related? If you went to a traditional doctor with my list, you would probably be told that “at your age, you have to expect some of these things.” We’ll get into my list later.

So I grabbed some more books, started searching the Internet and have come up with some very interesting information. I will do my best to present a comprehensive picture, but just know that this is a huge, overwhelming topic. Let’s start with Clinical Indicators from page 102 of Sally Norton’s book, slightly enhanced from my other readings.

Clinical Indicators of Oxalate Overload

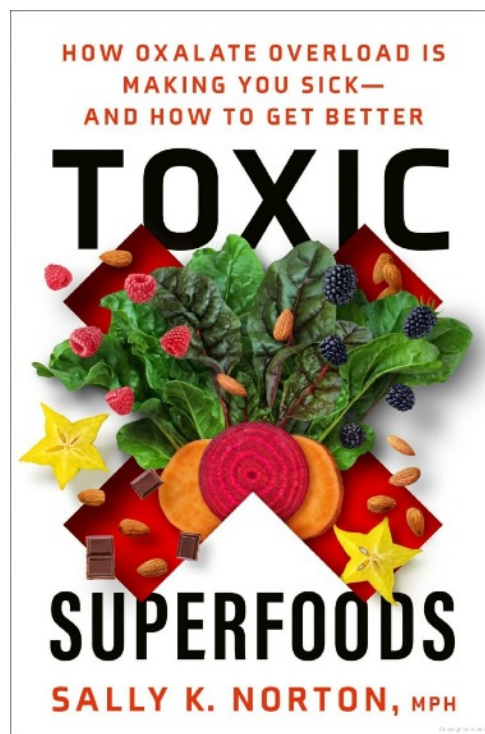
History of kidney stones, low functioning kidneys
Cloudy urine, invisible blood in urine
Recurrent yeast infections, urinary tracts infections, complaints of heavy groin
Episodic irritable bladder, frequent urination at night, high urinary frequency, painful urination
Unexplained pain: burning mouth and tooth pain, burning in the genitals, anus or urinary tract, joint specific pain, burning feet
Periodic joint swelling, pain or weakness, including bursitis, tendonitis, arthritis
Unexplained digestive distress or abdominal pain
Unexplained brain fog, mood problems, other neurological complaints
Signs of vasospasm (low blood flow): coldness, numbness, pain, Raynaud’s syndrome of hands or feet, angina (chest pain)
Bone fractures without obvious cause, a diagnosis of osteopenia/osteoporosis, especially low bone density or mixed bone density with one region high and another low.

Unexplained skin or vision problems
Unexplained anemia or low white or red blood cell counts
Changes in thyroid function or labs

Those are the clinical indicators. Here is a list of other symptoms or complaints I have read about:

ADD/ADHD, behavioral challenges, anxiety
Chronic fatigue and other mitochondrial disorders
Chronic histamine release causing itching
Fibromyalgia, muscle pain syndromes
Headaches, migraines, nerve problems
Insomnia Gout Gluten intolerance
Leaky gut syndrome / autoimmune disease flair
Muscle weakness, urinary or fecal incontinence
Tinnitus (ringing or roaring in the ears), hearing loss
Weight gain or inability to lose weight

As you read through these, if you have more than three issues, you may want to take a serious look at the rest of this newsletter. In just a handful of weeks, I am beginning to feel better. Ready to learn more?



What the heck are oxalates anyway?

In simple terms, oxalates are weapons that plants have to stop bugs and animals from eating them. They contain sharp edges and, in some cases, under an electron microscope, look like sewing needles. These are all microscopic structures so you will never see them, but they can do great damage. Do you ever get tingles or pain while eating something? It's probably because of oxalates.

