

Essiac: Fact or Fiction?

Ed

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"There is no cure for cancer. There never will be. There are only cures for people who have cancer." Rene Caisse

Abstract

The Ojibwa tribe of Canada used four herbs brewed into a tea to assist the body's efforts to treat cancers, and to provide nutritional support to the body for many other diseases, including gastric upset, and skin ailments. The four herbs used in the formula were Sheep Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*), Burdock (*Arctium Lappa*), Slippery Elm (*Ulmus Rubra* or *Fulva*) and Turkey Rhubarb (*Rheum palmatum* or *Officinale*). The properties of these herbs will be discussed, citing data showing research that supports the effectiveness of these herbs.

The Hoxsey formula, also used as a cancer treatment, has similar ingredients; both have an emphasis incorporating Burdock root. Aspects of nutritional science will be discussed.

What's in a Name?

In 1922 one of Nurse Rene M. Caisse's patients spoke of a Canadian Ojibway (also Chippewa) tribes' Indian herbal formula she had used to treat her own malignant breast cancer. This patient had been cured some 20 years previously, with no recurrence. Rene met with the tribal Indians to obtain their formula and was shown where and how to pick the herbs required for the formula. Nurse Caisse prepared her original herbal *formula into a drink named Essiac, which is Nurse Caisse's name spelled backwards.*

It is through her work that the tribal Indian formula has now become available around the world.

Background History:

Medicinal plants are a great resource for developing many of the commercial medications used today for the treatment of a wide range of diseases. (1) It should not be a surprise that their unrefined and wildcrafted harvest has some potency to provide medical treatments for a variety of illnesses, including cancer.

Although Essiac is an ancient formula, it has only recently been brought to the attention of some of the western doctors and veterinarians through some of the MLM companies that market it and from networking with other naturopathic/holistic veterinarians. (6)

Essiac is a herbal formula that has been used extensively by northern American Indian tribes for centuries. It has been used for pain relief, cancer cures, and gut ailments. Variations of its formula have a strong traditional base in the ancient Chinese, Japanese and Aryurvedic Indian herbal formulae. This cross-cultural commonality leads one to speculate about, and to further research its ingredients and methods of action.

Essiac was tested at both the Memorial Sloan-Kettering (MSKCC) and the US National Cancer Institutes (NCI) in the 1970s, and was said to have no anticancer activity in animal systems at that time. During this period Rene Caisse was lobbying for it to have a further fair trial. This paper will examine some of the politics behind these apparent negative outcomes of the studies. It is important to look at the history of the "Essiac trials" and to give the circumstances a fair consideration as there are indications of a possible bias of a political nature surrounding those studies. There are also persistent anecdotal positive reports, and importantly new research show that *many of the herbs separate identifiable components have individually demonstrated to have*

anticancer properties in independent tests.

Some possible methods of action for the plant compounds is that their organic compounds can bind to some nuclear receptors, such as the estrogen receptor to exert various biological effects (25) Other methods of interaction include free radical scavenging and antioxidant protection. Each of the components of the herbs may have several actions on different parts of the body.

Nurse Rene Caisse's life work:

From 1922 to 1978 Nurse Caisse helped thousands of people with her Essiac herbal supplement at her clinic in Bracebridge, Ontario, Canada. Although she refused payments for her services, she accepted donations to help support her clinic. Doctors referred cases to her that could no longer be helped with traditional Western Health care. Nurse Caisse dedicated her life to using the Essiac formula and helping the suffering.

Rene Caisse also used her Sheep Sorrel Solution topically as a douche, enema and mouthwash.

To read more about the history of Nurse Caisse, visit www.essiacinfo.org

The site is a wonderful resource on Rene Caisse and includes photographs and multimedia.

What are the ingredients of Essiac?

There are four main herbs in the original formula. They are said to help to support body functions by cleansing the blood, promoting cell repair, and aiding effective assimilation and elimination. When combined, their separate beneficial effects are said to be synergistically enhanced.

As herbs are edible food substances there are multiple minerals, vitamins, amino acids, sterols and fats, and carbohydrates in each herb. Identifying the "active" constituents of the essiac brew is a process that has been under investigation for at least the last 20 years. Medical researchers continue to search for newer versions of potential chemotherapeutic agents, and there have been several active ingredients found within the four herbs. Some of these active ingredients found in the formula are **Rhein, Emodin, Arctigenin, Glucans, beta-sitosterol, glucan polysaccharide,** and **Catechins**, but there are possibly hundreds of different chemicals that may be shown to have some effect in future research. Also the synergy and Pharmacodynamics of the recipe with the herbs brewed together may help contribute to the potency

The separate herbs that are used in the formula are discussed below.