

USE

- insomnia with muscle spasms or pain associated with accumulated nervous tension; the spasms could be in the muscles of the neck, jaw, diaphragm, or calves

PRACTICAL NOTES

This combination can be taken as 5 ml of 1:5 tincture in quarter of a cup of hot water before bed and, if necessary, on waking in the night. Once the insomnia, nervous tension, and muscle spasms are reduced, this combination can be replaced by a more tonic combination.

2. Headache + facial neuralgia

Liver Hyperactive Yang + Stagnant Qi and Blood in channels

Herb	Ratio	Temperature	Taste
Rosmarinus	1	warm	aromatic, bitter, acrid
Lavandula	1	sl. warm	aromatic, bitter, sl. acrid
Valeriana	1	cool	bitter, sweet
Piscidia	1	cold	bitter
Lobelia	0.5	warm-cool	acrid
Glycyrrhiza	0.5	neutral-cool	sweet
Zingiber	0.5	hot	acrid, aromatic

This combination is the same as *Rosmarinus: headache + nervous tension* and is discussed under that heading.

3. Dysmenorrhea + nervous tension

Uterus Stagnant Qi and Blood + Heart Spirit Disturbance

Herb	Ratio	Temperature	Taste
Piscidia	1	cold	bitter
Anemone	1	cold	bitter
Mentha puf.	1	warm	aromatic
Lobelia	0.5	warm-cool	acrid
Zingiber	0.5	hot	acrid, aromatic

GENERAL

This combination is for Uterus Stagnant Qi and Blood plus Heart Spirit Disturbance. There may also be some Liver Hyperactive Yang and/or Kidney fear. The overall temperature is more or less neutral but the combination contains cold, bitter herbs to calm the Spirit and warming, acrid, and aromatic herbs to relieve uterine muscle spasms.

USE

- dysmenorrhea aggravated by nervous tension

PRACTICAL NOTES

This combination can be taken as 5 ml of 1:5 tincture in quarter of a cup of hot water three times per day, for a few

days before menstruation and also during menstruation. This combination specifically relieves pain associated with muscle spasms and nervous tension. Once menstruation has stopped, this combination can be replaced by a more tonic or more regulatory combination.

COMPARISON OF THE THREE
PISCIDIA COMBINATIONS

1. Insomnia + muscle spasms

Heart Spirit Disturbance + Stagnation of Qi and Blood

Piscidia, Valeriana, and Lavandula combine to calm anxiety and promote sleep, and all five herbs can combine to relieve muscle spasms and pain associated with nervous tension. Valeriana and Piscidia are more sedative analgesics, whilst Lavandula, Lobelia, and Zingiber in combination can relieve muscle spasms by normalizing muscle tone and by stimulating the flow of Qi and Blood in the Muscle channels.

2. Headache + facial neuralgia

Liver Hyperactive Yang + Stagnant Qi and Blood in channels

Both the previous combination and this combination contain Piscidia, Valeriana, Lavandula, Lobelia, and Zingiber. The difference between the two combinations lies in the inclusion of Rosmarinus in combination No. 2. Rosmarinus is not only specific for headache, but its circulatory stimulant action can moderate the sedative action of Piscidia, enabling this combination to be used for patterns of mixed Excess and Deficiency. Rosmarinus is too stimulant to be included in combination No. 1 for insomnia.

3. Dysmenorrhea + nervous tension

Uterus Stagnant Qi and Blood + Heart Spirit Disturbance

This combination is similar to the first combination in that both contain Piscidia, Lobelia, and Zingiber to relieve muscle spasms associated with nervous tension. The presence of Anemone and Mentha pulegium makes this combination specific for pain in the reproductive system associated with emotional stress.

OTHER PISCIDIA COMBINATIONS

The following additional combination further illustrates the range of uses of Piscidia:

- *Valeriana: hypertension + headache*

Research

CONSTITUENTS

The following constituents have been reported:

Chinese actions	Western actions
I. clear Damp Heat in the channels	anti-inflammatory analgesic antiarthritic antirheumatic
II. tonify and move the Qi of the Spleen and Stomach	bitter digestive tonic anti-inflammatory

Clear Damp Heat in the channels Harpagophytum can be used to treat inflammatory disorders of the muscles, tendons, joints, and bones, involving pain and stiffness. In Chinese medicine, these disorders are termed *bi* syndromes (Painful Obstruction), and Harpagophytum can be associated with one or more of the following actions:

- clears Damp Heat in the channels
- clears Wind Damp (Heat) in the channels
- moves Qi and Blood in the channels

In my opinion, Harpagophytum is more for cases of Painful Obstruction involving Heat than for cases involving Cold. Harpagophytum can be used in herbal combinations for cases of Painful Obstruction involving Cold, but only if it is suitably combined with warming circulatory stimulant herbs, such as Zanthoxylum, Zingiber, or Capsicum.

WESTERN USES

The main Western uses of Harpagophytum are shown here in terms of its two main Chinese actions:

Chinese actions	Western uses
I. clear Damp Heat in the channels	arthritis, gout, myalgia, back pain, rheumatism
II. tonify and move the Qi of Spleen and Stomach	poor appetite, dyspepsia

DIRECTION OF ENERGY

In terms of Chinese medicine, Harpagophytum does not appear to have a marked directional effect on the movement of energy. It may improve the circulation of Qi and Blood in the channels of the joints, tendons, and muscles, and it may strengthen the movement of Qi in the Stomach and Intestines, and perhaps in the Liver and Gallbladder as well.

