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Plant Biotechnology Persa

Online ISSN: 2676-7414

Homepage: https://pbp.medilam.ac.ir

# A Review on the Treatment of Childhood Anorexia Using Natural and Herbal Agents

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**Article Info**

***Article type:***
Review Article

***Article History:***
Received: Jan. 29, 2025
Revised: Feb. 2, 2025
Accepted: Feb. 4, 2025
Published Online: July. 27, 2025

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**A B S T R A C T**

**Objective:** Anorexia in children is a common nutritional issue that can adversely affect their growth and overall health. The use of natural methods and medicinal plants in traditional medicine has gained attention as a safe and effective approach to address this concern. This study aims to identify medicinal plants effective in treating childhood anorexia, based on the rich knowledge and documentation of traditional medicine.

**Methodology:** This review article was conducted by searching for key terms related to medicinal plants, traditional medicine, children, appetite stimulants, and anorexia in databases such as Web of Science, Medline, PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Relevant articles were selected for literature review.

**Results:** In Iranian traditional medicine, several medicinal plants are considered effective appetite stimulants for children. These include lemon, rosemary, thyme, ginger, wheat, tarragon, black pepper, golpar, mint, oregano, coriander, fennel, potato, olive, pomegranate, fig, carrot, garlic, cinnamon, saffron, yarrow, wild thyme, chicory, turmeric, fenugreek, balm, horseradish, and aloe vera. These plants are part of the significant herbal flora in Iran and have been traditionally used to stimulate appetite in children.

**Conclusion:** Treating childhood anorexia with medicinal plants in Iranian traditional medicine is recognized as a safe and effective method. Due to their appetite-stimulating properties and digestive benefits, these herbs can contribute to enhancing appetite and improving the nutritional intake of children. Further research is needed to confirm the clinical effects of these plants.

**Keywords:** Children, Anorexia, Medicinal Plants, Growth and Health, Natural Treatment

➢ **How to cite this paper**
Joudi Z. A Review on the Treatment of Childhood Anorexia Using Natural and Herbal Agents. Plant Biotechnology Persa 2025; 7(3): 29-35.

## Introduction

Childhood mortality, especially the low-weight infants are prone to different kinds of short- and long-term diseases after birth [1]. Childhood anorexia constitutes a prevalent nutritional concern with potentially significant repercussions for physical and psychological development [2]. This condition can manifest due to a complex interplay of factors, including psychological stressors, underlying medical conditions, nutritional inadequacies, and maladaptive eating patterns [2]. Diminished appetite during critical growth periods not only compromises nutrient intake but also can negatively impact immune function, energy levels, and overall quality of life [3].

The etiology of childhood anorexia is multifactorial. Psychological factors, such as stress, parental anxiety surrounding feeding, and a tense mealtime atmosphere, may contribute to food refusal [3]. Gastrointestinal dysfunction, including constipation, can further suppress appetite, while environmental distractions during mealtimes may interfere with the recognition of hunger cues [4].

Plant Biotechnology Persa 2025; 7(3): 29-35.
DOI: 10.61186/pbp.7.3.8

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[ DOI: 10.61186/pbp.7.3.8 ]

Inappropriate portion sizes, neophobia, and excessive fluid consumption can also negatively influence appetite. Identifying these contributing factors and implementing appropriate nutritional interventions are crucial for promoting healthy eating behaviors in children [5].

Clinical manifestations of childhood anorexia may include weight loss or growth deceleration, fatigue, weakness, constipation, peripheral coldness, and dermatological issues (reference 6). Some children may experience hunger but exhibit diminished appetite or complete food refusal [6]. Preoccupation with food type and quantity, fear of weight gain, and denial of hunger are also frequently observed [7]. Early recognition of these symptoms is essential for effective prevention and management [7].

The consequences of anorexia can be substantial, both physically and psychologically. Nutritional deficiencies and weight loss can impair growth trajectories, induce muscle weakness, and contribute to stunted growth [8]. Micronutrient deficiencies can further compromise immune function, increasing susceptibility to infections [8]. Gastrointestinal complications, such as constipation and abdominal discomfort, are also commonly reported [9]. Psychologically, anorexia can manifest as anxiety, depression, and impaired concentration, potentially affecting academic performance and social interactions [9].

