Herbs as Medicine

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No therapeutic modality is so broadly and time tested, yet so hotly contested, as the use of herbs as medicine. Most health care providers educated to provide modern, high-tech health care have been trained to rely on the use of highly specific chemical compounds containing very precise amounts of the active agent for the management of a specific problem. Many have no time for herbal preparations that are applied to many different health problems in various organ systems—and in forms where the actual amount of active ingredient is essentially unknown. This is in marked contrast to those health care providers that have experienced the benefits of herbal therapy. Herbs, they claim, are effective in spite of the inability to guarantee dosage, and without the high complication rate of pharmaceutical medications.

Even before God created man, He had created herbs (plants) containing all of the ingredients necessary to sustain perfect health and long life (Genesis 1:12, 29). While we now live in a much different world, many believe the wise use of plants as food and as medicine still provide (in conjunction with other natural lifestyle practices) the best nourishment for body, mind, and spirit. While herbs may not always provide the rapid relief of symptoms possible with modern medications, the final outcome is often superior health and a greater faith in our loving God—the best of all worlds!

One of the advantages of herbs is that they are universally available. With a bit of study and investigation, one can discover those herbs with healing qualities available in his/her location. A good herbal plant book will help, but one can also learn by asking around of those that may know. Those desirous of applying the healing benefits of herbs would do well to begin by becoming well acquainted with a few readily available herbs such as garlic, mint, aloe vera, plantain, ginger, turmeric, etc., and gradually add to these as opportunity provides.

As a result of extensive scientific studies being done during the past few years, the chemical
constituents of most medicinal herbs are now known. It is interesting to note that in a great many instances, these constituents coincide closely with the chemicals used in modern medical practice for the same health problems. Furthermore, microbes seem not to develop resistance to antibiotic properties of plants as they do to modern antibiotic pharmaceutical products.

Those who do not have access to quality, modern high-tech health care, those who cannot afford it, who are not receiving the expected benefits, who are willing to sacrifice some of its benefit for the sake of avoiding some of its risks—or who want to be prepared to survive in times of trouble and disaster when high-tech care will not be available, will find real benefit in this chapter.

In the pages to follow, Thomas Jackson and Curtis Eakins provide an abundance of valuable information for those who wish to benefit from the use of herbs, both for the prevention and the treatment of illness. (Editorial comment)

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Many medicine cabinets are filled with pharmaceutical drugs and over-the-counter (OTC) preparations. However, many of these drugs and OTC preparations are actually synthetic
versions of plant extracts. In fact, did you know the very word, drug, links us to phyto-medicine? It comes from the German, droge (meaning, to dry), as in drying plants—the first step in processing plant material into medicine. Moreover, the average physician writes several plant/food-based prescriptions every day. Furthermore, even the most outspoken herb critics use medicines from plants (& foods) all the time—usually without realizing it. Let’s take a look at some of these remedies and their origin.

Aspirin—In 1828, French and German chemists extracted the active chemical salicin from white willow bark. Years later, a German chemist discovered that the meadowsweet flower contained salicin as well, and, that both white willow bark and meadowsweet flower also contained the chemical salicylic acid. Both chemicals have powerful pain-relieving, fever-reducing properties. To name the drug, they took spirin from meadowsweet’s Latin name, Spiraea, and came up with aspirin.

Cough syrup—Children’s cough remedies are often cherry flavored. That flavor is no accident. You see, the early colonists to America found Indian tribes using wild cherry bark tea as a treatment for colds and coughs (among other ailments). And, since 1820, the bark of the Native American wild cherry tree has been listed in the U.S. Pharmacopoeia as an expectorant.

Diarrhea Treatment—Ayurvedic (India) physicians first prescribed apples for the relief of diarrhea. The reason is due to its pulp, which is high in pectin, a soluble form of fiber. Also, pectin has been shown to be effective against several types of bacteria capable of causing diarrhea. Furthermore, pectin adds bulk to the stool, which helps resolve diarrhea. No wonder pectin is the “pectate” in the over-the-counter diarrhea preparation, Kaopectate.

Digestive Aid—Mint was mentioned as a stomach soother in the Eber’s Papyrus, the world’s oldest surviving medical text. From Greek and Roman homemakers to Chinese, Indian and German physicians, mint (particularly peppermint) was used as a digestive aid. Peppermint oil is mostly menthol that appears to soothe the smooth muscle lining of the digestive tract. No wonder it’s an ingredient in the antacids Tums and Phillips’ Milk of Magnesia. If you have had a meal in a restaurant lately, perhaps your check arrived with an after-dinner mint. These candies stem back to the mints legacy, not to freshen your breath, but when people sipped mint tea after a feast to settle their stomachs.

