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medicinal plant in medical
practice today

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English

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Potencies are given in the English notation, e.g. 6x where the German notation would be D6.

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■ Abstract

Use of the medicinal plant Panax ginseng from Asia is well established in general medicine. The indications and therapeutic measures are considered.

■ Keywords

Panax ginseng

Clinical use

Weak kidney radiation

“The higher function of the kidney, known as ‘kidney radiation’ is therefore deeply connected with the creation of human substance. It serves to configure the constructive stream of life so that live substance is ensouled and a correlate at substance level to the destructive form impulses action from the head region ... if kidney radiation is too weak, the action of the astral body from the lower human being is not sufficiently constructive” (1).

In ancient Chinese civilization, ginseng was considered to be a sacred plant. Legends and stories venerated a benevolent nature spirit, a guardian spirit. Its powers to heal were praised above all in cases where all other attempts to heal had failed.

It is not known when human beings first came across ginseng. Most legends say that it was not that the root was found by a person but that human beings were found by the root.

Hardly any other plant holds so much fascination for many people and is considered with awe. It has always been one of the most expensive plants. An old root of prime quality cost more than its weight in gold and 250 times its weight in silver.

Wars have been fought over possession of woods where ginseng grows. Ginseng gatherers would be ruthlessly attacked and robbed. Ginseng was of inestimable value in ancient China, especially also because the dominant principle in Chinese medicine was to treat healthy people to prevent disease. The physician would only be paid for this and not when people fell ill and needed treatment. In that case, the physician would be held

partly responsible. The view was that a bad physician provides help only once destruction has started, and he would therefore be said to be incapable.

Traditional Chinese medicine was above all successful in the field of preventive medicine, and Panax ginseng therefore always played a central role. The root also gained fame in America and Europe, with an actual ginseng boom in the 1970s. This led to scientific interest in the actions of the root and a new openness to traditional Chinese medicine. For a long time, western medical thinking did not fully penetrate and understand Panax ginseng. There is, however, ancient Asian knowledge of the medicinal actions.

A bridge can be built between eastern and western medicine by studying both approaches. The spiritual-scientific insights provided by R. Steiner contribute greatly to this.

Four case histories are given below to ease our way into understanding.

Case 1

A man of 64 years came to the practice. He was well built, pyknic constitution. He said he’d always had warm hands and feet and been very fit indeed except for recurrent polyps in the colon.

He was a successful businessman with marked powers of will and having his way as well as an excellent memory. He was also very active in sport and sexually. Married, with two daughters.

His memory was getting increasingly poorer now, as was his concentration. Before, he’d always been able to recall business letters or memos for a long time; now he had to look them up again and again or write memos for himself. He had had repeated pain and a sensation of coldness in the lower back region over the last two years. Tinnitus for c. 10 years, and inner ear hearing loss since he did his army service.

Talking to him I noted that his choleric temperament had changed, and he increasingly had phases of depression. At work he had many demands made on him, and economic changes and personnel problems in the firm also imposed emotional strain at times.

Life—in this case a long period of mental and physical overexertion, much sexual activity of an older man—



Fig. 1
1-year-old plant, still small



Fig. 2
2-year-old plant



Fig. 3
3-year-old plant

had caused this pyknic individual to develop a distinct weakness taking the form of weak kidney radiation. The astral body was not intervening strongly enough in the lower human being, with the result that the inward-directed building up of substance in the kidneys and adrenals, and their radiation into the nervous system were deficient.

This was evident in waning powers of memory, problems with concentration, tinnitus, and the recurrent pain and sensation of coldness in the region of the lumbar spine.

He was therefore prescribed Ginseng ethan. decoct. 1x dil. (Weleda), 10 drops t.d.s.

Four weeks later he reported progressive improvement in concentration and memory. The symptoms grew somewhat worse again during a 4-week break after 3 months.

The patient has been taking Ginseng 1x for 3 years, with relatively long pauses now and then. He feels distinctly more able to work, is still much involved in his occupation; his powers of concentration and ability to remember are very good again. He does much sport, has hardly any back problems. The tinnitus has grown less loud.

Case 2

A woman aged 54, school teacher, with essentially neurasthenic constitution who came to see me for the first time.

She had been under considerable strain in recent years, with continuous mental overwork at school and management functions. She had also done much physical work in building a house. She spoke of marked loss of performance for 2 years, with tiredness and weariness, and low blood pressure. Concentration was distinctly reduced, she was less able to remember things and also had ankle oedema. She said that she's always had an excellent memory and high-level intellectual performance.

