

Nature's Field

An Electronic Journal for NSP Distributors

Schizandra

Schisandra chinensis

By Steven H. Horne

A native to China, Russia, Korea and Japan, schizandra is a highly valued herb in Oriental medicine. Its Chinese name, *wu wei zi*, means five flavored herb. This is because schizandra has all the five flavors recognized in the TCM (traditional Chinese medicine). It contains all five of the tastes in Chinese medicine (sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent), which means it balances all five of the Chinese elements (earth, wood, water, metal and fire). Schizandra's various flavors signal the presence of a variety of phytochemicals which are responsible for its many health benefits.

Schizandra contains about 40 lignans, many of which have very positive effects on the liver. Schizandra also contains volatile oils, organic acids (citric, malic and tartaric), Vitamins A, C and E, and fixed oils containing linoleic, oleic, linolenic, lauric and plamitic fatty acids. All these substances give schizandra benefits for the liver, nervous, glandular, cardiovascular, respiratory, reproductive and urinary systems.

The lignans have a strong hepato-protective effect. They enhance glutathione production in the liver (glutathione is a very important cellular antioxidant), stimulate liver glycogen and protein synthesis, inhibit lipid peroxidation, improve bile acid metabolism, promote blood flow to the liver and liver regeneration, and protect the liver against substances like alcohol, industrial solvents (like carbon tetrachloride) and drug medications. Schizandra is a very good herb for reducing liver inflammation (hepatitis), whether the cause is viral, bacterial or chemical. It can be used in formulas with other hepatoprotective herbs like milk thistle to reduce damage to the liver when one is exposed to a lot of chemicals.

For the nervous system, schizandra acts as a stimulant. In Chinese medicine, the herb is said to calm the shen (spirit). In Western terms, it enhances memory, improves reflexes and has antidepressant and anticonvulsant effects. Schizandra fruits are also adaptogenic, so they reduce the output of stress hormones from the adrenals. This makes them a tonic and restorative for fatigue, chronic stress and insomnia.

One can easily see why schizandra berries are the number one ingredient in Nervous Fatigue Formula, which is used to treat "burn-out" from chronic stress. They are also included in Nutri-Calm, Master-Gland, Energ-V, Adrenal Support, Adap-tamax and Trigger Immune. All of these formulas enhance energy and aid the nervous and glandular systems.

The cardiovascular system also benefits from schizandra. It has antioxidant effects on the heart and reduces stress-induced heart palpitations. It has also been shown to improve athletic performance.

For the respiratory system, schizandra helps ease dry coughs, wheezing and allergic asthma. This is why it is an ingredient in Lung Support and Breathe EZ.

Schizandra also stimulates the uterus and can help strengthen uterine contractions. For this reason, some herbalists caution its use during pregnancy.

In TCM, schizandra is also used to astringe the jing. In Western terms, this means it is useful for preventing loss of bodily fluids. It is an effective herb for treating frequent urination, night sweats, early morning diarrhea and heavy menstrual bleeding. This is why it is present in both Urinary Maintenance, a tonic for the urinary system, and HY-C, a formula that helps hydrate the tissues.

Schizandra is also being used in China for rashes, eczema, diarrhea and failing eyesight and hearing. It can even help with a low sex drive. When the stresses of life take their toll on our body, we can be grateful we have schizandra as an herbal ally to balance the body and restore strength and vigor to the body.

Selected References

The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants by Andrew Chevallier.

The Comprehensive Guide to Nature's Sunshine Products by Tree of Light Publishing

Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica compiled and translated by Dan Bensky and

Andrew Gamble

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The Physical and Psychological Aspects of Stress

by Steven H. Horne, RH (AHG)



They say that nobody gets through this life without experiencing death and taxes. But, since both of these life experiences are stressful, it's safe to say that nobody gets through life without experiencing stress, either.

Stress is one of the major root causes of health problems. In fact, it is likely that most illness has at least some stress related component. (I personally can't think of a time when I got sick when I wasn't feeling stressed. How about you?)

