WHAT IT DOES BEST: Feverfew is used primarily to prevent migraine headaches.

BACKGROUND: Feverfew has been used for centuries to relieve menstrual disorders, fevers, headaches, psoriasis, arthritis and other inflammatory conditions.

RECENT FINDINGS: Feverfew is mainly considered a preventive measure, but some studies indicate this herb may also help reduce the severity of migraine headaches.

A recent trial showed a special extract of feverfew known as MIG-99 significantly reduced the frequency of migraine headaches, although there was no significant difference in the duration of attacks. In this placebo-controlled, double-blind study published in the November 2005 issue of the medical journal Cephalalgia, participants in the non-placebo group were given 6.25mg of MIG-99 three times daily. The decrease in migraine frequency began after one month and was maximal after two months of treatment. For participants experiencing an average of 4.76 attacks per 28-day period, the frequency was reduced by 1.9 attacks.

A smaller study published in the September 2002 issue of Cephalalgia produced similar results, though migraine frequency reduction occurred only in participants experiencing at least four migraine headaches per month. And an earlier British study reported some lessening of intensity in migraines, along with decreased frequency.

WHAT'S THE ACTIVE INGREDIENT? Feverfew is thought to contain numerous active compounds. Which of these exert antimigraine effects is unclear, but parthenolide has sometimes been suggested as one of the components responsible. Parthenolide inhibits the release of inflammatory compounds in the body and prevents excess clumping of blood platelets (platelet aggregation).

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS: According to some studies, mouth ulcerations may occur with feverfew use. Other minor side effects include stomach upset and nervousness.

IS IT SAFE TO TAKE WHILE PREGNANT OR NURSING? Feverfew is not recommended during pregnancy or while breast-feeding.

ARE THERE ANY DRUG INTERACTIONS? There are no well-documented drug interactions. Although it has not been established, feverfew may have blood-thinning effects; therefore, people on anticoagulant medications, including aspirin, should consult their physician.

WHICH TYPE AND HOW MUCH? Take 125mg of feverfew leaf daily. Look for capsules or tablets of freeze-dried extract standardized to contain at least 0.4 percent parthenolide.
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