

The_Health_Benefits_Of_Dandelions_2004.txt

Subj:{OHG} The Health Benefits of Dandelions

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From: (Jon Wood)

The following is an excerpt from the excellent book by Peter A. Gail, Ph.D., titled "The Dandelion Celebration-The Guide to Unexpected Cuisine." See end note.

Suppose your doctor tells you, on your next visit, that he has just discovered a miracle drug which, when eaten as a part of your daily diet or taken as a beverage, could, depending on the peculiarities of your body chemistry:

prevent or cure liver diseases, such as hepatitis or jaundice;

act as a tonic and gentle diuretic to purify your blood, cleanse your system, dissolve kidney stones, and otherwise improve gastrointestinal health;

assist in weight reduction;

cleanse your skin and eliminate acne;

improve your bowel function, working equally well to relieve both constipation and diarrhea;

prevent or lower high blood pressure;

prevent or cure anemia;

lower your serum cholesterol by as much as half;

eliminate or drastically reduce acid indigestion and gas buildup by

cutting the heaviness of fatty foods;

prevent or cure various forms of cancer;

prevent or control diabetes melitis;

and, at the same time, have no negative side effects and selectively act on only what ails you. If he gave you a prescription for this miracle medicine, would you use it religiously at first to solve whatever the problem is and then consistently for preventative body maintenance?

All the above curative functions, and more, have been attributed to one plant known to everyone, *Taraxacum officinale*, which means the "Official Remedy for Disorders." We call it the common dandelion. It is so well respected, in fact, that it appears in the U.S. National Formulary, and in the Pharmacopeias of Hungary, Poland, Switzerland, and the Soviet Union. It is one of the top 6 herbs in the Chinese herbal medicine chest.

According to the USDA Bulletin #8, "Composition of Foods" (Haytowitz and Matthews 1984), dandelions rank in the top 4 green vegetables in overall nutritional value. Minnich, in "Gardening for Better Nutrition" ranks them, out of all vegetables, including grains, seeds and greens, as tied for 9th best. According to these data, dandelions are nature's richest green vegetable source of beta-carotene, from which Vitamin A is created, and the third richest source of Vitamin A of all foods, after cod-liver oil and beef liver! They also are particularly rich in fiber, potassium, iron, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus and the B vitamins, thiamine and riboflavin, and are a good source of protein.

These figures represent only those published by the USDA. Studies in Russia and Eastern Europe by Gerasimova, Racz, Vogel, and Marei

(Hobbs 1985) indicate that dandelion is also rich in micronutrients such as copper, cobalt, zinc, boron, and molybdenum, as well as Vitamin D.

Much of what dandelions purportedly do in promoting good health could result from nutritional richness alone. Vogel considers the sodium in dandelions important in reducing inflammations of the liver. Gerasimova, the Russian chemist who analyzed the dandelion for, among other things, trace minerals, stated that "dandelion [is] an example of a harmonious combination of trace elements, vitamins and other biologically active substances in ratios optimal for a human organism" (Hobbs 1985).

Recent research, reported in the Natural Healing and Nutritional Annual, 1989 (Bricklin and Ferguson 1989) on the value of vitamins and minerals indicates that:

- * Vitamin A is important in fighting cancers of epithelial tissue, including mouth and lung;
- * Potassium rich foods, in adequate quantities, and particularly in balance with magnesium, helps keep blood pressure down and reduces risks of strokes;
- * Fiber fights diabetes, lowers cholesterol, reduces cancer and heart disease risks, and assists in weight loss. High fiber vegetables take up lots of room, are low in calories, and slow down digestion so the food stays in the stomach longer and you feel full longer;
- * Calcium in high concentrations can build strong bones and can lower blood pressure;

* B vitamins help reduce stress.

Throughout history, dandelions have had a reputation as being effective in promoting weight loss and laboratory research indicates that there is some support for this reputation. Controlled tests on laboratory mice and rats by the same Romanians indicated that a loss of up to 30% of body weight in 30 days was possible when the animals were fed dandelion extract with their food. Those on grass extract lost much less. The control group on plain water actually gained weight.

