



Glenda Bell, ryt 500

ASM Yoga Therapist

www.GlendaBellYoga.com

530-409-2997

Herbs that May help with pain management...

shared with us from Jim McDonald, Herbalist... www.herbcraft.org/backpain.html

Exceptions are noted in their summaries. And of course, remember the foundational role of magnesium.

cramp bark *viburnum opulus*, *v. prunefolium*, *v. acerfolium*

Cramp Bark, as its name clearly implies, is used to treat cramping. While many herbal antispasmodics can be very specific in regards to the kind of cramps they work best on, the beauty and virtue of Cramp Bark is that it possesses a broadly effective relaxant action that works throughout the body to reduce muscle tension and reactivity. Though small, frequent doses do work, I find its action most effective when taken in doses of around 30 drops of tincture. I often alternate this with more specific remedies, taking these more frequently, and Cramp Bark every two or three doses.

black cohosh *cimicifuga racemosa*

Though Black Cohosh has been pigeon holed as a “menopause herb” by supplement company marketing, it excels at treating muscle pain characterized by significant stiffness and a dull, achy, tender sensation. I have used a combination of Black Cohosh and Arnica tincture (not homeopathic but herbal) and find that the two together taken in small frequent doses are very effective at reducing muscle reactivity. Though Arnica is not properly an antispasmodic, it does act decidedly on muscles, relieving inflammation and increasing circulation to them. It may be worth noting that I feel that Black Cohosh tincture should be made from the fresh plant. While preparations made from the dried root may also be effective, I don’t think that they work as well, nor do I think that they possess the fullness of activity that the fresh plant brings to a preparation. 5-15 drops is a good dose range; I feel that larger doses of this herb are unnecessary.

lobelia *lobelia inflata*

Lobelia is a powerful antispasmodic, indicated by severe spasm. It doesn’t seem to work so well as a preventive, and so would not be an herb for regular use, but rather help to resolve spasm when the muscles are seized up and just won’t let go. To this end, it can be very effective; I know of a woman here in Michigan that has used it to address grand mal seizures, and said it has worked better than anything she’s ever seen used. Lobelia, in large doses, can have an emetic effect – it can make a person throw up, but the tincture taken in small doses is unlikely to produce this result. It also has a reputation of being dangerous, and some books have suggested that overdoses can prove fatal. This is, though, blatantly untrue, and although the story of how this misinformation got started is very interesting, it’s too long to report here. 1-10 drops of lobelia can do the trick; start low, and work your way up if needed.

kava kava *piper methysticum*

Kava Kava is a very effective remedy for relaxing tension, and it works both on the mind and the muscles. I very often use it when people are holding their emotional or mental tension physically, but it can also be useful when the physical tension of an injury is causing a lot of mental anxiety and unrest. While I think Kava poses no problems when taken frequently, it’s an herb I’d restrict to use as needed to deal with the anxiety attending injury, and not the mainstay of treatment. Also, I do think kava works rather nice in larger doses, anywhere from 30 to 90 drops (1 to 3 “squirts” of tincture).

nerve pain...

Nerve pain can be distinguished from muscle pain by certain characteristics. Pain that involves numbness, tingling, “shooting” or “searing” along the length of a limb indicates to us that the nerves are involved. While there is certainly an overlap in the herbs that treat muscular and nerve pain, the following are among the most effective:

saint john's wort *hypericum perforatum*

Like Black Cohosh, Saint John's Wort has been labeled an "herbal antidepressant" and few people know that it is an incredible remedy for injured nerves. Saint John's Wort seems to effectively restore the function of injured nerves, whether the injury has impaired their function (causing numbness, tingling and impaired sensation) or induced excessive reactivity (shooting and searing pains along the length of a nerve, as in sciatica, which it is specific for). Saint John's Wort not only helps to resolve the pain of nerve injuries, and probably the inflammation as well, but it also appears to build up and restore damaged or poorly functioning nerve cells to proper function; what herbalists call a trophorestorative. Saint John's Wort helps to relax muscles as well, though its actions on the nerves remedy predominate. 5-15 drop doses are effective, more can be taken if needed. External applications of an infused oil can also be astoundingly in their effect. Dried Saint John's Wort loses much of its virtues however; look for preparations made from the fresh plant.

