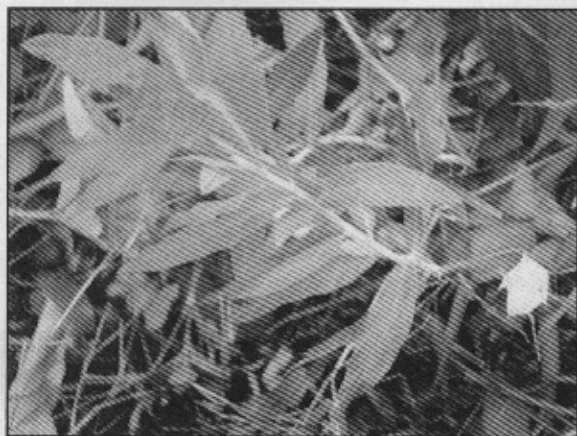


Chumash Treatments for Menopause, Premenstrual Syndrome and Dysmenorrhea

by James D. Adams and Cecilia Garcia



In the old days, women were the backbone of the village and had to keep the village active and prosperous, even when the men had gone fishing. The Chumash developed treatments for premenstrual syndrome and dysmenorrhea so that women could do their work with minimal disruption. Premenstrual syndrome occurs within the two weeks before menstruation and involves irritability, unhappiness, tension, bloating, discomfort, and other symptoms. Dysmenorrhea is pain, sometimes severe, during menstruation. Menopause is when an approximately 50-year-old woman stops menstruating, and is a time when a woman becomes an elder in the village. After passing through menopause, she becomes someone whose opinion is sought and who has a voice in deciding village business.

All of these conditions are treated with mugwort tea (*Artemisia douglasiana*). Mugwort grows near permanent water and prefers shade. It can be easily grown at home from seeds or from plants purchased at nurseries. The plants grow up to 7 feet tall usually as single, un-branching stems. The leaves

are about 4 inches long, oblong, and have at least 3 lobes. The tops of the leaves are green, whereas the undersides are white with small hairs.

Mugwort tea is made with one leaf added to cool water. Heat the water until it begins to simmer. Then allow the tea to cool before drinking. The tea is very mild and pale in color with a characteristic mugwort smell. Do not add sugar, honey or other sweetener.

Drink one cup of mugwort tea every evening until the taste becomes unpleasant. This may take a few days or a couple of weeks. At this point, stop drinking the tea and wait until you need it again. You will know when you need it, because you will develop a taste for it again. For the treatment of menopausal hot flashes, it may be necessary to use the tea, on and off, for a year or more. However, with each cup of mugwort tea, the hot flashes should diminish for awhile.

Mugwort is also dream sage. It is used to promote dreaming by making a pillow containing mugwort leaves and sleeping with your head on the pillow. This was described in our previous article in *Wilderness Way*, Volume 12 Issue 4.

Mugwort contains sesquiterpene lactones, such as dehydroleucodine, that are water soluble and appear to be the active compounds in the plant. Dehydroleucodine may have a serotonergic mechanism of action. Mugwort also contains thujone that is not water soluble and causes seizures and kidney damage. It is very important

to avoid internal use of essential oils and tinctures of mugwort since they contain high levels of thujone. Mugwort tea contains very little thujone. Use mugwort tea as described above. That is the safe way to use the plant. The Chumash have used this plant safely since the beginning of time.

About the Authors

Cecilia Garcia is a Chumash Healer (www.chumashmedicinewoman.com). James Adams is an Associate Professor in the USC School of Pharmacy. Cecilia Garcia and James Adams have written a second edition of their book *Healing with medicinal plants of the west – cultural and scientific basis for their use* that is available (\$14.95 + tax and shipping) at www.abeduspress.com or www.amazon.com