2. A Biblical perspective
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The Bible says, “[God] caused the grass to grow for the cattle, and the herb for the service of man” (Genesis 1:29, 30). This text of scripture will serve as our instructional support concerning the use of herbs. You will notice God’s Word plainly says that He intended the herbs to be for the service of man, not as a disservice. How can herbs be used as a disservice? Let me explain. Let’s say we’re trying to lower our cholesterol level. In doing so we decided to visit our nearest health food store to purchase some herbal supplements proven clinically to lower cholesterol levels. However, at the same time, we continue to consume foods such as saturated fats, trans-fats and high cholesterol-laden foods that will raise our blood cholesterol levels. And, to make matters worse, we limit our intake of foods such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains that will actually lower our cholesterol levels. Furthermore, we neglect to engage in any type of physical activity that will also reduce our cholesterol. The only thing we do is simply pop in some herbal capsules! Now friends, that’s using herbs as a disservice. (Editorial Note: The same might be said for any medicine!)

Or, let’s say that our cholesterol levels are in the optimal range. However, in spite of that fact, we still decide to take some cholesterol lowering herbal supplements as a preventive measure. Is there anything wrong with that? First of all, herbal medicine is designed primarily to be a service to us when we are sick, not when we are well. This fact is evident in light of the following words spoken by Jesus when He said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” (Matthew 9:12). You see, the first diet given to mankind recorded in Genesis 1:29 and Genesis 3:18 consisted of foods that will simply prevent any plaque build up in our arteries—void of cholesterol, trans-fat and virtually no saturated fat.

A) Preparing herbs for use

You can collect and dry your own by tying the herbs (fruits, flowers, leaves, stems, or roots) in bunches and hanging them in a warm, dry, shady spot until they crumble easily. Or, simply place the herbs on a cookie sheet or a piece of clean window screen in a 95°F oven. In addition, to best preserve herb’s medicinal properties, store them either in opaque glass or ceramic containers, or away from light. Fill the containers full to limit the amount of oxygen they contain. As you use your herbs, add cotton wadding to the container to limit the amount of oxygen inside them.

Dry herbs are available at most health food stores, but may be quite expensive.
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Our ancestors no doubt used herbs by eating the fresh plant. Today however, with our modern knowledge, herbal medicine can be taken in many forms to suit one’s particular needs and lifestyle. This is just one of the advantages in using herbs. The following is a list of different ways to prepare herbs.

B) Infusions

Infusions are simply herbal teas usually made from leaves, flowers or other soft parts. This is an economical and effective way to use locally available plants for medicinal uses. Take a preheated non-metal teapot (glass or ceramic) and put one teaspoon of dried herb (double amount for fresh herbs) into the pot for each cup of tea. Pour a cup of boiling water into the pot for each teaspoonful of herb. Cover pot and let steep from 5-10 minutes. Strain if needed and sweeten to taste. The infusion may be used hot or cold.

C) Decoctions

Decoctions are herbal teas made from roots and barks of plant material. The elements from these herb parts are more dense and coarse, making it more difficult to extract the herb’s active ingredients. Therefore, instead of steeping, you gently simmer the dried herb in water for 10-20 minutes.

D) Cold water extractions

Cold water extractions are similar to effusions and decoctions except for the cool (room) temperature. They are used primarily to separate the desired chemicals from the tannin in plants that are high in tannin. (Tannins are not extracted by cold water.) To make: Steep soft parts of plants for 12 hours and hard parts for 24 hours before straining.

E) Liquid extracts
Not all constituents of plants are water-soluble. Some are soluble in oil, some in ethyl alcohol, some in vinegar, or glycerin. Liquid extracts contain the medicinal properties of herbs that are obtained by soaking them in these substances for two to six weeks—shaking the solution every day during this time. The liquid is then strained from the herb material and used medicinally. If alcohol is used as the solvent, some companies evaporate the alcohol through heating and can then label the liquid extract, alcohol-free. (If the label does not say “alcohol-free”, assume that it contains up to 60% alcohol). Liquid extracts are growing in popularity due to the fact that they have a longer shelf life, and the body can assimilate the liquid easier and faster than capsules. Extracts may be taken with a little juice. Some active ingredients may be in high concentrations. Usual dose for oral use is 15–25 drops diluted in water. (When using alcohol to make an extract, **use only ethyl alcohol**, NEVER use Isopropyl alcohol, methyl alcohol, methylated spirits, or other alcohols to make extracts). Store liquid extracts in a tightly closed jar until ready for use.

F) Capsules

Capsules are the most popular way of taking herbs due to their convenience, especially if the herb has an unpleasant taste. However, taking herbs this way is also the least effective due to the fact that the grinding process of the herb actually breaks down the cell wall of the herb.

If a person chooses not to drink herbal tea or has a difficult time swallowing capsules, the capsules can also be opened and sprinkled on foods.

G) Compresses

Some herbs do their best work externally, acting through the skin. Compresses are one of the ways to apply them. One can make an herbal compress by soaking a small towel (or cloth) in a hot herbal tea solution. It can then be applied to the area to be treated. To avoid burning, make sure the liquid is not hotter than 180 degrees. Wring out the towel thoroughly and place on the desired area. For best results, cover with plastic and a dry towel to retain heat. Change the compress repeatedly for about 30 minutes.

