

Heart Health, Physically and Emotionally **Elizabeth Taddiken, ND**

February is heart health month and with that comes many wonderful tools to protect this amazing organ. Our heart is not just affected on a physical level and by what we take into our body as far as nutrition, but it is also affected by our energetic encounters with each other. Experiencing a loss of love, be it the death of a family member or the heartbreak of unrequited love, the grief can actually depress the heart muscle and lead to dysfunction. Thus, we must understand this and know how to approach this energetic heartbreak that can lead to physical heartbreak.

As a naturopathic physician, I have many tools to work on both the physical and emotional/energetic bodies of my patients. Botanical medicine has been one of my favorite tools for many years due to its amazing ability to heal on both of those levels. When it comes to heart health I have a few key herbs that are quite effective in concert with a complete treatment plan individualized to each patient.

Hawthorn (*Crataegus sp.*):

This wonderful cardiac tonic improves overall cardiac function and tone. It also helps open the heart on an energetic level and can aid in the need to forgive or accept forgiveness in order to help the healing process. Hawthorn is specific for the circulatory system and decreases inflammation in the vessels. It is helpful in maintaining healthy arteries, veins and strengthens connective tissue of the heart muscle. It is also a wonderful source of nutrition for the heart. I often find this herb indicated for nervous heart conditions and anything related to emotional heartache. Being that this herb is slow acting, and builds upon itself, I will monitor patients long-term while taking this in a particular blend. I love adding Hawthorn to my heart healthy chocolates. The wonderful flavonoid combination of Hawthorn berries combined with the antioxidant properties of chocolate is a combination that can't be beaten!

Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*):

Motherwort has many actions, however, one in particular is specific to the heart. Motherwort works as a hypotensive and therefore can reduce blood pressure specifically when it is due to stress and nervous tension. I personally like to use motherwort for patients when they are overwhelmed with worry. Particularly people who take on the weight of the world when it comes to concern over not only their own family but everyone else's as well. When this incessant worry causes hypertension I find motherwort to be quite effective in a botanical combination. On an energetic level, this herb can help the patient to relax, minimize overthinking and worry, and allow heart opening and a feeling of lightness to occur. I love combining motherwort with other relaxing herbs in my heart opening elixirs.

Rose petals (*Rosa canina*):

Rose medicine has been around for thousands of years. It has been associated with romance and balancing the heart as well as the mind. In Ayurvedic medicine, it is known to balance the Pitta Dosha which can become quite heated and temperamental at times. Rose is cooling and therefore a perfect addition to a heart strengthening botanical combination especially in the warmer months. However, I will use this anytime throughout the year when indicated. Energetically the Rose is the medicine of strength while maintaining openness. It is excellent to use when defining boundaries with others. It is also an aphrodisiac, and often given as a token of romantic love in the form of the red rose. However, the smell of rose and the addition to syrups and tonics can also assist in the heart opening and aphrodisiac qualities. Rose glycerite

is a favorite addition to my heart opening elixir, and I thoroughly enjoy prescribing as well as drinking a delicious cup of rose tea in the evening.

Hibiscus (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*):

This particular variety of Hibiscus is a well-known hypotensive herb. It is also a diuretic, cardioprotective, and antioxidant herb among many other uses and therefore can be quite a powerful medicinal tea. I love prescribing medicinal teas, and especially this one. Prescribing teas gives the patient a reason to take a moment for themselves in preparing their medicine adding to the meditative health benefits this provides. Due to the effectiveness of this herb, it is very important to be sure to check with your naturopathic physician prior to starting its use if you are already taking a diuretic pharmaceutical. When it comes to using medicinal teas I will usually prescribe a much higher amount of the dried herb than you would find in typical teas at the grocery store. This is one herb that does particularly well in that form, whereas other herbs show better results in a tincture or as a syrup.

As with any herb, there are potential contraindications. For example, if you are already taking pharmaceutical medication, during pregnancy and breastfeeding, or with certain conditions. Always consult with your naturopathic physician prior to starting a new herbal treatment.