

Materia Medica for the Digestive system

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Digestive Bitters and Cholagogues

Dandelion root

Bitter, cholagogue, classic digestive system tonic. This is the bitter of choice to start with or if there are not differentiating indications. The dose is ½ tsp of tincture 15 minutes before every meal.

Yellowdock root

Bitter, cholagogue, can loosen the stool and help retrain bowel function. Choose this bitter if there is sluggishness in the bowel with constipation. It is not habit-forming like stimulant laxatives. The dose is ¼ to ½ tsp of tincture 15 minutes before every meal.

Artichoke leaf

Bitter with a specific affinity for upper digestive and pancreatic secretions. More useful if there is frequent upper digestive stasis, belching, bad breath, nausea. Dose is ¼ to ½ tsp of tincture 15 minutes before every meal.

Gentian root

Powerful bitter used to increase hydrochloric acid and enzyme secretion in the stomach. Very useful if there is poor absorption and lots of undigested material in the stool (especially if eating “cool” foods like salads or raw veggies). Dose is 20 drops to ¼ tsp of tincture 15 minutes before every meal.

Blue Vervain leaf and flower

A good digestive bitter of special value if there is digestive deficiency coupled with nervousness, stress, and agitation. The dose is ¼ to ½ tsp 15 minutes before every meal.

Carminatives and Aromatics

Fennel seed

Excellent all-around aromatic, warming in nature and good for deficient and/or spasmodic GI tracts. Relieves gas and bloating. The dose is 1 teaspoon of whole seed, chewed before, during, or after meals. A tincture dose is ½ tsp.

Ginger root

Strengthening to the digestion as a whole and of specific use in and conditions exhibiting nausea. Can be taken as crystallized ginger, as a tea (1 tsp dry ginger powder, or 1 TBS fresh ginger root in 12 oz hot water, covered and steeped 15 minutes), or as a tincture (30-60 drops in a little water).

Peppermint leaf

Relaxing and cooling aromatic that relieves bloating from overeating and reduces spasms and cramping of the lower GI tract. Contraindicated in heartburn. Best taken as a warm tea, tincture (1/4 tsp.), enteric-coated capsule of the essential oil (for spasmodic colitis and irritable bowel), or as 2-3 Altoids peppermints.

Chamomile flower

Relaxing and cooling antispasmodic that reduces bloating and cramping pain, especially from an over-stimulated, over-stressed constitution. Also has a good anti-inflammatory action. Best taken as a warm tea, brewed only for 5 minutes. The tincture is not as effective.

Demulcents and Anti-inflammatories**Comfrey root (or leaf)**

The most powerful soother and regenerator of damaged or inflamed tissue, along the entire GI tract. Best used as a whole-plant capsule or tea (2 “OO” caps three times a day) and for short periods of time (3 months or less). Use caution in liver disease.

Calendula flower

A soothing and warming demulcent that also has carminative effect. Useful for healing and repairing tissue where there is also a digestive sluggishness and/or presence of an infective agent, especially a yeast or bacteria overgrowth. Use as a tea or tincture, 1/2 tsp. 2-4 times a day.

Licorice root

Soothing and anti-inflammatory, especially good for heartburn symptoms. Use as a tea or tincture, 1/4 tsp as needed for heartburn. Avoid prolonged use with high blood pressure.

Meadowsweet leaf, flower and stem

Astringent and demulcent anti-inflammatory that is excellent for all types of digestive inflammation. A warm tea is best, taken after meals and/or on an empty stomach, to ensure adequate demulcent effect. A tincture, though still anti-inflammatory, is less soothing.

Marshmallow root

General all-purpose soother, good to use instead of Comfrey root and perfectly safe for long-term use. A cold water infusion made by steeping 2 TBS of dry root in 1 pint of cold water, left overnight, is the method of choice. The tincture is of little value as a demulcent. Can be a bit nauseating to a sensitive constitution; take the tea in tablespoon doses if this is a problem.

Chickweed leaf

Only useful if eaten fresh in salads, is wonderfully cooling and soothing to all manner of GI inflammation.

Digestive astringents

Agrimony leaf and flower

Sour and tonifying to the mucus membranes of the whole GI tract, helping with prolapses, diverticula, pockets in the intestines that result from a lack of tone and from long-term sluggishness. Also a good bitter. Take ½ tsp of the tincture 15 minutes before meals.

Peach leaf

An astringent tea with good effect on the upper digestive tract, adjusting an over-relaxed esophageal sphincter and thereby helping with heartburn and reflux.

Blackberry Root

Excellent for controlling diarrhea, especially in children. Use ¼ to ½ tsp of tincture on an empty stomach, 3-5 times a day, or take 1-2 “OO” caps 3-5 times a day.

Yarrow flower and leaf

Astringent, bitter, and antiseptic, of good use in diarrheal infections and for those with general weakness and stasis in the GI tract. Take ½ tsp of tincture 3-5 times daily, or a cup of warm tea 3-5 times a day.

Digestive anti-infectives

Goldenseal root

Premier digestive anti-bacterial that is also bitter, cholagogue, astringent and tonifying. It often features as a component of many different digestive formulas because it is so excellent at healing and tonifying, as well as controlling active infection. 1 tsp of powder in a little water, 2-5 times a day (higher frequency for active infections), or 1-2 “OO” caps, or ½ to 1 tsp of tincture.

Pau D’arco bark

A tasty tea for ongoing candidiasis infection, also a good immune stimulant.

Wormwood leaf (and also Mugwort leaf)

Useful against worms and other enteric infections, it is also a strong bitter and helps re-align lower GI function if it has become sluggish, windy, or overly “loose”. Take ¼ tsp of the tincture in a little water, 2-5 times daily.

Garlic bulb

Fresh is best! 1-2 cloves, crushes and swallowed to control infection from worms, bacteria, and fungus. Daily dose can be 2-6 cloves.

Echinacea whole plant

Good support for any infection, and most useful for the “stomach flu” that is so highly contagious, especially among children. 1 to 2 tsp of tincture 2-5 times a day.

Hepato-protectants and liver modulators

Milk Thistle seed

The best liver protector and cholagogue we have available – useful in cases of chemical exposure, active liver infection (hepatitis), allergies, and systemic inflammation. The raw seed, crushed and/or ground, can be eaten in salad dressing, or on toast. Otherwise standardized extracts work well and are of reasonable cost.

Schizandra berry

Balances the liver's breakdown of steroidal and sexual hormones, helping in conditions that relate to painful menstruation and/or sluggish liver function.

Red Reishi mushroom

The dry fruiting bodies are tonifying to the whole physiology, and help modulate liver function reducing symptoms of allergy, food sensitivity, chemical sensitivity, and weak immunity. Taken as an extract, follow the manufacturer's recommendations – every one is different. Can be simmered into soup stock, with Burdock roots for liver protection. Use a handful of dry mushroom per gallon of stock.

Digestive nervines

Lemon Balm leaf

A nervine with aromatic, antispasmodic, and astringent qualities useful for conditions of the upper GI that appear in times of anxiety or stress. A warm tea before meals is ideal; a tsp of tincture can also be very helpful.

Wood Betony leaf

A nervine that modulates the effects of nervous stress on the entire digestive system, helping to control nervous spasms and indigestion, and the “butterflies in the stomach”. Best as a tea.

Oats “milky (immature) tops”

Premier nervous system relaxant and restorative, also demulcent and nutritive with a special affinity to dry and inflamed constitutions. For digestive health, the tea is best, but in more actively anxious situations, a tincture taken at ½ tsp 3 times daily can be of help.