H) Herbal baths
Herbal Baths can be very beneficial. To prepare, put about a half cup of dried herbs inside a folded cheesecloth (or cotton cloth) and tie the bundle around the waterspout, then run the water. Squeeze all the moisture from the bundle to capture the herb’s contents. Another method is simply making a pot of a strong infusion from the herb and pouring it into the bath water.

I) Syrups

Herbal Syrups are a simple and effective way to preserve the healing properties of some herbs. Syrups can soothe throats and provide relief from coughs and colds. To make, combine 2 ounces of dried herb with 1 quart of water in a large pot. Boil that down until it’s reduced to 1 pint. Add 1–2 tablespoons of honey. Store all herbal syrups in the refrigerator for up to one month. Syrups composed of concentrated solutions of fruit or juice with honey (or sugar) may also be used to mask the taste of bad tasting herbs.

J) Oils and ointments

Infused oils are oil extractions of the fat-soluble active principles found in plants. Olive, almond, or sunflower oils are readily available for this purpose. The process takes longer than with alcohol extractions. It may be done at room temperature for leaves, flowers, etc., but harder parts may require heat for extraction of the active substances. To make, add 4 ounces of fresh (2 ounces of dried) herbs to 1 pint (1/2 liter) of olive or other vegetable oil. Heat gently for one hour. Strain, and place in a bottle. For ointment, add 1 1/2 ounce beeswax to the mixture as it heats (Adjust the consistency by adjusting the amount of beeswax). Petroleum jelly or paraffin wax may be used instead of beeswax.

K) Lotions and creams

Lotions and creams are mixtures of oils or fats and water and an emulsifying agent. They have the benefit of being permeable, allowing the skin to breath and sweat, while still carrying the active agent into the tissue for its effect. Commonly available natural plant emulsifiers include pectin, carrageen-an, lecithin, agar, and acacia. Beeswax may be used to give “body” to creams.
L) Poultices

Poultices are paste-like preparations of plant (and other) materials that are applied to the outside of the body in an effort to create a therapeutic effect. They may be used to increase local blood flow and metabolism for a speedier resolution of a boil, or, like charcoal, be used to extract poisons from the body. (For more information about poultices, see Section XI, chapter 1, U).

M) Guides to determining the appropriate use of herbs and plants (Thomas Jackson)

We will now discuss how to determine the appropriate use of herbs, the principles of administering herbs, and simple herbal formulas and their remedial applications.

As you include herbs in your health restoration program, you need to exercise sound judgment and wisdom in regards to their advantages and disadvantages.

Avail yourself of the educational resources listed at the end of this chapter and consult with a trained person in the field of herbal medicine.

N) A systematic approach to herbal therapy

The systematic approach to herbs is the answer to those who after studying herbs from the basic historic approach became somewhat confused and discouraged. Herbal Therapy, like all rational therapy, should be simple and systematic.

Most modern herb books use the historic approach to herbs. For each disease there is a list of herbs, and for each herb, there is a list of diseases for which it may be used. This approach presents at the least three outstanding problems to the average layperson:
There are scores of complex herbal formulas to memorize.

No reasons are given as to how or why the same herbs work for so many different diseases.

This requires a layperson to make a specific diagnostic decision for each illness.

In the **systematic approach** to herbs, these hindrances to truly understanding disease, its cause, prevention, and cure are swept away by simplicity. Here is how:

All herbal remedies are drawn from four basic groupings.

The effect of the herb taken is defined by what group it is in.

Focus is on the body rather than the injured part alone.

As with any other natural remedy the focus should be on the body as a whole and not on the injured part alone. We see this principle in 1 Corinthians 12:26, “And whether one member suffers: all the members suffer with it.”

In order to better understand the nature of herbs and their effect on the body, a basic familiarity with simple physiology will be necessary. Here we will use a model to parallel a wood furnace to the human body:

**Wood Furnace Human Body**

Wood or fuel Nutrients
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Heat (fire) Energy (Vital Force)

Smoke and ash Carbon dioxide and waste

Using the principles of a wood-burning stove to illustrate the functions of the body clearly shows that:

The whole purpose for putting in wood or fuel is to continue the life of the fire that is judged by how much heat it puts out.

When selecting wood for the fire, it must be kept in mind that the best wood burns thoroughly with a constant heat and produces the least amount of smoke and residue.

2 Kings 4:32-35 clearly brings out that warmth is to life as cold is to death. Furthermore, every degree toward cold constitutes disease in the body. Therefore, the effect of herbal therapy is to increase the vital force of the body, and the body will throw off disease.

