Usnea

Usnea barbata

Family: Usneaceae

Names: Beard Lichen, Old Man’s beard, bear lichen; Usnée barbue, Barbe de capucin (French); Bart-Flechte (German)

Description: Usnea species are lichens, gray-green hairy things growing from trees. They grow on alders, old fruit trees and others. Further south of here along the coastal mountains, Usnea hangs in long strands from live Oaks and is often called Old Man's Beard. The fibers should be round as opposed to flat and gray-green. If you use your thumbnail to scrape off the outer portion of a "stem" there will be a slender white cord inside. When the lichen is moist, the cord will be elastic.

History: Because of its bitter taste and ability to stimulate digestion, usnea was historically used to treat indigestion. It was also reportedly used over 3,000 years ago in ancient Egypt, Greece, and China to treat infections.

Constituents: Usnic acid gives usnea its bitter taste and also acts as an antibiotic. Usnea also contains mucilage, which can be helpful in easing irritating coughs. Preliminary test-tube studies suggested an anticancer activity for usnic acid

Properties: alterative, antibacterial, antifungal

Energetics: sweet, cold

Meridians/Organs affected: lungs, liver, colon

Medicinal Uses: It has been shown to contain a strong tuberculostatic antibiotic, usnic acid, which, together with mucilage, is also found in some other lichens. It is affective against most streptococcus and staphylococcus infections, and for trichomonas in women (take in tincture form every two hours for a week). It is also good applied full strength to infected cuts, fungus infections, impetigo, gastrointestinal tract and urinary tract and streptococcus infections.

Usnea kills microbes by disrupting cellular metabolism, unlike other antibiotics which disrupt structural components of bacterial cells. Human cells are not affected. Usnea does not kill all bacteria, such as "gram-negative" microbes found in the gut. These naturally occurring bacteria are beneficial to
our health. Unlike taking prescription antibiotics which kill the disease-causing bacteria as well as the natural flora in the vagina and gut, the use of Usnea does not adversely affect our natural body ecology.

Generally, Usnea can be used for infections externally and internally caused by fungi (like ringworm or athlete's foot), yeast, gram-positive bacteria (as in strep throat, pneumonia), tuberculosis, or vaginal infections caused by trichomonas. An extract (tincture) is a convenient way to take Usnea. It can be diluted in a small amount of water for external application on the skin or for a vaginal douche. Usnea is especially effective for acute bacterial infections when taken in extract form every two hours. Many have also had great success using Usnea for sinusitis, bronchitis, abscesses, pneumonia and colds when nothing else has worked.

**Solvent:** alcohol

**Dosage:** Usnea, in capsule form, can be taken in the amount of 100 mg of the lichen three times per day. Tincture can be taken in the amount of 3–4 ml three times per day.

**Formulas:**

**For candida, fungal and yeast**

2 parts Echinacea purpurea root
2 parts black walnut hulls
3 parts usnea
2 parts spilanthes leaves and flowers
1 part goldenseal root
30-60 drops, mixed in a small amount of water, and taken orally, three to six times per day.

**Immune Support Tincture**

4 parts Usnea
2 parts Echinacea root
1 part licorice root
1 part calendula
1 part Thuja
2 parts goldenseal root

Take 25-50 drops of tincture mixed with a small amount of water orally, 2-3 times per day, 5-6 days a week, until the infection is cleared up.

**Toxicity:** There are no known side effects of usnea, and it has not been reported to interfere with the action of common medications. It is considered safe for use in children.

**References:**


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