

Herbs for Headaches

Herbs can ease pain and help to relieve various types of headaches

Headaches are most commonly treated with pain killers, which help with the pain, but do not prevent headaches from returning. The problem is that there are many types of headaches and many underlying causes that need to be addressed to actually help people eliminate frequent headaches. Herbs can play a role in easing headaches, but their effectiveness depends on matching the herb with the types of headaches it best relieves.

With that understanding, here are some of the major herbs that can be used to ease headaches. We recommend working with a competent herbalist to help you identify which remedies may be most helpful for you.

Herbs with an Aspirin-Like Action

Willow Bark: Contains salicylates, which are the natural compounds that led to the creation of aspirin. Willow bark has been used for thousands of years to ease inflammation and pain in headaches and arthritis. Like aspirin, it offers symptomatic relief rather than a cure, and it also takes a fairly large dose to be effective.

Black Cohosh: An antispasmodic that also contains salicylates. It will help ease vasoconstrictive headaches when taken in small doses and can also ease headaches caused by muscle spasms in the neck. It's best used in tincture form because large doses are known to cause vasodilative headaches in some people. Take 15-20 drops with water every 15-20 minutes until relief is obtained.

Meadowsweet: Another natural source of salicylates and may be helpful for headaches associated with digestive upset.

Wintergreen: The essential oil of wintergreen contains methyl-salicylate, which absorbs through the skin to reduce inflammation and pain. Massage it into the neck or head.

Possible Migraine Remedies

Feverfew: A popular remedy for migraine headaches, but it needs to be taken daily to be effective. It reduces the frequency and severity of migraines, but won't relieve a migraine headache once it starts. It's best to chew on a couple of fresh leaves everyday or use a standardized extract of freeze-dried feverfew.

Butterbur: Oral use of standardized, PA-free extract (15% petasin and isopetasin) of butterbur can reduce the frequency, intensity and duration of migraines. It also helps reduce allergic

reactions, which may account for part of its action on migraines because food allergies can trigger migraines.

Wood Betony: A good remedy for tension headaches and some types of migraines. It's also helpful for facial pain (neuralgia) and headache associated with tension from over thinking.

Remedies for Tension Headaches

Lobelia: May be helpful for easing vasoconstrictive or tension headaches. It is best used in tincture form as large doses can cause nausea or vomiting. Take 5-10 drops every 15-20 minutes with water until relief is obtained. You can also combine lobelia and capsicum extracts in equal parts and massage them into the neck and shoulders to relax neck muscles, which often helps relieve headaches.

Kava Kava: Like lobelia, kava kava can be used to relax muscles and ease both tension and cluster headaches (along with magnesium). It contains compounds that modify GABA receptors in the brain, reducing anxiety and aiding relaxation. It can also be applied topically to ease spasms in the neck.

Skullcap: A good remedy for people who are overstimulated and sensitive to sounds, touch, and light, something that happens to some migraine sufferers. It is a relaxing herb and may also ease headaches associated with stress and insomnia.

Kudzu: Eases neck pain and stiffness, which can be helpful for some types of headaches, especially headaches caused by high blood pressure. It can also be helpful for headaches associated with digestive issues like leaky gut.

Other Headache Remedies

Copaiba: The resin and the essential oil of copaiba contain B-caryophyllene, a terpene that acts as a phytocannabinoid on CB2 receptors, which modulates inflammatory reactions. It may be helpful for headaches caused by traumatic brain injury.

Periwinkle: This is an herb that increases blood flow to the brain, which can make it helpful for vasoconstrictive (tension) headaches. It is a low dose botanical, meaning you only use 1-3 drops several times a day. It should not be used during pregnancy or by people with low blood pressure or liver or kidney disease.

Lavender: Smelling lavender oil helps people who are high strung and wound-up causing tension headaches. It can inhaled or applied topically to the neck for headaches associated with stress and may help when used at the very beginning of a migraine.

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