Rhodiola is a warming, dispersing adaptogen useful for re-regulating the HPA axis, endocrine and nervous systems. It was shown to be useful for treating depression (Mao, et al, 2015; Darbinyan, et al, 2007). I use it for deficient or stagnant depression (use it with Lavender, Rosemary, Damiana, Mimosa or Holy Basil for stagnant depression), immune depletion from overwork or excessive exercise, altitude sickness (use it with Cordyceps, standardized Ginkgo and Codonopsis) and fatigue (Olsson, et al, 2009). It can be used as part of a protocol for CFIDS, Alzheimer’s (use it with standardized Ginkgo, Rosemary and Bacopa), ADD/ADHD, hypothyroidism (use it with Ashwaganda, Bacopa, Kelp and Gum Guggul), recovery from head trauma injury (use it with St. John’s wort, Bacopa, Gotu Kola, Schisandra and White Peony) and jet lag (use it with Holy Basil). Rhodiola is also being looked at for treating anxiety and in one preliminary study was found to be effective (Bystritsky, et al, 2008). Due to its stimulating qualities it would be best for anxious people who are deficient and moody (stagnant thoughts) rather than those who are hyper and have difficulty sleeping. Human research has found that Rhodiola has the ability to reduce the damaging effects of chronic stress (Edwards, et al, 2012), enhance energy and performance (Noreen, et al, 2013; De Bock, et al, 2004), memory (Dimpfel, 2014), mental status (Dimpfel, 2014), balance blood sugar levels and protect cells and organs against chemical and radiation-induced damage (Khanum, et al, 2005; Brown, et al, 2002).

Rhodiola can also decrease “Parkinsonian” symptoms (tardive dyskinesia, stiffness, bradykinesia) caused by antipsychotic medications (use it with Scullcap, Blue vervain, Siler/Fang Feng and Gambir/Gou Teng). It can be used as part of a protocol to relieve erectile dysfunction (use it with Muira Puama, Morinda/Ba Ji Tian and Epimedium/Yin Yang Huo) and amenorrhea/infertility due to hormonal imbalance or stress. In a human study, Rhodiola reduced inflammation caused by strenuous exercise and lowered C-reactive protein levels (Abidov, et al, 2004). It can improve physical performance and enhance recovery from exhaustive physical work. It is also used for mild congestive heart failure, angina, and lowering C-reactive protein levels which may help prevent atherosclerosis and myocardial infarctions. From a TCM perspective, Rhodiola can relieve heart blood stagnation (angina, pressure in the chest, palpitations), use it with Hawthorn, Tienqi Ginseng, Corydalis/Yan Hu Suo, Dan Shen/Salvia miltiorrhiza or Safflower/Hong Hua) or heart yang deficiency (shortness of breath, palpitation, cold extremities, fatigue, angina), use it with Hawthorn, Cinnamon, Arjuna, Processed Aconite/Dan Fu Zi, Lily of the Valley or Night Blooming Cereus).

A human study showed Rhodiola improved survival rates and respiratory function in patients with pulmonary hypertension who received cardiopulmonary bypass surgery (Xu, et al, 2003).
Traditionally it is used in Tibetan medicine for nourishing the lung and treating lung conditions such as hemoptysis, coughs and pneumonia. It is also used as a febrifuge, to increase circulation of blood and to build the yuan qi (the original qi).

### Secondary Uses


### Dosage

**Tea (Decoction):** 1-2 tsp. dried root, 10 oz. water, decoct 15 minutes, steep covered for 45 minutes, take 1-2 cups/day

**Tincture:** 1:5, 50% ETOH, 10% vegetable glycerin

**Dose:** 4-6 ml (80-120 gtt.) TID

**Triune:** 1/6 part

**Capsules/tablets:** Arctic root® (SHR-5)-standardized to 3% rosavin and 0.8% salidroside, 100-400 mg per day

### Preparations

Most studies have been done on a proprietary standardized extract of Rhodiola known as SHR-5 (Arctic root®) made by the Swedish Herbal Institute.

### Contraindications & Drug Interactions

Do not use Rhodiola with people who are bipolar, have hypomania or paranoia, as it can exacerbate these conditions. In a case report a 68-year-old woman with moderate chronic depression taking paroxetine experienced a serotonergic syndrome, with restlessness and trembling with when Rhodiola was taken with her existing medication (Maniscalco, et al, 2015).

It can occasionally cause overstimulation and insomnia in sensitive people.

Avoid using Rhodiola in people with heart/blood deficiency (excessive dreaming, nervousness, dizziness, long sleep latency), heart/yin deficiency (irritable, poor sleep, easily startled), phlegm fire disturbing the heart (mania, insomnia, vivid dreams, difficulty concentrating) or heart fire blazing (anxiety attacks, palpitations, violent dreams, insomnia) syndrome patterns.

Rhodiola can exacerbate yin deficieny conditions such as dry mouth, dry cough, dry stools or dry eyes.

In an animal study R. rosea significantly altered the pharmacokinetics of losartan increasing serum levels of the drug (Spanakis, et al, 2013). Human data is lacking to determine whether this can occur in humans or if it can cause clinically significant interactions.

### Special Notes

There are many Rhodiola species (R. crenulata, R. sachalinensis, R. sacra, R. kirilowii, R. imbricata, etc.), only R. rosea contains rosavins and has been extensively studied with human trials. There are numerous in vitro and animal studies using these other species showing that they may have antioxidant, antitumor, immunostimulating, cardioprotective, hepatoprotective and adaptogenic effects. In a human clinical trial an R. crenulata extract was not more effective than placebo for prevention of altitude sickness (Chiu, et al, 2013). In another human study, R. crenulata exhibited antiinflammatory and possibly immune amphoteric effects in people with COPD (Chen, et al, 2014). The people who took the herb (500 mg. per day) had reduced interferon, CD8 cells and high-sensitivity C-reactive protein, all of which promote COPD progression.

### Additional Resources & References


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