

# The tonic herb shop

## **The Chaga Mushroom (Kabanoanatake)**

Chaga is a fungus that prefers living on the Birch tree as a parasite. It belongs to the family of Hymenochaetaceae. Since the Birch tree normally grows in cold places, this means the Chaga mushroom prefers cold climates too. Hence it is abundantly found in Russia and Korea. There is plenty of it too in Northern and Eastern Europe. It can also be found on the Northern part of America and in the mountains of North Carolina.

The Chaga mushroom has a black look because it has high levels of melanin, the dark colour pigment. It is valued mostly because of its medicinal properties.

## **Chaga's Medicinal Properties**



A study done by Noda et al in 1998 showed that the Chaga mushroom can intervene against the development of tumours. This study was conducted in Poland.

The wild Chaga mushroom is the one credited with having anti-tumour properties giving much needed hope to cancer patients. Specifically, it is the one that grows on Birch trees and not the one farmed for commercial purposes. This is because the Birch tree has a huge impact on the mushroom's medicinal properties. The bark of the Birch tree has betulin, a compound that is used in cancer treatments. In that form, it cannot be safely consumed by human beings. So the Chaga absorbs it, synthesizes it, and puts it in a form that is safe for human consumption. Today, Betulin and Betulinic acid are not just being studied to help in fighting cancer, but also as agents in the fight against HIV. In 1958, scientific research had been conducted that associated the Chaga mushroom with the fight against gastric cancer, breast cancer, uterine cancer and liver cancer. These studies were done in Russia and Finland.

The Chaga mushroom has been used to treat psoriasis. **Psoriasis** is a skin disease where the patient gets patches that look reddish and rough. Every person involved in a study conducted in Russia in 1973 got healed of psoriasis completely. The study group consisted of 50 patients.



The Chaga has been respected due to its curative properties since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is associated with treatment of **gastritis**. When a person has gastritis, there is pain emanating from within the stomach. It is a situation where the lining of the stomach has gotten inflamed possibly due to prolonged use of medications like aspirin. Alcohol also does enough damage to the stomach lining as to cause gastritis. The causes of gastritis are, however, not confined to those two. It can also result from an infection, surgery and other traumatic situations. Usually when gastritis is chronic, there is a likelihood of infection by the bacterium, *Helicobacter Pylori*.

The symptoms of gastritis are varied ranging from nausea, vomiting and sometimes a bloating feeling. A common symptom is a burning sensation in the upper side of the abdomen. Some of these symptoms appear in other diseases too so it would be a good idea to go for specific tests. These specialised tests include blood and stool tests. One could also have a complete blood count.

Ultimately, gastroscopy may be the test to take.

Luckily, gastritis can be treated by using antacids, antibiotics and other medicines. There are many proton pump inhibitors that will deal effectively with gastritis.

The Chaga mushroom has also been associated with the treatment of **tuberculosis**. Tuberculosis, commonly referred to as TB, is an infectious disease caused by mycobacteria. The abbreviation TB stands for *tubercle bacillus*. The most common bacterium causing TB is *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It is treatable especially when diagnosed properly and correct medication taken accordingly. Inconsistent treatment can lead to resistance making it difficult for existing medications to treat the disease. If not handled with the intensity and seriousness that it deserves, TB can be fatal. For a long time, about half of all TB patients have been dying of TB related complications. TB basically attacks the lungs and its causing organisms are airborne. That is why hygienic behaviour is encouraged whenever a person is coughing or sneezing. Although the symptoms of the disease are sometimes quiet, the most common ones are persistent coughs, sputum with blood traces and weight loss. The person may also experience unexplained night sweats and sometimes fever.



This serious disease can also attack other organs apart from the lungs. Such cases take long to diagnose correctly. Effective diagnosis relies on chest x-rays, technically known as radiology. It can also be successfully done by subjecting body fluids to culture tests. For effective treatment, the patient sometimes needs to be put on a combination of drugs for a long period. Concerted efforts have been taken worldwide to sensitise people on the need to go for check-ups and adhere to treatment religiously. In the report of the World Health Organisation, 2011, figures showed that there were 8.8 million new TB cases in 2010 worldwide, and TB related deaths were 1.5 million. The overall TB cases have, however, been reducing.

