

The South African Herb Academy
Family Herb Advisor
Herbology Learning Program

How To Make and Use Your Own Herbal Remedies

by
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Brought to you by:

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Please note: Information and suggestions in this publication pertaining to diet, health, and treatment are presented only as material of general interest and not as a prescription for any specific person or condition in a specific case. The reader is advised and encouraged to seek the aid of a qualified health practitioner for advice pertaining to his or her particular conditions and needs.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	6
LESSON 1: SETTING THE SCENE	8
WHAT IS A HERB?	8
HERBS AND DRUGS: PROS AND CONS	8
<i>Your body knows and understand herbs</i>	8
<i>Herbal medicine uses the whole plant</i>	9
<i>The healer within</i>	9
<i>Drugs are easier – or are they?</i>	10
HOW TO USE HERBS SAFELY	11
<i>Before you take any herb, read up on it</i>	11
<i>Don't take herb identity for granted</i>	11
<i>Stick with the recommended dosage, and never exceed it</i>	12
<i>Respect your individuality</i>	12
<i>If you are pregnant or nursing, use herbs with caution</i>	12
<i>Don't give herbal remedies to children under age 2</i>	12
<i>Think twice before jumping on a herbs bandwagon</i>	12
<i>Never on Sunday's</i>	12
<i>Use your common sense</i>	13
<i>Consult your health care provider</i>	13
LEARNING BOTANICAL NAMES.....	13
LESSON 2: APPROACHES TO USING AND STUDYING HERBAL REMEDIES.....	15
TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE.....	15
PHARMACOLOGY OF ACTIVE INGREDIENTS	15
USED WITHIN A PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM	16
WITHIN A HOLISTIC FRAMEWORK	16
<i>The Paradigm of Holistic Medicine</i>	17
<i>Herbs and holism</i>	18
<i>The nature cure</i>	18
WHICH APPROACH IS BEST?	19
LESSON 3: UNDERSTANDING HOW HERBS HEAL.....	21
WHY STUDY HOW YOUR BODY FUNCTIONS?	21
SURVIVAL NEEDS OF THE BODY AND THEIR ASSOCIATED SYSTEMS.....	21
A TRADITIONAL PHYSIOLOGY	22
<i>Tonifying (Building)</i>	23
<i>Calming</i>	24
<i>Eliminating</i>	24
LEVELS OF ACTIVITY	24
<i>The nutritional level</i>	25
<i>The bio-chemical level</i>	25
<i>Psycho-emotional level</i>	26
<i>The energetic level</i>	26
LESSON 4: THE THERAPEUTIC ACTIONS OF HERBAL REMEDIES.....	27

INTRODUCTION	27
THE SUBTLE THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS OF HERBS	27
THE TONICS	28
<i>Your best tonics</i>	29
THE NERVINES	30
<i>The importance of healthy nerves</i>	30
<i>Examples</i>	30
THE CARMINATIVES.....	30
<i>The importance of digestion</i>	31
<i>Examples</i>	31
CLEANSING AND ELIMINATING ACTIONS.....	31
<i>Hepatics</i>	31
<i>Laxatives</i>	32
<i>Diuretics</i>	32
<i>Expectorants</i>	32
<i>Diaphoretics</i>	32
<i>Alteratives</i>	33
LESSON 5: HERBAL THERAPEUTICS.....	34
HERBS AND THE STAGES OF DISEASE	34
<i>Acute stage</i>	34
<i>Sub-acute stage</i>	34
<i>Chronic stage</i>	34
THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES TO ACUTE CONDITIONS	35
<i>Elimination(s)</i>	36
<i>Functional adjustments</i>	36
<i>Temperament</i>	36
<i>Restoration</i>	36
CHOOSING YOUR HERBAL REMEDIES	36
<i>Simples</i>	37
<i>Blends</i>	37
<i>Sample blend</i>	38
DOSAGES	38
<i>Herb teas and decoctions</i>	39
<i>Capsules or pills</i>	39
<i>Tinctures</i>	39
<i>Poultices or external applications</i>	39
<i>Long-term imbalances</i>	39
<i>Children</i>	39
<i>Elderly</i>	39
LESSON 6: THE GREEN PHARMACY.....	40
INFUSIONS	40
DECOCTIONS.....	41
ALCOHOL-BASED TINCTURE	42
VINEGAR-BASED TINCTURE	43
OINTMENTS	43
COMPRESSES	44
POULTICES.....	44
LINIMENTS.....	44