Last month I wrote about my own experiences with over-coming respiratory problems. I also have personal experience dealing with the problem of stress. In college, I was introduced to Dr. Richard Rahe's "Life Changes Stress Test." The test ranks different life events and gives them a stress score. For example, "death of a spouse" has the highest score (100), while divorce is second at 73. Even positive events have a stress factor associated with them. Marriage is 50 and a Vacation is 13. You check all the events you've had and total the score. If your score is between 150 and 299, you're moderately prone to stress related illness, while over 300 you're very likely to have stress related illnesses.

When I first took the test in college, I was over 300 and scored high for the previous three years as well. More recently, I went through a 7-8 year period in which all of the following happened: I went through two divorces, the break-up of three business relationships, the death of a child, the death of both my parents, serious financial problems that culminated in bankruptcy and seven changes in residency, along with, of course, the normal stresses we all face such as bills, taxes, etc. I've never totaled my score for those years, but I'm sure I was over 300 for several of them.

I'm not going to pretend that I went through all of this unscathed. Quite the contrary, I suffered major adrenal burn-out and gained a few unwanted pounds during that period of my life. I'm still not quite back to where I'd like to be energy and weight-wise, but I haven't developed any serious health problems, my hair hasn't turned gray and I still look much younger than I am. So, I'm still in good shape for my age, in spite of the stressful experiences I went through.

I attribute part of my ability to manage stress to my knowledge of herbs and nutrition, but I also know that the stress management skills I was taught in college (and have continued to learn about since) have played a key role in my healing process. So, bottom line, I'm speaking from first hand experience, not just theory, when I tell you that the stuff I'm about to share really works. And, since stress is both a physical problem and a psychological problem, I'm going to cover both aspects of stress management.

Physical Effects of Stress

Stress is a physical problem because stressful events cause the release of various chemical messengers (hormones and neurotransmitters) that produce physiological changes in the body. These chemical messengers are responsible for the physical effects of stress that can undermine our health and wellbeing.

The immediate effect of stress is the activation of the sympathetic nervous system and the depression of the parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system creates the physiological reactions you have when someone "jumps" you from behind the doorway. The physical reactions to being startled are instantaneous because they are created by the nerves. These reactions include your heart beating faster, shallow rapid breathing, hair standing on end and your pupils dilating (making you wide-eyed). These reactions also move blood away from your digestive organs and into your muscles and brain.

The cumulative effect of this is that your body gets put on "red alert." It is poised for action, ready to fight off or flee from the danger. This is why this stress response has been called the *flight or fight response*.

Of course, when your friend scares you, the physical reactions are over almost as quickly as they began. You realize the danger wasn't "real" and your nervous system rapidly calms down and restores you back to normal function. However, if your mind had perceived the danger as real, then the glandular system would have kicked in to create a stronger (and longer lasting) effect. Hormones would be released from the hypothalamus to stimulate the pituitary to produce ACTH, which would, in

turn, stimulate the adrenal glands. The adrenals would begin pumping out hormones like cortisol, epinephrine (adrenaline), aldosterone and testosterone into your blood stream to gear the body up for action.

There's Nothing Wrong with Stress (Really!)

There's nothing wrong with any of this. It's actually a very positive thing. If you were being attacked by a mugger (the modern equivalent of a bear or mountain lion), you'd want all those stress hormones because they allow your body to physically perform at it's peak. In fact, it isn't even really fair to call these hormones stress hormones because that implies they *cause* stress. They are really *anti-stress* hormones because they are gearing your body up so you can take action to combat what is really stressing you (the problem or situation you perceive as dangerous or painful).

So, what's the real problem here? Well, I can see three. First of all, it takes nutrients to produce these chemical messengers—nutrients like B-complex, vitamin C, zinc, and l-tyrosine. Modern diets are often low in these nutrients, so as one is repeatedly exposed to stressful events, the body can easily “burn up” its nutrient reserves. At this point, the nerves and glands can no longer pump us up with enough “juice” to deal with the stress we are facing. That's when we start to feel overwhelmed, exhausted and defeated.

So, it's quite obvious that good nutrition is going to increase our ability to manage stress. Sugary, caffeinated beverages may temporarily “amp” us up and help us “get through the day,” but ultimately they will contribute to our nutritional depletion. So, a diet full of whole, natural foods will provide more anti-stress nutrition than the SAD (Standard American Diet.) If you're under a lot of stress, a little extra nutritional boost in the form of some Nutri-Calm wouldn't hurt, either.

Years ago, I read an article by Australian Naturopath, Dorothy Hall, about silica. She maintained that silica also helps the body cope better with stress, both mechanically and emotionally. Silica is primarily found in the peelings and seeds of foods (the chewy parts). When we peel and core and throw away all the chewy stuff and only eat the soft parts of our food, it makes us soft, too. So, HSN-W can also be a good formula to keep your nerves from “fraying” when you're feeling really stressed.

A second reason why stress becomes a problem for many of us is that today's problems, unlike many of the sources of stress faced by people in the past, usually don't call for physical action. We don't have fields to plow, mountains to climb, bears and lions to fight (or run away from). Instead, our modern stress is largely mental (bills, traffic, work, family problems, etc.) which don't take much physical effort to fix. (It's true, you could try

running away from bills and family, but they'd probably just track you down, wouldn't they?)

However, even when you're stressed because you're stuck in freeway traffic, looking at a stack of bills or having your boss threaten to fire you, the physical reaction remains the same. The event still releases the hormones that gear the body up for physical action. Since there is nothing physically to do, this can make us feel tense, irritable and edgy and will sometimes cause us to explode with anger or frustration.

If you've ever taken a walk to let yourself “cool down,” then you understand that channeling that energy into any kind of physical activity dissipates it. The physical activity “burns off” the stress hormones. So, just about any kind of exercise, even walking, is going to reduce your stress level. Right now, I'm doing a lot of work in my garden, and that does wonders for reducing my stress levels. In fact, I enjoy it so much, I'd rather garden than come to the office sometimes.

The third problem that makes stress a serious issue for many people is the unrelenting nature of many modern problems. Stress can be thought of as stimulation, because that's what it's doing—stimulating us to action. As long as we also have “down time” where the parasympathetic nervous system can activate and help us unwind, it's not a problem.

During our “down time,” the parasympathetic nerves move blood to the digestive organs and the reproductive organs, enhancing digestion, elimination and sensual pleasure. Tissue

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regeneration and repair (i.e., healing) also take place under the influence of the parasympathetic nervous system.

Traditionally, people relaxed in the evenings, ate meals in a relaxed atmosphere and took more time for recreation. We often think that hunter-gatherer peoples (like the Native Americans) must have had very stressful lives living in the wilderness and having to forage for food, but this is not the case. Researchers have discovered that these people spent only 15-20 hours per week working and much of the remaining time was spent playing, relaxing, socializing, etc. Just look at your household pets (if you have any). How much time do they spend just lying around relaxing?

In contrast, many of us eat on the run (that's why they call it "fast food"), work long hours at jobs that don't require physical activity and seldom take time to just kick back and take it easy. Unwinding often involves watching TV, which may contain violent and stressful images that provoke the release of more stress hormones. Even our vacations tend to be adrenaline-pumping experiences—extreme sports, wild amusement park rides and rushed vacations. In short, many people in modern society never take time to really unwind.

So, if you're nutrient-depleted, seldom exercise and are constantly rushing around with little time to relax, your stress level will stay pretty high. This will cause your blood pressure and your blood sugar to stay elevated, your muscles to stay tense, your digestion and elimination to be poor and your nerves and glands to become increasingly depleted. In short, you've made yourself more prone to infections, diabetes, high blood pressure, strokes and heart attacks, constipation, indigestion and even cancer.

The answer to this problem is simply making, not finding, down time. You have to schedule time for relaxation. It may seem like you have too many things to do to afford to take the time off, but if you don't do it voluntarily, your body will make you do it involuntarily by making you sick. (And that kind of down time isn't any fun!)

Supplements for Stress

I don't want to spend a lot of time here discussing supplements for stress. After all, that's the focus of our *Sunshine Sharing* and *Herbal Hour* Video this month. However, I do need to cover the basics.