Herbs effect the body primarily in four ways. Herbs themselves do not heal, but they do react upon the body by kindling its vital force so as to raise the efficiency of poison elimination and cell rejuvenation. The four categories of herbs can be separated into two sets or types. The first type is composed of those that influence the actual life processes of the body. The second includes herbs that directly effect the structure of the body. So, basically herbs effect the structure and functions of the body.

0) Herbs that influence the body functions

Aromatics—Speed up and stimulate cell functions. This includes all spicy and fragrant herbs.
Demulcent (or Mucilaginous)—Calms down, soothes cell activity. This includes all high fiber, water absorbing, slippery herbs.

P) Herbs that influence cell and tissue structure

Astringents—Contract, tone, and tighten tissue. This includes all the herbs that make your lips pucker when they are put in your mouth. Many are found in roots and barks.

Bitters—Loosens, relaxes tissue structure. This includes all bitter herbs that make you want to spit them out when you put them on your tongue.

Q) How do they work?

Aromatics—Stimulate the nervous system causing an increase in the systematic functions of the body, as well as an increase of activity on a cellular level.

Demulcent—Absorbs toxins into itself much like a sponge, drawing away the poisons that cause inflammation.

Astringents—Have the ability to contract living tissue because of the presence of tannins. They effect mainly the digestive, urinary, and circulatory systems.

Bitters—Help by bringing into the system a large amount of oxygen. This property alone tends to accelerate the body’s ability to absorb other active compounds that strengthen the cell wall and other components of the cell.
R) Examples of herbs in their groupings

Aromatics—garlic, cayenne, ginger, hops, pennyroyal, peppermint, sage, chamomile.

Demulcent—psyllium, comfrey, slippery elm, flax seed, mullein, aloe, cabbage, echinacea, dulse, Irish moss.

Astringents—red raspberry, lemon, wild alum, white oak bark, eyebright, yarrow, white willow, bayberry

Bitters—golden seal, burdock, dandelion, nettle, peach bark, yucca, blue cohosh, pau d’arco, devil’s claw.

S) Principles of administering herbs

Women are usually given smaller doses than men. Larger persons may require larger doses, while children and the elderly require smaller doses.

Women often respond to herbs differently when pregnant. Therefore, use smaller doses and observe reaction closely. Some herbs should not be used at this time.

Highly nervous people are given smaller doses of stimulating herbs than are given to healthy robust persons or persons in a weakened, depressed condition.

Some people have intolerance to certain herbs because of allergies, faulty assimilation of nutrients, diarrhea, intestinal bacteria, body impairment, etc.
Take astringent herbs for a short time, and not together with nutritional supplements high in iron, as the tannins (acids) in these herbs will leach calcium, iron, and other nutrients out of the intestines.

T) Take special note of the different effect of certain herbs

Strong and bitter herbs can cause nausea if not taken with sufficient water.

Cayenne can give a burning sensation in the throat and stomach without actual burning.

Astringent herbs can leave the throat dry and scratchy.

Some potent beneficial herbs can produce toxic effects when taken too often or in large amounts.

Persons with high blood pressure should not use herbs that stimulate the constricting of blood arteries and capillaries while causing the heart to beat faster. Some are: licorice root, ephedra, and lily of the valley. Yet cayenne and garlic can be used in normal amounts.

In hotter climates the medicinal effect of stimulants and purgative herbs is often intensified.

Special care is needed when combining any herbal formula.

If herbs are bitter or have an unpleasant taste, take in a capsule or wrap in rice paper.

U) Some basic rules for taking herbs
Irritating substances may be given in a soy milk or syrup base.

For a gradual effect, give herbs in small quantities of syrup between meals, to slow absorption.

For a more concentrated effect on the stomach and intestines, give herbs in olive oil to lessen absorption.

To aid appetite and digestive juice flow, give before meals.

To prevent heartburn or stomach irritation, give herbs after a meal.

Herbs are more quickly absorbed when the stomach is empty (two hours after a meal).

Take slow-acting laxative herbs in the morning so as not to interfere with sleep.

Antispasmodic and sedative herbs are usually taken on an empty stomach before retiring or when needed.

Most herbs are given three times a day, an hour or so before meals, a cup of tea at a time.

V) Plant foods as medicine

“Let Thy Food Be Thy Medicine and Let Thy Medicine Be Thy Food.” —Hippocrates
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Healing agents are present in many plants, and in many parts of plants. When we think of medicinal herbs, we usually think of dried leaves, flowers, stems or roots. In a broader sense, the foods of plant origin that we eat not only provide agents essential to growth and maintenance, but often possess medicinal properties useful in both preventing and healing illness as well. Let us look at a few examples.

Pineapples, kiwi, papaya, and figs contain (among other ingredients) enzymes that reduce swelling and inflammation when used as food or as medicine.

Most berries are loaded with antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and many have antibiotic and antiviral properties.

The cruciferous plants; cabbage, broccoli, radishes, etc. are a source of anti-inflammatory agents that are useful in preventing and treating arthritis, cancer, heart disease, etc.

