

Key Herbs for Chronic Pain & Inflammation



Wintergreen Botanicals, LLC

Maria Noël Groves, RH (AHG), Clinical Herbalist
Allenstown, NH (Near Bear Brook State Park)
603-340-5161, office@wintergreenbotanicals.com

www.WintergreenBotanicals.com

PLEASE READ: *The information in this handout has not been approved by the FDA and does not in any way intend to diagnose or prescribe. Always consult with your health practitioner before taking any remedy.*

Above this, I also recommend that you...

1. Research an herb in at least three good sources before ingesting it (see website for sources),
2. Listen to your body/intuition to determine if an herb resonates or doesn't resonate with you.
3. Take proper steps to ensure that any wildcrafted or cultivated plant is what you think it is, AND
4. Check with your pharmacist for herb-drug interactions if you take prescriptions.

"Managing Chronic Pain & Inflammation" is a BIG topic to cover in our 30-minute mini session. So, we're going to focus on the five (or so) poster herbs that I've found most useful for various types of pain in my clinical practice. A broader discussion of pain and inflammation – and a more holistic overall plan – in these notes will introduce you to other useful herbs and concepts.

The Bigger Picture:

- Pain is the signal that something is wrong. It is not really the enemy, even though we aim to lessen it to improve quality of life. Get to the root of the problem/inflammation to really make a difference.
- While some herbs might work quickly, most take time – weeks, months, maybe years – to really shift pain patterns. No one herb works for all types of pain.
- Even though pain issues can be complex and are highly individual, I'm often amazed by how well natural approaches work to decrease or completely eliminate pain.
- A healthy lifestyle will make a tremendous difference in pain:
 - **Anti-Inflammatory Diet:** Low/no refined foods, sugar and high-glycemic foods, personal food allergens/sensitivities (gluten, nightshades, coffee/xanthines, etc), fried/trans/bad fats, excessive alcohol, meat, and dairy. Focus on...
 - **Vegetables**, especially dark leafy greens, broccoli family, lettuce family, orange-hued, purple-hued, and a rainbow of color in general
 - **Berries**, especially tart cherry, pomegranate, cranberry blueberry, aronia...) and some other fruits
 - **High-fiber whole carbs** – but not too much in one sitting – such as squash, sweet potatoes, beans, organic whole grains (focusing more on gluten-free grains like quinoa, millet, buckwheat, rice blends, oats), in moderation/if they agree: potatoes, wheat, corn
 - **Protein** from beans, nuts, seeds, pasture-raised eggs, grass-fed meat, clean fish and seafood, perhaps some fermented dairy or hard cheese
 - **Mushrooms** like shiitake, reishi, maitake, lion's mane, cooked, in soup/broth, etc.
 - **Bone broth**, particularly if made with cartilage-rich bones (chicken feet, beef knuckles), and incorporate herbs, mushroom, seaweed in the broth, too
 - **Calcium and magnesium** from bone broth, leafy greens, nuts, seeds, nettle, oatstraw, easily digested dairy, fortified "milks" and tofu, and/or supplements
 - **Vitamin D** from liver, sun/light-treated mushrooms, pasture-raised eggs, cod liver oil, fortified food, and/or supplements
 - **Fermented foods**, like kraut, kimchi, kefir, etc.

- **Omega 3-rich foods** like cold-water wild fish (salmon, sardines, kippers/herring, trout), grass-fed meat, eggs, flax, hemp, chia, walnuts, and/or supplements, and other good fats like avocado, olives, nuts
- **Proper hydration** with water, broth, herb/fruit-infused water, tea, etc.
- **Plenty of herbs, spices, green tea**, maybe some dark chocolate and red wine
Synergy is real! Turmeric w/black pepper. Cayenne w/green tea. Herbs in salad...
- **Sleep:** Good quality, regular, deep sleep is necessary! Sleep/pain herbs include valerian, hops, California poppy, wild lettuce, lavender, blue vervain, wood betony, flower essences (Rescue Remedy Sleep, lavender, St. John's wort, valerian...)
- **Regular Activity:** Helps lubricate joints, reduce inflammation, reduce risk for injury, improve balance, strengthen body, support detoxification, boost mood, etc. Consider gentle activities like swimming, walking, tai chi, and yoga. Turmeric, tart cherry juice, omega 3s, calcium, and magnesium can reduce exercise-induced inflammation.
- **Stress Reduction & Mind-Body Balance:** Helps boost mood, quality of life, and reduce inflammation. Time in nature, meditation, breath work (see Andrew Weil's 4-7-8 Breath video online), art, creative projects, laughter, time with friends and animals, work-life balance, gratitude journal, etc. Consider flower essences to support clients in these efforts (apple, crab apple, lilac, valerian, lavender, oak, olive, cayenne...) as well as nervines, sedatives, adaptogens, and a B vitamin complex.
- **Reduce Your Toxin Exposure:** Everyday toxins can increase inflammation and pain while disrupting healthy nerve-endocrine function and gut health. This can be an issue for autoimmune-related pain issues like rheumatoid arthritis. To the best of your abilities: Go organic, follow the diet tips (especially consider a guided detox, fast, or vegan diet), limit exposure to toxins, choose natural substances and naturally made products (everything from soap to paint and furniture), and avoid plastics especially for food packaging/storage. See ewg.com for all sorts of handy consumer guides. Also consider adding detoxifying herbs (turmeric, ginger, burdock, dandelion, nettle...) to the protocol/formula if toxin overload is a concern.
- **Other Therapies:** Massage, chiropractic, reiki, therapy, physical therapy, and even (gasp!) surgery may be appropriate and helpful.

