

Feverfew and Migraine

Feverfew is a popular herbal remedy used by people who experience migraine. This fact sheet looks at how feverfew may help you.

What is feverfew?

Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*) is a perennial plant belonging to the daisy family which grows in much of Europe, North America and Canada. It has been used in herbal remedies for centuries.

Why do people use herbal remedies?

You may decide to turn to herbal remedies to help control your migraines because: you feel you have run out of options with conventional medicine; herbal remedies will be “more natural” or you feel they are simply more helpful and appropriate for your condition.

Can feverfew help with migraines?

Feverfew is used as a preventative (or prophylactic) treatment for migraine. A number of people have reported that after taking feverfew their migraines have gradually become less frequent and in a few cases have stopped altogether.

Until recently only a few scientific studies into the use of feverfew had been conducted, and those few had been small in scale. However a well designed trial published in 2005 has attested to the efficacy of feverfew as a viable preventative treatment for migraine.

How should I take feverfew?

- Freeze dried capsules

The freeze dried capsules are generally recommended because the teas and fresh leaves have a bitter taste and may irritate your mouth.

Feverfew capsules can be bought from chemists and health stores. You should check the dosage of any preparations you buy as these can differ widely. A daily dose of 250 milligrams is usually enough.

The scientific research conducted so far has been done using the freeze dried capsules.

- Prepared tablets

Feverfew tablets can be bought from chemists and health stores.

- Growing your own feverfew

You can grow feverfew plants and it is the leaves that are used to treat migraine. You simply pick the leaves and then eat them in whichever way you find most suitable. They can be chopped up and put in salad or a sandwich. They taste rather bitter and so you may find a bit of sugar or honey will help.

One large or three smaller leaves can be eaten each day. Small leaves being about 4 centimetres long.

The leaves can be dried at home and seem to be just as effective as fresh leaves. For the best results pick the leaves when they are free from moisture (such as rain or dew). They should

be dried in a well ventilated place and away from direct sunlight. The leaves should be placed in a single layer as soon as they are picked and then turned over regularly for a few days to ensure they dry evenly. After that they can be stored in a tin or glass jar and kept as whole as possible. Keeping the leaves whole until you use them is a simple way of helping you to take a consistent dosage.

- Tincture

Feverfew used to be taken for a very wide range of conditions and so, for example, was applied to the skin in tincture form for the treatment of painful or itchy insect bites. Some herbalists still recommend this but since the 1970's feverfew is mainly used for migraine prevention.

- Teas

Feverfew leaves can be made into a tea although as said before this can taste bitter and may irritate your mouth.

When should I take feverfew?

Feverfew can only be taken as a preventative for migraine. It will not alleviate your migraine once it has started.

To be fully effective it needs to be taken every day. Feverfew is unlikely to work immediately and you may need to take it for several weeks before you experience marked improvements in your migraine.

It is best taken with food as this reduces the chance of its causing irritation to the stomach.

Does feverfew have any side effects?

Feverfew should not be taken during pregnancy as it can cause contractions. As feverfew is similar to aspirin and other NSAIDs such as ibuprofen, it is probably best not to take both at the same time. As with aspirin feverfew should not be taken if you are breast feeding.

Some people find that feverfew can cause mouth ulcers and minor skin irritations. There have been no reported effects on heart rate, blood pressure or weight.

If you decide to stop taking feverfew it is best to decrease the amount you take gradually to phase it out slowly. Some people who have suddenly stopped taking it after several years have experienced a return of their previous level of migraines along with other symptoms such as nausea, anxiety and insomnia. This is known as “feverfew rebound syndrome”.

As with any herbal remedy, it is advisable to consult your own doctor or herbalist before starting treatment.

Useful Contacts

- **Association of Master Herbalists** Tel: 01223 212744. Website: www.associationofmasterherbalists.co.uk
- **European Herbal and Traditional Medicine Practitioners Association**, 25 Lincoln Close, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, GL20 5TY. Tel: 01684 291605. Website: www.ehpa.org.uk Email: info@ehpa.eu

- **International Register of Consultant Herbalists and Homeopaths**, Birch Leaf Clinic, 1 Institute Row, Townshend, Cornwall, TR27 6AQ. Tel: 01736 850941. Website: www.irch.org Email: office@irch.org
- **National Institute of Medical Herbalists**, Elm House, 54 Mary Arches Street, Exeter, EX4 3BA. Tel: 01392 426022. Website: www.nimh.org.uk Email: info@nimh.org.uk
- **Unified Register of Consultant Herbalists**, Head Office, 58 Fairmantle Street, Truro, Cornwall, TR1 2EG. Tel: 07770 782537. Website: www.urhp.com