

# supplementary knowledge

## Senna

### *Cassia senna*

Senna is a perennial shrub that grows to approximately one metre in height, bearing yellow flowers and lance-shaped leaflets. It is native to tropical Africa and is now cultivated throughout that continent, as well as Egypt and Sudan. Both the plant's leaves and its flat kidney-shaped pods are used for medicinal purposes.

#### Key constituents said to be:

Anthraquinone glycosides (sennosides); naphthalene glycosides; mucilage; flavonoids; volatile oil.<sup>1</sup>

#### Key actions said to be:

Stimulant; laxative; cathartic.<sup>1</sup>

#### Said to benefit:

##### *Constipation*

Senna is most widely known for its ability to relieve occasional/chronic bouts of constipation;<sup>1,6,7</sup> a condition it has been used to treat for literally hundreds of years. The herb has two main actions that help to promote a bowel movement: firstly, it irritates the lining of the large intestine (causing the muscles to contract) and secondly, it helps to maintain fluid levels in the large bowels, making the stool softer and therefore easier to pass.<sup>1</sup>

##### *Other*

In Ayurvedic medicine, senna is sometimes used for skin problems, including acne.

#### Areas of caution or concern

Senna (or senna products) should not be used for more than 10 consecutive days, or taken if abdominal pain is present. Prolonged use of senna has been linked to liver problems/failure. There is also some debate as to whether it is safe to take the herb when pregnant or breast-feeding.

## Cayenne

### *Capsicum genus*

Cayenne pepper (*Capsicum frutescens*) and chilli pepper (*Capsicum annuum*) are close relatives of the capsicum genus, sharing many of the same properties/constituents. Both varieties are pungent (unlike the bell pepper, also a relative) and thrive in the tropical Americas, Africa and other hot climates. The fruit (pods) are conical in shape and vary in colour, ranging from green when they are unripe, to yellow or red - depending on the variety.

#### Key constituents said to be:

Capsaicinoids (including capsaicin, the plants main active ingredient); carotenoids.<sup>1,2</sup>

#### Key actions said to be:

Stimulant; tonic; carminative; spasmolytic; diaphoretic; antiseptic; rubefacient.<sup>1,2</sup>

#### Said to benefit:

##### *Pain and itching*

When applied topically, capsaicin depletes a component in nerve cells, known as 'substance P', which transmits pain impulses to the brain.<sup>1,2</sup> Studies have shown that ointments or pastes containing capsaicin can help to relieve pain associated with: neuralgia; osteoarthritis; rheumatoid arthritis; fibromyalgia; and diabetic/peripheral neuropathy.<sup>1,4</sup> Post operative pain, and lingering pain in people recovering from shingles, are also said to benefit, as is pruritis (itching), e.g. resulting from psoriasis.<sup>1,2</sup>

##### *Digestive system*

All hot varieties of the capsicum genus are said to benefit the digestive system. Consumed as a food or in supplement form, they promote the secretion of digestive juices and increase blood circulation to the stomach, helping to stimulate

digestion, and relieve flatulence, functional dyspepsia, and colic.<sup>1,2,5</sup>

##### *Poor circulation*

Ingested or applied topically, cayenne/chilli pepper is said to aid poor circulation, especially peripheral circulation (making it a potentially useful remedy for conditions such as Raynaud's disease).<sup>1,2</sup>

##### *Other*

Cayenne/chilli pepper may also be beneficial: as a gargle (for laryngitis); in alleviating muscular pain and stiffness; and for treating unbroken chilblains.<sup>1</sup>

#### Areas of caution or concern

Avoid contact with open skin, the eyes and mucous membranes. May not be suitable for people with peptic ulcers. **Always consult your GP before taking this, or any other herb, for the treatment of a medical condition, especially if pregnant or breast-feeding.**

***N.B. At time of publication, the Medicines Act 1968 prohibits any vitamin supplement or similar as being recommended as a treatment for any illness, disease, or other medical condition.***

***Any specific dietary advice (e.g. diet plans) MUST be approved by the client's own medical practitioner before commencing such a diet.***

1 Potter's Herbal Cyclopaedia, by Elizabeth Williamson (ISBN 0852073615)

2 Readers Digest Guide to Vitamins, Minerals and Supplements (ISBN: 0276424484)

3 Tandan R, et al. *Topical capsaicin in painful diabetic neuropathy. Controlled study with long-term follow-up.* Diabetes Care. Jan 1992; 15 (1); pp 8-14.

4 Codell GA, Araujo OE. *Capsaicin: identification, nomenclature, and pharmacotherapy.* The Annals of Pharmacotherapy. March 1993; 27 (3); pp 330-6.

5 Bortolotti M, Coccia G, Grossi G, Miglioli M. *The treatment of functional dyspepsia with red pepper.* Alimentary Pharmacology and Therapeutics. June 2002; 16 (6); pp 1075-82.

6 Passmore AD, et al. *A comparison of Agiolax and lactulose in elderly patients with chronic constipation.* Pharmacology. Oct 1993; 47 (Suppl); pp 249-52.

7 Kinnunen O, et al. *Safety and efficacy of a bulk laxative containing senna versus lactulose in the treatment of chronic constipation in geriatric patients.* Pharmacology. Oct 1993; 47 (Suppl); pp 253-5.

Capsicum pic: © Helen Rubtsov (www.istockphoto.com)