

HERology Transcript—The Truth About Nutritional Powders

[00:00:00]

Creatine In Hot Drinks

Joanne Stone: If you put creatine in something hot, is it not as effective as in something cold? Does it matter? Does it make any difference?

Anita Mirchandani: I honestly don't know if there's any evidence on that. I know people put creatine and collagen in their coffees. Personal experience, I wouldn't do that. I love my coffee too much, and I like it the way it is.

But

Joanne Stone: I'm,

Anita Mirchandani: that's just me. But- That's where it goes in my house.

Nutritional Powders Overview

Joanne Stone: Welcome to Herology, the podcast from the Mount Sinai Health System dedicated to advancing women's health through the lens of cutting-edge science and compassionate care. I'm your host for today, Dr. Joanne Stone, and our show is brought to you by the Carolyn Rowan Center for Women's Health and Wellness.

Today, we discuss what many health and fitness enthusiasts are talking about, nutritional powders. What are they? Pros and cons to each, and are they worth taking? Nutritional powders are highly efficient tools designed to bridge dietary gaps, accelerate athletic recovery, and boost overall wellness.

[00:01:00] Whether you're aiming to build muscle, increase strength, or support everyday dietary needs, supplements like protein and creatine often can offer distinct science-based health benefits. I'm joined by my Herology co-host, Dr. Anna Barbieri, and our guest, Anita Mirchandani, a registered dietitian and fitness professional who specializes in women's health, and also is our director

of nutrition at the Mount Sinai Carolyn Rowan Center for Women's Health and Wellness.

I'm so excited for today's podcast episode on nutritional powders, and there's-- I feel like my personal, um, social media accounts are just flooded constantly by things like, "You should be using whey powder," and, "Use this for your skin," and, "Use this for your bone," and, you know, green powders and all these different things.

So, um, having both of you, the dietician and, and gynecologic hormonal guru extraordinaire, um, is gonna be so exciting and really providing great insight for our, uh, patients, for anybody listening to the show. So, [00:02:00] uh, maybe we can just start by breaking down the different kinds of nutritional powders that are out there.

Anita Mirchandani: Absolutely. Yep. So what we see today, we have about five different nutritional powders. The first one is the most common, protein powder, which you'll see whey protein powder, um, and you'll also see, um, vegan versions of that. Um, the second one is, um, fiber-- or greens powder. So you'll see a variety of different greens powders, like, you know, different brands out there that promote for digestive health and, you know, an increase in fiber.

Um, the third is collagen. Um, collagen's becoming popular for connective tissue, he-hair, skin, nails, all of that. Um, you will also see creatine. So creatine is very popular, and, um, especially for women's health, women in their forties, we're seeing a lot of that now. Um, and then the fifth is actually, um, vitamin and mi-mineral powder.

So you can see that in different forms, whether it's, um, sort of like a, a blend, you know, that includes different vitamins to maybe put into water and drink at night, or in [00:03:00] electrolytes, you know, in the form of electrolytes. So those are the most, most common that we see out there right now.

Anna Barbieri: So you said social media, but I think they are all on my kitchen counter.

And it's one of those things, you know, how do you tell someone is fifty by looking at their kitchen counter? Like, um, yes, collagen, creatine, and electrolyte powder are all there.

Anita Mirchandani: It's, it's, it's-

Joanne Stone: Creatine was definitely on my- Yeah. ... on my, on my list.

Anita Mirchandani: I will say that that's probably what everyone is dabbling in right now.

They wanna sort of see... I mean, you're, you're hearing about it, you're hearing science, you're hearing some evidence, you're hearing some, you know, friends, word of mouth, and everyone's just excited to see what's out there and, and how it affects them

Joanne Stone: And I, I also feel like the new regulation about how much protein you should consume have really boosted sort of the need for some people to put more protein in their diet.

Anita Mirchandani: Certainly boosted the sales of protein powders.

Joanne Stone: That's it. It's for sure. Totally. Yeah. Totally.

Protein Powders Versus Food

Joanne Stone: I mean, so how do you know, is it better to use a powder as a supplement if they need more protein, or do you tell them to eat more? How do you, how [00:04:00] do you break that down?

Anita Mirchandani: I would say the first thing is, every person is in a different life cycle, so kinda figuring out where they are in their life cycle is the first step in what their needs might be.

The second step is sort of the functionality of it, like, are you busy? Do you need something on the go? Like, what is your sort of day-to-day lifestyle like? And, you know, the recommendations are, you know, what we read out there is, "You gotta get 100 grams of protein. You gotta get 100 grams of protein." And I think that overwhelms a lot of people, so they're like, "I can't physically eat 100 grams of protein."

I mean, just for reference- ... a palm portion is about 21 grams of protein, of animal protein. So, you know, like, that's a lot of chicken or something to eat in a day for a lot of people who may not even have time to sit down and eat. So the, the powders have become a popular, I would say, substitution, replacement, supplement, sort of to ensure that you're getting that many grams into your diet.

The difference being that there's a whole sort of analysis on eating your protein versus drinking your protein, and what is drinking your protein really doing for us? We, [00:05:00] we just don't have that much evidence that says that we're drinking our protein and it's doing exactly what it needs to be doing. So that's sort of like the mystery out there still with all of this.

Anna Barbieri: So, Anita, so do you tell your patients or clients that, uh, it's better to eat your protein, and I guess in its solid form, than drink it from a powder? Is that what we're saying? Yeah.

Anita Mirchandani: I would say yes. I would say I would start by sort of figuring out... And this is why it's great to kinda work with each person individually, 'cause your lifestyle and my lifestyle are totally different.