It must be noted that Saint John's Wort does interact with certain medications, causing them to be cleared from the body more rapidly. Because of this, it must be used with awareness and not used with drugs it may interact with. Be aware that it does not act with all drugs, but only those that are processed through certain detoxification channels in the body. Herbalist Jonathan Treasure explains the mechanism behind these interactions thoroughly here:

www.herbological.com/images/downloads/SJW.pdf

jamaican dogwood *piscidia erythrina*

Jamaican Dogwood is a very effective and unique remedy for pain. It has an action on both muscular and nerve pain, and when the tincture is applied topically, it can produce a topical anesthetic action. I've used Jamaican Dogwood when there is a combination of tight muscle constriction and very sensitive nerve pain. I've found it very effective as well when mental tension causes the muscles to lock up and not give. Though Jamaican Dogwood can be toxic in large doses, the large doses are measured in ounces, and not drops, and as the eclectic herbalist Finley Ellingwood says, it may "truly be called a harmless nerve sedative, indicated in the three following conditions: (1) spasmodic affections; (2) neuralgic affections; (3) cerebral excitation." Dosage range would be 5-30 drops, using 30 if needed, not from the start.

prickly ash *xanthoxylum americanum*

Prickly Ash tincture is sometimes, though unfortunately not quite always, amazingly effective for treating very severe, agonizing nerve pain. This would be pain of the searing and shooting variety - like an electric current - that doesn't go away and has the person either perpetually shifting or writhing around trying to find a position that makes the pain feel less intense. It does little for muscle pain and spasm, though. Like the muscular remedies, small frequent doses are far more effective than larger, in frequent ones. 5-10 drops should do, if it's going to work.

sweet clover *melilotus officinalis, m. alba*

Though I have not personally used either extensively, both White and Yellow Sweet Clover have been used to treat nerve pain, specifically when spinal nerve injuries are causing rather dreadful headaches. Upper Peninsula herbalist Andrea Corpolongo has used it and found it to be especially effective for headaches & migraines, taken immediately upon sensing their onset. King's American Dispensatory states that "Many observers have found it peculiarly effective in certain painful disorders, particularly neuralgias of long standing and associated with debility." Harvey Wickes Felter adds, "Melilotus is a remedy for pain associated with a sensation of coldness of the extremities and marked tenderness, lameness, or soreness to the touch." 5-15 drop doses should be sufficient.

nettle *urtica dioica, u. urens*

Nettle, in regards to addressing joint injuries, can be remarkable when the fresh plant is used to sting the area over the injury. This use, called "urtication", was once traditionally used to address injuries resulting in impaired nerve function, loss of sensation and paralysis. I've also used it to address inflammation in joints; it is specifically useful in tendonitis and other repetitive stress injuries, and has been used effectively in various forms of arthritis as well. Probably, it works by calling blood to the area affected. Because the sting can be uncomfortable, people have shunned this use, but I have found the long term benefits greatly outweigh the short term discomfort.

inflammation...

Inflammation can also be a cause of pain, though its initial occurrence is really a part of the body's healing response. The "heat" of inflammation is generated by an increase in activity in the area affected. So, when we injure ourselves, the body increases the cellular activity in that area to heal itself. When inflammation of a joint becomes chronic, this is a sign that some necessary function of the healing process cannot be completed; so we see again that it is a means the body uses to communicate with us. It may be that we are deficient in some essential nutrient, such as Omega 3 EFAs, or that there is a lack of lubrication in the joint. Chronic inflammation may also result from autoimmune activity or a food allergy. When we use suppressive anti-inflammatory medications - or even certain herbs - we suppress the healing response of the body, and this can perpetuate the injury as well, even as the inflammation itself is negated. Thankfully, most anti-inflammatory herbs do not act suppressively, but change the conditions in the tissues so that the healing process completes itself, and returns to a state of health.

