

Comfrey, *Symphytum officinale*, Boraginaceae family
Information Compiled By Sarah Heany
11/11/11

"Comfrey is a cell proliferant (encouraging only healthy cells to grow, not scar tissue), and possibly the most healing herb ever yet discovered. (It also has



an unjustified slur against it, about internal use - I would be happy to address that, too!) I include some in the mom's birth kit, and during labor make it into an infusion (strong tea) that the mother can dilute in her peri bottle for rinsing each time she uses the toilet. If the bottle is spraying before she begins to urinate, the urine will not burn, even if she had stitches.

It heals from the inside out, reduces healing time significantly, and virtually eliminates infections. The solids left over from making the infusion I roll into the leftover gauze pads and make peri compresses, which also go into the refrigerator for the mom to apply a fresh one whenever she needs to. The feedback is that they feel AWESOME."

"Several grand-multips have told me that they recovered better from their birth with me than they ever did before, and I am sure that the herbs played a big part in that." –Lorri Carr, CPM

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Symphytum means 'to heal'³

Other names:

Knitbone,² boneset²

Folklore and History:

Historically, comfrey has been used similarly as it is today; for wound healing, external ulcers, bruises, sprains and strains, to repair broken bones, to treat GI ulcers and inflammation, and cough.²

Hildegard of Bingen recommended it in the eleventh century for wound healing.³

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Comfrey has been written about and referred to by many herbalists (Paracelsus, Pliny, Gerard, Dioscorides, Culpepper)³ over the last several centuries and has been very highly esteemed for its healing properties.

Parts used:

Root and Rhizome⁴, Leaf⁴

Identification:

Comfrey grows to about 4 feet high, and has large leaves with visible white hairs on them, especially on young leaves, like peach fuzz. Comfrey grows like a weed and it is hard to get rid of once it has taken hold.

Comfrey flowers emerge in nodding clusters in late spring or early summer, "These flowers are small, delicate and bell-shaped. They may be creamy white, light yellow, red, purple, pink or blue in color.



"From the center of the dense cluster, a stalk bearing alternating leaves ascends, ultimately bearing flower clusters at its apex. The leaves themselves are long and pointed, with deep veins radiating from a prominent central vein which bisects each leaf. They are covered in short, scratchy hairs, giving them a sandpapery texture, and can grow up to a foot and a half in length.

"Comfrey roots grow in a wide-spreading, branching pattern, establishing the plant firmly in the soil and making it difficult to uproot. These roots are brittle in texture. On the outside, they are a deep, chocolate shade of brown. When broken, they reveal a creamy white color inside and a fresh, bright scent." –Tara Cochrane, eHow.com

Habitat:

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Originally from Europe and western Asia, it now grows in North America as well² It prefers a full to part sun with rich, moist, well drained soil.

Collection:

Harvest roots in spring or autumn⁴ when allantoin levels are highest.⁴
 To dry, split root down the middle and dry in moderate temperatures (40-60 degrees C or 104-140 degrees F)⁴

Constituents:

Allantoin^{3,5}

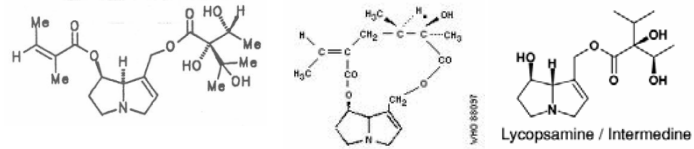
*Pyrrolizidine alkaloids^{3,5}

Echimidine⁵ →

Symphytine⁵ →

Lycopsamine⁵ →

Symlandine⁵ (found in fresh young leaves and root, but not in dried herb)⁵



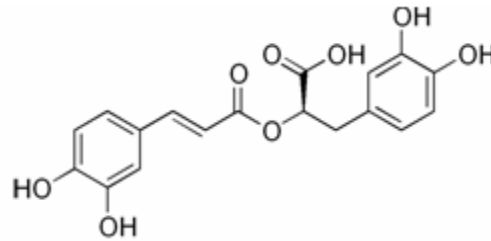
Phenolic acids⁵

Rosmarinic⁵ →

Chlorogenic⁵

Caffeic⁵

Lithospermic⁵



Mucilage^{1,5} (about 29%)⁵

Composed of a polysaccharide containing glucose and fructose^{3,5}

Choline⁵

Asparagines⁵

Volatile oil⁵

Tannins^{3,5}

Steroidal saponins⁵

triterpenes⁵

* See Contraindications section

Nutrients:

Vitamin A⁹

B vitamins³



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Calcium^{1,3}

Iron³

Protein (up to 7 times more protein than soy beans)³

Actions:

Vulnerary^{1,3,4,5,8}

Demulcent^{1,3,4,5,8}

Anti-inflammatory^{4,5}

Astringent^{4,5}

Expectorant^{3,4,5}

Energetics:

Cool, Moist, Yin

Indications:

Internal (some sources say to use Comfrey externally only, see contraindications section)

Wound healing^{3,4,5}

2-4 ml root tincture
or 1 cup of root tea
up to 3 times daily
during healing
process

Gastric and duodenal
ulcers^{2,3,4,5}

Combined with
marshmallow and
meadow sweet, drink
3 cups of root tea
daily during healing
process

Hiatus hernia^{4,5}

The injury that may cause, and definitely is an effect of, hiatus hernia can be addressed with the healing of comfrey. Drink 2-4 ml of pyrrolizidine free comfrey root tincture 3



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times a day for 1 week. Stop for a week and then repeat for 1 week.

