

Herbs as medicine

BY VICKI MCAFFEE, CLINICAL HERBALIST, CERTIFIED NUTRITIONIST

Herbalism is the oldest form of medicine and has been in continual use throughout the world since prehistoric times. From the unearthing at a Neanderthal burial site in Iraq of seven herbs used today as medicine, to modern-day methods of incorporating herbs into our daily lives, plants assist the body in restoring or maintaining health. They are the perfect bridge connecting all forms of medicine.

The first discovered written herbal information was in 1600 B.C. from Egypt that included fennel, cilantro, juniper and thyme.

Self-treating with misinformation from the Internet or from caring friends can generate many problems due to unreliable information. Confusion comes from the marketing of the latest “miracle herb,” the next best herbal cure-all and Dr. Oz’s daily favorite.

There is a need to be familiar with herb/drug interactions, herbal toxicity and dosing for the young or elderly.

So many plants to choose from, such as tonic herbs that work best over time or herbs that are used for acute situations, such as infections.

Should I use herbal formulas or use a herb on its own? A formula of herbs that reduce gastrointestinal problems is chamomile flowers, peppermint leaf, fennel seed and marshmallow root. Chamomile, a familiar herb to most, is well-known as a relaxing cup of tea when it is steeped for several minutes. If you let it steep for four hours, the tea becomes a strong medicinal that aids in reducing inflammation, spasms and pain in the small intestines.

Research today shows that the traditional use of plants as medicine is validated. Herbs can complement or replace pharmaceuticals

Peppermint has similar properties as chamomile, and fennel seed helps the body to expel or reduce excess gas and bloat. Marshmallow root creates a coating inside the intestinal tract allowing mucosal protection as the body, in its wisdom, heals itself. This tea

combination will aid digestion if steeped five to 10 minutes, and with the longer steeping, address the intestines.

The above shows that the preparation of a herb is as important as the constituents of the plants.

Important studies and research today are showing that the traditional use of plants as medicine is validated. Herbs can complement or replace pharmaceuticals with instruction from a clinical herbalist. In choosing a supplement company, it is crucial that the company has an American lab to test raw material that can come from all over the world. The companies will have a professional herbalist on staff who is familiar with the plants they sell. Look for small companies that process the herbs in small batches, ensuring freshness and vitality.

Many plants from other countries are organically grown in America, giving us herbals with hundreds of years of successful medicinal use, at our fingertips. Our ancestors used the herbs that grew all around them for obtaining and maintaining optimum health.

Today more than ever herbal products are vital in daily life.

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