

Some Wonder Herbs Beneficial in Geriatric Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial plants and their products have been used as food, shelter, clothing and mainly medicines for mankind. Nature has gifted us with some wonder plants which have been used from ancient times by our saints, which maintained their vigor by the use of these plants. As we all know aging is an inevitable process and it brings along with it many chronic diseases like hypertension, diabetes, osteoarthritis, neurological disorders etc. Many herbs are there which have marvelous capacity to boost immunity thereby posing a protection against the chronic diseases. These herbs impart healthy aging. The herbal formulations, balanced diet and proper lifestyle with good moral conduct imparts longevity to the elderly people.

Keywords: *hypertension, diabetes, osteoarthritis, neurological disorders, herbal formulations, longevity.*

INTRODUCTION

Nature has gifted a wide array of plants to human beings. Many of the plants are beneficial in some way or the other. In this paper we will review some wonder plants which are beneficial in geriatric healthcare.

As we all know ageing is a must process for every human being, but many herbs are there, the regular and monitored use of which boosts the immunity power and limits the risk of chronic diseases in elderly persons. The old age is prone to many diseases which may occur due to various factors like nutritional deficiencies, stress, social, physical and emotional factors. Enormous plants exist in

nature which are rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and many more beneficial compounds and these result in healthy ageing. Following are some wonder herbs useful in geriatric healthcare -

1. *Tinospora cordifolia* (Giloy)

Family-Menispermaceae

This plant boosts immunity and also improves digestion. The aqueous stem extract is used, it has higher nutritional content enriched with useful alkaloids, glycosides, steroids etc. These help in boosting the immunity and thereby preventing the elderly from further attack of many chronic diseases.

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2. *Phyllanthus emblica* (Amla)

Family Phyllanthaceae

It is the richest source of Vitamin C. Various parts of this plant are used to treat a wide range of diseases. The fruits are termed as wonder berry and poses analgesic, cardioprotective and neuroprotective properties. It is also an important hair tonic. It may be used as a rejuvenative to promote longevity.

3. *Withania somnifera* (Ashwagandha)

Family Solanaceae

It is commonly known as Indian Ginseng. This plant is one of the most revered plant in traditional ayurvedic medicine in India. It has a wide range of health benefits. It is said to provide a youthful state of mental and physical health (Engels and Brinckmann 1999). It increases the function of brain and nervous system and also act as a stress reliever. It has antioxidant properties which help to protect against cellular damage thus helping in geriatric health care. The root extract is very beneficial (Sandhu et al., 2010).

4. *Allium sativum* (lahsun)

Family-Amaryllidaceae

This plant has high medicinal value and has inflammatory, rheumatological, ulcer inhibiting, analgesic, antimicrobial, anticancer, liver protection and wound healing properties. The sulphur compounds present in garlic have incredible therapeutic potential. The antioxidants present help to provide Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Garlic helps to fight against infectious diseases, which are the common cause of death in elderly persons.

5. *Commiphora mukul* (Guggulu)

Family- Burseraceae

This is a very important plant used in Ayurvedic medicines. The beneficial part of this plant is the gum resin. It is rich in steroids, essential oils, flavonoids, amino acids and thus protects against a variety of diseases. This plant is praised for its anti inflammatory properties. It is used for the most common diseases in elderly persons like osteoarthritis

and rheumatoid arthritis. It is also said that the steroids present in this plant helps in lowering the levels of cholesterol and triglycerides (Singh et al., 2003).

6. *Curcuma longa* (turmeric)

Family -Zingiberaceae

Turmeric has been termed as golden spice. The rhizome is the plant part used which has active compound curcumin. It has the potential to improve heart health and prevent against Alzheimer and cancer. It is also useful in increasing the antioxidant levels of the body. Curcumin boosts levels of the brain hormone which increase the growth of new neurons and helps to fight various degenerative processes in the brain. Curcumin helps to treat symptoms of arthritis. Most importantly it helps in delaying ageing and fight age related chronic diseases (Araújo and Leon, 2001).