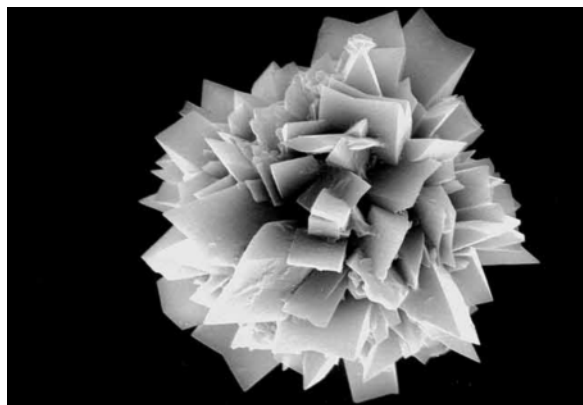
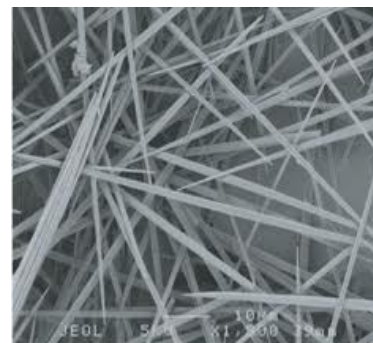
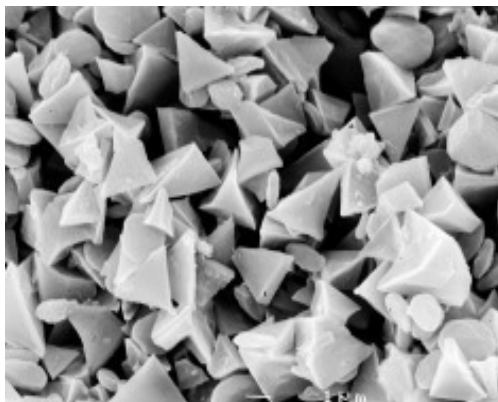
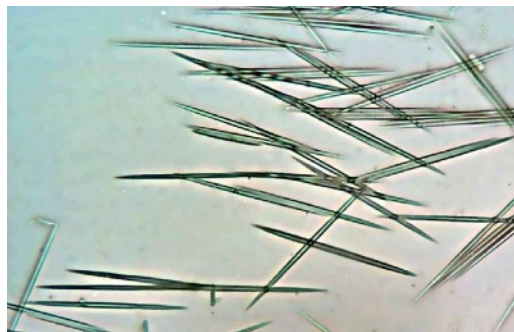
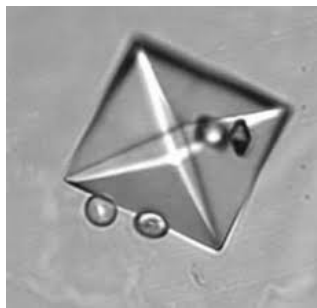
Why all the crazy symptoms?

The symptom list on the front page is definitely crazy. Six of those symptoms are mine, some of which I have dealt with most of my life and figured it was just my lot in life. I have always had vasospasms in my hands, especially spring and fall. It has never arisen to the level of Raynaud's Syndrome, where your circulation basically shuts down, but enough to be very painful at times. Fatigue has always been a constant companion. I have struggled with tinnitus on and off since childhood. I'm always itchy, sometimes worse than others but pretty much always. For anyone who really knows me, my immune system is very iffy and I'm prone to rashes. Now for the past year, I've had infections and some horrible pain issues related to my bladder. And the list goes on, but how would this all be related to oxalates?

One blog I found calls it Oxalate Crystal Disease (www.everywomanover29.com). Here's what happens. Most plants have these defense systems. If we have a wonderfully intact gut and beautifully working kidneys, and moderate oxalate intake, they are not a problem. However, most people have leaky gut syndrome to various degrees. The oxalates can disrupt the lining of the gut even further, allowing the oxalates into the blood stream. Your body knows that oxalates are dangerous. If the kidneys can't get rid of them right away, your body tucks them away in various tissues. Once you hit a threshold, you get pain.

Why symptoms come and go?

The short answer is because your dietary intake fluctuates. Since most of us pay no attention to them, our intake is high on some days, and on others, not so much. Spinach is one of the worst on the list of high oxalate foods. Let's say you decided to get "healthier" and started putting a big bunch of spinach into your Formula 1 shake every day, and use almond milk. For



a week or so, all is well. Then all of a sudden, your shoulder hurts like crazy! It happens to be the one you injured in high school sports, but why would that make a difference? Ice, ibuprofen, and you happened to have eggs and bacon twice over the weekend instead of a spinach shake, and the pain calms down, so life goes on.

