



## Nature's memory boosters

### Description

# Using medicinal herbs to fight Dementia and Alzheimer's

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Have you ever wondered about what herbs may have to offer a loved one who is suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's? Herbs offer a great deal.

Experts in Western medicine believe that oxidative damage is the leading cause of neuronal degeneration in both Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. They also believe that neurodegenerative diseases arise from the interaction of environmental and genetic susceptibility. They say that only a minority of cases of these diseases are of a purely genetic origin.

Western scientists have been working very hard to find a cure for dementia and Alzheimer's. Unfortunately, medications to date have fallen short. Chinese medicinal herbs used for millennia may hold the answers worried families are looking for.

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Chinese medicine regards both dementia and Alzheimer's as a deficiency of the energy of the kidneys. Kidney energy diminishes in the body as a person ages. Chinese medicine also sees dementia and Alzheimer's as a result of the build-up of toxins and blood stasis in multiple organs such as the kidney, liver, heart and spleen. Chinese herbal medicine attacks the multiple mechanisms of the disease. One of the many mixtures used is called Bushenhuatanyizhi. In a 2013 study done with sixty patients researchers found that 86.7% of patients using this mixture improved their cognitive function.<sup>1</sup>

The following herbs make up the concoction:



- ~~Radix Polygoni Multiflori (Heshouwu) – Polygonum multiflorum – also called FoTi~~
- Rhizoma Panacis Japonici (Zhujiashen) – Panax japonicum – Panax Ginseng
- Rhizoma Acori Tatarinowii (Shichangpu) – Acorus tatarinowii – Grassleaf sweetflag
- Caulis Bambusae In Taeniam (Zhuru) – Bambusa tuldoidea – Bamboo stem shavings
- Rhizoma Pinelliae (Banxia) – Pinellia ternate – Crow dipper / Pinellia
- Poria (Fuling) – Poria mushroom
- Radix palygalae (Yuanzhi) – Thinleaf Milkwort Root

Another concoction containing Panax Ginseng, Ginko Biloba and Crocus Sativus L has been tested on mice and has been found to reduce the Amyloid Burden in both dementia and Alzheimer's.<sup>2</sup>

## About the individual herbs in the 2nd concoction

### Panax Ginseng

Scientists have found that Panax Ginseng contains many active constituents which attack Alzheimer's from many different pathways. These constituents help to degrade the Alzheimer's by reducing the Amyloid Burden.

### Ginko Biloba



Image: Rudolf Schäfer

Ginko Biloba has been used in Chinese Medicine since 1280 AD. It was used primarily for chronic bronchitis, asthma, enuresis and tuberculosis. Experts have found that Ginko may improve cognitive performance.<sup>3</sup> They believe that this happens because Ginko works as an antioxidant and radical scavenger.

### Crocus Sativus L

Studies have concluded that Crocus Sativus L may also improve cognition by reducing the Amyloid burden.<sup>4</sup>

## What is the Amyloid burden?

The Amyloid burden happens when proteins become distorted into the wrong shape allowing many copies to stick together. These proteins become unhealthy, they lose their normal function and they cannot stay dissolved in the blood. The proteins form large fibers disrupting the normal function of nearby tissues and organs. Experts believe that these folded proteins (also known as Tau proteins) may be behind the neurodegenerative disorders such as



dementia, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. The fibres invade and cause damage in different areas of the brain.

## Individual herbs used to fight dementia and Alzheimer's

### Hyperzia Serrata

Hyperzia Serrata is another herb used to fight Alzheimer's by preventing acetylcholine deficiency. Acetylcholine is a neurotransmitter that is diminished in dementia patients and this herb helps to stop this from happening.<sup>5</sup>

### Siberian Ginseng



Image: Tatters ?

Scientists have found that this cousin works well on Alzheimer's patients by regulating protein clearance and Tau Proteins (folded proteins) in neurons and micoglia, therefore this herb degrades the Amyloid burden.

### Tianma

Tuber of Tianma have been used traditionally to treat dizziness, paralysis, epilepsy and hypertension. Tianma may also work in reducing the amyloid burden by decreasing the accumulation of misfolded proteins preventing neurodegeneration. Scientists have found this herb to be quite effective in animal models.<sup>6</sup>

### Hyperzine A

Hyperzine A is an alkaloid isolated from Hyperzia Serrata. Researchers have found that Hyperzine A may improve general cognitive function, global clinical status, behavioural disturbance and functional performance.<sup>7</sup>



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### **Salvia officinalis**

Salvia officinalis may reduce agitation in Alzheimer's patients. The common name for this herb is sage.<sup>8</sup>

### **Scutellaria baicalensis**

This is a medicinal plant that has both powerful anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant properties. It migrates to where there is damage in the brain and reduces inflammation.<sup>9</sup>

### **Other concoctions of Chinese Herbs used to fight Alzheimer's**

As I mentioned earlier, concoctions are popular in Chinese medicine because multiple herbs target multiple problems.<sup>10</sup> Experts have found that two other concoctions named Bai We Di Huang Wan and Yi-Gan San have shown a great deal of promise.

### **Indian or Ayurvedic herbs — Turmeric**



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Tumeric is considered to be a blood cleanser and purifier. Tumeric is also an anti-inflammatory and is useful in combination with pharmaceuticals such as NSAIDS (or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) in attenuating oxidative damage and cognitive deterioration. Interestingly, scientists have found that there is a great difference in the percentage of those suffering with Alzheimer's between the US and India. They believe that India's numbers are much smaller due to heavy consumption of Tumeric.

### **Consider this before using herbs**

Do your due diligence as herbs are the same as medications and you should always consult with an expert before taking them. This means consulting a Chinese medicine doctor or master herbalist. Also it is important to be careful about using herbs if you are on any pharmaceutical medication. Certain herbs may be contraindicated (meaning you cannot use them with certain medications). For example, many of the aforementioned herbs have blood thinning qualities and cannot be used by people taking blood thinners like Coumadin. If you are considering taking herbs or herbal medication, and you are on medication, please check with your pharmacist to see if there are any contraindications.

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Determining the purity, strength and quality control are problematic with herbs from China sold in Chinatown. Some are good and some are bad, and it is difficult to be certain that you are not getting herbs tainted with heavy metals because of the rampant pollution in China. Source your herbs organically. There are local organic growers in Quebec (Val David) who grow excellent herbs.

Most of the herbs used to treat dementia and Alzheimer's seem to have anti-inflammatory, anti-oxidant, and anti-amyloid properties. Many of these have been successful in animal studies and some have shown great promise in studies with people. Herbs used in combination with other therapies may hold out for those suffering and those with family members suffering with dementia and Alzheimer's.

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