Most of the herbal anti-inflammatories will be discussed in detail elsewhere, so here I will simply list them along with the tissues they seem to affect most. Some herbs possess a systemic action, which broadens their scope but also limits the specificity of their action.

🌿 Black Cohosh: *muscles*

🌿 Arnica: *muscles*

🌿 Saint John's Wort: *muscles and nerves*

🌿 Jamaican Dogwood: *muscles and nerves*

🌿 Sweet Clover: *nerves*

🌿 Solomon's Seal (both True and False): *tendons, cartilage and connective tissues*

🌿 Teasel: *muscles, tendons, cartilage and connective tissues*

🌿 Salicin-containing herbs (Willow, Wintergreen, Aspen, Birch, Meadowsweet): *systemic*

🌿 Licorice: *systemic*

🌿 Ginger: *systemic*

🌿 Turmeric: *systemic*

lubrication of joints & tissues...

One cause of inflammation can be a lack of lubrication in the joints. A foundational cause of this can be nutrient deficiency, especially a lack of Omega 3 EFAs. These, by providing oils, give tissues pliancy and resiliency, and make cells more resistant to damage. Another cause, specifically in synovial joints, hinges around the production and quality of synovial fluid in the joints. If, for some reason, the production of this fluid is impaired, there will not be adequate lubrication in the joint, and as a result friction and abrasion will result in inflammation. In such instances, using an anti-inflammatory drug that inhibits the body's inflammatory response is inherently short sighted, since it allows the cause of the condition to remain unaddressed and further structural damage to take place.

The role of herbs on the lubrication of joints and the production of synovial fluid is predominantly founded on empirical observation; which standard medical process does not, for the most part, value as a means of discerning legitimacy. Nonetheless, the results that practitioners have obtained using these plants speaks volumes. On the whole, plants acting on lubrication needn't be used as frequently as antispasmodics or herbs used for nerve pain. 3-5 doses a day is usually sufficient, and 2 will often do, if not optimal

solomon's seal *polygonatum biflorum*, and various other *polygonatum* species

I have found Solomon's Seal to be, without a doubt, among the most valuable herbs for addressing joint injuries of all kinds. Solomon's Seal seems to have a remarkable ability to restore proper lubrication in the joints, and I believe also helps restore pliancy to tendons and ligaments by supplying moisture to them if they are atrophied. It is

specifically indicated for tendonitis and other repetitive motion injuries. While nothing works all the time in all cases, it has been my experience and that of others I know who use it that Solomon's Seal almost always helps a condition, and sometimes does so miraculously. Though I can only speculate, I think that in joints it acts directly of the synovial glands to restore proper lubrication. I have frequently seen and experienced Solomon's Seal completely resolve that sensation of friction, grinding, or clicking in joints, and on a number of occasions see this result within a few minutes of a single dose of tincture. This is not always the case, though, and an immediate response should not be expected outright. Daily, consistent use of the tincture provides optimal results. Solomon's Seal, as noted above, seems to act as an anti-inflammatory on almost all of the connective tissues (though I don't feel that it has a pronounced action on the muscles), this end being achieved by restoring proper lubrication, which both supplements the deficiency and acts protectively to reduce friction on the tissues. Small doses of tincture work quite well; I tend to use 5-10 drops, though Matthew Wood, from whom I learned about this plant, uses 3-5.

