Devil’s Claw, *Harpagophytum procumbens*, belongs to the sesame seed family (Pedaliaceae), and is named after the distinctive claw-like hooks that cover its fruit. An herbaceous plant native to the Kalahari savanna of Southern Africa, the Namibian steppes and Madagascar, Devil’s Claw was first introduced to Europe in the early 1900s.

Unlike other plants, the Devil’s Claw does not have a distinctive aroma, but it contains compounds that impart it with its characteristic bitter taste. A leafy perennial with branching roots and shoots, Devil’s Claw also has secondary roots (tubers), that grow out of the main roots. Both the roots and tubers are used medicinally for their potent, though distinct, therapeutic benefits.

For centuries now, the Devil’s Claw has played a considerable role in African folk medicine. In fact, the people of the Kalahari have long relied on Devil’s Claw as a medicinal plant to treat a wide range of illnesses such as joint pain, digestive conditions, blood disorders, to reduce fever, as a general analgesic, and to relieve various pregnancy complaints.

The chemical constituents contained within Devil’s Claw are thought to help support joint health and bolster the integrity of connective tissue. It has been shown to be particularly useful in the treatment of arthritic and rheumatic conditions, back pain, inflammation of the body, general aches and pains in the muscles and joints.

In an effort to elucidate its various therapeutic benefits, considerable scientific investigation has been done on Devil’s Claw’s individual constituents. These have shown that a group of compounds in the Devil’s Claw root called iridoid glucosides, have extremely potent anti-inflammatory properties. The root has also been shown to contain several other anti-inflammatory compounds, as well as flavonoids and phytosterols, each with distinct antioxidant, choleretic and antispasmodic properties.

Today Devil’s Claw root is primarily used to relieve arthritic pain. Indeed, the herb is approved by ESCOP (European Scientific Cooperative on Phytotherapy) for the treatment of painful arthritis, tendinitis, loss of appetite and dyspepsia. Devil’s Claw is also approved as a non-prescription medicine by the German Commission E, to relieve arthritis, lower back, knee and hip pain. It is also used fairly regularly to treat a number of ailments including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, bursitis, tendonitis, loss of appetite and digestive disorders.

It should be noted that caution applies for those on blood thinning medication, as there appears to be a risk of increased bleeding when Devil’s Claw is taken concomitantly with anticoagulant drugs, such as warfarin (coumadin) and heparin.

**Pathologies**

**Arthritis / Joint conditions / Gout / Pain conditions:** Current use of Devil’s Claw in the Western world has focused primarily on its application in painful conditions of the musculo-skeletal system. It is frequently found in prescriptions for arthritis of different sorts, for rheumatic complaints and for low back pain, especially associated with spondylosis.
Over the years, several well-designed and meticulously recorded clinical studies have demonstrated the efficacy of Devil’s Claw in the treatment of inflammatory conditions. A particularly telling French double-blind, randomized study compared Devil’s Claw to a popularly prescribed anti-inflammatory agent (diacerein) in 122 patients with hip and knee osteoarthritis over a period of 4 months. Upon conclusion, the Devil’s Claw extract proved to be just as effective as the anti-inflammatory agent, with much better tolerance and little to no potential side effects. Interestingly, a subsequent three-year placebo-controlled study found diacerein, despite its popularity and widespread use, was actually ineffective at reducing osteoarthritis symptoms in the long term.

GASTROINTESTINAL CONDITIONS (GASTRIC/DUODENAL ULCERS, DYSPEPSIA, HEARTBURN): Devil’s claw is frequently used in alternative medicine as a digestive tonic for the relief of constipation, diarrhea, flatulence and many other conditions involving the GI tract. It has been shown that Devil’s Claw supplementation improves the absorption of nutrients from the gut, resulting in the body being better nourished on all levels. The characteristic bitter taste of Devil’s Claw is central to its GI effects, improving the function of the liver by helping it absorb nutrients more effectively and helping support cleansing and detoxification processes. Devil’s Claw has also shown to stimulate bile secretion from the gallbladder, thereby easing conditions such as constipation, bloating and flatulence. More recent research has found Devil’s Claw to improve conditions of the upper duodenum and pancreas and to cause a marked reduction in cholesterol levels.

APPETITE: Studies have analyzed the GHS-R1a (ghrelin) receptor activating potential of Harpagophytum procumbens, popularly known as Devil’s Claw, and its effect on food intake in vivo. Ghrelin is a stomach-derived peptide that has been identified as the only circulating hunger hormone that exerts a potent orexigenic effect via activation of its receptor, the growth hormone secretagogue receptor (GHS-R1a). Hence, the ghrelinergic system represents a promising target to treat obesity and obesity-related diseases. Exposure to H. procumbens extract demonstrated a significant increased cellular calcium influx, and a significant anorexigenic effect observed in following peripheral administration of H. procumbens extract. Based on this data, researchers conclude that Devil’s Claw root extract is a potential novel source for potent anti-obesity bioactives (appetite control).

CONCOMITANT PRODUCTS

CONCOMITANT PRODUCTS: Devil’s Claw has been a popular product for the treatment of musculoskeletal and joint conditions for a long time. While often used as a standalone, it is also classically found in various combination formulations. It combines particularly well with Glucosamine Sulfate, N-Acetyl glucosamine, Chondroitin, Undenatured Collagen, Silica, MSM, Hyaluronic Acid, Serrapeptase, Systemic enzymes and Eggshell Membrane, among others.