I read similar stories more than once. Previously injured tissues seem to be a favorite place for the body to put excess oxalate. You gave your body a break from the spinach, so the body was able to get rid of some of the build up and the pain settled down. The ice and ibuprofen didn't really do much. The really crazy part is, if you start up the spinach shakes again, the next time the pain could very well be in another place. It depends on where your body puts the excess oxalate this time.

Why don't more people know about this?

Traditional physicians treat symptoms and have little or no nutrition training. Even Sally Norton. She had

debilitating pain while she completed a Bachelor's degree in Nutrition and Master's in Public Health Leadership. She never heard the word oxalate that whole time. I recently had an appointment with my Functional Medicine physician. I brought Norton's book. I held it up and I asked, "Do you know anything about oxalates?" His response was a shrug and, "I know some people are sensitive to them." I still have a lot of respect for this guy. He changed my life more than 20 years ago, but now it would seem that if he knew more about oxalates, I might not have some of the trouble I have today.

Classically, even Functional Medicine folks, like myself, learn because either they or someone they love is not well and we want to get to the bottom of it. So here we are. I'll bet you have questions!

How much oxalate is too much?

There's the million dollar question. No one knows and only you, through careful food choices and experimentation, can figure out how much is too much. Another issue is that many information sources conflict with each other. Since it is microscopic (and there isn't any Big Pharma money behind any research) it's difficult to determine how much oxalate is present in each type of food.

Box 3.1: A Summary of Dietary Designations from Sally Norton's book, page 40, gives us some numbers.

BOX 3.1: A SUMMARY OF DIETARY DESIGNATIONS	
Daily Oxalate-Intake Categories	
↔ "Normal" diet: 130–220 mg/day	
↔ Low-oxalate diet: under 60 mg/day	
↔ High-oxalate diet: over 250 mg/day	
↔ Extremely high-oxalate diet: over 600 mg/day	
Food Designations	
↔ Low-oxalate food: under 4 mg/serving	
↔ Moderate-oxalate food: 4 mg to 9.9 mg/serving	
↔ High-oxalate food: over 10 mg/serving	
↔ Very high-oxalate food: over 15 mg/serving	

William Shaw PhD heads up the Great Plains Laboratory in Kansas. They specialize in non-traditional lab tests. He wrote this article: *The Green Smoothie Health Fad: This Road to Health Hell is Paved with Toxic Oxalate Crystals* (mosaicdx.com January, 2023). I put that in bold print so that it will stand out. He states, "Daily adult oxalate intake is usually 80-120 mg/d but it can range from 44-1000 mg/d in

individuals who eat a typical Western diet. I estimate that the person who consumes a green smoothie with two cups (about 150 grams) of spinach leaves is consuming about 15 grams or 15,000 mg of oxalates or about 150 times the average daily oxalate intake." In some folks, that could literally be a lethal dose. Not kidding. Page 82 of Norton's book describes a man who died from oxalate poisoning by eating a soup made of an herb called sorrel.

And it's not enough that excess oxalate is bad for us, oxalates bind to important minerals such as calcium, magnesium, zinc and iron. Many people are already deficient in these critical minerals, especially magnesium.

What are the high oxalate foods?

High Oxalate Foods		
Spinach	Kiwi	All nuts
Swiss chard	Raspberries	Peanuts
Beans	Blackberries	Cashews
Beet greens	Guava	Almonds
Beets	Pomegranate	Almond flour
Okra	Buckwheat	Chia seeds
Plantain	Amaranth	Sesame seeds
Potatoes	Quinoa	
Sweet potatoes	Cocoa powder	
Rhubarb	Chocolate	

Most resources list the foods as either high, medium or low oxalate. As you read above, spinach is the biggest challenge. A two cup serving of raw spinach automatically puts you into the category of an extremely high oxalate diet. And if it's a salad, I have certainly used more than 2 cups of spinach to make a salad, and then topped it with almonds and beets!

