

### 3.2.2.3.7.11 Damiana - why enhancing estrogens is not advisable

Damiana, *turnera diffusa* by scientific name, is yet another herbal medication, which is sold as an aphrodisiac. It has been claimed that it is more effective in women than in men, but allegedly can be of help for men, too. Unlike what is the case for tongkat ali, there is little modern scientific research on damiana.

Of course, there are "empirical" ethnobotanical references reaching back decades and even centuries, though less than for the vaginal tightness herbs kayu rapat and daun sirih. And the empirical references for the aphrodisiac value of damiana are far less definite and affirmative than for the other two herbals mentioned above.

I (as a man) have tested damiana myself. It has no effect on me, just as ginseng has no effect on me. I have also talked with women who have tried it. I don't know of anybody on whom it would have had an effect in a range of just 10 percent of the effect of tongkat ali, kayu rapat, or daun sirih.

Apart from their ineffectiveness on me, there is another parallelism between damiana and ginseng. Surprisingly enough, both are estrogenic substances. D. Zava, C. Dollbaum, and M. Blen of Aeron Biotechnology, San Leandro, California, USA, conducted a study, the results of which were published under the title "Estrogen and progesterin bioactivity of foods, herbs, and spices" in the scientific Journal Proc Soc Exp Biol Med in March 1998.

The authors summarized the results as follows:

"In this study we report on the content and bioactivity of plant (phyto) estrogens and progestins in various foods, herbs, and spices, before and after human consumption. Over 150 herbs traditionally used by herbalists for treating a variety of health problems were extracted and tested for their relative capacity to compete with estradiol and progesterone binding to intracellular receptors for progesterone (PR) and estradiol (ER) in intact human breast cancer cells. The six highest ER-binding herbs that are commonly consumed were soy, licorice, red clover, thyme, tumeric, hops, and verbena. The six highest PR-binding herbs and spices commonly consumed were oregano, verbena, tumeric, thyme, red clover and damiana."

It is already known that estrogenic substances can have some beneficial effects on the health of men as well as women. In some scientific studies, it has been shown that regardless of the age of adult men, higher estrogen levels mean protection against heart disease and stroke.

What these studies do not mention is the fact that the same phytoestrogens that protect against heart attacks also have the power to greatly interrupt the sexual appetite and sexual function of men.

I am not particularly afraid of dying of a heart attack. I will die of some cause anyway, and a quick death from a heart attack is probably better than a slow death from cancer or some other prolonged ailment.

What I don't want is a disturbance of my sexual function for as long as I am alive. I have, therefore, decided against substances such as damiana.

And I believe that even for women, phytoestrogens are ill-advised.

It has been known for decades that both sexes produce both so-called sex hormones, estrogens and testosterone (with the main estrogen, estradiol, actually metabolized from testosterone by the enzyme aromatase). However, men's testosterone levels are about

ten times as high as those of women.

In both sexes, testosterone is essential for sex drive. Men lacking in testosterone usually are sexually sluggish or impotent, while raising the testosterone levels in women just slightly can make a very, very big difference for sexual appetite. This is why many women react so well on tongkat ali, even if they take dosages much lower than men do.

In general, phytoestrogens are credited with disrupting sexual functions in mammalian males, rather than supporting them. For example, cattle grazing on fields of red clover (a phytoestrogen) will experience a marked decline in fertility.