

Black Cohosh

Latin Name: *Cimicifuga racemosa* or *Actaea racemosa*

Also known as: Black Snakeroot, Snakeroot, Rattlesnake Root, Blacksnake Root, Rattleweed, Rattleroot, Squaw Root, Bugbane, Bugwort, Richweed, Macrotys

Scientific Classification

Family: Ranunculaceae – buttercup family
 Genus / Species: *Cimicifuga racemosa* – in earlier classifications
 Genus / Species: **Actaea racemosa* (recently re-classified) – baneberry

**Actaea* is part of the baneberry genus, and plants within it usually produce berries. However, black cohosh bears its seeds in a follicle, which is more consistent with the *Cimicifuga* genus.

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPAL ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
Addictions	smoking • delirium tremens (from alcohol poisoning)
Autoimmune Disorders	RHEUMATISM
Blood and Circulatory System	angina • heart palpitations • cardiac stimulant • circulation • DROPSY (edema) • HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE • BLOOD CLEANSER
Body System	astringent (tightens and tones tissues)
Blood Sugar	Diabetes
Digestive Tract	digestive disorders • bowels • DIARRHEA • expels worms
Endocrine System	Thyroid
First Aid	SORES • INSECT BITES • BEE STINGS
Infections and Immune System	coughs • FEVERS • typhoid fever • MEASLES • smallpox • scarlet fever • cholera • MALARIA • WHOOPING COUGH
Inflammation	anti-inflammatory (of all kinds) • RHEUMATISM • arthritis
Liver	liver • gallstones
Lungs and Respiratory System	EXPECTORANT • sore throat • CHRONIC BRONCHITIS • LUNGS • ASTHMA • TUBERCULOSIS

<i>Muscles</i>	lumbago (lower backache) • relaxes muscles
<i>Nervous System</i>	chorea (nervous disease causing involuntary muscle movements) • convulsions • SPASMS • EPILEPSY • ST. VITUS DANCE • sciatica • paralysis • SPINAL MENINGITIS • HYSTERIA • nervous disorders • NEURALGIA • NERVINE (improves nerve function)
<i>Pain</i>	pain • headaches
<i>Poison</i>	POISON ANTIDOTE • POISONOUS BITES • SNAKE BITES
<i>Reproductive System</i>	syphilis <i>Female:</i> • ESTROGEN • ESTROGEN DEFICIENCY • HORMONE BALANCER • DYSMENORRHEA • MENSTRUAL PROBLEMS • MENSTRUAL CRAMPS • EMMENAGOGUE (promotes menstrual flow) • female aphrodisiac • uterine problems • CHILDBIRTH • CHILDBIRTH PAIN • HOT FLASHES • MENOPAUSE
<i>Skin, Tissues & Hair</i>	skin disorders • diaphoretic (increases perspiration)
<i>Sleep</i>	insomnia • sedative
<i>Urinary Tract</i>	kidney ailments • diuretic (increases urine flow)

Key Properties:

- FEMALE HERB – used especially for menopause and hormone replacement, regulates menstrual flow
- EXPECTORANT – loosens and removes phlegm in the respiratory tract
- NERVINE – strengthens nerve function, relieves spasms, calms nerves and acts as a sedative
- Anti-Inflammatory • ANTI-VENOMOUS

Primarily affecting: UTERUS • NERVES • LUNGS • HEART

History	The bruised root was used by Native Americans as an antidote for snake bites, applying it to the wound and taking the juice (in small amounts) internally. They also found it helped relieve arthritis and fatigue. Native American women knew of black cohosh's ability to relieve pain during menstrual periods and used it extensively during childbirth. The Delaware (living in the area we now call Oklahoma), steeped black cohosh tea (in combination with other herbs)
----------------	---

for a female tonic. The Iroquois (of New York area) used a strong root tea as a foot bath, soaking the feet and bathing sore, stiff areas of the body to treat rheumatism. The Cherokee (Southeastern states area) are said to have treated rheumatism and various female conditions with a root preparation. They also valued black cohosh as a tonic and diuretic.

Early American Colonists used black cohosh for yellow fever, malaria, fevers, bronchitis, dropsy (swelling of ankles and legs due to heart insufficiency), uterine problems, and nervous disorders. European colonists rapidly adopted the herb for similar uses.

In the late 19th century, black cohosh was the principal ingredient in the wildly popular herb compound of Lydia E. Pinkham. The label on the bottle read 'Vegetable Herbal Compound', but everybody knew it as 'A baby in every bottle' (meaning, it helped heal infertility).