Yes, beets, potatoes, nuts, chocolate are all very popular, very high ox foods. Kiwi, rhubarb and star fruit are all extremely high, so steer clear of those for sure. Not listed in this graphic are black tea, olives and soy products (which falls under beans).

I think I might need help. How do I get started?

If you think you might have some oxalate issues, identifying and staying away from all high-ox foods, most of which are listed in the chart above is a great place to start. Just removing the most obvious of the high-ox foods can make a difference. That seems to be the case for me. Almost right away, I had more energy.

After spending hours and hours reading, I strongly recommend you get Sally Norton's book. It's an easy read, for the most part. There are a lot of things to look at online and other books, but if anyone is quoted, it's usually Sally Norton. There is SO much information in the book, I find myself re-reading sections time and time again. I also wrote in the front of the book the date and

my list of symptoms. Write it down. It's so easy to forget (or is that just oxalate-induced brain fog???)

For me, I think just trying to get my head around this has been the bigger challenge.

Look at the foods on the high oxalate list and start cutting back. Spinach always a big, big offender. Just stop with the spinach, and watch for spinach as an ingredient in many "healthy" supplements. Michael and I don't eat much spinach, but we do (did) eat a lot of nuts. In fact, I created a shake we call Wedding Cake. Our wedding cake was almond flavored. I was able to recreate the taste using the Herbalife products, almonds and almond extract. It's wonderful! We were having at least one a day, in addition to nuts as snacks at home. I'm a big tea drinker and I love the Herbalife chocolate peanut protein bars. Tea, chocolate, peanuts, almonds, soy shake mix. Geez. All high oxalate.

In her book, Norton gives great examples of swaps. Instead of spinach salad, have Romaine and butter lettuces. That way you go from 600 mg to around 6!!! I'm serious. Instead of eating a handful of almonds (about 1 oz or 22 nuts) at 120 mg of oxalate, an ounce of pumpkin or sunflower seeds is less than 2 mg. She gives full meal swap ideas.

An easy way to avoid / reduce oxalates is to stay away from plants! One of my favorite books is by Nina Teicholz called *The Big Fat Surprise, Why Butter, Meat and Cheese Belong in a Healthy Diet*. Teicholz is quoted in Norton's book for good reason. There are no oxalates in butter, meat or cheese! Or anything from the animal kingdom.

Is there anything to watch for?

Here's one VERY important thing to know. You cannot go to zero, nor should you try. There is a terrible thing that happens called Oxalate Dumping Syndrome!! Oh my gosh. I think it has already happened to us. We jumped in a little too quickly. When you do that, your body gets a break from processing incoming oxalate and goes about the business of clearing out some of the stored stuff. We dropped nuts, starting drinking just the whey products, switched away from whole grain, seedy breads, etc. I all of a sudden had a flair of my bladder issues and my tinnitus went nuts (pun intended). So please go slowly. Give yourself time to figure some things out and slowly make changes.

Stay hydrated! That's a huge key. Your body will liberate stored oxalate then use your kidneys to

get them out of your body. If you don't stay hydrated, you may be setting yourself up for a kidney stone. You do not want that.

Are there any "hacks" I can use?

If you want some high ox veggies, your best bet is to boil them and then throw the water out. It can decrease the oxalate count by up to half, but you also have to take volume into account. If you cook spinach, the volume reduces dramatically so then you have effectively concentrated the oxalates.

Another hack is to include some dairy! Dairy products like milk, cheese, sour cream, yogurt and others contain calcium. (Note: heavy cream has no calcium). The calcium can bind the oxalates in the food, making sure they never make it out of the intestinal tract. If you are going to use milk, please drink whole A2 milk only. No room to explain.

What about the Herbalife Products?

I did contact Herbalife, and got a rather standard response. Oxalates are in plants. We have plants in our products. Consult your physician. (And you saw how far that got me.)

Soy is a bean; beans are a problem. So let's hack it! I started making my shakes with about 4 oz of half and half in addition to the water and ice. If you want to increase the protein, use the Herbalife24 Enhanced Protein Powder. It's whey and casein and has 24 grams of protein per serving. It also contains 343 mg of calcium! Double score!

