

## Nervines, Complementary Herbs for Adaptogens

In our fast-paced, stress filled world, adaptogens can provide significant benefits to help relieve the negative impact of constant worry, overwork, inadequate sleep, and unsustainable lifestyles. It is also obvious that adaptogens alone will not make up for lack of sleep, poor diet, lack of exercise, and a host of other issues that are the basic foundations of health. Americans are overfed, but undernourished. Obesity has become an epidemic in the pantry of plenty, yet in addition to our ever-expanding waistlines, we are often deficient in many nutrients, including magnesium, zinc, selenium, folate, Vitamin D, Omega 3 fatty acids, and even dietary fiber. Herbs are no substitute for healthier eating. The average American gets slightly more than 7 hours of sleep per night. In one study I read it stated that in 1910 the average person in this country slept 9 hours per night. If this is accurate, it means most Americans are sleep deprived. Adaptogens can help here, but more sleep is also required. Sitting at a desk all day long and a regular lack of physical exercise can contribute to sleeplessness, obesity, insulin resistance, and poor circulation. Again, adaptogens may offer benefits, but regular exercise, both strength training and cardio, are essential for good health. There are many additional issues that contribute to illness including smoking, drug and excessive alcohol use, feeling isolated and alone, being spiritually malnourished, and indoor or environmental pollution are all risk factors for disease.

In addition to lifestyle and dietary changes, there are other herbs that can enhance the effects of adaptogens, first and foremost among these are the nervines. Nervines are nerve tonics, calming herbs that are mildly relaxing without the overtly suppressant effects of sedatives. This type of herb restores emotional balance and nourishes the nerves and nervous system. Nervines help calm anxiety, stress induced heart, or gastrointestinal tract symptoms, mild sleeplessness, irritability and white coat hypertension.

### The Nervine Materia Medica

**Fresh Milky Oat** (*Avena sativa*) – for one week out of the common oats growing cycle, the immature oat seed is filled with a white “milk”. At this time, the chemistry of this food herb changes and, if it is harvested quickly and made into a fresh tincture or glycerite, it becomes what I believe is the greatest nervous system trophorestorative we have. A Trophorestorative is literally a food for a specific tissue or organ, one that nourishes the tissue, restoring normal function and vitality. Fresh Milky Oat extract is a superb food for the nervous system. It is a slow acting tonic remedy that calms shattered nerves, relieves emotional instability, reduces the symptoms of drug withdrawal, and it helps to restore a sense of peace and tranquility to over-stressed, angry, and chronically upset people. This may sound too good to be true, but for over 150 years, since the Eclectic physicians, this simple herb has been used and continues to be used for just such problems.

In my clinical practice I use Fresh Oat (usually with adaptogens) for PMS and menopausal anxiety and mood swings, nervous exhaustion, sexual neurasthenia (sexual weakness) caused by an excessive lifestyle, and to reduce the agitation that comes from withdrawal from cigarettes, coffee, amphetamines, or prescription sleep medications. It is most appropriate for people who are emotionally “frazzled”, they become oversensitive and hyper-reactive to both physical and emotional stresses. They cry at the drop of a hat, have emotional outbursts, shake, can’t deal with even small issues, and look like a deer in the headlights. Patients with chronic fatigue immune deficiency syndrome (CFIDS), multiple chemical sensitivities syndrome (MCSS), and panic disorder can all benefit over time from this gentle, non-habit forming food/herb that has no real side-effects or drug interactions.

Safety Rating: \* \* \*

## Dosage

Tincture (1:2): 80-100 drops, 3-4 times per day

Glycerite (1:2): 120-140 drops, 3-4 times per day

Safety Issues: Avoid use in patients with celiac disease or gluten intolerance.

Drug Interactions: Fresh Oat can relieve some of the irritability and agitation caused by withdrawal from prescription and non-prescription drugs.

Additional Information: Rolled Oats, Oatmeal, and Oatstraw, all come from the same plant but do not have the same effect as the fresh, undried milky oat.

