

# Medical Herbalism

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## Side effects of the top medicinal herbs: Part 1

by Paul Bergner

Any plant with medicinal properties has possible side effects; the very action of the herb on the physiology that is curative may produce an imbalance. Medicinal plants with little potential to cause side effects are the exception rather than the rule.

Information on side effects must be gathered from clinical observation and patient reports, but discrimination in interpreting individual case reports is necessary. The individual assessing the side effect may be unfamiliar with the traditions or practice of medical herbalism. For instance, hepatotoxic side effects have been erroneously attributed to scullcap, when its common adulterant germander (*Teucrium spp.*) was responsible. Warnings about such adulteration are available in standard herbal texts, including the *British Herbal Pharmacopoeia* of 1983 (Tierra). The physician responsible made no mention of the possibility.

The symptoms seen in the patient may be due to other factors than the herb. For instance, a drug-herb interaction with a benzodiazepine drug was attributed to kava (*Piper methysticum*), when the patient was also taking the drug *cimetidine*, a drug that is contraindicated with benzodiazepines and which in combination with them can produce the coma observed in the patient (Almeida and Grimsley)

Even if the effect is due to an herb, predicting side effects in other cases may be difficult. The effect may affect only an individual with a particular constitution, and could be uncommon in regular practice. Or the effect may be idiosyncratic to the individual, and would be rare in actual practice

The side effects reported in this article have all been observed in my own practice, in the teaching clinic at the Rocky Mountain Center for Botanical Studies, or have been received as case reports from professional

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## Little known uses of common medicinal plants

By David Winston, Herbalist, A.H.G.

It is human nature to become familiar with something, memorize its attributes or qualities, fix them in our minds, and assume we know them. Unfortunately, this type of rote learning eliminates creativity, and often prevents us from truly learning about something—be it a person, a plant, or a craft. As herbalists, it is important to learn the basic materia medica and firmly establish the uses, energetics, and doses of common medicines in our minds. This is a positive step, as long as it is a beginning, not an end, to learning. No matter how much one knows about a herb, there is always more to learn. An herbalist or clinician with a curious, and inquisitive mind is a vital and necessary skill that is required to become a competent practitioner. In book after book, I often see the same basic information about a given herb; it is rare to find new information in most texts. Experimentation, clinical research, and reading about eclectic, TCM, or ethnobotanical uses of a plant are all excellent ways to broaden our understanding and depth of knowledge about our materials of medicine. Our goal is to move away from sound-bite herbal knowledge of “saw palmetto is the prostate herb”, or “St. John’s wort is the depression herb”, and fully commit ourselves to exploring all the possibilities the plant kingdom has to offer to alleviate and prevent disease and suffering.

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## Little Known Uses *continued from page*

### Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)

Most herbalists are familiar with mullein leaf and flowers. Few are aware of the benefits of mullein root. The first year root of this weedy biennial acts as a mild sedative and antispasmodic. While it can be of use for cough spasms, it seems to be most effective for facial nerve pain and spasms, i.e., trigeminal neuralgia, Bell's palsy, and TMJ pain. Use it with hypericum, piscidia, and scutellaria. According to Maude Grieve, the root has also been utilized for toothaches, cramps, and for alleviating the pain of gout and gouty arthritis.

### Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

Nettle leaf is widely renowned as a nutritive pot herb, diuretic, antiarthritic, and antihistamine, along with many other uses. Nettle leaf is also a skin herb; its specific indication is skin that looks or feels like paper and tears easily. Nettle root is widely used in Europe, but is relatively unknown in the U.S. It is an antidyscratic agent, especially for the prostate. Nettle root, in combination with saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), Collinsonia (*C. Canadensis*), and white sage (*Salvia apiana*) is a highly effective formula for treating BPH. Nettle seed is perhaps the most profound medicine from this versatile herb. The seed is the most effective kidney tropho-restorative that I have used. Alone or combined with cordyceps, processed rehmannia, cornus fruit (*Cornus officinalis*), or pellatory-of-the-wall (*Parietaria diffusa*), I have found it helpful for slowing the progression and even reversing degenerative kidney disease, including glomerulonephritis, and chronic nephritis with degeneration.

### Echinacea (*E. purpurea*, *E. angustifolia*, *E. pallida*)

It seems that everyone knows that echinacea is the "immune herb". Along with that knowledge is a wealth of misinformation on dosage, length of time it can and should be taken, incorrect data on possible toxicity and contraindications.

The Eclectics, who introduced echinacea into western medical practice, used this herb not so much for colds and flu but for blood dyscreasias. According to John King, MD, the specific indications for echinacea are: "To correct fluid deprivation, 'bad blood', tendency to sepsis and malignancy, as in gangrene, sloughing and phagedenic ulcerations, carbuncles,

boils, and various forms of septicaemia; foul discharges with weakness and emaciation; deepened, bluish or purplish coloration of skin or mucous membranes, with a low form of inflammation; dirty-brownish tongue; jet-black tongue; tendency to the formation of multiple cellular abscesses of semiactive character, with marked asthenia. Of especial importance in typhoid, septicaemic and other adynamic fevers, and in malignant carbuncle, pulmonary gangrene, and cerebro-spinal meningitis." For these uses it was often combined with *Baptisia tinctoria*. Dr. King also felt the root was useful for controlling cancer pain, but not for treating the tumor itself. In Europe, echinacea is used topically for psoriasis, and I have used it in practice along with hydrastis, calendula, and plantago for cervical dysplasias with good success.

### Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)

As noted in my book *Saw Palmetto for Men and Women* (Storey, 1999), serenoa is a versatile herb that has been stereotyped as the "prostrate" herb. While it certainly is beneficial for BPH, it is also an adaptogen, immune tonic, yin tonic to the lungs and kidney, a female reproductive and urinary tonic. Saw palmetto was introduced originally as a remedy for weak, asthenic, depleted patients, especially those getting over lung infections such as pneumonia. The dried berries in a capsule act as an immunopotentiator and tonify the Wei Qi, Lungs, and Chinese Spleen. It is appropriate for anorexia, cachexia, deficient asthma, and chronic fatigue syndrome. Although thought of as a "men's" herb, saw palmetto is useful for women, especially for deep cystic acne, pelvic fullness syndrome, interstitial cystitis, fibroids, and along with licorice and white peony, for polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).

### St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)

Firmly entrenched in the public's mind as the "depression herb", hypericum has a multitude of other uses. Hypericum has long been known as a tropho-restorative to the nerves and nerve tissue. It is effective for treating nerve pain; peripheral neuropathies, Reynaud's disease, phantom limb pain, head trauma, and minor pinal injuries. This herb's reputation for treating mild to moderate depression is well deserved, but it is most appropriate for melancholia-a state of disordered digestion with a sour stomach and a sour disposition. It works well for people who 'emotionally' need some sunlight to chase away the inner

darkness. This sounds like St. John's wort would be useful for SAD, but in practice by itself it is of limited use. Mixed with melissa in equal parts it is much more useful for winter depression. St. John's wort is also used in Europe as a liver herb (it stimulates the cytochrome P-450 enzyme pathways) for biliousness, as a choleric, and for jaundice. In addition, it is used for bladder irritation, interstitial cystitis and bedwetting caused by irritation.

### **Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*)**

The seed of this plant is certainly the most active part and its benefits to the liver are well known. Less known is milk thistle's ability to affect the spleen and pancreas. The tincture is used with ceanothus for spleenomegaly and with ceanothus and chionanthus for pancreatitis. The seed tincture can also be used for dry, scaly, or crusty skin conditions along with arctium seed. Milk thistle leaf is also a useful medication. It can be used similarly to blessed thistle, as a digestive bitter, cholagogue, and galactagogue.

### **Black Cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*)**

The root of this herb has been promoted as an answer to the problems facing peri- and post-menopausal women. It does improve hot flashes and night sweats, but by itself seems less effective than vitex. In combination, cimicifuga and vitex, perhaps with Dang gui or leonurus, are vastly more effective for a wide range of menopausal symptomology; hot flashes, night sweats, anxiety, formication (skin crawling), and mood swings. These symptoms respond more quickly and surely to this combination rather than the individual herbs. Black cohosh is also appropriate for uterine pain, dysmenorrhea, menstrual backaches, pain associated with fibroids and testicular pain. Black cohosh, combined with kava and ashwagandha, is an effective formula for treating fibromyalgia and other inflammatory muscular conditions such as bursitis, sciatica, and neuralgias.

As an antispasmodic, cimicifuga can be useful for spasmodic coughs including pertussis, nervous bladder, bladder spasms and vaginismus. One other important use for this root is for 'doom and gloom' depression. This is a hormonal depression usually associated with PMS, menses, post-partum, or menopause. Black cohosh with cactus (*Selenocereus grandiflorus*) can be especially effective for menopausal depression.

### **Hawthorn (*Crataegus spp*)**

Normally thought of as a heart remedy and circulatory tonic, hawthorn is also a superb nervine. In clinical practice, I find the solid (native) extract is effective for treating ADD and ADHD. The tincture or tea, along with linden flower and chamomile, is useful for mild anxiety, white coated hypertension, and stress induced palpitations. Hawthorn also strengthens connective tissue due to high levels of OPCs (Oligomeric-procyanadins) and is appropriate for stabilizing muscle and fascia. It can be a valuable part of a protocol for ankylosing spondylitis, scleroderma, lupus, relapsing polychondritis, and polymyositis. Some practitioners also have stated that it can be a useful herb for stabilizing mast cells and reducing histamine response for allergic asthma and hay fever.

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## **Adverse Effects** *continued from page one*

herbalists in correspondence with *Medical Herbalism*, or in online reports at medherb.com. In assessing the reliability of reports I have considered:

1) Who reported the case. Information from a professional herbalist carried more weight than those from individuals.

2) Is there a rationale in traditional herbalism for the effect? For instance, I have received three case reports of patients taking echinacea experiencing joint pain that disappeared after stopping the echinacea. That side effect is also reported in the Eclectic medical literature (Felter).

3) Is there a rationale from scientific literature for the effect? For instance, depression has been reported as a side effect for *Vitex agnus-castus* in some patients. *Vitex* is known to increase progesterone, and depression is also a side effect of progesterone supplementation.

