

HERBS – A NATURAL SOLUTION

"God of his infinite goodnesse and bounty hath by the medium of Plants, bestowed almost all food, clothing and medicine upon man."

--Thomas Johnson
Gerard's Herbal, 1636.

"The frequency of use of unconventional therapy in the United States is far higher than previously reported.... We suggest that medical schools include information about unconventional therapies..in their curriculums."

New England Journal of Medicine,
January 1993

The second quote above is perhaps a portent that the herbal Dark Age is ending, that herbalists will escape the label of "quacks," and that the empirical body of knowledge offered by the botanical discipline of Herbolology will find its way into medical schools. We can hope.....

History and Background

Modern medicine is the evolution of the study and use by mankind of its first pharmacy...the plant world. The art of healing began with the use of herbs. If precedent and thousands of years of practice - with recognized benefits - is not arrogantly tossed aside, then it would seem more logical to think of allopathic medicine as the newcomer, the "alternative."

Between 1965 and 1980 one quarter of prescribed drugs sold in U. S. pharmacies contained constituents extracted from plant sources. This statistic has probably grown considerably in the last decade.

The value of plant-derived drugs such as atropine, codeine, digitoxin, digoxin, ephedrine, leurocristine, morphine, pilocarpine, pseudoephedrine, quinidine, quinine, tubocurarine and vincalukoblastine is discussed in pharmacology textbooks. It is estimated there are about 600,000 named plants in the world, but only about 5% have been analyzed! Who knows what cures yet await us?

A small clay tablet, excavated at the site of the Sumerian city of Nippur (now southern Iraq), is probably the world's oldest prescription record. Most of the ingredients inscribed in cuneiform characters 4,000 years ago were collected from the plant kingdom. Curative herbs such as thyme and mustard are listed as well as tree substances such as myrtle, pear, fig, and myrrh.

Medication from the bark of the willow tree (genus *Salix*) is mentioned, as it is down through history. Willow has a high content of salicylic acid...the active ingredient of aspirin, the most often prescribed drug today.

The Ebers Papyrus, a 66-foot-long scroll written in Egyptian hieratic script 35 centuries ago, contains more than 800 healing recipes.

The Egyptians ate roasted ox liver to improve night vision. (We know now that vitamin A found in liver has a beneficial effect on eyesight.) They put moldy bread on wounds or took it internally for various other maladies. (Many years would pass before scientists made penicillin and other antibiotics from mold cultures and soil bacteria.)

Another clay fragment excavated at Nineveh from the buried library of King Ashurbanipal of Assyria (668 to 626 B.C.) contains symbols representing 250 plants, along with mineral and animal substances used for Assyrian remedies. Many of the herbs were what herbalists call "simples" - garlic, licorice, mustard. Others were deadly nightshade or belladonna, henbane, and thorn apple, and one wonders how many patients met their demise as the correct dosages were experimented with! Today, however, we know they contain atropine, hyoscyamine, and scopolamine, prescribed by doctors to dilate eyes and to relieve spasms.

On the other side of the world we find ancient records in China: "oracle bones" etched with the names of plants and diseases; an herbal which lists herbs still in use today such as rhubarb, poppy, aconite, and ephedra (used even then to treat asthma).

Remedies for assorted maladies and accidents found in the writings of Pen Ts' ao Chino (c. 2800 B.C.) are still viable therapies in modern day China. Herbology is practiced alongside Western medicine and surgery in state-of-the-art facilities.

The Ayurvedic medicine of India has a pharmacopoeia of some 2,000 plants, and its herbal prescriptions are still widely used in that country.

Herbology is widely practiced in Germany, and Queen Elizabeth II has her own Royal Herborologist.

Scholars are recording evidence of the healing skills of our North American natives, using leaves, roots, bark, and seeds. Much of this traditional knowledge has been preserved in oral history, but is being recovered for our enlightenment.

Throughout all of history, in all parts of the world, we find detailed knowledge of the usefulness of plants as medicine. Mother Nature's pharmacy was used everywhere, and it is fascinating that claims of healing properties of certain herbs from one region were identical with those claimed for the same herbs in another area...even when communication was probably limited or non-existent!

Herbal therapy, both inside and outside of the medical systems of the world, has had its rise and fall of popularity, but this body of knowledge refuses to be ignored. The World Health Organization has a program entitled "Health for All by the Year 2000" with the goal of meeting the health needs of the world by utilizing the best elements of each country's traditional medical systems, including the utilization of plants as drugs which is so much a part of each developing country's profile. The method of reaching this goal was established after a worldwide study by two international health agencies and in its conclusion it was stated "Western medicine alone" could not do it.

