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## *Epifagus virginiana*: A review of its homoeopathic potential in stress-induced headache and migraine

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### Abstract

*Epifagus virginiana*, commonly known as beech drops, is an underutilized yet potentially valuable medicine in homoeopathic therapeutics. Derived from a parasitic plant native to North America, this remedy is primarily indicated for headaches precipitated by mental or physical exertion, emotional stress, or unusual excitement. Despite its limited proving and sparse mention in contemporary practice, classical homoeopathic texts highlight its efficacy in treating nervous and stress-induced headaches, particularly in women. This brief review aims to revisit the botanical, pharmacological, and homoeopathic aspects of *Epifagus virginiana*, consolidate its clinical indications, and encourage further investigation into its broader therapeutic potential. Greater attention to such lesser-known remedies could enrich homoeopathic prescribing and support individualized treatment approaches in headache management.

**Keywords:** Homoeopathy, *Epifagus virginiana*, lesser known medicine, migraine, Stress- induced

### 1. Introduction

In the vast treasury of homoeopathic materia medica, numerous lesser-known remedies remain hidden in the shadow of well-established polychrests. These remedies, though sparsely documented, often possess highly specific and effective clinical indications that merit deeper exploration and wider use in practice. One such underutilized gem is *Epifagus virginiana*, commonly referred to as Beech drops. This parasitic plant, native to North America, has historically occupied a modest place in homoeopathic therapeutics. However, growing evidence from classical materia medica and clinical observations suggests its valuable role in treating headaches triggered by mental or physical exertion, particularly those associated with stress. The purpose of this article is to shed light on this forgotten yet clinically relevant remedy and encourage its thoughtful consideration in appropriate clinical scenarios.

*Epifagus virginiana* is an obligate parasitic herbaceous plant that derives its nutrients from the roots of the American beech tree (*Fagus grandifolia*). It belongs to the botanical family Orobanchaceae. Unlike autotrophic plants, Beech drops lack chlorophyll and rely entirely on their host for sustenance. The name *Epiphagus* is derived from the Greek word “epi,” meaning “upon,” and “phagos” or “fagus,” meaning “beech,” highlighting its parasitic dependency on the beech tree. This plant is widely distributed across the eastern United States, parts of Canada, and eastern Mexico, where it thrives in deciduous forests beneath dense canopies of beech trees<sup>[1]</sup>.

### 2. Morphological description

*Epifagus virginiana*, commonly known as Beech drops, is a small, holoparasitic herb that grows to a height of 10 to 50 cm. It lacks chlorophyll and survives by parasitizing the roots of the American beech tree (*Fagus grandifolia*). The plant has an erect, pale brown stem, often streaked with fine brown to purple lines, and bears numerous elongate, ascending branches. Instead of true leaves, it has minute, non-functional leaf scales that are triangular to ovate in shape and measure about 2 to 4 mm in length. These scale-like structures are an adaptation to its non-photosynthetic lifestyle.

The plant produces two types of flowers: lower cleistogamous flowers, which are about 5 mm long and do not open, and upper chasmogamous flowers, around 1 cm in length, which are open and may be cross-pollinated. The upper flowers have a tubular white corolla marked with two longitudinal brown-purple stripes, aiding in pollinator attraction. The calyx is also tubular with multiple lobes. The fruit is an obliquely positioned capsule, approximately 5 mm long,

which contains numerous minute, dust-like seeds adapted for wide dispersal. The entire morphology of *Epifagus virginiana* reflects its parasitic nature and adaptation to a forest floor environment where light is limited [2].



**Fig 1:** Photograph of *Epifagus virginiana* [3]

### 3. Homoeopathic preparation

The mother tincture of *Epifagus virginiana* is prepared from whole fresh plant in full flowering season.

The monograph formula for the preparation of one litre of Mother tincture is [2].

*Epifagus virginiana* in Coarse powder - 100 g

Purified water - 400 ml

Strong alcohol - 635 ml

Potencies: 2x to contain one-part mother tincture, three parts purified water, six parts strong alcohol; 3x and higher with dispensing alcohol.

