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REGENERATIVE SYNTROPISCHE AGRICULTUR
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Ayurvedic Herbs for a Healthy Respiratory System

Prana, the energy from breathing, is preeminent in Ayurvedic and Yogic thinking. The breath, along with food, supplies almost all of the energy to run the body, and without movement of prana, nothing happens. Prana, a *Subdosha* of Vata, flows inward, but, of course, that inward breath must be balanced with exhalation.

Our body wisdom takes care of this pretty well, and we pay it no mind—until something goes into a crisis. The respiratory tree is a high priority tissue, so the body spares no energy expense to keep it pumping. Drenched in blood and oxygen, this tissue is the fastest healing in the body, and it usually heals quickly and easily. Plus, the respiratory system is really just a tube and a couple of bags, so it is conceptually pretty simple to manage.

The lungs, along with the heart, can never take a vacation, and they are on the move 24/7, so they need a lot of lubrication. Here Kapha Dosha enters, which has its main home in the upper trunk. Most respiratory issues involve regulating water across the membrane of the lungs between the inside of the body and the outside environment (actually the surface of the lungs).

Vata can cause dryness and crunchy blockages, and Pitta can bring inflammation. As is common with life-or-death organs, all three Doshas are usually involved by

the time they have relocated, manifested, and diversified to the lungs and express as an overt disease.

Ayurveda & Asthma

Bronchial asthma is actually now properly called reactive airway disease, or RAD. It is often (although not always) an allergic response, sometimes to the same allergens that cause hay fever, and is often exacerbated by stress, exercise, infection, fumes, and cold air. Asthma involves three major features. First, there's airway obstruction. In people with *vataja* asthma, allergens and environmental triggers make the bands of muscle surrounding the bronchial tubes tighten, and air cannot move freely. The air moving through the tightened airways causes the whistling sound we know as wheezing.

Ayurveda historically associates asthma with excess Kapha Dosha, but today, it is evolving into an inflammatory disorder experienced by those with excess Pitta, which causes red and swollen bronchial tubes. Inflammation contributes greatly to the long-term lung damage. In the long run, treating inflammation is key to managing asthma. Finally, there's airway irritability. Asthmatic airways are extremely sensitive. Even the slightest triggers, such as pollen or animal dander, may cause the airways to tend to overreact and narrow.

From a natural healing point of view, asthma is an adrenal issue manifesting in the lungs. Long-term resolution of asthma involves treatment of the adrenal glands to increase production of adrenal hormones, both stress hormones and anti-inflammatory hormones.

Usually, that resolves asthma very rapidly. Note that conventional short-term treatments for asthma symptoms, such as methylxanthines, stimulate or mimic the adrenal glands and their hormones. Steroids, also from the adrenals, are end-stage asthma drugs.

Drugs for acute asthma symptoms typically act on the adrenal cortex or medulla, or mimic adrenal hormones. In natural healing, we want to treat the lungs with specific pulmonary herbs to tonify, soothe, and strengthen lung tissue. Short-term asthma symptoms can be relieved with natural remedies, but the exciting part is that even lifelong asthma can eventually be resolved permanently with the use of long-term adrenal and lung tonics. Start with herbs to open the airways for the short term.

Herbal Support for Asthma

Probably the preeminent herbs for supporting a healthy bronchial response are the peppercorns (black pepper and pippali). Warming peppercorns are long-term lung tissue builders and detoxifiers. They do a good job of keeping the airways open over time.

Licorice root is a good choice, since it supports the proper function of the lungs and adrenals (it contains compounds that are similar to the adrenal cortical hormones) and in the short-term it supports healthy, normal excretion. Licorice is a powerful and diverse remedy in its own right. It supports a healthy immune response and healthy elimination of natural toxins from the liver.

Relaxing nervines can be useful for asthmatics. Calming herbs such as tagara may help in stressful situations when the bronchial system is taxed. Turmeric is widely used in Ayurvedic asthma regimes. It supports a healthy response to inflammation (this in some way is most likely related to the mechanism for asthma), and supports the proper function of the immune system. Turmeric can bring a sense of calm to the bronchial system, especially when mixed with coriander and cumin.

