Analgesia
The Search for Effective Pain Relief

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Physical Pain

- Ranges from mildly annoying to crippling.
- Pain can be localized or body-wide and can be acute, recurrent or chronic in nature.
- The search for effective pain relief predates humankind and is a continual area of research and experimentation.
Pain Management

Orthodox and CAM

• Pharmaceutical medications
  • Opiates, NSAIDs, antidepressants, muscle relaxants, acetaminophen, anticonvulsants, medical marijuana

• Body/mind techniques
  • Biofeedback, hypnosis, cognitive behavioral therapy, meditation

• Physical/structural approaches
  • Chiropractic, osteopathic/naturopathic manipulation, TENS, yoga, tai qi, massage, physical therapy, acupuncture

• Medical/surgical procedures
  • Nerve ablation, spinal cord stimulators, nerve blocks
• There is still significant under-treatment of moderate to severe pain, especially in people of color, women, the elderly and the poor.

• The most effective analgesics are the opiates. Unfortunately they are also highly addictive with long-term use, have significant adverse effects (constipation, drowsiness, nausea and vomiting) and high doses can lead to overdose and death.

• The FDA (March 22, 2016) increased warnings about the entire class of opiate medications. They noted potential interactions with antidepressants and migraine medications causing Serotonin syndrome, they can cause serious adrenal insufficiency and decrease the production of sex hormones (FDA, 2016). In addition, a disturbing animal study found that opiate use, while relieving pain, actually dramatically prolongs neuropathic pain by increasing inflammation and preventing the body from resetting to normal pain sensitivity.

Herbal Medicine

• Most of the strong-acting herbal analgesics have already been turned into pharmaceuticals (Opium Poppy ⇒ opiates), have significant toxicity (Gelsemium) or are illegal in most states (Cannabis).

• This leaves herbalists with milder-acting analgesics that, in general, are less effective than pharmaceutical medications.
• Botanicals excel in treating specific types of pain. We focus on where the pain occurs (head pain, musculo-skeletal pain, menstrual pain, nerve pain, urinary tract pain, etc.) and the nature of the pain (sharp and stabbing, dull and throbbing, peripheral nerve pain, spasmodic pain, etc.).

• This allows us to target and manage the pain with milder, less heroic therapies while improving efficacy.

• In herbal traditions throughout the world, the use of single herbs is almost unknown. The norm is complex formulas that fit the person being treated. Skilled combining of herbs creates a synergy of activity and the combined use of analgesics, antinociceptives, anti-inflammatories and antispasmodics (in some cases nervines, antidepressants or anxiolytics may also be used) reinforces the therapeutic effects and improves outcomes.
Bai Zhi root (*Angelica dahurica*)
Used for wind/damp arthritis, sciatica and sinus headache pain. Usually combined with Corydalis.

Black Cohosh root (*Actaea racemosa*)
Used for dull, deep-seated muscular pain as well as uterine, ovarian and testicular pain.
Chinese Clematis root /Wei Ling Xian (*Clematis chinensis*)

Used for wind/damp arthritis, sciatica, torticollis and SI joint pain.

Corydalis tuber/Yan Hu Suo (*Corydalis yanhusuo*)

Used for pain caused by blood stagnation, spasmodic pain and cancer pain.
Cyperus tuber/Xiang Fu (*Cyperus rotundus*)

Used for spasmodic abdominal pain.

Devil’s Claw tuber (*Harpagophytum procumbens*)

Relieves arthritis, bursitis, rheumatoid arthritis and back pain.
Dogbane root (*Apocynum cannabinum*)
Effective for pain with edema in the lumbar spine, SI joint or sciatica.

Gambir spines/Gou Teng (*Uncaria sinensis*)
Relieves liver wind (spasm, tremors, numbness and migratory pain).
Gelsemium herb (*Gelsemium sempervirens*)
Powerful (and potentially toxic) herb used for migraines, ovarian, facial nerve and endometrial pain.

Gum Guggul (*Commiphora mukul*)
Treats cold/damp or wind/damp arthritis, sciatica and lumbago.
Horse Chestnut seed (*Aesculus hippocastanum*)

Dull, throbbing pain with edema or impaired circulation to the tissue or organs.

Jamaica Dogwood bark (*Piscidia piscipula*)

Effective for moderate to severe nerve, spasmodic or musculoskeletal pain.
Ligusticum root/Chuan Xiong (*Ligusticum chuanxiong*)

Relieves pain due to congealed blood as well as nerve pain and headaches.

Magnolia bark (*Magnolia spp.*)

Used for hot/damp and wind/damp arthritis.
Mistletoe herb (*Viscum album*)

Used for intense rheumatic or neuralgic pain that feels like the tissue is being torn as well as vascular headaches with a red head.