**Scullcap herb** (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) – the history of this herb in many ways mirrors the history of herbal medicine in the United States. It was first introduced as a medicinal herb in the early 1800's and touted as a cure for hydrophobia (rabies). Notable doctors such as Lyman Spalding, the father of the U.S. Pharmacopoeia and James Thacher wrote books recommending the use of this herb for treating the dreaded rabies. As the years went by it fell into disuse by the orthodox medical profession (probably because it didn't really cure rabies) and only sectarian physicians and herbalists continued to use the plant. While it was no longer used for rabies, it was used for epilepsy, delirium tremens, nervousness, insomnia, torticollis (wry neck), muscle spasms, and other "nervous" conditions. As the Eclectics, physio-medicalists, and botanic practitioners disappeared or went underground during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so did the popularity of this herb.

The revival of herbal medicine in this country has created a renewed demand for many herbs, including Scullcap. As herbs have become more popular there has been a backlash from the medical community and media. Herbs were the darlings of the media during the mid 1990's, panaceas for what ailed you. Now they are regularly reported on as serious dangers to your health. Panaceas to poisons, what changed? Some of the change is simply due to increased study and use of herbal medicines; the more something is used, the more likely idiosyncratic effects and side effects will be noted. Some of the change has to do with the media's desire to sell newspapers or get you to watch their T.V. station. Fear and controversy sell. The orthodox American medical community has never trusted herbs. If it doesn't come from a major pharmaceutical manufacturer with FDA approval, it must be useless or dangerous, or both. There is an inherent inconsistency with that belief, but it is widely held.

This brings us back to Scullcap. In the late 1980's reports started to surface with cases of what was believed to be herb-induced hepatitis. These cases only occurred in people using multiple herb formulas. At first the hepatic damage was blamed on Mistletoe, a very strong and potentially toxic herb. Later Scullcap was implicated, although there are no known hepatotoxic compounds in the herb. The answer to this riddle most likely lies in the problem of adulteration. At that time much of the "Scullcap" sold in the U.S., UK, and Europe was actually another plant, Germander (*Teucrium* spp.) also erroneously known as "Pink Scullcap" (real Scullcap has blue flowers). As it turns out, Germander has known liver damaging chemicals and is definitely implicated in many cases of liver damage.

These events clearly show the importance of high standards of botanical identification needed to make sure you are getting the correct herb, and the necessity of botanically identifying the herb (or herbs) in a product before publishing an article in a medical journal claiming it has caused harm or injury. For more than a decade, since the herb industry has become aware of this problem of adulteration and corrected it, no additional cases of “Scullcap-induced” hepatotoxicity have occurred.

In clinical practice I and thousands of other herbalists, naturopathic physicians, and even a few mainstream medical doctors use Scullcap safely and regularly. It is indicated for stressed out people who, when nervous or agitated, develop muscle spasms, nervous tics, or tight, painful muscles. I also use it for the spasms and tremors associated with tardive dyskinesia, restless leg syndrome, mild Tourette’s syndrome, bruxism, and it can even offer some symptomatic relief for the tremors caused by Parkinson’s disease. I also use Scullcap for stress-induced headaches, petit-mal seizures (use it with Lobelia, Blue Vervain, and Gastrodia tuber), neck and back pain and panic disorder (use it with Motherwort, Blue Vervain, Chinese Polygala, and Pulsatilla).

Safety Rating: \* \* \*

Dosage

Fresh tincture (1:2): 60-80 drops, up to 4 times per day

Freeze-dried herb in capsules: 2 capsules, 3 times per day

Standardized extract: 2 capsules, 2 times per day

Safety issues: only buy Scullcap from reputable companies who fully identify the raw material either macroscopically or by laboratory testing.

Drug interactions: None known.

Additional Information: For the most part, dried Scullcap is inert, necessitating its use as a fresh tincture or freeze-dried product. Some herbalists use a separate species, *S. galerialata*, which they claim retains its activity even when dried.

