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The nervous system is what keeps everything in your body working in harmony, so that you can move throughout the world, perform your daily functions, think clearly, and maintain health inside your body. So if you want to prevent a whole host of problems, health conditions, and serious diseases, then keeping your nervous system in top shape is essential. In this article, we will cover what the nervous system is, common problems that can occur, and the 7 best herbs for nervous system health. What is the nervous system? The nervous system acts as a control center for your body. It is a complex network that carries information between your brain and your body, helping with everything from coordinating the movements of your muscles to telling your heart to stay in rhythm. It controls your sight and other senses, your muscles, the function of your internal organs, and also the way you think, feel, talk, and process the world around you. The nervous system is made up of the brain and a large network of nerves that are spread throughout the entire body. Nerves rely on chemical messengers called neurotransmitters to communicate with one another and the different parts of the body. That is how they tell each other what to do and how to react to different situations and circumstances. As a whole, the nervous system directs and organizes how you respond to the world around you, and it keeps your internal function running smoothly. When things go wrong with the nervous system It is easy for the nervous system to get out of balance, whether due to injury, inflammation, ongoing stress, oxidative damage, or imbalances in neurotransmitters. Any sort of imbalance or damage in the nervous system will result in it not functioning optimally. And when that happens, it impacts both our physical and mental states. Poor nervous system health can be at the root of several common conditions, such as: Anxiety Depression Stress Cognitive decline, concentration issues, and memory loss Sleep problems and insomnia Headaches And when things go really wrong, serious nervous system disorders can occur, such as: Alzheimer's disease Parkinson's disease Multiple Sclerosis Strokes Traumatic brain injuries Epilepsy As you can see, when your nervous system is unhealthy, damaged, or imbalanced, it can lead to many different symptoms and even serious neurodegenerative disorders. So what can you do to support your nervous system health, so that it can keep functioning like a well-oiled machine? One option is to turn to a variety of medicinal herbs to integrate into your self-care routine. 7 Herbs for nervous system health There are a large number of all-natural herbs that can be used to support nervous system health. Some are great for protecting your brain and nerves from damage, some help calm things down when you need it, and some keep your mental game sharp. Let's take a closer look at 7 of the best herbs for the nervous system: 1. Valerian root This herb has been used since ancient Greek and Roman times for treating insomnia and calming people down. It is still commonly used today for conditions like sleep disorders and anxiety. Valerian root helps calm the nervous system when it is overactive. It can do this by affecting levels of neurotransmitters involved in rest and sleep. For example, it increases the amount of a certain neurotransmitter called GABA, which has calming properties.1 2 8 That is likely why people find it helpful for battling anxiety and restless sleep.1 2 3 4 5 6 7 How it is used: You can take valerian root as a supplement or else drink it as a tea. It is best used before bedtime, as it has sedative-like effects. 2. Lemon balm Lemon balm doesn't just smell deliciously refreshing. It has also been used for over 2,000 years for complaints related to a disordered nervous system.9 Like valerian root, lemon balm can modulate the levels of certain neurotransmitters in the body, such as GABA.8 It can positively impact factors related to mood and cognitive performance, helping conditions like anxiety. It also supports children who have restlessness and concentration problems.3 10 11 Overall, valerian root can be a great option for boosting your mood and helping you think clearly. How it is used: You can take lemon balm as a supplement, or you can drink it as a tea. 3. Ashwagandha Ashwagandha is a medicinal herb commonly used in Ayurvedic medicine. It is one of the most popular adaptogenic herbs (herbs that help the body respond to stress and help it maintain balance).12 Ashwagandha is an anti-inflammatory herb and an antioxidant. This makes it very helpful for protecting the nervous system, and it has been widely studied for its treatment of nervous system disorders.12 13 14 Ashwagandha may be useful for protecting against dementia and Alzheimer's disease, and it may also boost memory and cognitive function.15 16 Additionally, ashwagandha can help promote calm and reduce anxiety.8 13 How it is used: Ashwagandha is taken as a supplement. 