

THE NATURAL PATH

*Your Guide to Good Health & Vitality
Cutting Edge Research Made Easy*

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The Top Herbs for PMS

THERE ARE MANY HERBS THAT HELP PMS. HERE ARE SIX OF THE BEST

PMS usually occurs in the week before menstruation and can include bloating, breast tenderness, headaches, palpitations, depression, irritability, fatigue, poor concentration, mood swings and even suicidal thoughts. It affects 48% of women of reproductive age.

There are way too many helpful herbs to cover in one piece: it would take a book. But here are some of the best, and best researched, supplements.

Chastetree Berry

Of all the powerful women's herbs, the most important and powerful of all is chastetree berry, or *Vitex agnus castus*. Chastetree helps nearly everything a woman could need help for from cyclical breast pain to painful periods to infertility and menopause. But the most important use of chastetree berry is PMS. Chastetree berry is the most important treatment, pharmaceutical or natural, for PMS.

There are all kinds of studies that show that, when taken for 3 menstrual cycles, most women will experience much improvement. The key is that it takes time to work. That's why most studies last at least 3 months.

The placebo-controlled studies consistently show 3 things about chastetree berry.

LOOK INSIDE

- Ginkgo for Mild Cognitive Impairment
- Curcumin for Migraines
- Increase Testosterone with Tongkat Ali
- Grow More Hair with Saw Palmetto

It's Going to Be a Bad Cold & Flu Season. But Not For You!



THE BEST AND LATEST RESEARCH ON COLDS & FLU

We could be in for an especially bad flu and cold season this year. Flu season has arrived earlier, and the dominant strain is both highly contagious and a mismatch for this year's flu vaccine.

But perhaps that doesn't need to be a problem for you. Herbs and vitamins aren't modified each year to match the predicted dominant strain.

Here are some of the best, and best researched, natural supplements for a nasty winter.

Vitamin C

The mainstream media wants you to believe that vitamin C is just a placebo. It's not. When you use enough, it works almost every time.

Vitamin C both prevents and fights colds. In a study of 1g of vitamin C, there were 45% fewer colds than on placebo (*Nutrients*. 2014;6:2572-83). At 6g a day, there were 8 times as many colds in a placebo group (*BMJ Mil Health* 2020;bmjmilitary-2019-001384).

A review of 21 studies that used 1-8g of vitamin C found that vitamin C reduces the length and severity of colds by 23% (*Scand J Infect Dis* 1994;26:1-6). More recent research has added to that evidence. A meta-analysis of 9 controlled studies found that taking extra vitamin C on top of regular supplementation at the onset of a cold shortens the cold by a significant 56% and significantly relieves symptoms (*Biomed Res Int* 2018;2018:1837634). A second meta-analysis of 10 double-blind, placebo-controlled studies of

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Lifesaver: Olive Leaf Extract for High Blood Pressure

This systematic review and meta-analysis of 12 placebo-controlled studies found that, in people who have high blood pressure, olive leaf extract significantly reduces total cholesterol, LDL-cholesterol and triglycerides and significantly reduced both systolic and diastolic blood pressure (*Diabetol Metab Syndr*. October 21, 2022;14(1):151).



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1g a day or more pointed to a significant 15% decrease in cold severity. It also reduced the duration of the cold (*BMC Public Health*. 2024;23,2468).

Zinc Lozenges

Here's another one the media says doesn't work. Wrong again!

Multiple studies show that taking 13-23mg of zinc lozenges every 2 waking hours can beat a cold in about 4 days versus 7-11 on placebo.

A meta-analysis of placebo-controlled studies of zinc acetate lozenges demonstrated a 3 day reduction in length of the cold (*BJCP*. 2016;82:1393- 8). A second meta-analysis found that 80-92mg a day of zinc acetate lozenges cured 70% of colds by day 5 compared to 27% on placebo. The zinc group recovered 3.1 times faster (*Open Forum Infect Dis*. 2017;4(2):ofx059).

Another meta-analysis of 7 controlled studies of zinc acetate or gluconate lozenges found a 33% reduction in cold duration overall and a 40% reduction in the zinc acetate group (*JRSM Open*. 2017;2;8(5):2054270417694291). A review by the highly respected Cochrane group, in which only some of the studies used zinc as lozenges and not all of them used a high enough dose, found a 2.37 day reduction in the duration of colds (*Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2024, Issue 5. Art. No.:CD014914).

Echinacea



Photo by Ted Sautter

The king of herbs for colds and flu. Tons of studies show that echinacea has the power to fight off a cold 3-4 days faster than placebo.

One double-blind study gave 673 healthy people echinacea or placebo for 4 months. The echinacea group had significantly fewer colds and cold symptoms, showing that echinacea both prevents and treats colds (*Evid Based Complement Altern Med* 2012(2):841315).

