

Got a pain? -- Have a cup of Brazilian mint

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For thousands of years it has been prescribed by traditional healers in Brazil to treat a range of ailments from headaches and stomach pain to fever and flu.

Now for the first time, researchers at Newcastle University have been able to scientifically prove the [pain](#) relieving properties of *Hyptis crenata* - otherwise known as Brazilian mint.

Testing this ancient South American herb on mice, the team led by researcher Graciela Rocha was able to show that when prepared as a 'tea' - the traditional way to administer the medicine - the mint was as effective as a synthetic aspirin-style drug Indometacin.

The research is being presented today at the 2nd International Symposium on Medicinal and Nutraceutical Plants in New Delhi, India, and will appear in the society's journal *Acta Horticulturae*.

Now the Newcastle University team plan to launch clinical trials to find out how effective the mint is as a pain relief for people.

Graciela explains: "Since humans first walked the earth we have looked to plants to provide a cure for our ailments - in fact it is estimated more than 50,000 plants are used worldwide for medicinal purposes.

"Besides traditional use, more than half of all prescription drugs are based on a molecule that occurs naturally in a plant.

"What we have done is to take a plant that is widely used to safely treat pain and scientifically proven that it works as well as some synthetic drugs. Now the next step is to find out how and why the plant works."

What the study showed

In order to mimic as closely as possible the traditional treatment, the Newcastle University team first carried out a survey in Brazil to find out how the medicine is typically prepared and how much should be consumed.

The most common method was to produce a decoction, a process whereby the dried leaves are boiled in water for 30 minutes and allowed to cool before being drunk as a 'tea'.

The team found that when the mint was given at a dose similar to that prescribed by traditional healers, the medicine was as effective at relieving pain as the Indometacin.

Graciela, who is herself Brazilian and remembers being given the tea as a cure for every childhood illness, adds: "The taste isn't what most people here in the UK would recognize as a mint.

"In fact it tastes more like sage which is another member of the mint family. Not that nice, really, but then medicine isn't supposed to be nice, is it?"

Source: Newcastle University

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