

CHAMOMILE, THE GENTLE ALTERNATIVE

Almost everyone is familiar with the herb chamomile and its yellow and white daisy-like flowers that are used to make the popular tea. But are you aware that it is one of the safest and gentlest of all the herbs?

The Ancient Egyptians dedicated chamomile to the sun, and the tea has been known and respected for centuries for its soothing and calming qualities, German chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) being the most effective. In Europe many people drink a cup of this herbal tea as their customary nightcap to relax them before going to bed.

Chamomile tea has a light, apple-like taste and is rich in calcium. It is a time-honoured remedy to soothe gastro-intestinal disorders, to relieve menstrual pain, to calm the nerves, and to help prevent migraine headaches. A cup of chamomile tea at night is said to induce sound natural sleep and calm an overactive brain. It is an ideal drink at study time or when under stress, and students and tired business people will benefit from a cup of chamomile tea at the end of a day.

A few drops added occasionally to a baby's milk bottle will help to calm and settle a restless infant; it will also soothe cramp or colic in the bowels when used as gripe water. To make Infant's Gripe Water put 1 teaspoon of dried chamomile in an enamel or stainless steel pan, add ml of boiling water and simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, allow to cool, strain, add honey and use tepid in baby's bottle.

A strong brew of the tea can be poured into an evening bath to help relax and soothe tired muscles. It can also be used as a compress or eye bath for the treatment of red, inflamed eyes. Just add the cold tea to an eyeglass and bathe the eyes.

Because of its low toxicity, chamomile is especially suitable for children. It will soothe skin disorders such as acne, burns, stings, and rashes, and is excellent for conjunctivitis, infant's teething problems, rheumatism and neuralgia. To ease rheumatism and other aches and pains massage the affected spot with a blend of 25 ml of soy oil and 2 drops each of chamomile and rosemary oils.

To soothe skin irritations, make a lotion by combining 5 tablespoons of olive oil, 10 of drops chamomile oil and 5 drops of Borneo camphor, and dab it onto the skin with a piece cottonwool.

Conjunctivitis can be treated by mixing 1 drop of chamomile oil with a teaspoon of witch hazel, and blending this solution with 30 ml of rose water. Let it stand for eight hours, strain through coffee-filter paper, and use with a compress on the eyelids. Be sure to keep your eyes closed.

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