And, um, you know, understanding what someone's lifestyle is, when they have time to sit down, you know, when they can put together, you know, what we call, like, a balanced plate visual. Um, and yes, I, I'm, I would say more often than not, I do recommend eating your protein. Eating signals this reaction with the gut and the brain that, you know, for example, Anna's about to eat her breakfast, so let's get the wheels turning.

Let's get all the digestive and absorptive systems going. So I, I, I, that's my, usually my first line of recommendation.

Joanne Stone: Can I ask a real [00:06:00] question? So, you know, so many of us are so busy, there's not time to, like, make a really great

Anna Barbieri: breakfast.

Joanne Stone: So did

Anna Barbieri: you say breakfast? I know. May I ask? What is breakfast- That was the, uh-

and how is that made? Yeah. Actually. That was the piece of candy I

Joanne Stone: was eating. Yeah.

Anita Mirchandani: No judgment.

Joanne Stone: Thank you. Yeah, the candy with extra protein in it. Um, so, uh, like, how would you compare a nutritional powder versus just, like, grabbing a fast bar, protein bar to eat?

Anita Mirchandani: I would say that the nutritional powder probably can, it would probably be a better decision, because with the powder you can create your own concoction.

So let's say you're doing your own little shake in the morning, or even if you wanna make a bowl. Like oftentimes I recommend clients if they're doing a nutritional powder to mix it into like a cottage cheese or a yogurt or something, you know, that, that might be a little bit more tastier and, and can still give them more bang for buck.

Um, and so, uh, that is definitely what I feel a little bit more versatile and nutritional dense, um, compared to just, you know, a grab-and-go bar.

Anna Barbieri: Yeah, I think, you know, there's a lot of bar companies popping up, and I feel [00:07:00] like we're seeing protein in everything. I think there is like, you can get a, you know, a coffee with protein foam, for example, like it's everywhere.

Um, so I, I would agree with that. I think once you look at the ingredient list and you look at the amount of sugar and preservatives and all the additives, kind of steering it into something that you know what it is, and maybe it's a single ingredient, seems a little bit healthier to me.

Anita Mirchandani: Yeah, absolutely.

And I think the other thing to keep in mind, again, is your schedule. Some days you just don't have that time, and maybe that bar is the solution. We're all about balance here. Yeah. Right? So I think you just have to figure out w- where you are in that day.

Joanne Stone: Yeah. It's true. I mean, my younger daughter, she like wakes up five minutes before she has to be at work, you know?

And so she's just grabbing that protein bar like that is- Grab and go. Grab and go ... yeah.

Whey Versus Vegan Protein

Anna Barbieri: I'm really curious about this question How do you compare whey powder, so whey powder comes from cow's milk- Mm-hmm ... right? Versus vegan powder, so plant-based powders. Is there a [00:08:00] difference, or is protein just protein?

Anita Mirchandani: It's a really good question. So whey protein is the most common protein. It's the most comparable to how animal protein is obviously digested and, and how we use in the metabolic processes. Vegan protein, such as pea protein, rice protein, um, there's like a few other blends. They're... We don't have enough evidence that they are, when broken down, they do what they need to be doing.

Um, and oftentimes you will see when you're comparing, for example, a, a simple whey protein or a whey protein isolate, which is also popular because it is lactose free, so those who have issues with dairy intolerance can do the isolate. Um, compared to a vegan protein, you... I mean, I've heard the main difference is there's so many ingredients that need to be able to sort of keep that powder together, and also the digestive response is very different.

You feel a lot more stomach gurgling, discomfort-

Anna Barbieri: Yeah ...

Anita Mirchandani: um, that type of stuff.

Anna Barbieri: But [00:09:00] I also think if you think of that, right, there's a difference between eating pea plant protein versus eating peas-

Anita Mirchandani: Correct ...

Anna Barbieri: or beans or tofu, which are going to be your vegan sources of protein. Yeah. That's a very different story than protein powder that's broken down.

Anita Mirchandani: Yeah, absolutely. I think that, you know, legumes are, like, basically what's grounded up and put into these vegan protein blends. Um, and- Yeah, taking the time to eat anything really is the, the best way, if you can.

Joanne Stone: And I think all of us would agree that the, m- you know, m- real whole foods are, are the better way of getting nutrition.

You know, eating fish instead of relying on omega-3 fish oils or things like that, or DHA, y- um, which so many of my pregnant patients are taking. But, you know, it's really better to take it, to get it from the source, which is the fish itself. Yeah, for sure. But, but if you can't, you know, and a lot of people in pregnancy particularly have an aversion to fish or that smell.

Mm-hmm. At least it's a way of [00:10:00] getting sort of that supplement, the DHA.

Anita Mirchandani: I, yes, I have to agree with that. I think that pregnancy oftentimes, or even, like, during the fertility process, um, people ha- you know, if, if you're working, if you're working with a reproductive endocrinologist and you're doing IVF or IUI, you tend to have, um, aversions as well.

I think it's really important to understand where a female is in her life stage because sometimes those nutri- nutritional powders are fuel for them, and they are necessary, and they get them through their day.

Joanne Stone: Yeah. Yeah. And I think that there's a lot of, you know, vitamin deficiencies that, I mean, again, I'll talk about pregnancy 'cause that's what I know.

Um, vitamin D deficiency, magnesium, potassium, um, iron. What are the... Are, are there powders that can help for those kinds of vitamin deficiencies?

Anita Mirchandani: We do see that, um, a fluctuation in, you know, levels, especially for women in their 40s, um, with a lot of these vitamins and minerals. I mean, there are common... The common forms are, you know, [00:11:00] simply, like, these, there's, like, these blends that, you know, various brands offer them where you mix them with water and drink them like you're drinking hot tea.

But even the electrolytes, like, the biggest reason I think electrolytes have become popular is because most people just forget to drink water and are very dehydrated. And dehydrated cause- dehydration causes a lot of symptoms that- Someone might feel like they're going through perimenopause, you know, brain fog, and migraines, and low energy.

