Reishi Mushroom
The gift of calmness and strength
Terry Willard, CIH, PhD

Health claims
In China, reishi mushroom is considered one of the best herbs to increase longevity. This adaptogenic mushroom has been shown to:
- calm the nervous system
- regulate blood pressure, cholesterol and other blood lipids
- strengthen the lungs, heart, liver, immune and endocrine systems
- reduce allergies, asthma and bronchitis
- effectively treat many forms of cancer, as well as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, insomnia and anxiety.

How does it work?
Reishi mushroom is an adaptogen that brings a person back into balance: An “adaptogen” will help a person adapt to a large range of environmental, biological, psychological and physical stresses, which this herb has certainly been proven to do. Reishi contains two major groups of constituents:
- Polysaccharides (gandelan A and B; and several glucans). Polysaccharides appear to work mostly on the immune system.
- Triterpenes (ganoderic acids, ganoderadiol, ergosterol). Triterpenes have hormone-like qualities that work on the blood lipids, allergies, and endocrine and nervous systems.

What evidence supports its use?
For the nervous system, reishi has been shown to reduce insomnia, anxiety, depression and paranoia. For respiratory problems, it demonstrated a 60 per cent recovery rate in allergy-related chronic bronchitis, with improvement in 97.9 per cent of cases. Other studies show benefit for 87.5 per cent of bronchial asthmatics with a cure rate of 48 per cent. For sinus problems, the cure rate is more than 50 per cent with about 80 per cent effectiveness.

Reishi protects the body from the effects of accumulated fatty acid and cholesterol, showing significant results in lowering blood lipids and fatty deposits in the liver. In studies on cholesterol and triglyceride levels, it significantly dropped their levels after two months. The extract has lowered blood pressure while increasing urine volume.
Another study found that 70 per cent of patients improved in blood pressure (especially diastolic) after removal of medication and use of reishi.

Reishi has also been shown to inhibit excessive platelet accumulation and reinforce the outer membrane of the red corpuscles, stopping blood clots. In China, it was effective in 80 per cent of myocardial infarction and angina cases while being curative in 25 per cent. This fungi has antibacterial effects on *Bacillus pneumonia, staphylococci* and *streptococci* bacteria. It can be used as an antidote in some mushroom poisonings.

Japanese studies confirm reishi can arrest metastatic cancer in laboratory mice. The Japanese Cancer Society found reishi effective against sarcomas. The active ingredients responsible for this are the polysaccharides gandelan A and B. In the digestive tract, reishi has an 80 per cent cure rate for ulcers. For chronic hepatitis, it proved a 10 per cent cure rate in two months, with 40 per cent reduction of symptoms.

**How should I take it?**

Reishi usually comes in capsule form. It is best to use a concentrated extract, usually 15:1. I suggest a person take 200 to 300 mg of this extract (equivalent to three to 4.5 grams of herb) twice daily. Reishi almost always works better in combination with other herbs or supplements. These can often be found in the same capsule, or can be taken with other supplements (equivalent to three to 4.5 grams of herb) at the same time.

**Caveats**

This herb has been shown to be completely safe, even well above dosage range. It can be consumed with pharmaceuticals.

**The bottom line**

This medicinal mushroom is proven to be one of our best adaptogens, treating a wide spectrum of health issues while helping us remain calm.

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Terry Willard, CIH, PhD, is a practitioner, teacher and director of the Wild Rose College of Natural Healing in Calgary, Alta. He has written several books on natural medicine, including his most recent, *Dr. Terry Willard’s Encyclopedia of Herbs* (Key Porter Books, 2002).

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