

Moonhawk's Musings

Greetings.

This month I am writing about the herb St John's Wort. It is commonly known for easing depression.

The recipe I have chosen is cheesy herb muffins. This is a recipe I adapted from another recipe. These muffins aren't the giant variety you find in various coffee shops and bakeries. The muffins are small in size, but packed with taste and goodness. The cheese content takes them off the low fat list, but they are not on the high fat list either. I prefer to think of them as a quick and easy breakfast on the run, or mid morning snack when it's a long time since breakfast and lunch is sometime in the future.

Next month I plan to tell you about the herb and essential oil lavender and provide culinary uses for this ancient herb.

Wishing you many good things

Moonhawk

St John's Wort



St John's Wort is well known as a herb rather than a plant. Its botanical name is *Hypericum perforatum*. It is a small (0.6m) growing shrub that originated in Europe and Asia. It has naturalised in Australia, and is classed as a weed, or noxious weed, in many areas. My partner and I spend many a spring day walking over our property pulling up young St John's Wort plants to prevent it spreading and taking over the natural environment.

The flowering tops are used in preparation of herbal tinctures and infused oils. The compound

hypericin, found in St John's Wort, gives preparations a distinct reddish hue.

The herb is anti-depressant, anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory and anti-neoplastic (it may prevent abnormal new growth such as that found in benign and cancerous tumours).

As an anti-depressant, St John's Wort is similar to pharmaceutical selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). It also inhibits the reuptake of noradrenaline and dopamine. It is these mechanisms that explain St John's Wort's ability to aid mild to moderate depression. This has been proven by a number of scientific studies.

Naturopaths and herbalists are not legally able to diagnose diseases such as depression. This doesn't mean they cannot prescribe St John's Wort for mild to moderate depression. I use a *Stress-Anxiety-Depression* questionnaire and/or a *Mood* questionnaire to determine if a patient needs St John's Wort, or one of the other anti-depression or anxiolytic herbs. I am also comfortable prescribing St John's Wort if a patient's doctor has diagnosed mild to moderate depression, and the patient is not taking a pharmaceutical anti-depressant.

If you think that St John's Wort may be the herb for you, contact the [Australian Traditional Medicine Society](#) (ATMS) or the [National Herbalist Association of Australia](#) (NHAA) to find a naturopath or herbalist who can correctly prescribe herbal supplements. (I know I keep saying this, but it's important that herbs are only prescribed by trained and accredited practitioners).

I rarely use St John's Wort as an anti-inflammatory as there are other herbs better suited to this purpose. I have known of St John's Wort infused oil being used in massage to ease inflammation from musculoskeletal injuries. I have also used it topically to assist in the treatment of shingles (herpes zoster), usually along with essential oils.

Studies are emerging where St John's Wort is showing promise in the treatment of certain types of tumours. This is in conjunction with a specific type of treatment referred to as photodynamic treatment. It's a case of watch this space on this particular effect.

St John's Wort has been shown to be effective in treating depression associated with menopause and andropause. It's also useful in assisting people who wish to give up smoking, and has positive effects on alcohol intake associated with depression.

Safety considerations

St John's Wort should not be used by people who have severe depression with psychotic symptoms, are a suicide risk, or whose symptoms are so severe that they cannot get on with aspects of their life such as going to work or interaction with family and friends.

While St John's Wort is an effective herb for treating mild to moderate depression, its ability to interact negatively with a range of pharmaceutical preparations makes it an herb to use with care. I would recommend only using St John's Wort if it is prescribed by a qualified practitioner, who will liaise with your doctor if needed.

St John's Wort is **contraindicated**, this means do not take concurrently with, cyclosporin, digoxin, HIV non-nucleoside, reverse transcriptase inhibitors, other, protease inhibitors, irinotecan, and anticoagulant drugs e.g. warfarin.

Caution is recommended when prescribing St John's Wort to people who are already taking a SSRI. This includes citalopram, escitalopram, fluoxetine, fluvoxamine, paroxetine and setraline. Prescribing St John's Wort with these pharmaceutical drugs may lead to serotonin syndrome.