Um, and I think the electrolytes have become popular because that's just a quick way to almost remind yourself that, "Oh, I gotta, gotta get hydrated."

Anna Barbieri: I can't tell you how many women I see in practice who are running around all day. I mean, I'm, I'm one of them, frankly, you know, who have a coffee in the morning and then don't eat or drink anything until dinner time, or it's late at night, which is really not very conducive to whole health.

But that's just the reality of life. So I do think, like, carrying something with you and drinking water, drinking water with electrolytes would be, uh... It's a, it's a good [00:12:00] tip. Yeah.

Anita Mirchandani: Yeah. You, you just have to say, like, if this, then that. If not this, then what? Like, you have to compare what's the better of whatever I'm being offered or I have on my hand in this given moment.

Joanne Stone: So does that compare to the... If you put the electrolyte powder in water or whatever, what do you recommend putting it in, and how does that compare to, like, the electro- electrolyte drinks that are already out there?

Anita Mirchandani: Oh, of course. Yeah. No, the electrolyte powders are definitely the more pure form, and most people mix it with water.

Um, I don't know. I'm trying to think if there's any other... Maybe sparkling water, I would think. Like, one of those, like, simple, clear hydration options. But, um, the, the popular electrolyte brands do have food coloring and, you know, some chemicals and, like, we're talking Gatorade. You know, all the common things that kids and all of us might gravitate towards if we're, like, really hot and sweaty and, you know, on the go.

Um, so yeah, these powders are a great way to just throw in your bag and... I mean, I, I take them. Like, I travel with [00:13:00] them, 'cause I find myself dehydrated on airplanes and in busy days like we're talking, you know?

Anna Barbieri: And there are some good brands that don't have those colorings. Correct. And, um, they may come...

You know, most of them are flavored- Mm-hmm ... because most people like different flavors. Um, I happen... I mean, listen, if you like margaritas with salt- ... you will probably like just a plain electrolyte powder that's pretty salty. Lime flavored. Wait, do you put the- Lime flavored ... do

Joanne Stone: you put the powder in the margarita?

Is that

Anna Barbieri: what we're doing? Um, I have not yet, but that's- No ... that is making me think. Yes.

Anita Mirchandani: I think we should test that eventually. Yes. 'Cause then you're not worrying about the post-alcohol effects. That's

Anna Barbieri: true. That's true. Exactly. You're mitigating that. That's a great idea. Love it. Okay. Can I go back for a second to the protein, uh, thing?

'Cause we were talking about plant-based versus whey. And in pregnancy a lot, to your point, lots of women are not meeting their protein requirements because they are so turned off to food protein- Mm ... sources. Like, m- not even in vegetarians or vegans, but even in women who eat meat [00:14:00] just say, "Oh, I can't take it."

So I think that is a good example of, uh, how they could substitute a little bit. Can you just... And I know this is not a question about protein powders. What are some good non-animal protein sources?

Anita Mirchandani: Absolutely, yep. So I would say the, my immediate go-to would be legumes, so like black beans, for example. And, um, just to touch a little bit on this, a lot of the nutritional fibers, I mean, nutritional powders, I, I did mention before one of the categories were, like, the green powders.

Like, and the reason those are popular is because fiber. So a lot of these plant protein sources, the ones I'm gonna list now, are multifaceted. They offer plant protein, they offer fiber, and healthy fats, which are really great for women going through this process. Um, so we talked about legumes. Um, nuts and seeds.

So sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, um, um, and, um, ground flax seed, hemp seeds, chia seeds, basil seeds. These are all very, um, popular, higher than normal [00:15:00] sources of plant protein, excellent source of fiber, and all very integrative with, um, healthy fats as well.

Anna Barbieri: Yeah. I think flax, um, so I like to recommend flax seed.

Mm-hmm. Um, not necessarily whole, because you're just going to poop it out. Poop it out. But ground at home. And I think we're all big foodies here, so shout-out to, to our hobby. Um, when you ground flax seed at home, it tastes amazing. It has this nutty flavor. You can put it in a glass jar, keep it in the fridge for a few weeks.

And there are some small, they're not very good studies, it's not great data, but even flax for menopause symptoms. Mm. Um, in practice, you know, I do have patients who report they're feeling better with it. This does not come out of large randomized clinical trials, but this is a, a totally healthy, low-risk intervention, so yay to flax seed.

Yeah.

Joanne Stone: So it's like creating your own flax seed powder, basically. That's what you're doing,

Anna Barbieri: right? Yep. Right. I have a coffee grinder that I grind herbs in, and um, like [00:16:00] seeds in. Yep. So I just put it in that and put it in a glass jar. It lasts probably, uh, several weeks to a couple of months, yeah.

Anita Mirchandani: I mean, touching upon that, I think 'cause of the omega-3s in ground flax seed too- Yep

and sort of a anti-inflammatory, low inflammation, you know, integration is very helpful during- Yeah ... women in their life cycles at that point.

Joanne Stone: I love it.

Creatine Benefits And Dosing

Joanne Stone: So tell me a little bit, um, more, can you go through some of the other nutritional powders that are out there? Like, which ones are scientifically beneficial?

We've all talked a- we all have creatine powder on our shelves and maybe use it few times a week. I feel like I, I remember to use it when I'm- Not in margaritas,

Anna Barbieri: though ...

Joanne Stone: doing strength. No, not in margaritas. First thing in the morning in coffee. I try, I remember to use it when I'm, when I have a workout with my trainer in the morning.

But, you know, I think that there is some good evidence that it does help with muscle strength, but I mean, pretty decent evidence, but let me hear it from-

Anita Mirchandani: Absolutely. Yeah. So creatine, I mean, I would say of all the nutritional powders, [00:17:00] creatine, maybe collagen, and probably a vitamin and mineral powder would be my most popular recommendations.

