How Can Herbs Help Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms?

by PATRICIA BRATIANU

Try These Herbs for Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a very complex condition. While most people think of it as an illness that impacts the joints, it actually affects multiple organ systems.

Mainstream treatments for RA include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, steroidal medications, and many other powerful drugs. Methotrexate, also used as chemotherapy for cancer patients, may be used.

Biologic medications are becoming increasingly common. While these types of medication may slow the progression of the disease and relieve RA symptoms, they are not always effective — and they can have serious side effects.

Herbal therapies can be used in many ways to relieve RA, in conjunction with conventional treatments (complementary therapies) or as alternative treatments (for mild cases). If you have RA, consult with your rheumatologist, as well as an expert in herbal medicine who has experience working with people who have RA, particularly if you have a moderate to severe case of the illness or if you are taking conventional medication.

Using Herbs for Rheumatoid Arthritis Relief and Management

You may choose to use an herb rather than a pharmaceutical NSAID to reduce pain and inflammation. Herbs may also be used to relieve minor infections and promote heart, skeletal, muscle and lung health.

Many people who have RA suffer from sleeplessness, anxiety, and depression due to the stress of living with a chronic illness. Herbs can soothe the mind and promote a healthy night’s sleep.

Some people employ herbs to help cope with the side effects of conventional medications. If methotrexate or a biologic makes you sick to your stomach, an herb may be helpful.

If you are using mainstream medication for your RA, don’t use an herb with similar actions. Instead, use herbs that support your body’s innate healing abilities.

Turmeric for RA Inflammation

Turmeric is a mild yellow-orange spice used extensively in Indian cooking. I add it to broths and other cooked dishes for its nutritional benefits.

Turmeric has been used to support health for thousands of years. It is one of the most well-researched and safest herbs you can consume. We should all enjoy turmeric every day — if you have RA, it’s even more important that you do.

Turmeric contains curcumin, which is believed to be responsible for many of the herb's healing actions. Curcumin reduces chronic and acute inflammation and has an action similar to but weaker than that of ibuprofen.

Unlike ibuprofen, which is very irritating to the gastrointestinal tract and may cause bleeding, turmeric is well-tolerated.

Another benefit of using turmeric to treat RA is that, when consumed in high doses, curcumin stimulates the adrenal glands to release natural cortisone. Synthetic cortisone is often prescribed to relieve swelling and pain from RA, but using your body's own cortisone is superior and safer than cortisone injections or pills.

Prescription steroidal medicines are highly effective, yet they have many undesirable side effects. They may cause nausea, vomiting, increased appetite, mood swings, insomnia, and a wide array of serious side effects. Your body's natural cortisone has none of those undesirable effects.

For healing purposes, use specially formulated capsules and liquids that provide you with the most bioavailable levels of curcuminoids and other active ingredients in the herb.

Willow Fights Arthritic Pain and Inflammation

Willow is one of the original sources of the chemical used to make aspirin. Unlike aspirin, it doesn't cause gastrointestinal irritation or bleeding.

Willow may be sufficient to keep you comfortable if your RA symptoms are mild. By using willow, you may find you need smaller, less frequent amounts of stronger medications, including narcotics, in order to maintain an acceptable level of comfort and joint mobility.

Cayenne Relieves Pain Internally and Externally

Cayenne is a hot herb that stimulates circulation, helping relieve pain and swelling. While cayenne may burn when you eat spicy food, it actually has a numbing component that relieves discomfort throughout your body.

Cayenne contains capsaicin, which can relieve pain when applied topically. Capsaicin cream is available to apply on sore joints; commercial topical remedies are available at pharmacies and from herbalists.

You must apply the cream or ointment four times daily for maximum effectiveness. It will initially provide limited relief, however with repeated use your comfort level may rise dramatically.

Boswellia Improves Joint Circulation

Boswellia is an ancient Ayurvedic herb that offers many benefits for RA sufferers. It improves blood supply to the joints and protects them from damage.

Boswellia relieves pain, inflammation, and swelling. The herb is useful when taken internally or applied externally to inflamed joints.

Ashwagandha Offers a Wide Array of Benefits

Ashwagandha is another ancient Indian herb that is receiving a great deal of attention currently. It is classified as an adaptogen, which means it helps your body withstand physical and mental stress better.

It energizes and helps your whole body function better while helping you focus and suppress inflammation. The herb's pain-relieving abilities are similar to aspirin.

Herbal Medicine and RA

Herbal medicine has much to offer you if you suffer from RA. Even ordinary culinary herbs may provide you with some assistance, such as:

- Ginger
- Mustard seeds
- Chamomile
- Fenugreek, peppermint, and spearmint

Because RA is such a complex condition, I recommend you consult an expert in herbal medicine before taking any herbs for rheumatoid arthritis symptoms. Herbal medicine doesn’t have the whole answer for making life with RA easier, but it offers many healing solutions.