4) Did the effect recur on rechallenge? In the article below, several herbalists have observed exacerbation of autoimmune diseases in themselves or in close family members under their care. The exacerbations improved with removal of echinacea, and then reappeared when it was reintroduced.

### **Echinacea (*Echinacea angustifolia*, *purpurea*)**

Echinacea may trigger an exacerbation of symptoms in some individuals with autoimmune conditions. I have observed or received first hand accounts from patients in four cases, each of them in individuals whose condition had been stabilized with immunosuppressive medications before administration of echinacea. This included two cases of systemic lupus, one of ulcerative colitis, and one of with glomerulonephritis due to unspecified causes. Seven other case reports have been received from herbalists, all of them for systemic lupus or multiple sclerosis, and some of these with repeated outbreaks on rechallenge. In three instances the subject experiencing the exacerbation was a professional medical herbalist or a close relative under their care. Echinacea may cause transient increases in the white blood cell count, especially during the first 48 hours of administration (Bergner 1994). It may also increase antibody production. Either physiological effect could provoke an exacerbation of autoimmunity such as occurred.

The Eclectic literature reports that echinacea may cause joint pain “occasionally when given in large doses,” (Felter). Three cases have been reported to *Medical Herbalism*, with only moderate doses of echinacea, and in each case the pain disappeared with removal of echinacea.

The most serious adverse effect of echinacea on health is that its habitual use can mask the symptoms of general immune weakness due to diet or lifestyle factors, and thus enable progressive deterioration of the health or exhaustion of the system. I have seen three such cases where habitual use (taken to suppress each cold for a period of a year, or taken most days for several years) appeared to have led to a deeper or more persistent infection or to complete exhaustion with chronic fatigue.

### **Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*)**

John Uri Lloyd wrote that hydrastis, even with the alkaloid hydrastine removed, was a powerful astringent (Felter and Lloyd), and that its irritating alkaloids could cause constipation and appetite loss. Earlier in the nineteenth century, the homeopath William Hale did experimental provings of hydrastis on human subjects and studied it for more than twenty years. Hale reported that the astringency of hydrastis can cause gastrointestinal disturbance and cracked and bleeding mucous membranes when taken in large doses. One individual reported to me that he had experienced all-night violent vomiting following large doses of concentrated tinctures (concentrated to 4:1) on two occasions; and I have observed an identical reaction in a small-framed woman who took ten capsules of hydrastis as part of a failed abortion protocol. The astringency of hydrastis may also suppress expectoration in acute conditions, extending the disease process or driving it deeper as the protection of the mucous-borne IgA antibodies is lost. Commercial promotion of the herb as an “antibiotic” for acute respiratory infection is more likely to cause harm than good.

One myth relating to hydrastis states that it can, like conventional antibiotics, cause intestinal dysbiosis. This is supposition only, and not confirmed either in traditional use or by scientific investigation. The antibiotic effects of berberine are supposedly responsible, yet one study of a segment of bowel flora after therapeutic administration of berberine sulfate (equivalent to that in 26 capsules of hydrastis) found no alteration in the flora at all (Rabbani et al.).

It should be noted that traditionally hydrastis was used in relatively low doses -- about 15 drops of the tincture. For a full discussion, see: Bergner, 1997.

### **Dandelion (*Taraxacum off*)**

*Taraxacum* is a benign herb with little potential to cause side effects. Like any bitter it may increase digestive tract pain on conditions of hypersecretion or hypertonicity of the mucous membrane. As with many herbs affecting the liver, even moderate doses may produce mild symptoms of emotional upset. Traditional medical systems issue a general caution against taking herbs that are energetically cooling for prolonged periods. I have one case from the RMCBS clinic where the herbalist recommended dandelion and Oregon grape root for a skin condition; the patient took the herbs for several months and then reported feeling cold all the time, whereas she had previously had a warm constitution.

### **Stinging nettle (*Urtica spp.*)**

Practitioners often make the mistake of offering *urtica* for its nutritive value without taking into account its actions on the constitution. It is diuretic and drying to the system, and may aggravate symptoms in patients who are dry, whether they are otherwise hot or cold in disposition, if taken in sufficient quantity. Symptoms ranging from dry mucous membranes and thirst, to dry skin and scalp and worsening dandruff or dry eczema have been reported frequently.

Traditional herbalists and food foragers warn against eating the raw mature leaf after flowering because mineral "cystoliths" may cause kidney irritation (Lust). This may apply to powdered nettles in capsules if they were harvested late in the year. Two of my herb students have reported kidney irritation and pain after eating nettles that were harvested late in the year.

### ***Panax ginseng***

*Panax ginseng* can cause significant discomfort and side effects when used inappropriately. The best practice follows the indications for general deficiency without heat signs in traditional Chinese medicine. Medication should be discontinued or the dose reduced when normal energy is attained to prevent overtonification. The first signs are usually neck tension and insomnia. The patient, who is enjoying the energy benefits of the ginseng, usually does not attribute the insomnia to the herb. I have also observed exacerbation of pain and cough, stimulation of excessive menses, and worsening of fibrocystic breast disease. I

have reliable case reports of nose bleed and hypertension. Typically the patient self-medicating with ginseng is using it to mask the symptoms of chronic fatigue due to causes in the diet or lifestyle, and by taking it allows the chronic effects of those causes to progress

*Panax quinquefolius* (American ginseng) is less likely to cause side effects, but can create milder symptoms similar to Asian ginseng. I have seen it increase the strength of a cough, presumably by tonifying the lungs.

