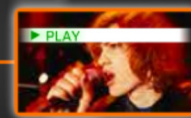




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[Ayurveda's Triphala Emerging as Cancer Fighter](#)

By Francis C. Assisi

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One of the commonest and cheapest of Indian ayurvedic medical formulations - Triphala - is now emerging as one of the most potent anticancer agents. This is the conclusion of scientists from a number

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of prominent research institutions in India as well as abroad, confirming some of the earlier studies conducted at Amala Cancer Research Center by Dr Ramadas Kuttan and associates since 2002.

In a study entitled 'Potential of traditional ayurvedic formulation, Triphala, as a novel anticancer drug' published in the January 2006 issue of Cancer Letters, scientists at the Radiation Biology and Health Sciences Division, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, found that Triphala "possessed the ability to induce cytotoxicity (cell death) in tumor cells but spared the normal cells."

The scientists explain that the differential effect of Triphala on normal and tumor cells seems to

be related to its ability to evoke differential response in intracellular ROS (Reactive Oxygen Species) generation. Conclusion: "The differential response of normal and tumor cells to Triphala in vitro and the substantial regression of transplanted tumor in mice fed with Triphala points to its potential use as an anticancer drug for clinical treatment."

Similarly, a December 2005 report in the Journal of Experimental and Clinical Cancer Research from the Radiation and Cancer Biology Laboratory at Jawaharlal Nehru University noted that Triphala was effective in reducing tumor incidences and increasing the antioxidant status of animals. The authors claim that theirs is "probably the first report on cancer chemopreventive potential of Triphala." They also note "it was important to observe that Triphala was more effective in reducing tumor incidences compared to its individual constituents."

Another report from the Department of Botanical Sciences, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, found that "Triphala" showed a significant cytotoxic effect on cancer cell-lines and the effect was similar on all cancer cell lines used in this study." The results, reported in the Journal of Ethnopharmacology in February 2005, reveal that the results may be due to the action of gallic acid-a major polyphenol observed in "Triphala". The same authors had previously reported that Triphala "had promising antimutagenic/anticarcinogenic potential."

In February 2006, scientists from the Dr. A.L. Mudaliar Post-Graduate Institute of Basic Medical Sciences, University of Madras, Taramani Campus, reported supplementation with Triphala prevents the noise-stress induced changes in the antioxidant as well as cell-mediated immune response in rats. What this means is that Triphala is an anti stress agent. This study concludes that Triphala restores the noise-stress induced changes because of its antioxidant properties.

Antioxidant studies conducted at The Radiation Chemistry and Chemical Dynamics Division, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in Trombay revealed that all three constituents of triphala are active and they exhibit slightly different activities under different conditions and the mixture, triphala, is expected to be more efficient due to the combined activity of the individual components. The findings were reported in the July 2005 issue of Phytotherapy Research. Two months later, scientists from BARC reported on the radio-protective ability of a component of Triphala.

Similar results were also reported from Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, in the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, when scientists claimed that "Triphala, an ayurvedic rasayana drug, protects mice against radiation-induced lethality by free-radical scavenging." They concluded that "Triphala provided protection against both gastrointestinal and hemopoetic death"

In Phytotherapy Research, July 2004, scientists from Kasturba Medical College reported that certain traditional Indian polyherbal crude drugs, including Triphala, may be potent and novel therapeutic agents for scavenging of (Nitrous Oxide) NO, and thereby inhibit the pathological conditions caused by excessive generation of NO and its oxidation product, peroxyntirite. The scientists say these findings may also help to explain, at least in part, the pharmacological activities like rejuvenating, adaptogenic, anti-infection, anti-inflammatory, cardioprotective and neuroprotective activities of these traditional, clinically used non toxic drugs.

Triphala, according to Dr Michael Tierra, a practicing herbalist and author of *The Wonders of Triphala: Ayurvedic Formula for Internal Purification*, is "one of the safest and most strengthening of the cleansing herb formulas; it gently promotes internal detoxification of all conditions of stagnation and excess while improving digestion and assimilation."

He adds: "It has been shown to be an effective blood purifier that stimulates bile secretion as it detoxifies the liver. Triphala benefits circulation, improves digestion and regulates elimination without causing any laxative dependency. Triphala is also taken for all eye disorders including the treatment of conjunctivitis, progressive myopia, early stages of glaucoma and cataracts. Triphala can be highly effective in removing stagnation of both the liver and intestines and is one of the greatest and most popular rejuvenators in ayurvedic medicine; it helps to aid the body's natural detoxification and elimination processes without weakening systems or becoming habit forming."

No wonder, observes Dr. Tierra, in India there is a saying comparing the importance of triphala to that of a mother. In 'A Botanical Approach to the Treatment of Cancer' Tierra claims that Triphala is a herbal formula to maintain balanced elimination and detoxification. He notes that Triphala "is widely regarded as a purgative and laxative but in fact it is considered a rasayana and rejuvenator. Its special value, therefore, is both as a regulator of elimination as well as rejuvenator of the whole body."

What is Triphala

Triphala is a combination of the dried fruits of *Terminalia chebula*, *Terminalia belerica*, and *Emblica officinalis* in equal proportions. These are popularly known in India as harad, behada and amla. Harada and behada have a warm energy, while amla is cool. Triphala, being a combination of all three, is therefore balanced, making it useful as an internal cleansing, detoxifying formula for everyone including more sensitive type individuals and vegetarians.

This formula and its individual ingredients are highly valued in Ayurveda, being compared to a "good manager of the house," aiding digestion, nutrient absorption and body metabolism.

According to Ayurvedic practitioners, daily use of triphala promotes normal appetite, good digestion, the increase of red blood cells and hemoglobin, and removal of undesirable fat. Triphala is very beneficial for creating a favorable chemical environment for the proliferation of beneficial intestinal bacteria and an unfavorable environment for non-beneficial intestinal bacteria. Of primary importance is the use of triphala as a bowel regulator. It is considered as safe as food and is not habit forming, even when taken on a daily basis. Since triphala is a tonic, cleanser and blood purifier, there is still one other important use for it and that is as a strengthener of the eyes, useful for cataracts, conjunctivitis and glaucoma. Triphala can be used as daily eyewash to strengthen vision, counteract many eye defects and eliminate redness and soreness.

Practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine claim that Triphala will also eliminate what is called deficient heat in Chinese medicine. This is a feeling of heat and burning on the chest, legs, palms and/or soles of the feet, all representing a B-vitamin deficiency in Western medicine. Triphala taken regularly will promote absorption and utilization of the B vitamins and will completely relieve the symptoms of deficient heat.

According to Dr Subhuti Dharmananda, Director, Institute for Traditional Medicine, Portland, Oregon, most of the "rasayana" (rejuvenation and longevity tonics) of Ayurveda are made with amla as an ingredient, and often with Triphala as a base to which numerous other herbs are added. Emblic myrobalans is the main ingredient of Chyawanprash, one of the important rasayanas and the principal Ayurvedic remedy currently produced in India (accounting for well over half the sales of the Ayurvedic medicines industry).

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