I would prefer not to use St John's Wort during pregnancy and breast feeding, as depression during this life event needs careful monitoring by a medical practitioner. It has been shown to be safe in animal studies, but this has not been tested in humans.

Reference: Herbs & Natural Supplements: An evidence based guide (2nd Edition), by Lesley Braun and Marc Cohen. The Essential Guide to Herbal Safety, by Simon Mills and Kerry Bone. Medicinal Plants of the World by Ben-Erik van Wyk & Michael Wink. In-Tele-Health © 2008 (from Hyperhealth Pro CD-ROM)

Cheesy Herb Muffins

This recipe makes 12 reasonable size muffins. Because there is no sugar in the recipe, the muffins tend not to brown much. The muffins go nicely with soup in winter, as a brunch item, or as a snack. Buttermilk is the key ingredient that makes the muffins lighter and fluffy.

Pre-heat the oven to 180 Celsius

Grease a 12 cup muffin pan, or line with muffin cups.

Ingredients

2 & ½ cups gluten free self raising flour 60 g butter
1 cup grated cheese – choose from jarlesburg, gruyere, cheddar, parmesan, or a mix.
2 teaspoons mixed dry herbs, **or**, 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh herbs
1&1/2 to 2 cups buttermilk 2 eggs
Salt and pepper

Rub the butter into the flour. Mix in the cheese and herbs. Add salt and pepper if you choose.

Beat the eggs with 1&1/2 cups of buttermilk. Add to the dry ingredients and mix well. If the mix is too dry, add more buttermilk. The batter needs to be wet without being sloppy.

Spoon mix into the muffin cups. The mix usually fills the muffin cups nearly to the top.

Bake for 18 minutes, rotate the pan, and bake for a further 5-7 minutes.

Rest pan on a wire wrack for 5 minutes, then turn the muffins out to cool.

Can be eaten warm. Freeze those that aren't eaten that day.

Variations:

Here are a number of variations to try. All yummy.

Add 1 cup canned or frozen (thawed) corn kernels. The muffins will be slightly larger, because of the additional ingredient.

Chop 3 rashers of bacon until crisp, break up and add to the muffins.

Add 1 cup mashed, cooked pumpkin to the mix.

Add 1 small packet (250g) frozen spinach (thawed) to the mix.

Press 1 cherry tomato into the top of each muffin before baking.

Bonus Recipe

I thought this month I would include a muffin recipe for those who can eat wheat and gluten - Blueberry-bran muffins. I started making these muffins long before I was diagnosed with coeliac disease. Now I make them for my partner – he takes 2 to work each morning to have with his morning coffee. **This recipe is not suitable for people who are wheat or gluten intolerant, or who have coeliac disease**, or who cannot eat wheat or gluten for one reason or another. Because the mix has to stand, it can be made in the evening, then baked fresh for breakfast – my beloved assures me they are yummy when baked in the morning and eaten fresh.

This recipe makes 12 good size muffins. Grease a 12 cup muffin pan, or line with muffin cups.

Pre-heat the oven to 180 Celsius

1 & ¾ cups unprocessed bran	1 & ¼ cups plain flour
2 teaspoons bicarb of soda	2 teaspoons mixed spice
¼ cup brown sugar	1 egg
1 ripe banana	375ml buttermilk
125ml vegetable oil	1 packet (400g) frozen blueberries (thawed)

Mix the bran, flour, bicarb, mixed spice, and brown sugar in a bowl.

Add the oil, buttermilk, egg and banana into a separate bowl, or large jug. Measure a heaped cup of blueberries and mix into the flour etc.

Add the rest of the blueberries and any juice to the other wet ingredients, blend with a stick blender until smooth.

Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and mix well, but do not over mix.

Cover the bowl with cling film and refrigerate for 10-12 hours, or overnight – this is an important step, the muffins will not work without this step.

Spoon into 12 muffin cups. The mix tends to be quite wet and may ooze over the top of the muffin cups. Don't worry about this, it's part of their charm.

Bake for 18 minutes, rotate the pan, and bake for a further 5-7 minutes.

Rest pan on a wire rack for 5 minutes, then turn the muffins out to cool.

Can be eaten warm. Freeze those that aren't eaten that day.