

Resetting the sensitivity with Holy Basil

By Marcus Webb



It's hard to ignore the power of the mind on the body. In cases of fibromyalgia (FM), what's more difficult to establish is what came first in many situations with a well-established association between stress, anxiety and pain often clouding the issue. Fibromyalgia is a complex situation with a number of related health problems often co-existing in one individual such as

irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Those who suffer IBS know from experience that stress is a potent trigger for a flare up in both IBS and FM. Interestingly, a specific brain area looks to be involved in both IBS and FM. Known as the amygdala its ability to regulate mood has become the focus of a growing number of scientific investigations. Over activity of this brain region is coupled with elevated levels of hormones (corticosteroids, glucocorticoids, mineralocorticoids and corticotropin) that are, in turn, related to establishing long term changes in emotional behaviour and in the perception of pain. Dysfunction of the amygdala has also been implicated in the generation and establishment of FM symptoms further strengthening the link between the neurobiological and psychological factors in this complex condition.

For many the thought of medicating the anxiety away does not sit well. Loosing control to a drug often generates additional anxieties and this in the long term may not be of benefit. One emerging natural agent that has an established role in traditional recipes originating from India is Holy Basil. This plant has special significance in Hinduism and can very often be found growing wild in thick clusters around temples in India. One easy recipe that can be made at home is holy basil tea known as Tulsi Kadha. It uses dried Holy Basil leaves that can be found in ethnic supermarkets and specialist food stores in combination with cloves, cumin and fennel seeds. Simply grind up in a mortar and pestle 2 cloves along with 1 teaspoon of fennel and cumin seeds and dry-roast in a heavy bottomed pan. Just as the powder smokes add 600ml of water along with 2 teaspoons of dried holy basil leaves. Bring the mix to the boil and simmer for 2-3 minutes. You can sweeten with honey. Holy basil tea has been recommended for stress and its calming effects on the nervous system. As well as forming the

basis for a relaxing tea, plenty of more elaborate recipes are available.

More recent research on Holy basil has revealed some interesting results. A team from India have turned their critical attention to this Ayurvedic remedy because of its traditional culinary use and relationship with easing anxiety disorders. Despite the leaves from Holy Basil being used for thousands of years in India to date there has not been an evidence based report on their clinical effects. The India researchers published their findings relating to the effects of Holy Basil and its role in emotional disorders, especially generalized anxiety disorder, in the Nepal Medical College Journal. As well as confirming the importance of certain key compounds of the leaf, such as eugenol, the team also showed for the first time that a two months course of Holy Basil reduced the symptoms of stress, anxiety and eased mild depression. It was suggested that these effects were mediated via mechanisms closely associated with a dysfunction of amygdala. At the heart of the effectiveness of Holy Basil lies its active compounds all of which appear to require separate extraction techniques depending on their solubility in water or fat. This has driven the development of the so-called Trinity Blend. This is a pure standardized leaf extract that delivers a full spectrum of the key compounds; the fat soluble terpenoids and phenolic derivatives as well as the more heat sensitive water soluble eugenol and caryophyllene compounds. Holy basil supplements are worth consideration in those wishing to avoid drug therapy for anxiety or in those who experience side effects from prescription medication. However, until more is known about the effects of the plant it's not recommended to mix Holy basil supplements with prescribed medication or use it if pregnant or breast feeding.

Resources:

Holy Basil supplements available from: [HYPERLINK "http://www.nutricentre.com"](http://www.nutricentre.com) www.nutricentre.com

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