Beyond nutritional richness, however, are the active chemical constituents contained in dandelions which may have specific therapeutic effects on the body. These include, as reported by Hobbs (1985):

* Inulin, which converts to fructose in the presence of cold or hydrochloric acid in the stomach. Fructose forms glycogen in the liver without requiring insulin, resulting in a slower blood sugar rise, which makes it good for diabetics and hypoglycemics;

* Tof-CFr, a glucose polymer similar to lentinan, which Japanese researchers have found to act against cancer cells in laboratory mice; Lentinan is a yeast glucan (glucose polymer) that increases resistance against protozoal and viral infections.;

* Pectin, which is anti-diarrheal and also forms ionic complexes with metal ions, which probably contributes to dandelion's reputation as a blood and gastrointestinal detoxifying herb. Pectin is prescribed regularly in Russia to remove heavy metals and radioactive elements from body tissues. Pectin can also lower cholesterol and, combined with Vitamin C, can lower it even more. Dandelion is a good source of both Pectin and Vitamin C;

The_Health_Benefits_Of_Dandelions_2004.txt

* Coumestrol, an estrogen mimic which possibly is responsible, at least in part, for stimulating milk flow and altering hormones;

* Apigenin and Luteolin, two flavonoid glycosides which have been demonstrated to have diuretic, anti-spasmodic, anti-oxidant and liver protecting actions and properties, and also to strengthen the heart and blood vessels. They also have anti-bacterial and anti-hypoglycemic properties, and, as estrogen mimics, may also stimulate milk production and alter hormones;

* Gallic Acid, which is anti-diarrheal and anti-bacterial;

* Linoleic and Linolenic Acid, which are essential fatty acids required by the body to produce prostaglandin which regulate blood pressure and such body processes as immune responses which suppress inflammation. These fatty acids can lower chronic inflammation, such as proliferative arthritis, regulate blood pressure and the menstrual cycle, and prevent platelet aggregation;

* Choline, which has been shown to help improve memory;

* Several Sesquiterpene compounds which are what make dandelions bitter. These may partly account for dandelions tonic effects on digestion, liver, spleen and gall bladder, and are highly anti-fungal;

* Several Triterpenes, which may contribute to bile or liver stimulation;

* Taraxasterol, which may contribute to liver and gall bladder health or to hormone altering.

These chemicals, individually, are not unique to dandelions, but the combination of them all in one plant, along with high levels of vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, proteins and fiber account for the

many claims made regarding the plant.

These claims include the following results of clinical and laboratory research, again as reported in Hobbs (1985):

* A doubling of bile output with leaf extracts, and a quadrupling of bile output with root extract. Bile assists with the emulsification, digestion and absorption of fats, in alkalinizing the intestines and in the prevention of putrefaction. This could explain the effectiveness of dandelion in reducing the effects of fatty foods (heartburn and acid indigestion);

* A reduction in serum cholesterol and urine bilirubin levels by as much as half in humans with severe liver imbalances has been demonstrated by Italian researchers;

* Diuretic effects with a strength approaching that of the potent diuretics Furosemide and Lasix, used for congestive heart failure and cirrhosis of the liver, with none of the serious side effects, were found by Romanian scientists. They found that water extract of dandelion leaves, administered orally, because of its high potassium content, replaced serum potassium electrolytes lost in the urine, eliminating such side effects common with the synthetics as severe potassium depletion, hepatic coma in liver patients, circulatory collapse, and transmission through mothers' milk;

* In 1979 a Japanese patent was filed for a freeze-dried warm water extract of dandelion root for anti-tumor use. It was found that administration of the extract markedly inhibited growth of particular carcinoma cells within one week after treatment;

* Dental researchers at Indiana University in 1982 used dandelion extracts in antiplaque preparations;

The_Health_Benefits_Of_Dandelions_2004.txt

* In studies from 1941 to 1952, the French scientist Henri Leclerc demonstrated the effectiveness of dandelion on chronic liver problems related to bile stones. He found that roots gathered in late summer to fall, when they are rich in bitter, white milky latex, should be used for all liver treatments;

* In 1956, Chauvin demonstrated the antibacterial effects of dandelion pollen, which may validate the centuries old use of dandelion flowers in Korean folk medicine to prevent furuncles (boils, skin infections), tuberculosis, and edema and promote blood circulation.

Also, Witt (1983) recommends dandelion tea to alleviate the water buildup in PMS (pre-menstrual syndrome).

There are many testimonials from those who have benefited from the use of dandelions in the treatment of what ailed them.

Robert Stickle, an internationally famous architect, was diagnosed as having a malignant melanoma 21 years ago, and was given, after radical surgery had not halted its spread, less than 2 years to live. He said, in a letter to Jeff Zullo, president of the Society for the Promotion of Dandelions, (June 23, 1986):

" I went on a search for the answer to my mortal problem, and [discovered] that perhaps it was a nutritional dilemma.... To me, cancer is primarily a liver failure manifestation. {Italians are very concerned about problems of the 'fegato'}. [I discovered that] the cancer rate in native Italians is very low among the farming population (paesanos). When they get affluent and move to the city, its the same as the rest of civilized man. Paesanos eat dandelions, make brew from the roots, and are healthy, often living to over 100 years."

