



Strengthen Your Heart

The herb arjuna holds promise for those with cardiovascular disease. BY JENNIFER KENNEDY

Health Claims

Arjuna (*Terminalia arjuna*) is used to treat cardiovascular diseases like angina, cardiomyopathy, and congestive heart failure. It is taken on its own or paired with heart disease drugs.

SUPPLEMENTAL ARJUNA

comes from the bark of a tall Indian tree. Ayurvedic doctors have used the bark to treat heart ailments for more than 300 years. The herb is just gaining recognition in America.

How It Works

Research suggests that compounds in arjuna called saponin glycosides enhance your heart's pumping action. The bark contains calcium and magnesium as well, which may play a role in improving muscle function. The antioxidants in the bark strengthen your veins and may prevent heart disease.

Evidence

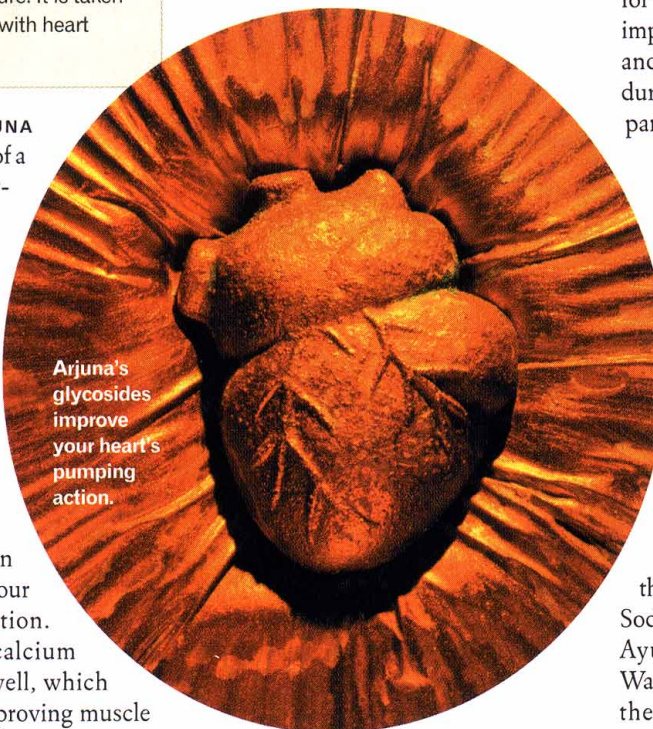
Several small clinical studies conducted in India support arjuna's use for heart ailments.

In a clinical trial published in the *Journal of the Association of Physicians of India* in 1999, researchers gave 17 patients with stable angina pectoris either an Ayurvedic formula containing arjuna or the angina drug isosorbide mononitrate. The arjuna formula reduced the frequency of angina attacks from an average of 79 per week to an average of 29 per week. Both groups of patients experienced a

reduction in symptoms like elevated heart rate and blood pressure.

A 1997 study in the *Indian Heart Journal* suggests that arjuna is effective for weakened heart muscles. In it, 24

rate (a desirable effect) than those who took a placebo. Symptoms like fatigue, high blood pressure, and frequent heart contractions also improved. All 12 patients went on taking arjuna for about two years. Ten continued to improve for two to three more months and maintained those improvements during the entire study. The other two participants died from heart disease.



Arjuna's glycosides improve your heart's pumping action.

How to Take It

Arjuna is so new in this country that it's not yet found in most stores, but it is sold on websites like www.vitaminlife.com and www.smallflower.com.

For cardiovascular problems, take 1,500 mg of arjuna divided into three doses daily for three to four weeks. Then gradually increase your daily dose to 3,000 mg (also divided into three doses); you can stay at this dose indefinitely, says Virender Sodhi, M.D., N.D., a naturopath and Ayurvedic physician in Bellevue, Wash. This dose is more effective than the smaller doses used in studies, he says.

Caveats

Arjuna appears to be safe. Consult your doctor before taking arjuna if you already take heart medication or if you are pregnant.

The Bottom Line

Centuries of anecdotal evidence support arjuna's ability to treat heart ailments. And the studies that have been conducted on it, while small, are promising.

Jennifer Kennedy is a freelance writer in the Boston area.

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