Is everyone jumping on the natural health bandwagon? No, but many people are interested and feel environmental concern for the earth's air and water should also extend to exploration of other earth/man relationships. They would welcome the opportunity to benefit not only from modern day "miracle drugs," but from older therapies.

Richard Grossman, in his book The Other Medicine, very eloquently describes an idyllic turn of events:

"Were we able to see all medical knowledge without the parochial vanity of modernism, we could also see the other medicines as potentially complementary and supplementary to other treatments in dealing with dis-

tressful symptoms. We need not be confined to either scientific medicine or the unconventional therapies, but are blessed with the opportunity to use both the relevant treatments of the ancients and the modern, both the East and West, both the rationalist and the empiricist, both the sophisticated and the primitive."

Classification of Herbs and How They Work

Orthodox medicine surrounds its prescriptions and diagnoses with the mystique of Latin and Greek and terms and labels unfamiliar to the average man or woman. Hippocrates taught: "Whoever treats of this (healing) art should treat of things which are familiar to the common people." Technical terms not understood are often misinterpreted by the patient and contribute to fear and needless dismay, thereby adding more stress to an already stressful situation. When a prescribed medication is familiar or its qualities are at least partially understood, most people are comfortable in cooperating with the treatment effort.

The terminology of Herbology is easily understood by "the common people." Botanical medicine is still explained using ancient traditions and symbology....updated with modern words, perhaps, more acceptable to our left brain approach to learning, but nevertheless consistent with basic principles of herbology.

In their efforts to alleviate the illnesses and pains of human life, earlier cultures looked to the elements they believed formed all things: air, water, earth and fire. They intuitively deduced that integrity is obtained by achieving balance among these elements. They then proceeded to categorize many areas of activity as belonging to one of these four elements, including ailments and their cures.

One of today's leading recognized Herbalists, Stephen Horne, endorses this four element concept, adds the categories of hot/cold, wet/dry, and uses the following herbal model to illustrate and develop many useful principles of herbology:

HERBAL MODEL of Stephen Horne

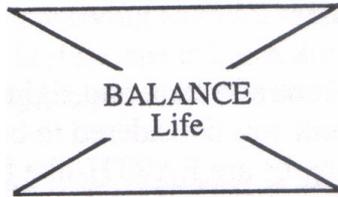
Bitters:

Herbs containing alkaloids, saponins, and related compounds. Used for cleansing and for altering the function of the body

Mucilants:

Herbs containing mucilage and related compounds. Used for soothing, protecting, lubricating.

Air
Hot (activating)
Wet (cleansing)



Water
Cold (soothing)
Wet (cleansing)

Earth
Cold (sedating)
Dry (toning)

Fire
Hot (stimulating)
Dry (dispersing)

Astringents:

Herbs containing organic acids, tannins in particular. Used for contracting, toning and tightening tissue.

Aromatics:

Herbs containing volatile oils and resins. Used for stimulating body processes.

Basically, this model is designed to show that health(life) is maintained by achieving balance.

There are four major categories of herbs:

Bitters
Mucilants
Astringents
Aromatics

When you understand the properties of each of these classifications, it is easier to see why the symbology of air, water, earth and fire apply. Let's explore the thinking behind the chart.

Bitter herbs cleanse and alter the function of the body, i.e., they dissolve and loosen morbid matter in the body and activate various body proc-

esses. Thus, bitter herbs act like AIR (oxygen is the breath of life or activator of life; oxygen is a dissolving element that breaks things down).

Mucilant herbs lubricate, soothe and protect; they hold WATER. In the digestive tract they coat the mucous membranes with a viscous (fluid) film; mucilaginous herbs also seem to aid in the production of healthy mucous elsewhere in the body by keeping it soft and loose (again, fluid).

Astringent herbs contract, tone and tighten tissues. In ancient tradition the earth element was considered to be cold and dry. Therefore, we say astringent herbs are EARTH-like because they cause tissues to be harder (dry) and they slow down or repress many body functions (cold or less active).

Aromatic herbs are stimulants, activators, antiseptics and disinfectants. In other words great energy is present as well as purifying components....FIRE. There is regenerative power in the volatile oils contained in aromatic herbs; they build the fire of life within our bodies.

What about the hot/cold, wet/dry designations? These, too, can be thought through logically.....

Herbs affect the structure of the body (by making it tighter or looser), and they can affect the function of the body (by speeding it up or slowing it down). Tradition identified these effects as drying or wetting and heating or cooling. (See highlight box.)

A **wetting** herb promotes a relaxing and loosening effect. One would want to loosen the tissues where there is something in the system blocking normal function, such as constipation, arthritis, blocked ducts or glands.

A **drying** herb makes tissues harder, tighter and more compact. One would want to dry up or contract tissues in situations such as excessive bleeding or hemorrhage, edema, swelling, etc.