Um, you know, for women in their life cycles, especially post-pregnancy, in postpartum/into like as we're evolving in our life cycles, creatine is huge for not only muscles, muscle health, bone health, but also I would say mental health. Like, I've noticed a lot of people when they've started integrating report back, um...

And you know, as you said, there's not super strong evidence out there, but there is evidence out there, um, that demonstrates that creatine upon like, you know, a 2.5 gram or, or even a 5 gram as you're ramping up consumption, um, especially on days that you are strength training, 'cause that's when your body could really absorb it and utilize it more.

Um, people notice improvements in concentration, in mood, in brain fog, uh, mental acuity. They feel more... R- I mean, if you're coming off of a day that you're not sleeping great, um, and you incorporate, incorporate creatine powder, like, you know, mixed in water to kind of drink [00:18:00] that throughout the day, um, you know, sort of improvement in energy levels as well, not feeling like you haven't been super rested.

Mm. So I mean, this is all practical applications for busy hustling women

Anna Barbieri: that could- Yeah, we do... You know, it's probably one of the most common supplement recommendations in our practice that focuses on midlife- Yeah ... and beyond. And we really try to distinguish between its muscle-promoting effect. And that's not to say, like, I mean, if somebody's not working out and lifting weights, just take, you know, using creatine powder is not gonna magically make you more toned.

Mm-hmm. Like, we gotta do, gotta do the work, right? Um, and the other one, and there's emerging data that's pretty decent about cognitive benefits, and there's a lot to be said about dosing. Some people, I don't know if you find this, some people don't tolerate creatine- Yes ... as well as others, especially if you get up to that 10 gram dose.

That seems to be the one where cognition is more affected. Mm-hmm. Um, rather than five, and maybe you can split it up. Do, you [00:19:00] know, five in the morning, five at night type of thing. But usually it's pretty well tolerated. But- I

Anita Mirchandani: have to agree with you on the top- Yeah ... uh, point of dosing. I think with any of the nutritional powders, that you'll see the serving size on the label, and I think oftentimes people just go right into it and they're like, "Oh, two scoops.

I'm gonna do the full two scoops." And I, I always tell people ramp up with whatever you do because-

Anna Barbieri: So true ...

Anita Mirchandani: you never know. So true. You're still getting- Yeah ... some benefit from it from using it. You may not... 'Cause, you know, their complaint might be, "But I'm not getting the, you know, 40 grams of protein on the label."

I'm like, "But you're still getting 20." Yeah. "And that's 20 more than you had yesterday." Yeah. So kind of ramp. Because, you know, we've got, we've got to worry about, you know, digestive discomfort and kidney health, and there's a lot of, you know, sort of repercussions with doing too much too quickly.

Joanne Stone: So I've also heard some, um, differences in whether or not cold water or hot drinks- can be used equally effectively?

Like, if you put creatine into something hot, does it not, is it not as effective as it is [00:20:00] in something cold? Does it matter? Does it make any difference?

Anita Mirchandani: I honestly don't know if there's any evidence on that. I know people put creatine and collagen in their coffees. Personal experience, I wouldn't do that.

I love my coffee too much, and I like it the way it is. But- ...

Joanne Stone: I'm,

Anita Mirchandani: that's just me. But- That's where it goes in my house.

Joanne Stone: Well, I had a conversation with Carolyn Ron, actually, about that. Yeah. I'm like, "I put it in my coffee." She's like, "Oh, I would never. I would never, like, like-" It's funny because- ... make my coffee taste

Anna Barbieri: different."

I put it in my coffee always, and my husband can taste the difference. I cannot taste it- I can taste it in there ... in the coffee. Oh, wow. And he does not tolerate it in his coffee. So- Yeah, I think 'cause I,

Anita Mirchandani: I think

Anna Barbieri: maybe- Yeah ...

Anita Mirchandani: I know what's going in, so maybe my brain's already thinking, like, it's gonna taste different.

Yeah. So it's already pre- preconditioning me. But, um, yeah, I, I, I would say that collagen powder blends better in cold... I mean, sorry, creatine blends better in co- ice cold water, and it r- it's almost like a refreshing drink. Like, oftentimes I recommend it, and then kind of make it, shake it up, m- put ice and leave it in the refrigerator, and then have it after your workout.

Joanne Stone: Mm. Well, I've been lately doing cold, making my own cold brew [00:21:00] at home.

Anita Mirchandani: Love cold brew.

Joanne Stone: I love cold brew. It's, like, the best.

Anna Barbieri: Try the creatine with that.

Joanne Stone: I'm gonna put it in the cold- It's good ... I'm gonna put it in the cold brew.

Anna Barbieri: Um, on the topic of creatine, I also think we should add, you know, um, many people do get blood work done more frequently now.

Mm-hmm. And the use of creatine can bump one's creatinine. We see that, again, our practice is really focusing on midlife and beyond, so we see, we have a lot of patients using creatine. Some of them we're not, we don't even know that they are using it, even if we ask. And we'll often see that bump in creatinine, maybe 10 to 20%, and that is one of the first questions we ask.

It's not a nephrology or renal health workup. It's, "Are you using creatine?" Because that may be the responsible thing, and it should revert back to normal if somebody stops using it.

Anita Mirchandani: I mean, I think we typically also see that if they're- Kind of consuming a larger, those larger dosage amounts Yes. Mm-hmm [00:22:00] Typically the 2.5, you know, a few times a week on the days you're strength training c- can still provide benefits and not-

Anna Barbieri: You know, and this brings us back to s- a, a topic we talk about a lot on this podcast.

