

Haritaki

(*Terminalia chebula*)



Haritaki is held in high esteem in Ayurveda for its properties to prevent and cure diseases. It has enjoyed the prime place among medicinal herbs in India since ancient times. It is called the 'King of Medicines' and is always listed first in Ayurveda because of its extraordinary therapeutic benefits.

Data on this medicinal plant is available in all Ayurvedic classics as well as in the *Nighantus* and works on the *Materia medica* of Ayurveda. The details of the plant are also mentioned in Tibetan literature and various floras of medicinal plants. It is found throughout India up to an altitude of 1500 m.¹ Fruit rind is used as medicine and is one of the ingredients in *Triphala* (three myrobalans). This plant is used externally in wound healing, fungal infections, inflammations of the mucous membrane of the mouth, and internally as a rejuvenative, astringent, purgative, stomachic, and laxative. It is useful in asthma, piles, and cough.^{2,3}

In Ayurveda seven varieties of *Haritaki* fruits, namely, *Vijaya*, *Rohini*, *Putana*, *Amrita*, *Abhaya*, *Jivanti*, and *Chetaki* has been described.⁴

It is a tall, large, deciduous tree. The wood is brownish-grey and very hard and durable. Leaf: The younger leaves have velvet hairs. The leaves are longer than broad, oval shaped. Flower: The flowers are small, creamy white, and sweet scented. Fruit: The fruit is a drupe with single seed. The drupe is shiny, spindle shaped, greenish yellow and faintly angled. Size of the fruit varies. Bark: The stem bark is dark brown and falls off into irregular woody scales.⁵

Active contents:

Fruits contain astringent substances - tannic acid, chebulinic acid, gallic acid etc. Resin and a purgative principle of the nature of anthraquinone and sennoside are also present.⁶

Herb Action:

Digestion: *Haritaki* is beneficial for the whole digestive tract. It increases appetite, and improve digestion and absorption. It provides effective cure for piles, gastro-intestinal infections and diarrhoea. It can also be used for colic and wind, worms and constipation. The unripe fruit is considered to be more of a laxative than the ripe one. *Haritaki* is also useful for infections of the gut and for parasites including amoebas. It is also said to be effective for use in inflammation of the mucous membrane and ulcers.⁷

Oxidative stress: *Haritaki* is known to protect against age-related diseases. This is because it helps fight oxidative stress. It boosts the concentration of many well known antioxidants, like glutathione, vitamin-C etc. The fruit of the *Haritaki* is an effective antioxidant. It is an excellent free radical scavenger. Studies also show that, it can be used to protect humans from radiation induced damage. The fruit is also used to prevent aging, and building immunity and body resistance against diseases.⁷

Indications : Constipation, Indigestion, Oxidative stress.

Contraindication: None

Dose: 1 Capsule two to three times a day or as advised by the Physician.

Composition: Each capsule contains 400 mg standardized extract of *Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula*).

References:

1. Chopra RN, Nayar SL, Chopra IC. New Delhi: CSIR; 1956. Glossary of Indian medicinal plants; p. 242.
2. Shastry JL. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Orientalia; 2005. Dravyaguna vijnan (pt-2) pp. 209–15.
3. Cooke Theodore. Calcutta: Botanical Survey of India; 1967. Flora of Bombay (pt-1) pp. 195–205.
4. Chunekar KC. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Bharati Academy; 1999. Bhavaprakashnighantu; p. 3.
5. <http://haritaki.in/aboutharitaki.html>.
6. <http://www.ayurhelp.com/articles/haritaki-sanskrit-terminalia-chebula>.
7. <http://naturalhomeremedies.co/Tchebula.html>