

Gotu Kola – The Healing Herb

by Kerry Bone

The herb Gotu Kola is a small and seemingly insignificant weed which grows as a ground cover in the warmer parts of the world. It is found in many continents, but in particular Asia, Africa and Australia. Gotu Kola has been traditionally used as a medicine in many countries.

Lab Research

One theme that is quite noticeable when running through the variety of traditional uses is the one of skin disorders. It was this aspect which led European scientists to investigate the effects of the compounds (phytochemicals) in this herb on healing and the skin. They located a group of phytochemicals in Gotu Kola known as triterpenes,¹ with asiaticoside being the main one.

The triterpenes in Gotu Kola were found to have wound healing activity in many experimental models (by injection, oral and topical administration). The mechanism of action includes the stimulation of maturation of the scar by the production of type I collagen (hence collagen synthesis) and a resulting decrease in the inflammatory reaction.² The constituents also stimulate glycosaminoglycan production (glycosaminoglycans are the first component of the extracellular matrix to be synthesised during the wound healing process),³ and act specifically to shorten the immediate phase of healing.⁴ Aqueous extract of Gotu Kola, particularly as a gel formulation, promoted healing in experimental open wounds.⁵ Oral and topical administration of Gotu Kola extract produced faster skin growth and a higher rate of wound contraction compared to controls.⁶

Results from Clinical Trials

One interesting point you may have picked up from the lab research is that Gotu Kola promotes healing when you take it orally. This is a significant finding. There are many herbs which can promote healing when put directly on the skin (as does Gotu Kola), but there are relatively few that we know of that can promote healing after being absorbed into the bloodstream following ingestion. This suggests that the healing potential of Gotu Kola is not just confined to the skin and this is certainly how I use it (in other

words, to promote healing in any tissue: skin, bones or other organs).

For example, oral administration of the triterpenes from Gotu Kola has been successfully used to treat keloids and hypertrophic scars. In a study of 227 patients, treatment with Gotu Kola actives for a period of 2 to 18 months had therapeutic value in both preventing and reducing keloids (excessive scar formation on the skin).⁷

Benefit has also been recorded in uncontrolled trials for the treatment of gastric and duodenal ulcers (the triterpenes from Gotu Kola, oral),^{8,9} gastritis (asiaticoside, oral)¹⁰ and bladder lesions caused by infection (the triterpenes from Gotu Kola, injection).¹¹ Positive results were obtained for oral use of the triterpenes from Gotu Kola taken for 3 to 8 weeks in 50 patients with leg ulcers.¹²

Topical application of Gotu Kola (or the triterpenes from Gotu Kola) to the skin has been successfully used in controlled and uncontrolled clinical trials to treat a wide variety of problems including: varicose veins,¹³ chronic venous insufficiency,¹⁴ psoriasis,¹⁵ leg ulcers¹⁶, soiled wounds resistant to other treatment,¹⁷ burns,^{18,19} and cellulitis.²⁰

Dosage and Other Issues

Gotu Kola is a very safe herb. As you can see from the above it can be applied directly to the skin or, as I tend to prescribe it, taken orally. Probably the only confirmed side effect from its use is that application to the skin can sometimes cause allergy.

I recommend Gotu Kola to my patients as part of my healing protocol and suggest that they take 4 mL of the 1:2 liquid extract twice a day (mixed with a little water). This ensures the correct dose of the clinically-proven triterpenes. Lower doses of weaker products are unlikely to be effective.

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