7. *Terminalia chebula* (Harad, Haritaki)

Family-Combretaceae

It possesses great therapeutic value. It occupies great esteem in Ayurveda for its properties to prevent and cure diseases. It is called king of medicines in Ayurvedic system of medicine. The rind of fruit has medicinal value and is one of the important ingredients in Triphala. This plant is used externally in wound healing, fungal infections and inflammations of mouth. Internally it is rejuvenative, astringent, purgative, stomachic and laxative and also used in asthma. This plant is a wonder herb, all parts of the plant are beneficial. The roots are helpful in diseases of bones, stem is useful in muscle diseases, bark is useful for skin diseases, branches are useful in heart diseases, leaves are useful for visceral diseases and the fruits for vital organs including heart diseases (Rath et al., 2013).

8. *Terminalia arjuna* (Arjuna)

Family-Combretaceae

This is the most important plant used as cardio tonic in heart failures, atherosclerosis and myocardium necrosis. It is also helpful in various blood diseases. Many compounds were isolated from bark, which had cardio

protective functions. The leaves of this plant has antitumor activity. Bark of Arjuna is also useful in skin diseases and debilitating diseases (Sandhu et al., 2010).

9. *Sida cordifolia* (Bala)

Family- Malvaceae

It is a highly reputable medicinal herb in Ayurveda. It is best plant for nervine tonic. It is anti-inflammatory, hypotensive and hypoglycemic agent. This plant is mainly used as a central nervous system depressant. This plant denotes strength in Ayurvedic system of medicine and it is used to uplift the strength of bones and muscles and enhances the over all stamina in the body and is an important plant in elderly care. It is valued for enhancing both the quality and quantity of sperm count in males. All parts of the plants have distinct medicinal actions chiefly roots. As per mentioned in Ayurveda, this plant is beneficial in pacifying all three dosha's in human body- the Vata, Pitta and Kapha. It is beneficial in managing fatigue which is a common problem in elders. The plant also has rejuvenating action. It is a diuretic herb that strengthens the urinary system. It is effective in promoting men's sexual health.

10. *Trigonella foenum-graecum* (Methi)

Family- Fabaceae

This plant has multipurpose uses in geriatric healthcare. This is one of the oldest traditional medicinal plant, rich source of dietary fibers and also rich in several phytochemicals and minerals. Methi possesses antioxidant, liver protection, antiulcer, anticancer, antibacterial and neuro protective properties. It is helpful in arthritis. A compound called protodioscin makes it useful in cancer and reducing tumor cell growth. It is useful in neurological disorders like Parkinson's, Alzheimer and depression the common problem of elderly people. This plant is also beneficial in diabetes and obesity.

11. *Asparagus racemosus* (Shatawari)

Family-Asparagaceae

Shatawari is considered as an important adaptogenic herb as it helps to cope the body with physical and emotional strength. It is a general health tonic, improves vitality and is one of the important ingredient in Ayurvedic medicine. It has antioxidant, anti inflammatory properties thereby boosting the immune system. It is also said to cure kidney stones, ulcers, diarrhea, maintain blood sugar level, relieves depression, most importantly, it is one of the nature's best anti-aging plant. The roots of shatawari contains saponin which helps to reduce the skin damage that leads to production of wrinkles, a characteristic symptom in old age. It also helps in preventing breakdown of collagen which is said to maintain the elasticity of skin (Singh and Murthy, 2009).

12. *Boswellia serrata* (Shallaki) hu

Family-Burseraceae

Boswellia is used widely in Ayurveda for treating arthritis. The extract of this plant is very beneficial in osteoarthritis. Boswellic acid is an active ingredient in this plant shows significant activity in treatment of inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, chronic bronchitis, asthma etc. It is also useful in brain injury. It improves knee joint function. The oleoresin of this plant is used as folk medicine from centuries (Gupta et al., 2011).

Besides the above mentioned plants, the nature is filled with many such plants which help in maintenance of health and achievement of long healthy and active life. There is a long list of plants useful in geriatric health care, the need is to explore and implement. Today the world is facing the side effects of allopathic medicines and hence inclination towards Ayurvedic system of medicines is prominently seen. The useful plant extracts of all the above mentioned plants and many more useful plants is nowadays available in the form of tablets and capsules, so it is very easy to for all of us to get benefit from the God gifted medicinal plants from nature.

CONCLUSION

India has a long history of traditional health practices. Many herbs are there which come under the category of wonder herbs. Studies done on many of the herbs have revealed that the antioxidants and the beneficial compounds present in many of the plants can be an effective alternate to allopathic medicines. These compounds have enormous therapeutic effects. Hence, today the need is innovation in the field of herbal medicines and explore more about the use of herbs. This will positively lead to more inventions in the herbal formulations for geriatric healthcare.

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