Shatavari's Impact on Female Hormones

Karri Jinkins

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Shatavari, is an herb in the Asparagus family, which is said to mean, *she who processes 1000 husbands,* hence the herbs reputation as a fertility enhancing plant, along with a wide range of other beneficial properties for medical issues such as increased milk production in lactating women, regulation of hormones during menopause, gastric ulcers, nervous disorders, and inflammation. The scope of this paper will focus specifically on assisting with female milk production and menopausal symptoms.

The plant is found in Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and the sub tropical regions of Australia and Africa. It has small pine-needle-like branches that are shiny green and produce tiny white flowers and small purple-blue round berries. The plant has tuberous roots that grow directly from the stem with roughly 100 roots from each plant. Both the root and the leaves of the plant have been used in traditional Indian Ayurveda for thousands of years.

John Douillard describes his first introduction to the herb, back in the 1980's in Kerala while he was visiting a famous Ayurvedic clinic in the Nampoorhiri tribal village (which had refused to conform to the British rule so still lived in their pre-colonial ways). When the Ayurvedic doctors and nurses of the village discovered his wife was pregnant (back home in America), they insisted he take some shatavari home to her. They assured him that this one herb had the ability to see women through their entire reproductive life, smoothly from menarche to menopause.

They even suggesting he give it to his daughters at the start of puberty to assure they start to menstruate without any problems. (Douillard, 2018).

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In 2011, there was a double-blind randomized, placebo-controlled, parallel-group, clinical trial done to measure the galactogogue effect of the Shatavari on 60 lactating mothers, which measured the changes of their milk production by way of prolactin hormone levels during the study. The primary findings were corroborated by the secondary outcome measures and were found to be statistically significant. (Gupta, Shaw, 2011). This study demonstrated evidence to support a belief that the prolactin hormone is directly responsible for the stimulation of milk secretions and that low levels of prolactin is indicative of inadequate mother's lactation. The Prolactin hormone level of the subjects taking Shatavari showed a mean increase of 32.87% verses a mean increase of only 9.56 in the control group. (Gupta, Shaw, 2011).

Ayurveda believes that the best way to solve menopausal symptoms in women is through diet, lifestyle and herbs since menopausal symptoms are often caused from imbalanced hormone levels. Once a woman enters menopause, her adrenals take over producing most of the body's progesterone (along with her adipose tissue) while the ovaries discontinue their production of the hormone. If a woman's cortisol (also produced in the adrenals) levels are high because of stress, the body will steal some of the active progesterone to help the adrenal glands produce more cortisol which will not only produce adrenal fatigue, but also imbalanced progesterone vs. estrogen. (Welch, 2011).

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In a study reported in 2016 in the International Journal of Reproductive Biomedicine, Yazd, shatavari was shown to balance the production of adrenal cortisol as well as increase the production of progesterone and other female hormones, specifically estrogen, GnRH, FSH and LH. (Jashni, Jahromi, Ranjbary, Kherameh, 2016). This study backed up many of the beliefs that the Ayurvedic community has had for thousands of years with regards to the Shatavari plant.

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