4. Rhodiola Rhodiola is a plant that is thought to be able to help people recover better from physical or mental strain and exhaustion.17 This makes it useful for preventing long-term damage to the nervous system and keeping us functioning at a healthy level. Rhodiola has anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective effects, can stimulate the nervous system, and may boost neurotransmitter levels.18 It has been reported to help improve cognitive function, enhance learning and memory, and support anxiety.19 It may also be useful for protecting against diseases like Alzheimer's disease, because of its many beneficial properties.3 17 18 19 How it is used: This herb is taken as a supplement. 5. Passionflower Passionflower is another great herb for the nervous system, because it has calming effects. It is traditionally used for things like sleep problems, anxiety, concentration issues, and even pain. Like some of the other herbs on this list, passionflower regulates the effect of the neurotransmitter GABA. That is likely why people report feeling more relaxed and calm with this herb, and why it may help with conditions such as insomnia.4 8 20 How it is used: Passionflower is available dried, and it can be used to make a tea. It is also available in supplement form. 6. Ginkgo biloba Extracts from the ginkgo biloba tree have long been used for medicinal purposes. Ginkgo can be helpful in improving things like anxiety, memory, cognitive function, and more. It may play a role in Alzheimer's and dementia as well.3 21 22 Ginkgo likely works by altering levels of neurotransmitters like serotonin and GABA, and also by lowering inflammation in the nervous system.4 8 23 This makes it really helpful for boosting nervous system function and preventing deterioration and damage. How it is used: Extracts from ginkgo leaf are used in tablets, capsules, and teas. 7. Chamomile Many of us are familiar with chamomile tea. It is a popular, soothing tea to sip on at bedtime. And for good reason. Chamomile tea actually impacts the nervous system in a way that helps support a healthy sleep cycle. Researchers believe that chamomile tea has certain compounds in it that react with receptors in the brain that regulate our sleep-wake cycle. Chamomile also impacts GABA (a calming neurotransmitter) and can help with relieving anxiety.8 24 25 How it is used: Chamomile is most commonly consumed as a tea before bedtime. It can also be found as a supplement or tincture. Add herbs to keep your nervous system healthy These 7 herbs for nervous system health can be great additions to your self-care routine. Whether that means sipping on chamomile tea before bed, taking a valerian root supplement to help manage your anxiety, or trying ginkgo to keep your memory sharp, there is something here for everyone. Remember, your nervous system is one of the most integral systems in your body, and it is essential for you to live a long, healthy life. Whatever you can do to help this system run smoothly will keep your brain and body happy in the long run and will be well worth your while. Along these lines, a ZYTO biocommunication scan, or bioScan, can help you discover the supplements and other wellness products that your body prefers. You can scan for items that not only support nervous system health, but overall wellness as well. Note: As with all supplements, it is always best to speak with your doctor before taking any of these herbs to ensure that they are a safe choice for you. About Chelsea Clark Chelsea Clark is a writer and certified health and wellness coach who is passionate about supporting others along their own health journeys. She enjoys helping people make positive, lasting changes so that they can live the happiest, healthiest life possible. Sources: 1. "Valerian Fact Sheet" National Institutes of Health. Ods.od.nih.org. 2. Mineo, L., C. Concerto, D. Patel, et al. "Valeriana officinalis Root Extract Modulates Cortical Excitatory Circuits in Humans." *Neurophysiology* 71, no 1 (2017): 3. Sarris, J., E. McIntyre, & D.A. Camfield. 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While no two herbs are exactly alike, herbalism does divide them into groups, based on their modern and traditional uses, properties and phytochemical constituents. This herb will look at a group of herbs called nervines, which includes all of the ingredients in our much-loved Mint Soother™ formulation, along with other herbs you likely know well. What are nervines? Nervines are herbs that offer support to the nervous system, including the brain and nerves. Your body has billions and billions of nerve cells, or neurons, including about 86 billion in your brain itself. As a reminder, your nervous system is responsible for getting messages from your brain to the rest of the body and back again. Your brain is the command center that controls feeling, talking, learning, remembering, moving and more.