Notopterygium/Qiang Huo (*Notopterygium incisum*)

Used in TCM for wind/cold or wind/damp pain, especially occipital headaches or dull throbbing pain in the neck, head, shoulders or upper back.
St. John’s wort flowering tops (*Hypericum perforatum*)

Specific for nerve pain and pain in the GI and GU tracts, as well as migraines.

Sweet Melilot herb (*Melilotus spp.*)

Indicated for sharp, stabbing pain.
White Peony/Bai Shao Yao (*Paeonia lactiflora*)

Used for spasmodic pain, migraines and fibromyalgia.

Willow bark (*Salix spp.*)

Classic remedy for mild to moderate pain due to backaches and osteoarthritis.
Wintergreen herb (*Gaultheria procumbens*)

Used for dull, achy pain in the GU tract.

Yucca root (*Yucca spp.*)

Long history of use by Native Americans to relieve arthritis pain in the knees or hips.
Antinociceptives

Ashwagandha root (*Withania somniferum*)

Calming adaptogen used for fibromyalgia pain and to enhance potency of other analgesics.
Betony (*Stachys officinalis*)
Specific for head pain.

Cannabis (*Cannabis sativa*)
High CBD strains can relieve chronic muscle pain and spasms caused by MS, Parkinson’s disease, Huntington’s disease, ALS as well as RSD, migraines and cluster headaches.
Indian Pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*)

Powerful antinociceptive. Distances you from pain. I use it with Corydalis and Bai Zhi to treat cancer pain.

Kava rhizome (*Piper methysticum*)

Antinociceptive and antispasmodic for fibromyalgia, urinary tract pain and sore, tight muscles.
Mimosa bark/He Huan Pi (*Albizia julibrissin*)

Phenomenal mood elevator for psychological pain, also used for pain due to blood stagnation.

Prickly Ash bark (*Zanthoxylum clava-herculis*)

Indicated for peripheral nerve pain with impaired circulation (peripheral neuropathies, Raynaud’s syndrome).
Antispasmodics

Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*)

The PA-free extract of this herb is a powerful antispasmodic which can be used for dysmenorrhea, leg cramps, torticollis or back spasms

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Khella seed (*Ammi visnaga*)
Used for respiratory, gallbladder, genito-urinary, cardiac and intestinal spasms.

Kudzu root (*Pueraria spp.*)
Especially effective for neck spasms and pain. Also used for migraines and intestinal and rectal spasms.
Siler root/Fang Feng (*Saposhnikovia divaricata*)

Used to treat cold/damp arthralgias, facial nerve pain and sciatica.

Wild Yam rhizome (*Dioscorea villosa*)

Specific for intestinal or bilious colic, gallbladder spasms or IBS.
Zizyphus/Suan Zao Ren seed (*Zizyphus spinosa*)

Used in TCM for spasmodic pain that interferes with sleep.

Other herbal antispasmodics include:
Black Haw, Cramp Bark, Skunk Cabbage, Roman Chamomile, Scullcap, Silk Tassel and Blue Vervain.
Antiinflammatories

Achyranthes root/Huai Niu Xi (*Achyranthes bidentata*)
Musculoskeletal pain, especially of the lower back, knee or ankle and sciatica.
Boswellia gum resin (*Boswellia serrata*)

Useful for pain due to blood stagnation, especially osteo- and rheumatoid arthritis, IBS and IBD, and cluster headaches.

Drynaria root/Gu Sui Bu (*Drynaria fortunei*)

Kidney yang tonic used to treat low back pain, sciatica and knee or ankle pain. Also used for facial nerve pain.
Gotu Kola herb (*Centella asiatica*)
Indicated for tissue that is red, hot and inflamed.

Guaiac wood (*Guaiacum officinale*)
Specific for hot/damp arthritis (Lyme arthralgia and rheumatoid arthritis.)
Sarsaparilla (*Smilax spp.*)

Like Gotu Kola, used for tissue that is red, hot and inflamed. It binds endotoxins in the gut, reducing the inflammatory load.

Teasel root/Xu Duan (*Dipsacus asper*)

Used in TCM to treat low back pain, weak or painful knees or ankles, it is also effective for treating wind damp arthritis, Lyme arthralgia and sciatica.
Turmeric rhizome (*Curcuma longa*)

Powerful antiinflammatory and antinociceptive agent. Treats cold/damp arthralgia, fibromyalgia, sciatica and brachial nerve pain. Also used for liver and gastric pain.

Other herbal/nutritional antiinflammatories include Pycnogenol®, Grape seed extract, Bromelain, Quercetin, SAMe, Ginger and Alpha Lipoic acid.
Topical Applications

Trauma Oil
Capsaicin

Essential Oils (EOs)

Topical applications of Lavender, Helichrysum, Tea Tree, Black Pepper and other essential oils can be used for temporary relief of pain due to trauma, headaches, etc.