

HERBS FOR ARTHRITIS

Alfalfa (*Medicago saliva*): Alfalfa is a folk remedy for arthritis in southern Appalachia. Alfalfa tea is rich with nutritive minerals. We recommend that you do not take the alfalfa powder; take the tea instead. Alfalfa contains 1-canavanine, an amino acid that can cause symptoms that are similar to those of systemic lupus, an autoimmune disease that can also cause joint pain. Some scientific studies show that these symptoms can occur in both animals and humans as a result of eating alfalfa. The amino acid is not present to any significant amount in alfalfa tea.

Dosage and Directions: Place 1 ounce of alfalfa in a pot. Cover with 1 quart of water and boil for thirty minutes. Strain and drink the quart throughout the day. Do this for two to three weeks, and then take a break for seven to ten days before starting again.

Angelica (*Angelica archangelica*): Angelica is an herb that has been used in European folk medicine since antiquity. It can be used to treat arthritis. The Western variety of angelica has 12 anti-inflammatory constituents, ten antispasmodic (muscle relaxant) constituents, and five anodyne (pain-relieving) ones. The Chinese sometimes use their native variety of the plant (*Angelica sinensis*) for the same purpose. The Chinese species is sold in North America under the names dang gui or dong quai.

Dosage and Directions: Place 1 tablespoon of the cut roots of either species of angelica in 1 pint of water and bring to a boil. Cover and boil for two minutes. Remove from heat and let stand, covered, until the water cools to room temperature. Strain and drink the tea in 3 doses during the day for two to three weeks at a time. Then, take a break for seven to ten days and start the treatment again if desired.

Black Cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*): An American Indian treatment for arthritis involved using the root of black cohosh. There are five species in the *Cimicifuga* genus worldwide that have been used to treat rheumatism. Black cohosh contains aspirin-like substances as well as other anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic constituents.

Dosage and Directions: Simmer 1 teaspoon of black cohosh root in 1 cup of boiling water for twenty minutes. Strain and drink the tea in 2 divided doses during the day. Do this for two to three weeks, and then take a break for seven to ten days before starting the treatment again.

Boswellia has unique anti-inflammatory action, much like the conventional non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) used by many for inflammatory conditions. Unlike NSAIDs, however, long-term use of boswellia does not lead to irritation or ulceration of the stomach.

Celery (*Apium graveolens*): The remedy of eating raw or cooked celery seeds or large amounts of the celery plant to treat rheumatism arrived in North America with the European immigrants. Using celery to treat rheumatism persists today in North American professional herbalism. Various parts of the celery plant contain more than 25 different anti-inflammatory compounds. And, taken as a food, celery is rich in minerals: A cup of celery contains more than 340 milligrams of potassium. (A potassium deficiency may contribute to some symptoms of arthritis.) **Dosage:** Place 1 teaspoon of celery seeds in a cup. Fill the cup with boiling water. Cover and let stand for fifteen minutes. Strain and drink. Drink 3 cups a day during an acute arthritis attack.

Chaparral (*Larrea tridentata*) Chaparral is widely promoted in health food stores as a treatment for arthritis. In the early 1990s, reports of liver toxicity for chaparral appeared in scientific documents, and 18 cases of adverse effects to chaparral have since been reported to the USFDA. Two of those patients required liver transplants. The individuals who were poisoned took powdered chaparral in the form of capsules, ingesting toxic constituents. You can avoid this by taking a tea instead. All folk uses for chaparral use it in the form of either externally as a wash or internally as a tea and not powdered herb. We recommend that you do not use this herb due to its toxicity.

Devil's claw is a good anti-inflammatory agent. Take 1,000 milligrams (1 gram) 2x daily.

Epsom Salt (magnesium sulfate): Magnesium has both anti-inflammatory and anti-arthritic properties and it can be absorbed through the skin. Magnesium is one of the most important of the essential minerals in the body, and it is commonly deficient in the American diet. A New England remedy for arthritis is a hot bath of Epsom salts. The heat of the bath can increase circulation and reduce the swelling of arthritis.

Dosage and Directions: Fill a bathtub with water as hot as you can stand. Add 2 cups of Epsom salts. Bathe for thirty minutes, adding hot water as necessary to keep the temperature warm. Do this daily as often as you'd like. (If you are pregnant or have cardiovascular disease consult your doctor before taking very hot baths.)

Feverfew has been used for centuries for arthritis. Some studies have found that the anti-inflammatory effects of this herb are greater than those achieved by NSAIDs. Take 250 milligrams once or twice daily.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) In one study, Indian researchers gave three to seven grams of ginger a day to 18 people with osteoarthritis and 28 with rheumatoid arthritis. More than 75 percent of those participating in the study reported at least some relief from pain and swelling. Even after more than two years of taking these high doses of ginger, none of the people reported side effects. Many people drink ginger tea for osteoarthritis. A ginger compress is also beneficial for arthritis.

Ginseng Liquor (*Panax quinquefolius*). Ginseng contains constituents called ginsenosides, which have a variety of pharmacological actions. It is an adaptogen - it increases the body's ability to handle a wide variety of stresses.

Note: Be sure to use American ginseng, not Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng*) for this remedy. Asian ginseng can actually aggravate the pain of arthritis.

Dosage and Directions: Chop 3.5 ounces of ginseng and place in 1 quart of liquor like vodka. Let the mixture stand for five to six weeks in a cool dark place, turning the container frequently. Strain and take 1 ounce of the liquid after dinner or before bedtime every night for up to three months. Then, take a break for two weeks before starting the treatment again.

Note: If you are prone to gout, the alcohol may aggravate your condition. In that case take ginseng tea without alcohol.

Hop Tea (*Humulus lupulus*): The hop plant contains at least 22 constituents that have anti-inflammatory activities, including several that act through the same cellular mechanisms as steroid drugs. Four constituents have antispasmodic properties, and ten may act as sedatives. The fresher the plant, the better. Today, hop tea is a popular remedy for rheumatism.

Dosage and Directions: Place 2 or 3 teaspoons of hop leaves in a cup and fill with boiling water. Cover the cup and let stand for fifteen minutes. Drink the tea while it's warm. Drink 1 to 3 cups between dinner and bedtime as needed.

Licorice acts in the body like cortisone, without the harmful side-effects. Licorice is believed to enhance the action of bupleuri. Licorice also has significant anti-inflammatory and anti-allergy activity. Licorice components are able to bind to glucocorticoid receptors on cells and exert glucocorticoid-like effects. It has been used historically in the treatment of inflammation, allergy, asthma and other conditions that put added stress on the adrenals. Long-term use of licorice can cause an elevation of blood pressure. Take 2 capsules daily.

Mustard Plaster (*Brassica alba*, *Brassica juncea*) Mustard plaster is a popular counterirritant treatment for arthritis. The irritating substance in mustard is allyl-isothiocyanate. This constituent is not activated, however, until the seeds are crushed and mixed with some liquid. Only then does the mustard produce the irritation necessary for the counterirritant effect.

Dosage and Directions: Crush the seeds of white or brown mustard or grind them in a seed grinder. Moisten the mixture with vinegar, then sprinkle with flour. Spread the mixture on a cloth. Place the cloth, poultice side down, on the skin. Leave on for no more than twenty minutes. Remove if the poultice becomes uncomfortable. After removing the poultice, wash the affected area.

Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*). Oregano, is a powerful antioxidant. The antioxidant activity of oregano and other medicinal mints is due in large part to rosmarinic acid, a compound with antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and antiviral properties. The antioxidants in oregano may help prevent the cell damage caused by free radicals. Free radical reactions are probably involved in inflammation, degenerative arthritis and the aging process in general. And evidence is accumulating that antioxidants may help relieve osteoarthritis and RA.

Pineapple (*Ananas comosus*). Bromelain, a chemical in pineapple, helps prevent inflammation. Athletic trainers have been reportedly recommending pineapple to athletes to prevent and treat sports injuries. It is believed to have beneficial effect on arthritis also. Bromelain can help the body get rid of immune antigen complex, compounds that are implicated in some arthritic conditions. It also helps digest fibrin, another compound suspected of being involved in some types of arthritis.

Red pepper, Cayenne pepper (*Capsicum* spp.) Red pepper interferes with pain perception. The pain-relieving chemical in red pepper, capsaicin, triggers the body to release endorphins, nature's own opiates. Red pepper also contains aspirin-like compounds known as salicylates.

