LEMON BALM FOR AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES

The uses of the herb Melissa officinalis in autoimmune diseases

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Lemon balm, a member of the mint family with the scientific name Melissa officinalis, is used to relieve a variety of symptoms and promote immune system health in patients with autoimmune disease.

What is Lemon Balm?

The herb lemon balm or balm (Melissa officinalis), a member of the mint family, originated in the Near East and was later transplanted to Europe by Benedictine missionaries who recognized its beneficial effects on health. In the 18th century, European settlers brought lemon balm to America for its uses as both a medicinal agent and a flavoring ingredient. Anyone fortunate enough to have lemon balm planted in his or her garden recognizes the relaxing aroma of this sprightly plant. The species name Melissa, which means honeybees, refers to the distinct fragrance, which accounts for the plant's ability to attract bees. Lemon balm is used to relieve common symptoms such as headache, rash and anxiety and to improve immune system health in patients with autoimmune diseases.

Biochemical Ingredients (Phytonutrients)

The active medicinal ingredients in lemon balm include citronella, citral, tannins, and geraniol. Preparations containing lemon balm should clearly list lemon balm or Melissa officinalis as ingredients rather than lemongrass or lemon oil.

The polyphenol tannins in lemon balm make it an effective antiviral treatment. Lemon balm is a first-line herbal treatment for herpes outbreaks. The high selenium content in lemon balm assists with its ability to regulate thyroid function and helps raise antioxidant levels, promoting immune system health. In autoimmune disease, oxidative stress is considered to be a major environmental trigger.

In Europe, preparations containing 700 mg lemon balm are used to treat the herpes disorder shingles. Topical creams containing 1 percent L-701, a dried extract of lemon balm, are also widely used to treat oral and skin blisters in herpes infections. Studies suggest that lemon balm reduces the development of resistance in the herpes virus and blocks the attachment of herpes virus to the receptor sites of host cells, preventing the spread of infection.

Effects and Uses
Used as an essential plant oil, as a tincture, or as a tea composed of dry leaves, lemon balm is used to treat anxiety, depression, palpitations, respiratory congestion, allergic reactions, menstrual pain, and nervousness. Lemon balm is used to mildly reduce thyroid hormone levels and symptoms associated with hyperthyroidism. Lemon balm promotes immune system health by fighting bacteria and viruses, which is demonstrated by its ability to reduce fever, spasms, flatulence and cramps. Lemon balm also promotes detoxification by stimulating liver and gall bladder function. Used externally as a pure oil diluted with a carrier such as almond or jojoba oils, lemon balm is used to treat insect bites, hives, blemishes, chest pain, fever blisters, and shingles.

Used as a tea lemon balm is used to stimulate the menstrual period in women with amenorrhea (absent or scanty menstrual periods), and is particularly useful in women nearing menopause. Lemon balm is also reported to have energizing effects in people with fatigue and is recommended for chronic fatigue syndrome. As a tea, lemon balm is also used to relieve migraine headaches.

**Used with Bugleweed in Graves’ disease**

Used as an injection along with Lycopus virginicus or bugleweed, lemon balm is widely used in Europe for treating Graves' disease. Lemon balm is also used as a tonic or tea to reduce and manage symptoms in Graves' disease. Lemon balm slows pituitary function, lowering TSH levels, which, in turn, reduces thyroid hormone levels. Paradoxically, lemon balm is also used to raise thyroid hormone levels in patients with hypothyroidism. Lemon balm strengthens rather than stimulates thyroid function, restoring normal levels to patients with autoimmune thyroid disease. However, its effects are mild and lemon balm is not considered an effective treatment for patients with moderate to severe hypothyroidism.

**Side effects**

Side effects have not been reported although some individuals could possibly have allergic reactions. As with any newly added medicinal product, patients should watch for side effects or allergic reactions. Lemon balm is not recommended for patients with glaucoma.

**Resources:**


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