

SHINGLES NATURAL TREATMENT

BY

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NOTICE

The purpose of this book is to increase your knowledge about shingles and what is known about controlling it naturally. It is not intended as medical advice and it is not meant to diagnose or treat any individual's health problems. You should not discontinue any course of medical treatment or undertake any new treatment without first consulting your own healthcare practitioner.

PREFACE

Contemporary society has developed an increasing interest in natural medicine, an interest that accelerated throughout the 1990s and has continued to do so into the 21st century. This renewed interest comes in response to a healthcare crisis in industrialized countries, led by the United States. In the U.S. we pay more for medical care and accomplish less than most other nations of comparable living standards, while healthcare costs continue to spiral out of control.

We are bankrupting our economy by spending more than a trillion dollars a year on medical treatments that are often inappropriate, ineffective, and unnecessarily dangerous. In spite of this high cost trend, medical science has yet to discover the critical underlying causes or the appropriate and effective treatments for any of the major human diseases, including cancer, AIDS, heart disease, herpes, shingles, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, arthritis, and osteoporosis.

These failures of modern medicine have given our collective memory a jolt to recall folk remedies that were once widely and successfully used for all sorts of human disorders. Such rediscovered folk medicines have now been evaluated in thousands of clinical and other scientific studies worldwide.

One such rediscovery in my laboratory is the North American desert shrub, *Larrea tridentata*, which has a long folk history in the treatment of many diseases. This book provides valuable information about this plant and its importance as a natural remedy for one of the most common and vexing sets of diseases that can afflict people: shingles.

Not a week goes by without several magazines, scientific journals, and newsletters adding to the information overload about natural medicine. This outpouring cannot be ignored. By now everyone from doctors to patients, from insurance companies to the drug industry, knows about this growing phenomenon. It is ironic, however, that the natural treatments are now referred to as 'alternative' or 'complementary' medicine, whereas the recent inventions of modern medicine constitute the mainstream.

This situation presents the end user (you, me, and every other individual seeking good health) with a contrast of choices. On one hand, mainstream medicine is extremely highly regulated as to who can train the physicians, who is allowed to practice medicine, which treatments are approved for research and clinical use, which companies can own treatments (that is, patented drugs and devices), and who is allowed to make and sell the approved products.

On the other hand, alternative medicine, to say the least, is much less regulated in all comparable areas. The lack of regulation puts a premium on knowing how to choose what works, based on tradition and science, and what doesn't work.

Training varies in quality and quantity for all manner of physicians. Some countries or states grant licenses for certain types of practitioners and not others. Natural drugs may be prescribed

by professionals but not labeled as medicines in retail stores. Alternative treatments often must slither around under the guise of nutritional supplements and be regulated more or less as foods.

So how are you going to decide on a treatment modality and choose from the many protocols that are available within it? You can be like a friend of mine who informed me that she didn't believe in natural medicines (to which I responded that I hadn't heard that this was a faith). Or you can be like many of my students in plant biology over the decades, who like to say that natural products are better for you because they are natural (at which point I am always delighted to tell them that strychnine, coniine [from poison hemlock], nicotine, and cocaine are all natural products, too). Neither extreme is an example of clear thinking.

All disciplines have something good to offer, so your personal challenge is really quite simple: Answer the question, 'What is most likely to be effective and safe for me?' Your best answer has to be based on the prior evidence that you can use for evaluating a treatment. This means that you will have to become a bit of a scientist (this isn't so bad...I enjoy being one!) so you can obtain, read, and evaluate published materials before making your decision.

This is where I come in, unless you already have access to a university library and the skills for finding and evaluating scientific literature. And this is where this book fills a niche for you, by presenting the information you need for evaluating and deciding on a certain treatment protocol for shingles.

Before moving on, I'd like you to ask the following question of me (because I'm going to answer it anyway): Why I am writing about THIS particular treatment for THIS particular medical problem? I have many reasons:

- 1) a professional and personal bias toward natural medicine;
- 2) a fascination with a plant species that I have seen almost everywhere in the deserts of the southwestern U.S. and adjacent Mexico;
- 3) research for the past 40 years with the types of chemicals that this plant species produces in abundance;
- 4) the continuing discoveries of the antiviral properties of these kinds of plant chemicals;
- 5) a fortunate discovery a few years ago revealing that an extract from this plant makes certain kinds of viral infections go away. (For the especially curious readers of this book, it was HIV.)

Several friends and colleagues have reviewed this book and have done their best to keep me from making it too technical. Nevertheless, I love plant biology and chemistry, and I know a lot about it and feel compelled to share as much of it as I can with anyone who will listen or read about it. So this book represents an uneasy truce between their recommendations for something that is not too detailed and my desire to expound on the science that is near and dear to me. All of the information in this book is important for everyone, and my goal is to make it understandable to you regardless of whether you are a scientist.

What you will find in this book is information about an overview of many natural approaches to treating shingles outbreaks, plus considerable detail about, *Larrea tridentate*, the one that I have studied in my own laboratory. Many excellent treatments for shingles are available, some of which are from natural sources and some of which are synthetic and available by prescription only. Be forewarned that there are plenty of bad treatments, too.