LESSON 7: PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE.....	46
4 STEPS TO BETTER-THAN-AVERAGE HEALTH AND WELLNESS	46
<i>Step 1 – Diagnosis</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Step 2 – Research the disorder</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Step 3 – Research treatment options</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Step 4 – Plan and implement a treatment plan.....</i>	<i>46</i>
 EXAMPLE 1: RESEARCH THE DISORDER	 47
<i>Description</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Symptoms.....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Causes</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Prognosis.....</i>	<i>48</i>
 EXAMPLE 2: RESEARCH TREATMENT OPTIONS	 48
<i>Description</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Symptoms.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>BROADER CONTEXT OF TREATMENT</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Affirmation.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Western medicine.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Herbal medicine</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>General recommendations and considerations</i>	<i>48</i>
 APPENDIX 1: HERBS FOR COMMON AILMENTS	 50
11 SIMPLE, UNIVERSAL GUIDELINES FOR GOOD HEALTH	50
 HERBS FOR DIGESTIVE AILMENTS	 51
<i>Digestive stimulants.....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Digestive Relaxants</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Acid stomach, indigestion, heartburn.....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Colic or cramping pains in the intestinal tract.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Flatulence.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Constipation</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Nausea or vomiting</i>	<i>52</i>
 HERBS FOR RESPIRATORY AILMENTS	 52
<i>Asthma.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Colds and flu.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Coughs.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Bronchitis</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Respiratory allergies, hayfever.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Sinus congestion.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Sore throat.....</i>	<i>54</i>
 HERBS FOR URINARY AILMENTS	 54
<i>Cystitis</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Water retention.....</i>	<i>54</i>
 HERBS FOR SKIN AILMENTS	 55
<i>Acne.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Dandruff.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Insect repellants.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Wounds, infections, boils, abrasions</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Burns</i>	<i>56</i>
 HERBS FOR CIRCULATORY AND LYMPHATIC AILMENTS	 56
<i>Chilblains</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Swollen ankles or knees.....</i>	<i>56</i>

HERBS FOR NERVOUS AILMENTS.....	56
<i>Anxiety</i>	56
<i>Depression</i>	57
<i>Headaches</i>	57
<i>Fatigue and stress</i>	57
<i>Insomnia</i>	57
<i>Withdrawal symptoms</i>	57
APPENDIX 2: A BASIC MATERIA MEDICA	58
BASIL / BASILIEKRUID	58
CATNIP / KATTEKRUID.....	58
CAYENNE / BRANDRISSIE.....	58
CHAMOMILE / KAMILLE.....	59
COMFREY / SMEERWORTEL	59
FENNEL / VINKEL.....	60
HYSSOP / HISOP.....	60
LEMON BALM / SITROENKRUID	60
MARIGOLD / GOUSBLOM	61
MINTS / MENTE	61
PARSLEY / PIETERSIELIE.....	61
ROSEMARY / ROOSMARYN.....	62
SAGE / SALIE	62
THYME / TIEMIE.....	63
YARROW / DUISENDBLAD.....	63
ABOUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN HERB ACADEMY	64
REPRINT & RESELL RIGHTS	65

Foreword

Congratulations on your purchase of this home-study course. You’ve taken the **first step** towards better-than-average health and wellness.

The most important principle you will learn in this course is that herbs are not an utopia - they are not silver bullets to health.

They are just one of the tools we use in our quest for **better-than-average** health and wellbeing.

In many areas of health education, there is a lack of acknowledgement, or respect, for the idea of “**starting where you are**” – introducing things slowly so you don’t get overwhelmed, and allowing that doing something imperfectly is better than not doing it at all.

Conversely, we believe it is desirable (actually mandatory) to go **beyond** the utterly simplistic.

At this moment in time anybody can tell you that *Echinacea* works wonders for a cold. But few people will be able to explain exactly why, and even less will be able to tell you that by simply adopting a healthy attitude, lifestyle and diet *Echinacea* will work miracles.

Even more important...

You might not even need the remedy.

You’re about to **learn how** to study your body and herbal remedies, and how to use and prepare your own herbal remedies. This will certainly help you become a knowledgeable and confident user of herbal remedies.

Unfortunately it will not necessarily take you beyond the point of “utterly simplistic”. To go successfully beyond this point you will need to:

- Study the four cornerstones of health and wellness
- Have a basic understanding of how your body functions
- Know how to enhance your key body systems

In the two appendixes you will find basic material on a range of common illnesses and a basic **materia medica**. We trust that this material will help you on your way to better-than-average health and wellness.

There are a couple of small **housekeeping details** to highlight before you scroll to your first lesson.

First on the list...

Print out the course, pour yourself a beverage of choice, bring along a pen to jot down some ideas, and take it all to your favourite sofa. Learning a subject is so much more **successful** when you’re comfortable.