### ***Eleutherococcus senticosus***

Most *eleutherococcus* products in the North American marketplace are much weaker than the Russian Pharmacopoeia product on which most research has been performed. They have mild medicinal effect, if any, and little potential for side effects. More concentrated forms, on the other hand, readily produce side effects. I have observed extreme anxiety with heart palpitations from a solid extract (concentration not specified), and severe heat signs including a bright heat rash on the face and nose from another concentrate. An extreme dose of a 2:1 concentrate, about twice the upper dose recommended by the Russian Pharmacopoeia, produced the symptoms of mania in a patient, which lasted for about six hours (Bergner, 2000)

### **Hawthorne (*Crataegus oxycantha*)**

No adverse effects to hawthorn have been observed or reported. Hawthorne may interact with heart medications, especially digitalis glycosides. The net effect is a potentiation of the drug effects, which may require lowering the dose of the drug slightly. One physician who has managed several such cases using strong standardized extracts of hawthorn says the effect is slight. One herbalist working in conjunction with a physician reports no effect on measured digoxin levels after three months of regular treatment with hawthorne tinctures. Standardized extracts or concentrates may thus have higher potential for interactions, but the interactions are likely to be mild.

### **Garlic (*Allium sativa*)**

Although promoted as a benign cardiovascular tonic, garlic is powerfully heating and drying to the system. In traditional European medicine it was classified as hot and dry "in the fourth degree," meaning that it is capable of producing tissue destruction

(Culpepper). This applies primarily to topical use. I have observed the permanent scar of the third degree burn produced in a patient who attempted to remove a wart with a garlic application. Frequent reports of second degree burns in food handlers exposed to garlic appear in the medical literature. Although I have no reports in hand, this calls into question the practice of using raw garlic suppositories for vaginal or rectal use. Garlic, whether raw or cooked, may exacerbate the whole array of "heat" symptoms and conditions. It is traditionally contraindicated in the dry patient, whether hot or cold (Culpepper). Garlic can produce powerful nausea and vomiting in strong undiluted doses.

### **Valerian (*Valeriana off.*)**

Although valerian is often classified as a sedative, in some individuals it causes insomnia, anxiety, or overstimulation of dreams and imagination. This may be due to its warming energetic properties. Felter describes it first as a "cerebral and spinal stimulant" (Felter) Ellingwood states that in large doses valerian "stimulates the brain, causing headache, giddiness, perverted vision, restlessness, agitation, and nausea (Ellingwood)."

Eclectic writers were unanimous that the indications for valerian are "deficient cerebral circulation" indicated by a pale face and cold skin. I am in the habit of asking different groups that I lecture to find out if they have ever experienced the stimulating effects of valerian, and typically 5-10% of the audience indicates that they have. In some classes I have the individuals stand up, and they almost universally have red faces or other evident signs of heat in the constitution. I had two patients who had taken valerian repeatedly throughout the night, and stayed awake all night long as a result.

### **Milk thistle seed (*Silybum marianum*)**

This is an un usually benign herb, even in the concentrated extract form. I have observed headaches in two patients, and in one of them the headache returned on rechallenge.

### **Bensky and Gamble**

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## **Kava Update and Correction**

By Paul Bergner

The German government has proposed in the last two weeks to ban standardized kava (*Piper methysticum*) extracts from commercial sale in Germany, and at least one company there has pulled its kava products from the marketplace. The government states that it has received 24 reports of liver toxicity in patients taking the kava standardized extracts. We covered the issue of potential hepatotoxicity of kava in our last issue (Bergner) including details of several published cases of hepatotoxicity, and a review of reported hepatotoxicity or other effects in the South Sea Islands. That article contained several errors in the discussion of solubility of kavalactones. Although kavalactones are dramatically more soluble in acetone or alcohol than in water, this is irrelevant to total dose in traditional brewed forms in the South Pacific, because the kavalactones are suspended as an emulsion in traditional beverages. It remains unclear why indi-

vidual taking doses via standardized extracts similar to those in traditional use would develop sometimes severe liver disease when this has not been reported in the South Pacific despite regular and often lifelong use of kava by individuals there.

Bergner, P. Adverse effects to kava (*Piper methysticum*)  
***Medical Herbalism***, 12(2):12-13

## **Veterinary Botanical Medicine Association formed**

The Veterinary Botanical Medicine Association has been formed “to encourage international interaction between veterinarians, herbalists, pharmacologists, and botanists.” Full membership is available to veterinarians, and other qualified individuals may join as associates. Certification will be available to qualified regular members or associates. For information, contact the VMBA at <http://members.fortunecity.com/swynn/VBMA>

Gaia garden

## Female Reproductive Herbs Compared

By Sharol Tilgner, N.D.

The following is an excerpt from Sharol Tilgner's book entitled *Herbal Medicine From the Heart of the Earth*.