The two main purposes for this book are: 1) to provide you with a list of solid natural approaches to controlling shingles, based on traditional knowledge; and, 2) to provide you with enough information about a particular botanical treatment so you can compare it with information about others and make a good decision regarding your own health. May all of your healthcare decisions be good ones!

INTRODUCTION

All living organisms play host to viruses, even including bacteria. It is a certainty that you will be affected by multiple kinds of viruses throughout your lifetime. The most common human viruses will show up as the common cold, flu, cold sores, chickenpox, and shingles. Less common, and more deadly, viruses are blamed for such diseases as ebola, AIDS, bird flu, SARS, and hepatitis. Scientists are also suspicious of viruses that are associated with multiple sclerosis, chronic fatigue syndrome, neurological diseases, cancer, and many more.

Your body is one of the main determining factors for whether you will suffer from shingles or any other viral disease. You are exposed to viruses on a daily basis, and most of the time your immune system or other defense mechanisms help you resist infections. Otherwise, you would be sick all of the time.

Another main factor for infection is the type of virus and its response to your defenses. Shingles, for example, is caused by the chickenpox virus that has infected millions of people. Out of all of the people who have had chickenpox, only about 1 to 3 per thousand healthy individuals under 65 years old will get shingles. This number goes up to as high as 12 per thousand for those older than 65. This just means that the vast majority of people who have been exposed to the virus do not develop symptoms, due to the combination of their bodies' defenses and the response of the virus to them.

Your best strategies for fighting viral infections must be based on whatever you can do to help your own defenses and whatever you can do to address the behavior of the virus itself. This book describes a powerful natural remedy for viral infections that does both, a remedy that comes from a common desert shrub that goes by the scientific name, *Larrea tridentata* ('Larrea'), and the common name, creosote bush.

Larrea has an extensive folk medical history among Native Americans and has attracted a great deal of interest from medical researchers over the past half century because of its uses in several kinds of human disorders, including chickenpox, digestive disorders, sores, inflammation, rheumatism, venereal disease, influenza, bronchitis, and the common cold.

The connection between this list and shingles is evident from the folk use of *Larrea* against chickenpox. The use of *Larrea* against influenza and the common cold suggests that this plant has broader antiviral effects than just against chickenpox or shingles, a notion that is now supported by several scientific studies.

WHY FOCUS ON HERPES VIRUSES?

Although the research on Larrea shows activity against several kinds of viruses, including HIV, the one you are most interested in, and the reason you bought this book, is the shingles virus. Since this is a herpes virus, much of the commentary that I provide here is applicable to all types of infections that are caused by this family of viruses.

Viruses that cause chickenpox, shingles, cold sores, genital herpes, Kaposi's sarcoma, and Epstein-Barr syndrome share so many characteristics that scientists classify them in the same family. They target the same kinds of tissues, although in different parts of the body, they have the same basic genetic composition, they respond to drugs the same way, and they respond to natural treatments the same way.

Throughout this book I will refer to shingles and herpes almost interchangeably, because of the tight-knit properties of this family of viruses. Keep in mind, however, is that shingles is not generally contagious, which means that it is not a sexually transmitted disease. Also keep in mind that all herpes viruses reside in your body throughout your lifetime. They don't ever go away permanently.

The more that people know about herpes viruses the better off they are when it comes to preventing or reducing outbreaks or treating full blown cases. Many, many books and articles have been published on this topic, some of which are listed in the bibliography at the end of this book.

In addition, this book provides some of the most important and basic information that everyone should know about viruses in general and herpes viruses in particular. The coverage of viruses is followed by details that you should know about the most commonly used prescription drugs for treating herpes. The drug overview is intended as a valuable addition to your personal health information arsenal.

The most recent contribution by modern science regarding shingles is the shingles vaccine. It has its merits, although they don't quite measure up to all the marketing hype. You can read about the pertinent details on this vaccine later, in the chapter explaining how to boost immunity to viruses.

The most important question in your mind is probably, 'How do I know that Larrea works?' After the sections about herpes and other viruses, you will find the information you need to answer this question. First you will see why Larrea is such a remarkable medicinal plant, followed by an explanation of the scientific basis for its use in treating herpes infections and the current medical evidence for its effectiveness.

You will also find a brief section containing directions on where to locate other sources of information about herpes (Appendix A), an explanation of the nettlesome but crucial issue of plant names in medical botany (Appendix B), a summary of recent U.S. patents that have been

granted for the use of Larrea in human health (Appendix C), and a strategy for finding and getting key products (Appendix D).

Scientists feel obliged to give official credit (or blame) where it is due. This means that we are in the habit of providing a bibliography of the published resources used for background material. In keeping with this tradition, the Bibliography includes examples from different kinds of resources that are the most important and most useful sources of further information for you about herpes and about Larrea. The list is not complete, but it is representative. Indeed, a complete literature review of herpes would require the evaluation of 3,200 articles that have been published since 1988, and more than 40 books, the first of which came out in 1967.