Her body temperature would rise up to 38 °C with even minimal physical effort, and extensive investigation had yielded no tangible reason for this.

Here, too, the astral body was not intervening strongly enough in the ether body, and kidney radiation was weakened due to overwork and strain in the intellectual sphere.

Prescription: Ginseng ethan. decoct. 1x dil. (Weleda), 10 drops t.d.s.

Psychotherapy was also recommended as she tended to ask too much of herself.

Three months later her temperatures no longer went above normal, memory had improved, she had more basic energy and better concentration. She felt her capacities had been restored.

Case 3

In the third case, a nurse aged 40 came to see me.

She had always been in good health, big and overweight. She had been married to a mentally ill man for 15 years who committed suicide one year after their separation. This caused profound shock, grief and guilt feelings for her.

She had first been treated by a colleague. I myself saw her only 4 months after the event. She told me that a few weeks after her husband's suicide she had developed great physical weakness, tiredness, marked problems with concentration and some loss of memory. She also felt a painful dragging sensation in the kidney region at intervals, with sensation of coldness and pain in the lower back. She was already having psychotherapy.

The harmful effect of grief, guilt feelings and shock on kidney function was very evident in this case.

Prescription: Ginseng ethan. decoct. 1x dil. (Weleda), 20 drops t.d.s.

Four weeks later she reported no more dragging pain in the kidney region and marked improvement in concentration and memory.

Good powers of concentration and memory had developed within 12 weeks. She felt strong and capable, saying there had been no more dragging pain or coldness in the kidney region.

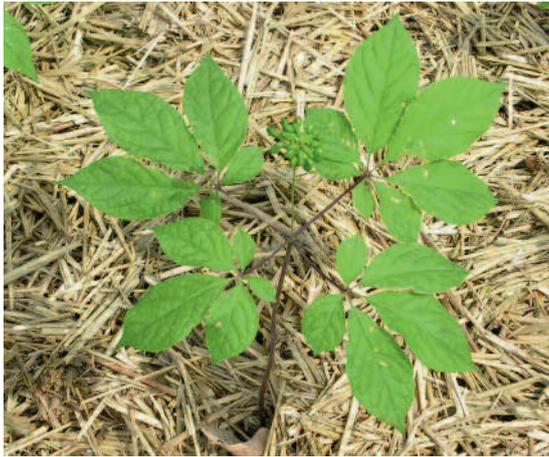


Fig. 4: 4-year-old plant, extraordinarily slow growth, taking several years

Case 4

A woman aged 45, slender, medium height, with remarkably thin dark hair, pale, complained of being tired a lot and exhausted and of very poor powers of concentration and memory. She was nervous, tremulous, perspires when doing the least thing, her sleep very restless. She was also hard of hearing and complained of recurrent tinnitus. She would often have lumbar pain with sensation of coldness in the region of the kidneys and in the knee.

She was staying in a women's refuge, having been married to a violent man who bear her and sexually abused her. She was still very much afraid of him, for he had threatened to kill her.

Here we have above all an example of fear as a distinctly harmful influence on the kidney, resulting in typical kidney symptoms.

The kidney, being the central organ of the astral body, is directly dependent on soul activity in the body. And this like no other organ in form and function.

As in the previous cases, kidney radiation was weak, hear after damage to construction function by frequent great fear.

Ginseng 1x, 20 drops t.d.s. was again the main prescription.

After 3 months she said her concentration and memory had distinctly improved. She was calmer, clearly less tired and exhausted. No sweats with slight effort. The back problem had also largely disappeared. Hearing was subjectively improved.

The medicinal plant Panax ginseng

The botanical name of the genus comes from the Greek panacea. Ginseng root has many names. They reflect the renown which it had in Chinese medicine. In Europe, ginseng has been known as a medicinal plant from the 17th century onwards.

Chinese script is based not on sounds but on words. Ginseng means rénshen in Chinese, and the first of the two symbols has many meanings, including "human spirit, form or dimension". The second syllable means

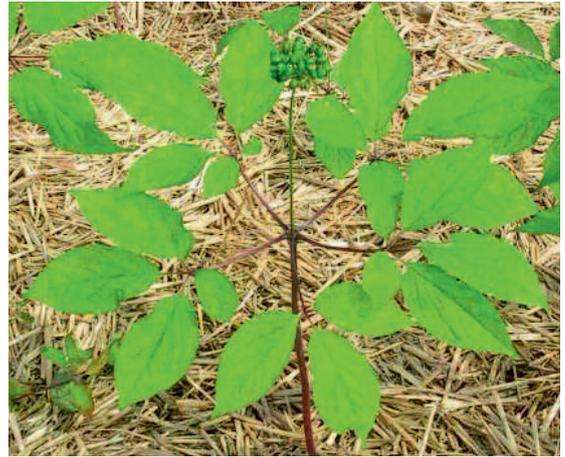


Fig. 5
5-year-old plant

"root" and also "crystallization of earth's inmost essential nature".

