

## HERBAL ALTERNATIVES TO DRUGS IN PAIN MANAGEMENT

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Many alternative medicine professional's protocol for pain management is to eradicate the underlying cause of chronic pain. All pain, whether chronic or acute, physical or emotional, is recognized, interpreted and acted upon by the brain. Every medicine has potential side effects, which can appear even if you take it only once. Even those that don't cause an immediate reaction can slowly but surely harm the body if taken over a long time, or if mixed with the wrong medicines. The followings herbal drugs will address the herbal solutions and external ointment remedies for pain treatment and hopefully for elimination.

Pain is universally understood as a signal of disease and is the most common symptom that brings a patient to a physician. Clinical medicine and traditional Oriental medicine share common goals of alleviating pain and eliminating the causes of pain; however, the philosophy and clinical approach to pain management in the two disciplines is very different. Generally speaking, drugs have immediate and reliable analgesic effects. Unfortunately, pharmaceuticals drugs often cause serious short- and long-term side-effects. In addition, the chronic use of drugs, especially opioid analgesics, is strongly associated with addiction and negative social consequences and connotations. As a result, more and more patients are turning to herbal medicine as their primary, complementary or alternative treatment for pain.

Herbal medicines definitely have outstanding analgesic, anti-inflammatory and anti-spasmodic functions and benefits. However, even though herbs and pharmaceutical drugs have many overlapping functions, they are not directly interchangeable or analogs of each other. The therapeutic effectiveness of herbal formulas is dependent on accurate diagnosis and careful prescription. When used properly, herbs are powerful alternatives to drugs for pain management.

According to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), the fundamental etiology of pain is *qi* stagnation, blood stagnation, or both. As is true in all treatment involving Chinese medicinal herbs, they are most commonly prescribed in carefully-combined formulas (rather than singly) that directly address the causes and/or symptoms of the imbalance and treat without creating unwanted side-effects or complications.

Successful treatment of pain also requires careful differential diagnosis of pain. The three main diagnostic keys are the location of the discomfort, the type of pain and the cause of pain.

### **Musculoskeletal Pain and Painful Obstruction (Bi) Syndrome**

Musculoskeletal pain is often classified as painful obstruction (bi) syndrome. Cold-type musculoskeletal pain is characterized by stiffness, pain and limited range of motion of the joints. Cold conditions are associated with chronic arthritis and arthralgias such as osteoarthritis and fibromyalgia. Heat-type musculoskeletal pain is characterized by redness, swelling, pain and/or inflammation of the

muscles and joints. Patients typically present with muscle cramping and spasms. Musculoskeletal disorders, typically involving inflammation of the muscles, bursae, tendons and ligaments.

Gentiana macrophylla root (*qin jiao*), a popular ingredient in some remedies, has been shown to have anti-inflammatory activities comparable to those of aspirin (salicylic acid). Aconite tsao wu (*cao wu*) and aconite wu tou (*chuan wu*) Other herbs have demonstrated exceptional anti-rheumatic, anti-inflammatory, analgesic and anti-pyretic functions. White peony (*bai shao*) and licorice (*gan cao*) have demonstrated remarkable properties in relieving spasms, cramps and pain of skeletal and smooth muscles. Clinical applications include dysmenorrhea, musculoskeletal disorders, trigeminal pain, muscle spasms and twitching in the facial region, pain in the lower back and legs, abdominal pain and cramps due to intestinal parasites, and epigastric and abdominal pain.

If there are complications to the musculoskeletal disorders described above, classical formulas offer treatment options for the patients. Cinnamon & anemarrhena combination (*gui zhi shao yao zhi mu tang*) treats musculoskeletal and joint pain due to wind heat. Cyathula & plantago formula (*ji sheng shen qi wan*) treats musculoskeletal and joint pain arising from cold. Coix combination (*yi yi ren tang*) treats musculoskeletal and joint pain caused by dampness. Tuhuo & astragalus combination (*san bi tang*) treats musculoskeletal and joint pain due to deficiency of *qi* and blood and weakness of the liver and kidney. If the etiology is unclear, notopterygium & turmeric combination (*juan bi tang*) may be used for relief of general musculoskeletal and joint pain.

Neck and shoulder injuries can be divided into two major categories: acute and chronic. Acute injuries are generally characterized by redness, swelling, inflammation and sharp pain. Chronic injuries are generally characterized by stiffness, numbness, discomfort and dull pain. Acute neck and shoulder problems are often caused by accidents, whiplash, improper sleeping or reading postures, and similar traumas. In addition to pain, redness, swelling and/or inflammation are sometimes present. Treatment consists of reducing pain, swelling and muscle spasms. Herbal formulas are designed to dispel painful symptoms while supporting the healing process. are combined with anti-spasmodic herbs and blood-invigorating herbs to alleviate pain, promote blood circulation and open the meridian channels.