An important meta-analysis of 6 high quality, controlled, long term studies of respiratory tract infection recurrence and complication, including pneumonia, bronchitis, ear infection and sinusitis showed that echinacea reduces the risk of recurrence by a significant 35%. In people

with higher susceptibility due to stress or weakened immunity, the reduction was an even more impressive 50%. Echinacea reduced the risk of complications by 50%, including 64.9% reduction of risk of pneumonia, ear infection and tonsillitis (*Adv Ther* 2015;32:187-200).

The latest word comes from a meta-analysis of 30 studies that found that echinacea safely and significantly reduces monthly RTIs by 32%, the number of people with more than one a month by 25%, the number of people with recurrent infections by 40% and the risk of complications by 56%. Importantly, echinacea reduced the need for antibiotics by a significant 40%, reducing total antibiotic days by 70% (*Antibiotics (Basel)*. 2024 Apr; 13(4): 364).

Elderberry

Several studies show that elderberry helps you recover from a cold in only 2 or 3 days compared to 7-8 on placebo. A meta-analysis of 4 controlled studies found that elderberry significantly reduces the severity and duration of symptoms. It works for both flu and cold but may be even more effective for flu (*Complement Ther Med* 2019;42:361-365).

Andrographis

This herb is one of the best but still doesn't get the attention it deserves. Andrographis is great for colds and sinusitis. It's better than placebo, and it's fast. Andrographis significantly improves runny nose and sore throat in only 2 days. Cough, headache, ear ache and fatigue significantly improve in 4 (*Phytomed* 1999;6:217-23). Andrographis not only treats, but also prevents colds. When kids take andrographis for 3 winter months, they have a 2.1 lower risk of catching a cold (*Phytomed* 1997;4:101-4).

Double-blind research shows that andrographis reduces cold intensity scores by 11.2 points versus 6.3 points on placebo. Significantly more people on andrographis were significantly or completely better after 5 days. After 10 days, 90.4% of the andrographis group, but only 21.2% of the placebo group was cured (*Altern Ther Health Med* 2018;24(2):16-26).

A systematic review of 33 controlled studies has demonstrated the power of andrographis over acute respiratory infections, including cold, flu, bronchitis, pneumonia, laryngitis and tonsillitis. Andrographis is significantly better than drugs for all symptoms but cough, and adding it to drugs is significantly better than drugs alone (*PLoS One* 2017; 12(8):e0181780).

An important new andrographis study may be the first to use objective measures on a validated scale instead of people reporting how they feel. The study, which included 300 people with confirmed uncomplicated upper respiratory tract infections, used the Wisconsin Upper Respiratory Symptom Survey. People given 400mg of andrographis extract had significantly lower symptom severity scores and global

scores than those taking placebo by day 3 (*Complementary Therapies in Medicine*. May 2023;73:102934).

Probiotics

A review of 14 controlled studies found that when you take probiotics for at least a week, you're less likely to catch upper respiratory infections, including colds (*Cochrane Database of Syst Rev* 2011;7:CD006895). You're also less likely to get an ear, nose, throat or respiratory infection (*Ther Adv Respir Dis* 2010;4(5):271-8).

The most exciting recent word comes from a double-blind study that gave either a placebo or a combination probiotic to 65 healthy people for 12 weeks. There was a significant decrease in the severity of cold symptoms in the probiotic group as well as a significant 32.7% decrease in duration of cold. While 44% of the placebo group suffered muscle pain, a significantly fewer 20% of the probiotic group did. 42% of the probiotic group reported no cold symptoms at all versus only 24% in the placebo group (*Nutrients*. 2025;17(9):1490).

Vitamin D

At any age, vitamin D helps. For infants, 1200IU of vitamin D significantly reduces the number of infections, the duration of symptoms and rapidly reduces viral load (*Pediatr Infect Dis J* 2018 Aug;37(8):749-754). In older kids, the same dose reduces incidence of the flu by 42% (*Am J Clin Nutr* 2010 May;91(5):1255-60). Seniors given high dose vitamin D have a significant 40% fewer acute respiratory infections (*J Am Geriatr Soc* 2017 Mar;65(3):496-503).

The latest word on vitamin D is a study that found that people who are hospitalized with pneumonia who have a vitamin D deficiency are 3.5 times more likely to die within 30 days and 3.27 times more likely in 180 days (*Open Forum Infectious Diseases*. December 2025;12(12):ofaf706).

Garlic

Regularly supplementing aged garlic extract reduces your number of colds by a significant 58% and reduces the severity of the cold if you do get it (*Clin Nutr* 2012;31:337-344). A group of people taking garlic containing 180mg of allicin for 12 weeks caught 24 colds compared to a placebo group that caught 65. The placebo group suffered 366 days of illness compared to 111 in the garlic group (*Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2014 Nov 11;11:CD006206).

