



Panax Ginseng

Both American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) and Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng*) roots are taken orally as adaptogens, aphrodisiacs, nourishing stimulants, and in the treatment of type II diabetes, as well as sexual dysfunction in men. The root is most often available in dried form, either whole or sliced.

The herbal remedies referred to as “ginseng” are derived from the roots of several plants. One of the most commonly used and researched of the ginsengs is *Panax ginseng*, also called Asian or Korean ginseng. The main active components of *Panax ginseng* are ginsenosides, which have been shown to have a variety of beneficial effects, including anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and anticancer effects. Results of clinical research studies demonstrate that *Panax ginseng* may improve psychological function, immune function, and conditions associated with diabetes. Overall, *Panax ginseng* appears to be well tolerated, although caution is advised about concomitant use with some pharmaceuticals.

For more than 2,000 years, the roots of this slow-growing plant have been valued in Chinese medicine. The two most commonly used species are Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng* C. A. Meyer), which is almost extinct in its natural habitat but is still cultivated, and American ginseng (*P. quinquefolius* L.), which is both harvested from the wild and cultivated. Asian ginseng is a perennial herb with a taproot resembling the shape of the human body. It grows in northern China, Korea, and Russia; its close relative, *Panax quinquefolius*, is cultivated in the United States. Because ginseng must be grown for 5 years before it is harvested, it commands a high price, with top-quality roots easily selling for more than \$10,000. Dried, unprocessed ginseng root is called white ginseng, and steamed, heat-dried root is red ginseng. Chinese herbalists believe that each form has its own particular benefits.



Panax ginseng should not be confused with Siberian ginseng (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*). Siberian ginseng - *Eleutherococcus senticosus* is only distantly related to the two true ginseng species Asian - *Panax ginseng* and American - *P. quinquefolius* L and possesses entirely different, unrelated chemical constituents. However, it is popularly called Russian or Siberian ginseng. The origin of this misnomer lies in the work of a Soviet scientist, I. I. Brekhman, who believed that *eleutherococcus* has the same properties as ginseng, and popularized it as a less-expensive alternative herb. According to Brekhman, *eleutherococcus* and ginseng are both adaptogens.

Ginseng products are popularly referred to as “tonics,” a term that has been replaced by “adaptogens” in much of the alternative medicine literature. The term “adaptogen” connotes an agent that purportedly “increases resistance to physical, chemical, and biological stress and builds up general vitality, including the physical and mental capacity for work.”

Panax ginseng is one of the most commonly used and highly researched species of ginseng. This species, which is native to China, Korea, and Russia, has been an important herbal remedy in traditional Chinese medicine for thousands of years, where it has been used primarily as a treatment for weakness and fatigue.

Traditional Use

According to the Harvard University botanist Shiu Ying Hu, the earliest mention of ginseng is in the 2,000-year-old herbal of Shen Nong. It is used for repairing the five viscera, quieting the spirit, curbing the emotion, stopping agitation, removing noxious influence, brightening the eyes, enlightening the mind and increasing wisdom. Continuous use leads one to longevity with light weight. Ginseng's perceived use has changed little in 2,000 years.

Prior to its discovery in the early seventeenth century, American ginseng had been used by American Indians, for purposes quite similar to the use of Asian ginseng by the Chinese. It was among the five most important medicinal plants of the Seneca Indians, and was primarily given to the elderly. According to Crow legend, the wife of Gray Bull learned in a dream that the leaf or root tea would aid in childbirth without suffering. The Penobscots, who referred to it as “man root,” prescribed the root tea to increase female fertility. The Meskwaki (Fox) Indians of Wisconsin regarded ginseng as a “universal remedy” for children and adults. It was combined with other medicinal plants to render them more powerful. The Menominee considered the root to be a tonic and strengthener of mental prowess. American ginseng never became an important medicinal plant in American medicine, though the root was official in the United States Pharmacopoeia from 1842-1882.

Current Status

In the last thirty years, Asian ginseng and increasingly, American ginseng, have been extensively studied. At least seven European clinical studies showed that standardized extracts decreased reaction time to visual and auditory stimuli; increased respiratory

performance, alertness, power of concentration, and grasp of abstract concepts; and improved visual and motor coordination.

Panax ginseng has proven to be quite helpful or the following conditions:

- Heart conditions
- High blood sugar/glucose intolerance
- Immune system enhancement
- Type 2 diabetes (adult-onset)

Early studies show marked potential in treatment for the following conditions:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children.
- Cancer chemotherapy
- Cancer prevention
- Cardiovascular risk reduction
- Chronic hepatitis B
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Coronary artery disease
- Erectly dysfunction
- Exercise performance
- Fatigue
- Heart damage (cardiac bypass complications)
- High blood pressure
- Liver protection
- Lung conditions
- Male infertility
- Menopausal symptoms
- Mental performance
- Mood and cognition in post-menopausal women
- Neurological disorders
- Quality of life
- Radiation therapy side effects
- Respiratory infections
- Sexual arousal (in women)

Panax ginseng generally is a safe, well-tolerated herbal medicine that may be used for a variety of medical conditions. Panax ginseng may interact with caffeine to cause hypertension, and it may lower blood alcohol concentrations. It also may decrease the effectiveness of warfarin (Comedian). Concomitant use of Panax ginseng and the monoamine oxides inhibitor phenelzine (Nard) may result in manic-like symptoms.

Contraindications - to the use of Panax ginseng include high blood pressure, acute asthma, acute infections, and nose bleeds or excessive menstruation. These effects appear to occur primarily with high dosages or prolonged use.

Allergies - People with known allergies to Panax species and/or plants in the Araliaceae family should avoid ginseng.

Many different doses are used traditionally. Practitioners sometimes recommended that after using ginseng continuously for 2-3 weeks, people should take a break for 1-2 weeks.



NSP sells [Korean \(Panex\) Ginseng](#) as well as [Wild American Ginseng](#).

Yours in Good Health!

Sincerely,

Chris Ritchason
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The Back to Herbs Team

References

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