I have used both the tincture internally and the infused oil externally quite a bit. I'm often asked if the tea will work as well as the tincture, and the honest answer is that I haven't used it and so don't really know. One consideration about using tea is that it will require a *lot* more root than the tincture, and since Solomon's Seal is difficult to find in commerce (I can confidently say that there probably isn't a single store in SE Michigan that has Solomon's Seal and I only know of a few in the country).

mullein *verbascum thapsus*

Mullein is mostly thought of as a "cough herb", but is, like Solomon's Seal, among the best musculoskeletal remedies I know of. While both the leaf and root can be used, I have the most experience with, and am partial to, the root. To be honest, I'm not entirely sure that Mullein works by affecting synovial fluids, though this is Matthew Wood's hypothesis: "It has a moistening, lubricating effect on the synovial membranes... so that it is hydrating to the spine and joints. It is often indicated in back injuries. People think they are untreatable and incurable, but an increase the synovial fluids will make the spine more pliable and comfortable. The vertebra will slip back into place more readily, pain and inflammation will decrease and the condition will get better." So, that's his thought. What I know of mullein root (Matt uses the leaves) is that it is one of the most effective means of addressing back problems caused by or resulting in misalignment. Whether or not it's working via lubrication, Mullein Root has helped me immensely when my spine's been kinked and I couldn't straighten up, and I've repeatedly seen it work well for clients and students as well. It seems to be most effective before the muscles react to the misalignment, and I've seen and experienced numerous instances where a single dose allow the person (occasionally myself) to just straighten right up. I think it is specific to misalignment resulting from herniated discs, as well as in treating sciatica resulting from misalignment. In acute cases, with all the nerve and muscle reactions that go along with them it need to be used more long term and supportively with other herbs, but after the acute phase has past and the back is no longer in "crisis" mode but still weak and not wholly stable, Mullein Root on its own can be immensely helpful. I think of it among the most essential remedies to restore spinal strength and integrity. 5-15 drops is a good dose; you can also make a tea from the roots.

fluid stagnation...

Another factor affecting lubrication is a stagnation of fluids in the joints. Since synovial fluid exists in a small, encapsulated space, stagnation is not likely. But other fluids, including cerebrospinal fluid, blood and lymph are more prone to impaired flow.

black cohosh *cimicifuga racemosa*

Black Cohosh, in addition to having an anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic action on the muscles, seems to possess a unique lubricating action on the spine. Matthew Wood, who has shown this plant to be among the best herbs in treating both recent and old whiplash cases, suggests that the injury causes a stagnation, or impaired flow, of the cerebrospinal fluid. We can think of the injury of whiplash as resulting in something similar to a kinked hose. Using this analogy, we can recognize that not only does the kink affect nerve function, but the ability of the cerebrospinal fluid to properly lubricate the spinal cord. Matthew Wood and Lise Wolff, both Minnesotan herbalists, have used Black Cohosh in whiplash extensively, and I have seen good results from it as well, though I have less experience with whiplash. If it seems to work, but not fully, a bit of Lobelia can be added to enhance its function. 5-15 drop doses are sufficient, and (again) I feel that Black Cohosh should be avoided in larger doses.

yarrow *achillea millefolium*

Yarrow acts specifically on the blood, and possesses the unique ability to staunch bleeding, to break up and disperse congested blood and to dispel stagnation and impaired circulation, despite that these uses seem contradictory. It is quite appropriate, if strangely nebulous, to say “Yarrow knows what to do with the blood”.

These unique multifaceted actions make Yarrow an invaluable ally in addressing any circulatory stagnation resulting from or concurrent with an injury. Yarrow oil or tincture applied topically over an area will both increase circulation in that area, and break up and congealed or stagnant blood. It may also be used internally in small doses of the tincture; 5-10 drops. The infusion works as well, both internally and as a compress. I’ll elaborate a bit more on Yarrow when discussing injuries.

arnica arnica montana and related species

Arnica increases the circulation of blood to muscles, and within and around a joint. It can be applied topically as a tincture, salve or an infused oil, and also taken internally. Arnica, in large doses can be very irritating to tissues and thus has been considered toxic. In appropriate doses of 5-10 drops, likelihood of aggravations are rare. Many people use homeopathic arnica for this reason, and because the uses of the two forms are almost identical. I have not, though, found the homeopathic form to be as effective as the herbal. I’ll elaborate more on Arnica when discussing injuries below.