TYPICAL CASE EXAMPLE

Signs and symptoms The patient has recurring arthritis with pain, stiffness, and some sensations of heat in the affected joints. There is a chronic tendency to poor appetite,

slow digestion, and gastroenteritis. The pulse is usually slightly wiry and slightly slippery, and becomes more rapid and flooding during the arthritic episodes. The tongue is pale and slightly purple, with red spots in the middle and back, and a yellowish greasy coat also in the middle and back.

Diagnosis The patient has Damp Heat in the channels of the joints with some Stagnant Qi and Damp Heat in the Stomach and Intestines, and some Spleen Deficient Qi.

Choice of Harpagophytum This herb is specific for inflammatory conditions of the joints, associated in Chinese medicine with Damp Heat, and can also be used to assist in the treatment of Deficiency, Stagnation, and Damp Heat in the Stomach and Intestines.

Limitations of Harpagophytum

TEMPERATURE

In this book, Harpagophytum is classified as cool and is more appropriate for warm conditions, although it can be used for hot, neutral, cool, or even cold conditions if it is suitably combined with other herbs.

TASTE

Harpagophytum is classified in this book as bitter in that it can reduce inflammation and, in Chinese medicine terminology, clear Damp Heat from the channels of the joints and muscles.

ACTIONS

Anti-inflammatory and analgesic Whilst there have been reports of the use of this herb in Southern Africa, Germany, and Britain for headache, migraine, and neuralgias, its most common use in the West is for inflammatory disorders of the joints, muscles, and tendons. It can be used in suitable combination with warming peripheral circulatory stimulants such as Zanthoxylum to treat arthritis or rheumatism with sensations of cold, but in my opinion, it is specific for arthritis and related disorders with sensations of heat.

Bitter digestive tonic Harpagophytum has a definitely bitter taste in the mouth and a tradition of use as a bitter tonic for poor appetite or for dyspepsia from sluggish digestion. However, I would only use this herb for atonic digestion if the condition was secondary to and associated with arthritis or related problems.

stances, such as hypnotics. However, according to the Botanical Safety Handbook, these proposed interactions have not been substantiated by other references.

Regulatory status

Please read the *Regulatory status* section in the chapter on *Safety*.

Smilax (sarsaparilla root) is on the UK General Sale List (Statutory Instrument Order 1977 No. 2129 to the Medicines Act 1968). Smilax is not included in Part 4 of Schedule 4 of the Therapeutic Goods Act Regulations of Australia. Smilax is not currently listed by the FDA (USA) as a prohibited substance, as subject to an import alert, or as a substance with a warning on its use.

Traditional sources

PROPERTIES

Temperature The main text cited in the *Chinese Herbal Medicine Dictionary* listed *S. glabra* (tú fù líng) as neutral, but another cited text listed it as cool. The Smilax species in common use in the West are listed as cool in this book since smilax can be used for psoriasis with irritation, which is associated in Chinese medicine terms with the presence of Heat Toxins.

Taste

Taste in the mouth The BHP described the dried rhizomes of Smilax as having a bitter taste. I found that:

- a 1:5 tincture of *S. ornata* in 25% alcohol tasted slightly bitter, slightly sweet, and slightly sour
- a sample of dried rhizome of *S. ornata* tasted initially slightly sweet and then slightly bitter on further chewing

Taste properties The main text cited in the *Chinese Herbal Medicine Dictionary* listed *S. glabra*, (tú fù líng) as sweet and bland, but another cited text listed it as bitter.

The Smilax species in common use in the West are listed as slightly bitter in this book, associated with their anti-inflammatory action. The relation of the slight sweet taste of Smilax to its actions is not clear.

ORGANS

In terms of Chinese medicine, Smilax, as used in the West, can be associated mainly with disorders of the following systems:

Organ	Examples of use	Source
Muscle channels	gout, rheumatoid arthritis	Christopher ²⁹ BHP
skin channels	skin eruptions, psoriasis	Christopher BHP

The main text cited in the *Chinese Herbal Medicine Dictionary* listed *S. glabra* (tú fù líng) as entering the Liver and Stomach, but another cited text listed it as entering the Liver and Spleen.

ACTIONS

- alterative
- dermatological agent
- anti-inflammatory
- antirheumatic and antiarthritic
- diuretic
- other

Alterative Although Christopher listed many actions for Smilax, including alterative, deobstruant, diuretic, tonic, stimulant, relaxant, diaphoretic, carminative, and demulcent, the main effect used in current Western practice is its alterative or 'blood cleansing' action. Whilst the original alterative use of this herb in the West was the treatment of syphilis, the two main current applications of the alterative action are for skin disorders and rheumatoid arthritis.

Dermatological agent Lyle⁴⁰ noted the use of Smilax as an alterative for skin diseases, Felter and Lloyd⁴¹ listed it for herpes, and Christopher recommended it for skin eruptions, psoriasis, chronic abscesses, old ulcers, and ringworm. The BHP gave its specific indication as psoriasis with irritation and heavy desquamation, and the BHC listed it for psoriasis and eczema.

Anti-inflammatory Christopher recommended Smilax for internal inflammations, and the BHC listed it as an anti-inflammatory. Moore⁴² has recommended *S. californica* for benign prostatic hypertrophy and for immune hyperactivity with allergies and chronic inflammations.

Antirheumatic and antiarthritic Felter and Lloyd noted the use of Smilax for rheumatism, and Christopher recommended it for rheumatism, gout, and arthritis. The BHP and the BHC both listed Smilax for rheumatism and rheumatoid arthritis.

Diuretic Felter and Lloyd noted the use of Smilax for 'passive general dropsy,' and the BHC listed it as a diuretic. Michael Moore used *S. californica* in combination with other herbs for nocturnal urination.