

Stinging Nettles for Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia and Other Health Benefits

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Abstract

With regards prostate enlargement and increased nightly bathroom visits, apparently the majority of men of sixty are affected around the world. The objective of the current work is to suggest the stinging nettle, *Urtica dioica*, as a herbal remedy. This is complementary to prescription drugs, many of which incur side effects on the men who take them. The many other health benefits of the stinging nettle are briefly outlined. Owing to its ability to thrive in many climates, the stinging nettle should be grown in households around the globe as a herbal remedy. Its use in pharmaceutical formulations is obvious.

Keywords: Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH); Herb, Tradition; Pharmaceutical; Bone; Rhinitis; Eye

Background

The stinging nettle, *Urtica dioica*, is a herbal medicinal plant used in the West. It is native to Asia, Europe, North Africa, North America and it has been planted elsewhere, including Australia. In fact, stinging nettles, *Urtica dioica*, have been used for centuries as a herbal medicine in Europe [1,2]. Stinging nettles have many beneficial health benefits. For instance, lashing using nettle twigs was a traditional therapy for rheumatism [2]. Indeed, the ancient Greeks used it for traditional medicine, and later also used by the Romans [2].

Literature survey performed about this topic revealed a list of health benefits resulting from eating nettle leaves, drinking tea derived from the leaves, or consumed as manufactured supplements.

Health Benefits of Stinging Nettles

Stinging nettles (usually considered a weed in the West) is essentially without cost when one plants it on purpose in one's organic garden. The leaves can be dried and drunk as a tea, the fresh young leaves can be eaten directly in a salad, or off the hand. Various other parts of the plant e.g. root, seeds, have also been used.

Randall and associates [3,4] have studied the beneficial effects of stinging nettles as complementary medical therapy for joint pain. Their work endorses its therapeutic benefits. The lack of expense is also a significant consideration.

Besides vitamin C, the stinging nettle has vitamins D and K [5], specifically vitamin K2 which prevents excess calcium from causing stiffening of the arteries. Stinging nettles have calcium, magnesium and potassium besides. Since nettles provide all the 5 nutrients for bone health (especially necessary for senior persons to prevent osteoporosis), it is better than fresh milk because milk only gives calcium and vitamin D towards bone health. In addition, fresh milk may have bovine hormones (which cause cows to need more antibiotics to combat disease and these might find their way into the milk) which may not necessary be good for you. The knowledge to take away from this is that stinging nettles may be better than fresh milk for bone health. In addition, it is best to avoid condensed milk because of the fat and sugar. The paper about the benefits of avoiding sugar are discussed in [6].

Stinging nettles are used as a natural treatment of perennial allergic rhinitis [7,8]. This ailment is principally runny noses because of pollutants in the air, food allergies, synthetic drugs, amongst many other possible causes. The symptoms can happen at any time of the year, to anyone around the world. Stinging nettles themselves do not cause hay fever. The leaves are used as a traditional remedy. Hence, the potential of using stinging nettles for perennial allergic rhinitis could be huge.

Stinging nettles have lutein and zeaxanthin, two dietary carotenoids found in the eyes [9], where [9] is a review about nutrition. Hence, they are expected to be essential for healthy eyes, which is a problem for many older folks. The dark green leafy vegetables like spinach, kale, broccoli and broccolini (hybrid of kai-lan and broccoli) have these two nutrients, and so does the stinging nettles. They make the eyes better at withstanding the bright sunlight as well as seeing when there is a glare (as in driving). The nutrients aid the macular in absorbing high-energy ultraviolet light from the sun, thus protecting the retina. The nutrients are also credited with the health benefit of allowing one to see in dim light. The fatty acids and carotenoids in stinging nettles were investigated in [10].

Sarich writes about the 29 health benefits of sipping nettle tea [11]. Of these, she included “cures the common cold”. This statement is not endorsed by the Mayo Clinic [12], where it is stated that there is no cure for the common cold. It has been experienced by the author that hot water relieves some symptoms of the common cold, and that hot infused nettles tea did the same. Certainly, drinking cold or iced water helped in worsening the symptoms of common cold. Replacing cold or iced water with hot liquids would appear as a relief or therapy.

Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia

As men age, the cells of their prostate gland often overgrow. The prostate gland swells and thus obstructs the bladder opening. This phenomenon impedes urination and the bladder emptying. This nonthreatening enlargement causes pressure on the urinary tract or urethra because it acts like a clamp on a hose. Symptoms that may result include a weak urinary stream, more frequent nighttime urination and urgency, as well as other unpleasant ones. The nonthreatening enlargement of the gland is called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

Prostate enlargement occurs in about 50% of the male population by the age of 60 years [13], and more than 90% of the men at age 80 years and older [14]. These percentages of men affected are so high that the matter should be a public health concern. Over a billion dollars are spent a year on prostate problems in North America [13]. It is the large numbers of men all over the world affected, that motivated the writing of this article.

Among the many benefits listed in [11], is included the statement “reduces incident of prostate cancer”. This statement is stronger than the conclusion made in the published research work of [15]. In [15], researchers described the active effect of nettle root extract in preventing the spread of prostate cancer. The beneficial effect of stinging nettle leaves on enlarged prostate in BPH has been experienced by the author, who has consumed the herb weekly for over fifteen years. The sub-species consumed and still being consumed by the author did not have nettles, and the young leaves are eaten directly for potency, rather than a tea infused with stinging nettle leaves.

The natural supplements used for prostate health are saw palmetto, pumpkin seeds, stinging nettles, and *Pygeum africanum*. The important fact is that these plants have the common substance, beta-sitosterol [13]. These four are also endorsed by the research performed in [16]. In addition, the efficacy of beta-sitosterol as a therapy for BPH has been shown in [17-19]. The findings of these last three references are rather conclusive.

Pumpkin seed oil and saw palmetto oil were confirmed as useful for BPH in [20]. In a related health problem, a flower pollen extract commonly called Cernitin (from rye, corn), has been found to be helpful for lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) [21].

Discussion and Conclusion

Stinging nettles offer noteworthy health benefits. In particular, the consumption of stinging nettles for relief of enlarged prostate symptoms is endorsed in the current work. That this traditional medical practice can be basically free, makes it an attractive recommendation. There has been no side effects noticed.

It is suggested that anyone taking medication for BPH without experiencing side effects, should continue their prescription medicines. Others should take their natural supplements for BPH. The leaves of the stinging nettles could be used as an additional natural supplement. Five or more young leaves of the stinging nettle can be consumed directly for a fast and immediate relief for urination problems and urgency. This has been the experience of the author. The author has been following the over-the-counter saw-palmetto capsule daily regimen for over fifteen years. It is expected that as one uses herbal medicine over time, the amount/concentration of the herbs need to increase for the same amount of effect to be achieved.

It is possible that the health benefits of nettles consumption has not been advertised enough. It has been used by the ancient Greeks, and later by the Romans. Its falling out of favor in industrialized Europe would be interesting to explore. The promotion of this humble plant as a therapeutic plant should be encouraged. Other health benefits discovered include bone health, eye health and allergic rhinitis. The use of stinging nettles in pharmaceutical formulations should be encouraged.

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