Ulcerative colitis^{4,5}

Drink 2-4 ml of pyrrolizidine free comfrey root tincture 3 times a day for 1 week. Stop for a week and then repeat for 1 week.

Hemorrhage^{4,5}

Bronchitis⁵

Combined with coltsfoot, elecampane or horehound, drink 2-4 ml of pyrrolizidine free comfrey root tincture 3 times a day for 1 week.

Irritable cough^{2,5}

Prepare comfrey root cold infusion, bring to a simmer for 30 minutes. Mix with remaining liquid in equal amount of honey. Heat to lightly simmer for 5 minutes (don't boil the honey). Store in a cool dark place. Take 1 tbs 3-4 times a day as needed only. – recipe taken from AnniesRemedy.com

External

Broken bones^{2,3,7}

Dr John R. Christopher's Bone, Flesh and Cartilage ointment, is a combination of comfrey root with other herbs (oak bark, marshmallow root, mullein, walnut bark, gravel root, wormwood, lobelia and skullcap) applied as a fomentation and as a tea. Apply topically daily for 3-8 hours until bones are healed. Healing bones should be done by a practiced care provider.

Bruises^{2,3,7}

Apply comfrey poultice to injured area for 3-8 hours daily until remediated

Conjunctivitis/blepharitis²

Apply comfrey tea compress to eyes while sleeping or for multiple short periods of time throughout the day.

Sprains^{2,3,7}

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Apply comfrey poultice to injured area for 3-8 hours daily until remediated

Proper scar formation^{4,5}

Apply comfrey poultice to injured area for 3-8 hours daily until scar has fully formed over injured area.

A salve made of comfrey oil can also be used, daily.

External ulcers^{2,4,5}

Apply comfrey poultice to injured area for 3-8 hours daily until wound healing is complete. Can be combined with other herbs (oak bark, marshmallow root, mullein, walnut bark, gravel root, wormwood, lobelia and skullcap).

Wounds^{2,4,5}

Apply comfrey poultice to injured area for 3-8 hours daily until wound healing is complete. The exception is deep lacerations or puncture wounds (see contraindications section)

A salve made with comfrey infused oil can also be used on more minor wounds or accompanying a wound dressing.

Postpartum perineal care⁸

A cold root infusion can be prepared and used in a peri bottle and/or sitz bath.

An infusion using powdered comfrey root mixed with hot water can be used in a peri-bottle and/or sitz bath.

Nipple Thrush⁸

Apply comfrey compress to nipples after nursing.

Cracked nipples⁸

Apply comfrey salve or oil infusion after nursing. Due to the internal use concerns, you do not want any remaining on your nipples prior to nursing. A compress may be preferred for this reason.

Vulvovaginitis⁸

A cold root infusion can be prepared and used in a peri bottle and/or sitz bath.

An infusion using powdered comfrey root mixed with hot water can be used in a peri-bottle and/or sitz bath.

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A suppository can be made with the comfrey oil infusion or a fine powder and used nightly during the healing process.
Vaginal dryness⁸

A suppository can be made with the comfrey oil infusion or a fine powder and used nightly for 1 week.

Herpes⁹

Apply comfrey poultice to injured area for 3-8 hours daily until wound healing is complete.

Fractures^{4,5}

Dr John R. Christopher's Bone, Flesh and Cartilage ointment, is a combination of comfrey root with other herbs (oak bark, marshmallow root, mullein, walnut bark, gravel root, wormwood, lobelia and skullcap) applied as a fomentation and as a tea. Apply topically daily for 3-8 hours until bones are healed.

Healing bones should be done by a practiced care provider.

Chronic varicose ulcer^{4,5}

Apply comfrey poultice to injured area for 3-8 hours daily until wound healing is complete. Can be combined with other herbs (oak bark, marshmallow root, mullein, walnut bark, gravel root, wormwood, lobelia and skullcap).

Contraindications:

Deep wounds⁵ may heal superficially before the deeper areas which can cause abscess when comfrey is used topically.

Puncture wounds (same reason as above)

Internal use of comfrey root tea is contraindicated, according to many, unless it is guaranteed pyrrolizidine-free.²

Topical use should not exceed 4-6 weeks total per year.⁸

Pregnancy^{1,8,9}

** Pyrrolizidine Alkaloids (PA's):

Because of the presence of PA's in comfrey, comfrey has been labeled as unsafe for internal use.