* Your nervous system is connected to and communicates with everything else in the body. As such, nervines are often paired with other herbs that support different systems and structures of the body. You'll commonly hear nervines discussed alongside adaptogens, a group of herbs used to support our bodies' natural responses to stress, fatigue and more.* Nervines can be divided into several groups. Two common types of nervines are: Nervine tonics offer nourishment and support for the nervous system. Examples include Albizia, Bacopa, Milky Oats and Skullcap.* Nervine relaxants provide calming support for the nervous system. Examples include California Poppy, Catnip, Chamomile, Hops, Kava, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Passionflower and Valerian.* Here's a closer look at some common nervines.* Albizia (Albizia julibrissin) is also known as Mimosa. Travel across the Southeast US in summer, and you'll see its whimsical pink and white flowers fluttering in the wind. They're light and feathery, with a pleasant fragrance. The trees are technically an invasive species in the South, introduced back in the late 1700s by French botanist Andre Michaux. They're actually native to China, where the tree is known as Silk Plant or 'the Tree of Happiness.' The bark has long been used in traditional Chinese herbalism to calm the mind and heart. The bark and flower traditionally were used in times of grief. Take one look at the delicate pink flowers and you can't help but smile!* Botanical Name: Albizia julibrissin Common Name(s): Albizia, Silk Tree, Mimosa Tree, Pinyin; He Huan Pi Plant Family: Fabaceae Native Habitat: China, but now found in Europe and North America Parts Used: Bark Use(s): Stabilizing support for the nervous system.* Known commonly as "Happiness Bark" for its use calming the mind and heart.* Supports mental calmness and traditionally used in times of grief.* Flavor Profile: Slightly bittersweet and acrid, woody Though Bacopa (Bacopa monnieri) is an Ayurvedic herb native to India, it also grows wild in areas of Texas and other southern states. Also known as Water Hyssop, it's a perennial "creeping" herb that loves warm, wet climates. It has been used in Ayurveda since the 6th century to support healthy brain function, and Vedic scholars relied on it when memorizing sacred texts. Bacopa is so revered that one of its common names is Brahmi, named after the Hindu god Brahma.* Botanical Name: Bacopa monnieri Common Name(s): Bacopa, Brahmi, Herb-of-Grace, Indian Pennywort, Water Hyssop Plant Family: Plantaginaceae Native Habitat: Australia and India, East Asia and the United States Parts Used: Herb Use(s): Supports healthy brain function.* Flavor Profile: Bitter, slightly salty and sour California Poppy (Eschscholzia californica) is native to California, Oregon, Washington and the southwestern United States, and it has been naturalized in many other areas around the world. Though California Poppy is generally grown as a perennial in temperate climates, here at Herb Pharm, we grow it as an annual, as we harvest the whole plant every year. The vibrant blossoms are one of our favorite sights in summer, especially as sundown approaches, when their flower petals begin to close. California Poppy is traditionally used for calming support for the nervous system.* Native American tribes used this herb for centuries, in herbalism and as food, and in some regions placed California Poppy flowers under their children's beds to help them sleep. It's also the official state flower of California. Botanical Name: Eschscholzia californica Common Name(s): California poppy Plant Family: Papaveraceae Native Habitat: Western US Parts Used: Whole flowering plant Use(s): Traditionally used for calming support for the nervous system.* Flavor Profile: Bitter with mild aromatic notes As the name suggests, Catnip (Nepeta cataria) is beloved by our feline friends. However, this herb is not only for cats. We think it's underappreciated by humans — and there's plenty of Catmint to share! (And if you struggle to keep deer or aphids out of your garden, consider planting Catnip, as it repels them both.) Catnip loves the sun and is an aromatic perennial like many of its Mint family relatives. If you've ever seen a cat in the presence of Catnip, you might be surprised to learn that it is categorized as a relaxing nervine for humans. Catnip is stimulating when cats sniff it, but relaxing when they eat it!* Traditionally Catnip was consumed as a tea across Europe, to offer calming support to mind and body. It is sometimes combined with Peppermint, which soothes indigestion and occasional nausea, or Lemon Balm, which provides support for nervousness and over-excitement.