**bacopa: brains & beauty**

Known as one of the best herbs for better mental function, bacopa also offers beauty benefits

By Kim Erickson

What's the hottest new beauty trend from Bollywood? Centuries-old herbal ingredients borrowed from Ayurveda, the ancient Indian method of holistic healing. One Ayurvedic herb that's finding its way into skin and hair care products is bacopa.

This delicate creeping flower is best known for its brain benefits, but bacopa's potent antioxidant properties have caught the attention of cosmetic manufacturers for its potential as a skin-saving free radical fighter. Some are even adding bacopa to hair and body treatments, making it a pampering bioactive that can boost beauty from head to toe.

What It Is

Bacopa, also known as water hyssop or brahmi, grows wild throughout India, where it has been used since at least the sixth century AD as a tonic for the nervous system and heart. Packed with phytosterols and flavonoids, bacopa's real claim to fame is bacopasides—the saponins thought to repair damaged neurons in the brain.

What It Does

In-vitro research has shown that bacopa protects against DNA damage in human fibroblasts—cells that form connective tissue. More recently, lab studies suggest that bacopa also encourages cancer cells to die in connective tissue. If future studies support these findings, cosmetic manufacturers may look to bacopa as protection against skin damage, premature wrinkles, and age spots.

But skin isn't the only place you'll find bacopa's beauty benefits.

Women throughout India have long used bacopa for luxuriously long, shiny hair. Known as brahmi oil, bacopa is infused into either sesame or coconut oil. This light moisturizing oil is applied to the roots of hair and gently massaged into the scalp to stimulate and revitalize it. Brahmi oil is also wonderful in a warm bath or used during massage, especially if you have dry, damaged skin.

**Bonus Benefits**

No one is quite sure how bacopa influences neurological chemistry—and research is still in the early stages—but studies show a clear link between bacopa and the brain. One recent double-blind trial of 68 healthy participants found that those taking 150 mg of bacopa twice daily for 90 days experienced a significant improvement in their working memory compared to those taking a placebo.

Earlier studies discovered that bacopa reduced anxiety while helping the mind learn quickly and retain information. And because of bacopa's protective effect on neurons, some researchers believe it may help prevent and treat dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Less well-known are bacopa's gastrointestinal benefits, especially for people suffering from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). A clinical trial of 169 patients with IBS compared the effects of an Ayurvedic preparation containing bacopa to standard drug therapy. At the end of the trial, those participants with IBS characterized by constipation did better on the drugs. But the subjects suffering from IBS with diarrhea got more relief from the ayurvedic therapy—probably because of bacopa's ability to ease spasms in the gastrointestinal tract.

Where to Find It

If you want the benefits of bacopa, think both inside and out. Try taking 200 to 400 mg of a bacopa supplement to boost cognition and memory while potentially protecting your brain from age-related dementia. And also look for the herb in personal care products.

**Product Examples** (left to right):

- Garden of Life Ocean's 3 Better Brain is an innovative new supplement that combines the powers of omega-3 fatty acids with herbs such as bacopa and vinpocetine.
- Tattva's Herbs Supercritical Brahmi Hair Oil helps rejuvenate dry, dull locks with the help of bacopa. Also try: Hesh Pharma "Hesh" Brahmi Hair Powder.
- Himalaya Pure Herbs Bacopa Mental Alertness is one of the first herb supplements to carry the USDA Organic seal. And the new formula is free of fillers, including magnesium stearate.