**Mimosa bark** (*Albizia julibrissin*) – is called He Huan Pi in Chinese medicine, which means “collective happiness bark”. In Chinese tradition it is used for disturbed shen symptoms, including bad dreams, irritability, anger, depression, and poor memory. Clinically, I use it (along with Hawthorn berries and Rose petals), for “broken hearts”, grief and deep sadness. I have used this formula for almost 10 years and the results are simply astonishing. I have patients who have had significant recoveries from post-traumatic stress disorder, long-term unresolved grief, depression, and “susto” (Spanish for fear). I even know people who would not think of going to see their therapist without first taking this formula. They claim it allows them to feel more deeply, bring up unresolved issues, and to quickly move from sadness, tears, and pain to a place of emotional balance.

Safety Rating: \* \* 1/2

Dosage

Tincture (1:5): 40-80 drops, up to 3 times per day

Tea: 1-2 tsp. dried bark to 8 oz. water. Decoct for 10 minutes, steep 30-40 minutes, take 4 oz. up to 3 times per day.

Safety Issues: Avoid using Mimosa bark during pregnancy.

Drug interactions: None known, but use cautiously with prescription antidepressants.

Additional Information: Mimosa blossoms (He Huan Hua) also can be used to calm the shen and elevate mood, but they are weaker and less effective than the bark.

**Lemon Balm herb** (*Melissa officinalis*) – makes a delightful tasting tea that can be drunk simply for pleasure or for its mood elevating and nervine effects. Human studies indicate this lemony smelling member of the mint family can enhance cognitive function, improve mood, and can relieve some of the symptoms of mild to moderate Alzheimer’s disease, especially irritability and forgetfulness. It can also be taken for stress headaches, to promote better sleep quality (use it with Chamomile and Linden Flower), for nervous stomach, ADD/ADHD, and most importantly for seasonal affective disorder (SAD). For SAD, I use equal parts St. John’s wort and Lemon Balm as a tea or a tincture. This pairing of herbs is a simple but elegant example of the concept of “synergy” in herbal prescribing.

Most Americans have a very rudimentary understanding of herbal medicine, thinking that using an herb like St. John’s wort instead of a pharmaceutical antidepressant represents good herbal practice. This way of thinking is foreign to virtually all advanced herbal traditions (TCM, Kampo, Tibetan medicine, Ayurveda, Unani-Tibb, Sidhha, etc.). In these traditions, “simpling”, the use of a single herb, is rare and mostly associated with lay or folk usage. It is the skillful combining of herbs chosen for the individual patient and their unique symptom picture that defines the true art of herbal medicine. In the case of Lemon Balm and St. John’s wort, both have a mild effect on people with SAD, but the two together are vastly more effective than either one alone.

This type of “intelligent design” is rarely utilized when researchers study herbs and is one of the reasons that a good clinical herbalist should always be a part of any medicinal plant research team.

Safety Rating: \* \* \*

Dosage

Tea: 1-2 tsp. dried leaf to 8 oz. hot water, steep, covered, 15 minutes, take 2-3 cups per day

Tincture (1:2.5): 80-100 drops up to 4 times per day

Safety Issues: Lemon Balm in large amounts is a thyroxin inhibitor. Avoid using it in patients with Hashimoto’s Thyroiditis and other hypothyroid conditions.

Drug Interactions: it is theoretically possible (although unlikely) that large amounts of Lemon Balm may act as an antagonist to synthroid and levoxyl.

Additional Information: gather Lemon Balm before it flowers, when it has a delightful odor and mild fragrant lemony taste. If gathered later, it becomes bitter. I frequently use Lemon Balm along with other pleasant tasting herbs (Chamomile, Hibiscus, Ginger, Linden Flower, Fennel seed) as “beverage medicines”. They are safe, tasty, and have gentle health promoting effects for children, teenagers, pregnant or nursing women, and the elderly.

