

Chaste Tree

Vitex agnus-castus



Vitex agnus-castus Benefits

Vitex agnus-castus has been used since ancient times as a female remedy. One of its properties was to reduce sexual desire and it is recorded that Roman wives whose husbands were abroad with the legions spread the aromatic leaves on their couches for this purpose. It became known as the chasteberry tree. During the Middle Ages, chasteberry's supposed effect on sexual desire led to it becoming a food spice at monasteries, where it was called "Monk's pepper" or "Cloister pepper."

Vitex agnus-castus can be used to treat the following:

- acne (associated with menstrual cycle)
- amenorrhea
- catarrh
- colic
- diarrhea
- dysmenorrhea
- dyspepsia

- endometriosis
- female infertility
- fever
- fibrocystic breast disease
- headache
- hemicrania
- hemorrhoids
- menopause
- menorrhagia (heavy menstruation)
- menstrual difficulties (secondary amenorrhea)
- nausea
- premenstrual syndrome

Female Reproductive System

Traditionally, it has been an important European remedy for controlling and regulating the female reproductive system. Long used to regularise monthly periods and treat amenorrhea and dysmenorrhea, it was used to help ease menopausal problems and aid the birth process. Hippocrates, Dioscorides, and Theophrastus mention the use of agnus castus for a wide variety of conditions, including haemorrhage following childbirth, and also to assist with the 'passing of afterbirth'. Decoctions of the fruit and plant were also used in sitz baths for diseases of the uterus.

Because of the intact herbal culture in Germany and other parts of Europe, agnus-castus has not lost its popularity. In fact it remains probably the most commonly used herb for regulating hormones and relieving menstrual difficulties and is considered to be the best herb for ailments such as fibroid cysts of the uterus and endometriosis.

Agnus castus has not been significantly investigated for its therapeutic effects. However, preliminary investigations do indeed show the presence of compounds which are able to adjust the production of female hormones. Studies have shown that extracts of agnus castus can stimulate the release of Leutenizing Hormone (LH) and inhibit the release of Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH). This suggests that the volatile oil has a progesterone-like effect. Its benefits stem from its actions upon the pituitary gland specifically on the production of luteinizing hormone. This increases progesterone production and helps regulate a woman's cycle. Agnus castus may also regulate prolactin secretion. The ability to decrease excessive prolactin levels may benefit infertile women.

Anxiety and PMS

A study conducted in London (double blind study) showed a 60% group reduction or elimination of PMS symptoms such as anxiety, nervous tension, insomnia, or mood changes, from subjects who were taking dried agnus castus capsules.

Employing an aqueous extract from the fruit, a 1979 study reported good results on premenstrual water retention. Women were able to sustain a good level of milk production for breastfeeding while taking this herb. While it took some time for the drug to take effect, the women were able to continue the use of the drug for months without harmful side effects.

Vitex agnus-castus Herb Notes / Side Effects

Latin Names:

Vitex agnus-castus

Common Names:

Agnus Castus, Nirgundi, Sambhalu, Monk's Berry, Monk's pepper, cloister pepper, cloister berry, Indrani, Nochi, Vitex, Vitex agnus castus

Suggested Properties:

Leaves: anti-parasitical, alterative, aromatic, vermifuge, pain reliever
Root: tonic, febrifuge, expectorant, diuretic
Fruit: nervine, cephalic, emmenagogue

Notes:

With its emphasis on long-term balancing of a woman's hormonal system, Agnus Castus is not a fast-acting herb. For premenstrual syndrome or frequent or heavy periods, Agnus Castus can be used continuously for four to six months. Women with amenorrhea and infertility can remain on Agnus Castus for twelve to eighteen months, unless pregnancy occurs during treatment.

Side Effects

Side effects of using Agnus Castus are rare. Minor gastrointestinal upset and a mild skin rash with itching have been reported in less than 2% of the women monitored while taking Agnus Castus. It is not recommended for use during pregnancy.