Who are the studies based on? Yes. Right? If you are 130 pound woman, maybe 10 grams of creatine is not the right amount of you, even though this was the right amount in some small randomized trial, because maybe that was not the focus of that trial, right? So I think we have to take that with a grain of salt, Noelle.

Anita Mirchandani: That's actually a very good point, and I think that's why it's really important to understand, like, w- the one of the takeaways I would say when people are listening is that you're, you're not the same as your friend. So your friend might say, "I've got the best recommendation. You gotta try this." You're going into it blind.

And so just to be aware of all the different things that come of it, you know, before or when you're taking it, that maybe you, you just don't tolerate it or you don't feel the same or, or whatever it might be. Um, it's [00:23:00] very individualized, the response.

Joanne Stone: I love taking with a grain of salt or taking with a grain of flaxseed.

I think that's gonna be the new expression that I'm gonna use. Taking it with

Anita Mirchandani: a grain of salt. Take it with those electrolytes,

Joanne Stone: right? Exactly. I, I also wanted to mention magnesium, because I feel like that's being used for a lot of different reasons. There's a lot of magnesium

Anna Barbieri: powders out there, yes,

Joanne Stone: for sure.

Yeah. A lot of different types and, and for different reasons, like, uh, used for sleep- Yeah ... used for constipation. What do you think?

Anita Mirchandani: I find that the magnesium powders are popular in a lot of my patients that don't love to swallow capsules. Like, it's like too many pills, too many supplements, and they just get overwhelmed, and the magnesium powders oftentimes are in various blends with like GABA and, um, L-theanine and chamomile, and sometimes especially for, um, the ones that help promote relaxation, nerve relaxation and, and sleep or, or evening time, they almost are consuming it as though it's like a tea, because they're mixing it with warm water and they're sipping it slowly.

And so I find that that is one of the more popular versions of magnesium and, [00:24:00] or these powders consumed.

Anna Barbieri: Yeah. So I think with magnesium, that's such a good point. Actually, to get the right dose of magnesium, let's say magnesium glycinate, one of the more common forms out there, you really need 300 to 400 milligrams of that.

Powders as Night Ritual

Anna Barbieri: Yep. Most of the capsules are going to be about 110, 120. So now you're taking four of them, and these are big mamas. These are like no more Like, these are big chocky mamas ... pills, yeah. It's hard. I mean, I, I can't do that either. So putting it in powder- Makes one go through the routine and the ceremony of kind of that stirring it in your mug, this is the time to relax.

And I think that adds this other kind of routine and sort of signaling layer to everything, if you're going to use it for something like sleep. Yeah.

Anita Mirchandani: And also, I would say that the vitamin mineral pathway, in terms of digestion and absorption, is a lot less, I would say, rigorous than something like a protein powder.

Like, you don't have to... It's, it's not [00:25:00] as, as, as sort of strict about it. Like, with protein, animal protein, whey protein, plant protein, um, there's a lot of nuances in the digestive and absorptive pathway. But with vitamins and minerals, it's almost like it's like flushing in, flushing out, so it's just not as, it's not as serious, as I would say.

Joanne Stone: Yeah. Mm. And I, I love the idea of it being a ritual, actually. Yeah. You know? To get you in the mood for going to sleep, and, and putting in tea, and it's almost like that mindfulness, you know- Yeah ... meditative t- time that, which, that you can- Right. And kind of- ... really relax ... think of

Anna Barbieri: how we think of coffee in the morning.

Absolutely. That's a ritual too. That's a start the day ritual, and this is the end of the day ritual. Mm-hmm. To replace the margarita.

Safety and Third Party Testing

Joanne Stone: What, what about, um, regulation of some of these powders? I mean, I've heard that some of them could be contaminated or have lead in them. What are your thoughts on the regulation and sort of the...

Are they, are they, uh, pure? Are they pure? Are they... Would we have to worry about some of the components that are in them?

Anita Mirchandani: Yeah, I would say that in the probably [00:26:00] last 18 months it's been kind of a frustrating sort of, um, news world out there because, uh, there's been so many protein powders, common brands, that have been recalled for containing heavy metals and, and lead.

Um, I would say that the two biggest sort of, um, vetting points that I would recommend people look into is NSF, which is National Sanitation Foundation. If they have the NSF logo and/or you can go to the NSF website and type in the brand, oftentimes you can get a pretty good reading on what you're taking or what the history of that, you know, brand has been.

Um, the other one is ConsumerLab. I, I, I, I think ConsumerLab is a really good sort of just starting point for whether it's a nutritional powder or a supplement, kind of just seeing what this brand's reputation is and what they offer and, you know, sort of a track record on them.

Anna Barbieri: Yeah. Like a background check.

I think that's really good framework, and I love how you're very, um, kind of middle of the road and rational about it. You know, when we talk to patients about these [00:27:00] powders, the first question is, "What are you using it for?" Mm. And will it... Do you need this powder, and will this powder benefit you? Right? And if you're going to use it, which powder are we talking about, and how do you choose the quality one?

Which is, we go through a very similar process. I would say, you know, with the rise and explosion of these products, especially in women's health and

especially, again, in midlife- Mm-hmm ... it's like a marketing frenzy- Yes ... on many different products. If a product is promising way too many things, it's not likely to do that.

Correct. Like, you will not cure your night sweats, hot flashes, vaginal dryness, brain fog, weight gain, fatigue, and all of that with a protein blend. It just won't. With

Anita Mirchandani: two scoops of protein blend. Two scoops,

Anna Barbieri: sorry. Two scoops of protein. What a shame. I mean,

Anita Mirchandani: wouldn't

Joanne Stone: that be amazing?

Anna Barbieri: That would be. How cool would you imagine?

