Herb Of The Month

July 1, 2000 By Michael Onstott

ASTRAGALUS

Part: Root
Forms: Sliced or whole root (for tea), liquid extract, capsules and tablets
Uses: Immune modulator; combined with other herbs, treats many conditions
Daily dose: (two or three a day) root: 1–2 tsp. (as tea); extract: 2–3 droppers-full; 1–4 caps/tabs: 1 to 4
Monthly cost: $35–$150 (astragulus-plus combo for tea), $15–$55 (extract), $12–$35 (caps/tabs)
Caution: Only use under the guidance of an herbalist who can recommend individualized combinations of herbs.

T o the untrained eye, the pale-yellow root slices of astragalus look like oversized popsicle sticks. But Chinese herbalists have dubbed this sweet,stimulating immune modulator the “yellow emperor” of plant remedies. Astragalus is combined with other herbs (depending on the complaint) to strengthen the body’s chi (vital energy), improve digestion and appetite, reduce fatigue, help heal damaged tissues, lower blood pressure and treat anemia, diarrhea, heart conditions and respiratory infections. Studies confirm the herb’s powerful ability to boost the body’s defenses against infections and cancers: Astragalus induces production of white blood cells, interferon and antibodies, and enhances CD4 cell activity. Research on cancer patients given the herb during chemo and radiation treatments found improved immune and bone marrow function, increased survival rates and reduced side effects (especially nausea). For all these reasons, astragalus—used properly—may help.

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