My concern is with the new vegan line. Ask my team and they will tell you that right from the beginning I urged caution. The Greens Booster is one of those products Dr Shaw warned about. Spinach isn't real high on the list, but sweet potatoes are ingredient #2 in the veggies list. Go slow.

Another area you might not think about are fiber supplements. Some are full of oxalates and fiber can block absorption of minerals. The V-line fiber first ingredient is oat fiber, which is low ox, so that's good!

Would you like some stories?

Right off the bat let me share this comment with you from Norton's book. She states that many of her clients began with gluten sensitivity and other food sensitivities. Once they cleared their oxalates, those sensitivities went away (page 49).

Sally Norton's story started as a kid. She learned about gardening and fell in love with Swiss Chard, right below spinach on the high-ox list! She

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describes herself as an oxalate overload survivor. One of her main symptoms was vulvodynia or pain in the lady parts. Not nice. She wasn't sleeping, had terrible arthritis, gout (despite being a vegetarian at that time) and brain fog, among others. It was a journey, but getting rid of the high-ox foods made all of it go away.

A story that encouraged me was Barry (*page 14*). He said he had been "suffering with itching for years and no one could help me." Going low-ox reduced it "significantly."

The itching I have at times drives me nuts. I've been taking antihistamine medication for more than a year. I'm sure some of you are shocked to read that. But you have to live your life. That hasn't gotten any better yet, but my fatigue is definitely better. I'll give up almonds so that I can give up the afternoon nap that had been critical for so long.

Debra (*pages 147-148*) for 13 years was "tortured by fecal incontinence. Her frequent 'accidents' - 8 to 10 episodes per day - were accompanied by flatulence (gas), cramping, nausea, fatigue, and back and hip pain." She had multiple medical visits, became gluten free and was told to have a high-fiber diet. After meeting Norton, "she adopted a low-oxalate diet. Astoundingly, normal bowel function returned in just three days."

Helen, 72, (*pages 175 - 177*) struggled with constant hunger and could not lose weight. She also had headaches, back pain, hip and knee pain, could not walk easily or climb stairs and had disturbed sleep. She switch to low-ox. One month later she reported, "I feel like I've got my life back....For once, I feel as if I'm actually digesting and absorbing my food, and for the first time in years, I don't feel hungry." Eventually she dramatically reduced all of her pain and lost 50 pounds. Way to go, Helen!

Ron was retired and in his seventies (*pages 183-184*). He was a musician and in good health but had nagging pain in his thumb which made playing difficult. Their cook wanted to shift to low oxalate cooking, but Ron did not want to give up his daily treat: an afternoon bite of dark chocolate and evening peanut butter and celery snack. "Together, Ron's two daily snacks delivered 180 mg of oxalate" which was in addition to a diet that delivered between 700 and 2,500 mg of oxalate a day. After hearing a story about someone recovering from carpal tunnel syndrome by changing their diet, he gave up is snacks and lower the intake in other areas. Within a short amount of time, he was and remains pain free.

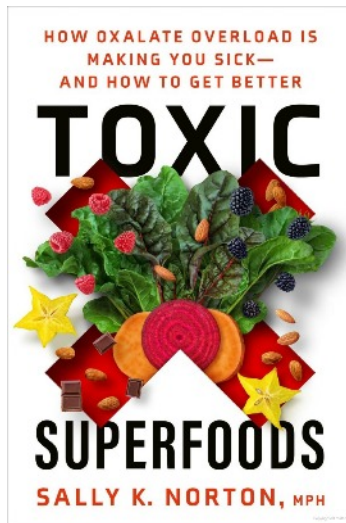
Here's one that doesn't have such a happy ending (*page 10*). "Three weeks after completing a 10-day 'green smoothie cleanse' for weight loss, a woman with a history of gastric bypass went to the hospital. Her kidney's had shut down from the oxalates. She was immediately put on a low-ox diet, but remains on kidney dialysis.

