

HEDGEROW HERBALS

The quarterly newsletter from your local herbalist - Julie Dore
Articles, news, recipes and tips for a healthy you

MARCH 2008

FREE

Welcome to the spring edition which includes information on asthma, stress and an armchair plant safari

ASTHMA ATTACK

Asthma can be a frightening and debilitating condition. An attack can be triggered by a number of factors and identifying them is important in the long-term management of the condition. Common ones include allergies to pollen, house dust, animal fur, house mites and certain foods; irritation from cold, smoke, damp, fog and household chemicals; infections or heightened emotions especially stress overtiredness and anxiety.



Elecampane *Inula helenium*

Steroid inhalers treat the symptoms but not the cause and have long term side effects. However, by avoiding or reducing contact with your triggers and adapting other lifestyle changes, you may be able to reduce inhaler use. Keep a food diary to ensure you have no food triggers. Common ones are dairy, wheat, eggs, nuts and shellfish. Avoid mucus-forming foods such as dairy, bananas and orange juice. Other foods that can make things worse are refined sugar, saturated and hydrogenated fats, artificial additives (especially sulphites), salt (as it causes the muscles of airway to contract), aspirin, anti-inflammatory drugs and chlorinated water.

Foods that help against the effects of asthma include unrefined sunflower oil which contains *inulin*, an effective agent against asthma. Quercetin (an antioxidant) improves lung tissue and is found in apples, onions and green tea. Lycopene found in tomatoes, fresh or cooked, has been found to reduce the risk of an attack. Foods rich in vitamin A, C, E, calcium, magnesium and zinc can help as can the essential fatty acids found in fish oils. If stress is a trigger ensure a good dietary intake of vitamin B. Onions, garlic and ginger help open the airways so alleviating attacks.

Other helpful strategies include deep or abdominal breathing exercises especially the Buteyko method. Also useful are sessions of Alexander Technique or Pilates and relaxation techniques such as yoga or meditation. Ensure your immune system is strong to avoid colds. An ioniser that produces negative ions (or a running shower) helps some people.

Thyme *Thymus vulgaris*



Herbs can be used to lessen the severity of attacks & reduce the effect of some triggers. In addition they can strengthen the lungs and reduce mucus. Immune boosting herbs such as Echinacea are vital. The volatile oils in thyme help dilate the bronchials while

hyssop helps expel mucus. Liquorice both soothes the lungs and supports the adrenal glands reducing allergic or stress triggers. Lung tonics include elecampane, horsetail, mullein and plantain. Anti-stress herbs (see below) can reduce attacks when this is a trigger. A medical herbalist can also prescribe strong anti-asthma herbs such as ephedra and lobelia.

SO WHAT IS STRESS?



Stress is any event or group of events that disturbs our equilibrium and it can be perceived as anything that is threatening, harmful, fearful or demanding. Whilst a certain amount is

beneficial, too much unresolved stress is harmful to health. For our distant ancestors the stress response to a sudden threat (the FIGHT or FLIGHT response) was a necessary survival aid but nowadays we rarely flee or fight so all the stress hormones stay pent up in our bodies eventually reeking havoc to both our physical and emotional health.

Stress is categorised into three types:

Psychological – relates to emotional or mental overwork (incl. fear, guilt, anger)

Physical – relates to environmental changes i.e. extreme temperatures, noise, pollution, allergies, inactivity, inadequate light, electromagnetic radiation from TVs, phones, computers etc.

Physiological – relates to our physical condition i.e. lack of sleep, excess exercise, hunger, illness or its treatment, jetlag or shift work

HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M STRESSED?

The trouble is that the range of symptoms is wide but if you are experiencing any of the stressors above plus suffering from a number of the following then it is likely that you are suffering from stress.

EMOTIONALLY we experience the following:

Anxiety, restlessness	Impaired memory and concentration
Irritability, moodiness	Excessive smoking and/or drinking
anger	Compulsive eating
Depression	Fears of rejection & failure
Insecurity	Feelings of guilt, shame or isolation
Inability to make decisions	Avoidance of places or situations
Negative thoughts	
Obsessive or compulsive behaviour	
Loss of libido	
Drug abuse	

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS include:

Recurrent headaches	Dry mouth
Vague aches and pains incl. , chest and stomach pains	Excessive perspiration
Dizziness or faintness	Palpitations or rapid pulse
Pins and needles or numbness	Insomnia
Heartburn or nausea	Flushing
Muscle tension	Diarrhoea
Eczema or psoriasis	Period irregularity
	increased pain
	Fatigue

In the short to medium term, stress suppresses the immune system (increasing the risk of infections), slows down the body's rate of repair, its metabolism and robs the body of vital nutrients. In the long term, stress accelerates ageing, causes weight gain and increases the risk of developing osteoporosis, high blood pressure, heart disease, strokes, cancer, autoimmune & digestive disorders.