* Catnip is great for kids, too. You'll find it in both Kids Tummy TLC™ and Kids Fast Asleep™. Botanical Name: Nepeta cataria Common Name(s): Catnip, Catmint Plant Family: Lamiaceae Native Habitat: Parts of Europe, central Asia, the Middle East and China, but now found in North America Parts Used: Flowering herb Use(s): Calming support for the nervous system.* Flavor Profile: Aromatic and moderately bitter Chamomile (Matricaria chamomilla and formerly known as Matricaria recutita) is a member of the Daisy family that has been used in herbalism for thousands of years, dating back to ancient Rome, Greece and Egypt! You might be most familiar with aromatic, bittersweet Chamomile tea, but the herb has also been used traditionally as an eye wash, an herbal bath and a powder. It's still quite popular today, in herbalism, as a tea and in skin care (as an essential oil). This gentle herb is appropriate for kids and adults, and you'll even find a mention of it in the beloved children's book, The Tale of Peter Rabbit. His mother brews up a cup Chamomile tea after a frightful experience in Mr. McGregor's garden (and a feast of vegetables!) We grow this herb on the farm. You can distinguish it from other members of the Daisy family by the hollow center of its white and yellow flowers. Known as the receptacle, this hollowness is sometimes called the "womb" of Chamomile, a nod to both its traditional use and genus name. Matricaria comes from the Latin word for matron, or the wife of an honorable man in ancient Rome. Botanical Name: Matricaria chamomilla Common Name(s): Chamomile, German Chamomile, Hungarian Chamomile, Mayweed, Sweet False Chamomile, True Chamomile Plant Family: Asteraceae Native Habitat: Europe Parts Used: Flower Use(s): Calming support of the nervous system.* Flavor Profile: Aromatic and bittersweet Hops (Humulus lupulus) are perhaps best known today as a ubiquitous, bitter and aromatic ingredient in beer. Pliny, the ancient Roman philosopher, wrote of Hops back in the first century AD. Then, Hops was a salad green — and you might still find the young shoots from Hop vines in your salad in central Europe. In the centuries that followed, this relative of Hemp and Cannabis was also used in herbalism, then to preserve and flavor beer. The strobiles, or the scaly conelike fruit, are used in brewing and herbalism. Take a close look at a Hop strobile, and you'll see the sticky abundant powder between the scales. This substance is known as lupulin, and it provides the plant's characteristic scent and taste. Hops are sturdy vines that love to climb and wind around their supports. Their botanical species name, lupulus, is a nod to the strength with which Hops winds its tendrils. Lupulus stems from the Latin word for wolf, as the ancient Romans falsely believed Hops strangled other plants (as wolves do to prey). Although Hops does not, in fact, put other plants in a sleeper hold, it does offer traditional calming support for the nervous system.* Botanical Name: Humulus lupulus Common Name(s): Hops Plant Family: Cannabaceae Native Habitat: Europe Parts Used: Strobiles Use(s): Traditional calming support of the nervous system.* Flavor Profile: Bitter and aromatic Kava (Piper methysticum) has become popular in the West in recent decades, but it has been consumed across the South Pacific for more than 3,000 years. Native to islands including Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Hawaii, this herb has been used to ceremonially welcome dignitaries, settle disputes and facilitate reconciliation. There, Kava is still consumed traditionally, as a beverage and usually in a group. Traditionally, mostly men drank Kava in Tonga, while in Fiji, anyone could partake. That's a fascinating historical fact, given that Kava promotes peaceful relaxation and reduces stress and frustration.* Botanical Name: Piper methysticum Common Name(s): Kava, Awa, Kava Kava, Kava Pepper, Yangona Plant Family: Piperaceae Native Habitat: South Pacific Parts Used: Rhizome with root Use(s): Traditionally used to support the nervous system.* Support for occasional & mild anxiety.* Promotes peaceful relaxation, reduces stress and frustration.* Flavor Profile: Distinctively spicy, bitter, and slightly soapy flavor, accompanied by a numbing sensation Lavender (Lavandula angustifolia) is one of the most aromatic nervines you'll encounter! We grow this beautiful herb on our farm in southern Oregon. While our mountain valley looks markedly different from the south of France, the latitude of the two locations is quite similar. That's good news for us, since Lavender thrives on our farm. Beloved for its signature, potent fragrance and delicate purple flowers, Lavender gets its name from the Latin word for "to wash," a nod to its use by both ancient Greeks and Romans. It continues to be a popular fragrance in soaps, detergents and perfumes, all these millennia later. The entire plant is fragrant, but the flowers are used in herbalism. They bloom in June or July, and they're harvested and carefully dried soon after. Lavender sachets are commonly used to keep clothes smelling fresh and ward off any moths that might chew holes in them. Botanical Name: Lavandula angustifolia Common Name(s): Lavender, English Lavender, Common Lavender Plant Family: Lamiaceae Native Habitat: The Mediterranean region Parts Used: Flower Use(s): Traditionally used for calming support of the nervous system.