Hot herbs speed up the function, hastens metabolism thereby creating more energy and heat in the body. Herbs of this nature would be useful combating fatigue, low energy or vitality as is often found with colds, poor digestion, poor circulation, etc.

Cold herbs slow down excessive metabolic activity. Conditions of excessive heat such as fevers or inflammation are "hot" because they are trying to expel toxins which are irritating the body. Cold herbs assist in this natural process by drawing off or absorbing the poisons, thereby "cooling down" the situation.

To summarize our understanding of the properties of herbs up to this point . . .

"To use herbs effectively, we need to first know the basic nature of the herb we are using. Does it contract and harden or does it relax and loosen? Is it stimulating or is it cooling and soothing? Once we know this, there is only one other thing we need to know and that is, which organ or body system does it influence the most...." (Stephen Horne, Nature's Field, March/April 1987.)

The "one other thing we need to know" alluded to in the above quote is beyond the scope of this book. This time around we will stick to basic concepts of natural healing for the newcomer who is investigating options in health care. Those of you who decide to further pursue the use of herbs should work with a qualified herbalist as to specific problems.

For a listing of common herbs in each of the four categories, please refer to the Appendix.

Preparation and Use

"One of the wonders of herbs is their tremendous versatility, not only for the scores of maladies which they treat, but for the number of ways in which they can be prepared and used." (Jack Ritchason, The Little Herb Encyclopedia, 1982)

Most everyone is familiar with herb teas. This is the most common association with herbs. A **decoction** is a tea made from roots and bark; an **infusion** is made from leaves and blossoms.

An extraction of an herb (usually in powder form) simmered with an oil, such as olive oil, then strained and bottled becomes an **oil of herbs**. A **tincture** is similar except the extraction is combined with vinegar or alcohol.

Ointments, salves and lotions are usually a variation of the oil based preparation.

A **poultice** or **herb pack** is for external use, and is prepared by mixing crushed fresh herbs or powdered herbs with mineral water to form a thick paste which is then spread on a cloth and placed over the affected area.

By far the most convenient form of ingestion are the **capsules and tablets** available today. Most herbalists recommend capsules and tablets be taken with a full glass of pure water before eating. It may also be recommended that tablets be chewed so that they are more easily digested and assimilated.

Repair, Regeneration and Maintenance

Drugs do not repair tissue. Drugs treat and/or suppress symptoms. Doctors do not heal patients. *Any* health practitioner you can name does not heal the sufferer. **THE BODY HEALS ITSELF**. This is the mystery and wonder of all ages.

Herbs work naturally with the body's own healing wisdom. They can be utilized to assist in the body's various systems for repairing, regenerating and maintenance. There are over thirty references to herbs in the Bible. In every part of the world the good Lord has provided plant material that can be used for healing and regeneration assistance.

HERBS ARE USED TO CLEANSE THE BODY, FEED THE GLANDS, AND TO BALANCE THE BODY'S NATURAL CHEMICAL COMPONENTS.

Although there is some food value in herbs (carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, etc.), herbs are not used to provide the nutrients our bodies need to function. You still need to follow a nutritious, balanced, chemical-free diet as we have already discussed. Besides, herbs don't taste as good as fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts and grains! (Exception: the wonderful world of condiments used to season and spice cooking.)

Herbs are not a drug; they are not primarily a "quick fix", but work gently and naturally without serious side effects. Depending on the severity of an ailment or dysfunction, three months of sustained high dosage is usually the norm for repairs to be done. Complete regeneration sometimes takes a year or more. A rule of thumb used in the field of natural healing is that it takes one month for every year of illness to rebuild the body.

For repair work, dosages are often five to seven times that required for maintaining health (after the body has been regenerated). Unlike the scary stories we hear about overdoses and incorrect dosages of drugs, herb dosage is easily adjusted by observation of how your body reacts.

But you must give herbs a chance to do their job. As pointed out, they take time to do their job. (Another exception: there are herbs that work quickly to control pain, congestion and other acute conditions.) One of the hardest parts of the herbalist/client relationship is convincing the client to take ENOUGH of an herb LONG ENOUGH for regeneration. We are too used to life in the fast lane these days and most of us want instant results!

However, taking herbs is easier than it was hundreds of years ago. Technology has given us the capsule and the know-how to reduce pounds of plant material into powdered form. Instead of decoctions and infusions (steeping or boiling herbs, bark, etc. in water), you might say we now have "fast-food herbs"...a sort of McHerb, if you will!

One other point about taking herbs...they can be used alone (referred to as a "simple") or they can be used in combinations. You can take one at a time or dozens at a time without side effects. In fact, experience has shown that often herbs complement and enhance each other.

