



A Science of Medicine
The Art of Care

A Review on the Use and Efficacy of Vitex Angus Castus on the Regulation of Hormones in Relation to Disorders of the Female Reproductive System

Dr. Ferial de Jongh

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Vitex Angus Castus, also known as the Chaste tree and Monk's Pepper, is a tree found in the Mediterranean and is native to Greece and Italy. Steeped in folklore and history, the tree was associated with the Greek goddess Demeter, and it came to symbolize marriage, fertility and agriculture.

For at least 2500 years, the tree has been used as a treatment for menstrual difficulties. Hippocrates was the first to canonically state various applications, and he was supported by Pliny, Dioscorides and Theophrastus. These treatments were also applied by the English Herbalist, John Gerarde in the sixteenth century.

The Female Reproductive System is subject to a myriad of influences. Hormonal fluctuations accompany every stage of development, from puberty to menopause, as well as the more regular cycles within a single menstrual cycle. Specifically, Oestrogen, Progesterone and Prolactin have been identified as the major influences on a woman's over-all well being.

One of the most difficult challenges a woman can face during her menstrual cycle is Pre-menstrual Stress Syndrome, which corresponds to a woman's menstrual periods. Some include mood swings, irritability, depression, anxiety, hives, abdominal and pelvic cramps, menstrual migraines and oedema. All these symptoms can be attributed to either an over abundance, or lack, certain hormones involved in the cycle.

Unani-Tibb, as most other alternative approaches to healthcare, emphasizes a holistic, natural way to address illness conditions and the maintenance thereof. By assisting the body in maintaining balance, Unani-Tibb aims at addressing various illnesses through diet, herbal supplements, rest, etc.

Tibb classifies each problem or condition according to its temperament, and the majority of Female Reproductive problems are classified as either Hot and Moist, or Cold and Moist. This overabundance of Moistness is what causes swollen hands and feet, tearfulness, depression, anxiety. Thus, according to Tibb, lifestyle changes and dietary adaptations that increase the overall levels of Dryness within the patient will counteract these symptoms, and aids Pheysis in restoring balance. This is where Vitex Angus Castus plays a crucial part: its overall dominant quality of Temperament is Dryness.

Currently, the Chaste tree and its extracts are prescribed as phytomedicine for various problems, including: Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, Menstrual Cycle irregularities, Premenstrual Syndrome, Amenorrhea and Luteal Phase Defect. The method of action of Vitex Angus Castus lies in the regulation of hormones, specifically oestrogen and progesterone. Vitex Angus Castus has proven to stimulate and normalize the levels of these hormones during the menstrual cycle. The Chaste tree does this by reducing the excess moisture in the body, therefore allowing Pheysis to restore and rejuvenate the hormone levels within the body of the patient.

Recent studies have shown that Vitex Angus Castus, as herbal preparation, has progesterone activity. It has also been shown to be a uterine stimulant and emmenagogue.

Vitex Angus Castus also works on Prolactin levels. Prolactin is Cold and Moist (Phlegmatic) in nature, and hence, too much of it will result in conditions which are also Phlegmatic in nature, particularly those with a dominant Moist quality. This includes hypomenorrhea (very low flow of menstrual blood), amenorrhea (no menstrual flow), leucorrhoea, and oedema. Vitex Angus Castus assists physis here in that it increases the levels of Heat and Dryness in the body, thereby decreasing the levels of Moistness in the body.