



DONG QUAI EXTRACT

The queen of herbs

If ginseng is the 'King of Herbs' then dong quai is the 'Queen of Herbs.' This revered herb has a 2,000-year history of use and is often referred to as the "female ginseng." Dong quai ranks next to licorice and ginseng in frequency of use in Traditional Chinese Medicine herbal preparations.

Although dong quai was introduced to North Americans by Merck in 1899, it has not been extensively studied by researchers to verify the numerous claims made for it. However, the empirical evidence and historical use of the herb should definitely prompt further research.

In Asia, dong quai, (also known as *Angelica sinensis* and Chinese angelica) is the tonic herb for women. Dr. Pi-Kwang Tsung, former assistant professor of pathology at the University of Connecticut Medical School in Farmington, says dong quai "is the leading chinese herb for gynecological health... Studies show that dang-qui [dong quai] increases red blood cell counts... That's why Chinese physicians give it to women who have just given birth. Childbirth involves blood loss, and dang-qui helps the body replace lost red blood cells." (The Editors of Prevention)

IS IT A PHYTOESTROGEN?

The use of dong quai to treat numerous female disorders goes back at least 2,000 years, leading some to conclude that it works as a phytoestrogen. Research seems to disprove the 'phytoestrogen' theory. "Experiments show that whereas the volatile oil in the root causes relaxation of the uterine muscle, both water and alcohol extracts stimulate uterine contractions; ...Dong quai also normalizes irregular uterine contractions, improving blood flow to the uterus. The actions do not appear to result from estrogenic activity, as dong quai does not produce changes in the ovaries or vaginal tissue." (Foster)

THE ACTIVES THAT MAKE IT WORK

Aromatic compounds in dong quai root are said to relieve smooth muscle spasms, especially in the uterus. Dong quai contains ferulic acid, a natural pain reliever, as well as coumarins, phytosterols, polysaccharides and flavonoids.

Dong quai has an interesting nutrient profile that might account for some of its health-enhancing properties. It is high in cobalt (a constituent of vitamin B12), iron, magnesium and vitamin E.

HELPFUL FOR MENSTRUAL PROBLEMS

As a regulating, balancing tonic herb, dong quai is useful for almost every menstrual problem, from painful menstruation to delayed menstrual cycles. It even plays a role in mitigating PMS symptoms. Renowned herbalist, Rosemary Gladstar comments on dong quai's usefulness: "It is also a good toning herb to use for young women just entering their menstrual cycles. Its highly specific mode of action seems to benefit every woman's problem. It is nonestrogenic in action, yet balances and regulates hormonal production." (Gladstar)

Dong quai is not recommended during menstruation. If you are taking it regularly, use it until one week before menstruating, and resume again at the end of the cycle.

USEFUL FOR MENOPAUSE

Dr. Carolyn DeMarco, author of *Take Charge of Your Body*, recommends dong quai for lessening the discomforts of menopause. Rosemary Gladstar also suggests dong quai for menopause: "It is an excellent herb to help ease women into menopause and is highly recommended for use during menopause if difficulty arises." (Gladstar)

However, dong quai is rarely used alone in Traditional Chinese Medicine. It is usually a prominent part of a formula. We suggest women use dong quai as one component in their herbal repertoire, along with vitex, black cohosh and other beneficial herbs for women.

NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY

Although considered the primary herb for women, dong quai has many other beneficial effects on the body, which makes it useful for everyone. It is an immune system enhancer because it stimulates B and T lymphocyte activity. Dong quai's blood vessel dilating ability can lower blood pressure. The coumarins in dong quai act as vasodilators and antispasmodics. "Dong quai also inhibits platelet aggregation, probably through the presence of ferulic acid." (Mowrey)

Dong quai root was studied in patients who had chronic hepatitis and cirrhosis of the liver. It improved protein metabolism in 60% of the patients. (Chang, *et al.*)

Chinese health care practitioners use dong quai to treat anemia, injuries, migraine headaches and numerous other conditions. Dr. Tsung explains that dong quai increases red

blood cell production. That is why it may be helpful for fatigue as well as anemia because most of us function more efficiently when there are plenty of red blood cells oxygenating the blood.

SAFETY

Dong quai is considered to be very safe in moderation, however the furocoumarins it contains may cause photosensitivity in some persons, resulting in dermatitis. Since coumarins are natural blood thinners, caution may be in order for those currently on blood thinning medication. Although an outstanding herb for women, dong quai should not be used during pregnancy due to its ability to stimulate uterine contractions, unless under the supervision of a health care practitioner.

DOSAGE

Natural Factors, the Canadian leader in standardized herbal extracts, makes dong quai available in easy-to-take capsules that can be taken alone or made into a tea. Unless suggested otherwise by your health care practitioner, one to two capsules (preferably between meals) is the preferred daily dosage.

If serious ailments exist, consult with a knowledgeable health care practitioner prior to use.

Investigate for yourself why dong quai is called the "Queen of Herbs" and benefit from 2,000 years of Chinese healing.

KEY REFERENCES

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