HERBAL CLIPPINGS

COUGH IT UP
At the Practice for Internal Medicine and Pneumology in Munich, Germany, a fluid extract of thyme (Thymus vulgaris) and ivy leaves (Hedra helix) (5.4 ml three times daily) was given to 361 outpatients with acute bronchitis who were having at least 10 coughing fits during the day and/or bronchial mucus production that was difficult to cough up. By the seventh to ninth day, 69% of these volunteers improved compared to less than half of those taking a placebo, and their coughing fits were cut by half two days sooner. Symptoms of acute bronchitis improved rapidly with everyone, but disappeared faster in the herb group in this double-blind, multicenter study. A previous study gave volunteers a cough syrup of ivy leaf extract combined with marshmallow root mucilage and thyme and anise seed infusions (about 10 ml) for an average of 12 days. The irritating coughs from the common cold, bronchitis, or respiratory tract diseases that produced viscous mucus all improved substantially in almost everyone. Participants in the studies found the syrup easy to take. Buechi, S., et al. 2005. Open trial to assess aspects of safety and efficacy of a combined herbal cough syrup with ivy and thyme, Forsch Komplementarmed Klass, Kemmerich, B. 2006. Efficacy and tolerability of a fluid extract combination of thyme herb and ivy leaves and matched placebo in adults suffering from acute bronchitis with productive cough. Arzneimittelforschung 56:959-61.

WORMWOOD
Research shows that wormwood (Artemesia absinthium) destroys parasites, intestinal worms, and bacterial infections, decreases inflammation, and helps protect the liver. It was given to 40 people with Crohn's disease in a clinical trial along with the antinflammatory drugs (cortisone steroids and salicylates) used to treat the disorder (250 mg. three times a day) along with rose (Rosespp.), cardamom (Elettaria cardamomum), and mastic resin ( Pistacia lentiscus) [see Report, AHA 21:3]. The wormwood contained 0.37% absinthia, its primary active compound, and less than 5 ppm of thujone, the potent compound responsible for its well-known toxicity. After 10 to 13 weeks, 65% of the group taking wormwood was almost free of symptoms and were also feeling less depressed. It was another 10 weeks before inflammation returned and they needed to resume their use of steroid drugs. [see Legal, p. 7.]

SAGE ADVICE
Clinical studies support the traditional lore that culinary sage (Salvia officinalis) improves memory. Sage may even help people with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease. The University of Naples Federico II in Italy tested a standardized extract of the leaves on brain (pheochromocytoma) cells. The active compound, rosmarinic acid, reduced several occurrences that are related to memory loss, including oxidation, as well as fragmenting DNA in the cell, and activating caspase and phosphate transport. This means that sage probably helps protect brain neurons and nervous system damage. Iuvone, T. 2006. The space sage and its active ingredient rosmarinic acid protect PCL2 cells from amyloid-beta peptide-induced neurotoxicity. JPharmacal Exp Ther 317(3):1143-9.

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OUT OF CIRCULATION

Pycnogenol, an extract from French Maritime pinetree (Pinus pinaster or P. maritime) manufactured by Horphag Research, Ltd. in the U.K. is a potent antioxidant. One study found that it reduces microangiopathy, which affects diabetics, causing capillary walls to become so weak that they bleed and leak protein. Ultimately, blood flows slowly, resulting in swollen and ulcerated legs, blood clots, and possibly kidney failure, and retinopathy of the eyes. When Pycnogenol (50 mg capsules, 3 times daily for a month) was given to 30 diabetics 55-68 years old with severe microangiopathy, their blood vessels strengthened, capillaries leaked less, and inflammation reduced.

At L'Aquila University in Italy, 30 insulin-dependent diabetics took Pycnogenol (150 mg) for a month. Their capillary blood flow increased 34% while they were lying down and 68% when standing, compared to only 5% and 8%, respectively, in a placebo group. Ankle swelling went down 17% only 10 minutes after standing. Pycnogenol may also reduce high blood sugar in diabetics, ulcerations, and blood clots forming during air plane flights (overnight). (See AHA 2011)


SMOKE LESS

The Dong-eui Institute of Technology in Korea found that 11 out of 21 species of medicinal herbs they screened were potent antioxidants that were also able to degrade nicotine. When they gave herb tea to 100 male smokers, cloves (Eugenia aromatica) and astragalus (Astragalus membranaceus) worked the best. The level of urinary cotinine—a metabolite of nicotine—increased for the first two weeks, and then greatly decreased for the next two weeks, indicating the conversion of nicotine. There were 38% of the men who stop smoking completely, compared to only 1.2% of men in a control group, and they had fewer symptoms of withdrawals.


COMFREY CREAM PAINLESS

Acomfreycream (Symphytum uplandicum) made from fresh tincture for topical use, called Traumaplant from Harras Pharma Curarina in Germany, was used to treat 215 people with back pain. The double-blind, randomized, controlled, multicenter study from the Czech Republic found cream containing the most comfrey (10% active ingredient) worked much faster and better to reduce pain while in motion, at rest, or the body was palpated than a 1% product. In a similar study, Traumaplant relieved ankle pain that typically got worse during active movement. The swelling went down the most during the third to fourth day, and then, after one week. The results were mostly good to excellent and the cream easy to tolerate.


ANTICANCER ST. JOHN’S WORT

Hyperforin, a compound from St. John’s wort (Hypericum perforatum), is a key player in the herb’s antidepressant activity, powerful anti-inflammatory, immune system enhancer, and cancer tumor inhibitor. Researchers at Temple University discovered a new protein in the herb that inhibits the AIDS virus from taking over new cells. Another study found that a unique compound—called biouyanaquin A—isolated from Chinese St. John’s wort (Hypericum chinense var. salicifolium) was active against HIV, inhibiting the division of cells that were infected.


ANTICANCER TURMERIC

The National Institutes of Health has been investigating how turmeric (Curcuma longa) counters cancer. Now, the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center at the University of Texas is engaged in further clinical studies with curcuminoids, derived from curcumin compounds in turmeric. They inhibited growth and hastened disintegration of human colon cancer cells. Curcumin, and other natural plant polyphenol flavonoids such as epigallocatechingallate from green tea (Camelliasinensis), are reported to easily access the brain, helping protect nerves and scavenging free radicals, in part by chelating heavy metals like iron. Curcuminoids specifically help the body clear the plaque (amyloid-beta) deposits in the brain that have been linked to Alzheimer’s disease and may offer a new type of treatment. These compounds seem to enhance general immune system activity and appear to have several types of antiinflammatory activity. Curcumin has also been shown to decrease the inflammatory COX-2 (cyclooxygenase) and prostaglandin E2 while barely changing levels of the beneficial COX-1 and slowed excessive cell growth in joint fluid. This may help researchers discover a new pathway to treat rheumatoid arthritis. [See AHA 2011: 20:162: anti-ulcer, 10:2 gallstones, 9:1 anticancerogen.]

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