

The Longwood Herbal Task Force
(<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/default.htm>) and
The Center for Holistic Pediatric Education and Research
(<http://www.childrenshospital.org/holistic/>)

Hoxsey Formula

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Principal Proposed Use: Cancer remedy

Overview

The Hoxsey herbal mixture is one of the most commonly used complementary therapies for cancer in the United States. Despite its colorful history, there are no controlled trials evaluating its efficacy in treating any form of cancer. There are also no reports of adverse effects, but the potential for a variety of side effects exists due to constituent herbs and chemicals that may cause diarrhea, neural toxicity, potassium depletion and iodism. There are no data evaluating safety during pregnancy, lactation or childhood. Treatment is highly individualized and is available only through the Hoxsey Clinic in Mexico.

Historical and Popular Uses

The late Harry Hoxsey was an Illinois coal miner who began to promote himself as populist herbal folk healer in the 1920's. In 1840, one of his grandfather's horses who apparently had cancer on his leg made a full recovery after eating grass and herbs growing in the pasture. The grandfather, John Hoxsey, collected the herbs and made them into a salve to treat afflicted horses topically. Hoxsey's father (also John Hoxsey), a veterinarian licensed under the grandfather clause of the Illinois Medical Practice Act of 1877, also used the herbal salve to treat animals (and eventually humans) who had cancer¹.

Harry Hoxsey's treatment includes external herbal salves (a red salve and a yellow salve), herbal teas, vitamins (vitamin C) and mineral supplements (calcium), laxatives, douches, antiseptic washes and personal counseling. The red salve includes bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), antimony sulfide and zinc chloride; the yellow salve includes arsenic, antimony

sulfide, talc and sulfur. The internal tonic consists of cascara (*Rhamnus purshiana*) and one or more of the following: potassium iodide, red clover blossoms (*Trifolium pratense*), buckthorn bark (*Rhamnus frangula*), burdock root (*Arctium lappa*), barberry or berberis root (*Berberis vulgaris*), licorice root (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), poke berries and root (*Phytolacca americana*), Queens root or stillingia root (*Stillingia sylvatica*) and prickly ash bark (*Zanthoxylum americanum*). Hoxsey advised patients to avoid consuming tomatoes, alcohol, processed flour and vinegar to avoid negating the formula's effects.

The chain of 17 clinics that Hoxsey ran in Texas in the 1930's and 1940's have all closed. The Hoxsey Clinic in Tijuana, Mexico is the chief facility providing Hoxsey treatment today (BioMedical Center, PO Box 727, 615 General Ferreira, Colonia Juarez, Tijuana, Mexico).

Botany

Medicinal species: Multiple species as above. The precise amounts of individual ingredients vary for each patient and are a proprietary secret.

Common names: Hoxsey formula

Botanical family: See individual monographs for specific herbs

Plant description: See individual monographs for specific herbs

Where it's grown: All of the ingredients grow easily in North America.

Biochemistry

Hoxsey Formula: Potentially Active Chemical Constituents

The herbal mixture is a unique, proprietary secret for each individual and may contain varying amounts of active chemical constituents. Several key ingredients in the tonic are potent cathartics. See individual monographs for specific biochemical ingredients.

Experimental Studies

Hoxsey Formula: Potential Clinical Benefits

1. Cardiovascular: N/A
2. Pulmonary: N/A
3. Renal and electrolyte balance: N/A
4. Gastrointestinal/hepatic: N/A
5. Neuro-psychiatric: N/A
6. Endocrine: N/A
7. Hematologic: N/A
8. Rheumatologic: N/A
9. Reproductive: N/A
10. Immune modulation: N/A
11. Antimicrobial: N/A
12. Antineoplastic: Antineoplastic
13. Antioxidant: N/A
14. Skin and mucus membranes: N/A
15. Other/miscellaneous: N/A

Because the Hoxsey formula is used primarily as a cancer remedy, this review focuses on studies of the herbal mixture's effect on cancer. See individual monographs for discussions of the effects of individual herbal components on other body systems.

12. Antineoplastic: Antineoplastic

- i. *In vitro data*: None
- ii. *Animal data*: None aside from historical anecdotes
- iii. *Human data*: Anecdotal reports claim miraculous cancer cures from the Hoxsey treatment. However, many of the patients who claimed to be cured had diagnosed themselves and did not have biopsy proven cancer, had been treated with conventional therapies as well as the Hoxsey formula, still had cancer even after the treatment, or had died².

In a cohort study of 39 cancer patients treated at the Mexican Biomedical Center (Hoxsey Clinic), 23 were lost to follow-up within four years; of the remaining 16 patients, 10 had died with an average survival time of 15.4 months. There were six survivors with an average survival time of 58 months : two had lung cancer (type and stage unspecified), two had melanoma, one had bladder cancer and one had labial cancer (stage unspecified). The investigators contacted patients directly and did not review medical records or perform physical examinations or laboratory tests³.

No controlled trials have evaluated the safety or efficacy of the Hoxsey formula.

Toxicity and Contraindications

All herbal products carry the potential for contamination with other herbal products, pesticides, herbicides, heavy metals and pharmaceuticals.

Allergic reactions can occur to any natural product in sensitive persons.

Allergic reactions: Contact dermatitis from burdock root has been reported.

Potentially toxic compounds in the Hoxsey formula: Pokeweed is generally considered toxic and may cause death due to respiratory paralysis. Buckthorn and cascara can cause severe diarrhea, dehydration and potassium depletion. No acute adverse effects of the Hoxsey formula have been reported.

Acute toxicity: Burdock root, one of the Hoxsey formula's constituents, may be contaminated with another species that can cause acute atropine-like poisoning. No acute toxicity of the Hoxsey formula itself has been reported.

Chronic toxicity: Due to its cathartic effects, Hoxsey's tonic may deplete serum potassium, thereby potentiating effects of cardiac glycosides; prudence suggests limiting chronic use or closely monitoring renal function and electrolytes. The potential for heavy metal toxicity exists from the external pastes containing antimony and arsenic. No adverse effects have been reported.

Limitations during other illnesses or in patients with specific organ dysfunction: Due to iodide from potassium iodide, Hoxsey tonics should be used with caution in patients who may be sensitive to it.

Interactions with other herbs or pharmaceuticals: Due to potential potassium depletion, avoid use by patients taking cardiac glycosides.

Safety during pregnancy and/or childhood: Not generally recommended during pregnancy, lactation or childhood.

Typical Dosages

Provision of dosage information does NOT constitute a recommendation or endorsement, but rather indicates the range of doses commonly used in herbal practice. Doses may vary according to the type and severity of the condition treated and individual patient conditions.

Typical adult doses: Unknown

Pediatric dosages: Unknown

Availability of standardized preparations: Unknown

See Also:

Hoxsey Formula Clinician Information Summary:

<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/hoxsey/hoxsey.cis.pdf>

Hoxsey Formula Patient Fact Sheet: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/hoxsey/hoxsey.ph.pdf>

University of Texas Center for Alternative Medicine Research in Cancer:

<http://www.sph.uth.tmc.edu:8052/utcam/agents/hoxsey.htm>

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2. Anonymous. Questionable methods of cancer management: 'nutritional' therapies. Cancer Forum 1994; 18:28-33.
3. Austin S, Baumgartner E, DeKadt S. Long term follow-up of cancer patients using Contreras, Hoxsey and Gerson therapies. Journal of Naturopathic Medicine 1995; 5:74-76.