### 4. Chemical composition

The chemical analysis of *Epifagus virginiana* reveals a phytochemical profile that is still relatively underexplored. Traditional usage and preliminary studies suggest that the plant is rich in tannins, particularly condensed tannins, which account for its notable astringent properties and historical application in treating diarrhoea and other gastrointestinal issues. In addition to tannins, *Epifagus virginiana* contains various phenolic compounds, including flavonoids and phenolic acids, which may contribute to antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. Although not extensively characterized, compounds such as gallic acid and ellagic acid derivatives are suspected to be present based on the plant's pharmacological behaviour and similarities with related species. The presence of alkaloids is either minimal or absent, as indicated by limited reports, and volatile constituents have not been documented in detail, aligning with the plant's lack of aromatic properties. Some researchers hypothesize the occurrence of lignans and coumarins, which are common in other parasitic or hemiparasitic plants, although definitive evidence in *Epifagus virginiana* is lacking. Its chemical composition may also be influenced by its parasitic relationship, potentially absorbing or modifying compounds from its host plant. Despite its longstanding use in folk medicine, modern phytochemical research using advanced

analytical techniques such as HPLC, GC-MS, or NMR remains scarce. Consequently, while initial findings highlight the therapeutic potential of *Epifagus virginiana*, especially due to its tannin content, comprehensive phytochemical profiling and pharmacological validation are necessary to establish its bioactive constituents and their therapeutic relevance. The unique biological nature of this plant makes it a candidate for further study, particularly in the fields of ethnobotany, natural product chemistry, and parasitic plant biology [4].

*Epifagus virginiana* was proved and introduced by Ralf Morlen. Proving symptoms of *Epifagus virginiana* as described by Richard Hughes were pain in both sides of head, lasting until went to bed. This symptom may be associated with viscid saliva, and constant desire to spit [5].

### 5.1 Homoeopathic uses of *Epifagus virginiana*

In homoeopathic therapeutics, J.H. Clarke stated that, he had cured severe headaches which were caused by physical or nervous over-strain or any unusual exertion or excitement, as going on a visit, or doing a day's shopping. Such headache may be better from a good sleep and has the sensation of pressing pain from within outward. It may also be associated with a concomitant symptom; "Constantly wants to spit viscid saliva" [6].

William Boericke described *Epifagus virginiana* as a remedy for sick, neurasthenic, and nervous headaches, especially in women, brought on or made worse by exertion and shopping. He also added, pressing pain in temples and inclination to spit viscid saliva. Sick headache coming on when deviating from ordinary pursuits. Headaches from tiredness of nerve caused by mental or physical exhaustion, preceded by hunger [7].

Robin Murphy particularly highlighted its headache as nervous, pressive pain which travel from right to left, continues until 4 pm. He illustrated the mental symptoms of *Epifagus virginiana* as confusion of mind, mistakes in writing and fear of death [8].

E B Nash points out that, this medicine often cures headaches after a hard day's work, overfatigue from work, often called "tired headache." It is a fact that one symptom does not always make unfailing indication for a remedy, but a symptom often verified is always valuable leader to the totality of symptoms [9].

T F Allen narrated several cures of sick headache with the general characteristic of being caused by unusual excitement or fatigue, for example, visiting or shopping; some cases associated with nausea and vomiting [10].

### 5.2 Important rubrics for headache of *Epifagus virginiana* in Complete Repertory [11]

Head; pain, headache; excitement, emotional; agg.

Head; pain, headache; exertion; agg.

Head; pain, headache; forehead; exercise, after; slight

Head; pain, headache; temples; right

Head; pain, headache; pressing; extending to; outward

Head; pain, headache; pressing; temples; left

Head; pain, headache; pressing; temples; right

Head; pain, headache; shopping, from

### 5.3 Clinical application

*Epifagus virginiana* is found to be very useful in clinical practice for stress induced headache and also indicated in acute episodes of migraine after exertion or shopping. It is effective especially in lower potencies (3X or 6C), in repeated frequently in divided dose.

## 6. Conclusion

The lesser-known drug, *Epifagus virginiana* prepared from North American medicinal plant had only a partial homoeopathic drug proving. The therapeutic potential of this lesser-known medicine has to be explored further by conducting thorough Drug proving, followed by clinical verification of its proving symptoms and undertaking different phases of clinical trials. As a result, once known as less frequently used drug in the homoeopathic literature could become a deep acting polycrest, constitutional medicine applicable for various ailments, for the well-being of the ailing folk.

## 7. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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