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MOODTOPIA

Tame Your Moods, De-Stress, and Find Balance Using Herbal Remedies, Aromatherapy, and More

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HERBS THAT SUPPORT THE LIVER

When you are selecting herbs to support your liver, gravitate to the ones that most closely match your life situation. If you're purchasing these products, you'll often find that companies make a blend of herbs. That's totally fine. These are called liver supports, liver tonics, or "bitters." Whichever formulation you buy, make sure to pick one that says on the label "liver support" and *not* "cleanse" or "detox." I suggest to my clients that they take herbs in tincture or liquid form rather than capsules, because they're absorbed better that way. (Please see Chapter 5 for information on how these are prepared.) Dosage depends on your weight. Typically for adults, I recommend 25 to 45 drops two to three times a day—before meals if possible. As recommended earlier, check with your registered herbalist or health-care provider about any contraindications before beginning a course of liver-support herbs.

Most of the following herbs are known as bitters. You will see a difference after thirty days. How long should you take the herb before you eat? Just five to ten minutes. But even if taken in middle of meal, you can gain benefit.

Artichoke Leaves (*Cynara scolymus*)

Artichoke leaves help regenerate the liver because they stimulate the flow of bile from the liver to the gallbladder, where toxins can be removed. This can help with digestion.

Indication: This is my favorite herb choice for anyone who struggles with indigestion. Often, if the liver is unable to properly break down the fats in foods, people can struggle with GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease). Although this plant alone will not cure GERD, the reflux of food is an indication that it is needed.

Burdock Root (*Arctium lappa*)

Burdock root is edible. Worldwide, people mix it into stir-fries and soups. It's a tasty addition to your diet, but it's also an excellent liver support. This herb also aids with skin conditions, including eczema, psoriasis, acne, and dermatitis. These ailments often manifest when the liver is overloaded with a diet high in fat and protein that the body can't break down.

Indication: I suggest this herb when my clients not only complain of moodiness but also about their troubling skin. It may be dry, oily skin, or easily damaged, or wounds may take longer to heal.

Culver Root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*)

Culver root is a powerful liver support. Only a small amount is needed. It can assist the liver and gallbladder by increasing the production and secretion of bile, which lubricates the intestines. This, in turn, enhances bowel movements.

Indication: I suggest this herb when my client's system has been under a lot of stress. Improper diet and stress may affect the bowels, creating bloating, constipation, diarrhea or hemorrhoids.

Dandelion Root (*Taraxacum officinale*)

This is the root of the common dandelion plant—yes, the one you’re always trying to yank out of your lawn. Hidden beneath the green leafy plant with the wonderful highlighter-yellow flowers is the root—the part that helps nourish the liver. Dandelion root has been celebrated as a liver support throughout the ages because it stimulates bile flow. Herbalists often use it to help fight fatty liver, cirrhosis, estrogen dominance, and also acne.

Indication: I suggest this plant for clients whose legs or feet tend to swell. It also helps people who don’t urinate as often as they should.

Gentian Root (*Gentiana lutea*)

Gentian root is used specifically to protect the liver, stimulate its function, help cell proliferation, and increase the flow of bile. It is also known to inhibit the development of viruses that affect the liver. According to the University of Maryland Medical Center, gentian is often used in Europe to treat anemia by stimulating the digestive system to more easily absorb iron and other nutrients.¹⁷

Indication: I suggest this for clients who suffer from such digestive problems as GERD, or who feel sluggish after they eat, and also to clients prone to anemia.

Milk Thistle Seed (*Silybum marianum*)

Milk thistle has been used across the globe for generations due to its remarkable effects on the liver and gallbladder. It helps with the detoxification of poisons (such as alcohol), can help regenerate damaged liver tissue, stimulates bile production, and improves digestion. It is rare that I suggest herbs in capsule form, but this is one herb that performs well in that modality. The customary use was to grind the seeds and add them to porridge. Today, I recommend four capsules before breakfast and dinner.

Indication: I suggest this herb to anyone who has been on a medication for a long time—especially women coming off long-term use of birth control pills or pain medications. It’s also helpful for people who have seasonal allergies or catch colds or flu frequently. Milk thistle is not recommended for use with birth control pills because it can undermine their effectiveness.

Watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*)

Watercress is a food and an herb. It’s a tasty but bitter green in the cruciferous family, so it’s related to cabbage, arugula, cauliflower, and broccoli. It’s rich in phytochemicals called glucosinolates that contain sulfur. This compound enhances your liver’s filtering abilities, has a cooling effect on the body, and aids digestion. Hippocrates described it as a stimulant and expectorant.

Indication: This herb complements other herbs in a blend. You can also add it to a salad mix as a great way to sneak in bitters.

Yellow Dock Root (*Rumex crispus*)

Yellow dock root is known as a blood purifier and is commonly used to remove toxins. It helps break down fatty foods by stimulating bile production, enhancing normal liver detoxification and improving the flow of digestive juices. It also has mild diuretic effects, which help flush harmful substances. It can reduce irritation of the liver and digestive system.

Indication: I choose this herb for clients who are anemic or feel sluggish, who have had a long illness, and who have trouble eating enough protein. Yellow dock has a lot of natural iron and is easily absorbed.