Compounds in red pepper can also help relieve arthritis when you apply the herb to the skin. Researchers have discovered that you'll get significant pain relief if you apply capsaicin cream directly to painful arthritic joints four times daily. In one study of this treatment, the capsaicin cream reduced RA pain by more than half. Osteoarthritis pain was reduced by about one-third.

Dosage and Directions: Place 1 ounce of cayenne pepper in 1 quart of rubbing alcohol (a poison not for internal use). Let stand for three weeks, shaking the bottle each day. Then, using a cloth, apply to the affected area during acute attacks of pain. Leave the solution in place for ten to twenty minutes, then wipe clean. You can also use an OTC cream that contain capsaicin like Zostrix or Capzasin-P.

Rosemary (*Rosemarinus officinalis*). Drinking rosemary tea to treat arthritis is an American folk medicine practice. The plant's leaves contain four anti-inflammatory substances—carnosol, oleanolic acid, rosmarinic acid, and ursolic acid. Carnosol acts on the same anti-inflammatory pathways as both steroids and aspirin, oleanolic acid has been marketed as an antioxidant in China, rosmarinic acid acts as an anti-inflammatory, and ursolic acid, which makes up about four percent of the plant by weight, has been shown to have antiarthritic effects in animal trials.

Dosage and Directions: Put 1/2 ounce of rosemary leaves in a 1-quart canning jar and fill the jar with boiling water. Cover tightly and let stand for thirty minutes. Drink a cup of the hot tea before going to bed and have another cupful in the morning before breakfast. Do this for two to three weeks, and then take a break for seven to ten days before starting the treatment again.

Sesame Seeds (*Sesamum indicum*): A remedy for arthritis from Chinese folk medicine is to eat sesame seeds. One-half ounce of the seeds contains about 4 grams of essential fatty acids, 175 milligrams of calcium, 64 milligrams of magnesium, and, 0.73 milligrams of copper. Increased copper intake may be important during arthritis attacks because the body's requirements go up during inflammation.

Dosage and Directions: Grind up 1/2 ounce of sesame seeds in a coffee grinder and sprinkle on your food at meal- time. You can use this treatment for as long as you like.

Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*): Stinging nettle is an official remedy for rheumatism in Germany. It is the most important herb to consider for treating early- onset arthritis. Nettle juice contain an anti-inflammatory component similar to that of steroid drugs. It also nettle contains 47 parts per million of the mineral boron, figured on a dry-weight basis. Boron is an important mineral for arthritis. (The Rheumatoid Disease Foundation suggests that three milligrams of boron, taken daily, may be helpful in treating osteoarthritis and RA.)

Directions: Take 1 tablespoon of nettle juice three times a day. You can freeze the juice for later use.

Turmeric (Curcumin, Curcuma longa) Curcumin, the yellow pigment of turmeric, has significant anti-inflammatory action. Curcumin has been shown to be as effective as cortisone or phenylbutazone in certain models of inflammation. Curcumin also exhibits many beneficial effects on liver functions. The typical dosage of curcumin is 400 to 600 mg 3 times daily. Curcumin is sometimes given in combination with an equal dose of an extract of the pineapple plant called bromelain, which appears to possess anti-inflammatory properties of its own.

Curcumin is thought to be quite safe. Side effects are rare and are generally limited to occasional allergic reactions and mild stomach upset. However, safety in very young children, pregnant or nursing women, and those with severe liver or kidney disease has not been established.

Wild Cucumber Bark Described as "the best plant for treating rheumatism and arthritis" according to herbalists. It can be put in drinking alcohol or made as a tea.

Dosage: Take a teaspoon of it three times a day and one tablespoon at night.

Note: Wild cucumber is a laxative. When taking wild cucumber bark, the dose should be kept below that which loosens the bowels.

Wild Yam (*Dioscorea villosa*): Wild yam contains diosgenin, a steroid constituent with anti-inflammatory properties. Wild yam tea is a popular folk remedy for muscular rheumatism. (Some eat the root of the wild yam instead.)

