

## Supplement Sampler

### **Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*)**



#### **Best Indications**

Seasonal Allergies (Allergic Rhinitis)  
Headache Prevention

#### **Mechanism of Action**

Butterbur is a broad leafed plant that was used to wrap butter prior to refrigeration. It has anti-spasmodic properties and reduces the synthesis of leukotrienes and histamines. This mechanism helps to stabilize mast cells. One mechanism by which it may benefit headaches is through its anti-inflammatory properties.

#### **Best Studies**

**Allergic Rhinitis:** 125 patients with seasonal allergic rhinitis were randomized to receive butterbur or cetirizine (*Zyrtec*) in a double blinded study. The butterbur was given four times a day and the cetirizine was given once daily. The two therapies had similar benefit after two weeks of therapy, but the butterbur had significantly less sedating side effects. (*Schapowal A. Petasites Study Group. Randomised controlled trial of butterbur and cetirizine for treating seasonal allergic rhinitis. BMJ 2002;324:144-6.*)

**Migraine Headaches Prevention:** 245 patients with regular migraines were randomized to receive *Petasites* extract 75 mg bid, *Petasites* extract 50 mg bid, or placebo bid for four months. The 75 mg dose was most effective and reduced the frequency of headaches by 48% compared to 26% with placebo. The 50 mg dose reduced them by 36%. The most common side effect was mild GI symptoms, mainly burping. (*Lipton RB, Gobel H, Einhaupl KM, et al. Petasites hybridus root (butterbur) is an effective preventive treatment for migraine. Neurology 2004;63:2240-4.*)

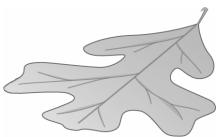
This also appears to be safe in children and adolescents. Of 108 patients (ages 6-17), there was a reduction in attack frequency by 68% in those treated with butterbur. (*Pothmann R, Danesch U. Migraine Prevention in Children and Adolescents: Results of an Open Study With a Special Butterbur Root Extract. Headache 2005;45:196-203.*)

#### **Dose**

**Children** (6-9 yrs old) 25 mg bid, (9-13 yrs old) 50 mg bid of *Petasites* extract for headache prevention.

**Adults** 75-150 mg bid of *Petasites* extract for Headache prevention and qid dosing for allergic rhinitis.

The research on headaches used a pyrrolizidine alkaloid free butterbur rhizome extract standardized to 15% petasin and isopetasin called *Petadolex* (Weber & Weber, GmbH & Co, Germany).



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## Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*)

### Side Effects

The main concern is the hepatotoxic pyrrolizidine alkaloid (PA) content that is found in the root. It is recommended that patients use a preparation where this has been removed (Such as the *Petadolex*). Otherwise the side effects are mild and mainly consist of abdominal discomfort and belching.

### Cost

*Petadolex* costs around \$35-\$45 for 50, 50 mg capsules.

### Disclaimer

*The health benefits from multi-colored whole food eaten with a smile with family and friends significantly trumps any product found in a bottle, be it a supplement or drug!*

*Brought to you by your colleagues in the UW Department of Family Medicine Integrative Medicine Program.*

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