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FILE: · Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)

DATE: July 15, 1999

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RE: **Dandelion Monograph: Traditional Herb Increases Bile Flow and is a Safe Diuretic**

Anon. Monograph: *Taraxacum officinale*, *Alternative Medicine Review*, Volume 4, Number 2, 1999. pp. 112-114.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) has been used primarily to treat dysfunction of the liver, gall bladder, and for water retention. The chemical constituencies of the root act upon the liver and gall bladder, while the leaves of dandelion act as a diuretic. The author discusses the pharmacology, mechanisms of action, the effects of dandelion with other herbs, and the known side effects and toxicity in this monograph. Unfortunately, the author of this brief monograph has not adequately distinguished between the actions of the root and the leaf, leaving the reader somewhat confused as to which plant part is appropriate for which action. (In some systems of traditional medicine dandelion root and leaf are used as separate medicinal agents; for example, the German Commission E has published two separate monographs on the root and leaf, respectively.)

Dandelion contains significantly large amounts of terpenoid and sterol bitter principles throughout the roots, leaves and flowers. Dandelion also contains polysaccharides, pectin, resin, mucilage and various flavonoids. This herb is also a good source of vitamins and minerals to include beta carotene, non-provitamin A carotenoids, xanthophylls, chlorophyll, vitamins C and D, many of the B-complex vitamins, and a host of minerals: choline, iron, silicon, magnesium, sodium and numerous other minerals.

Dandelion acts to moderate glucose, as a cholagogue, diuretic, and to enhance the immune system. Dandelion may be effective in modulating blood sugar production. The high insulin content of the plant may prevent fluctuations in blood sugar levels. The root of the plant is indicated in increasing the flow of bile. An aqueous extract of the leaf has been shown to have diuretic activity in experimental research on mice. The potassium in dandelion leaves could also serve to replace potassium lost through diuresis. Other experimental studies indicate immune function enhancement by increasing cell-mediated, humoral and non-specific immunity. Studies of the aqueous extract of dandelion indicate immune enhancement activity through restoration of nitric oxide production. Scientific literature also reports antitumor activity from administration of the aqueous extract.

A small study of persons with chronic colitis indicated a treatment success rate of 96% in an herbal formula of dandelion combined with St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) and fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*). Dandelion has few documented side effects and is therefore considered one of the safest and well-tolerated medicinal plants. An area of concern is the possible role of dandelion *pollen* as an allergen in atopic persons, which has resulted in a systemic reaction indicated by dermatitis and in one case, an anaphylactic reaction. No carcinogenic activity has been documented in an animal model cited in this article. —*Susie Epstein*

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