Actions	Angelica sinensis	Glycyrrhiza	Vitex	Alchemilla	Mitchella
Menstrual cycle	<p>A warming female tonic that enriches the blood, promotes blood circulation, regulates and normalizes menstruation and the menstrual cycle. It will stimulate the uterus if the volatile oil is decocted off and acts as an antispasmodic if made as a proper infusion with the volatile oil intact or as a liquid extract.</p> <p>It is beneficial with gynecological problems, including PMS, menstrual cramps, menopausal related symptoms, uterine bleeding due to stagnation and chronic pelvic infections.</p> <p>Specific for gynecological complaints with congestion spasms and pain, chills, dryness of skin, constipation due to dryness and uterine or ovarian masses.</p> <p>Experiments have shown Dong quai stimulates uterine cell multiplication.</p> <p>Since it is a uterine vasodilator, it may worsen heavy clotted menses.</p>	<p>Licorice is anti-inflammatory and a hepatoprotectant. Used primarily for menopausal complaints.</p>	<p>It is thought to be useful in all ailments due to hyperprolactinemia and luteal phase defect. (Klaus-Jurgen)</p> <p>Consider for infertility, dysmenorrhea, uterine fibroids, fibrocystic breasts, amenorrhea and sporadic periods.</p>	<p>Lady's mantle is indicated for hemorrhage; prolapsed uterus and abnormal tissue growth such as fibroids.</p>	<p>Partridge berry is a uterine tonic indicated in generalized edema, uterine congestion, dark, red, swollen cervix, dysmenorrhea and uterine bleeding with bright red blood. It is beneficial for female reproductive tract weakness and improves neuromuscular/vascular tone of the uterus. Partridge berry is used in atonic uterus and uterine bleeding due to atony.</p>
Pregnancy	<p>Dong quai is contraindicated in pregnancy.</p>	<p>Contraindicated in pregnancy due to hormonal effects including phytoestrogens as well as aldosteronism effect.</p>	<p>This progestagen effect is used in some cases to prevent miscarriages. However, it is generally contraindicated in pregnancy due to its emmenagogue effect. (Hobbs).</p> <p>It may counteract the effectiveness of birth control pills and other hormone therapy (Hobbs).</p>		<p>Used in the later part of pregnancy as a tonic to promote easier childbirth.</p>
Labor & Postpartum				<p>Lady's mantle antagonizes the drug pitocin.</p> <p>Used for postpartum bleeding.</p>	<p>Used for postpartum hemorrhage.</p>

Actions (continued)	Angelica sinensis	Glycyrrhiza	Vitex	Alchemilla	Mitchella
Phyto-hormonal	Contains the phytoestrogenic sterol, beta-sitosterol.	Contains the phytoestrogenic isoflavone, formononetin and beta-sitosterol.	Chaste tree is thought to increase luteinizing hormone production and inhibit the release of follicle stimulating hormone. This shifts the ratio of estrogens to progestagens in favor of the progestagens, with a corpus luteum hormone effect.  Prolactin is inhibited by chaste tree. The luteinizing hormone release and progesterone synthesis has been attributed to inhibition of prolactin activity. In animal research, it appears to directly bind to dopamine receptors in the anterior pituitary and inhibits prolactin synthesis and release.		

Actions	Cimicifuga	Anemone	Caulophyllum	Dioscorea	Capsella	Leonurus
Menstrual cycle	Used for dysmenorrhea with congestion, aching pains and muscular soreness. Used for amenorrhea, oligomenorrhea, late menstruation, and menopausal complaints or post hysterectomy. Specific for above situations when accompanied by congestion, chilliness, nervous system irritation or excitement, depression of a deep, dark and heavy nature, incessant talking and neuralgia.  Many symptoms are worse in the morning, during menses and with cold applications. Symptoms are better with warmth and after eating. It is specific for headaches in the late luteal phase associated with low estrogen levels.	Indicated for menstrual complaints in women who are anemic, intolerant of fatty foods, have coated tongues, cold extremities and a feeble pulse. It is specific for amenorrhea following wet cold feet, acute endometriosis, ovarian neuralgia and congestive ovaritis with inflammation, dull, nagging, aching, tearing pains; not cramping pains.  Often the person who responds to pulsatilla will have nervous conditions like fearfulness, general nervousness, dejection, and weep easily. The individual is gentle, with a yielding disposition, and has changeable symptoms and moods. The body discharges are usually yellow.	Blue cohosh is a reproductive tract tonic. Consider this herb when there is reproductive tract debility arising from chronic inflammatory conditions. It is both tonifying to atonic uterine tissue while it is also relaxing to spastic uterine muscles.  It is used for menstrual cramps of a spasmodic nature as well as pelvic pain with heavy, achy, congestion and prolapsed lax tissues.  Specific for uterine spasms on the first day of the menstrual flow, pain in the thighs and lower back, spasmodic muscular pains, rheumatic pains and a dull frontal headache with thirst.	Consider for spasmodic pains for all hollow organs, including uterine spasms. Used for dysmenorrhea and premenstrual tension headaches. It is used in conjunction with other herbs for menopausal symptoms.	Shepherd's purse is indicated for atony and prolapse of pelvic organs and passive bleeding. It is used for hemorrhoids, atonic enuresis, atonic menorrhagia and metrorrhagia and bleeding fibroid tumors. Specific for hemorrhage with a colorless flow.	Motherwort is used as an emmenagogue, antispasmodic and in lumbar discomfort and bearing down pains from debilitated reproductive systems. Specific for premenstrual cramps with delayed menstruation, congestive amenorrhea or dysmenorrhea, menopausal complaints, nervous palpitations, premenstrual nerve tension, high blood pressure due to stress and nerve pain from herpes zoster and herpes simplex.  It is specific for symptoms that include nervousness, anxiety, restlessness, sleeplessness and cardiac palpitations or tachycardia.