Yeah. You know, so I, I think... I thank you for the, like, rationality in all of this. And

Anita Mirchandani: I also think, listen, we're all used to, like, the instant gratification- Yeah ... of, like, you know, [00:28:00] Amazon. And so it's like also be aware, like, these brands are readily available all the time, you know? And just to be smart, like, consumer marketing, there's a whole thing behind it.

So definitely try to do a little bit of investigative research. Also, I'm sure in your practice, Anna, you probably have a streamlined, a list of go-tos that you know are tried and trust, you know, um, trusted. So I think it's also good just to kind of go with that recommendation as well.

Anna Barbieri: We spend a lot of time actually on vetting different products and companies and, and just to put it out in the open, like, we have no financial relationships with any of them, so.

Joanne Stone: Yeah. I'm

Anita Mirchandani: the same in my practice as well.

Joanne Stone: No, I think that's, that's great.

Choosing Yogurt Fat and Goals

Joanne Stone: I wanted to go back to something that you mentioned a little earlier about, we talked about breakfast and, you know, not having time and sort of making some nutritional breakfast with cottage cheese or yogurt and adding some of the powder into that.

Um, there's so many different options for yogurt and cottage cheese, like [00:29:00] 4% fat- Mm-hmm ... 0% fat, 1%, 2%. Same thing with the, same thing with cottage cheese. So what do you recommend, I mean, to do? I usually just go for the zero fat one, but I don't know if that's the right thing. Mm. I mean, is that, is that, does it depend on the individual, on their weight loss goals or weight gain goals or what?

How do you, how do you decide that? Yes,

Anita Mirchandani: that's a

Joanne Stone: great question. Or fertility or things like that?

Anita Mirchandani: Great question. Yes. So from women's health, from fertility to menopause, we've got so many different types of individuals. To say, start, I would say that, yes, it depends on the goal. If you're in- trying to lose weight and try to be in a caloric deficit, w- you have to pick and choose what you're gonna have into your diet.

If you choose to have the 4% milk fat, you gotta cut somewhere else. So it's kind of like that. If you don't wanna have the 4% milk fat and you wanna have the zero because you wanna go ahead and have a glass of, you know, alcohol and balance at, like, happy hour, like, you have to kind of figure out where and w- kind of what your day's going to be like and what you're gonna integrate.

And so I think that's where, [00:30:00] like, the analysis comes in. I believe in healthy fats. Like, I always recommend a 4% or a 5% because, you know, healthy fats are very important for ovulatory function, and oftentimes I see women restricting fats thinking that if I eat too much fat, which, yes, 'cause it is the most nutrient dense macro, um, I'm not gonna lose weight.

Well, yes, but then you have to cut somewhere else. That's the first thing. The second thing is healthy fats help burn fat. If we don't have enough dietary fats coming in, we hold on to fat, which is an inflammatory... It's not, and it's, we're

holding on to fat which is basically kind of the visceral fat that's the inflammatory marker sort of connectivity.

So we want to get rid of that and promote the dietary fat to, to kind of do the benefits of the, uh, that come out of the digestion and absorption process

Joanne Stone: That makes so much sense. Right.

DIY Protein Mix and Yogurt Talk

Joanne Stone: And I think, um, we have, like, a little demo here. Mm-hmm. So Nita, you, you make up your own protein powder, right?

Anita Mirchandani: I fol- I actually, to, to piggyback off of what Anna was saying, I blend my own version of ground flax seed, ground hemp seeds, um, [00:31:00] chia seeds, blanched almond flour, um, sunflower seeds, and pumpkin seeds.

Anna Barbieri: That sounds delicious.

Anita Mirchandani: Yep. Yeah. It's, um, and it's, it's great. It keeps me full. It's great plant protein in the morning. Um, and so I w- thought you guys should try some.

Joanne Stone: Try it? Yeah. Well, and Steven, our amazing producer, brought us some homemade Greek yogurt, and you should join us for this. Did, did you

Anita Mirchandani: make this yogurt, Steven?

I

Stephen Calabria: did not. Okay. I bought it, uh, from a place that advertises it as homemade. Oh,

Anita Mirchandani: great.

Stephen Calabria: But here you go.

Joanne Stone: Okay, so this is the yogurt, and this is, let's see, different cups. We have some berries, scoopers.

Anita Mirchandani: So just for, like, a fun little sort of, uh, macro balance, we've got healthy fat and protein from the yogurt.

We've got fiber from the berries. We've got plant protein and fiber from the powder. So we've got, like, a full, full blend here, and you've got, you've got some carbohydrates in, you know.

Anna Barbieri: This, this looks great. You know, I think what you said about cutting somewhere else, like, [00:32:00] that, that brings us to my next favorite nutritional point with patients.

You know, a lot of women- focus on weight loss.

Anita Mirchandani: Mm-hmm.

Anna Barbieri: And there's still a lot of argument where there's no such thing as the perfect diet. You know, is it keto? Is it low carb? Is it vegan? And all of that, and we take a very middle of the road balanced approach and try to tailor nutrition to the particular individual.

But it is true that in order to lose weight, we have to be in caloric deficit. Mm-hmm. It helps to have to be insulin sensitive. It helps to have your hormones on board and working normally. But that caloric deficit needs to be there, so we do have to pick and choose how to do that.

Anita Mirchandani: 100%. The other thing alongside that is- I'm so

Joanne Stone: excited about this.

Anna Barbieri: I know. It, it looks great. It looks so

Joanne Stone: good.

Anita Mirchandani: Is blood sugar regulation. I will say that all of this helps promote that sort of regulatory effect.

Anna Barbieri: Because of its protein and fat content. Correct. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Joanne Stone: All right. Well, should we

Anita Mirchandani: go and try it? Want some berries? Did you get the

Anna Barbieri: berries?

Anita Mirchandani: Yes. Did you, you guys grab berries?

Yes.

Joanne Stone: All right, [00:33:00] cheers.

