

There are a number of different herbs which can be used to reduce inflammation.

However, please note that herbs are potent and can interact with prescribed medication.

I would recommend ginger as a good anti-inflammatory; taken internally, for example, as lemon and ginger teas, or ginger cordial (available in supermarkets) made into ginger beer with sparkling spring water; it can also be applied externally, the ginger root having been steeped in boiling water, and a warm compress can be applied to specific areas such as an inflamed joint.

Devil's Claw is a preparation using the tuber of a plant that grows in the Kalahari Desert. Native Africans have long used its medicinal properties. It was German researchers who first brought the herb into Western use, it being currently approved as a nonprescription medicine by the German Commission E, a body which advises the German counterpart of the Medicines Control Agency.

Various studies have demonstrated significant benefit using Devil's Claw for relief of pain and inflammation. It is also helpful for certain types of indigestion: those in which gas is a problem; note that its use should be avoided by those with heartburn, reflux, gastritis, hiatus hernia, peptic ulcers or indeed, any condition in which there is excessive stomach acid. Caution should be used in those with gallstones. This is because Devil's Claw increases stomach acid.

As a rule, the herb is quite a safe one to take alongside other medication, with the exception of anticoagulants such as Warfarin (Coumadin(r)) and Ticlopidine(Ticlid(r)).

I have seen an isolated reference to the triggering of an allergic reaction, aside from which, there appears to be virtually no adverse events associated with the preparation.

A typical dose is 750mg 3 times a day (preparation with 3% of the active ingredients, iridoid glycosides).

Most pharmacy outlets should stock a preparation of Devil's Claw, either on its own or in combination with herbs such as Yucca, Willow (Salix: natural source of salicylate, the basis of aspirin), Feverfew and Bromelain (an enzyme extract of pineapple).

Aromatherapy:

Lavender essential oil is well known for its relaxant properties and can be combined with other oils such as marjoram, chamomile (Roman), and basil.

These are generally prepared in a carrier oil such as almond. Usually, massage and/or compresses can be helpful in reducing muscle cramps, muscle and joint pain etc.

More information on aromatherapy can be found by contacting the AOC: Aromatherapy Organisations Council, PO Box 19834, London, SE25 6WF Telephone/fax (0181) 251 7912.

This is the governing body for the aromatherapy profession in the UK, comprising 12 member associations, through which the AOC represents the interests of over 115 training establishments and 6000 aromatherapists.