Herb Of The Month

March 1, 2000 By Michael Onstott

Panax Ginseng

Part: Root
Forms: Whole or chopped root, liquid extract, capsules, granules, powder
Uses: Treats mental and physical fatigue, low sexual energy and stress
Dose: 1 to 3 grams of root or powder (as tea), 1 to 4 capsules or tabs, 1 or 2 packets of granules (as tea), all daily; 20 to 30 drops of liquid extract, twice daily
Cost: $16–$110 (roots), $7–$40 (capsules, tabs or powder), $16–$40 (extract), $7–$25 (granules), all monthly
Where: Asian herb shops or specialty markets, health food stores
Warning: Before taking, consult a qualified practitioner. Not recommended for pregnant women or people with high blood pressure or serious heart conditions.

Panax ginseng—a hairy root curiously resembling the human body—is so highly regarded in Asia as an energizer and aphrodisiac that it's dubbed the King of Herbs. Not to be confused with Siberian ginseng, Panax ginseng is a potent tonic used to treat people with deficient chi—Chinese for vital life energy. But in contrast to the monotherapy common in the U.S., Asian herbalists usually balance the root's stimulating effects by prescribing it together with soothing and restorative herbs. Many (non-HIV) studies have found that Panax ginseng can benefit people experiencing consistent weakness and fatigue or recovering from acute illness. Ginseng enhances physical and mental capacity by improving muscular absorption of oxygen and helping boost production of certain adrenal hormones. Dried roots (at least four years old) and extracts are often chosen for their greater potency, but granules can also make an invigorating tea. (In any form, the Korean variety is often recommended as the most uniform in quality.) But herbalists caution that Panax is generally inappropriate as a long-term daily tonic—especially without diagnosis and monitoring—because such use can cause side effects. So, once again, you can have too much of a good thing.

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