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# HERBCLIP

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FILE: Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

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RE: **Nettle Monograph**

Bombardelli, E. and P. Morazzoni. *Urtica dioica* L. *Fitoterapia*, 1997, Vol.48 (5), pp. 387-402.

The above-ground portion of common nettle or stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica* L.) has been used as a medicinal plant since ancient times. It grows throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia and North and South America. In Europe, the nettle plant is widely used in popular medicine as a diuretic, astringent, antihemorrhagic, expectorant, and the treatment of arthritis, rheumatism and chronic skin disease. Nettle preparations are used for topical application to treat seborrhea, dandruff and for preventing hair loss. The German Commission E recognizes it as a supportive therapy for rheumatic ailments and inflammatory diseases of the lower urinary tract. This review discusses the pharmacologically active components of the plant and its medical applications.

*U. dioica* root extracts are used to treat urinary tract disorders associated with slight to moderate benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), a slow, progressive enlargement of the prostate gland. Because of the complex composition of *Urtica* extracts, standardization is difficult. Many active constituents, such as phytosterols, pentacyclic triterpenes, lignans, coumarin, ceramides and hydroxy fatty acids have been found in lipid soluble fraction of the plant; polysaccharides and lectin have been found in the water-soluble fraction. Both lipid- and water-soluble extracts of the root are used in therapy. Various constituents in *U. dioica* root extracts have been found to affect steroid metabolism, have an anti-inflammatory effect, have an antiprostatic effect, affect the level of circulating hormones in the blood and possibly act as anticancer agents.

In clinical studies, the use of nettle root has been proven to significantly reduce nocturia (frequent urination during the night) and improve maximum urinary flow among men with mild to moderate BPH. Side effects were infrequent and mild and generally involved gastrointestinal complaints. In one study a combination of nettle root and *Pygeum africanum* bark extract was compared to finasteride (Proscar®), a drug often prescribed for BPH. The herbal combination was found to be as effective as finasteride, but with less adverse effects. —*Densie Webb, PhD*

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