**Blue Vervain herb** (*Verbena hastata*) – is a little-known herb that is a nervine, anxiolytic, and antispasmodic. It is one of my favorite herbs for anxiety. I use it in combination with Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*), Chinese Polygala root (*Polygala tenuifolia*) and Fresh Oat (*Avena sativa*) for PMS or menopausal anxiety. It is also used with Ashwagandha and Scullcap for nervous tics, restless leg syndrome, mild Tourette’s syndrome, and tardive dyskinesia. It is especially indicated for women who have pre-menstrual or menopausal anxiety, or other issues related to hormonal fluctuations. It can relieve menstrual cramps, vaginismus, PMS mood swings, and irritability, spastic bladder, and menstrual headaches.

Safety Rating: \* \* 1/2

Dosage

Tea: 1 tsp. dried herb to 8 oz. hot water, steep 15-20 minutes, take 4 oz. three times per day

Tincture (1:2.5):20-40 drops, up to 3 times per day

Safety Issues: Avoid use during pregnancy. Excessive doses of this herb can cause nausea; always combine it with carminative herbs (Ginger, Cinnamon, Orange Peel, etc.).

Drug Interactions: None known.

Additional Information: The European species, *Verbena officinalis*, is commonly used in France and Germany for nervous exhaustion, Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (what in the U.S. we call chronic fatigue immune deficiency syndrome), nervous headaches, convulsions, and agoraphobia.

**Motherwort herb** (*Leonurus cardiaca*) – is the herb I most frequently combine with Blue Vervain for simple anxiety. I use 2 part *Leonurus* to 1 part *Verbena*. This combination is also superb for PMS and menopausal irritability, mood swings, and anxiety. In addition to its nervine and anxiolytic effects, Motherwort also has antispasmodic, blood pressure lowering, and cardiac tonic activity. The name Motherwort comes from this plant’s long history of use for female reproductive problems including menstrual pain, lack of menstruation, ovulatory pain, and menstrual headaches. I also use it with Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*) for menopausal insomnia. With this type of insomnia, the woman has little or no difficulty falling asleep but routinely wakes up at 2-3:00 am and can’t get back to sleep. The combination of these two herbs with a possible addition of Fresh Oat or Lavender can effectively treat this problem.

Motherwort is also of benefit for labile (white coat) hypertension. It used to be thought this type of hypertension was relatively harmless “my blood pressure only goes up when I go to the doctor”. But in reality this stress-induced high blood pressure isn’t just when you go to the doctor. It is also when you are stuck in traffic, frustrated, having an argument, when the boss is yelling at you, or when you feel there is never enough time in the day to get everything done. In other words, anytime you are anxious, upset, angry, or nervous, your blood pressure goes up. Motherwort, along with Fresh Oat, Reishi mushroom, and *Rhodiola*, can help to moderate stress and the rise in blood pressure that for many people comes with it.

One other use for this herb is for relieving stress-induced cardiac palpitations. If you recall the old television show, Sanford and Son, Fred Sanford (Redd Fox) would get upset, grab his chest and yell, "Elizabeth, I'm coming"....he could have used some Motherwort.

Safety Rating: \* \* \*

Dosage

Tea: 1 tsp. dried herb to 8 oz. water, steep 15-20 minutes, take 4 oz. 3 times per day.

Tincture (1:2.5): 50-80 drops, 3 or 4 times per day

Safety Issues: Avoid use in pregnancy

Drug Interactions: None known, but caution should be used if combining this herb with blood thinning medication.

Additional information: Chinese Motherwort (*L. heterophyllus*) is known as Yi Mu Cao. It is also used for female reproductive problems and for hypertension.

**Linden flower** (*Tilia platyphyllos*, *T. cordata*) - is also known in Europe as Lime flower. It makes a delightful smelling and tasting tea. Linden flowers (actually the medicinal part is the flower and a modified leaf known as a pedicel) have nervine, mild antidepressant, and blood pressure lowering effects. While you can use this herb as a tincture, the tea is the preferred form for use. Combinations of Linden flower, Lemon Balm, Chamomile, Catnip, Damiana, and other pleasant tasting herbs are an enjoyable and effective way to reduce stress, irritability, mild anxiety, depression, and nervous headaches. Linden mixed with Chrysanthemum flower and Motherwort, can reduce mildly elevated blood pressure. Linden mixed with Hawthorn, Lemon Balm, and Chamomile can calm children with ADD/ADHD.

