Where He Shou Wu Comes From

This root This root has been valued for centuries has been valued for centuries in Chinese in Chinese medicine for its medicine for its ability to keep ability to keep hair dark and hair dark and strong with age.

strong with age. Today it is Today it is sold as a remedy for sold as a remedy for hair loss. It's hair loss. It's not exactly the same thing not exactly the same thing, and research, and research shows why it shows why it matters. I am Dr.

matters. I am Dr. Elizabeth Taradkin, a Elizabeth Taradkin, a naturopathic doctor naturopathic doctor practicing in Phoenix, practicing in Phoenix, Arizona, and Arizona, and consulting consulting consulting internationally. I internationally. I also practice also practice acupuncture and acupuncture and Chinese medicine, Chinese medicine, so herbs like this one are part of my are part of my daily daily daily practice. Today we practice. Today we are looking at he shou wu, also known as fo- ti. At the end of this ti. At the end of this video, you'll learn video, you'll learn what what what the research says about the research says about hair color and hair hair color and hair loss, and loss, and why why why preparation and quality are important.

preparation and quality are important. Let's start with Let's start with where he where he shou wu comes from, as its shou wu comes from, as its traditional traditional traditional use says a lot use says a lot about how about how it should have been it should have been consumed. The title consumed. The title is often translated as " Mr. He's Black Hair." It comes from." It comes from a legend about a man a legend about a man whose gray hair whose gray hair turned dark again turned dark again after he after he started using this started using this root. This history is root. This history is largely the largely the reason why reason why the herb has the herb has such an enduring such an enduring reputation as a reputation as a hair remedy today. But in hair remedy today. But in Chinese medicine, Chinese medicine, he shou wu has never he shou wu has never been a stand-alone been a stand-alone hair remedy.

hair remedy. This is a tonic herb. This is a tonic herb. It is It is It is used to used to nourish what in nourish what in Chinese medicine Chinese medicine is called blood and is called blood and essence or “jing,” essence or “jing,” which are associated with which are associated with healthy hair, healthy hair, strong bones, and strong bones, and graceful aging.

graceful aging. Chinese medicine Chinese medicine understands this herb understands this herb much more deeply, much more deeply, including knowing exactly which including knowing exactly which organ systems organ systems it supports. We won't go into it supports. We won't go into this in depth in the this in depth in the video, but it's a video, but it's a reminder that he shou wu reminder that he shou wu comes from a comes from a much broader much broader system of care.

system of care. Traditionally, the root Traditionally, the root is prepared before is prepared before use. It is use. It is steamed, often in steamed, often in black soybean juice black soybean juice, and then dried,, and then dried, sometimes over sometimes over several cycles. This several cycles. This prepared form prepared form is called jia he is called jia he shou wu. The raw root shou wu. The raw root acts differently in the body acts differently in the body and and and has been used for has been used for other purposes. In other purposes. In practice, it is practice, it is usually combined with usually combined with other herbs in a other herbs in a formula tailored formula tailored to the to the individual, rather than taken individual, rather than taken alone. So when you alone. So when you see he shou wu see he shou wu sold as a sold as a single-ingredient single-ingredient single-ingredient hair supplement, hair supplement, it's a modern it's a modern use of a use of a use of a traditional herb.

It can still be It can still be useful, but how useful, but how it is prepared and it is prepared and used used used matters, and we matters, and we will come back to that.

will come back to that.

Why Hair Color and Hair Loss Are Different Questions

Hair color and Hair color and hair loss are two different stories. are two different stories. This is where a lot of online content gets content gets confusing. Maintaining confusing. Maintaining dark dark dark hair color and helping hair color and helping with thinning with thinning hair are two different hair are two different issues, and issues, and research on this research on this herb is clearly herb is clearly divided along this divided along this line. If you are line. If you are dealing with dealing with hair thinning, it is important what hair thinning, it is important what question question question was asked in the was asked in the study.

study. study. Hair color depends on the Hair color depends on the pigment cells in the pigment cells in the follicle. They follicle. They produce melanin, produce melanin, which gives hair which gives hair its color. With age, its color. With age, these cells these cells slow down and slow down and hair turns gray. A 2015 study 2015 study in mice examined in mice examined the link between he-shou-wu the link between he-shou-wu and graying.

Researchers have found Researchers have found that this root that this root increases increases increases melanin levels and acts on the melanin levels and acts on the pathway that stimulates pathway that stimulates pigment cells pigment cells to produce color.

