**HERBAL CLIPPINGS**

**SELF HEAL VS. HERPES**

Dalhousie University of Canada and the Chinese University of Hong Kong found that an extract of self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*) may prove to be a powerful new herpes treatment. At the May annual meeting of the American Society of Microbiologists, they announced that a lignin-carbohydrate complex in the herb was quite active against cold sores and genital herpes, at least in guinea pigs and mice. It has a different anti-herpes mechanism than the drug, acyclovir, which is now encountering resistant strains of herpes. Self heal grows in North America, Europe, and China, where it is used to treat mouth and throat sores, as an astringent for mouth and wounds, and to lower blood pressure. It was inactive against cytomegalovirus, flu types A and B, the poliovirus, and stomach virus. The polysaccharide in self heal has specific activity against the herpes virus and appears to work differently from other anionic carbohydrates, such as heparin. It may compete with the virus for cell receptors as well as employing an unknown mechanism after the virus has penetrated the cells.


**BLACK CURRANT**

The Asashikawa Medical College in Japan found that blackcurrant (*Ribes nigrum*) is a “possible candidate as a herbal medicine for herpes virus.” An extract of the fruit prevented HSV-1 from attaching itself on the cell membrane. It also cut, by half, the formation of plaque, inhibiting the cells’ ability to replicate HSV-1 and 2, and the closely related chicken pox (varicella-zoster). It seems to work by decreasing the ability of infected cells to manufacture protein from the earliest stages of the infection. Blackcurrant also directly inactivated both flu virus A and B up to 99%, and 100% in type A after 6 hours. The University of Madras in India found the extract also seems to prevent infected cells from releasing the virus. Another study isolated embelin, a benzoquinone-derivative, from blackcurrant. They determined that it was responsible for significantly inhibiting five of the 12 common bacteria strains they tested and was moderate activity against three more. Previous study showed that the seed oil stimulated immune function in older people [See AHA 19:1].


**IMMUNE HERBS**

Ten commonly used herbs were analyzed for their ability to work on the immune system and to modulate production of the immune system’s lymphocytes in the lab at the Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, New York. Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) and green tea (*Camellia sinensis*) consistently suppressed immune responses while dong quai (*Angelica sinensis*), milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*), and St. John’s wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) stimulated the immune system. Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*) enhanced the production in one type of assay, but in not all of them. The researchers concluded from all the results that green tea, dong quai, ginseng, milk thistle, and ginger may be relevant in organ transplants in humans.


**GINSENG AIDS MEMORY**

Beijing University of Chinese Medicine found that a ginseng compound may have cognitive benefits for stroke patients. A study presented at the 2003 American Stroke Association’s 28th International Stroke Conference in Phoenix, Arizona selected 40 people with mild to moderate dementia due to blood vessel problems resulting from multiple small strokes. An extract of ginseng leaf and root (*Panax ginseng*) and sanchi ginseng (*Panax notoginseng*) was given to 25 of them three times a day. The result was better verbal learning and memory scores, such as story recall and delayed word recall compared to 15 people taking the dementia drug Duxil (40 mg.), which increases oxygen to the brain. In previous research, ginseng increased brain chemical activity in aged mice, but its effects on humans had not been well studied.