Overall Inflammation & Toxin/Pain Connection

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) fights various inflammatory pathways, most notably inhibiting COX-2. It's a good place to start when looking for a "pain herb." Long-term use can reduce the inflammation and pain associated with rheumatoid and osteoarthritis as well as other types of pain relating to chronic inflammation. Turmeric, of course, has other benefits that may factor into choosing it as a pain herb (ie: big-picture pain patterns) and other health issues presented by the client. It's a profound liver tonic – improving detoxification as well as protecting the liver – powerful antioxidant, antidepressive, fights cancer, reduces cholesterol, may lower blood sugar, improves digestion as a bitter, etc. Turmeric's main constituent curcumin is not well absorbed in the gut, but adding just 1% of piperine in black pepper boosts curcumin's bioavailability 2,000 times! Turmeric powder (1/4+ teaspoons) in food or capsules (2-4+/day) tend to work best, but I do make turmeric tincture for broader client formulas. Try a 1:2 fresh root in 95% alcohol (don't bother with 100-proof vodka) or, even better, 1:5 dry powder in 70% alcohol. The more it stains, the stronger it is, and high proof alcohol does a dramatically better job extracting turmeric's unique carotenoids.

Also consider ginger for "cold" pain and stagnation (combined with fellow anti-inflammatories holy basil, rosemary, green tea, Baikal skullcap and others in Zyflamend), **bone broth** and **cartilage/gelatin-like** compounds to help cushion joints and relieve inflammation, and general anti-inflammatories **tart cherry juice** and **boswellia**.

Stress/Inflammation/Pain Patterns

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) has performed well in studies for arthritis in combination with turmeric and boswellia. It's a superb anti-inflammatory adaptogen as well as a nerve and immune tonic with studies supporting its ability to boost mood and improve mental function. For many clients, stress, mood, and autoimmune issues coincide with pain. It may be hard to tell which came first, but ashwagandha is a good herb to consider solo or particularly in a customized blend. I use it as a powder in milk, in tea and soup blends, and as a tincture (1:5 dry roots in 50-60% alcohol), and capsules work, too. Be aware that it is a nightshade and some people with nightshade sensitivity may react to it (but not everyone).

Also consider holy basil. Although decent studies are sadly lacking, it is also a favorite of mine for a range of issues including for calm energy, improved mood, released grief, reduced anxiety, blood sugar and cortisol balance, and as an anti-inflammatory. I often use it as a tea or tincture (1:2 fresh flowering plant in 95% alcohol), but pretty much any form of it works well. Carbon dioxide capsules are pricey but potent. I find the rama variety grows best in my garden and mostly work with that as tincture and tea. A nice clove-y scent and flavor (eugenol) indicates potency, and unfortunately a lot of the dried holy basil on the market is only so-so. A 50/50 blend of ashwagandha and holy basil tinctures is a good start for those with a lot of stress, exhaustion, and pain. You can stick with that or build a broader formula from there. **St. John's wort** is worth considering for pain issues with a serotonin or nerve component (like fibromyalgia) in combination with more overt pain herbs internally – be very aware of drug RX and rare sun sensitivity – although I tend to use it more often topically than internally for pain.

Muscle Tension:

Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*) is really just one example of many herbs that help relax muscle tension and relieve spasms and cramps, though it is among my favorites for headaches and neck/shoulder tension amongst driven, type-A personalities. Also consider it for nerve pain, insomnia (including pain-related insomnia, etc). It's almost always taken as a tincture (1:2 fresh flowering tops in 95% or 1:5 dry in ~50% alcohol), and sometimes just a few drops on the tongue or a small percent in the formula will be the miracle-worker.