A simple tea of Linden Flower, Chamomile, and Fennel seed can relieve digestive upset, wakefulness, coughs, and agitation in children with fevers. For insomnia and bad dreams, mix lime flowers with Passionflower, Reishi mushroom, and Lavender.

Safety Rating: \* \* \*

Dosage

Tea: 1-2 tsp. dried flowers/pedicels to 8 oz. hot water, steep 10-15 minutes, take up to 3 cups per day.

Safety Issues: allergies to the flower pollen are possible, but have not been reported in the literature.

Drug Interactions: none known.

Additional Information: The American species, *Tilia americana*, commonly called Busswood, has flowers that look identical to Linden flower, yet it does not have the sweet aroma or medicinal activity of its European relatives.

**Hawthorn berry, flower, and leaf** (*Crataegus oxycanthoides*, *C. monogyna*) – Hawthorn is a trophorestorative or food for the heart and circulatory system. It is frequently used for angina pain, mild congestive heart failure, to treat and prevent atherosclerosis, and for many other cardiovascular conditions. Few people are aware that Hawthorn is also an excellent nervine. In Chinese medicine, the heart stores the shen (mind, consciousness). Distributed shen symptoms include anxiety, insomnia, bad dreams, palpitations, and irritability. Interestingly enough, Candice Pert, PhD., the author of the book, *Molecules of Emotion*, confirms this heart/emotion connection claimed in Chinese medicine. She shows that, based on her research, the heart is not just an organ to pump blood, but that it is indeed an organ with receptors for a wide range of hormones and neuropeptides, i.e., the molecules of emotion. In this case, even though Hawthorn is a “heart herb”, or perhaps because of it, it helps disturbed shen symptoms, especially attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In practice, I prefer to use a solid extract of the Hawthorn berry for children and adults who can’t sit still, are fidgety, can’t stop talking, are disruptive, and have no ability to concentrate. It works and it has no side effects associated with the prescription medicines used to treat these conditions.

I also use a combination of Hawthorn berry, leaf, and flower, Mimosa bark, and Rose petals for treating broken hearts, sadness, and grief (see Mimosa for more details).

Safety Rating: \* \* \*

Dosage

Tea: 1 tsp. dried berries to 10 oz. water, decoct 15-20 minutes, steep 1/2 hour. Take up to 3 cups per ay.

Tincture (1:5): 60-80 drops up to 4 times per day

Solid extract: 1/4-1/2 tsp. 2-3 times per day

Safety Issues: none known

Drug Interactions: There are theoretical concerns that Hawthorn may potentiate Digitalis based medications (Digoxin, Lanoxin). Several recent studies indicate there is no such interaction. I have seen two cases where Hawthorn potentiated beta-blockers, so use them together cautiously.

Additional Information: Hawthorn flowers were once used to make May wine and the berries can be made into a jelly.

**Passion flower herb** (*Passiflora incarnata*) – is a nervine/sedative, antispasmodic, and anxiolytic herb. Of all of the nervines, it has the most defined sedating effect. The specific indications for *Passiflora* are circular thinking that causes insomnia. The person can’t shut off their mind at night and they lay in bed thinking about the day, yesterday, tomorrow, last month, next month, what if this and if only that. I have had patients tell me its like they have a talk radio station on in their heads and they can’t find the off switch. Passion flower is the off switch. For menopausal insomnia, I give it with Motherwort. For anxiety it can be combined with Fresh Oat, Blue Vervain, and Motherwort.

Passion flower is also used for stress-induced headaches, bruxism (use it with Scullcap), torticollis (wry neck) and in human studies it was beneficial for reducing drug withdrawal symptoms.

On a somewhat humorous note, Passion flower is frequently added to “herbal male enhancement” products. The joke is this herb has no benefit for stimulating libido or improving erectile function. Obviously it was chosen because of its suggestive name, meaning the formulator either put it in thinking the consumer won’t know what it really does, or they themselves don’t really know. Either situation is a sad commentary on the state of much of today’s herb industry. Passion flower’s name derives from its supposed symbolic reflection of the Passion of Christ, not its ability to stimulate physical passion. The only benefit this herb may have on sexual functioning is for performance anxiety in men or vaginismus in women.

