The herb wormwood, is most famous as an ingredient of the alcoholic beverage absinthe. However, wormwood also has a long history of medicinal use. Among these is a reputed ability to kill intestinal worms that gave rise to the herb’s common name.

Wormwood has not been scientifically established as an effective treatment for intestinal parasites. However, a recent study suggests it might offer benefit for another disease of the intestines: Crohn’s disease, a condition in which various portions of the intestinal tract becomes inflamed.

This 10-week, double-blind study conducted in Germany enrolled 40 people with Crohn’s disease who had achieved good control of their symptoms through use of steroids and other medications. Half of the participants were given an herbal blend containing wormwood (500 mg three time daily), while the other half were given an identically appearing placebo. Beginning at the second week of the study, researchers began to gradually reduce the steroid dosage given to participants. Over subsequent weeks, most of those given placebo experienced a worsening of symptoms, as would be expected. In contrast, most of those receiving wormwood showed a gradual improvement of symptoms.

These are promising findings. However, it must be kept in mind that a great many treatments that show promise in a single study fail to hold up in subsequent independent testing. Further research will be needed to establish wormwood as a helpful treatment for Crohn’s disease.

NOTE: Contrary to popular belief, it does not appear that either absinthe or wormwood are notably toxic. No serious side effects were attributed to wormwood in this study.

REFERENCES: