LESS PRESSURE WITH HAWTHORN
Several recent studies reconfirm hawthorn’s (Crataegus oxyacantha) ability to inhibit heart failure and reduce blood pressure. A randomized, double-blind study with 36 people who had mild hypertension gave them either daily supplements of a hawthorn extract (600mg) with magnesium (500mg) or both, or a placebo. After two and a half months, all the treatments lowered blood pressure, but hawthorn was most effective at reducing the resting diastolic blood pressure. It also had the extra benefit of relieving anxiety. [Also see AHA 11:4.]


A randomized, double-blind placebo study with 40 people aged 40 to 80 years old has found that an extract made from the leaves, twigs, and flowers of hawthorn (Crataegus oxyacantha) was safe and effective in reducing the early stages of congestive heart failure. This probably indicates that hawthorn helped the heart use oxygen more efficiently. After three months, hawthorn reduced symptoms and slightly improved exercise tolerance. This study helps to verify similar findings from previous research. The extract used is produced by Schwabe Pharmaceuticals of Germany and marketed in the US by Nature’s Way in Utah. [Ed. note: Hawthorn leaf and flower extract was approved for congestive heart failure by Germany’s Commission E in 1994 [see AHA 11:4, 144], although the usual treatment is pharmaceutical diuretics, beta-blockers, and digitalis, a glycoside of the toxic foxglove (Digitale purpurea).]


...and WITH NETTLES!
Stinging nettle roots (Urtica dioica) can help reverse high blood pressure. The Università di Pisa in Italy found that it does so by relaxing blood vessels (releasing endothelial nitric oxide, opening potassium channels, and decreasing inotropic activity), as well as purified fractions. Studies mentioned in previous AHA issues show that nettle helps relieve hay fever symptoms, arthritic pain, and is a selective inhibitor of the HIV and herpes viruses. [See AHA 7:3, 9:1, 16:4.] Stinging nettle (Urtica dioica & U. urens) leaf extract may also be effective against rheumatic diseases and other inflammatory joint diseases. Results from studies at Freie Universität in Berlin, Germany, suggest that nettle contain one of the most active antiinflammatory substances (Hox alpha and 13-HOTRe). It suppresses cytokines that cause joint inflammation by degrading tissue. [Testi, L. 2002. Cardiovascular effects of U. root extracts. Journal of Ethnopharmacology 81(3):205-209; & Schiele-Taraci G, et al. 2002. Effects of the antithrombin remedy hoe alpha—a new stinging nettle leaf extract. Phytomedicine 9(2):477-85.]

MULLEIN REDUCE VIRUS & PAIN
Researchers at the Pediatric and Adolescent Ambulatory Community Clinic in Israel declared commercial drops, known as Otkonan, eardrops appropriate to treat earache (otitis media). The formula contains mullein (Verbascum thapsus), garlic (Allium sativum), calendula flowers (Calendula officinalis), and St. John’s wort (Hypericum perforatum) extracted into an olive oil base. It relieved ear pain in the study of 103 children between the ages of 6 and 18 years old who had eardrum problems. The drops worked as well as anesthetic pharmaceutical eardrops of the pharmaceutical compounds ametocaine and phenazone in a glycerin base.


In a study at the Institute of Microbiology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Bulgaria, tissue cultures were used to determine that mullein was effective in treating several types of viral infections that caused flu. It was even more effective when combined with derivatives of Amantadine, a drug that inhibits the flu virus and its ability to reproduce. A previous study at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver found that mullein was one of 12 out of 100 plant extracts that had antiviral properties. It also significantly reduced the herpes virus type 1.


GINKGO
Researchers from the Cochrane Collaboration at Oxford University in England decided that ginkgo (Ginkgo biloba) effectively improves cognitive function after looking at 33 separate randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled studies that ranged from 3-52 weeks. Besides the mental process, ginkgo helped improve mood and emotional functions in doses less than 200mg. The review was sponsored by the UK Alzheimers Society. In response to recent media publicity based on one previous study in the Journal of the American Medical Association that found ginkgo ineffective, this study’s authors said, “Anything short of a miracle drug will generate some null or even negative results in small trial.”

Since the media did not pick up this positive study, the American Herb Council, the Council for Responsible Nutrition, and a ginkgo manufacturer are sending out press releases to the media. ABC director Mark Blumenthal said, “Unfortunately, the public’s impression from the news generated by JAMA was uncertainty about ginkgo’s scientifically documented benefits.”


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