

## Controlling Pain With *Corydalis*

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*Editor's note:* This is the [second article](#) in a series on the utility of herbs / herbal formulas in clinical chiropractic practice.

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Pain is the No. 1 reason patients visit our clinics. We wish they came first for prevention, but the truth is we are often primary pain doctors. With ever-increasing insurance regulations, we are frequently being relegated to acute pain care doctors, although we also routinely treat chronic pain conditions.

Most of our chronic pain patients have already seen MDs hoping for some relief. Many have been prescribed pain-control medications such as codeine, morphine and NSAIDs. Unfortunately, there are often significant side effects from these medications, and of course, they do little or nothing to actually heal the patient.

As doctors of chiropractic, we have long had the mission to save our patients from the pernicious effects of drugs and surgery. As D.D. Palmer said, "Chiropractic first, drugs second and surgery last." We have been providing chiropractic first. That is our fundamental job. What else can we do to help chronic pain patients?

Our patients are trained by advertising that there is something they can take for their chronic pain. But an antagonist drug is not the answer due to the many side effects previously mentioned. However, there is a tool in our toolbox. Herbs and herbal combinations that complement the spinal manipulation by working with the innate healing properties of the body. These herbs augment the normal physiological functions of the body instead of working against it.

The good news is that we can prescribe these herbs while remaining true to our philosophy at its core. One of these herbs in our toolbox is *Corydalis* (Chinese name: *Yan Hu Suo*).

### Corydalis for Pain Control

*Corydalis* has a long, frequent history of use in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for pain control. The primary reason for pain, according to TCM theory, is "qi blockage," and *Corydalis* is thought to soothe this blockage.

*Corydalis* is commonly used clinically for back pain (including back pain of spinal origin that has a nerve irritation or muscle spasm component), headaches, inflammation and menstrual pain. Animal studies suggest *Corydalis* may block inflammation and nerve pain.

The compound in *Corydalis*, dehydrocorybulbine (DHCB), is believed to produce [pain-relieving effects](#) similar to prescription drugs by blocking pain signals in the brain.<sup>1</sup> However, it does so naturally and does not carry the risk of addiction that many prescribed pain medications do.

In fact, some medical websites state that *Corydalis* can be used for mild depression, mild mental disorders, emotional disturbances, severe nerve damage and limb tremors. It is also used to lower blood pressure and relax spasms in the small intestine.<sup>2</sup>

### Administration / Dosage

*Corydalis* comes in two forms: granular and softgel capsules. In granular form, *Corydalis* is a single herb prescribed at one packet per day, mixed with hot water as a tea.

It is also available in a softgel capsule. Softgel capsules are usually blended with a second herb, angelica. This is prescribed at two capsules, three times per day. Softgel caps contain the herbal ingredients in liquid form and can be easily absorbed.

*Corydalis* is generally considered safe for healthy adults. It is recommended for chronic moderate to significant pain. It should not be used for occasional, minor pain.

### Safety Precautions

*Corydalis* is safe, but with some [general restrictions](#). It should not be used by pregnant or breast-feeding women, or people with an irregular heart rhythm.<sup>2</sup> It also may [interact with](#) medications such as hypnotics, sedatives, cancer medications and anti-arrhythmic drugs.<sup>3</sup> As always make certain you know what medications your patients are taking. It should be noted there is no buildup of tolerance with use of *Corydalis*.

Our chronic pain patients look to us for pain relief. In addition to chiropractic spinal manipulation and adjunctive therapies, we now have something more to offer without exposing them to dangerous side effects. We can take comfort in knowing *Corydalis* has been safely used for thousands of years for chronic pain relief.

### References

1. Zhang Y, et al. A novel analgesic isolated from a traditional Chinese medicine. *Curr Biol*, Jan. 20, 2014;24(2):117-23.
2. "Corydalis: Uses, Side Effects, Interactions and Warnings." WebMD.com.
3. "What Is Corydalis? Dosing, Side Effects and More." YahooHealth.com.

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