(Speaking of side effects....while many drugs are plant-derived, ONE component has usually been extracted for use, thereby destroying the plant's integrity and losing the synergistic effects of the other elements in the WHOLE plant.)

Cleansing, Cleansing, Cleansing

If there is one point agreed upon by all the writings and lectures and tapes you may read or listen to on the subject of herbs, it is the fact that they are cleansing agents. If herbs offered no other benefits, this therapy alone would be a boon to mankind. Why?

If the body were provided with the food it needs for energy and repair, in a form that is easily assimilated, AND THEN WASTE BY-PRODUCTS WERE PROMPTLY AND COMPLETELY ELIMINATED, IT WOULD NEVER COMPLAIN OR MALFUNCTION.

However, no matter how well you care for your body, it naturally builds up toxins. Toxins are the result of metabolic activity. And, in today's society, most people give their bodies food that builds up an abnormal amount of these poisonous substances....over and above what the body can eliminate and/or detoxify. As these toxins build up in your system, illness or dis-ease may occur.

A cold or the flu or a more serious ailment happens when the body is full of toxins, excess mucus and other waste. Germs, microbes and parasites live on the waste in a body. It is normal for the body to try to cleanse itself of these unhealthy accumulations. So the next time you have a runny nose, a fever, diarrhea, realize your body is just trying to save your life.

The body's eliminative systems are the bowels, the kidneys, the bronchial tubes, the skin and the lymphatic system. Herbs are of great assistance in the elimination/cleansing process. In fact, most herbs when first taken will have a laxative effect whether that is the effect you are taking it for or not. Herbs can stimulate the peristaltic action of the bowels, increase urination (diuretic), act as expectorants, and increase perspiration.

The body will continue to manifest its "disease crisis" until enough of the offending toxins or irritants are removed to sustain life. Herbs can

be used to finish the clean-up beyond this minimum level so the same symptoms or ailments do not recur.

As we learned in our discussion of iridology, nearly everyone has some inherent weaknesses in the body. For some it may be the respiratory system. For others, the vulnerable area may be the sinuses, the liver, the kidneys, the thyroid or reproductive system. To prevent toxins settling in these vulnerable areas, herbs can be used to strengthen natural defenses and to move out the undesirables.

A word of caution here....

When dealing with a long standing condition, or if the client is very debilitated, I feel the process of elimination should proceed slow and easy. A sudden and immediate release of large amounts of toxins and waste into the body's system may be too much for it to handle. Once again, you must listen to the body and let nature do her work as you gently assist the healing process.

CASE #136 - PAT

Relief from chronic cold symptoms . . .

It was her second winter of persistent cold symptoms and she was seeing the doctor again to get relief. He said it was asthma and bronchitis and prescribed the same medication he had the winter before - medication that did not work for her.

"I don't know why I even got the prescription filled," Pat says now, looking back.

Her daughter was visiting about that time and asked Pat if she'd ever considered the holistic health approach. Pat admitted she hadn't, but felt desperate enough to give it a try. They located Options in the Peoria phone book and made an appointment.

"I didn't know what to expect," says Pat, "but I didn't want to go back (to prescription drugs)."

Pat began seeing Helen Cox, Options Director, who suggested a regimen of diet and herbs. Helen warned Pat that in the process of healing, the

body might revert to past symptoms before being cleansed of the toxins and infections.

"Sure enough," says Pat, "my body reverted to old symptoms, but I could see improvement right away. I did have some ups and downs, but within three months, I was totally different."

Her fateful meeting with Helen was several years ago, and, according to Pat, she has felt healthy ever since. She found that over the years her body had become immune to antibiotics, and they were no longer effective in fighting cold and flue symptoms. Now, herbs will clear the symptoms quickly.

"Within a matter of hours," she says, "you feel relief and you feel so much better. It seems so simple, but it works. I think I'll continue with it for the rest of my life. I rely on Helen's advice. So far, it's been great for me."

The herbs Pat takes change from time to time, but she sticks pretty close to her healthier diet and expresses no regrets at the lifestyle change.

"I stay away from sweets," she says, "and eat more garden type food - fruits and vegetables - as well as turkey and fish. Your body kind of lets you know when you indulge in a piece of chocolate cake or the like! I don't stick to a strict diet...I just know when to get back on again."



HOMEOPATHY - THE LAW OF SIMILARS

"As humankind evolves, the individual becomes a more integrated and finely tuned system and more sensitive with respect to changes in subtle energies. Our future medicine will proceed towards the development of techniques and treatments that use successively finer and finer energies..."

---Dr. William A. Tiller, Professor
of Materials Science and
Engineering, Stanford University