Chronic neck and shoulder problems are characterized by pain, numbness, stiffness, discomfort, limited mobility, slow recovery or continuing deterioration. Strong analgesic herbs like corydalis (*yan hu suo*) is a main herb in the treatment of both acute and chronic neck and shoulder problems. In addition to having strong analgesic properties, it also has a distinctive facility for treating both acute and chronic cases of inflammation. Corydalis also protects against NSAID-induced gastric and duodenal ulcers by reducing gastric acid secretions.

Traumatic injury is characterized by severe *qi* and blood stagnation. Types of injuries include bruises, contusions, sprains, broken bones, surgical incisions and related internal trauma, and other physical traumas. For complications of traumatic injury, cinnamon & hoelen formula (*gui zhi fu ling wan*) is used to treat internal bleeding after traumatic or sports injuries; persica & rhubarb combination (*tao ren cheng qi tang*) is used to treat subcutaneous bleeding with severe swelling and pain.

**Manu (*Inula racemosa*)**

- Local herb found in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh.
- Manu when used in paste form on fracture of tail, horn and metacarpal, enhances the fracture healing and reduce the period of convalescence in animals.
- Action: Increases the blood circulation over the fractured area.

**Harjore (*Cissus quadrangularis*)**

- Harjore is a perennial climber which is used in treatment of bone fractures in animals as well as in humans. It hastens the fracture healing process.
- Action: Increases the blood circulation over the fractured area.

**Ridge gourd (*Luffa acutangula*)**

- The extract of Ridge gourd leaves is useful in the treatment of cutaneous wounds in animals due to its antiseptic action.

**Seabuckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*)**

- Found commonly in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh. The topical use of Seabuckthorn oil enhances the healing of wounds and ulcers in animals.

**Arnica (*Arnica montana*)**

- Action: Anti-inflammatory
- Uses: Arnica is mainly used for inflammation and pain of bumps, bruises and sprains. It stimulates white blood cell activity which breaks down congested blood by dispersing trapped fluids

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

- Black Cohosh has its roots deeply embedded and in American Indian history.
- Uses: Relief for colds, cough, constipation, pain relief, sleep aid, rheumatism, and general pain relief.
- Actions: Analgesic, Anti-rheumatic and Antispasmodic properties.

**Boswellia (*Boswellia serrata*)**

- Uses: In the ancient Ayurvedic medical texts of India, referred as guggals.
- Historically, the guggals were recommended by Ayurvedic physicians for a variety of conditions, including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, diarrhea, dysentery, pulmonary disease, and ringworm.

**Ashwaganda**

- Ashwaganda has been used for many years to treat pain in Ayurvedic medicine in India. It reduces pain and inflammation.
- Ashwagandha is especially valued in conditions of long-standing stress from chronic disorders.
- Uses: Arthritis, asthma, bronchitis, cancer, candida, fever, inflammation, nausea and rheumatism. It builds immunity.

### **Melatonin Mel.-W**

- Contents: Alfalfa, Parsley, Chamomile, Gotu Kola, Barberry, Black Walnut, Bee Pollen and Maca.
- Melatonin showed significant analgesic effects in animal studies.
- It was also shown to enhance the pain-suppressing effects of analgesics.
- It possesses marked anti-inflammatory, immunoregulatory, and analgesic effects that may be related to the system of opiate modulation.
- Use melatonin cautiously when treating autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.

**Rue** is an excellent herb for the repair of sore and damaged muscles and joints

### **Ginger**

- Ginger has anti-inflammatory and anti-pain effects.
- It has also been used to treat headache, nausea and vomiting.
- It is thought to have antioxidant and anti-depressant properties as well.
- Russian experience reports great relief with Ginger in the maladies of migraine, alcohol and lymphatic problems, as well as heart troubles and heart palpitations.

### **Feverfew**

- Feverfew reduces fevers by inducing sweating.
- All digestive disturbances, such as colic (stomach and intestinal gas pains) are handled.
- Alcoholic delirium and loquacity (running off at the mouth or motor mouth) are remedied by Feverfew.
- Inflammation in the lungs, abdomen and stomach can be cured by use of Feverfew.
- It contains a rich supply of the Vitamin B known as Niacin.

### **Meadowsweet**

- Pain reliever. Natural "aspirin".
- Used to relieve pain and many other complaints such as: colic (abdominal gas pains), respiratory problems, gout, arthritis, water retention, rheumatism (sore joints), reducing fever, correcting painful urination.

