

Warning: you should be aware that herbs are every bit as dangerous as conventional medication. You should ALWAYS check with your doctor before commencing use of any herbal preparation.

Note also that herbal preparations may give imprecise doses of the active, bioavailable ingredient and different commercial preparations may vary in strength.

This is a selection of herbs; you do NOT need to take all of these; the most likely to be beneficial are starred.

***Gingko biloba** is thought to improve mental ability; it could perhaps be helpful in patients who have difficulty maintaining attention, or feel that their short-term memory is impaired (which is a common complaint and probably results either from a high pain level, which distracts attention, or from use of a combination of different sedating medications).

Gingko is also anti-inflammatory, vasodilatory and relaxant. It is helpful in cases of poor circulation such as Raynaud's.

A recent study in Dundee has been looking at the use of gingko in Raynaud's syndrome (which causes poor circulation to the hands and feet) after anecdotal reports by members of the Raynaud's and Scleroderma Association that they had had benefit from a product called Seredrin, which contains gingko.

Gingko has also been found to be useful in treating vertigo and tinnitus.

It may cause increased bleeding in patients on anticoagulants or NSAIDs. Dose

120-240mg/day.

Valeriana is used worldwide as a relaxing remedy in cases of hypertension and stress-related cardiac problems.

Herbalists may recommend combinations of Valerian with Humulus or Passiflora for sleep promotion or Valerian plus Viburnum for muscular cramps.

Valerian will potentiate the effects of barbiturates; it may reduce the symptoms of benzodiazepine withdrawal. (It has BZD-like effects but acts on different receptors).

***Ginger:** has been found to have anti-inflammatory qualities; taken as an herbal tea, lemon and ginger is a pleasant combination that is a good replacement for ordinary tea or coffee.

Alternatively, half- one teaspoonful (1-2g) per day of powdered ginger taken in food can be helpful in reducing inflammatory problems.

It can also be used externally as a compress for painful joints: grate 1-2 oz.

Fresh ginger root (*Zinziber officianale*): infuse in half a cup of hot (not boiling) water; dip a soft, folded cloth in and wrap around the affected joint. Cover with a dry cloth to retain the heat.

Ginger is also helpful in reducing nausea, which might be helpful if this is a side-effect from medication.

Cat's Claw: has long been used as a homoeopathic remedy for intestinal conditions such as ulcers, Crohn's disease. It is also of use in treating arthritis and rheumatism, chronic fatigue syndrome and lupus.

Feverfew is often found to be helpful in treating migraine type headaches.

The leaves contain a substance, which inhibits secretion of platelets and white blood cells, which may have implications for its use in autoimmune conditions. (But may also increase bleeding).

Cessation may lead to rebound headache. 5-15% of patients develop aphthous ulcers or gastrointestinal irritation.

Try to use an alcohol-free preparation, as sometimes alcohol is a trigger for migraines.

Do not take with Warfarin or if pregnant.

It takes about a month to become effective.

Cilantro: Chinese parsley: coriander: this culinary herb has been found to act as a chelation agent, flushing out heavy metal such as mercury, lead and aluminium. It has also been found to reduce neuralgia and has anti-spasmodic and anti-inflammatory properties.

Horse chestnut: this is helpful in reducing swelling in the legs due to fluid retention, as it acts as a diuretic.

However, patients should NOT commence use of this herbal drug on their own initiative; fluid retention occurs for a variety of reasons and must be investigated to establish the cause before indiscriminate treatment is begun.

Diuretic preparations can potentially damage the kidneys.

Capsicum: (peppers): in the 1980s, a study found that in Thailand, people who had a daily diet including peppers (capsicums) had a high fibrinolytic activity.

Fibrinolysis (breakdown of excessive scar tissue: part of the healing process whereby the amount of scar tissue can be regulated) has been found to be defective in arachnoiditis (Jayson).

Topical capsaicin, a prescription cream, has been used to treat pain in diabetic neuropathy and post-herpetic neuralgia (shingles).

Initially, there is an increase in the burning sensation (similar to the burning mouth one gets from eating curry) but after a few days, this is reduced.

Whether dietary intake of peppers is of help in reducing burning pain remains to be seen, but it may be worth trying if the patient enjoys spicy food.

Bromelain: anti-inflammatory 2-3 g/day (see above)

Aloe vera: well known to most ladies as a beauty product, but as well as being useful externally, it may be taken internally for colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, urinary tract disorders etc. it is anti-inflammatory.

Garlic: anti-infective

Cistus: may stimulate lymph drainage.

Helichrysum: anti-inflammatory

Marjoram: useful to combat muscle spasms.

Black spruce: for muscular aches and pains, spasms.

Bergamot: strengthens the immune system.

Cleavers: tonic for lymphatic system especially combined with Echinacea or calendula.

Lobelia: topical application for muscle cramps.

