

Chapter 12

Turkish Herbal Medicine in the Treatment of Back Pain

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ABSTRACT

The number of plants used for treatments has been steadily increasing since ancient times. There were around 250 herbal drugs used during the Mesopotamian civilization. During the time of the Greeks, 60 medicinal plants were known. During the Arab-Persian civilization, this number increased to about 4,000. At the beginning of the 19th century, the number of known medicinal plants reached 13,000. These herbal drugs are used to treat many diseases, from diabetes to cancer. Back pain and related symptoms rank as the second most common affliction of humankind. One of the proposed methods to control and treat back pain symptoms is traditional folk medicine. This chapter examines the recent ethnobotanical studies to form a compilation on medicinal plants used as Turkish herbal medicine in the treatment of back pain and their local names, parts, and usage forms.

INTRODUCTION

The therapeutic properties of many plant species have been known by humans since ancient times. On the other hand, poisons of plant origin have been known and used by people since the first ages of the history. Native African used *Strophanthus hispidus* and *Strophanthus kombe* seeds against their enemies as arrow poisons. In addition, the ancient Greeks used *Conium maculatum* was used as an official poi-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1320-0.ch012

son substance. Researchers know that the wild and domestic animals benefit from the healing effects of plants and do not eat the harmful plants.

The ancient people, who have no real and scientific knowledge on diseases and treatments, tried to find solutions to health problems through the opportunities they had and the theories they could produce. As the archaeological findings come to light, medical tools of the Roman period, votive materials in the temples, drug recipes, wall paintings, and others reveal a more specific picture of this period's medicine.

Plants are the most important source of traditional folk medicine. People living in various parts of the world have benefited from the plants grown in their environment for this purpose. In these drugs, individuals used the whole plant, various plant organs (roots, leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, etc.), or plant-derived substances (milk, terebinth, resin, balsam, etc.). Individuals use plants directly or in various forms (pills, powder, infusion, decoction, ointment, cataplasm). In Turkey, the most commonly used traditional medicine preparation forms are infusions and decoctions.

In folk medicine, plants are often used alone or with each other. Individuals create special prescriptions in the preparation of these drugs, and they adjust the amounts accordingly. The effect of a plant can be increased when used with other plants (Sağında, 2014).

In a report published by the World Health Organization (WHO) published in 2000, authors state that 50% of people in Europe, Australia, and North America reported using one of the alternative supportive treatment methods in addition to the drug for the treatment of diseases. Herbal supplements were the most frequently used among these methods (Ersöz, 2012).

In today's world, medicinal plants have become an area of interest in contemporary scientific medicine in addition to being the main treatment tool of alternative medicine. The interest for the use of these plants on the way to preventing diseases or living healthier is becoming more and more widespread. Due to this increase in interest, the production, processing, and sales of medicinal plants are emerging as a growing sector (Kıran, 2006).

It is of great importance to recognize and use the plants that are still used today and that are the basis of many of synthetic drugs. In the last quarter of the 20th century, researchers found that synthetic drugs have many side effects and potential for damage in addition to their benefits. Due to this finding, there has been a return to herbal medicine in the treatment of many diseases. In the Green Stream, called "Return to Nature", herbal medicines became the first choice in the treatment of simple daily diseases (Kızılarıslan, 2008).

Traditional Uses of Medicinal Plants in Turkey

Turkey is located at the intersection of three different phytogeographical regions. These phytogeographical regions are European-Siberian (in North Anatolia), the Mediterranean (in Western and Southern Anatolia), and Irano-Turanian (in Central and South-Eastern Anatolia) (Erik & Tarikahya, 2004).

These phytogeographical regions of Turkey are the main cause of the evolution of different species of plants. More than 12,000 plant taxa grow naturally in Turkey. Approximately 3,649 (3/1 ratio) of them are endemic taxa (Güner et al., 2012). However, the endemic richness of Turkey is not limited to this number: the average number of plants is increasing by the discovery of a new endemic taxa presence every 10 days (Güner et al., 2012; Torlak et al., 2010).

Turkey, thanks to its important geographical location, is one of the leading countries in the aromatic and medicinal plant trade. The superiority provided by its geographical location has brought wealth to Turkey in terms of aromatic and medicinal plants compared to other countries, and this has enabled

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