Curcumin

The newest herb for colds is curcumin. A new study found that when healthy people take a daily dose of 150mg of a highly bioavailable curcumin for 12 weeks, they experience significantly fewer days with cold symptoms (*J Diet Suppl*. 2023 Mar 16;1-28).



SPOTLIGHT: Ginkgo Biloba for Mild Cognitive Impairment

Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is the cognitive area between the normal cognitive decline of aging and the serious cognitive decline of dementia. It causes difficulties with memory, thinking, judgement and language but falls short of affecting your life the way Alzheimer's does.

MCI may increase your risk of Alzheimer's, but not for everyone. Overall, it increases the risk of dementia by 5 times. 15% of people with MCI will progress to dementia within 1-2 years and 65%-80% will within 3-6 years. 40-60% of people over 58 who have MCI have an underlying Alzheimer's pathology. People with a type of MCI called amnesic MCI are at greater risk of developing Alzheimer's.

Though Acetylcholinesterase inhibitors (AChEI) are the most commonly used drugs to treat MCI symptoms, they "remain largely ineffective." The great cognition herb *Ginkgo biloba*, however, has been shown to improve memory in people with amnesic MCI (*CNS Neurol Disord Drug Targets*. 2021;20(4):378-384).

Exciting New Research

This study of 133 people with amnesic MCI who had an average age of 75 compared the effectiveness of an AChEI alone to ginkgo alone or a combination of the two.

On the mini-mental state examination, the combination was better than either treatment alone, suggesting adding ginkgo works better than the drug alone. The combination was also best for verbal episodic memory.

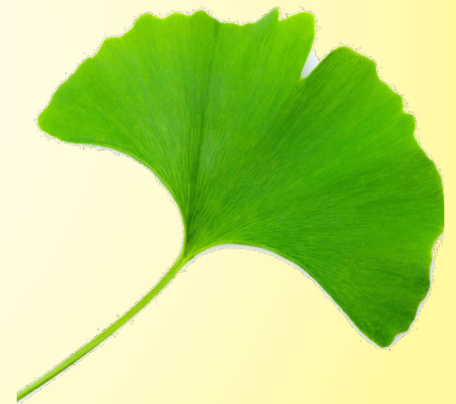
When it came to ability to switch attention and verbal fluency, ginkgo alone or in combination worked better than the drug alone. While all 3 groups improved in most categories, the drug only group alone did not improve in attention switching and information processing speed.

As for behavioural and psychological symptoms, ginkgo alone and in combination with the drug was superior to the drug alone.

Ginkgo not only beat the drug for efficacy, it beat it for safety. The number of possible adverse events in the ginkgo

group was 28.7% compared to 46.1% in the drug only group.

Though acetylcholinesterase inhibitors are not all that effective on their own, this study suggests that they are much more effective when combined with *Ginkgo biloba*, which, when taken alone, also has efficacy and safety advantages over the drug (*Alzheimers Dement (N Y)*. August 2, 2022;8(1);e12338).



Do You Suffer from Migraines?

This double-blind study gave 65 people who suffered from migraines without aura a placebo or curcumin for 8 weeks.

Compared to placebo, the curcumin significantly improved severity, duration and frequency of migraines.

It also significantly improved headache impact, stress, sleep quality and quality of life.

The curcumin safely brought relief to the migraine sufferers with no adverse effects.

Chin J Integr Med
2025 Nov;31(11):963-972

NATURAL PATH NEWSFLASH



Tongkat Ali Increases Testosterone

Hypogonadism, a condition in which men don't produce enough testosterone, can lead to reduced libido, erectile dysfunction, infertility, obesity, reduced muscle mass, fatigue and depression.

7 out of 9 observational and controlled studies in a systematic review found that tongkat ali significantly increases testosterone.

A meta-analysis of 5 controlled studies found that tongkat ali significantly increases testosterone, especially in men with hypogonadism.

Medicina (Kaunas). August 4, 2022;58(8):1047

Ageless!



The Great Hair Herb for Men & Women

Pattern hair loss affects 80% of men over 80 and 40% of women by the time they're 50.

But, compared to placebo, saw palmetto berry extract significantly increases terminal hair growth, the thick, fully developed hairs you want to grow back, and significantly reduces hairs shed in a hair pull test.

Saw palmetto berry also specifically helped menopausal women whose hormonal changes affect hair loss: they significantly increased terminal hairs and decreased hair shedding.

The saw palmetto was safe with no adverse events.

J Cosmet Dermatol. 2025 Nov 30;24(12):e70585.