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The unsaturated form of PA's can directly cause veno-occlusive disease (VOD)⁸ and has resulted in deaths over time.⁸ This occurred, usually, when the plant is consumed as a medicine of long periods of time or as a survival food during times of famine.⁸ These alkaloids have been found to be mutagenic and carcinogenic,⁸ therefore, contraindicated in pregnancy for regular use.⁸

The mature leaf contains very little, if any, of these alkaloids.²

Leaf ointment containing (5%-20% of dried herb)

Commission E recommends that the daily applied dosage not exceed 100 mcg of pyrrolizidine alkaloids with 1,2-unsaturated necine structure, including their N-oxides.^{5,8} Also, that topical use should not exceed 4-6 weeks total per year.⁸

Root ointment (containing 5%-20% of dried herb)

Commission E recommends that the daily applied dosage not exceed 100 mcg of pyrrolizidine alkaloids with 1,2-unsaturated necine structure, including their N-oxides.^{5,8} Also, that topical use should not exceed 4-6 weeks total per year.⁸

** "Comfrey is rich in allantoin, calcium salts, and mucopolysacharrides, all of which are cell builders and serve to neutralize the cell-inhibiting action of the pyrrolizidine alkaloids"³

** "The comfrey incident might have looked different if it had been put into context of a toxicity scale. One such scale is the HERP index, which classifies the cancer-causing potentials of various substances. Extrapolating from the HERP index, former U.S. Department of Agriculture botanist James Duke, Ph.D., calculates that less than one fifth an ounce of brown mustard is twice as cancer-causing as comfrey, tea, which has roughly the same cancer-causing potential as a peanut butter sandwich. Wine is 144 times more cancer causing than an equal amount of comfrey tea." –Mark Blumenthal³

Grape skins contain high levels of pyrrolizidine alkaloids. These skins are not removed to make wine. Furthermore, the study done on

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comfrey's hepato-toxicity was performed on lab rats. Comfrey was given them as 30-50% of their daily diet. The youngest rats (6 weeks) developed tumors on their livers. If we were to eat several platefuls, daily, of comfrey, that would be the equivalent to what the researchers gave the rats... proving that all medicine can be a poison when taken in massive quantities.

Combinations:

For ulcers (internal or external), combines well with Marshmallow⁴ and meadowsweet (for GI ulcers)⁴



For chest and bronchial issues, combines well with Coltsfoot, Elecampane or Horehound.



For Topical wounds, combines well with calendula, tea tree and other antibacterials, anti-inflammatories, and vulneraries.



Preparation and Dosage:

Root Tincture: Herb Pharm sells a pyrrolizidine free comfrey root extract.

1:5 in 25% alcohol⁵

*2-4 ml three times a day^{4,5}

Root Decoction:

1-3 tsp⁵ of dried herb in 1 cup of water⁵. Bring to boil and simmer for 10-15 minutes. ^{4,5}

*Drink three times a day⁵

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3.5 ounces (100 grams)² simmered in 1 pint (500 ml)² of water for 10-15 minutes.²

Soak cloth or gauze in decoction and apply to the skin for 15 minutes or more²

Root Cold infusion:

Pour 1 cup of boiling water over 2 tsp of root. Let stand for 6-8 hours⁵

This infusion can be added to a peri-bottle &/or sitz bath⁸ for use during postpartum for perineal repair

Root infusion:

Mix 1 Tbs of herbal powder with 1 cup hot water, stirring well.⁹

This infusion can be added to a peri-bottle &/or sitz bath⁸ for use during postpartum for perineal repair^{8,9} OR to soothe irritated and inflamed vulva tissue⁹

Fresh leaf poultice:

Grind up lightly and apply directly to skin²

Leaf with vinegar poultice⁷:

Mash fresh or dried comfrey leaf in a mortar with a pestle, with enough vinegar to soak the comfrey thoroughly.⁷

Apply the mash at least one half inch thick directly on injured area (sprains, bruises, broken bones) and bind it with a clean cotton cloth.⁷

Use daily and leave on area for at least 3 hours (or overnight)⁷



Root &/or leaf oil infusion¹:

Put 4 ounces of herb (finely chopped or ground) in a clean, dry quart jar and cover with oil of choice. Oil level should be 1-2 inches above herb.¹ Store in a cool dark place for 1 month, shaking mixture daily OR fill saucepan halfway with water, place on low heat and put jar in the water, let set for 3 days OR place jar of herbal oil in direct sunlight for 10 days. After the allotted

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time, strain herbs from oil with cloth or gauze and store in a clean, dry container.

Comfrey infused oil or fine powder can be added to a suppository blend⁸

Comfrey infused oil can be used directly on skin or used to make a salve and mixed with other herbs if desired.



* See Contraindications section

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