

HERBAL TREATMENT OF MIGRAINES

Q. I have heard that the herb Feverfew is good for treating migraine headaches. What is the best way to take it and are there any other herbs that can help?

A. Feverfew is a herb that has been traditionally used, as its name suggests, to cure fevers, and also to relieve arthritis pain. The leaves are collected when the plant is in flower. More recently, clinical trials have shown it can reduce the severity and frequency of migraines especially if the herb is taken over a period of a few months. Other symptoms of migraine such as nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to noise and light were also shown to have improved. You can take the dried, powdered herb in capsules or as a tincture. Some people find chewing 3 or 4 of the fresh leaves is most effective but it could perhaps cause an allergic reaction (mouth ulcers) and for this reason you could eat them between slices of bread in a Feverfew sandwich! Natural substances in the plant act on the blood vessels, which are affected when you suffer a migraine attack. Interactions with anti-coagulant drugs are possible so get advice from a qualified medical herbalist or your G.P.

I would advise anyone prone to migraines to find the underlying cause with the help of a qualified health practitioner. You can then decide on the best form of treatment.

Common causes or 'triggers' are food allergy/intolerance, emotional changes, too little or too much sleep, hormonal changes, withdrawal from certain drugs and sun exposure or changes in the weather.

Food and drinks containing substances called amines, for example, mature cheeses, pickles, cured meats, citrus fruits, red wine and caffeinated drinks, can trigger an attack. Not everyone agrees that chocolate triggers migraines. You can try an elimination diet to find your own sensitivities. Eating foods rich in omega 3 fatty acids such as salmon and tuna may help to avoid the spasms to the blood vessels linked to migraines. Increasing your magnesium and calcium intake will help maintain healthy blood vessels and reduce muscle tension. Many herbal remedies help to keep the digestive system healthy and help your body deal with intolerances and allergies. Dandelion and Plantain, for example, are very gentle.

Relaxation therapies along with herbs can help with stress and emotional problems. Tonic herbs support the adrenal glands involved in helping your body adapt to stress and herbal 'nervines' support your nervous system and help reduce pain. Borage, Liquorice and Ginseng are adrenal 'supporters' and Chamomile, Valerian, Lavender, Rosemary and Oats are nervines. A qualified medical herbalist can prescribe several pain-

relieving herbs, depending on your particular requirements, but you could try teas or capsules of Ginger or Chilli pepper for mild relief. If the cause is hormone imbalance, there are herbs to re-adjust, such as Agnus castus.

It is worth having a check-up with a qualified health practitioner to make sure your symptoms are those of migraine and not some other condition. It is advisable to do so *before* taking any herbal remedies.

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