

Therapeutics of Red Golden Threads- Saffron

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Red golden threads of saffron are divine delight when submerged in milk and added in different cuisine of the world. The radiance of its distinct colour and aroma calls for complete refreshment, richness and rejuvenation. It symbolizes the royalty and auspiciousness when put on the forehead as kesar tilak. Saffron word comes from the French word "Safran" meaning yellow or red gold. Saffron is obtained as the stigma of the mauve coloured flower of *Crocus sativus*. It is mainly cultivated in Iran, India and Greece. Can you imagine yield of saffron? Over 70,000 flowers yield only 500g of saffron threads [1]. Saffron is one of the most expensive spices owing to its painstaking labour and marginal yield. Saffron has its association with the eternal beauty of Cleopetra. In traditional Greek medicine, it is used in the treatments of acne, pigmentation, skin diseases and wounds that are followed even now. For younger, flawless and brighter looking skin, saffron is flourishing in cosmetic and perfumery industries.

The medicinal use of saffron has been inscribed in Assurbanipal library (668 - 627 BC); the ancient Iranian physician, Avicenna stated that "Saffron, especially its oil, facilitates breath and strengthens the respiratory organs". Owing to its robust healing power it is often prescribed in Ayurveda and herbal medicines for numerous ailments. Therapeutic richness of saffron may be attributed to the presence of wide range of volatile and non-volatile compounds including crocin, crocetin, and safranal as main active compounds. Crocin imparts its characteristic red orange colour (Sindoori colour); crocetin, its taste (slightly bitter) and safranal its odor and aroma. Saffron is also a rich source of numerous bioactive compounds like carotenoids (β carotene, lycopene

and zeaxanthin), phenolics and flavanoids due to which it demonstrates antioxidant, anti-inflammatory properties and reported to be hepato-protective, neuroprotective or, cardioprotective, if taken in prescribed and safe dose (mg /day). Some adverse effects of its high dose (g/day) were observed in animal experiments and also during pregnancy. Many traditional treatises indicated its effectiveness in improving respiratory functions and alleviating anxiety, depression and other neurological disorders including Alzheimer's disease (AD). However, several clinical controlled trials could not demonstrate its efficacy in glycemic control among diabetic subjects, although it showed significant effect on lowering the serum levels of total cholesterol, low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, malondialdehyde (MDA). The carotenoids of red threads of saffron demonstrated reduction in age related macular degeneration (ADMR) when consumed @ 20 mg/day for 3 months.

Though natural saffron is available in thread form, but is also available in the form of extract, tablets and syrup and establishing itself as a promising candidate for nutraceutical product either alone and with other herbs or nutrients for boosting health, immunity, beauty and longevity [2-7].

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