Actions (continued)	Cimicifuga	Anemone	Caulophyllum	Dioscorea	Capsella	Leonurus
Menstrual cycle (continued)		Animal research has indicated pulsatilla reduces uterine contractions in vitro, it has a sedative and analgesic activity in vivo (Pilcher, Leclerc).	Used with cervical varicose veins, amenorrhea, as well as premature or profuse menstruation			
Pregnancy	Used as an emmenagogue and should be avoided in the first trimester (Brinker).	It is a uterine stimulant, and is contraindicated in pregnancy. (Brinker)	Because blue cohosh can increase blood to the pelvis, it should be used cautiously in woman with heavy menstruation. In rat studies, it has inhibited ovulation (Lawrence). Generally not recognized as safe during pregnancy due to uterine stimulation (Lawrence, McGuffin). It may be used in the 9 <sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy, but only under the guidance of a trained health care professional.	Used for nausea of pregnancy and miscarriages associated with low progesterone levels.	It is a uterine stimulant and is contraindicated in pregnancy.	It is contraindicated in pregnancy due to the emmenagogue effect. It contains the uterine-stimulating constituents, stachydrine and leonurine (Brinker, McGuffin).
Labor & Postpartum	It will increase and normalize uterine contractions during labor. It is also useful for after-pains following labor and prevents post-partum hemorrhage.		Blue cohosh is used to relieve false labor pains, while increasing the strength of the contractions during actual labor. It decreases pain in childbirth and alleviates after pains.			
Phyto-hormonal	It appears to act as a phytoestrogen. Black cohosh has been shown to suppress luteinizing hormone surges associated with hot flashes in menopausal women. Constituents of black cohosh compete in vitro with 17-beta-estradiol for estrogen receptor binding sites (Duker). Research with rats shows a reduction of serum levels of luteinizing hormone in ovariectomized rats with a methanol extract of black cohosh and substances in the extract were shown to bind with estrogen receptors in the rat uteri (Harmschfefer).			Wild yam contains no known progesterone. However, people have used it for conditions where progesterone-like actions would be of use. Contains the phytoestrogen, diosgenin. See Charmaelerium Phytohormonal information for more details on diosgenin.		

Actions	Viburnum	Chamaelirium	Trillium	Medicago	Rubus
Menstrual cycle	Used for dysmenorrhea. Indicated for pelvic pains that extend down the thighs and are accompanied by nausea. The spasms are worse lying on the affected side, in warm rooms and in the evening. They are better in open air and from resting. Antispasmodic, astringent, anti-inflammatory, nervine, balances sympathetic and parasympathetic tone, hypotensive – relaxes muscles and gives tone to atonic tissues.	Helps normalize menses if there are problems with engorgement, prolapse, and hormonal imbalance. Helps decrease pain if pain is due to relaxed, prolapsed organs such as bladder or uterine prolapse. Pain felt is usually lumbar pain that extends down the thighs and back of the legs. There is restlessness and general weakness. Often there is a history of hemorrhoids, varicose veins of the legs and labial varicosities.	Helps normalize menses if there are problems with engorgement, poor pelvic tone and menorrhagia due to atony. Helps decrease pain if pain is due to relaxed, prolapsed organs such as bladder or uterine prolapse.	A nutritious tonic.	Used as a tonic to the uterus. Useful in menorrhagia due to astringency. May help with uterine muscle relaxation in dysmenorrhea due to calcium and magnesium content in both leaves and fruit.
Pregnancy	Prevents morning sickness. For habitual miscarriage – given in advance and continued past time of usual miscarriage.	For habitual miscarriage due to incompetent cervix.	Used for threatened abortion due to poor uterine tone and incompetent cervix. Used with excessive mucous discharge.	Plants with coumestans and isoflavones have been shown to decrease fertility in animals that graze on these types of plants. Alfalfa should be used with caution in women or men with fertility problems. It is contraindicated in pregnancy due to the uterine stimulant action seen in animals due to the constituent stachydrine.	Red raspberry is often used during pregnancy to improve uterine tone. Brinker says in his book Herb Contraindications and Drug Interactions that it is contraindicated where there is a history of precipitate labors. He also claims it has antigonadotropic activity. Many women take it throughout their pregnancy as a general tonic.
Labor & Postpartum	Prevents premature contractions. Prevents hemorrhage. After labor, restores normal tone and capillary circulation to the uterus. Prevents prolapse and malposition. Contains beta-sitosterol, which is a phytoestrogenic sterol.	After labor helps preserve normal uterine tone and prevent uterine prolapse.	Beth root is used prior to labor to facilitate contractions and ensure an easier delivery. It will also decrease the occurrence and severity of postpartum hemorrhage.	It has been shown to stimulate lactation and increase the quality of breast milk.	A strong tea can be made into ice cubes and given as ice chips to women during labor. It will help prevent postpartum hemorrhage.
Phyto-hormonal		Contains .0013% diosgenin. Diosgenin is manipulated chemically in laboratories to create estrone, testosterone, and progesterone as well as adreno-cortical hormones. In current research on animals, it appears that diosgenin usually turns into smilagenin due to action on it by gut flora (Marker). Both animals and humans poorly absorb diosgenin (Cayen). When diosgenin was given orally to female rats, they had an increase in uterine weight,		Many isoflavones and coumestans have been found to have estrogenic activity. Alfalfa contains the isoflavones biochanin A, daidzein, formononetin and genistein and coumestans coumestrol, 5-methoxy-4'-O-methylcoumestrol, 4'-O-methylcoumestrol, sativol, medicagol, 3'-methoxycoumestrol, trifolol, lucernol (Farnsworth). Research indicates the isoflavones formononetin and biochanin A, have very weak	

