



20th Iranian Pharmacy Students Seminar
12-14 April, 2017, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Faculty of Pharmacy

IPSS20

Herbal Medicine for Low Back Pain: A Cochrane Review

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Introduction and Background: Low back pain is a common condition and a substantial economic burden in industrialized societies(1). A large proportion of patients with chronic low back pain use complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and/or visit CAM practitioners. Several herbal medicines have been purported for use in low back pain(2).

Methods: The following databases were searched: Medline (1966 to April 2003), Embase (1980 to April 2003), Cochrane Controlled Trials Register (Issue 1, 2003), and Cochrane Complementary Medicine (CM) field Trials Register. Additionally, reference lists in review articles, guidelines, and in the retrieved trials were checked.

Results: Ten trials were included in this review. Two high-quality trials utilizing *Harpagophytum procumbens* (Devil's claw) found strong evidence for short-term improvements in pain and rescue medication for daily doses standardized to 50 mg or 100 mg Harpagoside with another high-quality trial demonstrating relative equivalence to 12.5 mg per day of Rofecoxib. Two moderate-quality trials utilizing *Salix Alba* (White willow bark) found moderate evidence for short-term improvements in pain and rescue medication for daily doses standardized to 120 mg or 240 mg Salicin with an additional trial demonstrating relative equivalence to 12.5 mg per day of Rofecoxib.

Discussion and Conclusions: *Harpagophytum procumbens*, *Salix Alba*, and *Capsicum frutescens* seem to reduce pain more than placebo. Additional trials testing these herbal medicines against standard treatments will clarify their equivalence in terms of efficacy.

Keywords: Low back pain, Devil's claw, Rofecoxib, Salicin, Harpagophytum procumbens, Salix Alba, Capsicum frutescens

References:

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