Hair loss is a different process. In the is a different process. In the most common most common type of thinning, type of thinning, hair follicles hair follicles gradually gradually gradually shrink under the shrink under the influence of a hormone influence of a hormone called DHT, or called DHT, or dihydrotestosterone.

dihydrotestosterone. As they decrease, As they decrease, the hair becomes thinner and the hair becomes thinner and shorter. During shorter. During perimenopause and perimenopause and menopause, when menopause, when estrogen levels estrogen levels drop, the effects of drop, the effects of androgens such as androgens such as DHT on the scalp DHT on the scalp become more noticeable. This is become more noticeable. This is one of the reasons why one of the reasons why thinning often thinning often manifests itself at manifests itself at this stage of life.

this stage of life. Think about it this way. Think about it this way. Pigment is paint. Pigment is paint. The follicle is the wall on The follicle is the wall on which it is applied.

which it is applied. Examining the paint Examining the paint tells us little tells us little about the wall itself. So about the wall itself. So when you see when you see claims about this claims about this herb and hair, herb and hair, ask what ask what exactly it is about.

Traditional reputation Traditional reputation and most and most research is about research is about color. color. Hair loss Hair loss requires its own requires its own evidence, and that's what evidence, and that's what we'll we'll we'll get to now. If this get to now. If this information is information is useful to you, useful to you, subscribe to the subscribe to the channel where we channel where we cover cover cover naturopathic and naturopathic and functional functional functional medicine in the field of medicine in the field of women's and women's and family health.

family health. You won't want to You won't want to miss what miss what comes next. So, what comes next.

What the Hair Loss Research Shows

So, what did the hair loss study show? The most relevant most relevant study on he-shou-wu study on he-shou-wu for for for hair loss was hair loss was published in published in 2020, and it’s a 2020, and it’s a promising promising promising start. That's because start. That's because it directly it directly addressed the process behind the most common type of most common type of dilution.

dilution. dilution. The researchers worked The researchers worked with with with dermal papilla cells. These are the

cells at the base of These are the cells at the base of the follicle that give the follicle that give it the signal to grow or it the signal to grow or rest. They rest. They also tested also tested the extract on human the extract on human hair follicles hair follicles kept kept kept alive in the laboratory.

He-shou-wu extract He-shou-wu extract prolonged the growth phase of the prolonged the growth phase of the hair cycle, hair cycle, called anagen. It also mitigated. It also mitigated the effects of DHT on these the effects of DHT on these cells. In other cells. In other words, it words, it counteracted the very counteracted the very process that process that causes follicles causes follicles to shrink. This was to shrink. This was done in done in a lab, not on a lab, not on people using this people using this herb. There are currently no herb. There are currently no human clinical trials human clinical trials proving that he- shou-wu restores shou-wu restores hair growth. So this hair growth. So this finding is finding is finding is encouraging and encouraging and in line with the in line with the in line with the herb's traditional reputation, but herb's traditional reputation, but it's just the beginning. So, it's just the beginning. So, if you are considering if you are considering he-shou-wu for he-shou-wu for hair thinning, hair thinning, consider it just consider it just one possible one possible part of a larger part of a larger plan, not a plan, not a stand-alone solution. Hair thinning in. Hair thinning in middle age middle age usually has several usually has several causes, including causes, including hormones, hormones, hormones, thyroid function, thyroid function, iron levels, stress, iron levels, stress, and nutrition. These are and nutrition.

Safety and Liver Considerations

These are definitely worth definitely worth paying attention to paying attention to first, as first, as removing these removing these obstacles often obstacles often brings the biggest brings the biggest changes. Now changes. Now let's talk about let's talk about safety, because this is where safety, because this is where quality is quality is crucial.

crucial. He Shou Wu is well He Shou Wu is well tolerated by tolerated by tolerated by most people, but most people, but has a rare has a rare side effect side effect that is worth knowing about— liver irritation or damage.

Over decades of Over decades of widespread widespread widespread use, use, use, researchers have collected researchers have collected several hundred several hundred published case reports published case reports of of of liver damage liver damage associated with this associated with this herb. Most of herb. Most of these people recovered these people recovered after they after they stopped stopped stopped taking it.

taking it. Studies also Studies also show that these show that these reactions are reactions are largely largely largely individual in individual in individual in nature. A 2019 study 2019 study found that people with a found that people with a certain certain certain immune gene variant were immune gene variant were much more likely to experience much more likely to experience such a such a reaction. So, it reaction. So, it doesn't look like a weed doesn't look like a weed that harms everyone, but that harms everyone, but rather an rather an individual individual individual sensitivity of sensitivity of individuals. Many of the individuals. Many of the reported reported reported cases involved cases involved raw root, raw root, unregulated unregulated unregulated supplements, or high supplements, or high doses taken without doses taken without supervision. Laboratory supervision.