* Traditionally used to lift the spirit and soothe mild, occasional anxiety.* Traditionally used for relaxing, calming and in nervousness.* Traditionally used for nervous stomach, gas, motion sickness.* Flavor Profile: Intensely floral, aromatic and moderately bitter Lemon Balm is a relative of Mint and Catnip. It's easy to grow and a favorite among pollinators. The herb gets its genus name, Melissa, from the Greek word for "honeybee," and it's planted to attract them for honey production! Lemon Balm leaves may repel ants and flies, both on the plant and when rubbed on your skin. The leaves are gathered fresh and used then, or dried. They're commonly used for tea, in fruit cups and to flavor liqueurs like Chartreuse and Benedictine. The pleasant aroma lingers long after drying, so Lemon Balm is also found in potpourri. Lemon Balm is a gentle herb that's appropriate for use in children and adults. Botanical Name: Melissa officinalis Common Name(s): Lemon Balm, Balm, Bee Balm, Melissa, Melissa Balm Plant Family: Lamiaceae Native Habitat: The Mediterranean region, Europe and Iran Parts Used: Herb Use(s): Calming support for the nervous system.* Support for a calm mind and mild, occasional anxiety.* Flavor Profile: Very lemony, slightly sour and bitter Oat milk may be a trendy drink that's tasty in a latte, but did you know that this humble plant has been a beloved food, beverage and herb for almost 2,000 years? Even Greek goddesses drank Oat "milk." According to myths, Earth mother Gaia herself was raised on Oat Seed (Avena sativa). Another myth states that to dream of a field of ripe Oats is a most favorable omen. (The idea is that the field is ready for the sickle or harvest.) We grow Oats as a cover crop, to nourish the soil, then harvest the unripe seeds for our extracts. Oat Seed extract is made from the same Oats you might eat for breakfast. The only difference is that, in herbalism, the grains are harvested when they are green and still "milky." This milk isn't what you'll add to your cereal. (That's made by soaking and blending mature Oats.) Instead, it's the substance inside each seed — and when you pop one, you'll see the milk. Oat Seed offers traditional support for the nervous system. Traditionally, rolled Oats have also been used to soothe from the outside in — perhaps you've added some to a bath when you've stumbled upon poison ivy or stayed in the sun too long!* Botanical Name: Avena sativa Common Name(s): Oat Plant Family: Poaceae Native Habitat: Europe, Asia and Africa Parts Used: "Milky" seed Use(s): Traditional support for the nervous system.* Flavor Profile: Mildly sweet Passionflower (Passiflora incarnata) is a fast-growing climbing vine considered an invasive weed in some Southern states. You'll see the vine's tendrils endlessly curling around and around whatever it finds, which may serve as a reminder that it offers support for exhaustion from cerebral fullness and from excitement. Passionflower is an herb used in Native American herbalism, specifically the Cherokee and Houma tribes in the Southeast.* Ever hear of Maypop jelly? It's made from Passionflower fruit! The plant's flowers attract pollinators when in bloom, and wild turkeys also like to snack on Passionflower tendrils. Botanical Name: Passiflora incarnata Common Name(s): Passifloraceae Plant Family: Passionflower, Apricot Vine, Maypop, Wild Passionflower Native Habitat: Southeastern US Parts Used: Flowering herb Use(s): Disturbed sleep from mental worry, and exhaustion from cerebral fullness and from excitement.* Promotes calm and relaxation.* Support for mild and occasional anxiety.* Flavor Profile: Bitter and earthy Skullcap (Scutellaria lateriflora) is a perennial herb native to North America. You might see it growing in meadows or the woods in summer, with its characteristic little blue or purple flowers. It has been used for centuries in herbalism. We know that the Native Americans used it 200 years ago, and the Eclectics and other herbalists used it after that. The herb's genus name, Scutellaria, stems from the Latin word that means "little dish" or "shield," which is a nod to the shape of the flower's calyx. We grow Skullcap on our farm, where we harvest it fresh and extract the flowering herb. Botanical Name: Scutellaria lateriflora Common Name(s): Skullcap, Blue Skullcap, Scullcap Plant Family: Lamiaceae Native Habitat: North America Parts Used: Flowering herb Use(s): Traditional relaxing herb to calm your mind.