Goldenseal: used as a diuretic, anti-inflammatory, laxative. Overdose may cause paralysis (dose not known): functions as an aquaretic, not diuretic (only water excreted not sodium): may worsen oedema and/or hypertension.

Chamomile: tea is very relaxing before bed.

Tea-tree oil: an Australian plant which is well known for its antiseptic properties: can be helpful with infections, including fungal ones.

Lemongrass: very useful to combat fungal infections.

Example of an herbal formula for low back pain and muscle spasms:

4 parts kava kava root: relaxant

2 parts cramp bark (*Viburnum opulus*): relaxant

2 parts cayenne pepper (*Capsicum minimum*)

1 part ginger root

1 part lobelia (*Lobelia inflata*): nervine

1 part red clover blossoms (*Trifolium pratense*) blood cleanser.

Herbs to promote a healthy Liver (which will aid metabolism of any drugs you need to take, as well as herbs and food):

Milk thistle

Dandelion root

Artichokes are also good for the liver

A cautionary note:

St. John's Wort (SJW): a popular herb taken to combat depression, it works in a similar way to Prozac; may cause agitation; skin rash (photosensitises).

Earlier this year, the Department of Health issued a warning about the interaction of SJW with prescription medication for treatment of heart conditions, blood clots, asthma, depression* and migraines.

It may also affect the oral contraceptive pill. (* Interacts with SSRIs such as Prozac and celexa)

Echinacea: immune stimulant; arachnoiditis may well be an autoimmune condition so this herb should not be taken except for very short periods for problems such as ?flu. It may also cause liver toxicity and corticosteroids may be rendered less effective.

Aromatherapy: The use of essential oil preparations: these are natural aromatic essences extracted from wild or cultivated plants. These extracts are compounds that could be considered to be kinds of vegetable hormones that have biodynamic potential; they should be used with great care and in suitably diluted doses, as they are highly concentrated.

NB> some essential oils can cause photosensitivity: which may result in a rash on exposure to sunlight. You need to ensure that you check this before using the oil.

Essential oils can be applied in various ways:

1. used as massage oil (usually in a carrier oil such as almond or grape seed)
2. In a bath
3. As a compress
4. Inhaled

5. In a tea

Used in Shiatsu massage, (which concentrates on acupuncture points) aromatherapy can be very beneficial.

Here are some suggested oils: most likely to be beneficial are starred.

***Lavender** has a reputation as a muscle relaxant and generally for relaxation.

Lavender and lemon are thought to have beneficial effects on the immune system.

***Lemon** (and other citrus oils) is known to boost energy levels in the same way as mint.

***Peppermint**: good for neuralgia. It is also known to be restorative: boosting energy levels: so it may be useful prior to exercising.

***Eucalyptus**: very helpful for clearing congestion due to catarrh (e.g. sinus); it may also help with neuralgic pain.

Basil helps to clear the mind and promotes improved concentration.

Chamomile: relaxant

Cypress

Neroli: helps to lift a depressed mood

Ledum palustre (wild rosemary) has been suggested to combat after-effects of steroid injections.

Clary sage: useful for inflammation; also helpful in depression.

Sage: (Salvia) has recently been recognised to help slow down neurodegenerative disease symptom progression (such as in Alzheimer's disease): it is known to aromatherapists as a good nerve tonic.

Thyme: for joint pain.

Rosemary: very stimulating; avoid using in the evening. It not only warms muscles, but also stimulates the brain so can be helpful if you have to 'perk up' for an occasion.

Example of a combination:

Lavender, marjoram and peppermint ratio 2:2:3 blended in a 50/50 mix of almond oil and coconut oil.

Homoeopathy:

Based on the principle, like cures like, a tiny dose of the substance that causes the symptoms is administered.

Homoeopathy in its classical form requires individual prescription by a practitioner who performs a very detailed analysis not only of physical symptoms, their triggers and associated factors, but also of the patient's personality, diet etc.: enabling him/her to establish what is known as the 'constitutional diagnosis'.

Buying 'off the peg' remedies from a health shop is anathema to these practitioners.

However, there are a few remedies that can be used without using an in-depth approach:

Arnica: the most well known remedy: taken as a tablet or applied as a cream/drops; can be used after falls, or visit to the dentist, to reduce bruising.

Rhus tox. : For joint pain of rheumatic type.

Tamus communis: for chilblains

Other remedies that could potentially be of help in arachnoiditis:

Graphites: taken internally for several months is thought to reduce scar tissue.

Thiosinamum: tincture applied externally may reduce scar formation after burns/other injury

Allium cepa, Ammon carb. and **Hypericum** have been found to help phantom limb pain.

Ruta for tendon inflammation.

Lycopodium: for migraines where headache is worse on right side and aggravated by trying to concentrate.

Iris: migraine with blurred vision and vomiting

Natrum mur.: throbbing, blinding headache with feeling of congestion.