## **Feverfew**

Bachelor's buttons, Featherfew (*Tanacetum parthenium* L. aka *Chrysanthemum parthenium* L. aka *Pyrethrum parthenium* L.)

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**PREPARATIONS:** Feverfew is native to southeastern Europe. It is a short perennial with small, daisy-like yellow flowers which give off a strong, bitter odour. The dried leaves and sometimes flowers and stems are used to make supplements, including capsules, tablets, and liquid extracts.

ACTIVE CONSTITUENTS: Parthenolide and tanetin are the suspected active ingredients. Preparations may be standardised to contain 0.2–0.4% parthenolides. Laboratory evidence indicates that feverfew causes vasodilation and reduces inflammation. Feverfew's constituents inhibit phagocytosis, platelet aggregation, and secretion of inflammatory mediators (arachidonic acid and serotonin).

MAIN USES: The main contemporary uses for feverfew are for migraine headaches and rheumatoid arthritis. It has been used as a herbal remedy for centuries for fevers, headaches, stomach aches, toothaches, insect bites, infertility, and problems with menstruation and with labour during childbirth.

**EVIDENCE FOR EFFICACY:** There is insufficient evidence from five randomised, double-blind trials to suggest an effect of feverfew over and above placebo for preventing migraine. There is no evidence from one randomised, double-blind trial to suggest an effect of feverfew over and above placebo for treating rheumatoid arthritis.

**ADVERSE EFFECTS:** 5–15% of users develop aphthous ulcers and/or gastrointestinal tract

## Summary Message

There is insufficient evidence to support the use of feverfew for prevention of migraine headaches or for treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. Feverfew can cause mouth ulcers and gastrointestinal upsets and occasional allergic reactions. Health professionals should be aware of the possibility of (undisclosed) use of feverfew in patients on aspirin or warfarin. As with all herbal medicines, different feverfew products vary in their pharmaceutical quality, and the implications of this for efficacy and safety should be considered.

irritation. It also may increase the tendency to bleed. Allergic reactions to feverfew can occur. People who are allergic to other members of the daisy family (including ragweed and chrysanthemums) are more likely to be allergic to feverfew. People taking regular feverfew may experience a withdrawal syndrome characterised by rebound headache, anxiety, fatigue, muscle stiffness, and joint pain and are advised to stop the preparation slowly. Historically feverfew has been used to induce menstrual bleeding and it should be avoided in pregnancy.

**DRUG INTERACTIONS:** Possible interactions with warfarin and aspirin.

## Key references

- Pittler MH, Ernst E. Feverfew for preventing migraine. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. 1, 2009.
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- Little CV, Parsons T. Herbal therapy for treating rheumatoid arthritis. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. 1, 2009.

Hobbs C. Feverfew: a review. HerbalGram. 1989;20:2636.

Herbal medicines are a popular health care choice, but few have been tested to contemporary standards. **CHARMS & HARMS** summarises the evidence for the potential benefits and possible harms of well-known herbal medicines.