Most herbs that help the body relax are going to inhibit the sympathetic nervous system and/or stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system. So, all our standard nervine formulas can be used to help reduce stress levels by helping us to "unwind." These include Stress-J, Nerve Control, Nerve Eight, Chinese Stress Relief and Herbal Sleep. Any of these can be good combinations to take at the end of a long, hard,

stress-filled day. They work better than a "night-cap" and are a lot healthier, too.

For really chronic stress, however, we need adaptagens. Adaptagens reduce the output of stress hormones from the adrenals. Eleuthero Root was the first one discovered. I've taken it off and on during periods of stress and found it to be very helpful. Adaptamax, Mineral-Chi Tonic and Suma Combination are all good adaptagenic combinations. If you feel like you're under a lot of stress, I highly recommend them.

Cortisol is an important hormone in this stress cascade. It is one of the glucocorticoids produced by the adrenals which help to regulate blood sugar. It also dampens inflammation. So, in one way it is part of the healing process. Too little cortisol and inflammation runs rampant; too much and the immune system is depressed. Too much cortisol and you also gain weight, which is what happened to me when I went through that seven-year period of intense stress.

When cortisol levels are high, as in acutely stressful conditions where you feel "all wound up," Nature's Cortisol can help. It has adaptagenic effects and helps reduce cortisol output from the adrenals.

In spite of the negative effects of excess levels of cortisol, it isn't "a nasty little hormone" as some TV commercials have suggested. When cortisol levels are too low, you'll get chronic inflammation (as in autoimmune disorders, asthma, chronic



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fatigue, etc.) Here, yucca, licorice and wild yam can all be used to support the adrenals and reduce the inflammation. Nature's Cortisol should be avoided when the cortisol levels are low because it reduces rather than enhances cortisol.

When the stress has really gotten to you, and your adrenals are beginning to get exhausted, you'll find Nervous Fatigue Formula or Adrenal Support to be indispensable. The first signs of "burn-out" are disturbed dreams and restless sleep. Later, you start to feel tired during the day, but toss and turn all night long, waking up frequently. You'll feel confused, moody, lose your memory and feel "unable to cope."

When I was going through some severely stressful periods a few years ago, Nervous Fatigue Formula saved my sanity. Later, Adrenal Support really helped me rebuilt.

Like I said, all this nutritional stuff is covered in a lot more detail in this month's Sunshine Sharing and Herbal Hour Video. So, what I really want to talk about now is the psychological aspect of stress.

Is It All In Your Mind?

Last month, when my son and I attended the Whole Foods Expo in Anaheim, California, we left a day early and went to Disneyland and the California Adventure theme park. We rode Space Mountain, Tower of Terror, etc.—and had a blast. What's interesting is that all these amusement park rides are causing the release of the same hormones we associate with stress. Yet, it was fun!

The same is true for rock climbing, hang gliding, surfing, riding motorcycles and so forth. People do this because it gets "stress" hormones pumping in their bodies and they love it.

It's also interesting that the body reacts the same way to an imagined experience as it does to a real experience. The same chemicals are released. So, when we watch an action-adventure or horror film, we get the same chemical response as when we ride a roller coaster. In both cases, we're "flirting" with danger. On the roller coaster, our senses tell us we're in "danger" but we know we're really not, and we have the same experience in the movie theater.

So, it's quite obvious that people can actually enjoy the physiological effects of stress. That's because stress hormones can help us feel good. They give us energy and can even create a kind of internal "high." If we don't produce enough of them, then we feel tired and depressed. So, as with any other aspect of health, balance is the key.

But, let's go back to that perception thing. Remember that an imaginary experience can cause the same physical stress response as a real experience. That's why what is stressful for one person, can be fun for another. It really depends on the attitude and perceptions of the individual.

My gardening is hard work, but it's relaxing to me. It reduces my stress level. Now, if I hated the outdoors and hated getting dirty and I was forced to do gardening, I would have an entirely different reaction, wouldn't I? So, it isn't just the activity or event itself that causes stress, it's our perception of it. Anxiety and excitement create basically the same chemical reactions in the body, but one is perceived as enjoyable and the other as negative.

