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JULY 2014 ISSUE

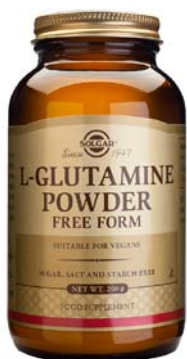
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Marvellous Ginseng



traditionally known for their adaptogenic properties. This means that they are useful during periods of stress as they can help to increase your tolerance to stressors whether they're mental, physical or environmental, or all three! They work by balancing the release of stress hormones and by supporting the pituitary glands, hypothalamus and adrenal glands - the organs which are responsible for producing the stress hormones.

Discovered over 5000 years ago, Ginseng was traditionally used in Chinese medicine to increase longevity. Belonging to the genus *Panax* family and meaning 'all-healing' in Greek, it has long been seen as a cure-all. As time has passed, the protective properties of this slow growing plant have been recognised throughout the world and it now has a variety of different uses.

While there are many different types of Ginseng, three main types are best known for their therapeutic properties. Korean ginseng or *panax ginseng* is the better known of these three. Also referred to as Asian or Chinese ginseng, Korean ginseng shares many benefits with the other two commonly used varieties; American ginseng (*panax quinquefolium*) and Siberian Ginseng (*eleutherococcus senticosus*). Despite sharing many benefits, differing ratios of the active components mean that each variety of ginsengs has its own individual benefits too.

Although these stress hormones have a positive effect during short periods of stress, it's well known that prolonged periods of stress can take its toll on the immune system. When this happens we are more susceptible to picking up those annoying coughs and colds – just another thing for your body to deal with! Ginseng is useful in that it works to help strengthen the immune system whilst also helping the body cope with the stress. Ginseng contains a component called *polysaccharides* which has been shown to stimulate the body's production of the white blood cells called 'killer T cells'. These specialised immune cells help to destroy bacteria and viruses that are harmful to the body and can also help with chronic inflammation. By working to combat stress and boost immune functioning, using a high quality ginseng supplement can help to increase overall energy levels and keep fatigue at bay. Through its action of increasing the

All three of these ginsengs are

(continued overleaf)

DEFINING: Lovely Legs

With the incredible summer (by recent standards anyway) hemlines are a-rising. This makes many quite conscious about the appearance of their legs. There are three issues which I will deal with: varicose or unsightly veins, oedema or puffy ankles, and sore legs for those like waitresses, nurses and sales staff who find themselves constantly on their feet.

As it happens there is one unifying remedy which helps to address all three leg problems. It is the Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), best known for its conkers. Horse Chestnut contains a group of chemicals collectively called Aescin which are responsible for most of the activity of the plant, and most of the benefits of Aescin occur below the waist.

It is not known exactly how Aescin works but it is thought that one of the things it does is enhance a substance which causes constriction of veins. This can be reasonably fast-acting for the appearance of varicose veins.

Aescin also improves the quality of the connective tissue in very small blood vessels. It has been clinically shown to reduce the rate at which larger proteins can pass through the capillary walls (an anti-exudative effect, no less!) This is an indication that the rate of fluid entering the tissues of the foot and ankle is reduced. Net effect? Less puffy, swollen ankles.

People can get swollen ankles at this time of the year generally as a result of the heat. The basic practical advice is

to maintain a good intake of water, reduce intake of sodium which can help draw fluid into tissues, and to elevate feet above the level of the heart 3-4 times a day for 30 minutes each. Compression stockings are another option in more chronic cases but many people don't want to wear them for aesthetic reasons. In this case, taking a supplement of Horse Chestnut can be a viable alternative.

We sell Horse Chestnut in two major forms. A. Vogel Venaforce is available in tablets and Venagel is the gel form (sample attached!) If you have a severe problem like varicose veins, Chronic Venous Insufficiency or severe oedema then the tablets are recommended, possibly with the back-up of the gel. If you suffer from passing sore legs and swollen ankles after a long shift on your feet then you may get benefits from the gel alone. So, next time you want to tip a waitress, leave her a tube of Venagel!

John, Diploma in Health Food Retail



use of fatty acids as an energy source, ginseng is commonly used by sports enthusiasts such as long distance runners and bodybuilders to give them that extra burst of energy when needed.

All of this sounds good so far, but how do you know which type of ginseng is right for you? Traditionally Korean ginseng is a 'male tonic' while Siberian ginseng is a 'female tonic'. This comes down to the individual properties of each of these varieties and their benefits. Korean ginseng has been used by men to help improve erectile function through increased dilation of blood vessels. In comparison, Siberian ginseng (which although not a 'true' ginseng, is closely related) is often used by females to help regulate hormones. This is particularly helpful for those with an irregular menstrual cycle or those going through the menopause.

Most of us will be aware of the use of ginseng to help increase mental alertness. This effect is specific to Korean ginseng and is due to the ratio of the active component of the plant – the ginsenosides. The ratio of the ginsenosides differs in American ginseng and actually causes it to have the opposite effect! This means that for those suffering from mild anxiety, irritability and nervous tension, American ginseng would be the clear choice.

As ginsenosides are the active ingredient (or eleutheroside in the case of Siberian Ginseng) try and select products containing extracts standardised on these ingredients. If you're looking to take it for general health, aim for 100-250mg a day (or 300-400mg of Siberian Ginseng). This dose can be doubled during times of stress or when recovering from illness to help you get back on your feet. If you're unsure on which type and dosage is right for you just come in and ask.

Caroline, Hanover Healthfoods