Bitter herbs support the reduction of a long-term accumulation of mucus, and these include turmeric and dandelion; pungent herbs thin mucus and support the bronchial system in doing its job. Consider black pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and ginger.

Herbs to Boost Immunity

Could anything be more miserable than a cold? The running nose. The aching muscles. The pounding head. When the cold and flu season rolls around again, the bugs can give a good bite.

Cold and flu (influenza) are caused by viruses. (Traditional Ayurveda does not recognize microbes, but we modern practitioners can use this lens to view these diseases.) These bugs cannot be killed by chemicals— not by drugs like antibiotics, and not by herbal compounds. The only way to tame these diseases is to motivate the body's own immune system. And herbs don't just help eject the microbes. Patients can also feel better while the immune system is doing its job by treating aches, congestion, cough, and fever.

Herbal healing regimes for infection include three fundamental steps:

- Boot out the invader
- Nourish the tissue that allowed the infection to take root (in this case, the respiratory system)
- Support the immune system to prevent relapse

Pippali

Ayurveda uses many species of peppercorns, and they generally have a *prabhava* for the respiratory system. Pippali (*Piper longum*) supports lung function, and is not as drying as black pepper, which is excellent for releasing mucus, such as sinus congestion. A traditional preparation is to boil 10 peppercorns in milk and drink for a sinus releasing experience like no other.

Licorice

Probably the most common respiratory discomfort is a simple sore throat. Soothing the irritated throat with herbal demulcents and the tender lungs with reflex demulcents often brings substantial relief. Licorice root (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) guards respiratory mucus membranes with a coating of carbohydrate slime. Use 1 teaspoon of root powder, brewed as tea, three times a day, sip it morning and afternoon as needed. Oral doses of licorice lubricate the lung lining by reflex action.

Triphala

Triphala, an Ayurvedic combination of the fruits amalaki, haritaki, and bibhitaki, is the classic herbal decoction for long-term gargling, and many Ayurveda aficionados include it in their *dinacharya* to balance the Doshas in the throat area. Singers and public speakers gargle with bibhitaki decoction, which is more drying, to astringe the throat before a performance.

Kalmegh (Andrographis)

Kalmegh leaf and root (*Andrographis paniculata*) are very widely used in Ayurveda, but this herb is just now getting attention here in the U.S. It is a wild annual shrub from the plains of Asia that is also cultivated in the gardens of North India, where it has been a household remedy for many centuries. In Ayurveda, it is used for upper respiratory health during seasonal stress.

Its *karma* (action) is *kaphapitta shamaka* (it reduces vitiated Kapha and Pitta Dosha). Andrographis is one of the coldest, bitterest herbs in the Ayurvedic pharmacopoeia—it is a standout for all such actions including digestion, bile function, and reducing nausea.

Already sick but want to recover faster? Kalmegh might be your remedy. This herb has been widely studied by scientists. At least 676 studies have been published since the 1970s for its multitude of benefits. A study from Chile showed very great benefit for people with colds. A group of 158 people took Andrographis and measured their symptoms of headache, tiredness, earache, sleeplessness, sore throat, nasal secretion, phlegm, and

frequency and intensity of cough. At day four, a significant decrease in the intensity of all symptoms was observed for the *Andrographis paniculata* group. ¹ A double-blind-placebo-controlled study performed in Sweden treated 50 patients in the early stages of a cold with an herbal preparation containing 85 mg of *Andrographis paniculata* extract three times daily. After five days, 68% reported complete recovery, compared to only 36% of the controls. In the treated group, 55% called their colds unusually mild. These patients also took less sick leave from work. To top off all this research, a 2017 meta-analysis that crunched the numbers on 33 studies, including 71,715 patients, concluded that *Andrographis* “appears beneficial and safe for relieving acute respiratory tract infection symptoms and shortening time to symptom resolution.”²

Vasaka

Vasaka leaf (*Adhatoda vasica*, Malabar nut) is a famous Ayurvedic respiratory herb. *Vasa* means “perfume,” a nod to the aromatic flower of this plant. Commonly found growing in India, the remedy is bitter, astringent, light, dry, and cold, with a pungent *vipaka*. It is kaphapittahar, but use caution in cases of long-term aggravated vata.