So, what really creates the reaction we call stress is when we perceive that something is "bad" and we mentally resist it. Taking the same situation and thinking, "Okay, I don't like this, but I'm going to make the best of it," takes most of the stress out of it.

Furthermore, you'll note that we don't put "stress" as a root cause of disease on the Disease Tree model. Instead, we say, "unresolved mental and emotional stress." It's the stressful events and situations that we are unable to resolve and let go of that really cause us to get sick. It's the stuff that happened 10 years ago that we still get upset about when we think about it.

So, if we change our perception of something, we can actually take a lot of the stress out of it. For example, we could fuss and fume about a traffic jam, or we could decide, "Hey, this is a great time to relax." and put on some nice music or a motivational program. In other words, stuff isn't just happening to us; we are assigning meaning to the stuff that is happening to us. And, if we assign a negative meaning to any event in our life, it will cause us stress. If we choose (and we can choose) to see the event in a different light, the stress can be defused.

My father in his 50's and 60's could outwork me when I was in my teens and early 20's. In fact, he could outwork most men who were 20-30 years younger than he was. He shared with me his secret. He said he stayed relaxed, but just picked up the pace. He said that when you tense up, you get tired faster.

So, when faced with a stressful event, we have a choice. We can fuss, fume, stew and otherwise resist what is happening, OR we can take a deep breath, allow ourselves to relax and just take things one step at a time. Doing the former will give us an ulcer or worse; doing the latter will keep our mind clear, our body primed for action, and have us doing our best to resolve the situation. The choice is ours.

In fact, when I practice what my now deceased chiropractor Michael Brenay said, and practice having a "gratitude attitude," stressful situations rapidly diminish into manageable situations. When one is grateful, it dissolves resistance, and that dissolves tension, which dissipates stress. And that keeps us healthy, physically and emotionally. So, as Dr. Brenay would say, "Glide down the glory road of life with a gratitude attitude."



Kimberly Balas' Clinician's Corner

Caffeine Concerns and Other Questions

Caffeine Supplements?

Is it safe to take an herbal supplement that contains caffeine?

Gwinene

Herbs that contain caffeine have been used as medicines, and when used in combinations can sometimes be helpful. I have used guarana for ADD kids, before, with great success. My favorite remedy for ADD was Nature's Chi, but it is no longer available. Nature's Chi was a natural alternative to Ritalin.

However, caffeine-bearing plants are strong medicines and need to be used with care. Here are just a few points on caffeine. A chocolate bar contains approximately 25 mg of caffeine. A cola soda contains about 40 mg. A cup of coffee contains about 175 mg. The PET scans of a brain with a consumption of 400 mg of caffeine is the same as the scan of a fully diagnosed schizophrenic.

So, everything in moderation...

Should Herbalists Use Caffeine?

I am surprised and somewhat disappointed at how many NSP members willingly ingest caffeine. I personally try to keep it out of my diet. Years ago, prior to getting into this field and learning what it does to your body, I drank 12 to 15 cups of coffee a day. As natural health practitioners we are supposed to lead by example. What do NSP people tell clients when they see them drinking their coffee? "Well I only have one or two a day."

The same excuse can be used by someone who likes to eat a Big Mac. "Well I only have one or two a day." Substitute this with any other vice and you will start to get the picture. Consider smoking, drugs, aspartame, processed sugar and so forth. All this would be kind of like the over weight fitness trainer, the doctor who smokes or the corrupted law enforcement officer. Kind of hard to have any credibility here, don't you think?

Don't get me wrong. I too enjoy the odd treat and enjoy a good bowl of ice cream every two or three weeks, knowing it is not very healthy unless I have the time to make it myself.

Dan

This is what I tell my clients to encourage them to modify their lifestyle habits, while not holding them in judgement: "It isn't what you do once in a while, but what you do everyday that counts." We can't live in a glass bubble in society, which is why we support the body with supplements and other healthy habits.

For instance, our emotional state is part of that picture. If we're constantly feeling guilty about our choices, that's not good for our health, either. We need to consciously strive to do good things for our body and reach our personal health goals without being negative with ourselves.

