

Digging for answers

4 botanicals offer effective pain relief without the dangerous side effects of medication.

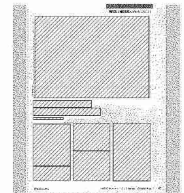
BY **JACOB TEITELBAUM, MD**

FOR PRACTITIONERS, ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS TO SEE IS patients becoming more immobile as they get older. Unfortunately, this occurrence is all too common. One in five Americans are currently living with diagnosed osteoarthritis, and two out of three individuals struggling with obesity will likely develop knee osteoarthritis in their lifetime.¹

Pharmaceutical manufacturers have rushed to fill the subsequent demand for painkillers, and the results have been devastating. Deaths from

painkillers have tripled in the past decade, with more than 16,500 bleeding ulcer deaths from arthritis medication, the doubling to tripling risk of heart attack and stroke, and 15,000 overdose deaths from prescribed narcotics.²⁻⁴ This translates to over 45,000 U.S. deaths per year that could have been prevented by using natural options that are often more effective than medication.

Like the debilitating health conditions that many people face, many over-the-counter (OTC) and prescrip-



tion drugs are highly dangerous. These drugs only address pain and not its cause, making them unsuitable for the task at hand. Certainly, better options have emerged for patients, whether they are dealing with rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, past injuries, or work-related wear and tear. Alternatives have emerged in nature as effective botanical compounds that strengthen the cushioning cartilage of the joints and reduce damaging inflammation.

Nature's solutions

Four important natural agents continue to gain momentum through research:

Curcumin from turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) is packed with beneficial properties and earns a top spot on the list. Dried and powdered turmeric has been used in India as both a spice and a medicine for centuries. In addition to flavoring food, turmeric has been used to treat conditions as varied as toothache, gas, chest pain, and menstrual problems. Current research has fact, one of curcumin's most interesting properties is its ability to protect chondrocytes, specialized cells found in joint cartilage, from being broken down by inflammatory compounds (IL-1beta, MMP3) in the body.⁹

Devil's Claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) from South Africa has powerful applications for practitioners in relieving arthritis inflammation and protecting joints and cartilage.


In a clinical study published in *Phytomedicine*, Devil's Claw relieved hip pain by 54 percent and knee pain by 38 percent in eight weeks.¹⁰ In another study, Devil's Claw was equal in pain-relieving ability to rofecoxib, a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug that has since been pulled off the

prescription market because of its side effects.¹¹

Not all Devil's Claw extracts are equally prepared. Many of them are only standardized at 2 percent harpagosides, the plant's key compound. But, there is a specialized, concentrated extract standardized to 20 percent harpagosides with documented advantages. Concentrated Devil's Claw extract has been found to reduce COX-2 activity by 31 percent.¹²

Aside from fighting inflammation, Devil's Claw helps regenerate cushioning tissue by increasing the level of glycosaminoglycans (GAGs), which are natural building blocks of tissue. This includes the extracellular matrix that acts as a shock absorber between the joints.¹³ Additionally, Devil's Claw boosts hyaluronic acid synthesis in cells that produce and maintain the natural cushioning cartilage between the vertebrae and joints (chondrocytes) by 41 percent.¹⁴

Indian gooseberry (*Emblica officinalis*)—also known as “amla”—has shown anti-inflammatory activity that can protect collagen and cartilage. Scientific research has shown that amla protects chondrocyte activity and inhibits cartilage-damaging enzyme activity in cell studies.^{15,16}

These botanicals have a history of traditional use that is being confirmed in clinical studies and ongoing research. Practitioners have the opportunity to help patients find viable alternatives for relief without complications and side effects, all while making an active life possible. 

practitioners (vitality101.com/pan) and an internationally known expert in the fields of chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, sleep, and pain. He is the author of many books, including the perennial bestseller *From Fatigued to Fantastic; Real Cause, Real Cure; Pain Free 1-2-3*; and the popular, free iPhone &

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JACOB TEITELBAUM, MD, is director of the Practitioners Alliance network, fostering communication between all health