

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Herbs as alternate in treating acne

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Dear editor,

As we are associated with health care profession it is our supreme duty to utilize our knowledge in promoting public awareness about any illness or remedies to combat against these illnesses. Acne is a condition worsening the dilemma of our societies. Here we want to emphasize the importance of safe natural options against this sticky situation.

With many mainstream treatment options available, acne vulgaris remains a common condition in our societies. All these treatments carry risks, and none is completely satisfactory. Natural alternatives are gaining greater research support and have much to offer clinically.

Despite some efforts by drug manufacturers to inform consumers, the incidence of women exposed to oral tretinoin, a known teratogen, during pregnancy has been increasing, possibly as a result of direct-to-consumer drug advertising. These and other concerns, including cost, underline the need for safer, effective and cheaper approaches, including those offered by herbal medicine. This letter is to draw your attention primarily to herbal treatments for acne. Few botanical medicines have been evaluated systematically in clinical trials, and there is virtually no research on the common approach of natural-medicine practitioners for acne recommending multiple lifestyle changes along with multiple natural products. Herbs with various actions, namely antimicrobial (*Melaleuca alternifolia*), inflammation-modulating (*Berberis vulgaris*), anticomedogenic (*Commiphora mukul*), and, in certain cases also hormone-balancing actions (*saw palmetto*) are also useful for treating acne. There are sufficient pilot data to warrant larger trials on various natural therapies, including herbal medicines in isolation, and combined with each other. The data are also sufficient to support a recommendation for use of these herbs in clinical practice. This is particularly true, given how safe they are. Overall, herbal medicine has much to offer to improve our ability to deal with the complex issues that acne represents (1).

In the past, much disparate and introductory research has been done on the effects of herbs on multiple aspects of acne. Especially in dermatology, no approach was optimally sufficient to serve pa-

tients who might be significantly helped by natural therapies. But in recent era, many sophisticated researches have come to conquer this deficiency. In a study utilizing single-blind randomly comparative therapeutic clinical trial, a 2 % tea lotion was a more effective mode of therapy in treatment of patients with acne than 5 % zinc sulphate solution (2). *H. rhamnoides* topical formulation was found effective in decreasing skin sebum production (3). Topical application of  $\alpha$ -linoleic acid and EGCG ((-)-epigallocatechin-3-gallate) in animal model have shown to inhibit sebum production. This activity takes place due to selective inhibition of 5 $\alpha$ -reductase (4). Furthermore, a lot of research is going on as botanicals are gaining interest in the treatment of acne.

A comprehensive approach combining multiple herbs, safe dermal formulations as well as lifestyle and dietary changes could be helpful in fight against this impasse situation with acne. We wish to hearten this theme, so that considerable effort can be made against this disorder.

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