This concept is explained very well in the book, French Women Don't Get Fat. The author explains that by enjoying a little treat now and then without guilt, one doesn't become obsessed with food. The extreme outlook of trying to always get it perfect can wreak as much havoc on your health as occasionally doing something that isn't organic or isn't considered healthy. We do the best we can and we forgive the rest.

I personally use organic coffee once in a while for the bitter action and to get a little acid response going (which some need) and I also use it in enemas for clients. Everything in moderation is the key. As far as caffeine goes, yes, in large quantities, it can be detrimental but it also has

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its place as a natural drug in helping some with a parasympathetic response.

What works for some doesn't work for others. Some strive to keep all dairy out, some caffeine. We all have our personal biochemical needs. So, we can't make blanket statements about nutrition that will apply across the board to everyone. There's my 2 cents' worth.

Coffee Makes Me Sleepy

I was never a coffee drinker until I became hooked on the new Vanilla liquid creamer, this last year. In my 30's if I dared to drink any coffee it was only one cup, because if I drank more I'd be bouncing off the walls. So I avoided anything with caffeine.

Now I'm in my early 50's, and when I drink coffee sometimes I end up falling asleep. Go figure. Why would that be? Oh, and one more thing, coffee helps to move my bowels. I can smell it, and I go.

Sue

You have shifted from having a dominant sympathetic nervous system (which made coffee wind you up) to a dominant parasympathetic nervous system (so the coffee actually helps balance your nerves). It takes energy to move the bowels, so the stimulation to the adrenals and nerves contributes to the bowel eliminations. The Cellular Energy will help with bowel movements too. Stay on this formula for about 10 weeks and you should see a difference.

Vari-Gone and the Gallbladder

I read something you wrote where you recommended Vari-Gone for the gallbladder. How would you explain using Vari-Gone for gall bladder? I have several people including myself that have issues with the gall bladder from time to time.

Jeff

This is another example of how we pigeon-hole formulas in our mind just because of the name of the formula. The body is completely interconnected and herbal remedies and nutritional supplements affect multiple body systems.

By aiding blood vessels and the flow of blood, Vari-Gone affects circulation throughout the body. It increases blood flow to organs, especially the liver, gallbladder and kidneys. In particular, Vari-Gone aids venous circulation and the liver gets a major portion of its blood through the

hepatic vein. Herbalist Michael Moore actually suggests that varicose veins are a sign of blood congestion in the liver.

Horse chestnut, one of the ingredients in Vari-Gone, contains aescin. Aescin reduces swelling and inflammation. Usually with gall bladder insufficiency there is underlying inflammation. Aescin seals leaking capillaries, improving the elastic strength of veins, preventing the release of enzymes (known as glycosaminoglycan hydrolases) that break down collagen and open holes in capillary walls, decreasing inflammation, and blocking other various physiological events that lead to vein damage.

The rutin in the formula also helps with congestion in the glyconerazation pathway of the liver which would help with bile activity and also with inhibiting an enzyme called aldose reductase. This enzyme is usually present in the eye and in gall bladder as well. It helps change glucose (sugar-glucose) into the sugar alcohol sorbitol. Too much sorbitol trapped in eye and nerve cells can damage these cells, leading to retinopathy and neuropathy.

So, you can see that Vari-Gone can help a lot more than just varicose veins. It also works on hemorrhoids, which are a varicose vein in the rectum.

Cracked Nipples and Nursing

I have a new Mom who is finding it very hard to nurse because of the pain. Her nipples are cracking and so sore that the Mom cries and is pushing baby away. Any advise?

No name

I am using organic coconut oil on the breasts and it is great for this. You can also increase good fats in the diet.

Thyroid and Bipolar Disorder

An MD is doing research on using high levels of thyroid medication to treat bipolar disorder. Of course, I am thinking supplements. Have you ever used thyroid supplements for biopolar disorder.

Nicole

I successfully use the Thyroid Support and doses high in iodine for this. Most of the time the iodine alone will help with over 40% of all mental instabilities.

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