Radix ginseng is also called "man root", "root of life" or "extension of life" or "root of strength". It is also known as the "mandrake of the east". Its chemical composition is completely different from that of Mandragora and it does not contain alkaloids.

Chinese ginseng is a long-lived member of the Araliaceae family (as is common ivy) and said to live for up to 100 years. The Araliaceae include 65 genera with a total of 800 species. Most of them are native to tropical or subtropical areas, the tropical rainforests of South and East Asia, Central and South America. They will not generally thrive in temperate regions.

Panax ginseng, on the other hand, grows mainly in the shady mountain forests in the north western provinces of China, northern parts of Korea and adjoining areas in the far eastern parts of Russia, i.e. in northern latitudes, where the winters are cold and summers not and dry, with spring and autumn relatively short. It is also only rarely found at below 500 metres above sea level.

Only a few species of the genus Panax genera have, however, made themselves at home there, with only two of them considered to be true ginseng. One is Panax ginseng C. A. Meyer, native to north east China and Korea, the other Panax quinquefolius in North America. Other species differ markedly in habit, form and composition and also have different medical indications.

True ginseng prefers residual soil from primary rock, lluvial sand or humus, likes air and light but no sun, which indicates a high level of sensitivity and an ability to transform matter using only little light energy. This and the fact that it grows at great heights may be seen as signs of vitality. It forms undergrowth in spring under shade trees (lime, maple, beech, walnut and elm) from a perennial root and is extraordinarily hard to find.

It has often been said that ginseng shines in the dark, and ginseng gatherers would go on the hunt at night, shooting the plant with bow and arrow. Today one assumes that those were glow worms magically drawn to ginseng just as people are.



Fig. 6
6-year-old plant



Fig. 7
1 and 2-year-old plants

The rhizome sits like a neck at the top of the ginseng root. Leaf buds rise from a stem which is soft at first, lignifying only little later on, and reaching a height of 30 – 60 cm. The 3 – 6 leaf shoots make a star or cross. Five single leaves open up terminally like the fingers of a hand (up to six depending on age). The leaf stalks are 8 – 15 cm in length and solid. Individual leaves vary slightly in size and form, with two smaller ones on either side of the stalk and three slightly larger ones in the middle. All leaves are slightly dentate and starting from the central nerve folded like a roof.

A flowering shoot rises rapidly in May/June, reaching a height of 20 cm. The inflorescence with up to 40 individual flowers develops in June/July. The fruit developing after pollination are pea-like, spherical or kidney-shaped berries up to 20 in number, greenish-yellow to start with, then carmine red, with 2 or 3 seeds each.

The part of the plant put to medicinal use grows underground. Looking at it we see the rhizome from which the aerial parts grow. It is surrounded by shoot scars arranged in a ring. These annual scars, as they are called, arise when the bud at the upper end of the rhizome opens up in spring so that the aerial parts may grow from it. In autumn the leaves wither, new leaves grow in spring. The rhizome lengthens year by year. The root shrinks and withdraws into the soil so that the bud will be exactly at surface level. This leaves rings in the neck of the root by which the age of the plant is determined.

The root grows under the rhizome. It has a central stem and several lateral arms. It may be up to 4 – 6 cm in diameter and weigh up to 100 g.

It is mainly roots growing in the wild that may look like a man. One has to think of the rhizome as the head, the central stem the trunk and the lateral arms as limbs. This has given rise to the name ginseng (*Fig. 14*).

The roots are the shape of tap roots, branching more or less depending on age. They grow to a length of 20 cm and diameter of 2.5 cm. The surface is a pale yellow. The thin root bark is of cork-like matter. The odour is weak, the taste earthy, slightly bitter to begin with and then sweetish and slimy.

Distinction is made between white and red ginseng. White ginseng is from roots that have been dried in the sun or in kilns. The cork layer separates off in the process. Red ginseng is from roots treated with hot water or steam (to preserve them) before they are dried. In Chinese medicine, red and white ginseng are said to have different medicinal properties.

Taking years to grow, ginseng takes up a great deal from the ground, so much for instance, that when it has been harvested cultivation must be moved to other fields as seed will no longer germinate.

