Guggul is one of the most treasured Ayurvedic herbs. Today, it is getting global attention as a cholesterol lowering agent.

Ancient Sanskrit texts, written by physicians of the revered Ayurvedic medical system more than 2,500 years ago, described the condition now known as atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) with a remarkable degree of scientific accuracy as some of our medical books would today. These texts also prescribed a treatment for it – the herb called guggul (commiphora mukul).

The earliest references for the therapeutic properties of guggul are listed in Atharva Veda (one of the four well-known scriptures of India), which devoted an entire verse to praising the herb. The ancient books promised freedom from heart disease for those who consumed “tears” of the bark of this knobby plant.

Ayurvedic doctors, who still practise today, had effectively catalogued more than 600 plants and plant-derived medicines by 600 B.C. Guggul held a prominent position in their medical journals (Indian Journal of Medical Research, Vol.17, April 1988).

Indian Government Approval

The discovery of guggul in modern times makes a very interesting narration. In 1966, inspired by the ancient Sanskrit texts, a young Indian doctoral candidate named G.V. Satyavati of Banares Hindu University reported the cholesterol lowering effects of this herb. She based her work on the insights provided by the famous Ayurvedic treatise – related to the treatment of obesity and associated blood fat disorders with guggul.

Intrigued by the similarities between the ancient concept of medoroga (obesity and blood fat disorders) and atherosclerosis, Satyavati and her advisor carried out the first laboratory testing. Their early works showed that guggul did indeed bring down cholesterol levels in rabbits. Amazingly, it protected the animals against hardening of the arteries. Other researchers became interested, and a two-year study was done on test subjects, who were fed hydrogenated vegetable oil to artificially elevate their cholesterol levels. Again, the blood fat normalised.

In the three decades since the groundbreaking work, much has happened. The initial work sparked by Satyavati has entered clinical trials that further confirmed cholesterol lowering effects of this herb. In 1986, guggul was approved for sale by the Indian Government as a cholesterol lowering agent, following a period of intense investigation by Government scientists and independent investigators.

Clinical Research

A considerable volume of research, dating back to the 1960s, has validated gum guggul’s amazing benefits.

It has been clinically documented to reduce total cholesterol by 15% and bad cholesterol (LDL) by 17%. The herb can
also increase good cholesterol (HDL) by 12%. This, in fact, can improve the cardiovascular ratio – making it the only herb documented to improve overall blood lipid profile!

After more than 2,500 years of successful use in India, this natural herb is now also available in the United States as a supplement, containing the purified and standardised form of the guggul tree resin.

The most wonderful thing is that on top of all the good effects, it has no adverse side effects! This is unlike modern anti-cholesterol medications that may lead to muscle weakness and loss of libido.

**Blood triglycerides**

Indeed, guggul is a physician’s dream-come-true – it brings down the level of unwanted LDL and VLDL components which clog the arteries, and at the same time, raises the anti-clogging HDL. Guggul also reduces blood triglycerides (*Indian Journal of Medical Research, Vol. 17, April 1988*).

Low-fat diets have become popular but unfortunately, they usually lower the beneficial HDL level along with total cholesterol. Guggul is a much better alternative, as struggling to remove all fats from the diet is actually not beneficial to health when one goes to the extreme.

**Blood clots**

An artery narrowed by plaque can easily become obstructed by a blood clot. Such an event may precipitate a heart attack if the clot forms in a coronary artery. In the brain, a blood clot can result in a stroke. Platelets form clots by clumping together. Studies in Europe have shown that guggul decreases platelet stickiness and normalises clotting, while additionally assisting the body in breaking up clots, thus helping in preventing strokes as well as heart attacks (*Planta Medica, Vol. 37, 1979*).

**Guggulsterones**

More recently, guggul achieved the acceptance of the international scientific community – something that no other Indian herb has achieved so far. In the May 2nd, 2003 issue of the *Science* journal, researchers from Baylor College of Medicine, University of Texas and the National Cancer Institute were able to explain the mechanism of guggulsterones – the active agent of the extracts of this plant.

The lead researcher, Dr. David Moore of the Baylor College of Medicine found that guggul does indeed live up to its Ayurvedic reputation.

His team found that the plant compound’s mode of action is quite different from that of the popular statin class cholesterol lowering drugs. “This identifies a completely new way to lower cholesterol,” he adds.

This means that the herb, or other compounds that work similarly, could potentially be used in combination. The new research shows that the guggulsterone works by blocking a substance that stops the body from getting rid of cholesterol. This means that the body is able to get rid of more cholesterol. Statins, on the other hand, block the body from making more cholesterol. Guggul and statins can be used together when guided by an informed professional. Indeed, Moore wrote that he himself took both in combination for a short period, and the combination did lower his cholesterol further.

Getting published in *Science* – the official mouthpiece of The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), is certainly going to open many doors for guggul. The AAAS is the world’s largest medical society. It was founded in 1848 with 134,000 members and 272 affiliates serving 10 million members worldwide. There is certainly more coming up by way of funding for more research on this herb. The founding fathers of Ayurveda, who prescribed guggul for blood fat disorders more than 2,500 years ago, would be really proud.😊