

Ginseng

What is Ginseng?

There are three different herbs commonly called Ginseng: Asian or Korean Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*), American Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) and Siberian "Ginseng" (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*). The latter herb is actually not Ginseng at all, but the Russian scientists responsible for promoting it believe that it functions identically. "White" Ginseng root (unprocessed) is sometimes bleached and then dried, while "red" Ginseng is prepared from white Ginseng by various processing methods, such as steaming the fresh root before drying. There are many types and grades of Ginseng, depending on the origin, root maturity, parts of the root used, and methods of raw material preparation or processing. Korean Ginseng has the most clinical potential and is the focus of this discussion.



Why recommend administration of Ginseng to my pet?

In Chinese medicine, Korean Ginseng is used as a Qi tonic to boost vitality. Likewise, Ginseng is used for the same purposes by veterinarians, often as a component of a larger herbal formula. Some practitioners use Ginseng in any weakened pet, to build resistance, reduce susceptibility to illness, and promote health and longevity. There are some more specific actions, however, of Korean Ginseng that can guide its use. For example, one of the most recent laboratory studies demonstrated that Korean Ginseng reduces liver cell rupture and minimizes fibrosis during liver repair.

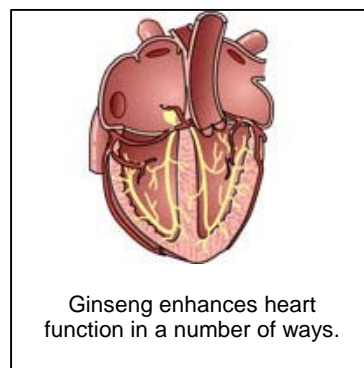
One of the most important uses of Ginseng in Chinese medicine is in injectable form as a component of a formula to treat hypovolemic shock (shock caused from decreased volume of blood). Ginseng does, indeed, enhance heart function, by:

- Increasing blood flow to heart muscle
- Reducing heart muscle damage during infarctions (heart attacks)
- Reducing certain rhythm disturbances enhancing circulation

A general effect of so-called Qi tonics in Chinese medicine is the lowering of fasting blood glucose (sugar), making Ginseng worth considering as an adjunct to the management of diabetes mellitus.

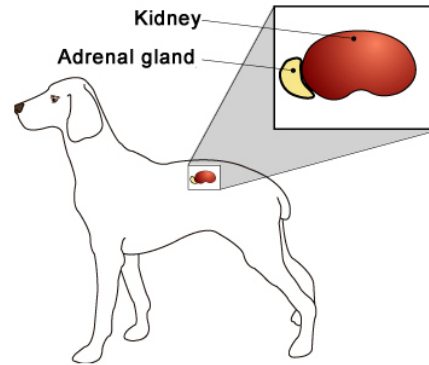
Probably the most profound hormonal effect of Ginseng, however, is its effect on the adrenal gland, making it of tremendous relevance in the management of refractory Addison's disease. Regarding the stimulation of adrenal function, Ginseng helps one adapt to external stressors by:

- Increasing cortisol (stress hormone) release in acute stress
- Reducing cortisol release in chronic stress
- Heightening alertness at rest



With a heightened sense of alertness comes improved cognitive (mental) function. A placebo controlled study of 20 healthy volunteer humans showed that Ginseng significantly enhanced short term memory.

Together with Licourice root extract, Korean Ginseng is arguably the most powerful adrenal gland stimulant in existence. Licourice root stimulates both parts of the adrenal gland and increases the duration of the adrenal hormone effects. Thus Ginseng and Licourice root are routinely effective in the management of refractory hypoadrenocorticism, or Addison's disease.



How much experience is there with the use of Ginseng in pets?

As is true with many herbs, Ginseng has been used for many years by practicing herbalists. There are no controlled studies in pets.

What species of animals are being treated regularly with Ginseng?

Ginseng is commonly prescribed to dogs and cats. It may be of particular benefit in the management of Addison's disease, congestive heart failure, diabetes mellitus, chronic low grade hepatitis and perhaps even cognitive dysfunction in dogs and cats. It can be used to minimize stress in any animal.

How safe is Ginseng?

There are no recognized side effects of Ginseng, but based on traditional herbal lore, the herb should be used with caution in animals with:

- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Bleeding disorders
- Hyperexcitability
- Acute infections
- High fevers
- Patients treated with insulin

Veterinary advice should be sought when using Ginseng long term.



Where do I obtain Ginseng and do I need a prescription?

Your veterinarian may have preferred supplements that he or she will recommend. Pet owners are cautioned against buying supplements without knowledge of the manufacturer, as supplements are not highly regulated and some supplements may not contain the labelled amount of ingredients. A prescription is not needed for Ginseng.

This client information sheet is based on material written by Steve Marsden, DVM ND MSOM LAc DipICH AHG, Shawn Messonnier, DVM and Cheryl Yuill, DVM, MSc, CVH.

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