Anita Mirchandani: Cheers.

Joanne Stone: Yes. Cheers to protein powder yogurt, full fat Greek yogurt. That's great. Thank you, Steven, for the yogurt. We got berries. We got all the stuff in here. I'm very excited to try it.

Anna Barbieri: The powder is delicious.

Joanne Stone: Mm.

Anna Barbieri: Mix it up really good.

Anita Mirchandani: It's

Anna Barbieri: really good. I'm getting in there. Wow, this yogurt's delicious.

Joanne Stone: So Anita, this is... We're grateful for Steven to bring us some store bought yogurt. What's the difference between store bought packaged ones, like some of the brands that are out there, or making it yourself?

Anita Mirchandani: I think the biggest difference... So making it yourself is obviously the cleanest way to do it. You can get whole milk, boil your whole milk.

Um, s- sort of s- once it's kind of boiled, you get, you're gonna see a thick layer form, which is the whey. You can strain it or sieve it off a little bit, and then completely strain what the final product is into a glass container, and typically what you need is some culture from a prior yogurt. So it could even be a store bought culture, [00:34:00] just to have that, 'cause what you need is the healthy bacteria to then ferment and multiply in the yogurt that you are creating.

Mm. Um, typically-

Joanne Stone: So it's sort of like making a sourdough bread with the starter. Yeah, it's sort

Anita Mirchandani: of like making bread. Yeah, same. Yes. That's the mother. It's like yeast. Yeah. Yes, exactly. Um, so you stir it, and then you cover it in like a, you know, a cooled towel, and then keep it in a temperature controlled setting.

Um, and this could take a few trials just to figure out where that right temperature is, and typically overnight it's called it sets. It's like setting. And then the next day, you know, within 12 hours you check and you usually have a nice thick form.

Anna Barbieri: So do you do that at home

Anita Mirchandani: yourself? I, we, we do it at home.

Yeah, we like to have it with, um... So I'm South Asian, so it's like, it's like a common thing to do in our culture. Um, and we use it for a lot of different... Like, we make like, you know, um, cucumber raita. Like, like different things with the yogurt. So yeah, it's kind of a common thing. So

Anna Barbieri: what's the difference...

I mean, I'm gonna... I am a foodie. I consider myself that, but I don't know the answer to this. What's the difference between- the, that type of yogurt and Greek yogurt. What's the [00:35:00] difference?

Anita Mirchandani: Greek yogurt is not strained, so it has greater protein.

Anna Barbieri: Got

Anita Mirchandani: it. Ah. That's why you see the, the brands that you see having close to 15, sometimes even 17 grams of protein for over a half cup serving, three-fourths a cup usually.

Um, and that's a big difference. Mm. Yeah. Got

Joanne Stone: it. I feel like a long time ago when I was, I don't know, in my 20s, I had a yogurt maker. You know, like something to... an automatic yogurt maker. Mm-hmm. But I, I'm sure it's still out... I'm gonna Google that later and have a feel. I have a

Anita Mirchandani: feeling it's out there.

Joanne Stone: It's

Anita Mirchandani: true.

There's everything. Yeah, I'm sure. There's a nut milk maker. There's a juicer. I mean, there's... it's, I feel like there's gotta be. It's gotta be there. I'm

Anna Barbieri: sure.

Collagen Hype and Final Takeaways

Anna Barbieri: Tell us about collagen. So some, I think some people confuse collagen peptides versus protein powder. Mm-hmm. Tell us, like, do you need both? What is the difference and what are the applications?

Anita Mirchandani: So when you see a label, when you see collagen, it usually will say peptides on it. Very, very small print. Yeah. But what I think you need to understand is, like, the actual collagen [00:36:00] powder is the precursor for bone health to muscle. So it's not going... it's not like you're gonna take it and all of a sudden you're gonna see yourself more muscular.

Right. The peptide form is a more rapidly absorbable form that is typically sort of recommended when oftentimes you are very much doing heavy lifting. Um, it's a complementary to that. But the powder is a more day-to-day, I would say, you know, like for the- The average, you know, female that's just trying to get a little oomph or boost into their routine.

Anna Barbieri: And I think there is, again, like speaking of evidence, there is some evidence in the dermatology literature about collagen peptides and thickness of skin, for example, and appearance of wrinkles. Mm-hmm. Again, these are not large trials, but there is some to that. You know, I also think people think that if they use collagen peptides, some magically that powder is really what's making its way to their nails, and it's not, right?

Like, it's still metabolized and broken down by the body, and you use the [00:37:00] building blocks of that.

Anita Mirchandani: I have to agree. It's also so interesting because I don't know how much time you have in a day when you're working with your patient, but imagine explaining- Not enough.

Anna Barbieri: I know. The answer's not enough. Yeah.

Anita Mirchandani: Imagine being, explaining every single scientific sort of pattern because if you think about what you just said, there's also a vasodilation sort of mechanism of action. And to explain everything that happens to this patient, I mean, mind blown, it'll be 20 minutes. So it- but there's so many more functionalities that come into our body when we are consuming these things that actually could potentially be why something is working the way it is.

Anna Barbieri: I think that's, that's a great point, too. I mean, our bodies are very, very complex, and sometimes we don't understand why something works. But I do think it behooves us in medicine to advise patients about whether something works. Mm-hmm. Right? So, like, I just, I, I really try to be very careful about that, that piece.

You know, there's so many products out there that are marketed, [00:38:00] especially for women, that we really do need to focus on the things that work. And perhaps, you know, something like collagen peptides, I don't think we're gonna have a randomized control trial of 200,000 women in it.

Anita Mirchandani: No.

Anna Barbieri: So we can maybe focus on at least some evidence But also consider how harmful a substance may be.

