

Steel Magnolias

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Dear Friend,

A few years ago, I happened to be vacationing in the Deep South when the magnolia trees were in full bloom. It was breathtaking! But, according to new research, this lovely state flower of both Mississippi and Louisiana offers up more than just a fragrant view.

Over the past few years, studies have begun to surface on magnolia's ability to combat stress, obesity and even cancer. The key to its medicinal properties can be found in the bark and seed cones of the magnolia tree.

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Stress less, weigh less  
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Stress has been linked to everything from a weakened immune system to ulcers, and even heart disease. Now research shows that stress is also a factor in the growing obesity epidemic. And treating one can influence the other.

Here's how it works: Stress elevates cortisol levels, which can wreak havoc on our blood sugar levels. The result is excessive hunger, cravings for sweets and simple carbs, and ultimately extra pounds.

So instead of dieting, which only causes more stress, some experts now recommend treating stress to lower cortisol levels. Enter magnolia. Long used in Kampo medicine (a traditional form of medicine widely practiced in China and Japan), magnolia has powerful anti-anxiety properties, directly affecting the central nervous system. In fact, research out of Gunma University in Maebashi, Japan, shows that one derivative of the herb, honokiol, is just as effective as diazepam for reducing stress and measurably lowering cortisol levels. Better yet, magnolia doesn't cause the addiction, depression, amnesia or motor dysfunction common to diazepam.

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Killing cancer  
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The magnolia story doesn't end with stress reduction. An even more exciting breakthrough occurred last year at Atlanta's Emory University School of Medicine when a team of researchers found that honokiol extracted from the seed cones of

magnolia trees prevented the growth of new blood vessels in animal tumors and slowed tumor growth by 50 percent.

According to the study, honokiol prevents the body from sending the signal to grow new blood vessels around a tumor. Tumors, once they begin growing, can't continue to grow past a certain size without the oxygen and nutrients that these blood vessels provide. So, honokiol literally starves cancer cells to death by cutting off their food supply.

Laboratory tests by Taiwanese scientists have found that honokiol isn't the only cancer killing chemical in magnolia. Another compound, magnolol, also has anti-cancer activity. In one study by Taipei Medical University, a low dose of magnolol inhibited the synthesis of DNA and decreased the number of cancer cells in human colon and liver cancer cells. When the researchers injected a higher dose of magnolol into cancerous tumors, they found that the tumors shrank up to 85 percent. These are truly awesome findings!

Ok, so no one has actually tested magnolia on human cancer patients. At least, not yet. But I'll keep my ear to the ground for news on clinical trials and let you know the results. If things pan out, this medicinal flower could augment – or even replace – chemotherapy.

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One last thing . . .  
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Magnolia is also a potent antibacterial and antifungal which has been used for centuries to treat intestinal bugs, asthma, wheezing, high blood pressure and bacterial infections. While there aren't any studies to back up these claims, we do know that magnolia is an incredibly effective antioxidant. In fact, Japanese researchers have found antioxidant levels in magnolia bark to be 1,000 times more powerful than vitamin E.

Magnolia extract is available in capsule form, but it's important to look for a standardized supplement containing one to two percent honokiol and magnolol. Standardized extracts are taken with a dosage ranging from 250-750mg daily.

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This just in . . .  
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Nothing is more unsightly – or more miserable – than a cold sore. And one reader named Marlies wants to know what to do about them:

“I take vitamins and extra C, but I still get cold sores. What else can I do to avoid this?”

If you've never been visited by a cold sore, count your blessings. They are painful fluid-filled blisters that form on the borders of the lips and are caused by the herpes simplex virus. The blisters, which are contagious, eventually break, ooze and crust over before healing.

When a cold sore begins to rear its ugly head, taking extra vitamin C is a good first step – at least 5,000 mg. a day along with 50 to 100 mg. of zinc, according to Dr. James Balch. But studies show that using vitamin C and zinc topically may be even more effective.

Applying witch hazel has also been shown to exert significant antiviral activity against cold sores in test tube experiments. In a double-blind trial, people with acute cold sore outbreaks applied a topical cream containing either a 2 percent witch hazel bark extract or a placebo six times a day for three to eight days. By the end of the eighth day, those using the witch-hazel cream had a pronounced reduction in the size and spread of the inflammation compared to the placebo group.

Several other natural remedies may also be effective in combating cold sores. At the first tingling of a cold sore, take lemon balm, licorice or garlic internally and begin frequent topical applications of lemon balm, either as a commercial cream or a compress made from the essential oil.

In one clinical trial, 116 people with either cold sores or genital herpes applied a cream containing a 1 percent lemon balm extract five times daily. Nearly 96 percent of the patients had healed lesions after eight days, compared with the 10 to 14 days the lesions take to heal naturally.

St. John's wort, either as an oil or ointment, can also be applied topically. Test-tube studies show that these substances inhibit the virus. But, whether you use topical lemon balm or St. John's wort, the key to success is prompt, frequent treatment.

Yours in health and happiness,  
Bonnie Jenkins  
Advanced Natural Medicine Bulletin

References:

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For questions, requests or comments to Bonnie, go to:

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