

# **Robert McDowell's Herbal Treatments**

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## **The Bute Debate and Herbal Alternatives to Phenylbutazone:**

Rheumatism, Arthritis and Pain resulting from accident, injury or over exertion have been around as long as man and animals have walked upon the earth.

Primitive man and animals instinctively sought out those plant substances which provided relief from pain and assisted healing of these conditions. Instincts also led them to lick or to bind or even to chew away at proud flesh around a wound and those who have been around stock horses and other farm animals will know how often, even a severe open wound, will heal cleanly and with surprisingly little scarring.

The anti-inflammatory herbs were "discovered" not by scientists in a laboratory but from initiates who passed down through the generations the accumulated knowledge of the herbal medicine available in a particular environment. Also from animal herders watching their stock self medicate from amongst the herbs at their disposal.

The anti-inflammatory properties of the bark of the White Willow has been fully understood for all of mankind's recorded history. Other herbs commonly referred to in the herbal writings of the middle ages (like Culpepper writing in Britain in the 1650's) were Burdock, Guaiacum, and Devil's Claw all of which were recommended for the relief of Rheumatism, Arthritis and Sciatica and all of which are used by herbalists for exactly the same complaints today.

The modern Aspirin was "discovered" simply by analyzing the white willow bark and separating out one of the many medicinal ingredients. This ingredient was then synthesized, patented, and promoted as the active ingredient and modern pharmaceutical companies were born. Aspirin is now being rediscovered as a low dose preventative maintenance medicine said to be useful in preventing heart disease and improving circulation. .

With the age of the active ingredient came the age of the side effect. That is to say, while white willow bark extract even in quite high dose levels and prolonged use has almost no effect on the gastro-intestinal tract. Aspirin, on the other hand, in even moderate doses and for relatively short periods, can cause ulceration and worse in the stomach and the gut. Even in the low doses (100mg) currently being prescribed in preventative medicine there are emerging signs, particularly in many elderly people, that even these tiny doses are still too strong and cause digestive system irritation and blood vessel fragility. The iron tablets prescribed by your Doctor often cause quite severe constipation while the high iron natural supplements prescribed by your Herbalist are all laxative in their action. (consider Liquorice, Molasses, Prunes, Rosehips Syrup or Nettle Soup for example)

The fact that Aspirin use carries serious risks from side effects and that White Willow Bark does not, is simply because the package of complex chemical substances (dozens of them) which are included within the whole plant extract and excluded from the drug, mesh in a balanced and harmonious way with the complex chemistry of our bodily processes. The principal of the active ingredient is the problem. All ingredients in plant substances are active, and our bodies, which evolved on this earth with the plants, relate well to the packages and mostly not very well with the separate ingredients.

Of course there are other drugs and herbs for that matter, which are out and out poisons which have side effects that produce desirable medical results. Take for example Curare, Atropine and Digitalis (all derived from plants and used by the medical profession and not by Herbalists who

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consider them far too dangerous) and Methatrexate a chemo-therapy agent sometimes used for arthritis treatment.

Routine usage of chemical medicines is almost always detrimental to long term health prospects. This applies even to so called safe medications like aspirin and it applies much more to stronger ones like Phenylbutazone. This drug while very widely used, can in some cases and even in small doses, cause ulceration of the digestive tract and severe scouring which mostly results in death.

Inflammation and Pain are both part of the natural healing process. Inflammation and Swelling bring fluids to cushion a damaged area and aid in the healing process and, pain will stop us causing further damage by continued use. When we are in pain we are meant to rest, not to continue with the activity which resulted in pain.

This brings us to the argument as to whether Bute is dangerous to health and/or can mask pain sufficiently to allow your horse to continue work to the detriment of its long term well-being. This obviously varies in individual cases, sensitivities and dose levels. In turn this suggests that Professional Vets are those best equipped to make these decisions and control administration. Unfortunately despite manufacturers recommendations to the contrary, mostly individual owners administer their own Bute whether prescribed or obtained outside of the prescription system. Most but not all phenylbutazone toxicity deaths and injury come as a complete surprise and do not result from massive overdoses but just ignorance, careless dosing or individual sensitivity.

Happily, as a Herbalist, I can prescribe combinations of Anti-inflammatory herbs which reduce inflammation and pain, have no side effects, do not swab test and do not mask pain to the extent that the horse will continue with any level of work which will cause long term damage to the injured area. In fact I can go further, and include ingredients which reduce shock, promote healing and clear the blood of toxic residues resulting from or involved in the pain process.

## Helpful herbs:

White Willow Bark, Devils Claw, Guaiacum, Burdock, Rosehips, Nettle, Equisetum and Comfrey.

Do not attempt to mix these up yourself as there are some cautions with Devils Claw, Comfrey and Guaiacum for example but in the proper proportions you have a safe, healing, anti-inflammatory treatment which will support your horses healing, while making it more comfortable, and may even allow you to safely continue to work it in competition.

This sort of approach should always be the first choice for preventative treatment, management and first aid. Bute should be reserved for emergencies where pain and inflammation must be reduced as a matter of urgency and the risks associated with its use can therefore be justified. As with the herbs, the decisions as to treatment programs and dose levels in emergencies, should be left to the professionals. With this approach the question of allowable levels of Bute in competition horses would not arise.

Other more exotic and dangerous procedures like administering Chemotherapy agents, Pin Firing or injecting Gold, Steroids or Sharks Cartilage into Joints should never be inflicted upon animals. This sort of practice should be left to the Charlatans in human medicine (alternate and orthodox) where at least the patient is involved in the choice.

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I am happy to give specific advice on individual cases over the internet or by telephone or fax. The formulation I call Anti-Inflammatory/Healer, which is made up from the herbs discussed above, can be ordered online and dispatched the same day by going to the relevant section of my product list.

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