

asktheherbalist – by KARA PURKH SINGH KHALSA, D.N. C., R.H.

## Powerful Brew

**Q** I was diagnosed with acid reflux disease and found it unbearably uncomfortable. My doctor prescribed Nexium, but that medication did not last the 24 hours it was supposed to. My mother bought a product called reishi coffee for me. After one day, I noticed a great reduction in my symptoms. The burning sensation, the nausea, the horrible taste in my mouth all disappeared within two weeks. I found that it has a wonderful effect on my acne as well. I was hoping you could tell me more about it. N.C., via e-mail

**A** The beverage you describe is simply coffee blended with reishi (also called lingzhi). It is a tasty way to get reishi into the diet. Your results are not at all unusual for this famous East Asian mushroom.

Reishi ( *Ganoderma Lucidium* ) grows in coastal areas of China and is found on decaying logs and tree stumps. Brewed as a beverage, the dried mushroom actually has an earthy taste, like coffee, so the flavors are compatible. This beverage is a common commercial tea preparation in Asia.

Reishi mushroom is lauded for its digestive properties. It promotes liver function, which can play a role. The starchy nature of its constituents has a coating effect in the gut. In a study published in 2002, rats were given stomach ulcers and then treated with reishi polysaccharides, which produced a healing effect on the mucous membranes. The anti-inflammatory properties can also help with acid stomach.

Considered “the mushroom of immortality and spiritual potency,” reishi is well known as an adaptogen (a general tonic for long term stamina). It is arguably the most revered herbal substance in Asia, surely ranking with ginseng as the elite medicine of choice. It has been used by Asian hermits, monks, Taoist adepts and spiritual seekers. In Chinese medicine, reishi is used to prolong life. Experiments with mice have confirmed this effect.

Reishi also enhances physiological resistance to stress. Many of my colleagues reach for reishi as their first herb of choice for promoting a sense of balanced energy and calm mood. It treats insomnia long-term.

Reishi has demonstrated immune support in numerous studies. It has anti-tumor activity, as well as being antiviral and antibacterial. One study found that reishi tea reduces pain from shingles. It broadly reduces allergic reactions, and is used by herbalists for food allergies. The immune effects are thought to be largely from its polysaccharides, which are also the active ingredients in Echinacea and astragalus.

Reishi has analgesic, nervine relaxant and anti-allergic effects (inhibiting histamine release and all types of hypersensitivity reactions). It is an antioxidant; and it regenerates liver tissue that has been lost due to liver necrosis or hepatitis. In one study, 355 patients diagnosed with hepatitis B showed improvements in liver enzymes and improved symptoms. Reishi is more effective in cases in which the liver impairment is not considered severe.

Reishi is cardiogenic and promotes blood circulation. Active ingredients reduce platelet stickiness. Ganoderic acids, which have a molecular structure similar to steroid hormones, may lower blood pressure as well as decrease LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. These specific triterpenoids also help reduce platelet stickiness.

Reishi is anti-inflammatory, so the benefits to your acne are not surprising. Drink two cups per day of reishi coffee, brewed according to label instructions. Take 3 to 10 gm of reishi per day, brewed as a tea, or in capsules.

Coffee that's good for you? A cup of reishi can stop acid reflux and clear acne.

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