calendula calendula officinalis

Calendula is a broadly acting herb, but here we’ll stick to its uses as a lymphatic. Lymphatic herbs are used to decongest or otherwise improve the flow of the lymph within the body. Lymphatic fluid is responsible for supplying the cells with nutrition, cleaning up metabolic wastes, acting as the environment in which immune activity takes place and pretty much makes up most of the interstitial fluid of the body. Lymphatic fluid is not circulated by a pump as is the blood (though it does travel with the blood on its way to the cells), but rather relies on movement of the body to circulate. Inactivity - which more or less comes along with most injuries - impairs lymphatic flow, and thus an herb like Calendula can be useful to prevent stagnation. I’ll elaborate more on calendula (déjà vu?) when discussing injuries below. Dose of tincture would be 5-30 drops.

structural integrity...

Of course, when considering healing from back and joint injuries, we must acknowledge the foundational importance of the strength and nutrition of the bones and connective tissues. If these are weak, then they will have difficulty healing, and will be prone to re-injury. The importance of nutrition has already been covered, but I would like to again stress that excess calcium intake and the exclusion of the nutrients needed to properly absorb and utilize it should be thoroughly considered. There are certain herbs that we can add as offering a nutritive influence...

horsetail equisetum arvense and related species

Horsetail species are probably the richest sources of silica available to us via plants. They contain so much as not to be edible, and their common name “scouring rush” refers to their use as an abrasive to scour pots and pans. Since silica, as covered above, is so important in its role of providing a matrix for all connective tissues, improving their strength and resilience, horsetail is a very valuable ally. Steeping a good handful of the plant in boiling water will extract a very bioavailable form of silica. As an infusion, Horsetail may be combined with Oatstraw (also high in silica), Nettles, Raspberry leaf and other nutrient rich herbs to provide mineral nutrition. Strangely, though alcohol is a very poor solvent for silica, the tincture of the fresh plant seems, nonetheless, to afford many of the benefits we would ascribe to silica. Why this is I don’t know, but perhaps the plant not only supplies silica in its whole form, but also improves the metabolism and utilization of silica. Dosage of tincture would be 5-15 drops, 2-3 times a day. The infusion would probably be preferable as a form of nourishment; look to thin hair with splitting ends and brittle nails as signs of silica deficiency.

royal fern osmunda regalis

I’m still getting to know Royal Fern, but was turned onto it by Matthew Wood. It’s a very seldom used plant, more obscure even than Mullein root or Solomon’s Seal, but what little information can be found on it makes reference to its usefulness as a restorative medicine for bones and joints. Eclectic herbalist Finley Ellingwood wrote of it “With some physicians this agent is very popular in the treatment of... diseases of the bones from malnutrition, weakness of the osseous structure, rickets... It is also useful in weak back, especially in those cases where, with weakness of the muscular structure of the back, there are symptoms of incipient disease of the spinal vertebrae. It has been used

also in subluxations.” Matt has said that it’s the only thing that has reliably helped his back pain. Dose would be 5-15 drops, 3 or so times a day.

structural damage-breaks and tears

There are myriad herbs that can be used to address the damage that physical trauma inflicts on the body. Probably, no other modality offers as many virtues or as many options. Among the most effective, I offer...

comfrey symphytum officinalis

Comfrey possesses a remarkable ability to facilitate rapid healing of virtually all tissues, and has been known and revered for long ages for this ability. It will heal broken skin, broken bones, torn muscles, tendons or ligaments, and just about anything else with great speed. Recently, though, the presence of potentially liver toxic pyrrolizidine alkaloids in Comfrey have prompted some people to avoid its use. While there is not a lot of clear cut evidence that liver failure or other harm is directly associated with the use of Comfrey, very good herbalists have opinions on both sides of the debate. I urge you, if you choose to use Comfrey, to look at the points presented on either side and make your own educated decision. For my part, I do not think that, taken in small doses and in limited duration, the use of Comfrey in healing injuries poses more risk than the benefits it offers. One thing I would say, though, is that the quick pace at which Comfrey heals may cause problems; for instance, healing bones together before they are well aligned (in this case I’d mix it with Mullein). Some herbalists have also voiced suspicions that Comfrey may in some cases produce calcifications around a fracture it’s healing. I have not seen this, but offer it as a consideration.

