**Herb Profile: Dong Quai**

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**Dong quai (Angelica sinensis)**

This herb is commonly used in the Orient to regulate menstrual function and tone female organs.

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**Health claims**

Dong quai (Angelica sinensis) is one of the world's best menopause and perimenopause herbs. It has been used extensively in China to regulate menses, after childbirth and stopping birth control pills, as a blood tonic and mild sedative, as well as for abdominal pains, angina, chills, hypertension and headaches.

**How does it work?**

Contrary to popular belief, dong quai has no estrogenic effect. It's completely safe for women going through menopause who have concerns about estrogenic tumours. Dong quai both contracts and relaxes uterine muscles, a dual effect underlying its effectiveness in regulating menstrual complaints. Another mechanism is its ability to enhance body metabolism and oxygen utilization in the liver. As all hormones are ultimately cleared from the body via the liver, this greatly benefits metabolism and endocrine function. Dong quai also protects the liver from toxic materials.

**What evidence supports its use?**

Dong quai has a clinical history that’s several thousand years old. It was first recorded in Chinese literature in Collection of Commentaries on the *Materia Medica* in 500 BC. Its tonic action is most seen in its ability to “tone the blood.” This concept from traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) refers to much more than anemia and can include both psychological and physiological issues. “Deficient blood” in the TCM sense has symptoms of low
Many individuals are allergic to mould's travelling cells, called spores. But it can be fairly difficult to pin down the exact cause of your strange allergic reactions—because most often you don't even know you have mould lurking around your home. Potential health effects and symptoms associated with mould exposure include various allergic reactions such as hives, asthma and other respiratory complaints.

What is mould, anyway?
Fungi are ubiquitous on our planet—and mould is simply one type of fungus. Fungi are found in every ecological niche and are necessary for the breakdown and recycling of organic materials that allow plants and animals to live. Included in the fungi group are yeasts, mould and mildew, as well as large mushrooms, puffballs and bracket fungi that grow on dead trees.

Mould spores are almost always present, ready to land on and germinate in any damp materials. Next thing, you're itchy and sneezing or trying to catch your breath.

Health effects generally fall into four categories: allergic reactions, infection, irritation (of mucous membranes, for instance) and toxicity.

Sometimes a problem derives from the volatile organic compounds (VOCs) produced through metabolism. So long as the mould is there, it can be emitting these toxic compounds—and causing your family health problems and sensitivity responses.

Then there's the smell. A scent described as "mouldy" or "musty" indicates the presence of mould. And...okay...stop.

By now you're beginning to feel that itching, burning and crawling skin—and you probably don't even have mould. But if you do, how do you get rid of it?

Mould occurs because of moisture problems. When excess mould growth occurs, you've got to get rid of the moisture. Without dampness, mould moves on. Here are the top ways to control moisture in your home and prevent, or get rid of, mould:

- Fix leaks and seepage. If water is entering the house from the outside, your options range from simple landscaping to extensive excavation and waterproofing. The ground should slope away from the house. Water in the basement can result from the lack of gutters or a water flow toward the house. Water leaks in pipes or around tubs and sinks can provide a place for biological pollutants to grow.
- Put a plastic cover over dirt in crawlspaces to prevent moisture from coming in from the ground. Be sure crawlspaces are well ventilated.
- Use exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchens to remove moisture to the outside—not into the attic. Vent your clothes dryer to the outside.
- Turn off appliances such as humidifiers or kerosene heaters, if you notice moisture on windows and other surfaces.
- Use dehumidifiers and air conditioners, especially in hot, humid climates, to reduce moisture in the air. But be sure that the appliances themselves don't become sources of biological pollutants.
- Raise the temperature of cold surfaces where moisture condenses. Use insulation or storm windows. A storm window installed on the inside works better than one installed on the outside. Open doors between rooms, especially doors to closets—which may be colder than the rooms—to increase circulation. Circulation carries heat to the cold surfaces. Increase air circulation by using fans and by moving furniture from wall corners to promote air and heat circulation. Be sure your house has a source of fresh air and can expel excessive moisture from the home.
- Pay special attention to carpet on concrete floors. Carpet can absorb moisture and serve as a place for mould to grow. Use area rugs, which can be taken up and washed often. If carpet is to be installed over a concrete floor, it may be necessary to use a vapour barrier—plastic sheeting—over the concrete; and cover that with subflooring—insulation covered with plywood—to prevent a moisture problem.

If you're just not the allergic type and you haven't noticed any musty odours, don't panic. Just keep your eyes open for moisture or any kind of encrusted growth in damp areas. But if you or anyone in your family is asthmatic, allergy-prone or simply sensitive—and especially if someone in your home has a compromised immune system—you should actively seek out damp areas. Look for those corners and closets that are cooler than the rest of your home and take some of the actions recommended above.

Toronto writer Michael Downey's articles appear regularly in newspapers and health magazines across the US and Canada.

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