Dosage and Directions: Place 1 ounce of wild yam root in a 1-quart canning jar. Add a few slices of fresh ginger root. Fill the jar with boiling water, put the lid on tightly, and let the mixture stand until it reaches room temperature. Drink 2 to 3 cups of the tea each day for three to six weeks, then take a break for seven to ten days.

Willow (*Salix*, various species) Willow bark was the original herbal aspirin. It contains a chemical called salicin, which the Bayer Company eventually transformed into aspirin that so many people with arthritis take daily. Willow bark tea has pain-relieving and anti-inflammatory effects similar to those of aspirin. But because the irritation-causing ingredient in aspirin tablets is diluted in tea, you'll have less risk of stomach upset, ulcer and overdose if you take the tea instead of the pills.

Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*): Wintergreen was used to treat arthritis by the American Indian tribes. The plant was accepted in the United States as an official medicine for arthritis in 1820. The chief active pain-relieving constituent in wintergreen is methyl-salicylate. This compound can be toxic when consumed in concentrated wintergreen oil, even when applied to the skin, so stick with using the dried herb.

Dosage and Directions: Place 1 or 2 teaspoons of dried wintergreen leaves in a cup and cover with boiling water. Cover the cup and let steep for fifteen minutes. Strain and drink 3 cups a day. Do this for two to three weeks, and then take a break for seven to ten days before starting again.

Yucca -Yucca has long been used to reduce arthritic pain. A double-blind clinical trial indicated a saponin extract of yucca demonstrated a positive therapeutic effect. It was suggested that effects were due to indirect effects on the gastrointestinal flora. It is possible that yucca decreases bacterial endotoxin absorption thus reducing this inhibition of cartilage synthesis.

Herbal Formula For Pain

5-ml tincture made from 2 parts willow (*Salix* spp.) bark and 1 part each of black cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) and nettle (*Urtica dioica*), taken three times a day.

To relieve muscle tension, rub a tincture of lobelia (*Lobelia inflata*) and cramp bark (*Viburnum opulus*) on the affected area.

Bogbean, black cohosh, celery seed, meadowsweet, yarrow: A complex capsule or infusion.

Wild yam or guaiacum: Add or use separately when there is severe inflammation.

St. John wort: Oil or ointment can be rubbed into pain areas.

Lavender, marjoram, rosemary, peppermint: A mixture of essential oils for passage.

Buchu and sarsaparilla: For chronic rheumatism.

Paraguay tea (*Ilex paraguayensis*): Infusion.

Fireweed (*Erechtites hieracifolia*): Oil to be applied to painful area.

Burdock root, celery seed, yarrow, thuya: A mixture (infusion/ capsules/tincture) for gout.

Balm of Gilead (*Populus candicans*): Ointment for pain.

Couchgrass (*Agropyrum repens*): Use root in decoction.

Chinese/Oriental Herbs/Formula

Coix Combination: For acute or subacute chronic rheumatic pain, difficulty moving the hands and feet, Arthralgia, muscle pain, paralysis.

Pueraria Combination: For initial stage of neuralgia, chronic rheumatic pain, sore shoulders, facial neuralgia.

Ma-Huang and Coix Combination: For chronic rheumatic pain, neuralgia, muscle pain.

Cinnamon and Atractylodes Combination: For people of little physical strength with no serious muscular distension, a tendency to perspire, oliguria or frequent urination, painful swelling of the limbs, joints.

Rehmannia Eight Formula: For cold arms and legs in the elderly; especially for pain in the lower limbs and lower back.

Clematis and Stephania Combination: For chronic disease with occluded blood, pain in the arms and legs, joint pain, neuralgia, lower- back pain, muscle pain; especially for sciatica and pain in the legs.

Tang-kuei and Anemarrhena Combination: For reddening, swelling, and pain of the muscles around the joints.

Persica and Rhubarb Combination: For people whose normal complexion is dark and reddish, with headaches, constipation, menoxenia, and sciatica.

Tu Huo and Vaeicum Combination: For pain in the loins and knees, chills, numbness, weakness, neuralgia.

Clematis and Carthamus Formula: For chronic multiple joint pain, pain in the arm and leg joints, neuralgia.

Du Huo Ji Sheng Wan - useful for some types of arthritis.