Therefore it is vital for our health to control or reduce stress and to heal its harmful effects. Diet, exercise and herbs can make a big difference to the way our bodies cope with stress and hence lessen the debilitating effect it has.

DIET – eat regular meals with the occasional healthy snack to keep blood sugar levels even - this helps you to cope with mental and physical pressures better.

AVOID

- ✗ Foods that contain refined sugar or carbohydrates
- ✗ Excess stimulants such as caffeine (i.e. coffee, tea, chocolate and canned drinks)
- ✗ Excess alcohol and nicotine

ALL OF THESE IN THEMSELVES CAUSE CHEMICAL STRESS TO THE BODY

USEFUL FOODS for stress busting

- ✓ Combine tryptophan rich (chicken, turkey, eggs, cheese, beans, pulses, walnuts) with unrefined carbohydrates (oats, potatoes, wholegrains) to help the brain to synthesise mood enhancing serotonin
- ✓ B vitamins, especially B6 and folic acid, are vital for enabling normal function of the nervous system – found in chicken, lean meat, fish, nuts, pulses, yeast, bananas, grains, nuts, sunflower seeds, broccoli and leafy greens, tomatoes (*NB if you supplement with B vitamins always take them in the morning as they have been known to disrupt sleep*)



Astragalus

- ✓ Omega 3 essential fatty acids can have a calming effect; eat oily fish twice a week
- ✓ Vitamin C has been found to reduce the levels of stress hormones in the blood
- ✓ Stress both depletes minerals and increases the body's needs, so ensure adequate calcium, zinc, magnesium and iron.

EXERCISE - Regular exercise you enjoy, including walking, gardening etc, helps remove the stress hormones from the blood **BUT** do not over exercise as this in itself is a physically stressor. Calming exercise such as yoga, T'ai chi or meditation can improve relaxation.

TAKE STEPS TO CONTROL STRESS

- **List the things that make you stressed** and look at each one and decide how you can avoid, change or tackle it
- Set yourself **realistic goals** and break big problems down into **manageable steps**
- Don't make decisions under the pressure of deadlines but **give yourself time**
- Learn to say **NO** and not feel guilt
- Embrace **patience and imperfection** – an untidy house is preferable to rapid ageing
- **Think positively** about yourself, your abilities and about challenges ahead
- Give yourself **a pat on the back** for a job well done even if others forget
- Be kind to yourself and **reward yourself** with something that relaxes and uplifts
- When stress threatens **breath deeply and slowly**, take time out even if only for a few minutes or better still take a short walk

HERBS FOR STRESS

There is no one herb for treating stress. As a medical herbalist I decide which combination of herbs will suit individual needs. Herbs can help protect the body against the ravages of stress including supporting the immune system e.g. astragalus. Some act as tonics and restoratives to depleted systems, especially the adrenal glands (borage, liquorice or Siberian ginseng), whilst others calm the nervous system and ease muscle tension (chamomile, cramp bark).



Individual symptoms such as anxiety, panic attacks, digestive problems, headaches and depression would also be addressed.

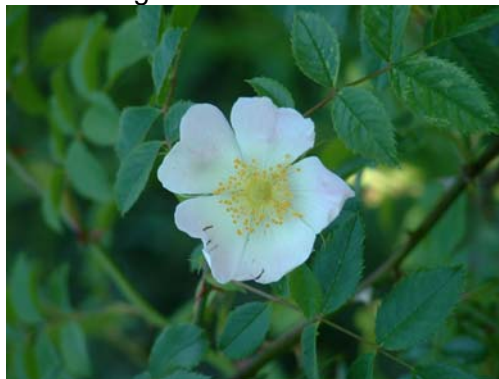
Siberian Ginseng *Eleutherococcus senticosus*

Armchair Plant Safari

If you haven't been able to join one of my popular medicinal plant walks, here are abridged notes on some of the plants you have missed. These are all easily recognisable plants that you will find on a walk in the Cambridgeshire countryside and many are flowering in spring and early summer.

DANDELION *Taraxacum officinale*

One of my top ten medical plants, the leaves act as diuretics and the roots as a liver tonic, mild laxative and blood cleanser. Add young leaves and flowers to salads, and with more vitamin A than carrots, you can also steam and eat the roots as a vegetable.



WILD or DOG ROSE *Rosa canina*

This beautiful climber probably gets its name because the Romans used it to treat rabies. Now it is used for the high vitamin C of the hips. They are used in cough mixes and to strengthen the immune system but can also be useful for diarrhoea and colic. Be careful of the fine irritating hairs in the fruit.