### **Essential Oils for Pain**

- Cinnamon for infections, coughs, colds, flu, rheumatism, arthritis, general debility, aches, pains.
- Eucalyptus for catarrh, bronchitis, colds, flu, fever, sinusitis, muscular aches and pains, headaches, sluggishness, mental exhaustion, rheumatism, asthma, insect bites, rashes, skin ulcers, sore throats.
- As an analgesic: Black Pepper, Chamomile, helichrysum.
- As a muscular pain reliever: Basil, Clove, Ginger, Marjoram, Oregano, Peppermint, Pine, Ravensara, Rosemary, Thyme.

Other choices are:

**Sha Hsien Chin Ointment:**

Excellent for athlete's foot, eczema and other skin problems.

**Tiger Balm ointment:**

Used for temporary relief of minor aches and pains of muscles and joints.

**Iron Hand Liniment:**

Used for the prevention and healing of injuries. Used to toughen skin and strengthen tendons, ligaments, and bone.

**Tung Shueh Pills:**

Natural herbal remedy for joint and muscle pain. Works well for arthritis, back and joint pain as well as for muscular strains and injuries. Good for acute and chronic pain problems.

**Devil's claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*)**

Originates from the Kalahari and Savannah desert regions of South and Southeast Africa. In these parts of the world, Devil's claw has historically been used to treat a wide range of conditions including fever, malaria and indigestion. The medicinal ingredient of the Devil's claw plant is extracted from the dried out roots.

Currently, the major uses of Devil's claw are as an anti-inflammatory and pain reliever for joint diseases such as degenerative joint disease or osteoarthritis, Low back pain and headache.

**Evening Primrose Oil:**

Contains Gamma linoleic acid the precursor of prostaglandin E1 (PGE1). Deficiencies of PGE1 cause breast pain. Anti inflammatory in action.

Used topically in inflammatory conditions such as arthritis, joint and back pain.

**Lavender angustifolia oil:** Analgesic, anti-rheumatic, anti-spasmodic, nervine.

Used externally to take the pain out of skin wounds such as burns, bites, stings and itching. Massage in for muscle aches, cramps, rheumatic arthritic pain and sprains.

**Opium (Wild) Lettuce** - Anti-spasmodic, hypnotic, nervine.

Often used as a substitute for opium. Commonly used as a mild sedative or hypnotic for insomnia and relaxation, it is also used for coughing, nervousness and muscular pain relief associated with women's ailments.

Actions : Anodyne, Nervine and Anti-spasmodic

**Peppermint:** Analgesic, anti-spasmodic, nervine.

An herb prized for its medicinal benefits . Control muscle aches and chronic pain. When massaged into the skin, peppermint oil plays an innocuous trick on the nerves. Tea good for stomach pain and cramps other than acid reflux and heartburn. Used externally for muscle pain, neuralgia and headaches.

**St. Johns Wort:** External analgesic, anti-inflammatory.

Uses: Sciatica, wounds, burns, lacerations, neuralgias

Its action is based on the ability of the active ingredient, hypericin to inhibit the breakdown of neurotransmitters in the brain. Externally it is used on cuts as a disinfectant and to relieve inflammation and promote healing. The oil can be applied to sprains, bruises and varicose veins. Folk medicine has also has used it as a treatment for cancer.

### **Willow Bark**

The bark of the stately white willow tree (*Salix alba*) has been used in China for centuries as a medicine because of its ability to relieve pain and lower fever. The white willow bark is often called "herbal aspirin." The active ingredient in white willow is salicin, which the body converts into salicylic acid.

Relieve acute and chronic pain, including headache, back and neck pain, and muscle aches. The effectiveness of white willow bark for easing these and other types of discomforts results from its power to lower prostaglandin levels. Control arthritis discomforts.

### **Kava Kava** (*Piper methysticum*)

Kava is a diuretic and an anti-inflammatory, thus useful for gout, rheumatism, bronchial congestion, cystitis and prostatitis. It is an effective local anesthetic and pain reliever when applied externally as a liniment.

Parts Used: Root and rhizome. Used as powder, fluid extract, and tonic beverage.

### **Chili Peppers:** Counter Irritant

Capsaicin is the chemical in chili peppers which is most effective for temporary relief of arthritic pain in joints close to your skin's surface, such as your fingers, knees and elbows.

### **Wintergreen oil** - anti-rheumatic, analgesic, Counter Irritant

**Menthol, Wintergreen oil** : These products may relieve occasional, mild muscle aches, but they're not effective for most forms of chronic pain. In addition, they typically require frequent applications, and some products have a strong medicinal smell. Externally used for joint and muscle stiffness, swelling, rheumatism, arthritis.