Also consider Magnesium, magnesium, magnesium – It's not an herb, but people with muscle cramps, tension, headaches, menstrual cramps, etc. are often deficient in magnesium, and supplementing with it can often help prevent and quickly relieve pain. Powders/liquids tend to work better than pills, and B vitamins are needed to absorb it and vice versa. Magnesium citrate is my preferred form, as are Ionic Fizz and Natural Calm brands. There are also plenty of other muscle-relaxing, antispasmodic herbs, most of which are also sedatives and/or nervines. **Pedicularis** (know what it's parasitizing and will pick up constituents from its host plant) is an amazing skeletal muscle relaxant if you have access to it – google Michael Moore's and 7Song's online profiles for more. Also **wood betony** (the *Stachys*, not the *Pedicularis*) is quite nice and easy/pretty to cultivate. Cramp bark (especially for menstrual cramps), wild yam root (organic cultivated due to sustainability issues), and so many more! I also like **flower essences** of lilac (spine straightening, feeling unburdened) and comfrey (deep healing) solo or a few drops added to a tincture blend. It can also help to mix pain herbs that work on various pathways – I have one with wild peony root, California poppy, pedicularis, corydalis, a little bit of birch and wintergreen (they're toxic in large quantities), and a few other odds and ends that works quickly for symptomatic pain. It's also worth noting that some of the muscle tension pain folks are very sensitive to caffeine and caffeine withdrawal/fluctuations. That weekend deviation from your normal **coffee** could be the cause of the headache that starts later that day or even three days later...

Nerve Pain

St. John's Wort Oil (*Hypericum perforatum*) is made by infusing the fresh buds and flowers in olive oil until it turns a deep red hue. I use it for gentle yet fast relief for nerve pain (sometimes other types of pain, too – it's worth trying!), and it may heal nerve damage when applied regularly long term. Consider it for

sciatica, new and old injuries, etc. Though St. John's wort interacts with many medications, this is less likely when used topically. Market quality varies *widely*. You want an oil made with primarily the fresh buds and flowers (a few leaves are ok, but they're much weaker). This should make a nice, red oil – the redder, the more potent. Use color as a guide when buying it. The red pigments can vary year from year, but you can optimize by doing the following: harvest after a hot, sunny week; choose a location that is dry, hot, and sunny, with preferably poor soil; harvest primarily buds and flowers (especially buds); place your jar in the sun as it macerates. It may take 2+ weeks for the red hue to develop.

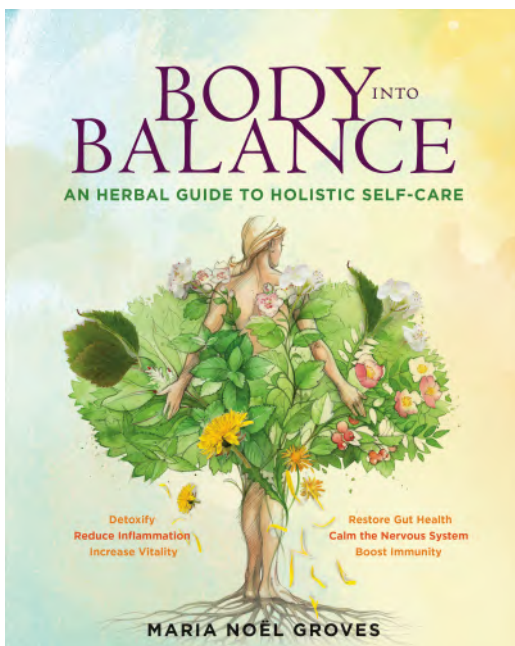
Also consider lion's mane mushroom and other *Hericium* species to help promote nerve growth and function after injury and in aging. Though most studied for dementia, it holds promise for nerve pain and issues like Lyme. Also **nervines** like holy basil, bacopa, gotu kola, milky oat seed, mimosa, hawthorn, when it seems the nerves themselves need support, in combination with more overt pain herbs.

Tendon/Ligament Pain:

Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*) is a supreme herb for tendon and ligament issues – both the pain and the healing of them. Think of it for sprains, strains, injuries old and new. It's almost always used as a tincture (1:2 fresh root in 40-95% alcohol), though I have heard that tea works, too. Just a few drops on the tongue may suffice, but more typical doses are ok, too. You can also apply it topically, and it blends very well with other pain herbs in formula. You may notice an improvement immediately with more improvement as time goes on. Check out jim mcdonald's website for a really nice article on back pain as well as a profile on Solomon's seal. When wild harvesting or harvesting from a stand of your own that you don't want to totally knock off, dig and pull a section off the back rhizome, leaving the main rhizome and stalk behind to continue growing. You can also have fresh Solomon seal drop shipped to you from places like Healing Spirits Herb Farm.

