

Saffron – Not just a precious and expensive spice!

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As a therapeutic plant, saffron is considered an excellent reliever of stomach ailment and an antispasmodic. Saffron helps digestion and increases appetite. It is also relieves renal colic, reduces stomachaches and relieves tension. It helps in keeping cholesterol levels in control.

Since ancient times, saffron has been used in many Asian countries to treat acne and skin diseases. Saffron paste is applied on the skin to improve complexion.

During the last years it was used as a drug for flu-like infections, depression, hepatomegaly (enlarged liver) and as a sedative for its essential oils. It is also considered that in small quantities it regulates women's menstruation and helps conception.

It is a fact that even since antiquity, crocus was attributed to have aphrodisiac properties. Many writers along with Greek mythology sources associate crocus with fertility. Crocus in general is an excellent stimulant.

Besides being an antioxidant, saffron is good for AMD (Age related macular degeneration). Research by Professor SILVIA BISTI of the ARC Centre of Excellence in Vision Science (The Vision Centre) and University of L'Aquila, Italy, has shown that the high-priced golden culinary herb made from crocus flowers not only protects the vision cells (photoreceptors) from damage, it may also act to slow and possibly even reverse the course of blinding diseases such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and retinitis pigmentosa (1).

Cancer claims more than 5 million lives each year throughout the world. This makes cancer the largest cause of mortality in the world. Since 1990, Dr. FIKRAT ABDULLAYEV has been carrying out research to determine if saffron can be used to cure or prevent cancer. In a



research carried out at Mexican Ministry of Science and Technology (CONACyT), he found that saffron not only inhibited the formation of new cancers, but in many different types of studies it also shrunk existing tumors. In addition, saffron at times appears to enhance the anticancer effect of chemotherapy (2).

Depressive disorders affect about 19 million Americans each year. Depression is usually treated with a combination of psychotherapy and medications. Fluoxetine (Prozac™) and paroxetine (Paxil™) are antidepressants that increase the level of serotonin in the brain, causing an elevation in mood (3).

In a recent saffron study conducted by researchers at the Tehran University of Medical Services in Iran, forty patients who were diagnosed with mild to moderate depression were recruited to receive either 30 mg of saffron per day or 20 mg of Prozac per day. No placebo was used. After measuring depressive symptoms throughout the six-week trial period, both saffron and Prozac were found to be equally effective in relieving depression (4).

Saffron has sedative properties and is used in traditional medicine for anticonvulsant properties. The results of a study carried out in Iran indicate that the extracts of saffron may be beneficial in both absence and clonic seizures (5).

Boon for the skin – Since olden times,

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Table I – Typical nutritional value of saffron (6) (Per 100 g)

Principle	Nutrient value	Percentage of RDA
Energy	310 Kcal	15.5
Carbohydrates	65.37 g	50
Protein	11.43 g	21
Total fat	5.85 g	29
Cholesterol	0 mg	0
Dietary fiber	3.9 g	10
Vitamins		
Folates	93 µg	23
Niacin	1.46 mg	9
Pyridoxine	1.01 mg	77
Riboflavin	0.26 mg	20
Vitamin A	530 IU	18
Vitamin C	80.8 mg	135
Electrolytes		
Sodium	148 mg	10
Potassium	1724 mg	37
Minerals		
Calcium	111 mg	11
Copper	0.33 mg	37
Iron	11.10 mg	139
Magnesium	264 mg	66
Manganese	28.4 mg	1235
Phosphorus	252 mg	36
Selenium	5.6 µg	10
Zinc	1.09 mg	10

Source: USDA National Nutrient data base

saffron has been regarded as highly beneficial for skin. Not only does it add glow to the skin and cure blemishes, it also acts as a blood purifier.

Table I shows the nutritional value of saffron. Anywhere from 400,000 stigmas or upwards of 85,000 flowers are required to yield a pound of saffron. Producing saffron is labor intensive. In a good crop, each

plant typically produces several flowers. The stigma or female part of the flower is the actual source of saffron. The stigmas are painstakingly picked by hand. Then they are dried or cured and transformed into pure saffron. Due to the difficulty of extracting minute stigmas from the flower *Crocus sativus*, saffron strands are prohibitively expensive.

Prevention is more important than treatment. Regular intake of saffron (3-5 g daily) in our daily diet can prevent us from a lot of diseases. But, one major drawback of using any natural remedy is that it has to be taken regularly for a long time.

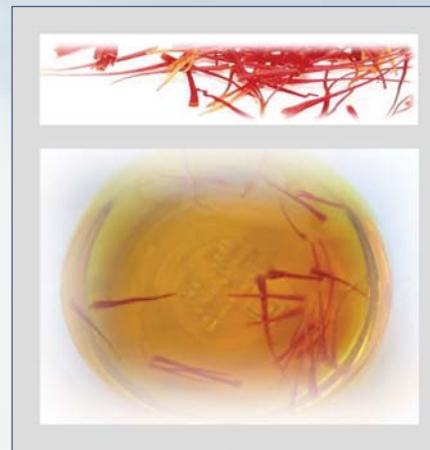
A general citizen cannot afford to consume natural saffron strands for a long time due to three reasons: the first one being it is very expensive; second being the saffron strands stale fast; and third being the limited availability of saffron strands. A consumer has to keep buying fresh strands.

It is very difficult for common man to avail the medicinal benefits of Saffron. VAV's natural saffron extract comes in very handy where these issues are concerned.

Is there way out to cope up with both the factors? Can saffron be readily available economically?

The answer is YES! Considering this, Mumbai based VAV Life Sciences (7) has developed Natural Saffron Extract. Natural Saffron Extract (8) is 100% natural and apart from the carrier propylene glycol, there is no other chemistry involved. Saffron Extract is a specially formulated food grade extract of saffron without losing any of its natural properties.

The process used in extraction, namely super critical extraction gives the product



stability and shelf life of up to three years. Besides, the extract is much more economical to use.

Advantages of natural saffron extract over saffron strands:

- Cost effective;
- Easily available throughout year;
- Can be directly incorporated into water, milk or fat based food preparations;
- Has a shelf life of three years;
- Easier to use and handle;
- Can be dosed precisely.

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