



The Health Nugget

Healing Leaves

James Cook was one of the greatest sea navigators in history. In the late 1700s, he sailed from England around South Africa, to Tahiti, Australia and beyond. His eyes saw what very few had in his time. He and his men were aware of the risks of their adventure. He wrote, “every man seem’d to have a just sence of the danger we were in and exerted himself to the very utmost.”¹ On board he carried limes and sauerkraut, his nutritional efforts to stave off disease.

On his trip through the South Pacific, over 1000 new plant species were identified. One in particular would come to be well known, even in present day medical literature. Upon landing on Australia’s eastern shores, Aborigines introduced Cook to a tree that they claimed possessed healing powers. They used these leaves for various ailments. “Crushed leaves of ‘tea trees’ were inhaled to treat coughs and colds or were sprinkled on wounds, after which a poultice was applied. In addition, tea tree leaves were soaked to make an infusion to treat sore throats or skin ailments.”²

Since then we have learned much about the leaves from the tea tree and the oil extracted from it. The scientific community is validating what the Aborigines knew from their experience.

Of the three main infectious organisms that affect humans, tea tree oil has been found to effectively combat them all: fungi, bacteria and viruses.

Antiviral

Using tea tree oil against herpes simplex virus in the lab greatly reduced virus titers. Researchers concluded that, “Although the active anti-herpes components of Australian tea tree and eucalyptus oil are not yet known, their possible application as antiviral agents in recurrent herpes infection is promising.”³

As mentioned, studies documenting tea tree oils efficacy are limited as it is a non-pharmaceutical. While its broad-spectrum activity includes its antibacterial, antifungal, antiviral and antiprotozoal activities, much of the evidence relating to its use in treatment is anecdotal. Tea tree oil has been used to treat canker sores, warts and genital infections.

Antifungal & Yeast

During World War II an outbreak of foot fungus hospitalized hundreds of Australian soldiers. None of the ointments, lotions or medicines of that time worked to stop the fungus. One day a medic who was an Aborigine from Australia remembered about the tea tree. After coating affected soldiers’ feet with the pungent smelling oil, the fungus was killed within a few days. Tea tree oil has also been used to treat dandruff and oral thrush. In the lab, *Candida albicans* cells were treated with tea tree oil. It was found that “the different components of tea tree oil vary in their modes of action against yeasts and that tea tree oil has several mechanisms of antifungal action.”⁴

Tea tree oil has been found to be effective for treating ringworm and other fungal infections of the skin, such as athlete’s foot and jock itch, and fungal infection of the nails. It has also been used to treat boils and other localized bacterial infections.

Anti-Parasitic

Researchers at the University of Queensland in Australia evaluated tea tree oil and lavender oil as an effective treatment for head lice. Assessing 123 individuals with head lice as well as a control group, the authors of the study con-

cluded, “The high efficacy of the melaleuca oil (tea tree oil) and lavender oil product and the head lice ‘suffocation’ product offers an alternative to the pyrethrins-based product.... Tea tree and peppermint caused the most repellence, and tea tree and lavender prevented some blood feeding on treated skin. Comparatively, tea tree oil was most efficacious, with DEET ranking equal second overall.”⁵ A 2008 study in the lab showed that a tea tree oil preparation was more effective against head lice than permethrin, a popular pharmaceutical remedy.

Scabies results in red rashes that can be quite itchy. It is caused by mites burrowing into the skin. There has been some documentation of resistance to anti-parasitic compounds typically used to treat scabies. Concern over treatment failures has brought tea tree oil into the spotlight as an effectual option in the treatment of scabies.

Tea tree oil has also been used as a mosquito repellent and for treating their bites. Tea tree oil has antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties and is usually non-irritating. Test a small area of skin before applying the oil liberally. If the essential oil irritates your skin, wash it off with soap and water and dilute the tea tree oil in five parts of jojoba or almond oil before reapplying.

Antibacterial

Tea tree preparations may be as effective as drug therapy for the treatment of certain staph skin infections, according to reports in *The Journal of Hospital Infection* (2004; 56: 283–6). Two hundred and twenty-four people were studied and either treated with tea tree oil or typical drug therapies. Tea tree oil was found to be just as effective as the drug therapies in treating Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. Whether from insects or

the microscopic world, we face very real dangers, especially when we travel to unfamiliar areas of the globe. Tea tree oil seems like a well worth addition to any travel bag when you realize it’s incredible versatility. It has been used to treat mouth ulcers and abscesses, conjunctivitis, acne, boils, impetigo, psoriasis, dandruff, vaginitis, thrush, septic wounds, cuts and abrasions, carbuncles, skin infections, mites and lice. Truly, these are healing leaves.

In vision, Ezekiel saw such leaves. First, he was shown a stream of water flowing out from under the temple. Gradually and systematically the water increased in width and depth until it became a river to swim in and then too deep to pass through. The One who was showing him this river said, “These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes” (Ezekiel 47:8-9 KJV, NKJV). Jesus said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God?” (Mark 4:30, Amplified Bible). What can we liken it to? To Ezekiel, it was likened to this river that gave life and brought healing wherever it went. Trees flourished on both sides of this river. “Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”

¹Cook, James. “Cook’s Journal: Daily Entries.” *South Seas Voyaging Accounts*. 6/13/1770. <http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/17700613.html>.

²Carson, C.F., Hammer, K.A., Riley, T.V. “*Melaleuca alternifolia* (Tea Tree) Oil: a Review of Antimicrobial and Other Medicinal Properties.” *Clinical Microbiology Reviews*. <http://cmr.asm.org/content/19/1/50.full>.

³Schnitzler P, Schön K, Reichling J. “Antiviral activity of Australian tea tree oil and eucalyptus oil against herpes simplex virus in cell culture.” *Pharmazie*. 2001 Apr; 56(4):343-7. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11338678>.

⁴Hammer, K.A., Carson, C.F., Riley, T.V. “Antifungal effects of *Melaleuca alternifolia* (tea tree) oil and its components on *Candida albicans*, *Candida glabrata* and *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*.” *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy*, Oxford Journals. 5/12/04. <http://jac.oxfordjournals.org/content/53/6/1081.full>.

⁵“Treating head lice naturally.” *The C.A.M. Report*. 8/27/10. <http://www.thecamreport.com/2011/01/treating-head-lice-naturally>.