Originally people had to grow other plants for about 10 years and then wait another 4 – 6 years after sowing before the root could be harvested. This meant at least 14 years between two possible harvests. The older the plant the more valuable is the root. It grows slowly, takes much substance from the soil, and also concentrates all the powers of light and warmth during that long process in the root.

Ginseng also has other special features. It can only be grown from the seed of plants that are four years old. It then takes 18 months to 2 years for the first shoots to rise. The aerial part of the plant is inconspicuous (*Figs 1 – 6*). All the energy goes into developing the root. The root and rhizome are the principal organ of the plant.

There appear to be major quantitative differences depending on growth site and surrounding area. Thus efficacy is greatest the closer to North Korea and decreases with distance from China (least good in the USA).

The photographs show comparative growth of aerial and underground parts of the plant over a number of years.

- 1) Aerial growth of ginseng (*Figs 1 – 6*)
- 2) Comparison between aerial and underground growth (*Figs 7 – 11*)
- 3) Fully grown ginseng root (*Figs. 12 – 15*)

Remarkably, ginseng shows slow progressive development for the first 2 or 3 years and after this most of the growth energy goes into the root.



Fig. 8: 3-year-old plant



Fig. 9: 4-year-old plant



Fig. 10: 5-year-old plant



Fig. 11: 6-year-old plant

Active principles

This is a most interesting chapter, for the active principles vary enormous and the range of action is wide.

The main principles are said to be 13 different saponins called gisenodies. They are glucosides and structurally close to steroid hormones.

Ginsenosides are found mainly in the root bark, their concentrating rising as the plant gets older (e. g. 1.5 % in 4-year-old plants, 8 % in 6-year-old plants). The bark of lateral roots also contains ginsenosides, but with a different range of actions.

Saponins shaken in a small amount of water in air make the mixture froth, are therefore substances which make it possible for the astral to be active in the watery and etheric.

The most efficacious constituents are said to be two large groups of ginsenosides referred to as panaxadiol Rb1 and panaxatriol Gg1. The differ only in the sugars bound to their basic structure.

Given on their own, both are up to 1,000 times more effective than the whole dried root or extracts of this. On the other hand the evidence is that the ginseng action is best where the two are in a ratio of 1:1, which is practically only the case with Korean ginseng.

Looking at ginseng from this point of view one soon realizes that the action is not uniform but divides into two major areas. In Chinese medicine, two different potential actions are postulated:

yang action—stimulating

yin action—calming.

The study of individual ginsenosides has given the same result:

Ginsenoside Rg1 panaxatriol has a stimulant effect.

Ginsenoside Rb1 panaxadiol has a calming effect.

These actions do not cancel one another out on simultaneous exhibition of the two ginsenosides. Depending on the situation in the organism, the one action or the other will be more to the fore.

Other constituents are tannins and bitter principles, 0.15 % sulphur, volatile oils, amino acids, peptides,

steroids, vit. C, B, various minerals and also a relatively high level of germanium.

The concentrations of constituents vary considerably, depending on soil, climate, seed quality and care.

The saponins are like a metaphor for the unusual configuration principles of ginseng. One gets the impression that the plant seeks to go beyond plant nature. The shape of the root points to this, as does the shape of the petals which are divided in five and like a hand. The saponins show this in the way they combine the watery and the airy element. Ginseng addresses ether body and astral body in a very special way; it helps the astral body to intervene in the ether body.

In Chinese medicine, ginseng is used to treat many different symptoms and conditions, but essentially diseases arising from a weakness in the kidneys. A yin or yang weakness in the kidneys which then gives rise to all the other problems.

In China, the powers of the kidney are the root forces in human beings. The kidney is the root of life, basis of all primary yin and yang forces in the organism on which the other organs feed. Renal functions are described as follows:

- Governs birth, growth, procreation and development
- Produces marrow, fills brain and bones
- Transformation of water
- Opens up into the ears.

The main organs to which ginseng action is directed appear to be the renal and the nervous system, renal system meaning kidneys and adrenals.

A number of studies and trials done since the 1950s have yielded interesting results. Exhibition of ginseng prior to extraordinary strain and extreme situations for humans and animals results in distinctly increased speed in learning, improved mental capacity and improved memory. Sensory perceptions show increased acuity, and subjects adapt more quickly to new situations, i.e. exhibition of ginseng permits distinctly improved adaptation to stressful situations.

Removal of the adrenal in animal experiments showed greatly reduced ginseng efficacy. Ginseng thus

Fig. 12
Dried root of 6-year-old ginseng plant



Fig. 13
Fresh 6-year-old ginseng root



clearly affects the release of hormones from the gland. It will be faster and more effective, with regeneration also more rapid.