GOOSE GRASS *Galium aparine*

This annoying sticky weed is a relative of the Arabica coffee bush so you can roast those clinging seeds to make coffee. The whole plant can be cooked and eaten like spinach. It is an important plant for the medical herbalist acting as a lymph tonic and overall cleansing plant. It is used in combination with other plants for many skin problems, swollen glands and urinary infections. Hot and bothered after your walk? then rub it under your arms to benefit from the juice's deodorant properties.

STINGING NETTLE *Urtica dioica*

Another of my top ten medicinal plants, nettles are also an excellent source of vitamin A, C, E, folic acid, iron, calcium, potassium and protein. Cooked (like spinach) or dried, nettles lose their sting and make a great tonic plant. Medicinally the leaves are a diuretic, blood cleanser and anti-histamine whilst the roots are used in treating benign prostate problems. The seeds are a restoring tonic to the kidneys. Medieval healers beat patients to try and activate paralysed limbs

but rest assured herbalists do not use them like that anymore!

YARROW *Achillea millefolium*

A wound healer from ancient times. According to Homer yarrow was used by the Greek hero Achilles to treat his men's injuries. A great first aid herb, use a fresh leaf, bruised, to staunch bleeding or pop one up the nose to stop a nose bleed. Herbalists use it to tone blood vessels, improve digestion and relieve cramps. Bathing the head in yarrow tea is supposed to reduce hair loss. Include it in your wedding bouquet for 7 years of happiness (not sure what happens after that!)

HAWTHORN *Crataegus oxyacantha*

A symbol of hope in the Middle Ages this plant is a wonderful tonic to the ageing heart. It can be taken safely long term to improve the health of the heart, helping in cases of arrhythmia, angina, blood pressure and recovery from heart attack. It helps improve circulation and can also help in menopausal flushes. The spring tips were called "bread & cheese" and eaten by country children.

PLANTAIN *Plantago lanceolata*

With a single seed head producing 14,000 seeds it is no wonder this plant has been spread along the highways and byeways of Europe. The Native Americans called it "White Man's Foot" as it appeared wherever Europeans settled. The leaves contain an antibiotic, aucubin. Use crushed or chewed leaves on cuts, burns or stings to prevent infection and aid healing. Its no surprise a herbalist friend of mine calls them Fairy Bandages! It is used for its anti-catarrrhal properties to treat colds, sinusitis and hayfever.



DAISY *Bellis perennis*

The name is a shortening of Day's Eye as the flowers only open during the day but it is another name that tells us about its amazing medical uses, Bruisewort. An ointment made from daisies can be used to aid the healing of bruises, sprains and operations. It is similar to arnica but not endangered and safer (arnica is toxic if taken internally and must never be used on broken skin).

ELDERFLOWER *Sambucus nigra*

There is more folklore about Elder than any other plant - if you burn it you will see the devil, fairies take babies who sleep in elder wood cradles and you must ask permission of the tree before cutting it are just a few! The berries (which must always be cooked) are rich in vitamins and contain anti-viral constituents. The flowers are used to treat colds, hayfever and fevers as well as boosting the immune system.

Inspired, intrigued? Why not join me on a real plant safari this spring or summer when I will be telling you even more fascinating things about the medicinal uses and folklore of plants growing at these beautiful nature reserves. Or try your hand at making your own remedies at a workshop.

DIARY DATES

- **Sunday 27th April** (2pm) at **Fen Drayton Lakes RSPB reserve** phone 01954 233267 to reserve a place - £5 adults, £2 children but 1/2 price for RSPB members
- **Sunday 18th May** (2pm) Walk on the Heath –exploring the medicinal plants growing on **Royston Heath**. Contact the Royston clinic below to reserve a place
- **Sunday 22nd June** 10am-4pm **Wicken Fen** - morning walk and afternoon workshop using plants from the Fen to make medicines. Contact 01353 720274 – booking is essential
- **Sunday 29th June** (2pm) **Milton Country Park** Tickets £5 adults, £3 children – phone 01223 420060 to reserve a place
- **Sunday 6th July** Herbcraft workshop on herbal first aid at **Royston Health Centre**

THIS NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED 3 TIMES A YEAR SO LOOK OUT FOR THE NEXT EDITION OF HEDGEROW-HERBAL NEWS WHICH WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM JULY 2008

Visit the Hedgerow Herbals website www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk.

For advice, consultations etc contact **Julie Dore** at

Physic Oakington Therapy Centre Oakington Road, Girton, CB3 0QH. Telephone 01223 237459, or email reception@physic.co.uk.

St Ives Complementary Health, Armes Corner, London Rd, St Ives Cambs PE27 5ES 01480 492088

Royston Complementary Health Centre, 31c Market Hill, Royston, Herts. SG8 9JS 01763 247440