Actions (continued)	Viburnum	Chamaelirium	Trillium	Medicago	Rubus
Phyto-hormonal (continued)		vaginal opening and vaginal cornification (Tewari). When injected into ovariectomized mice there was a growth of mammary epithelium (Aradhana). This shows a clear estrogenic activity on rat tissue. Chamaelirium and Aletris both contain diosgenin and they both have produced estrogenic activity in rats. (Costello)		estrogenic activity compared with natural estrone or synthetic DES (Guggolz). Research indicates coumestrol and genistein compete with 17-B estradiol binding sites.	

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# Traditional Medicine

## The energetics of some herbal pairs in Unani Tibb

by Paul Bergner

Unani Tibb (Arabic: "Medicine of the Greeks") is the descendant of the Greek Four Humors medical system, the dominant medical system of the European civilization throughout most of its history. The Greek system, further developed by the Romans, was eventually adopted by the Arabs, developed even further, and spread throughout the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, and part of South Asia. Under British rule, Unani Tibb largely supplanted Ayurveda as the dominant medical system in Northern India, where it is still practiced today. Its sphere of influence has

reached all the way from the British Isles to the borders of China, and south past the Sahara Desert into Africa.

Unani is experiencing a re-examination among herbalists in the West, through such texts as Hakim Chisthi's *The Traditional Healer* (Healing Arts Press, 1988) and Graeme Tobyn's *Culpepper's Medicine* (Element Books, 1997.) The re-publication of Book I of Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* in a new translation by Laleh Bakhtiar in 1999 has made key source materials for the system available. Unani medicine exists as a living system in Pakistan and northern India, and resources from that part of the world have generally been overlooked by Westerners seeking to resurrect the Four Humors system. The Hamdard Foundation and Hamdard University in Pakistan and India offer medical degrees in Unani Tibb, publish the *Hamdard Medicus Journal*, and also publish a number of books on Unani Tibb. [Hamdard Foundation, Nazimabad, Karachi-74600, Pakistan; or Hamdard Dawakhana

**Table 1**

Latin Name	Common Name	Temperment	Corrigent (balancing agent)
<b><i>Achillea millefolium</i></b>	yarrow	cold 3 dry 3	anise
<b><i>Allium cepa</i></b>	onion	hot 3 dry 1	vinegar, honey
<b><i>Allium sativum</i></b>	garlic	hot 4 dry 3	fried in almond oil with coriander
<b><i>Althea officinalis</i></b>	marshmallow	neutral - moist 2	honey and fennel
<b><i>Berberis vulgaris</i></b>	barberry	cold 2 dry 2	sugar and cloves
<b><i>Capsicum spp.</i></b>	<b>Cayenne</b>	<b>hot 3 dry 3</b>	<b>milk, ghee</b>
<b><i>Centella asiatica</i></b>	gotu kola	hot 2 dry 2	coriander
<b><i>Cichorium intybus</i></b>	chicory	cold 1 moist 1	honey, vinegar, viola
<b><i>Coptis spp.</i></b>	gold thread	cold 3 dry 3	honey
<b><i>Curcuma longa</i></b>	turmeric	hot 3 dry 3	citrus juice
<b><i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i></b>	licorice	hot 1 moist 1	rose
<b><i>Gynmena sylvestre</i></b>	gymnema	hot 2 dry 2	black pepper and salt
<b><i>Inula helenium</i></b>	elecampagne	warm 2 dry 2	anise and rose petal syrup
<b><i>Juniperus communis</i></b>	juniper		hot 2 dry 2
	honey and butter		
<b><i>Lavendula off.</i></b>	Lavendar	hot 1 dry 1	lemon juice, sour articles
<b><i>Matricaria cham.</i></b>	Chamomile	hot 1 dry 1	honey
<b><i>Mentha piperita</i></b>	peppermint	hot 2 dry 2	honey, rose, violet
<b><i>Paeonia off.</i></b>	Peony	hot 2 dry 2	rose petals with sugar,
	fresh milk		
<b><i>Plantago lanceolata</i></b>	plantain		cold 2 moist 2
	honey and lemon		
<b><i>Rosa spp.</i></b>	<b>rose petal</b>	<b>cold 1 dry 2</b>	<b>anise</b>
<b><i>Salix alba</i></b>	willow bark	cold 1 moist 1	rose
<b><i>Valeriana off.</i></b>	valerian		warm 1 dry 2
	rose		
Viola spp.	violet leaf	cold 1 moist 2	pond lily and marjoram
Zingiber off.	ginger	warm 3 dry 1	almond oil, honey
Zizyphus jujuba	jujube dates	balanced - moist 1	honey, rose, sugar