As seen with the ginsenosides, this concerns the potential for astral activity in the watery and etheric. This basic principle pertains also to the renal system when considered from the spiritual-scientific point of view.

The kidney is the main organ of the astral body. Physiologically it primarily serves to eliminate the substances normally found in urine. By far the greater part of matter eliminated in the ultra filtrate is resorbed, going through qualitative change and vitalization in the whole process in the kidney. Considering all the substance qualities that are new in the blood of renal and adrenal veins (which has remarkable arterial quality, rich in oxygen)—we need only think of sodium, cortisone, aldosterone, the regulation of haemopoiesis and hence the activity of iron in the blood, of blood pressure, etc.—it is evident that through the functions of kidney and adrenals the blood is eminently able to enable the functions of the central nervous system and the development of human consciousness. On the other hand, the functions of the sexual organs also depend to a great extent on the ac-

tivities of the renal/adrenal system. An adrenal crisis with Addison's disease is an extreme case of loss of such production of consciousness-sustaining substance comes to be incompatible with life. Patients with Addison's disease die in hyperkalaemic cardiac arrest, consciousness having been progressively weakened. They have turning into pure plant, as it were.

Functionally, this substance-creating activity of the renal system starts with degradation and elimination brought about by the astral body. This creates the precondition for the creative activity that follows, i.e. anabolism is performed by the ether body but guided by the astral body.

The katabolic dynamics of the astral body thus go through a reversal in the renal system, calling forth an anabolic etheric activity in the sphere of these organs which on its part makes the consciousness-creating activity of astral body guided by I substantially possible in the upper human being. This gives the substance not only life in the autonomic sense but also soul quality.

Rudolf Steiner was the first to refer to and describe this constructive function of the kidney: "... that the kidney and liver system sends out radiation which is met by the sculpted forms of the head system. The kidney system sends out the forces of metabolism radially and the nervous system exists to give the organism its inner and outer forms, ... it is the sculptor" (2).

Kidney radiation is initially a dynamic, supersensible process which, however, extends into the substantially tangible anabolism in kidneys and adrenals and thus also "radiates" in substance terms into the organism as a whole, making it possible for conscious inner life to arise. This also helps us to understand the physiology of awakening (and triggering of the birth process) where the renal and adrenal system holds central significance.

It is in the nature of the kidney to mediate the combined activities of astral body and ether body within metabolism. These may, however, be disrupted, and one disorder may be referred to as weak kidney radiation.

With weak kidney radiation, the astral body is not sufficiently active from the lower human being. A whole sequence of symptoms follow: weakness, memory problems, low blood pressure, gastrointestinal disorders, etc., i.e. an asthenic constitution. This helps us to understand when ginseng is helpful.

It is particularly effective in patients

- of advanced age, i.e. above 60 years of age,
- after prolonged illness,
- after a long period of mental and physical strain,
- or also following excessive sexual activity.

The symptoms are

- physical and mental weakness with problems in concentration, forgetfulness and a degree of hearing loss
- tinnitus, vertigo, apathy, sensation of coldness in lumbar region and knees
- recurrent lumbago, oedema of legs, large volume of pale urine and decreasing vitality of sexual organs.

Ginseng 1x (5 – 10 drops) is also excellent when pre-puberty children have attention or memory deficits

Fig. 14
Fresh 6-year-old
ginseng root



without hyperactivity. Typical signs are being slow to wake up, dreaming at school, and all the symptoms listed under ADS without hyperactivity. In this case the weak kidney radiation may be considered to be a symptom of immaturity, delayed incarnation of the astral body in the renal and adrenal system (3).

The action of ginseng root extract is such that the astral forces are deeply anchored in the kidney again, which stimulates constructive function, secretion in these organs.

It therefore does not merely have a tonic, stimulant action but also calms and soothes. The powers of light and air are integrated better in the kidney again, and the "light-giving" character which the kidney has for the nervous system is strengthened. The "original creation of light" in the upper human being can be stronger again (4).

Ginseng is therefore excellent for treating weaknesses in the nervous and renal systems. These come with age and may also arise in specific situations. In the pathophysiology of spiritual anthropology, the patient's symptoms are due to weak kidney radiation.

The paper has been written following a lecture I gave at the medical course in Bad Boll in November 2006.

I would above all thank Gerg Soldner most warmly for looking through the manuscript and making valuable suggestions. I am indebted to Florafarm ginseng farm in Lower Saxony for providing the excellent photographs of ginseng (5).

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