RUPA  MANU

and the Calming and Relaxing Chamomile

Manu was having a great day. He had got an “A” in his maths test, he wrote the best answer in English and for lunch he had a spinach-corn sandwich with cheese, peppers, and lots of onions. But later that afternoon he felt a burning sensation in the back of his throat. His chest and stomach started to hurt, too. Manu had a mean case of... Indigestion!

What is Indigestion? This was the first question he asked his Bantu mama on reaching home. To which Bantu mama replied, “Indigestion is just another name for an upset stomach. It’s also called dyspepsia”. Rupa who was quietly listening to all this, jumped in and teasingly said, “Indigestion usually happens when people eat too much, too fast, or foods that don’t agree with them. So, it’s fair to say that the big spinach-corn-sandwich didn’t agree with you”. Meanwhile, Manu started crying as he was having a funny sensation in his tummy and a burning sensation in his chest region.

Bantu mama eased him by saying, “seems like you have a little heartburn along with Indigestion. It doesn’t mean there is anything wrong with your heart. Heartburn is a burning feeling that travels from a person’s chest up to the neck and throat. It is caused by stomach acid, which isn’t a problem unless it gets out of your stomach”. “So relax, here, have this cup of chamomile tea and you will be fine in no time”. Indeed, Manu became fine in some time and started playing with Rupa as if nothing had happened.

Later in the evening, Bantu mama told them more about “tummy troubles” and what actually happens when children get an upset stomach.

“With heartburn, stomach acid splashes up and irritates the oesophagus, the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach. This is called oesophageal reflux and can leave a sour or bitter taste in the person’s mouth. Indigestion and heartburn are common problems for kids and grownups. That’s why you see all those commercials for heartburn and indigestion medicines on TV. But don’t take any medicine for indigestion unless your parents or doctor says it’s OK. Most of the ones that are advertised on TV are meant for adults, not kids” warned Bantu mama.

After having a light dinner comprising of soup and nourishing ‘khichadi’, Manu’s mom advised him to sleep early but he was not willing to. Once again Bantu mama walked in with another cup of chamomile tea and asked him to drink that. Manu crinkled his nose and started running away saying, “I am fine now, my tummy doesn’t hurt anymore”. “Please drink this, this will calm you down too and will help you sleep better”, Bantu mama said.

“Oh, is that so” said Manu taking the tea cup in his hand and started sipping the warm tea that had the sweetness of honey added to it. “Tell me more about this wonder herb, chamomile” slipping into a comfortable position on his mama’s lap. “Chamomile has long been used as a bedtime tea to relax you so you can fall asleep faster. This same property of chamomile as a sleeping aid is also beneficial in children and/or adults with ADHD. It not only helps with the sleep problem frequently seen in children with ADHD, but the anxiety as well, plus all your digestive problems” informed Bantu mama.

“Chamomile has been used thousands of years by many different cultures as medicine. Its use can be dated back to the ancient Egyptians, Romans, and Greeks. It has been used, both orally and topically, to treat many conditions, such as anxiety, insomnia, colds, sore throats, abscesses, gum inflammation (gingivitis), psoriasis, acne, eczema, minor burns, stomach ulcers, indigestion, diaper rash, colic, and chickenpox” he added. “Wow” said Rupa and went back to hearing what Bantu mama was saying. “There are two common types of chamomile - German chamomile and Roman (or English) chamomile. German chamomile is the more commonly used type. Although they belong to different species, they are used to treat the same health problems. They are both used to calm the nerves, soothe gastrointestinal problems, relieve muscle spasms, and soothe skin irritation and mild skin infections”.

“Snooze...snooze”, this was the sound coming out of Manu’s nostrils, ten minutes later, as he had dozed off into a peaceful slumber listening to this story. Slowly, Rupa too climbed onto her bed and in no time was fast asleep. And in their dream, they dreamt of tiny, star-like daisies...
Dried flower heads of chamomile are used in manufacturing herbal tea, ointments, potpourri, herb pillows, shampoos, herbal medicines and cosmetics.