Alongside pharmacological treatments and nutritional interventions, traditional medicine and natural therapies have played a significant role in improving children's appetite. In many traditional medicine systems, including Iranian, Chinese, and Indian medicine, medicinal plants and natural methods are used to stimulate appetite [9].

Medicinal plants can help improve children's appetite through various mechanisms [9]. Some plants, such as fennel and chamomile, enhance digestion and increase the feeling of hunger by affecting the digestive system [10]. Others, like ginger and cinnamon, stimulate appetite by boosting digestive enzyme secretion and activating taste receptors [11]. Plants such as mint and cumin reduce bloating and regulate bowel function, alleviating false feelings of fullness and promoting food intake [12].

The aim of this review study is to identify the indigenous medicinal plants of Iran that improve childhood anorexia based on traditional medicine sources and existing scientific evidence.

## Methodology

This review study was conducted to identify effective medicinal plants in treating childhood anorexia based on reputable sources. A literature search was performed using keywords such as "medicinal plants," "traditional medicine," "children," "appetite stimulants," and "anorexia" in databases like Web of Science, Medline, PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Additionally, texts on Iranian traditional and herbal medicine were reviewed.

Inclusion criteria involved articles with sound scientific design, access to relevant data, and a focus on treating childhood anorexia using medicinal plants. Studies that lacked sufficient data, duplicate reviews, or low-quality research were excluded from the review process.

## Results

Based on the literature review, it was found that in Iranian traditional medicine, a range of medicinal plants are used for their appetite-stimulating properties in children. These include lemon, rosemary, thyme, ginger, wheat, tarragon, black pepper, golpar, mint, oregano, coriander, and fennel. Additionally, plants such as potato, olive, pomegranate, fig, carrot, garlic, cinnamon, saffron, yarrow, wild thyme, chicory, turmeric, fenugreek, balm, horseradish, and aloe vera are also recognized in traditional texts as appetite enhancers for children. Additional results are detailed in Table 1.

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**Table 1:** Native Medicinal Plants of Iran and Their Use in Iranian Traditional Medicine for Treating Children's Appetite Loss

| Persian name | English name | Scientific name | Herbal name | Mechanism [13-27] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lilotorsh | Lemon | Citrus limon | Rutaceae | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, digestive aid |
| Rozmary | Rosemary | Rosmarinus officinalis | Lamiaceae | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, memory enhancement |
| Avishan | Thyme | Thymus vulgaris | Lamiaceae | Antimicrobial, antifungal, antioxidant, respiratory health |
| Zangabil | Ginger | Zingiber officinale | Zingiberaceae | Anti-inflammatory, digestive aid, nausea relief, analgesic |
| Gandoum | Wheat | Triticum aestivum | Poaceae | Rich in antioxidants, reduces cholesterol and blood sugar |
| Tarkhoun | Tarragon | Artemisia dracunculus | Asteraceae | Digestive stimulant, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory |
| Felfelsiah | Black Pepper | Piper nigrum | Piperaceae | Stimulates digestion, antioxidant, enhances nutrient absorption |
| Golpar | Ajwain (Carom Seed) | Trachyspermum ammi | Apiaceae | Digestive aid, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory |
| Naena | Mint | Mentha spp. | Lamiaceae | Antimicrobial, digestive aid, analgesic, anti-nausea |
| Pouneh kouhi | Oregano | Origanum vulgare | Lamiaceae | Antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant |
| Geshniz | Coriander | Coriandrum sativum | Apiaceae | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, digestive aid |
| Razianeh | Fennel | Foeniculum vulgare | Apiaceae | Digestive aid, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sibzamini | Potato | Solanum tuberosum | Solanaceae | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, supports digestion |
| Zeytoun | Olive | Olea europaea | Oleaceae | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, cardiovascular health |
| Anar | Pomegranate | Punica granatum | Lythraceae | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, heart health, anti-cancer |
| Anjir | Fig | Ficus carica | Moraceae | Rich in fiber, supports digestive health, antioxidant |
| Havich | Carrot | Daucus carota | Apiaceae | Rich in vitamin A, antioxidant, supports eye health |
| Sir | Garlic | Allium sativum | Amaryllidaceae | Antimicrobial, cardiovascular health, antioxidant |
| Darchin | Cinnamon | Cinnamomum verum | Lauraceae | Anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, blood sugar regulation |
| Zafaran | Saffron | Crocus sativus | Iridaceae | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, mood enhancement |
| Boumadaran | Yarrow | Achillea millefolium | Asteraceae | Antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, wound healing |
| Alafe cheshme | Cress | Lepidium sativum | Brassicaceae | Rich in antioxidants, supports digestion |
| Kasni | Chicory | Cichorium intybus | Asteraceae | Supports liver health, digestive aid, anti-inflammatory |
| Zardchobeh | Turmeric | Curcuma longa | Zingiberaceae | Anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, supports joint health |
| Shanbalileh | Fenugreek | Trigonella foenum-graecum | Fabaceae | Anti-inflammatory, blood sugar control, digestive aid |
| Badranjbouye | Lemon Balm | Melissa officinalis | Lamiaceae | Calming, anti-anxiety, digestive aid, antimicrobial |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Torbeh kouhi | Horseradish | Armoracia rusticana | Brassicaceae | Antimicrobial, digestive aid, anti-inflammatory |
| Aloevera | Aloevera | Aloe vera | Asphodelaceae | Skin healing, anti-inflammatory, digestive aid |