Many nuts, avocados, and olives provide beneficial fats, including Omega 3 fatty acids, agents effective in preventing and treating diseases of the blood vessels, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and other diseases common to our modern society.

Whole grains and many seeds, besides providing an excellent source of calories and micronutrients, provide bulk for effective bowel health as well.

Legumes (beans, peas, lentils, etc.) are useful for preventing heart disease and cancer among other disorders.

Many other examples might be included, but the bottom line is this—most plant foods have properties that possess healing properties. In view of this, one seeking to grow and stay in health will eat freely of a wide variety of foods of plant origin. Furthermore, there are also specific foods that are beneficial for specific health problems. Every provider of natural health care should study to discover these foods and the illness they help to control.
W) Safety

Even though some medicinal herbs are quite toxic when used in excessive dose, and though herbs are still widely used in many parts of the world, reports of adverse effects, including death are rare, and less frequent than for modern medications.

World-renowned pharmacognosist (study of natural agents), Norman Farnsworth, Professor of Pharmacy of the University of Illinois delivered a presentation on the topic of Utilization of Medicinal Plants at the WHO symposium in Philadelphia, PA. Professor Farnsworth states “based on published reports, side effects or toxic reactions associated with herbal medicines in any form are rare…of all the classes of substances reported to cause toxicities of sufficient magnitude to be reported in the United States, plants are the least problematic.”

X) Common misconceptions

**Herbal medicine is safe because it’s natural:** After researching the literature, one can truly say, that at the very least, herbal medicine is safer than conventional drugs. The primary reason for this is that herbal medicine incorporates the whole plant material with its active ingredients intact, rendering a more holistic, gentler approach. This isn't true of drugs. Moreover, most medicinal plants have a very broad range between their effective and toxic doses. However, safety is based on proper usage. Over the last 10 years, most of the reports due to adverse reactions have been associated with the misuse of herbal medicine, especially those for weight loss. In most cases, the poison is in the dose!

**Herbal medicine lacks scientific validation:** The scientific validation of herbal medicine has been going on for hundreds of years, just not in this country! Most clinical studies on herbal medicine come from countries that still appreciate and embrace this discipline—Japan, Russia, China, Germany and many European nations. However, times and interest have changed in America. Some of the most respected peer-review medical journals such as Journal of the American Medical Association, the New England Journal of Medicine, etc. are now publishing clinical studies on herbal medicine quite frequently. In fact, there are now more than a dozen medical journals whose primary focus is publishing the latest research on plant medicines. Some of these journals (a few available via the internet) are The International Journal of Alternative Medicine, Journal of Naturopathic Medicine, Journal of Natural Products, Journal of
Never take herbal medicine and conventional drugs together: There is nothing wrong with using herbal medicine and conventional medicine together so long as the two are carefully coordinated for compatibility, dose, etc. Properly applied, one can indeed bring about a complimentary beneficial effect. In fact, traditional medicine (including herbs) is sometimes called complementary medicine. However, case in point: if one is taking drugs to lower cholesterol and decides to add red yeast, garlic, or guggul lipid to enhance the effect, these supplements may result in increasing the potency of the drugs. While this particular interaction may not be life-threatening, it may sometimes be wise for your health-care provider to modify the dose of the drugs. Unfortunately, most patients who use herbal medicine along with their conventional drugs do not disclose this to their health-care provider. Until the fact is generally known among the public that herbs and drugs are both potent agents that can cause harm, the advice not to take them together remains true.

Herbs, when used for healing, are medicines, and must be treated like medicine! They should only be used when specifically needed, and then, only in modest amounts. More is not always better! Herbs too can be toxic in excessive doses.

Y) Commonly accepted herbs and their applications

Through the centuries, a number of herbs have been touted for the special benefits they afford. More recently, new applications have been suggested. Some of these are listed here. While some are universally available, others will not be available to you at all. **Optimal benefit from herbs will be obtained by utilizing those herbs that are available locally** (in your garden, along the wayside, or in the field or forest near you). Store bought (or those purchased on the Internet) are expensive and may or may not contain the active ingredients stated on the packaging. Standardization and labeling remain a significant problem with many natural products.

While the four broad groups of herbs described above are useful for those desiring to know the principles involved in selecting herbal medicines, there are times when lists are useful when looking to alternative means for treating a given symptom or illness.
Note: When tested by scientific method, many of these herbs are at least as effective as drugs obtained from the pharmacy, and generally much safer to use.

Please refer to A–M in the early part of this chapter regarding preparation and application—infusions, decoctions (teas), etc.

1. Herbs that relieve inflammation (pain, swelling, redness, and fever)

   a. Herbs to relieve pain

   White willow bark (Usual dose is 240 mg/day), meadowsweet, wild lettuce.

   Omega-3 fatty acids (1.5–5 gm/day with meals).

   Green tea (3–4 cups decaffeinated tea or 300–400 mg extract/day).

   Pycnogenol (Maritime pine bark—100–200 mg/day).