**Matricaria chamomilla**

*Synonyms:* Matricaria recutita  
*Family:* Compositae (Asteraceae)

**Common Names:**  
Chamomile, Scented Mayweed

**Other Names:**  
Camomile, German chamomile, Ground Apple, Whig Plant, White Stars

German chamomile or wild chamomile is an annual plant with tiny, daisy like flowers. Chamomile plant got its name from the Greek words ‘chamos’ and ‘milos’, which represent ground and apple respectively. This means low-growing (ground level) shrubs with the smell of apples.

Many people associate chamomile with relaxing bedtime tea, but it also has many other properties that are not as well known. Chamomile is also used as a digestive tonic, as an antiseptic and anti-inflammatory plant and is often used in skin care products to help heal inflammation and kill bacteria that cause acne. To make your own poultice, mash chamomile leaves and add just enough water to make a paste and apply to affected area.

**Where can you find me?**  
I am one of the important medicinal herbs, native to southern and eastern Europe. I am also grown in Germany, Hungary, France, Russia, Yugoslavia, and Brazil. I was introduced in India during the Mughal period, now I am grown in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Jammu and Kashmir. I grow best in clay, poor and mountain soils.
How do I look like?
I am a low-growing, annual plant. I have smooth, erect and hairy stems which grow up to 60 cms. My leaves are long and narrow, bipinnate to tripinnate. My star shaped flowers appear solitary on long, erect stalks. They have white ray florets and hollow, conical center, yellow in colour. My flowering period is from July to September. My fruit is small and dry.

Parts used: Whole plant


What are my Uses?

- Because of my extraordinarily gentle effectiveness, I am the first herb of choice for many home remedies. My seemingly endless list of uses can all be traced to my effects on the nervous system and digestive system, as well as to my anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties.
- **Digestive Tonic**: The bitter principles in chamomile make it an excellent tonic for the liver and digestive system. The bittersweet flavour stimulates the gastric juices, and helps to settle the stomach. Chamomile teas can be used as part of a treatment program for irritable bowel syndrome because of its antispasmodic properties. Chamomile’s anti-inflammatory actions soothe inflammation throughout the digestive tract. Chamomile is more effective for nausea and morning sickness when used with ginger. Steep chamomile for at least 20 minutes to more thoroughly extract the bitters.
- **Beautiful Skin and Hair**: Chamomile contains compounds that are antibacterial and anti-inflammatory. The anti-inflammatory effect of the essential oil of chamomile applied topically improves skin regeneration. Skin washes and baths with chamomile tea can calm skin inflammations, as well as bacterial skin diseases. A cold compress with chamomile tea does wonders for puffy eyes. Cooled chamomile tea used as a hair rinse brings on the highlights in coloured hair. Add lemon juice to enhance the effect. Chamomile flower extracts are helpful in managing eczema also.
- **Emotional healing**: Chamomile calms anxiety, eases stress and may have a positive effect on attention deficit disorder (ADD). Chamomile tea and chamomile oil are safe for children and babies who have trouble sleeping or are under stress.
- **Women’s Health**: Chamomile is a mild but effective remedy for delayed menstruation and irregular menstruation, and is especially helpful in these conditions that may be triggered by stress, anxiety, and tension. Chamomile is an excellent healing agent in douche formulas and sitz baths to treat vaginitis and yeast infections.

- **First Aid**: Both Chamomile teas, and chamomile essential oils can be used in herbal skin washes to help heal cuts, scrapes, and abrasions. To treat boils, bathe the affected area with hot water and a blend of 3 to 4 drops chamomile, lavender and tea tree oil twice a day. Chamomile also teams up with lavender oil as a treatment for minor burns. Chamomile makes an effective hot poultice to reduce swelling and ease pain when applied to a swollen jaw, or painful ear. For a dental abscess, put 1 drop of chamomile oil on a cotton ball and apply directly to the abscess. German chamomile used as a gargle is beneficial for gingivitis. A gargle made with chamomile tea can be used for bacterial infections of the mouth and gums.

How to Make Chamomile Tea?
Chamomile tea is known well as an aid to sleep. It is also used to calm nerves, dispel stomach gas and aid digestion. Making your own at home is easy.

**Ingredients**: 2-3 teaspoons dried chamomile flowers per cup and hot water.

Put the dried chamomile flowers into a cup. Pour in hot water. Allow to infuse for 3-5 minutes. Strain into another cup using a tea strainer. Add honey or lemon juice to adjust the taste if desired and drink.