

Herb profile: chamomile

Terry Willard, CIH, PhD

Chamomile (*Chamomilla*)



Chamomile has a wide range of actions, but is best known for soothing nervousness and the digestive system.



Health claims

Specifically valued as a children's medicine, even for the very young, the herb chamomile can also have strong effects on adults.

What is it?

Native to Europe and Asia, chamomile is a member of the daisy family. No plant was better known as a common domestic medicine to the country folk of old, whether they were in Germany or England, the Middle East or China.

How does it work?

Chamomile is a relaxant, reducing spasms even in very small doses. This is one of the few remedies that often work better in quite small amounts (one to four drops of tincture or by the teacup). The most commonly used variety is German chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*). Its close relative, Roman chamomile (*Anthemis nobilis*) has most of the same attributes but is a bit milder. They are often used interchangeably.

What evidence supports its use?

The relaxant and carminative (flatulence relieving) effects of chamomile are attributed mostly to anthemic acid, while the herb's tigilic, apigenin chamilin and chamazulene constituents have been shown to reduce spasms in concentrations between one part in 30,000 to one part in a million. Some of chamomile's constituents have proven to be anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antifungal and to



increase immune function. German chamomile has also been proven to be very effective in toning the uterus in female complaints.

How should I take it?

Chamomile is effective as a tea—one teaspoon (5 ml) of herb steeped in one cup of water, but often works better as one to four drops of tincture. Often used in homeopathy (*Chamomilla*), it is effective in a wide range of homeopathic dosages.

For teething babies, chamomile is excellent (a few drops of tincture in one-half cup of water, or several sips of brewed tea). It can also be used to control certain forms of colic and to lower fevers. Peevish children, those who are continuously fretting or crying out or who demand constant care, can benefit from this remedy.

Generally, the type of children and adults calmed by chamomile is very distinct: petulant, self-centred, intolerant to pain and wanting to have it “their” way all the time. They are inclined to quarrel and are adverse to being touched, soothed or spoken to.

Next time you feel bloated, try chamomile tea, either by itself or mixed with mint, and it will soothe the stomach. For delayed menstrual flow, chamomile can relieve that feeling of a heavy uterus. Take it together with ginger, either as a tea or tincture.


Caveats

This herb has been used by many cultures for thousands of years and is considered very safe. It can cause vomiting if large amounts of a tea infusion are consumed. People sensitive to ragweed pollen may obtain skin rashes from this herb.


The bottom line

Chamomile is one of the oldest known and most widely used herbs and has proven itself to be a gentle soother for all ages. It works on the nerves, digestive tract and for teething. It is specifically good for relaxing petulant people. **F**

Terry Willard, CIH, PhD, is a practitioner, teacher and director of the Wild Rose College of Natural Healing in Calgary, Alta. He has written several books on natural medicine, including his most recent *Dr. Terry Willard's Encyclopedia of Herbs* (Key Porter Books, 2002).



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