How to Use It Thoughtfully

Laboratory studies studies studies show that show that traditional traditional traditional cooking reduces cooking reduces levels of compounds levels of compounds associated with associated with liver stress, although liver stress, although cooking itself does not eliminate cooking itself does not eliminate the risk completely. So, the risk completely. So, if you are considering if you are considering taking taking taking He Shou Wu, here is what I He Shou Wu, here is what I look for.

look for. Use Use Use prepared root prepared root from a reliable from a reliable manufacturer who manufacturer who tests their tests their products. Work with a Chinese Chinese herbalist who herbalist who can help you find the can help you find the right formula and right formula and dosage for dosage for you. In my practice, you. In my practice, I check I check liver function in all my liver function in all my patients at least patients at least once a year, and if once a year, and if clinically clinically clinically necessary, every 3–6 months.

Avoid Avoid taking if you have taking if you have liver problems, liver problems, and tell your doctor and tell your doctor about any other about any other medications or supplements medications or supplements you are taking. If you you are taking. If you notice yellowing of the notice yellowing of the skin or eyes, dark skin or eyes, dark urine, unusual fatigue, urine, unusual fatigue, or pain in the upper or pain in the upper right right right abdomen, stop abdomen, stop taking it and contact your taking it and contact your doctor. This is what the doctor. This is what the most gentle and most gentle and effective effective effective intervention looks like. The right intervention looks like. The right grass, the right grass, the right preparation and preparation and the right support.

So, what does this So, what does this bring us to? He Shou Wu bring us to? He Shou Wu has a centuries-old has a centuries-old tradition of tradition of tradition of use, use, use, especially for especially for maintaining dark maintaining dark and strong hair with and strong hair with age. Research age. Research into hair color into hair color is in its is in its early stages and early stages and has been conducted on has been conducted on animals.

animals. animals. Research on Research on hair loss hair loss is encouraging, but so is encouraging, but so far has only been conducted in far has only been conducted in laboratory settings.

laboratory settings. Like any herb Like any herb that affects the body, that affects the body, it works best it works best when when when used correctly.

used correctly. Properly Properly Properly prepared, from a prepared, from a quality source, and quality source, and selected for the selected for the right person.

right person. If your hair is If your hair is thinning, start with the thinning, start with the basics and figure out basics and figure out the cause of this condition.

He Shou Wu can be He Shou Wu can be part of this plan part of this plan if used if used thoughtfully and under thoughtfully and under supervision. This is not a supervision. This is not a quick solution to the quick solution to the problem, but it is problem, but it is not something to be afraid of either.

not something to be afraid of either.

The Foundations That Matter Most

It deserves to be It deserves to be used with used with knowledge and knowledge and respect for the tradition respect for the tradition from which it comes.

from which it comes. Before using any herb, I always any herb, I always go back to the basics. Healthy Healthy hair requires hair requires adequate adequate adequate protein and minerals protein and minerals like iron and zinc, like iron and zinc, stable stable stable blood sugar levels, blood sugar levels, adequate sleep, and, adequate sleep, and, of course, of course, stress management. A stress management. A period of severe stress period of severe stress can trigger can trigger hair loss hair loss after a few months.

after a few months. This also means This also means checking your hormones checking your hormones and thyroid function when your hair starts when your hair starts thinning in middle thinning in middle age. When we age. When we remove obstacles and remove obstacles and give the body what give the body what it needs, a it needs, a plant like he shou wu plant like he shou wu has a much stronger has a much stronger foundation for action. If foundation for action. If this was helpful, this was helpful, subscribe so you don't subscribe so you don't miss the next miss the next video. And if you video. And if you want to want to delve deeper into the topic of delve deeper into the topic of thinning hair in thinning hair in midlife, midlife, midlife, watch my video watch my video on what helps on what helps with with with hair loss and hair loss and skin changes during skin changes during menopause. I'll leave menopause. I'll leave the link right here.

the link right here. Take care, and Take care, and see you in the see you in the