The_Health_Benefits_Of_Dandelions_2004.txt

He states that he began eating dandelion salad every day, and his improvement confounded the doctors. When he wrote the letter in 1986, 18 years had passed and there had been no recurrence of the melanoma.

A benefit which comes from writing articles for national media is that you hear from people who have interesting stories to tell. I recently received a call from Peter Gruchawka, a 70 year old gentleman from Manorville, NY, who reported that he had been diagnosed with diabetes melitis 3 months before and was put on 5 grams of Micronase. At the time, he had a 5+ sugar spillover in his urine. He took Micronase for about a month before he learned, from his wife who is a nurse, that Micronase can do damage to the liver. He had read in "Herbal Medicine" by Diane Buchanan and "Back to Eden" by Jethro Kloss about the effectiveness of dandelions in controlling diabetes. Without saying anything to his doctors, he stopped taking Micronase and began drinking dandelion coffee each day. During the first week, his urinary sugar, measured night and morning, was erratic and unstable, but after a week, his sugar stabilized and when he called, he had been getting negative urine sugar readings for over a month. The doctors are amazed and can't explain it. An interesting side benefit to replacing Micronase with dandelion coffee is that, while Micronase damages the liver as a side effect, dandelions are particularly known for strengthening the liver.

According to Mr. Gruchawka, he changed nothing but the medication. He had cut out pastries and other sugars when he was diagnosed and started on Micronase, and has continued to do without those things while taking dandelion coffee.

In reporting these claims, however, I must add three qualifiers:

1. First, unfortunately, neither herbs nor synthetic remedies work for everyone in the same way. Different bodies respond differently to medicines, and what works incredibly well for one person may not work

at all, or work less well, for someone else.

2. Second, good health results from a combination of healthy diet and enough exercise to keep the body toned. Bob Stickle, for all his insistence that dandelions cured him, changed, according to a mutual friend, his entire lifestyle. He didn't just add dandelion salad to what he was already doing.

3. People with health problems need to seek the advice and care of a competent physician, with whom this information can be shared. It is important to reemphasize that it is presented as information only. I am not a medical doctor, and neither advocate nor prescribe dandelions or dandelion products for use by anyone or for any ailment. Only your doctor can do that.

Because there are so many variables, it is hard to attribute Mr. Stickle's cure to any one of them directly. Likewise, Italian farmers live a lifestyle which combines a healthy diet, lots of work and clean air. They heat and cook with wood, which they have to cut and split. They haul water for household use. When they move to the city, diet, exercise, and environmental conditions change. Stress and sedentary habits increase.

And there is the importance of faith in the healing process, whether it be faith in God or faith in the curative properties of the herb being taken.

While dandelions, given all these variables, may never be proved to cure any specific ill, they are an extremely healthy green which cannot in any way hurt you. Research on how much you would have to eat to cause harm indicates that eating grass is more dangerous than eating dandelions (Hobbs 1985). Therefore, with everything going for dandelions, it is highly probable that everyone can derive at least some nutritional benefit from them by eating or drinking them

regularly.

The medical and pharmacological establishment is generally critical of claims regarding the use of herbs on disease, and their concerns need to be put in perspective.

Herbal medicines have been used very effectively far longer than synthetics, and many current pharmaceutical products have been derived from research on plants used as medicine by many cultures. The problem with plants, however, is that they are available to anyone. It is impossible to patent a plant, and thereby gain proprietary rights to it. As a consequence, pharmaceutical companies attempt to isolate the active properties from medicinal plants and synthesize them so that they can patent them. Many of the synthetics have serious side-effects which were not present in the natural plant product, often because other chemicals in the plant offset them (i.e. the large quantities of potassium in dandelions which allows for potassium replenishment when dandelion is used as a diuretic).

USDA botanist Dr. James Duke (1989) suggests that a proper and appropriate "herbal soup", filled with "vitamins, minerals, fibers and a whole host of bioactive compounds," from which the body can selectively strain the compounds it needs to restore itself to health, will be more effective than synthetic medicines containing a "very select and specialized compound or two plus filler, usually non-nutritive." This is especially true if the "herbal soup", in the form of a potent potherb like dandelion, is a regular part of the diet so that the appropriate bioactive substances are present in the right amounts when the body needs them.

The book that this reprint was taken from "The Dandelion Celebration-The Guide to Unexpected Cuisine" is recommended to anyone who would like to know more about this remarkable plant. It covers everything you could want to know about dandelions and more, including recipes,

The_Health_Benefits_Of_Dandelions_2004.txt

planting, picking and preparing, along with the wonderful history of this "Official Remedy for Disorders", *Taraxacum officinale*, the common dandelion.

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