**Table 2****Some media for delivering herbs or balancing their energetics**

almond oil	warm 2 moist 1
citrus juice	cold 1 moist 1
ghee	warm 2 moist 2
honey	warm 2 moist 2
milk	warm 1 moist 1
olive oil	warm 1 moist 1
sugar	warm 1 moist 2
vinegar	cold 1 dry 1
ice water	cold 4 moist 4
warm water	cold 2 moist 2
salt water	warm 2 dry 2
wine	warm 2 dry 2
yoghurt	cold 2 moist 2

(wakf), Hamdard Marg, New Delhi - 110006]. *Indusynic Medicine: Traditional Medicine of Herbal, Animal, and Mineral Origin in Pakistan*, published by University of Karachi in 1997, contains an overview of Unani Tibb, and a materia medica of about 300 herbs.

*Indusynic Medicine* contains an introduction to the principles of Unani medicine, and for each plant in the materia medica gives the traditional energetics of the plant (hot, cold, moist, dry), its major uses, herbs or substances that combine well with it, and herbs that may be substituted for it if it is not available. The herbal combinations and their usefulness for developing formulas is the subject of this article. Table 1 shows the traditional pairs of some of the herbs listed in the book. Table 2 shows the energetics of some media for delivering herbs. The energetic effect and its degree of action appears in column three of that table. The concept of energetics in Unani medicine is somewhat different than that in Chinese medicine or Ayurveda in some areas. The footnote in Table 2 gives an explanation of the degrees of action (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or 4<sup>th</sup>). As is evident from the list and tables, Unani medicine has a wide variety of media for delivery of herbs. One most interesting is a honey paste. The herbs in a formula are first powdered and mixed well. Then honey is simmered until it just begins to boil. The herbs are placed in it sufficient to make a thick paste, and the mixture is allowed to cool. The paste

**Continued on back page**

**Table 3****Unani Tibb Signs of Intemperament****Excess of heat**

Feelings of uncomfortable heat  
Great suffering with fever  
Easily fatigued (exercise makes heat)  
Excessive thirst  
Burning or irritation in pit of stomach  
Bitter taste in mouth  
Pulse weak, rapid  
Intolerance of hot food and drinks  
Relief from cold foods and drinks  
Fewer layers of clothing  
Throws off bed covers  
Intolerance of summer heat  
Inflammatory conditions  
Fatigue

**Excess of cold**

Weak digestion  
Diminished thirst  
Phlegm and catarrh with fever  
Worse with cold drinks or food  
Better with hot drinks or food  
Desires more clothing or bedcovers  
Intolerance of winter cold

Key distinguishing clinical signs for hot or cold: pulse, thirst, clothing, bedcovers, likes and dislikes

**Excess of dryness**

Dry, rough skin  
Insomnia  
Wasting  
Intolerance of drying food (vinegar, salt)  
Worse in dry wind or climate  
Hot water, oil, absorbed through skin  
Better with moistening food

**Excess of moisture**

Signs similar to cold  
Desire for drying foods  
Worse with moistening foods  
Excess sleep  
Puffy eyelids  
Tissues excessive (muscle, fat)  
Puffiness or edema  
Excess salivation  
Excess nasal mucous  
Tendency to diarrhea

Key distinguishing clinical signs for dry or moist: skin, tissues, membranes, sleep, likes or dislikes

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**Unani** *continued from page eighteen*

can then be taken directly, or made into pills. Highly volatile substances can be added to the honey at the last minute. Other substances, such as citrus juice or vinegar may also be used to dilute the honey. Following are two examples of how the herbal pairing might be used to construct a formula.

**A digestive formula**

<b>Herb</b>	<b>Corrigent</b>
Mentha	honey, rose, violet
Matricaria	honey
Glycyrrhiza	rose
Fennel	celery seed
Althea	honey, fennel

**A possible formula**

Mentha	4 parts
Matricaria	4 parts
Glycyrrhiza	4 parts
Fennel	4 parts
Althea	2 parts
Rosa	2 parts
Viola	2 parts
Celery	1 part

Anise 1 (corrigent for rosa)

Take as powder in honey. The main ingredients may be increased or reduced in proportion according to the constitution and state of the patient.

**An anti-inflammatory formula**

Curcuma longa, turmeric, has a wide variety of medical applications. One of them is as a systemic anti-inflammatory. The dose is about a half-teaspoon three times a day. Compliance is difficult, however, because of the bad taste and the strong drying effect.

<b>Herb</b>	<b>Corrigent</b>
Curcuma	citrus juice
Glycyrrhiza	rose
Plantain	honey, lemon

**A possible formula**

Curcuma	3 parts
Glycyrrhiza	2 parts
Plantain	2 parts
Rosa	1 parts
Anise	1 parts

Take as powder in syrup of honey and lemon juice. After honey is melted and fluid, add one-fourth part of lemon or lime juice. Warm until the honey is completely liquid, and then add the powdered herbs.

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