

# Licorice Root—More Than Candy

Optimal Health Systems  
January, 2009

The only thing most people may know about licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*, 'sweet wood') is that many big or little kids like to munch on the sweet red or black twisties called licorice that can be found in the candy aisle of any supermarket. But most likely those chewy tasties of a few decades ago today aren't licorice at all but a conglomeration of ingredients flavored by anise oil, which has a licorice-like flavor, but not its health benefits.

Maybe you don't care as long as it tastes good. But if you've heard somewhere that licorice is good for you and are looking for a 'more healthy' sweet, read the ingredient list carefully. The label should say "licorice mass." The counterfeit will say "artificial licorice, or "anise." You may find that you need to order online or visit your local health food or other store that carries the old-fashioned REAL STUFF. This is made from the extract of licorice root combined with flour, sugar, water, molasses and treacle.

Don't tell the kids, but licorice—the "real stuff"—is more than candy; it's actually medicine. The long, wrinkled, fibrous root that grows horizontally underground beneath a bush that grows up to four feet, is one of the tried and true medicinal herbs that has been used for thousands of years—alone and in food preparation—to treat everything from the common cold to inflammatory disorders, stomach ailments and liver problems.

It is thought that licorice was first utilized, both as food and medicine, in ancient Mesopotamia. Clay tablets found near Baghdad, Iraq indicate the potent root was used to treat royalty many centuries before the birth of Christ. Licorice root was widely used by the ancient Egyptians (it was found in the tombs of the pharaohs, including the famous Tutankhamen), the Greeks, Romans and Chinese.

The Greeks used licorice to treat thirst and ease water retention. Hippocrates called licorice root "sweet wood" because in its pure form it is fifty times sweeter than sugar—a property that has resulted in its use around the world in cough syrups and lozenges as well as candy. Today it is still one of the most popularly prescribed herbs in Chinese medicine as a general antiviral, antioxidant immune system protector, and to ease coughs, sore throats and bronchitis. Other names for the herb are 'Chinese Licorice,' "Gan Cao," and "Kua-lao."

Licorice has long been valued as a soothing and coating agent and an efficient expectorant to rid phlegm and mucous from the respiratory tract (University of Maryland Medical Center, umm.edu). Like many other historic medicinal plants that have been 'rediscovered' today, it is increasingly studied and used by health care professionals and those knowledgeable about the medicinal properties of various plants and herbs.

According to UMMC, animal studies and early trials in humans support the value of licorice for stomach ulcers, and deglycyrrhizinated licorice (a licorice supplement in which the component glycyrrhizin is removed), is already prescribed by medical practitioners for ulcers. However, several studies indicate the licorice component

glycyrrhizin (the source of the herb's sweetness) may be more effective at treating—and preventing—the recurrence of ulcers than conventional medications!

While UMMC reports that emerging studies are beginning to suggest that licorice may be an effective treatment for heart disease, the catch-22 at this stage is that too much of the glycyrrhizin component has been found to increase blood pressure in a few susceptible individuals. However, some medical research indicates that a person would have to consume one-quarter pound of licorice every day to have any discernable rise in blood pressure. Much more study is needed yet to determine whether licorice will play a major role as a treatment for heart disease.

On a more definite note, today the humble licorice root is being intensely researched as a weapon against HIV and Aids. Its antiviral properties have been shown to trigger the body's virus-fighting agents, slowing or preventing the progress of HIV into Aids. As most people know, the HIV virus targets the body's immune system and destroys white blood cells. Licorice helps trigger the chemical compound interferon which is the body's virus fighting agent.

The glycyrrhizin contained in licorice is known to fight Hepatitis B and C, and can create an anti-inflammatory effect against allergic reactions and swelling. Used directly on the skin, it is similar to cortisone and thus can be used effectively in the treatment of many dermatological ailments including dermatitis, eczema and psoriasis (Vicki Niedzielska, helium.com).

Perhaps one of the most promising medicinal benefits of licorice root is in the supplemental treatment of adrenal fatigue, what Dr. James L. Wilson refers to as the Twenty-First Century Stress Syndrome. Adrenal fatigue is not recognized by most conventional medicine as a 'disease.' It is often diagnosed as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, Addison's Disease or serious allergies, all of which have one thing in common—fatigue that simply can't be overcome.

This condition affects up to eighty percent of U. S. adults to a greater or lesser extent in today's stress-filled U.S. culture. What most people don't realize is that it is not possible to combat the effects of stress without having healthily functioning adrenal glands. Licorice supports the adrenal glands, and its compound glycyrrhizin helps prevent the breakdown of cortisol, as well as raising cortisol levels to combat stress and fatigue. The hormone cortisone is vital if there is to be any hope of dealing effectively with stress and fatigue (nutritional-supplements-health-guide.com). Remember that deglycyrrhizinated licorice extracts do not contain the compound that stimulates the adrenal glands (glycyrrhizin).

Dr. Wilson says licorice root is the herb best known for support of adrenal function, along with lifestyle changes. If you think you may be suffering from adrenal fatigue (usually characterized by LOW blood pressure), you may wish to obtain his book, *Adrenal Fatigue—The 21st Century Stress Syndrome*, by James L. Wilson, N.D., D.C., Ph.D.

Licorice root is native to southern Europe and the Mediterranean countries. Today it is widely cultivated in Russia, Spain, Iran and India. Licorice products are made from peeled and unpeeled dried root. There are powdered and finely cut root preparations made for teas, tablets and capsules, as well as liquid extracts. Tea may be the best form for many people in order to avoid the sugar added to candy.

*Please note that licorice consumption during pregnancy is not advised, and many experts say that heavy daily use of licorice (more than one-quarter of a pound) for more than four to six weeks is not recommended for anyone. People with diabetes, liver or kidney conditions should consult their medical provider before using licorice as a supplement.*

Licorice root can be found in the following Optimal Health Systems' products: Opti-Cleanse & Repair and Adrena Boost.

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