Safety Rating: \* \* \*

Dosage

Tea: 1-2 tsp. dried herb to 8 oz. water, steep 20-30 minutes, take 4 oz. up to 4 times per day.

Tincture (1:2 or 1:5): 60-80 drops, 3 to 4 times per day

Safety Issues: none known

Drug Interactions: Passion flower may potentiate prescription sedatives, antispasmodics, and anxiolytics; use cautiously together. Do not use with MAOI’s (mono-amine oxidase inhibitors).

Additional Information: the fruits of Passion flower can be made into juice or jellies. Passion flower gives canned “fruit punch” flavored juice its characteristic taste.

**Chamomile flowers** (*Matricaria recutita*) – have a very long history of use as a medicine and beverage tea. In Europe, Chamomile tea is consumed by millions of people per day as a relaxing tea for anxiety, upset stomach, irritability, nervous headaches, insomnia, and IBS symptoms. It is an excellent herb for children due to its safety, efficacy, and pleasant taste. I use it for ADD/ADHD (mix it 50/50 with apple juice), growing pains, fevers with restlessness and irritability, teething pain, colic in infants (it is taken by the mother and the essential oils pass into the breast milk, preventing or relieving colic in the baby), and nightmares.

I also use Chamomile for relieving PMS anxiety, menopausal mood swings, and menstrual cramps. It is especially useful for people whose moods are erratic, agitated one minute, fine the next, and then anxious ten minutes later.

Chamomile is one of my favorite remedies for stress-induced gastro-intestinal symptoms – you get stressed out, you have diarrhea, nervous stomach, constipation, acid reflux, heartburn, bowel spasms, or hiccoughs. I combine Chamomile with Catnip, Hops, or Valerian for these GI tract conditions.

Safety Rating: \* \* \*

Dosage

Tea: 1-2 tsp. dried flowers to 8 oz. water, steep 30-40 minutes, take up to 3 cups per day

Tincture (1:2.5 or 1:4): 60-90 drops, up to 4 times per day

Safety Issues: There is one reported case of a person drinking Chamomile tea, having a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis), and dying. There are other cases of people having less severe allergic reactions as well. While this is a concern, it must be put into context. Hundreds or thousands of people die every year from allergic reactions to peanuts, shellfish, and other common foods. Quite literally, there is someone, somewhere, that is probably allergic to almost any food. Considering that hundreds of millions of cups of Chamomile tea are consumed yearly, it can only be seen as a very safe herb.

Avoid taking Chamomile and other flowering herbs from the Asteraceae family (Feverfew, Roman Chamomile, Calendula, Yarrow, Boneset, and Echinacea flowers) if you have severe ragweed pollen allergies. Since these plants are related, there is a possibility of cross-reactivity to the pollen of other closely linked plants.

Drug Interactions: none known

Additional Information: Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) has similar uses to the better known common or German Chamomile (*M. recutita*). German Chamomile is better tasting and more useful for digestive upsets. The Roman Chamomile has a somewhat stronger antispasmodic effect.

**St. John's wort flowering tops** (*Hypericum perforatum*) – has become known as the “depression herb”. This is unfortunate, because while it is useful for some types of depression, it has a much broader range of uses. Stating that Hypericum is the “depression herb” or Saw Palmetto is the “prostate herb” or Black Cohosh is the “menopause herb” is great for companies selling these herbs, but it does a great disservice to the plant and the public. Each herb has a personality – a range of uses, activities, and specific qualities that make it appropriate or not, for each person. Real herbal medicine is more than using an herb to replace a pharmaceutical medication. Real herbal medicine utilizes diet, herbs, and lifestyle changes to prevent illness, relieve symptoms, and to enhance normal physiological function. Getting to truly know the scope and function of each herb allows the practitioner to finely tune his or her recommendations to fit each distinct and unique patient. I believe you get the best results when you treat the patient rather than the disease.

