

## Hawthorn and Heart Health

Hawthorn is well-known as being a heart-healthy herb. New research supports the heart benefits of hawthorn.

Hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata*), a member of the rose family, has been used traditionally for various heart concerns. Leaves, flowers and berries are traditionally used. Hawthorn contains many substances that may benefit the heart. Two groups of substances in particular—flavonoids and proanthocyanidins—are thought to be most responsible for hawthorn’s beneficial effects on the heart. Flavonoids help dilate blood vessels, improve blood flow and support a healthy heart rate. Both flavonoids and proanthocyanidins have antioxidant properties. The antioxidant actions of hawthorn may help protect against heart disease and support healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels.<sup>1</sup>

A recent Cochrane Review study found that hawthorn may be beneficial in the treatment of chronic heart failure. In chronic heart failure, the heart is no longer able to pump enough blood throughout the body. Researchers concluded, based on the literature review, that hawthorn extract showed “significant benefit” for patients with chronic heart failure, and it appeared to be safe.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Cochrane Review, “Hawthorn extract (made from the dried leaves, flowers and fruits of the hawthorn bush) may be used as an oral treatment option for chronic heart failure.” The analysis of hawthorn studies “showed improvements in heart failure symptoms and in the function of the heart. The results, therefore, are suggestive of a benefit from hawthorn extract used in addition to conventional treatments for chronic heart failure.”<sup>2</sup>

Patients in the trials experienced improved maximal workload, increased exercise tolerance, reduced oxygen consumption by the heart, and reduced shortness of breath and fatigue. A few patients reported “infrequent, mild and transient” nausea, dizziness, and heart and stomach complaints.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, the review showed a “significant benefit in symptom control and physiologic outcomes” in patients who took hawthorn. According to the researchers, hawthorn appears to boost the strength of the heart muscle’s contractions, increase blood flow through the arteries and reduce irregular heartbeats.<sup>2</sup>

Authors of the review recommended that patients being treated for chronic heart failure use hawthorn only with physician supervision. People with this condition should be under a doctor’s care.

This promising review adds credence to the use of hawthorn to support heart health. Even those who do not suffer from chronic heart failure can enjoy the benefits that have been illustrated in this review. Hawthorn is a key ingredient in NSP’s Cardio Assurance and is available as a single product.

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<sup>1</sup> Jellin J, Gregory P, Batz F, Hitchens K, et al. *Pharmacist’s Letter/Prescriber’s Letter Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database* 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Stockton, CA: Therapeutic Research Faculty; 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Pittler MH, Guo R, Ernst E. Hawthorn extract for treating chronic heart failure. *Cochrane Database System Review* 2008, Issue 1. Art. No.: CD005312. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD005312.pub2.