



Digestive Aids: Back to the Basics with Herbal Medicine

By Katolen Yardley, MNIMH, Medical Herbalist

Herbal medicine offers invaluable aid for chronic digestive disorders as well as common symptoms of overeating including heart burn, indigestion, cramping and bloating. As most herbal medicines are taken orally, they come into direct contact with the mucous membranes lining the digestive tract, offering quick relief. Herbal medicines offer gentle, non-habit forming alternatives to over-the-counter and prescription medications and are suitable for long term aid. The medical actions of herbs are often categorized into groups according to their therapeutic action.

Digestive stimulants help to increase or improve digestive activities. Two categories of stimulant herbs include bitters and hepatics (herbs which support the liver). **Bitters** have been used traditionally, sipped before meals. Herbal bitters act to stimulate the release of gastric juice and digestive enzymes for optimal digestion. They also help to increase appetite. Bitters have a general tonic action on digestion, stimulating the body's self repair mechanisms. Some bitter herbs include wormwood, centaury, yarrow and gentian. Bitter herbs are consumed in small amounts and should not be ingested in conditions of excess stomach acid or ulcers. **Hepatics** are herbs that strengthen tone and support the liver. The liver is our primary organ for cleansing and detoxification, facilitating the deactivation of hormones, drugs, food additives and pollutants. The liver is involved in carbohydrate, fat and protein metabolism and helps to maintain stable blood sugar levels. It is also involved in both the synthesis of cholesterol and its breakdown into bile salts. In addition, the liver provided storage for fat soluble vitamins. Examples of Hepatic herbs include: dandelion root, wild yam root, yellow dock root.

Digestive Relaxants, in contrast, help to reduce over-activity and relax tissues. These herbs are used in a clinic environment to reduce bloating and stomach distension. **Carminative herbs** are plants that contain volatile oils, the component of the plant that imparts the familiar fragrant/aromatic scent associated with many dried herbs. Their main action in digestion is to soothe and settle the gut wall, ease cramping and expel wind from the stomach and intestines, while providing gentle anti spasmodic properties. Some common carminative herbs containing a characteristic scent include caraway seed, fennel seed, peppermint leaf, ginger root and anise seed.

Herbal medicines are gentle and ideal for incorporating into one's daily routine. Digestive herbs can be used in either tea or tincture form. An adult general dosage for herbal teas is 1 tsp. of the herb for every cup of boiled water, steeped for 15 minutes; 3-4 cups daily will provide a medicinal dose. When using tinctures, the dosage varies depending upon the herbs used. A standard adult dose is generally 2-3 ml taken 2-3 times daily.

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For more detailed information on herbal medicines, register for our upcoming seminar:

[Herbal Medicine for Common Digestive Complaints](#)

We will cover a general overview of digestive function, followed by a review of the actions and application of key digestive aids including herbal astringents, bitters, carminatives, digestive relaxants and demulcent herbs. Common digestive complaints will be addressed, from indigestion, irritable bowel, gas and bloating, to stimulating a poor appetite. This will be an interactive evening combined with herb tasting and fun! Taught by [Katolen Yardley, MNIMH, Medical Herbalist](#).

Date: Tuesday, March 9, 2010 Time: 6:00- 7:30 pm

Cost: \$ 10 cash or cheque at the door. Space is limited. Pre registration is required. To register call 604-683-2298 or email: info@alchemyelixir.com

Location: [Alchemy & Elixir Health Group](#) # 320-1026 Davie St. Vancouver, BC. V6E 1M3