In 2020, an actor named Liam Hemsworth did an interview for *Men's Health* magazine stating that spinach smoothies gave him a kidney stone (*pages 9 - 10*). He also had "malaise, depression and lethargy." The kidney stone just topped things off. "Every morning I was having five handfuls of spinach and then almond milk, almond butter, and also some vegan protein in a smoothie. And that was what I considered super healthy. So, I had to completely rethink what I was putting into my body."

Hemsworth had to rethink his "health food." I would like to invite you to do the same. Your health is your most precious gift. Don't let "health food trends" destroy it.

* P.S. Both books, Norton and Teicholz, would
* * make great Christmas gifts!! Blessings!
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Toxic Superfoods: An Oxalate Update

In my last newsletter, I laid out the case against eating spinach and almonds, along with most potatoes, beets, Swiss chard, and the list goes on. In the couple of months that I have been talking about this with people, it's the spinach and almonds that hits home the most. I know, right? It's insane! One poor lady in Costco had this most horrified look on her face when I told her she should reconsider buying that almond milk. "But I thought almonds were good for us!"

Yes, I talk to strangers in public places. Don't you? The most "famous" one was when I walked up to a young mom with a little one in her cart and said, "You know ... choosey mothers really *don't* choose JIF." She pulled her hand back as if she had been bitten! "They DON'T?" Then I explained to her about the fully hydrogenated vegetable oils - which really means Crisco. Now I would also tell her that the oxalate and mold content of most peanut butter makes it toxic and unfit for human consumption.

Almonds are bad, but spinach and Swiss chard? Yes! Even worse! I checked with my sister to learn if my memory was correct. I used to eat spinach like there wasn't anything else. I ate it canned, frozen, raw, you name it. I would have a whole can of spinach as a meal. Your body would prefer you keep oxalates under 200 mg per day. One can of spinach has more than 2,000 mg of oxalate!!!!

But back to my oxalate journey. It's been pretty crazy. I was desperate. I've always had itchy skin and rashes, aches and pains, fatigue, hypothyroidism and adrenal challenges. The clincher came when I developed pain in my lady parts. Sometimes it hurt so bad to pee, I would just sit there and cry (if I wasn't screaming). True story. So I wanted to turn this around ASAP. Sally warns, "Do not go to zero!" Slowly back off and let your body adjust to the lower levels. She warned that if you go to low too quickly, you end up with what she calls dumping syndrome. She's not kidding!

The first thing was a horrible, itchy rash on my arms, neck and face. I've always had rashes, but this time it looked and felt different. I could feel the crystals coming out of my skin. At one point, the skin on the back of my right ear (not left, only right) felt bumpy. Michael said it looked as if I had 100 tiny white heads just under the skin.

I signed up for a live Zoom class with Sally Norton. There were about 40 people on the call. It was very interesting. Sally warned, again, oxalates are damaging going into you body, but even more damaging coming out. Why? It was just an oxalate crystal going in, but once in the body, it joined up with calcium, magnesium or some other mineral which makes it bigger! Just like the calcium oxalate crystals that make up kidney stones! I can feel them under my skin. I don't fully understand it all, but it's a real thing.

If you don't have a copy of my last newsletter, drop me a line and I'll get one out to you. If you have any of the symptoms, please consider cutting back on your oxalate intake. One gal I know was having a lot of muscle stiffness and pain. No longer eating almonds is rather quickly taking care of it. She says that munching on pumpkin seeds is just as satisfying as the almonds were.

Another friend was developing the same lady-parts pain. Now with this information about oxalates, she can control/get rid of the pain simply through watching what she eats. One of the things that was a challenge for me is my original flavor Herbal Tea Concentrate! I used to live on that stuff. It probably has about 80 mg of oxalate per cup. I find if I mix in just a tiny amount of cal/mag citrates, it doesn't affect the flavor but binds up the oxalates before they get into my body and I don't absorb them. Now I can have my tea and painless pee, too! (Okay, bad joke, but true!)

It's going to be a long road, but what is the option? If you want more information on the cal/mag citrates, let me know. It's best to email me at SupplementalWellness4u@gmail.com.

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Blessings!!