Mm-hmm. Something like collagen peptide is not truly harmful, although again, there is some harm potentially if the product is not pure, and there's harm to your wallet, right? Mm-hmm. So look, I, I, I think I like to be in this, again, the rational center on that when talking to people about, about products. Yeah.

Anita Mirchandani: I would say what, what's interesting also just to sort of take away with this is that sometimes also, you know, as we discuss, there are so many nutritional powders out there. Maybe also let's not try everything all at once. Like, maybe we take and we isolate one at a time, or we try to see what is the most important to my life cycle, my phase of life right now.[00:39:00]

What can I really benefit from? And kind of hone in on that for a period of time to maybe give yourself some data or take that sort of symptom response, dose response to your physician, to a medical practitioner, to a dietician, and say, "This is what I've done. Help me analyze this. What's happening?"

Joanne Stone: And I also think that we, you know, we don't want to over-prescribe or endorse the powders at the stake of maybe the, a individual not getting the whole food- Mm-hmm

nutrients that they need. 'Cause a- as we said, we think that's the best way of getting, you know, nutrition. So using things in moderation, you know, app- most things in moderation are okay.

Anna Barbieri: Absolutely.

Joanne Stone: Um, so-

Anna Barbieri: Wait, can I say

Joanne Stone: something

Anna Barbieri: there? Yeah. Sorry. Please. 'Cause I think at the stake, and I think that was a bit of a Freudian slip.

So, um, you know, I think there are many people who are very, uh- Tied to their established way of eating. [00:40:00] And even if they, they have micronutrient deficiencies or macronutrient imbalance, they are so connected to their way of eating that they would rather spend money and buy five different powders, vitamins, and supplements instead of going after the whole foods that they need.

Anita Mirchandani: Mm-hmm.

Anna Barbieri: And I certainly am very open-minded and not judgmental about ways of eating. Mm-hmm. But probably extremes of diet are not appropriate, and I certainly have had- Mm ... patients who have considered switching to, from a completely vegan diet and adding some animal protein and have done much better. I have had patients who went the opposite way, went from essentially a carnivore diet and added some greens and fibers, and they did better.

And sometimes it doesn't make a difference. But I, I really love that point, that the point is not to engage in five nutritional powders or [00:41:00] however

many. The point is to always consider whole foods- Mm-hmm ... and then use these things in moderation as needed with a sort of a sober, yeah, head on.

Joanne Stone: Just to, you know, wrap things up, 'cause I don't wanna, um, make sure we're staying within our timeframe.

Can you, I don't know if you can do this, but, like, give some recommendations? You, we've talked about sort of age-related differences, so some goals in your 20s and 30s, what might be best for that group, in your 40s to 50s, in your 60 plus. Can you give some general recommendations, knowing of course that this is not exactly specific to a particular patient, but just in general for our audience to, for some takeaway?

Anita Mirchandani: Yeah, sure. So I think in your 20s and 30s, that's when you're kind of, I mean, from what I remember, living your best lives. So you're- I miss those days. I know. I always do, yeah. But this is

Anna Barbieri: pretty good. Yeah. This is, come on, this is pretty fun.

Anita Mirchandani: It's, it's new norm of fun. Um, so I would say that the biggest thing are probably what I see in those, in those decades are, you know, making sure you're getting [00:42:00] enough, um, hydration support, making sure you're getting enough, um, oh, I would say probably- You're not eating great.

I mean, you're just, you, you probably, you're either-

Anna Barbieri: Your body's so forgiving.

Anita Mirchandani: Yes, your body's so forgiving. I forgot to mention. So you're not really thinking about, "Am I getting a well-rounded diet? Am I..." You know, so maybe that's when a lot of these younger, you know, profiles are consuming more protein powders, 'cause it's just easier and quicker, and they're busier.

Um, and I would say probably, you know, fiber is something we can emphasize the 20s and 30s to start paying attention to, but oftentimes they're not paying attention to that. What I do see a lot of is these vi- vitamin and mineral powders and these electrolyte powders in the 20s and 30s, because I just think that hydration is almost, like, the biggest concern for everybody and, or, or it's what they pay atten- pay the most attention to.

Once you hit 30s and 40s onwards, we're talking about bone health, we're talking about muscle health, we're talking about mental health. We're talking about weight loss, weight gain, that support around that whole weight management system. And so that's when I think that, you know, maybe the, the greens [00:43:00] powders might be a little bit more, um, influential or...

And again, we're, we're, we're saying this with, like, you've already emphasized whole foods is important. But suppose that that's not what you have available to you, then the greens powders, and we're seeing collagen, and we're seeing creatine, and we're seeing some of the individualized sort of supplemental powders becoming more popular because that's sort of, like, enhancing the extra boost to what people are trying to do in their day-to-day.

Joanne Stone: I love it. Well, I'm gonna get some electrolyte powder, 'cause I went through, this morning, had my coffee. I don't think I've had a sip of water, other than, like, one sip of- Of the, from the bottle. For sure.

Anita Mirchandani: For sure. Yeah.

Joanne Stone: Um, so this has been amazing, so thank you so much, and it's just been a fabulous conversation.

Anita Mirchandani: I've had a great time. It's- I hope everyone enjoyed listening, and it's, it's just, you know, I'm, uh, very passionate about all this stuff, so happy to share. Thank you so much. Thank you.

Joanne Stone: That's it for this episode of Herology. I'm your host, Joanne Stone. For more groundbreaking conversations on women's health, subscribe to the Mount Sinai Health Systems Herology [00:44:00] podcast on YouTube, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts.

Herology's a production of the Mount Sinai Health System and the Carolyn Rowan Center for Women's Health and Wellness. To learn more about the Rowan Center and our state-of-the-art facilities helping shape the future of women's health, scan the QR code on your screen or click the link in the description below.