   Frankincense (Boswellia—300–500 mg 2 or 3 times daily).

   Cat’s Claw (Uncaria Tomentosa—20–60 mg/day.

   Ashwaganda demonstrates anti-inflammatory properties and pain relief for arthritis.
Devil’s Claw demonstrates anti-inflammatory properties and pain relief similar to cortisone—good for arthritis and other inflammatory pain

Ginger root—Ginger may also be used as tea, massaged into the skin, or added to the bath. When used as a bath for Rheumatoid arthritis, boil one cup of chopped ginger root for 20 minutes. Place the liquid in the tub of warm water. Stay in the bath about 30 minutes.

Capsaicin (from Cayenne and other hot peppers)—may be applied directly to the skin as an infusion (tea), used in ointments for herpes (shingles), neuralgias, diabetic neuritis, etc., or massaged into the tissues around joints for osteoarthritis and other aches and pains (Section V, chapter 14).

Feverfew: Reduces severity and frequency of migraine, both if used daily to prevent, and for treatment (See also, Section V, chapter 14).

Turmeric (curcumin)—(400–600 mg three times daily) anti-inflammatory, arthritis, menstrual pain, topical antiseptic, and wound healing agent—may be used internally as tea, capsule, etc. or applied externally as ointment, paste, etc.

Common poppies—Use 8–10 petals as infusion (tea) or syrup. Use 2–3 seedpods (unripe, fresh or dried) as decoction. Note: common poppies provide analgesic (pain relieving) qualities, but do not contain addicting drugs.

Bromelain from pineapples, papain from papaya, ficin from figs, and actinidin from kiwi are proteases (enzymes) that reduce inflammation and are often very effective in relieving pain—as food, for direct application to inflamed area as poultice, or in concentrated extracts commercially available. Bromelain is found in highest concentrations in the stem and root of the pineapple.

Herbs that are bitter or make the mouth pucker: Tannins are the primary active agent. Common universal sources include many tree barks, roots, leaves, and seeds. Examples—witch hazel, oak, walnut, willow, clove, plantain, and brambles (raspberry, etc.).
b. Plant sterols

Plant sterols, the plant equivalent to steroids in animals, reduce C-reactive protein (CRP), the protein that is associated with increased risk of heart attacks and other types of inflammation. Plant sterols are found in avocados, nuts, soluble fiber, soy proteins, etc. and are taken internally as food.

c. Phytochemicals found in cruciferous plants

Plants like broccoli have the ability to protect body cells from injury. Phase 2 enzymes are the normal “good guys” in our cells that protect the cells from cancer-causing chemicals and other toxic agents. The phytochemicals in cruciferous plants have the ability to boost the activity of these “good guys,” enhancing their ability to protect the cells from destructive inflammatory (Cox-2) enzymes.

Experimentally, these phytochemicals boost the phase 2 enzymes, enabling them to block the action of those enzymes within the joints that cause inflammation and destruction of cartilage. It is postulated that they may help prevent arthritis and help damaged cartilage to heal. Other Cox-2 enzyme inhibitors include feverfew, hops, oregano, ginger, turmeric, rosemary, and foods containing Omega-3 fatty acids.

(See also Section V, chapter 14.)

d. Herbs with analgesic qualities for topical (on skin or mucus membranes) use

Cloves—apply clove or a drop of clove oil to an aching tooth. Use tea (decoction) as a
Aloe Vera—Gel from fresh cut leaf brings quick relief when applied directly to all types of burns, abrasions, rash, and other skin conditions.

e. Herbs to relieve itching

Aloe vera, witch hazel, jewelweed when applied as juice, infusions (tea), or poultices.

Plantain (crushed fresh leaves, or infusion)—bee stings, bites of various kinds, hemorrhoids.

2. Herbs affecting the brain and nervous system

a. Herbs that relieve driver fatigue (often used as lozenges)

Cinnamon: May increase alertness and decrease driver fatigue and frustration at the wheel. Cinnamon odors boost motivation and performance.

Peppermint: Peppermint odor may increase alertness, boost motivation and performance, and decrease driver fatigue.

b. Herbs for the nerves

Lettuce, wild lettuce, lavender, linden, poppy, rose petals, willow, catnip, hops, valerian, chamomile, St. John’s Wort, gingo biloba—prepared as infusions of decoctions.
c. Alzheimer’s disease

Turmeric reduces the action of a number of genes that promote inflammation as it is linked to heart disease, colon and some other cancers, and Alzheimer’s disease (Note: India, where turmeric is regularly used in food, has the world's lowest incidence of Alzheimer’s disease). Other Cox-2 inhibitors may also be beneficial for preventing and managing patients with Alzheimer’s disease.

3. Herbs with hormone modulating properties

May be useful for symptoms related to hormone balance in both males and females

a. Herbs for female symptoms Breast pain, menstrual disorders, menopause, etc. in females

Orange tree, basil, wormwood, black cohosh (squaw root), parsley, and calendula (infusion or decoctions of roots, leaves, flowers or seeds).

