

# COMFREY

THE MISUNDERSTOOD HERB

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Thousands of years of success stories place comfrey in the running as one of the finest healing herbs ever to find its way to humanity.



Bio

**C**omfrey has been in the herbal realm since the armies of Alexander the Great with thousands of years' worth of use for humans and animals alike.

*Symphytum officinale*, the Latin name for comfrey, is comprised of *sympthuo*, meaning “to make grow together” and *officinale*, which means storage. According to Dr John R Christopher, a leader in herbology, “one of the main constituents of comfrey is allantoin, which is a specific cell proliferant. It has the property of multiplying healthy cells and not malignant cells.” That’s pretty impressive for an herb.

So today, why has it been categorized as “poison” by governments all over the world?

Easy. Comfrey is one of those plants that works too well for the comfort of the pharmaceutical industry. Comfrey repairs tissue and bone and relieves pain and inflammation. It’s been evidenced to effectively eliminate malignant tumors. Drugs for these same ailments are widely held under the strict control of the pharmaceutical industry.

All the bad press started back in the 1970s in Australia. The newspapers were awash with the news that comfrey kills. This came after centuries of use with no adverse side effects whatsoever. What’s this all about?

### IF BIG PHARMA CAN'T MAKE MONEY

It’s about the pharmaceutical industry who went looking for one single constituent of the plant so they could patent it and use it as a drug. When they found out they couldn’t synthesize the effects of the whole plant, they declared the plant poison so that nobody would use it.

Comfrey contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids. (PAs) This one constituent is what the fuss is all about. PAs can cause liver problems, no doubt about it; however there are many other herbs and shrubs that contain higher amounts of PAs than common comfrey does. In one study by Dr C Culvenor, baby rats were injected with an amount of the isolated alkaloid (PA) equivalent to a human eating 19,880 leaves. Keep in mind these babies had the isolated PAs injected into their

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stomach cavity and were not allowed to ingest the whole leaf. Yes, they developed liver tumors but was it an accurate account of consumption of the whole plant? No, not by any means.

## COMFREY HAS MANY CONSTITUENTS

What isn't being said is that for one element of comfrey that can cause damage, there are over 100 other constituents that actually nourish the liver. Comfrey contains its own antidote. Herbs are historically more beneficial and have fewer, if any, side effects when the whole plant or root is used.

Let's look at it this way: when a body sheds damaged cells, they need to be eliminated through the proper channels in the body. That means they have to pass through the liver, as they are now in the blood. It's during this process that it's most important to have the whole plant, with all its components, to effectively do the job without adverse side effects.

There have been many studies done that show extended use of comfrey produces no liver damage whatsoever, but these are considered anecdotal and not "scientific" enough for the governing bodies to respect. In a world full of science and microscopes, one would think there would be more scientific documentation on herbs. But the fact is, in today's commercial world, testing is very expensive and no money can be made from such evidence. It's most likely that quite the opposite would be proven. If whole herbs were proven scientifically to be of value, and not just one isolated constituent of the herb, the pharmaceutical companies would surely be out of business.

## A LEAF A DAY

The fact is, comfrey is a perfectly balanced collection of allantoin, alkaloids, chlorophyll, mucin, saponins, inulin and a vast amount of minerals and vitamins, including B vitamins. It's one of the only plants that can pull B-12 from the soil. The high nutrient content is the result of the very deep root system that is always looking for moisture, and along the way picks up nutrients deep in the soil. "A leaf a day keeps illness away," says Dr H E Kirschner in his book, *Nature's Healing Grasses*, which has four chapters dedicated to comfrey.

In *The Safety of Comfrey*, J A Pembrey states, "There appear to be no cases, in medical history or veterinary records, of humans or animals showing clinical symptoms of pyrrolizidine alkaloid poisoning from the consumption of comfrey." Lawrence D. Hills stated in the foreword of the book that "The Commonwealth Bureau of Animal Health carried out a computer search through their records of 137,000 cases of stock poisoning by plants, since 1972, and found only one concerning case: a case of comfrey-nitrate poisoning in pigs from excessive use of fertilizers in Germany."

There have been many studies done on the effects of PAs, none of which focus strictly on comfrey. There are dozens of articles on the internet with stories, both old and new, touting the wonders of comfrey. In Australia, thousands of people contacted Parliament and signed petitions in favor of comfrey but they were told they had to prove it was safe before the ruling would be changed. Hundreds of years of testimony were not enough.

Is comfrey safe? Webster's dictionary's defines safe: 1: free from harm or risk: unhurt, 2a: secure from threat of danger, harm, or loss, 3: affording safety or security from danger, risk, or difficulty,



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4a: not threatening danger: harmless, b: unlikely to produce controversy or contradiction, 5: not likely to take risks: cautious.

With this definition in mind we would have to conclude that no, comfrey is not safe. However, using the same definition, would any medication qualify as “safe”? There is always a risk of an allergic reaction in any herb or medication. We need to ask “do the results outweigh the risks?” and “what is an acceptable risk?” Clearly non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) have risks, yet they are sold over the counter by the millions, and there a hundred thousand reported toxic exposures every year.

**WHAT'S THE ANSWER?**

So what is the answer and how can we use herbs safely? Well, it's very important to learn about herb safety before you begin to use them on your own. It's not acceptable that because herbs are “natural” they are not harmful. Water is natural but you can still drown in it. Unfortunately, many learn just enough about herbs to get into trouble. There are herbal courses you could take, from beginner to master classes. You don't need to be a master herbalist to learn a few things that may be helpful to you and your family (pets included). But it is important to know enough to be safe, and to rely on a qualified herbalist to help you.

One example is to synergistically blend comfrey leaf with other herbs that will work as a team. Each herb can effectively buffer the effects of other herbs until the desired results occur.

Thousands of years of success stories place comfrey in the running as one of the finest healing herbs ever to find its way to humanity. This statement is not made lightly. The FDA considers millennia of testimonials to be “anecdotal” rather than scientific evidence. In fact, the testimonials are evidence; they just haven't been proven under a microscope - yet. Evidently comfrey is doing something right.

I'll leave you with one final thought. Prior to the latest studies release, comfrey was set to become one of the largest fodder crops for agriculture. Cows do very well on it as it has over seven times more protein than soy. Soy is now the leading livestock fodder on the world market and over 80% of it is genetically modified. Just another aspect to ponder! 🌱

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