* Traditionally used to support, restore and tone the nervous system.* Flavor Profile: Slightly bitter, mildly aromatic, slightly astringent On our Pharm, Valerian is one of the most polarizing herbs. People either love it or... not. If you've ever smelled a fresh-cut Valerian root, you might know why some on our team find other tasks to keep busy during Valerian harvests. Once bruised, it has a peculiar and aromatic smell that is a little too potent for some. This reminds us that plants are as unique as people! Valerian is among about 75 crops we grow on our Certified Organic farms, and it has been used in herbalism for at least 2,000 years. Hippocrates and Galen wrote of — and used — Valerian! During medieval times, Valerian was used as a spice and a perfume. And during World War II, Valerian was taken during air raids in Great Britain. (It promotes relaxation and restful sleep.)* According to legend, the Pied Piper used Valerian to lure rodents away from the town of Hamelin. And cats also like Valerian (it's like Catnip to them)! Botanical Name: Valeriana officinalis Common Name(s): Caprifoliaceae Plant Family: Garden Valerian Native Habitat: Europe and Asia Parts Used: Rhizome with root Use(s): Promotes relaxation and restful sleep.* Flavor Profile: Bitter, sharp and aromatic Did you know the phrase "dog days of summer" references Sirius (the Dog Star)? The Ancient Greeks and Romans referred to this period of summer after the solstice as the "dog star days," when the Earth was in close proximity to Sirius. This period is also the height of summer — where days are long, hot, and ripe for adventure. If you're ready to grab your paw-some pal and get out there, learn about these herbal allies for human use to support energy, stamina, and of course, recovery. And please make sure to follow these tips to keep your pet safe and cool in the heat! All Herb Pharm products are specifically developed for human use. If you are interested in finding a holistic veterinarian near you, please visit the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association. Power up your day with help from Guayusa. This exciting new addition to our lineup is also our very first nootropic capsule! Guayusa has been used for thousands of years throughout South America. This herb provides natural energy, clear focus, and antioxidant activity support - all without the extra jitters. We make our Guayusa capsules with the dried leaf of Ilex guayusa plants that are ethically sourced from Ecuador. It'll help you make sure the doggo never misses their daily walk.* Rhodiola is another one of our favorites for both energy and adaptogenic support. If the fast pace of summer has you feeling a bit stressed, Rhodiola can help make things more manageable. After all, hopping between vacations, work responsibilities, and day-to-day fun activities can require a lot to balance! Rhodiola supports a normalized stress response and promotes energy, endurance, and stamina. Rhodiola liquid herbal extract can help you keep up with all, and we offer Rhodiola, Alcohol-Free for those who prefer it.* If you're looking for another versatile liquid herbal extract to keep on hand, Asian Ginseng is definitely a power choice! Not only does Asian Ginseng support energy, it's also a nootropic that helps you focus and an adaptogen that helps you manage daily stress. Out of all of our caffeine-free energy-supportive herbal options, Asian Ginseng is on the upper end of the energy scale. It's perfect for those summer moments when you want to skip the siesta and re-energize yourself for the day ahead. And for those avoiding alcohol, we also offer Asian Ginseng, Alcohol-Free.* It wouldn't be a day out with the dogs without a little bark! And speaking of bark, our Cramp Bark liquid herbal extract is a favorite for traditional support of the musculoskeletal system. Key if you plan to be active as we close out the summer. We prepare this liquid herbal extract using the responsibly wildcrafted bark of Viburnum opulus trees in Kentucky. The bark is hand-harvested in the spring or fall, carefully shade-dried, then thoroughly extracted.* To round out your selections for the dog days of summer, consider adding our Turmeric liquid herbal extract to your lineup. While you might be familiar with Turmeric as a tasty culinary spice, it is also regarded as a traditional Ayurvedic tonic herb for multi-system support. In fact, modern research and clinical studies on Turmeric began in India in the 1970s and it has become one of the most well-studied herbs.2 You can think of Turmeric as your golden herbal ally for healthy joint function support as well as a post-exercise recovery aid for all ages.*