Evening primrose oil (2–4 grams daily as capsule).

Turmeric (curcumin)—1/2–1 gram daily as capsule or tea) (menstrual pain, and menopause).

Saw Palmetto (fresh fruit or decoction).

Tea Tree oil, lavender oil (also frequently used in “natural” cosmetics, medications, etc.).
Pycnogenol (maritime pine bark extract)—effective in treatment of endometriosis at 30 mg. twice daily.

Goldenseal (infusion of roots), Witch Hazel (infusion of leaves or bark), grapevine (decoction of leaves), useful for heavy periods.

b. Herbs for prostate

Saw Palmetto: 50–100 grams daily of fresh fruit or as decoction.

Pumpkin seeds: Eat a handful of seeds 2–3 times daily, raw or cooked.

Phytosterol flower pollen extract called Cernitin and Prostaphil, sugar cane pulp, soybean products as a regular part of diet.

Evening Primrose: 2–4 grams daily as capsules.

Other Hormone modulators—licorice, skullcap, ginseng, chase tree, partridge berry, lavender oil, nettle—as infusions (tea), capsules, etc.

Turmeric when used in the diet.

Cruciferous plants in diet.

c. Herbal therapy for thyroid
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Kelp—Fucus vesiculosis is an excellent source of iodine.

Cruciferous vegetables interfere with thyroid function.

4. Herbs that enhance immune functions

Echinacea, astragalus, licorice, skullcap, ginseng, rose hips, garlic, turmeric, (curcumin), oregano, shiitake mushroom, and many others.

Strawberry, violet, and many other leaves very high in vitamin C.

Most berries and fruits are high in antioxidants and other protective phyto-nutrients.

5. Herbs effective against invading organisms—parasites, bacteria, viruses, etc.

a. Herbs with antibiotic qualities

Calendula (decoction of flowers), grapefruit seeds or extract, garlic, onion, aloe vera.

Turmeric (curcumin), Oregano—antibiotic and antiviral (flu, colds).

Black elderberry, anti-viral, effective for most flu viruses.
b. Urinary antiseptic herbs

Garlic—raw, extracts, or decoctions.

Cranberry juice, nasturtium and heather (decoction of flowers, leaves, fruit), Thyme (infusion of leaves).

Bearberry (upland cranberry)—Use decoction with 50–60 grams of dry, ground leaves. Soak 3–4 hours before boiling for 15 minutes.

c. Herbs for vaginal infections

Douche (irrigation) White willow (decoction of bark), pomegranate (infusion of flowers and bark), goldenseal (infusions of plant), myrtle (infusion of leaves and berries), Turmeric—anti-viral and anti-bacterial, healing.

d. AIDS

These herbs used in conjunction of optimal lifestyle practices are said to be effective in the management of AIDS—golden seal, ashwa gande, garlic, echinacea, turmeric (curcumin).

e. Herbs effective against some parasites

Garlic—as garlic oil or as an enema for worms—a garlic clove in the anus is said to be helpful for pin-worms.
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Onion—Use the juice of one raw onion daily. It may be mixed in a blender with honey, lemon, tomato, or carrot juice and taken in small amounts during the day.

Wormwood—10–20 grams per liter of water infusion (tea) (Too dangerous and sour for children).

Pumpkin seeds—Crush 200–400 grams of seeds (fresh, dry, or cooked). Eat 1/3 of this at each meal with nothing else but water and carrots for one day. Take a purgative one hour following last “meal.”

Black walnut tea made from seed hulls.

Myrrh—oleo gum resin from the stem—10 mg/kg weight/day for 3 days—said to be very effective against Schistosoma hematobium.

Turmeric—Parasites, including round worms, malaria, and scabies.

Papaya and papaya seeds for intestinal worms, and for malaria.

Ginger root for Giardia and fish worms.

6. Herbs useful for the digestive system

a. Herbs that neutralize acid, coat the lining of the stomach, relieve spasm, etc.

Peppermint—may be used as tea, lozenge (peppermint oil tablets are commercially
available—meta-analysis studies suggest that peppermint oil is more effective than many commercial anti-spasmodic medications on the market). Note: use with caution in presence of esophageal reflux symptoms!

Raspberry leaf tea, carrot, or cabbage (cooked, raw, or as juice), cassava, oats (cooked), olive oil, avocado, Slippery Elm (reduces gastric and intestinal inflammation), blueberry (bilberry) may substitute for Zantac.

Ginger (Nausea and motion sickness).

Turmeric (used for gastrointestinal symptoms, reduces inflammation).

Fennel (gastrointestinal spasms).

Dill, caraway, basil, marjoram, calendula blossoms or licorice root (infusion of seeds or leaves).

African red tea (Rooibos bush) said to be very effective for infant colic.

b. Diarrhea

Garlic: Use as decoction, as sauce diluted with water, or eat raw cloves.

