

## How to Nutritionally Strengthen our Nerves and Sense Organs

One of the most amazing insights of Rudolf Steiner's research is the discovery of the correspondence between the Human and the Plant organs. Placed one next to the other it turns out that the Human Body exactly mirrors an Inverted Plant:

Brain – Roots  
Heart Lungs – Leaves  
Reproductive organs – Flowers, Seeds

A detailed explanation would lead too far, but just think how in their middle realm, in the leaves, the plants do exactly the opposite of what the human physiology does: instead of inhaling oxygen, O<sub>2</sub>, and expelling carbon dioxide, CO<sub>2</sub>, the plant takes in CO<sub>2</sub> and releases O<sub>2</sub>. Similarly the connecting function of the human nerve sense organization to its environment is mirrored by the root physiology which has to carefully note what is happening in the surrounding soil.

To repeat, this is only very cursory but the implications are significant.

In a discussion with teachers R. Steiner points out that

*“we can have a beneficial effect on the nerve sense system by adding the proper amount of salt to the foods that children eat. Thus, if we notice that a child tends to be inattentive, to be flighty and turn away from what you present, that the child is what we might call too sanguine or too phlegmatic ( we can strengthen its nerve constitution)...by providing the child with more salt.”<sup>1</sup>*

Of course, R. Steiner emphasizes on many occasions that the salt will be best supplied in the form of roots which are plant organs that specialize in the subtle handling of minerals.

*“The root is rich in salts, the flower rich in oils. The result is that when we eat the root we introduce much salt into our intestines. These salts find their way to the brain and stimulate it. If someone has headaches, not migraines, but headaches that fill the whole head it is quite good for them to eat roots. You can notice that there is a certain sharpness to many roots.”<sup>2</sup>*

In fact R. Steiner specifically mentions that root eating introduces powers of increased thinking, reasoning and meditation into the brain. If we want to develop, however, a more independent spiritual activity we might want to avoid roots so that a more independent faculty of thinking can be developed that is not so much dependent on external food factors. If this method of avoidance, however, is employed prematurely, fogginess and confusion can result.<sup>3</sup>

Building on R. Steiner's findings both doctors and nutritionists alike have found over many decades that roots really do strengthen both the physical and the spiritual function of the nerve sense organization.

Over the years we have recommended root rich diets to many of our patients: kohlrabi, celery, yams, radishes, beets and carrots. A favorite dish of many is a simple fennel root recipe that Andrea Rentea prepares. She lightly boils the fennel roots, then seasons them and bakes them with a copious sprinkling of Feta cheese. (Eating the roots must be

helping her, considering all the energy she has to do all her studies, chores, the medical office and cook delicious root meals too.)

Going beyond the food as such, the root effect can be strengthened by ingesting concentrated root extracts in the form of capsules served as nutritional supplements. Some of the more common ones are curcumin, ginkgo, rhodiola, withania (also known as ashwagandha), barberry, nettles and many more. The only issue here is that the products have to be of reasonably good quality in terms of purity and freedom from pesticides, among other factors. It helps if the label disclosure points to a standardization of the main ingredients.

Of course, all the roots mentioned below have many, many more areas of health usefulness than mentioned here but we are concentrating in this article only on how they can help the “brain functions”.

Here are some examples:

Probably our favorite “king” (or queen) of all roots, in the sense of versatility, is the barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*) root. When the concentration of the most active ingredient, called berberine, is 90% or better, studies have shown that it is a significant help to the nerves as an anti-depressant, even an anti-psychotic remedy.

Curcumin (*Curcuma longa*) root, also known as turmeric, the main spice of curry, is perhaps no less important. R. Steiner calls it a “magnet” for removing illness. When offered with a purity of over 95% curcuminoids it has been shown to counteract the pathological changes leading to Alzheimer’s disease.

Withania (*Withania somnifera*) root, also known as ashwagandha, is a strong tonic with calming effects; helps to overcome the exhaustion of chronic stress; and improves short and long term memory.

Also, let’s look at the Rhodiola (*Rhodiola rosea*) root, which ideally should be standardized to 4% rosavins and 2% salidroside. It typifies the root effects on the nerve functions. Rhodiola is a powerful healing plant growing in high mountainous areas. The roots give off a rose like fragrance when cut. When students, physicians and scientists were asked to take 300 mg daily for several days, before they engaged in intense intellectual work or final exams, their mental abilities vastly improved and loss of work capacity due to fatigue was prevented. In another study, proof readers taking rhodiola had a significantly lower number of errors over their non-treated counterparts, even after 8 work hours. Increase in physical fitness, mental sharpness, hand-eye coordination, and resistance to cold and noise were noted in careful studies. Rhodiola was found to resolve depressive states, significantly improve retention and attention span.

There is yet a third way to enhance the effectiveness of the root preparations. We have looked at the nutritional value of food as such, then at the concentrated root extracts. Additionally one can burn the root material and then extract from the ashes the fine trace minerals that are so abundant in the root system. Combining all three, the whole root, the extract of the most active root ingredient, and the root ashes or their minerals, one can deliver the most significant results, not just from a physical but also from a spiritual point of view.

Incidentally, since roots grow particularly well and influence the plants a lot more at the time of the full moon, we feel that a root rich meal, or root supplementation, is especially important at the time of the full moon: several days before, including and again a few days after that moon phase.

Finally and unfortunately, we need to stress that our current scientific understanding of the nerve and sense functions is very limited. The nervous system does a lot more than support a “mental” life. Anthroposophical science makes it clear that nerves play a role on

many other levels for example enhancing the optimal growth of the internal organs. No wonder that the embryonic development begins with head and proceeds down toward the limbs. Nevertheless, for a lot of these functions conventional scientific underpinnings are still to come.

Consequently, roots may help us a lot more than this small scratching of the surface has let us intimate. Until we understand much more, partaking of the roots as much as possible will only help and we can rest assured that we will increase both our mental and physical health.

Roots are truly miracles of nature!

*(All the information given in this article is for educational purposes only. Do not start any supplementation or exercise program without consulting a qualified health care professional!)*

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#### References

1. R. Steiner, Faculty Meetings with R. Steiner, vol. 2, 1922-1924, page 532, Anthroposophic Press, 1998
2. R. Steiner, Nutrition and Stimulants, page 55-56, Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 1991
3. R. Steiner, Nutrition and Stimulants, page 153, Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 1991