A Bengali proverb says that “a person cannot die of disease in an area where nirgundi (*Vitex negundo*), vasaka (*Adhatoda vasica*), and vacha (*Acorus calamus*) are found, provided that one knows how to use them.” Vasaka helps clear out excess Pitta in *rakta dhatu*, which may manifest in the form of excess heat, while

also clearing out Kapha that has become stuck in *Rasa dhatu*. As a powerful supporter of the bronchial system, vasaka helps eliminate excess Kapha from the throat and promotes healthy bronchodilation for easy, comfortable, relaxed breathing. Also consider vasaka for improving voice quality, plus relieving agitation in the bronchial system. Add to the list excess heat in the body and *rakta pitta* (excess pitta in the blood).

Vasaka leaves are smoked to support open pathways in the bronchial system. Consider combining vasaka with other herbs that support a healthy respiratory response. A combination of bibhitaki, licorice, pippali, and vasaka facilitates even bronchodilation, removing excess Kapha in the lungs. Vasaka and trikatu in honey supports easy, regular, deep breathing. A respiratory supporting syrup can be made from the combination of vasaka leaf, licorice root, tulsi leaf, ginger root, haritaki fruit, pippali fruit, and peppermint or menthol.

Sitopaladi

A couple of Ayurvedic formulas are standouts for respiratory health. Sitopaladi is in every home in India. It is for acute, serious, unproductive cough and specific for cough with copious white or slightly yellow sputum, sore throat, and high fever. A simple formula, it contains sugar, bamboo manna (dried, aged bamboo sap, vamsa lochana), pippali, cardamom, and cinnamon. The formula name means, “Sugar, etc.,” as it is based on sitopala, or white sugar. Taken as a powder, this fine powder liquefies in the mouth and becomes a sugary

syrup to soothe the irritated throat. The sugar and the warming herbs liquefy and mobilize mucus, allowing the sputum to be expectorated, and the *vamsa lochana* rapidly shuts down the cough reflex. As an added bonus, the warming herbs are *dipana* (promoting *agni*), helping to burn the overall excess Kapha. Most people use two heaping tablespoons per dose, as needed. If persistent throat mucus is a problem, some people use one teaspoon once or twice a day for a few weeks to thin and eliminate the Kapha Dosha in the throat.

Talisadi

Talisadi falls in the same respiratory category as sitopaladi, but it is a hotter formula as it contains all the ingredients in sitopaladi, plus black pepper, ginger, and talisa, an herb that is a good addition to your personal *materia medica*. Talisadi has an immune and lung focus. The star herb, talisa, or talispatra (*Abies webbiana*), or Indian silver fir, is a conifer from the Himalayas. The needles are bitter, sweet, light, and hot, and *kaphavatahar*. The formula based on these needles is fragrant, expectorant, mildly laxative, and can act as a dipana. Talisadi may find use in *kaphaja* asthma. Most people use 2–5 grams per day, in divided doses, with honey or warm water as an *anupan*.

Sitopaladi and talisadi are similar formulas, but they have different uses. Use sitopaladi to promote a productive cough, and the hotter talisadi for fever or when the cold is accompanied by digestive symptoms,

including indigestion, anorexia, and diarrhea.

Fortunately, the body desperately wants to keep the lungs healthy and the breath pumping, so we can work with the body's priorities to heal these lung problems. With some insight, careful differential assessment, and diligent monitoring, even the most obnoxious respiratory problems can be a thing of the past. Take a deep breath and dig in, and you can get some serious inspiration in your quest for lifelong healthy breathing.

<https://www.banyanbotanicals.com/info/ayurvedic-living/learning-ayurveda/glossary-of-ayurvedic-terms/>

Regards for health

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "S. Zumbühl". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Director in Charge
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