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Ginseng Side Effects, Interactions and Warnings

▷ Products containing ginseng varied greatly in their herb content as well as recommendations for use.

- Evid Based Complement Alternat Med. 2004 Dec;1(3):305-313. Epub 2004 Oct 6. -- Phytochemical Assays of Commercial Botanical Dietary Supplements. -- Krochmal R, Hardy M, Bowerman S, Lu QY, Wang HJ, Elashoff R, Heber D.

▷ Since ginseng is considered to be a stimulant, caution should be exercised if you ingest caffeine, products containing pseudoephedrine or other stimulants.

▷ Vitamin C can interfere with or increase the absorption of ginseng. - Mol Cell Biochem. 2000 Jan;204(1-2):77-82. -- Interactions between Panax quinquefolium saponins and vitamin C are observed in vitro. -- Li JP, Huang M, Teoh H, Man RY.

▷ Reports include reactions such as headache, insomnia, anxiety and breast soreness or tenderness. It is also possible that skin rashes may develop as well as asthma attacks, increased blood pressure, diarrhea, euphoria, nervousness, skin eruptions, heart palpitations, or post-menopausal uterine bleeding. Stop using ginseng and consult your pharmacist or doctor if you suffer any side effects.

▷ Use ginseng only under the direction of an herbalist or a licensed healthcare professional if you have any of the following conditions: pregnancy, insomnia, hay fever, fibrocystic breasts, asthma, emphysema, high blood pressure, blood-clotting problems, heart disorders, hypoglycemia or diabetes.

▷ This article advises against using ginseng in pregnant women in the first trimester because of possible birth defects.

- Birth Defects Res B Dev Reprod Toxicol. 2005 Apr;74(2):207-9. -- Developmental toxicity research of ginsenoside Rb1 using a whole mouse embryo culture model. -- Liu P, Xu Y, Yin H, Wang J, Chen K,

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Ginseng

Definition

Ginseng is an herbal preparation derived from the aromatic root of a plant of the genus *Panax*, which is native to East Asia. Ginseng belongs to the Araliaceae family of plants. Siberian ginseng belongs to a different genus, *Eleutherococcus senticosus*. The English name of the plant is a modification of its Chinese name, *ren shen*, which means "man" and "herb." The Chinese name comes from the ginseng root's resemblance to the shape of the human body, whence the plant's traditional use as a tonic for male sexual vigor and potency. The Latin name for the species, *Panax*, is derived from the Greek word *panacea*, which means "cure-all," or, "all-healer."

There are three species of ginseng in common use in the United States: American ginseng, Korean ginseng, and Siberian ginseng. All are regarded as adaptogens that normalize immune functions and are preparations that help the body adapt to change, thus lowering the risk of stress-related illness. American ginseng, whose botanical name is *Panax quinquefolius*, has recently been evaluated as a treatment for high blood sugar in patients with type 2 (adult-onset) diabetes. It is considered to be less stimulating than the Korean or Siberian varieties. Korean ginseng, or *Panax ginseng*, is the species most often studied in Western as well as Asian trials of botanical preparations. Siberian ginseng, or *Eleutherococcus senticosus*, has been used in Russian sports medicine to boost athletic performance and strengthen the immune system.

As of 2002, ginseng is one of the most expensive herbs in the world, costing as much as \$20 per ounce, or more for red ginseng with the root, which is over 10,000 years old. It is one of the top three herbal products sold in the United States.

Purpose

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), ginseng is regarded as having a "sweet" and "neutral" nature. It is thought to have a particular affinity for the spleen and lungs. It is used as an aphrodisiac, a tonic for the spleen, kidney and adrenal functions, and lungs, and a general restorative for the qi or vital energy in the body. TCM also recommends ginseng for asthma, weak pulse, indigestion, lack of appetite, rectal prolapse, hypertension, diabetes, **insomnia**, angina, congestive heart failure, and heart palpitations. It is important to note that ginseng is an exception to the rule that Chinese herbal medicine rarely uses a single herb in the manner of Western herbalism. Ginseng is often listed as one ingredient among several in Chinese medicines; it is, however, one of the few herbs in TCM that is sometimes prescribed by itself.

In the West, ginseng is frequently advertised as an energy booster, a memory aid, a sexual stimulant, a treatment for impotence and gastrointestinal disorders, and a promoter of longevity. Many Western researchers consider these claims inflated; some studies have found no difference between ginseng and a placebo in terms of the energy levels or general well-being reported by test subjects. Most studies nevertheless have shown improved energy, memory function and performance especially when fatigued, though most of the studies have been short-term. Ginseng's association with the male reproductive system

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The use of herbs is a time-honored approach to strengthening the body and treating disease. However, herbs contain active substances that can trigger side effects and interact with other herbs, supplements or medications. For these reasons, herbs should be taken with care, under the supervision of a practitioner knowledgeable in the field of botanical medicine.

Possible side effects of Ginseng have a reasonably good safety record. The most common side effects are nervousness and excitability that usually decrease after the first few days. The ability to concentrate may be decreased, and blood sugar may decrease to abnormally low levels. Because ginseng has an estrogen-like effect, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should not take it. Occasionally, there have been reports of more serious side effects, such as asthma attacks, increased blood pressure, palpitations, and, in postmenopausal women, uterine bleeding. To many people, ginseng tastes unpleasant.

Both American and Asian ginsengs are stimulants and may cause nervousness or sleeplessness, particularly if taken at high doses. Other reported side effects include high blood pressure, insomnia, restlessness, anxiety, euphoria, diarrhea, vomiting, headache, nosebleed, breast pain and vaginal bleeding.

Siberian ginseng may cause nervousness and restlessness in some individuals. In rare cases, Siberian ginseng may cause mild diarrhea. Siberian ginseng is not recommended for individuals with very high blood pressure. It may cause insomnia in some people if taken too close to bedtime. IF symptoms like breathing problems, tightness in the throat or chest, chest pain, skin hives, rash, or itchy or swollen skin develop, the use of taking Siberian ginseng may be stopped.

There have been reports that Asian ginseng may possibly decrease the effectiveness of the blood-thinning medication. Warfarin when taken with ginseng may inhibit platelet activity. Aspirin may not interact well either. Consult with your physician before taking any herbal supplement. The American Herbal Products Association (AHPA) has rated

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