Thyme flowers, bramble (blackberry or other), grapevine, (juice or a decoction of leaves and buds).

Papaya, cassava, apples, and other fruit.
c. Constipation

High complex carbohydrate diet—whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, etc.

Psyllium, flax seed, senna, many others.

Molasses—take daily, adjusting dosage to desired effect. (Note: It may take several days to realize the optimum benefit.) Unstable diabetics must exercise caution.

d. Purging, cleansing

Cascara sagrada, powder, or decoction of bark, castor oil.

7. Herbs useful for the respiratory system

a. Herbs for the throat

Wild cherry bark (tea), Horehound (liquid extract), Garlic in oil, Turmeric in honey.

Gargles with hot sage tea or many of the anti-inflammatory herbs listed above (Y, 1, a).

Elderberry (juice of berries or tea of leaves)—colds, flu, sore throats.
b. Cough

Eucalyptus—use as a steam inhalation with Eucalyptus leaves in boiling water for inhalation—drink tea made from several leaves (20–30 grams per liter water) or 2–3 drops of essence per glass of water, or use as syrup or lozenges containing essence of eucalyptus.

Thyme: Steam inhalation with 2–3 drops of essence per liter of water; 2–3 drops on handkerchief for inhaling; Drink 2–3 drops in water three times daily.

Onion: Expectorant—loosens secretions—use raw, ground in blender and mixed with honey and/or lemon. Sip as needed for cough and congestion.

Poppy: Syrup made with 8–10 petals/cup; infusion with 6–8 petals per cup or decoction of 2–3 green-dry seedpods in 1/2 cup water, use 2–3 tablespoons full before bedtime.

Hyssop: Use infusion of 50–60 grams per liter of water, or 2–3 drops or essence per cup and drink 1 cup 3–4 times daily.

Linden: infusions of flowers or decoctions of bark 20–40 grams per liter. Drink 3–4 cups per day with honey.

Prickly lettuce: drink juice 1/2 cup or 1 cup of infusion 3–5 times daily.

Mullein—tea of flowers or leaves.

Ginger, horehound, juniper, plantain, licorice, and raw garlic are other commonly available herbs with good qualities for chest congestion.
Turmeric—early studies suggest usefulness in managing cystic fibrosis.

c. Wheezing

Same as for cough above.

African red tea (rooibos bush) useful for asthma.

8. Herbs useful for the eyes

Infusions and decoctions of cornflower, tea, oak bark, witch hazel, plantain, garden violets, fennel, grapevine, rose and briars, Saskatoon blueberry juice.

Drops of aloe vera are a safe, effective agent to reduce inflammation.

9. Herbs useful for the skin

Aloe Vera gel—burns, sunburn, wounds.

Evening primrose oil—healing agent.

For poultices—plantain, carrots, cabbage, onion, ivy leaves.
For infusions and decoctions for compresses—pansy, rose, witch hazel, calendula, lemon, oak, and walnut.

Tea tree oil—candida, tinea, and other fungus infections.

Turmeric—antibiotic, antiseptic and healing properties—used in Asia to beautify the skin.

Pine pitch applied directly to superficial wounds to enhance healing.

Geranium oil—control bleeding, useful for shingles (herpes zoster pain).

Plantain—available worldwide—crushed leaves useful as poultice for bites, stings, healing wounds and ulcers.

10. Herbs useful in preventing and fighting cancer

Many herbs (foods and medicinal herbs), too numerous to list, are effective in preventing and fighting cancer. The following comments give one an example of what is presently understood in this very active field of study.

In the laboratory, lung cancer cells are inhibited by isothiocyanates, sulfur-containing chemicals found in cruciferous plants, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, turnips, collards, brussel sprouts, cabbage, rutabaga, Chinese cabbage, bok choy, horseradish, radishes, and watercress.

M.D. Anderson Cancer Center: Curcumin (the yellow pigment in Turmeric) decreased cell viability in all three melanoma cell lines on which it was tested. A molecule known to be overactive in tumor growth, NF-Kappa B, was shut down by turmeric. Curcumin has proven effective in preventing and controlling many different kinds of cancer including multiple
myeloma, breast and pancreatic tumors in preliminary research. Persons using turmeric in their diet have less instance of colon cancer. It may be used as a vaginal suppository to prevent cervical cancer.

Turmeric has very low toxicity. It may be used as ground powder as tea, 1/2–1 teaspoon once or twice daily, taken with honey, or used in food. Alcohol extracts are also available.

Green tea (decaf available), pomegranate, asparagus, mistletoe, blue-green algae and feverfew represent just a few of the many agents with anticancer potential.

Summary

This discussion regarding herbs as medicine is merely a sampling of the information available for those who are serious about herbal therapy. This is a rapidly expanding field of research with new findings published on a regular basis. For most people, what is most important is that one knows a few important herbs that are readily available in time of need.