Also consider mullein root for nourishing tendons/ligaments and straightening the spine, **horsetail** tincture for broken bones and connective tissue support, **pleurisy root** when things need to get moving (ie: frozen shoulder). Also bone broth, horsetail, oat straw, gotu kola, etc. – simmer it all together and consume daily.

This topic is covered in MUCH greater detail in my forthcoming book, *Body into Balance*, which has an entire chapter devoted to managing chronic pain, with detailed discussions of different types of pain, more herbs, recipes, and specific protocols for different common pain issues.



Maria Noel Groves, RH(AHG)

Maria runs Wintergreen Botanicals Herbal Clinic & Education Center in New Hampshire and is the president of the NH Herbal Network Chapter of the AHG. She is certified by the Southwest School of Botanical Medicine, and has nearly two decades of experience with herbs and natural health. Her practice focuses on education and empowerment through classes, health consultations, and journalism. www.WintergreenBotanicals.com



Body into Balance comes out March 2016!

- Herbal guide with a western body system approach
- Covers many common health concerns and concepts
- Holistic anatomy and physiology, patterns of disease
- Includes whole food nutrition and lifestyle tips
- Remedy-making and favorite recipes
- A highly readable “textbook” for the layperson, student, school, herbalist, and nurse alike!

Request a review copy for your herb school or publication: Email publicity@storey.com

The Pain Herb Chart

Natural COX-2 Inhibitors

Turmeric &/or Ginger
Hops
Rosemary
Baikal & American Skullcaps
Holy Basil
Green/White Tea

Natural Aspirins & Opiates

Willow Bark*
Meadowsweet
Black Birch/Wintergreen*
Peony Root
California Poppy

Other Natural

Anti-inflammatories

Boswellia
Bromelain & Protein Enzymes
Anti-inflammatory Diet
Omega 3s & GLA
Ashwaganda
Cherry Fruit
Yucca
Bunchberry Leaves

Muscle Relaxers & CNS Sedatives

Magnesium
Skullcap
Hops
Valerian
Jamaican Dogwood*
Pedicularis
Kava
Passionflower
Wood Betony/Blue Vervain

Warming & “Juicy” Herbs

Pleurisy Root
Prickly Ash
Cayenne
Ginger

Connective Tissue Repair

Glucosamine & Chondr.
Hyaluronic Acid & MSM
Vitamin C
Vitamin B Complex & B 6
Gotu Kola
Gin Raisins
Bone Broth
Horsetail, Oatstraw
Solomon’s Seal/Mullein Rts
Maria Noël Groves

Nerve Pain

St. John’s Wort (topical & internal*)
Skullcap
Blue Vervain

Antispasmodics

Wild Yam
Peppermint
Cramp Bark

Topical Counter-Irritants, Etc.

Cayenne (Capcaicin)
Menthol & Peppermint
Camphor
Essential Oils: Peppermint, Juniper,
Wintergreen, Rosemary, Eucalyptus

Other Topical Remedies

Arnica oil/cream
St. John’s wort oil
Dandelion flower oil
Elder leaf oil

Natural Anti-histamines

Butterbur
Quercetin
Citrus Bioflavanoids
Grape seed & skin extract
Pycnogenol
Bromelain

Improve Circulation/Lymph/Vascular

Feverfew
Clematis
Vinca & Vinpocetine*
Cayenne
Horse Chestnut*
Gotu Kola
Red Root (lymph)

Serotonin Boosters

St. John’s Wort*
5 HTP & Tryptophan

Adaptogenic/Energy Connection

Panax ginseng/ American ginseng
Eleuthero (Siberian “ginseng”)
Rhodiola
Gotu kola
Schisandra
Reishi, Turkey Tails
Cordyceps, Maitake
Holy Basil

** Particularly be sure to research cautions before using*

Autoimmune Connection

Reishi, Turkey Tails
Maitake, Shitake
Astragalus
Schizandra
Ashwagandha

Diuretics

Dandelion leaf & root
Parsley leaf, root & seed
Nettle leaf
Celery ribs, root & seed
Cornsilk

Detoxification Connection

See “Diuretics”
Turmeric
Guggul
Triphala
Magnesium (high doses)
Milk Thistle
Schizandra
Ginger
Lemon
Fermented Foods
Raw foods
Vegetarian Diet

Cellular Energy

Vitamin B Complex
Vitamin C
Magnesium
CoQ10
Alpha Lipoic Acid
NADH? DHEA?
Electrolytes

Bodywork & Mind/Body Balance

Biofeedback
Chiropractic/Osteopathic
CranioSacral
Rolfing/Massage
Physical Therapy
Gentle Exercise/Activity:
Tai chi, yoga, swimming,
walking
Baths/Hot tub/Sauna
Acupuncture
Meditation
Time in Nature
Aromatherapy
Therapy
Flower Essences