The Top Herbs for PMS

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1. It really works. In one study, 52% of women on chastetree berry reduced their symptoms by 50% or more compared to 24% of the placebo group (*BMJ* 2001;322:134 (7279):134-7). In another, PMS scores dropped by 22.82 points on chastetree berry versus 15.5 points on placebo (*Maturitas* 2009;63:99-103). In a third, chastetree berry was significantly better than placebo for all but one of 17 symptoms.

2. It helps the whole spectrum of symptoms. The placebo-controlled research shows that it helps breast tenderness, bloating, pain, headache, fatigue, mood swings, tension, anger, irritability, anxiety, nervousness and depression (*BMJ* 2001;322:134-37; *Aust NZ J Obstet Gynaecol* 2010;50(2):189-93; *Phytomed* 2012;19(14):1325-1331).



Chastetree Berry

3. It's safe. Chastetree berry is as safe as a placebo with no serious side effects (*Maturitas* 2009;63:99-103).

A systematic review and meta-analysis of 17 controlled studies has confirmed that chastetree berry has a large beneficial effect on all PMS symptoms, including anxiety and depression. Chastetree berry was superior to placebo in 9 out of 10 studies and in every study that used chastetree berry extract.

Conventional medicine's answer for women with PMS is either SSRI antidepressants or oral contraceptives. But this review found chastetree berry to be comparable to oral contraceptives and to Prozac with no significant difference except that the chastetree berry is safer. When all the studies were put together, the beneficial effect of chastetree berry was "large" (*Am J Obstet Gynecol* 2017;217(2):150-166).

Saffron

Newer to the PMS list is the beautiful herb saffron. Saffron helps both depression and anxiety in PMS (*Pharmacopsychiatry* 2017;50(2):64-8).

Two systematic reviews and meta-analyses published this year have confirmed that saffron significantly improves the symptoms of PMS (*Korean J Fam Med*. 2025 Oct 28. doi:10.4082/kjfm.24.0259). One, which included 3 controlled studies, found that saffron is significantly better than controls for PMS. It concluded that 8-12 weeks of taking saffron was effective at reducing the symptoms of PMS and that it might cause fewer side effects than drugs (*Rev Clin Med*. 2025;12(2):17-25).

Curcumin

A decade ago, the controlled research started to suggest that curcumin improves PMS (*Neuropeptides* 2015 Nov 11. pii: S0143-4179(15)00118-3), including both the physical and mood symptoms (*Complement Ther Med*. 2015;23(3):318-24).

Now new research builds on that evidence. The double-blind study included 62 university medical students. Half were given a placebo, and half were given 500mg of curcumin. They started taking their treatment 7 days before menstruation and continued to 3 days after menstruation for 2 menstrual cycles.

The women taking the curcumin had significantly greater improvement on the Premenstrual Symptoms Screening Tool than the women taking the placebo. The scores in the curcumin group dropped from 52.7 to 42.6, while those in the placebo group only went down from 49.7 to 44.1. (*J Pharm Health Care Sci*. 2025 Jul 16;11:61)

Chamomile

This gentle herb may be even more powerful than drugs. When women were given 100mg of chamomile extract or 250mg of the drug mefenamic acid 3 times a day for 2 months in a double-blind study, there was no significant difference in the ability of the 2 treatments to reduce the physical symptoms of PMS, including

breast pain. But the herb was better than the drug at significantly relieving the emotional symptoms of PMS. This study suggests that chamomile is better than drugs for comprehensively treating PMS (*Complement Ther Clin Pract* 2014;20:81-8).

Adding to the evidence, a 2019 systematic review of 8 controlled studies confirmed that chamomile is effective for PMS (*J Pharmacopuncture*. 2019 Dec;22(4):204-209).

A recent double-blind study again highlighted the mood benefits of chamomile. 118 women were given either a placebo or a 250mg capsule of chamomile every 8 hours from 7 days before menstruation to the start of menstruation. The improvement in severity of mood symptoms was significantly greater in the chamomile group (*Eur J Obstet Gynecol Reprod Biol X*. 2021 Oct; 12: 100134).

Valerian

You knew valerian was the best herb for sleep, but did you know it helped PMS? This double-blind study gave women with PMS valerian extract or placebo. There was significant improvement on valerian but no improvement on placebo. Valerian was significantly better at improving PMS symptom severity. It significantly improved both emotional and physical symptoms (*J Tradit Complement Med* 2016;6(3):309-315).

Pomegranate

This is new! When 60 women with PMS were given either pomegranate extract or nothing for two cycles, the women who were given the pomegranate had a significantly greater improvement in PMS symptom scores.

The study also looked at how the pomegranate extract impacted quality of life. It found that social quality of life improved significantly more in the pomegranate group (*J Affect Disord*. 2024 Sep 14 ;368:266-273).

About Linda Woolven & Ted Snider



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