The importance of black cohosh as a medicinal plant was recognized in the first works on American herbs, dating back to 1801. It was widely prescribed by physicians in 19th century America, where it had a great reputation as an anti-inflammatory for arthritis and rheumatism and played important roles in normalizing suppressed, painful or difficult menses and relieving pain after childbirth. It was also used for nervous disorders. The root was an official drug of the United States Pharmacopoeia from 1820 to 1926.

Migrating across the Atlantic, black cohosh became a popular European treatment for women's problems, arthritis, and high blood pressure. Black cohosh also has a long history of use in Asia.

Attributes	<u>Key Components: (including, but not limited to)</u>
<i>Nutrition</i>	Vitamins <u>A</u> • <u>B5</u> (pantothenic acid) • <u>Calcium</u> • <u>Iron</u> • <u>Magnesium</u> • <u>Phosphorous</u> • <u>Potassium</u> • other <u>Trace Minerals</u> • <u>Phytoestrogens</u> • <u>Phytosterin</u> • <u>Isoferulic Acid</u> • <u>Salicylic Acid</u> (a precursor to aspirin) • <u>Starches</u> • <u>Sugars</u> • <u>Tannins</u> • <u>Fatty Acids</u> • <u>Gum</u> • <u>Resin</u> (in the root) • <u>Wax</u> • <u>Volatile Material</u> (when fresh, but lost with maturity)
<i>Women</i>	Black cohosh is widely known for supporting women's health and relieving unpleasant symptoms associated with hormone imbalance, particularly during menopause. It was

widely thought to contain phytoestrogens (plant-derived estrogens) and other compounds that help balance the female system. The latest studies show that black cohosh might not contain any phytoestrogens but helps balance the body in other ways.

In my opinion, this just shows the remarkable nature of herbs. Whether black cohosh has phytoestrogens or not, really doesn't matter. What matters, is that our bodies know what to do when we feed it with the right nutrients. Herbs like black cohosh have historically proven themselves over and over again for hundreds and sometimes even thousands of years. For me, supportive studies are just a bonus.

Black cohosh can stimulate blood flow to the pelvic area and restore menstruation when it is sluggish. Used with ginger, it can help relieve menstrual cramps. Black cohosh helps initiate uterine contractions, curbs hemorrhaging and allays the nervousness and afterpains of delivery.

The German Commission E Report allows black cohosh products to be labeled for premenstrual discomfort, dysmenorrhea (painful or difficult menstruation) or climacteric (menopausal) neurovegetative ailments. (1)

Reported active properties of black cohosh include an estrogen-like action (binding to estrogen receptors) and the suppression of luteinizing hormones of the pituitary gland (reducing the occurrence of hot flashes). (2)

Researchers found that after 6-8 weeks of treatment, 80 percent of patients had beneficial effects in a 629 patient German clinical study. There was dramatic relief from, and reduction of, hot flashes, sweating, headache, vertigo, palpitation and tinnitus in over 49 percent of the volunteers. Over 39 percent reported significant reductions of these symptoms, along with diminished nervousness, irritability and depression. (3)

A 1987 German double blind study produced significant reduction of menopausal symptoms and depression. (4) In a 1988 German clinical study, the authors concluded that in cases where conventional hormone therapy is contraindicated, black cohosh extract is the therapy of choice. (5) (It makes me wonder why the authors of the study wouldn't recommend a natural choice first).

Hormone Replacement

A significant interest in using black cohosh and other 'female'

*Therapy (HRT) Study
(1994-2002)*

herbs for the relief of menopausal discomfort developed at the premature termination of a monumental Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) study, involving more than 16,000 women. In 1994, a long-term study led by the National Institutes of Health called the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) was initiated with the hope of establishing proof that Premarin and Provera (estrogen replacement medications) would not only relieve menopause symptoms but continuous HRT could be used to protect aging women from heart attacks, strokes, osteoporosis and cancer.

However, on July 9, 2002, the WHI came to an abrupt halt. The HRT study had proven unequivocally that the drugs were unsafe and, in fact, were significant factors causing increased risk of breast and uterine cancers, heart attacks, strokes, brain tumors and dementia in the women they were following.

Women who take synthetic estrogen have been able to switch to black cohosh immediately, with no side effects or drug withdrawal symptoms. Black cohosh does not exhibit the same cancer-causing agents as traditional HRT. Black cohosh works even better when mixed with other hormone balancing herbs.