ADAPTOGENS

After you've begun your liver-support routine, the next step in preparing your body is to start taking an adaptogen. I recommend these as overall wellness tonics. Using a "tonic" to restore balance and health is an ancient idea. As David Winston explained, "'Adaptogen' is a relatively new way of describing a type of remedy commonly found in traditional Chinese (Qi tonic), African (Manyasi), Tibetan, Ayurvedic (Rasayana), and Cherokee medicine."¹⁸ These agents don't alter the mind; rather, they help the entire body function optimally during times of stress. In fact, they bring your body back from an extreme to a balanced state. They're called adaptogens because of their unique ability to *adapt* their function to your body's specific needs. As a consequence, they literally help you adapt to your environment, allowing you to better handle stress, whether mental or physical.

Adaptogens work slowly and subtly, but over time they strengthen your body's response to stress and enhance your ability to cope with anxiety and fatigue. But patience is important—you have to give them time to undo all the stress that has accumulated in the body. (Think of the tortoise and the hare.)

As I explained earlier, in modern society our body is constantly in a state of stress. Our system was created for the fight-or-flight response—we see a lion and we run. But people who live in today's cities remain in this mode most of the time. Because of the pervasive impact of urban life, we're always stressed—adrenaline at the ready. And that can make us moody!

Your adrenal glands are important for your overall health and should be in perfect balance to help you stay in charge of your emotions. They produce vital hormones, including cortisol, that work in conjunction with adrenaline and noradrenaline to regulate your reactions to stress. Adaptogens are a unique group of herbs that address your chronic and acutely stressful moments by improving the health of your adrenal system. Introducing adaptogens into your daily routine will help you reduce the damage that the adrenal system can produce when you are under stress.

What About Adrenal Burnout?

Just like the buzzwords *liver detox*, the term *adrenal burnout* seems all the rage these days. But is this a bona fide syndrome and must it be addressed? Master herbalist and teacher David Winston told me, "There is adrenal insufficiency, which is rare and causes serious disease. But there is no such thing as 'adrenal burnout.' I think people are really describing the negative effects of chronic stress, with elevated cortisol levels and HPA axis or SAS dysfunction. And yes, herbs can help this—especially adaptogens and nervines."¹⁹

Most of the research on adaptogens has occurred with athletes in China and Russia, where these herbs are used to maintain competitors' health and enhance their performance.²⁰ Researchers find that they can put these athletes into abnormally difficult situations both physically and emotionally. But when they use adaptogens, the athletes recover faster and maintain their health.

Adaptogens work well with your liver-support herbs and they blend even more beautifully with the mood herbs discussed in Chapter 5. At some point, you'll find the perfect combination of liver support, adaptogens, and mood herbs. You'll take them two to three times a day to help your life run more smoothly. For now, simply choose one to three adaptogens from the following list or a blend from a reputable company that most closely matches your life situation. The dosage for all of them is 25 to 40 drops diluted in juice or water two to three times a day. These herbs can be taken with or without food. I use them in tincture form. Just note that ginsengs can be quite stimulating, so begin with small doses and find what works best for you. Rhodiola has a slight stimulating effect which is less intense than ginseng if you find the latter is too much for you.

American Ginseng Root (*Panax quinquefolius*)

The genus *Panax* comes from the Greek word *panacea*, meaning "all healing." American ginseng is mildly stimulating. It's known for its ability to fight physical and mental fatigue. It helps a person find energy that may be hidden in his or her body. It is also used for chronic stress with depression or anxiety. It can mitigate burnout, compromised immune systems, and insomnia. Athletes throughout the world use this herb while training, to boost their strength and stamina. Students often take it while studying because it helps them maintain a high level of mental alertness and improves memory.

Indications: I suggest this herb to clients who feel they need a gentle push to get through their day. They may have slightly high cholesterol, feel sluggish midday, and have a cloudy mind. It's considered a "cooling" ginseng and is best for people who tend to feel hot or who get heated when they become angry or moody.

Ashwagandha Root (*Withania somnifera*)

Ashwagandha has been part of Ayurvedic medicine for generations. This herb calms the system and has traditionally been used for anxiety, bad dreams, mild obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), insomnia, and nervous exhaustion. It simultaneously stimulates and calms the central nervous system, creating a balance. It also lowers cortisol levels, which reduces the feeling of stress in the body.

Indications: I suggest this herb when a person has worked too hard without taking a break. It also can assist the body if you've been through an illness or catch cold too easily. Ashwagandha can gently stimulate thyroid function, and many people who are borderline hypothyroid benefit from it. This herb also increases libido.

Asian Ginseng Root (*Panax ginseng*)

Red ginseng is the most stimulating of the adaptogens; it increases capillary circulation in the brain. It is useful for people who lack energy and feel "played out" or overtired. Traditionally, it has been used for depression, exhaustion, and insomnia. Since this herb gives a wonderful "push" to the system, I recommend refraining from taking it after six p.m.

Indications: I suggest this ginseng to clients who are exhausted and can't muster the energy to get through their day. This herb is powerful and gives one energy to perform better and remain alert. It

does *not* work like caffeine and does not give that feeling of coming off an adrenaline rush. I recommend it to clients who describe themselves as having “brain fog.”

Cordyceps Fungus (*Cordyceps sinensis*)

Cordyceps is a wonderfully versatile medicinal mushroom that has many applications. In fact, doctors in China have used it for more than two thousand years. The risk of cognitive decline and dementia increases with age, but research suggests that cordyceps helps keep the brain healthy with age, both structurally and functionally. Cordyceps is believed to enhance athletic performance.