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## Discussion

One of the effective plants in this regard is lemon (Citrus limon), which, with its antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and antimicrobial properties, can aid in improving the digestive process and stimulating appetite [28]. Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis), with its memory-enhancing, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant properties, can not only boost appetite but also positively affect the child's overall health [29]. Ginger (Zingiber officinale) is another significant plant with anti-inflammatory and digestive benefits, commonly used to reduce nausea and increase appetite in children [30]. These plants serve as natural aids for appetite stimulation and digestive enhancement in Iranian traditional medicine [28-30].

Fennel (Foeniculum vulgare) and mint (Mentha spp.) are also recognized as plants with digestive benefits. Fennel is particularly effective in treating digestive problems and enhancing appetite [31], while mint, with its carminative and soothing properties, helps alleviate abdominal pain and stimulate appetite [32]. Coriander (Coriandrum sativum) and tarragon (Artemisia dracunculus) also support digestion and increase food cravings in children through their anti-inflammatory and digestive effects [33,34].

Plants like pomegranate (Punica granatum) and olive (Olea europaea), with their antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, assist in strengthening the immune system and maintaining the child's overall health, which ultimately impacts the desire to eat and improves appetite [35,36]. Turmeric (Curcuma longa), as an anti-inflammatory plant and blood sugar regulator, can be beneficial in treating appetite loss resulting from inflammatory conditions or diabetes in children [37,38]. In many diseases and disorders [39-44], turning to nature and embracing traditional or natural therapeutic approaches can serve as a beneficial and complementary strategy helping to alleviate symptoms, support overall well-being, and enhance patients' quality of life [45].

## Conclusion

In general, native medicinal plants of Iran, with their diverse properties, can be used as natural remedies for improving children's appetite. Due to their high safety profile and minimal side effects, these plants are often a suitable alternative to chemical treatments in many cases. However, it is essential that the use of these plants be supervised by a doctor or a traditional medicine specialist to ensure optimal benefits from their positive effects.

## Statements and Declarations

### Funding support

The authors did not receive support from any organization for the submitted work

### Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

### Ethics approval

This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

### Consent to participate

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

### Author contributions

ZJ: Conceptualization, the original draft writing, investigation, writing including reviewing and editing and investigation and formal analysis; ZJ: Conceptualization, supervision, and project administration; ZJ Conceptualization, the original draft writing, investigation, writing including reviewing and editing

### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the clinical research development unit of Imam Khomeini Hospital, Urmia University of Medical Sciences, for English editing.

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