A more recent (2005) trial involving 304 postmenopausal women showed that black cohosh extract was significantly more effective than was placebo in decreasing menopausal symptoms, particularly hot flashes. Liver enzyme levels watched during the study (liver enzymes increase when liver is damaged) did not show clinically relevant changes in the primarily important hepatic enzymes (GGT, AST, ALT) in comparison to placebo. (6)

Heart

Black cohosh slightly lowers the heart rate while it increases the force of its beat and equalizes circulation. The herb reduces arterial action and is a mild cardiac tonic, especially useful for fatty hearts. Its action on the central nervous system, heart and circulation resembles the action of digitalis (a medicinal heart stimulant, originally extracted from the herb foxglove). It contracts the heart muscle and helps relieve chest pains.

Nervous System

Black cohosh is used as a tonic for the central nervous system in both men and women and is regarded as a nervine (strengthens nerve function). It works directly on the nervous system, relieves nervous tension, soothes local pain, and alleviates headaches. This versatile herb is also an

	<p>excellent and safe sedative.</p> <p>The medulla oblongata (the lower half of the brainstem) deals with autonomic functions, such as breathing and blood pressure. Black cohosh is reported to help heal medulla oblongata damage caused by hallucinogenic drugs.</p> <p>The herb relieves or prevents spasms and is used for epilepsy. It helps reduce tinnitus (ringing in the ears) and has been used effectively for spinal meningitis.</p>
<i>Inflammation</i>	Black cohosh can be used in a poultice to help ease all kinds of inflammation and can diminish the effects of inflammation due to bee sting allergies.
<i>Lungs and Mucous Membranes</i>	Black cohosh has a stimulating effect on secretions of the spleen, liver, kidneys and lymphatic system. It is a viable expectorant for acute, chronic pulmonary and bronchial conditions. Because it breaks up mucus and phlegm deposits, it is found in many sinus combinations.
<i>Muscles</i>	Black cohosh has a strong effect on the muscular system. It relaxes and soothes inflammation and is a remedy of the greatest importance in muscular rheumatism.
<i>Anti-venomous</i>	The plant's genus name, Cimicifuga, from the Latin 'cimex' (bug) and 'fugare' (to drive away), is so named because certain species tend to drive away bugs and other insects. It can also be used as an antidote for the venom of serpents.
Herb Parts Used	Preparations of black cohosh are made from its roots and rhizomes (underground stems).
Preparations and Remedies	Black cohosh is used fresh or in dried form, and made into infusions (teas), capsules, pills, and tinctures (liquid extracts).
<i>Powdered</i>	Black cohosh is even more effective when taken with other female herbs (such as blue cohosh, dong quai, red raspberry leaf, bayberry bark, squawvine and damiana). Black cohosh taken alone may take up to four to six weeks to produce its full benefits.
<i>Tea</i>	Simmer 1 teaspoon of the cut and sifted herb for every cup of water for 5-15 minutes. Drink one cup twice daily
Safety	No health hazards are known when used in proper amounts.

	<p>If taken in larger amounts than needed, black cohosh may cause a headache at the base of the skull. If headaches or nausea occur while taking this herb, take smaller doses or discontinue use.</p> <p>Black cohosh is not to be taken during early pregnancy. It may be taken in the final weeks of pregnancy, but only to ease or induce labor</p>
<p>Plant Profile</p> <p><i>Description</i></p>	<p><i>Natural Habitat:</i> The plant is native to eastern North America from the extreme south of Ontario, Canada down into the United States to central Georgia, and west to Missouri and Arkansas. Black cohosh grows in a variety of woodland situations and is often found in small woodland openings. It is now cultivated in Europe and Asia as well.</p> <p>Black cohosh flourishes in the deep shade of moist hillsides. It has striking, bushy foliage with tall stems which bloom May through September (depending on the climate). Black cohosh is a tall perennial herb (it grows back without replanting) with a large, knotty root. The flowers bloom on a tall stem, which grows 2-1/2 to 8 feet tall, in racemes up to 20 inches long; they have no petals or sepals, only a tight cluster of 55-110 white stamens, each about a half-inch long surrounding the white stigma. When flowering, black cohosh exhibits a strong, distinctively sweet smell that repels some insects, earning its name 'bugbane.' Its fruit is a dry follicle about a half-inch long that contains several seeds.</p>