When we apply this concept to St. John's wort we find an herb that has been used since the time of the ancient Greeks for the nervous system. In the ancient herbals, it is recommended for “nervous griefs”, melancholia, nerve pain, and numbness. In clinical practice, herbalists still use this wonderful plant for all of these conditions and more. When I was starting to learn about herbs in the late 1960's, I was taught St. John's wort was not so much for depression as for nerve pain and nerve damage. It is used orally and topically (Hypericum oil) for Bell's Palsy, Trigeminal neuralgia, carpal tunnel syndrome, recovery from head trauma injuries, vulvodynia (vaginal pain), peripheral nerve pain, phantom limb pain, temporio-mandibular joint (TMJ) pain, and injuries to tissue with a profusion of nerves, such as the fingers, the spine, nipples, or genitalia. Hypericum oil is also used externally for first degree burns, painful bruises, muscle tears, insect bites, shingles, and painful puncture wounds.

St. John's wort was used for melancholia (hepatic depression) which to the ancient Greeks meant a person had an excess of the black bile. This caused fatigue, lethargy, indigestion, a dark outlook with a sense of emotional unease, and apathy. To a great degree this describes the type of depression that Hypericum is most effective for. Mild to moderate depression with a sour disposition and a “sour stomach”. Think of Mr. Scrooge in A Christmas Carol. He goes to work every day, he eats, he goes through the motions, but he has no joy in his life. Think of this herb for people who are in the dark, living a shadow life, it opens the “emotional windows” and lets the sunlight in.

As I mentioned in the Lemon Balm monograph, the combination of Melissa and Hypericum is very effective for SAD, which is caused by a lack of sunlight.

Hypericum can also be used with Rosemary and Evening Primrose herb (*Oenothera biennis*), yes, I mean the herb, not the oil, for bilious or hepatic depression. This type of depression is synonymous with the description of melancholia given previously.

Safety Rating: \* \* \*

Dosage

Tincture (1:2 or 1:5): 40-60 drops, 3 to 4 times per day

Tea: 2 tsp. dried flowers/buds to 8 oz. hot water, steep 30-40 minutes, take 4 oz. 3 to 4 times per day

Capsules (standardized extract): 350 mg. three times per day

Safety Issues: in large doses this herb has caused sensitivity to sunlight in cows and in a few cases with people as well. Some people have suggested using Hypericum oil as a sunscreen. This is a bad idea, as it can increase sun sensitivity and cause severe sunburn.

Drug Interactions: St. John's wort is well-known for enhancing Phase I liver detoxification, which reduces blood levels of many medications. Do not take St. John's wort with Warfarin, Digoxin, Protease inhibitors, anti-organ transplant rejection drugs (cyclosporine), and chemotherapy agents (irinotecan). Use caution when taking this herb with contraceptive pills. Only use Hypericum with SSRI's under a physician's supervision.

Additional Information: St. John's wort is available in a low hyperforin extract, which shows little, if any, ability to increase drug metabolism. The ability to stimulate cytochrome P450 pathways (C4P3A4, CYP2D6, 2YPE1) is dose dependent and the traditional use of this herb in a formula with several other herbs is likely to reduce the possibility of drug interactions as well.

### **Other Nervine Herbs**

There are many other herbs that have nervine qualities. Many are little known or better known for other properties. I would like to briefly mention a few other nervous system tonics including Wood Betony (*Pedicularis spp.*) which I mostly use for occipital headaches and sore, overworked muscles. Another herb often confused with Wood Betony is the European Betony (*Stachys betonica*). It is little used in the U.S., but commonly utilized in the UK for nervous tension, mild anxiety, and stress-induced insomnia. Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) is effective for children's fevers with irritability and convulsions. In adults, I use it with Chamomile for digestive problems that are caused or made worse by stress. Damiana (*Turnera spp.*) is mostly thought of as an aphrodisiac; in actuality it is not. Damiana is a nervine and mild antidepressant that is most useful for depression with loss of libido or mild depression in the elderly.