



Cascara Sagrada

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Cascara sagrada is a natural laxative that comes from the reddish-brown bark of the Rhamnus purshiana tree native to the Pacific Northwest. It was used by various Native American Indian tribes, who also passed their sacred bark on to Spanish explorers.

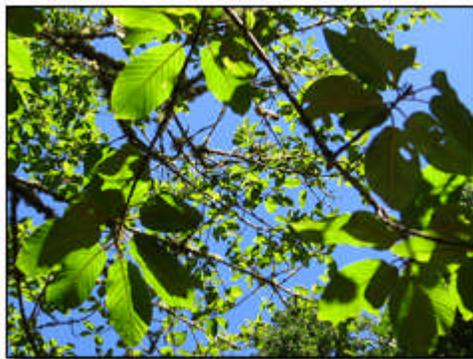
One of nature's most gentle and effective laxatives, cascara sagrada stimulates a sluggish colon while producing a tonifying effect. It is one of the most preferred herbal remedies for chronic constipation. As a nutritional support for the eliminative function, the bark of Cascara Sagrada has been used by cultures around the world, including the North American Indians and American settlers. Spanish missionaries noticed its use among the Indians and called it "sacred", hence its Spanish name. Cascara Sagrada helps in painless evacuations. After extended usage, the bowels will function regularly and naturally from its tonic effects.



A famous surgeon in American history, Dr. Harvey Kellogg of Battle Creek, Michigan, who later founded the cereal company that still bears his name, wrote: "Of the 22,000 operations I have personally performed, I have never found a single normal colon." In his Battle Creek sanitarium, Dr. Kellogg treated 40,000 patients with gastrointestinal disease. All but 2 of them, according to his accounts, avoided surgery through his ministrations. Dr. Kellogg: "The colon is where health problems start" - he believed that the colon could be the origin of most health problems and maintained that 90% of disease is due to improper functioning of the colon.

The word "constipation" is derived from the Latin word "constipatus," which translated means "to press or crowd together, to pack, to cram." There is no better, more effective way to stay healthy and avoid illness and disease than to do what is necessary to take good care of the bowels. Proper and regular elimination is critical to keep the system from poisoning itself. Auto-toxemia is the culprit in almost all diseases and degenerative conditions. Dr. John Tilden, during the 1930's, in his book Toxemia Explained: The True Interpretation of the

Cause of Disease presented the concept that toxins were the only cause of disease. Through preventative health habits one can dramatically reduce the chances of chronic disease, illness and cellular degeneration. At least one bowel movement per day is the minimal number recommended and some people have several healthy bowel movements per day usually due to a diet of non-processed and whole foods, proper hydration, and regular exercise.



The most notable constituents in cascara sagrada are hydroxyanthraquinone glycosides called cascarosides. Cascarosides exhibit a cathartic effect that induces the large intestine to increase its muscular contraction (peristalsis), causing a bowel movement. The anthraquinones in the Cascara Sagrada are oxidized in the intestine. The oxidation process produces a substance which stimulates peristalsis (the moving of the bowels), resulting in the laxative properties. The anthraquinones have also exhibited potent antibacterial properties against intestinal bacteria.

Cascara sagrada is the dried bark of *Rhamnus purshiana*. Cascara Sagrada is a tree which grows on the Pacific Coast in North America, mostly in British Columbia, Oregon, Washington, and California. The tree grows to a height of 20-60 feet. The bark is collected from mid-April to the end of August, at which time it separates easily from the wood. It should be aged for at least 1 year before use in medicinal preparations, but 3-year-old bark is preferred for pharmaceutical purposes because it exhibits a milder cathartic activity because of the oxidation of glycosides present in the bark.

Other important constituents include resins, tannins, and lipids which make up the majority of the other bark ingredients. Today, many common laxatives use cascara sagrada as an ingredient. To use cascara sagrada as a laxative, the bark must be carefully prepared by curing for at least one year or heated and dried to speed up the aging process. Aging is essential because fresh cascara sagrada is irritating to the gastrointestinal system, causing vomiting and upset stomach.

Cascara Sagrada is perhaps the safest and most effective laxative available and has been used to restore tone to the colon and thereby overcome laxative dependency in the elderly as well as for the mild constipation that can occur following anal or rectal surgery as it prevents the pressure and pain associated with hemorrhoids and anal fissures. A bowel movement usually will take place within six to eight hours of taking a typically recommended dose of cascara sagrada.

Actions

The glycosides found in cascara sagrada are stimulant cathartics that exert their action by increasing the smooth-muscle tone in the wall of the large intestine and have only minor effects on the small intestine. The drug is transformed by intestinal bacteria into substances that increase peristalsis in the large intestine and help restore intestinal tone.

In 1990, the FDA released the results of its study on OTC products and placed cascara sagrada in category I (safe and effective) as a laxative.

Contraindications and Precautions

Cascara sagrada is contraindicated in breast-feeding patients because it crosses the placental barrier, is excreted in breast milk, and increases the risk of diarrhea in a breast-fed infant. Cautious use is safe for pregnant women if after consulting a health practitioner use is approved.

Effective bowel regimens for constipation include temporary pharmacotherapy together with maintaining sufficient fluid intake and hydration, increasing fiber in the diet, eating regular meals, and exercising. Patients with chronic constipation (longer than 1 week) should be evaluated by a primary health care provider for underlying causes of obstruction.

Adverse Reactions

GI: abdominal pain.

EENT: allergic rhinitis.

Respiratory: IgE-mediated asthma.

Chronic use or abuse

GI: abdominal cramps, diarrhea, melanosis coli (darkening pigmentation of colonic mucosa), steatorrhea, vomiting.

GU: urine discoloration

Metabolic: fluid and electrolyte imbalance, vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

Musculoskeletal: osteomalacia.

Other: laxative dependency.

Interactions: None reported, but the absorption of some drugs may be diminished.



NSP has a wide variety of Cascara Sagrada products. These include Cascara Sagrada and Cascara Sagrada Vegetabs, Bowel Detox, Para Cleanse, All Cell Detox and Cleanstart products.

References

<http://www.ayurvedic-medicines.org/herbal-medicines/cascara-sagrada.htm>
<http://www.nutrasanus.com/cascara-sagrada.htm>

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Yours in Good Health!

Sincerely,

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The Back to Herbs Team

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