arnica arnica montana and related species

Arnica is among the premier herbs for treating injury. Applied topically, it summons the blood and Vital Force of the body to the injury and will help ease swelling, inflammation, pain, and bruising. Taken internally it helps repair and ease the pain resulting from torn muscles and connective tissues, either from a sprain or from overzealous exercise (think about the achy feeling after a workout, or the first day of heavy duty yardwork in the spring); I’ve taken 5 drops before bed after a hard days labor to ease that sore, achy, “I did too much” feeling that often comes the next morning. Remember, in its herbal form Arnica should be used in small doses of 5-10 drops. Also, because of its action of summoning blood to the site it is applied topically to, it should not be used on broken skin. In such cases, think Yarrow.

solomon’s seal polygonatum biflorum, and various other polygonatum species

Solomon’s Seal is very effective at both healing broken bones (I sometimes call it “bone glue”) and addressing injuries to tendons and ligaments. It has a unique ability to adjust the tension of tendons, helping relax them if they’re too tight, and tighten them if they’ve been stretched out. It will also heal tears, and for this would combine well with Comfrey, Teasel and/or Horsetail.

saint john’s wort hypericum perforatum

Saint John’s Wort is very effective at potentiating the healing response to trauma. If the infused oil or salve is applied topically, it really does help improve the recovery quite a bit, acting on the muscles, nerves, and pain. To this end, it is very often combined with Arnica, Calendula and Yarrow, as they all compliment each other’s actions.

horsetail equisetum arvense and related species

Horsetail is probably one of the best remedies to help heal broken bones and, particularly, torn cartilage, tendons and ligaments. The tincture in 5-15 drop doses works quite well, as does the tea.

yarrow achillea millefolium

As mentioned above, Yarrow helps both to stop bleeding and also to disperse congealed blood, making it very important in the treatment of bruising. It can be applied topically as a poultice (the fresh leaves and/or flowers crushed up), a tincture, an infused oil, a salve, or a compress made from the tea. Yarrow stops bleeding, even severe bleeding, remarkably well. It is also markedly antiseptic.

calendula calendula officinalis

As an injury remedy, Calendula helps the body clean up the debris that results from trauma to a joint. It helps to resolve the swelling of injuries by facilitating lymphatic cleanup. A tea can be used as a compress for external application, as can an oil, tincture or salve.

teasel dipsacus sylvestris

Teasel root has been used to treat torn connective tissues, and may be among the best remedies for torn muscles. It possesses an anti-inflammatory action on virtually all joint tissues, and David Winston has spoken of its usefulness in treating narrowing of the vertebral discs. Dose of tincture: 5-15 drops.

goldenseal hydrastis canadensis

Goldenseal tincture can be applied topically, or taken in very small (1-3 drop) doses internally to help strengthen weak and injured spinal discs. This is another use I learned from Matthew Wood, and know works, but have no real sense of how. When I first tried Goldenseal for a herniated disc, I could immediately feel it working. I think it has a very important place in the treatment of disc injuries, as well as Matt's other uses, torn bursa and torn meniscus. Please though, if using Goldenseal, *only* use organically cultivated root. This plant is endangered in the wild because of its popularity as an herbal medicine.

There are always, in any therapy or treatment, limitations, and while the use of herbs to address back and joint injuries has constantly and repeatedly amazed me, there are still times when my best efforts don't work well enough, and others when I just don't know quite what to do. In some of these cases, the options afforded by modern medicine, which can be so inappropriate as an initial option, may provide the best choice to make. If this is the case, it makes no sense whatsoever to deny their usefulness, or to feel like turning to those options means you have in any way failed or been failed by more holistic alternatives. Holism is by nature inclusive; even of conventional medical practice.

shared with us from Jim McDonald, Herbalist... www.herbcraft.org/backpain.html



Glenda Bell, ryt 500
ASM Yoga Therapist
www.GlendaBellYoga.com
530-409-2997