

From our friends at Back To Herbs – 08/20/10



## Astragalus

Also known as- milk vetch, huang qi (Chinese), ogi (Japanese), and hwanggi (Korean).

**Astragalus (Astragalus membranaceus) has been used in Traditional Chinese Medicine for thousands of years**, often in combination with other herbs, to strengthen the body against disease. Astragalus is an adaptogen, meaning it helps protect the body against various stresses, including physical, mental, or emotional stress. Astragalus may help protect the body from diseases such as cancer and diabetes. It contains antioxidants, which protect cells against damage caused by free radicals. Astragalus is used to protect and support the immune system, for preventing colds and upper respiratory infections, to lower blood pressure, to treat diabetes, and to protect the liver.



Astragalus has antibacterial, and anti-inflammatory properties. It is sometimes used topically for wounds. In addition, studies have shown that astragalus has antiviral properties and stimulates the immune system, suggesting that it is effective at preventing colds and flu.

Astragalus is the chief energy tonic of traditional Asian medicine. Astragalus has been used as an immunity booster in China for nearly 4,000 years. Astragalus is derived from the root of a plant (Astragalus Membranaceus) in the pea family. Analysis shows that astragalus contains polysaccharides, monosaccharides, flavonoid, alkaloid, including choline and betaine, folic acid, various amino acids, mucoitin, gum, cellulose, picrorhiza, and fourteen mineral trace elements, including selenium, zinc and iron.

As an adaptogen, it has a balancing effect on bodily functions. Practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine use astragalus to strengthen or tone the body's overall vitality, improve digestion, and support the spleen. Chinese often keep it in their water container to get the tonic effect constantly. Studies confirm it contains medicinally active compounds, including a polysaccharide that stimulates the immune system.

The Oriental medicine system considers the astragalus root to be an extremely useful remedy for physical weaknesses. Chinese herbalists use this remedy to treat every sort of wasting or exhausting disease. Extreme physical exhaustion is often a result of certain energy draining disorders including chronic fatigue syndrome, infections such as candidiasis, herpes simplex virus, cases of mononucleosis, and low sugar or hypoglycemia. These disorders can all cause extreme fatigue to the individual they affect.

As one of the important tonic herbs in Chinese medicine, Asian scientists have studied astragalus extensively. Numerous studies confirm its immunostimulant, antibacterial, antiviral, anti-inflammatory, adaptogenic, and diuretic effects. Its wide usage in China as an immune system booster brought interest from Europe, Japan and America. Original Chinese studies dated back to 1981, when a study by Hou et al showed that astragalus when taken orally induced greater quantities of interferon (a group of substances produced by the body as part of the normal defense mechanism against viral infections) and leukocytes (white blood cells that react to invading microorganisms or foreign particles - comprising the B cells, T cells, macrophages, monocytes, and granulocytes) in the blood stream. As well as boasting interferon levels research indicates that it benefits liver function. In China, Astragalus is widely used in the treatment of hepatitis. It seems to reduce toxin levels significantly; boost interferon levels and inhibits viral protein expression while having little or no effect on normal DNA.

Since 1975, astragalus has been used in China in cancer patients undergoing radiation treatment and chemotherapy. Conventional cancer treatments reduce the function of the immune system, so astragalus helps return it to normal function. Its positive effects on the cardiovascular system have also been extensively studied in China. Animal studies suggest that astragalus can help prevent the development of cholesterol plaques after an arterial wall has been damaged, which can keep the coronary arteries from becoming too narrow. Astragalus also is useful in the treatment of viral myocarditis, a flu-like infection that affects the heart.

According to the Sloane-Kettering Cancer Center, "Laboratory studies and some clinical trials suggest that astragalus stimulates certain parts of the immune system." Certain immune cells, such as monocytes and lymphocytes, help the body fight off viruses. The action of these cells may be increased by astragalus, therefore boosting the immune system. According to Mark Stengler, N.D., astragalus may also help the body secrete a chemical called interferon, which wards off the replication of viruses. Research shows that simple preparations of astragalus as a whole herb stimulate the immune system in several ways. It increases the number of stem cells in bone marrow, and encourages their maturity into active white blood cells. It appears to help signal the white blood cells known as neutrophils to migrate to places where they are needed to fight infection. It stimulates the "germ-eating" white blood cells known as macrophages, activates T-cells and natural killer (NK) cells, and increases the production of immune globulins.

Astragalus was studied as a treatment for patients with immune systems suppressed as a result of chemotherapy. According to the University of Maryland Medical Center, "In these studies, astragalus supplements have been shown to speed recovery and extend life expectancy." Astragalus has also been shown in animal studies to reverse the immune suppression that is a side effect of some chemotherapy drugs.

Herbal extracts containing astragalus may help athletes utilize oxygen, thereby reducing their fatigue. Because astragalus is an adaptogen, it can also help the body adapt to the physical stress brought on by exercise. It also improves stamina.

Effective as a vasodilator, a substance which encourages blood to flow to the skin surface, astragalus is used to rectify cases of excessive sweating, including disorders like sudden night sweats. Persistent thirst can be reduced by the use of astragalus and it is also very helpful in bringing relief from fluid retention disorders.

Traditional uses:

- Adaptogen - protects the body from stress
- Colds and influenza
- Persistent infection
- Fever
- Multiple allergies
- Asthma

- Chronic fatigue
- Fatigue or lack of appetite associated with chemotherapy
- Anemia
- Wounds
- Heart disease
- Kidney disease
- Hepatitis
- Stomach ulcers



Be sure to try NSP's [Astragalus \(100 caps\)](#) from Nature's Sunshine. You can see other related products [clicking here](#).

### References

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**Yours in Good Health!**

Sincerely,

Chris Ritchason  
Dr. Jack & Verlyn Ritchason, Founders  
The Back to Herbs Team

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This information was provided by  
**Chuck & Judy Erkfitz**  
*Natures Better Way*

PO Box 261 - 880 W Dryden Rd., Metamora, MI 48455

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1-810-678-3131 [erkfitz@erkfitz.com](mailto:erkfitz@erkfitz.com)