You will emerge from this course with a radically stronger information base and skill set -- well on your way towards taking better care of yourself and your family.

The “**How to Make and Use Herbal Remedies**” course is a “**work-at-your-own-pace**” course. Some of you will be able to devote **large blocks of time** to it. So you’ll complete the whole course in one (or even less) days.

Others may only have 15-30 minutes per day to spend on it. So it could take you a week or more to complete a part of the course.

Either way, it does **not** matter how **long** it takes you to complete the course. Set aside a certain amount of time per day to attend this course. You’ll find it was time well, no **best**, spent.

You will note that there are **no projects or assignments** to complete. We suggest that you use yourself as a **case study**. Apply each and every piece of material to yourself.

If you do that, by the time you have finished the 7 lessons of this course you will:

- Know the **pros and cons** of herbs and drugs, and how to use herbs safely
- Be able to apply the principals of the “**nature cure**”
- Have an understanding of how herbs **heal**
- Understand how to use the **therapeutic actions** of herbs to your advantage
- Be able to devise your own **treatment plan**, including the art of blending your own formulations
- Know how to make **herbal preparations** such as infusions, ointments, etc.

Next...

Please feel free to **promote** the **South African Herb Academy** to family, friends or colleagues – anyone you know who are interested in growing and/or using herbs. The manuals and information we share is for **EVERYONE**. Whether you have **minimal or extensive experience**, you will benefit from the information provided.

Warm regards,

Di-Di Hoffman

Kameeldrift, Pretoria, South Africa

Lesson 1: Setting the scene

“Herbs have been used medicinally around the globe for centuries, with success in a fantastically broad range of situations that should excite anyone who wants to heal him- or herself or others.

Trough the ages other cultures (Native American, Asian, European) have demonstrated ways to prevent and heal the ailments we fear and dread the most.

Today, research is continually confirming what these cultures have known all along: Herbs and foods can help you enhance your health, strength, youthfulness and immunity for as long as you live.” – Robyn Landis

What is a herb?

Herbal medicine has a bountiful history stretching back to the time of the earliest healers. Even today, for many people of the world, herbal medicines are the only therapeutic agents available.

Just to give you an idea, in 1985 the World Health Organization estimated that **80%** of the world’s population relied on herbs for their primary health care needs. You may think that this is restricted to the developing countries.

Think again. An estimated 70% of all medical doctors in Germany regularly prescribe herbal medicines. In South Africa we only have about 30 000 medical doctors (prescribing drugs) but we have approximately 200 000 African Herbalists (recommending herbs).

Herbs are different things to different people.

To the **botanist** they are non-woody plants under 30cm high. To a **chef** they are aromatic leaves, roots, seeds and bulbs. Some like to describe herbs as plants somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between food and drugs.

To a **herbologist**, strictly speaking, a herb is any plant material that can be used in medicine and health care.

Herbs and drugs: Pros and Cons

People are often curious about what makes herbs more desirable to use for health and healing than drugs.

There are several important reasons why herbs are a healthier and more sensible choice for improving your health and wellness:

Your body knows and understand herbs

Herbs are made up of the same compounds as plant foods - they are only more concentrated. Your body **instinctively recognize** plant compounds because we have been in contact with these compounds for millennia. We do not react negatively to most

plant compounds, as if they were foreign, because they aren't foreign. Your body knows how to digest, metabolize and excrete waste from plant compounds.

Drugs, on the other hand, are new to our bodies. Because we haven't had millennia to evolve specific mechanisms for dealing with them, our bodies don't know what to do with these unrecognizable foreigners.

Robyn Landis says: “*Because drugs are unlike anything our bodies have seen and dealt with before, they almost always produce what we call ‘side effects.’*”

While undesirable, side effects are the body's normal reaction to a foreign invasion – which is what ingestion of a drug represents.

The body may mount an attack on the invader, just as it does on anything out of the ordinary.

A drug may also produce toxic build-up because of the body's lack of built-in ability to process, assimilate and eliminate such substances.”

This does not imply that whatever is straight from a plant is always and absolutely good and safe – any common food, even carrots can become toxic when **eaten in excess**, and some plants are even deadly poisons – but it does indicate that herbs can work with rather than override the body's natural healing activity.

Herbal medicine uses the whole plant

This does not mean that we use all the parts of the plant from the roots to the seeds in a single remedy but that the part that we use – be it root, bark, leaves, flower or seed – will be used complete **as nature provided** it.

According to Vicki Pitman this contrasts with orthodox medicine which tries to isolate a single ‘active’ chemical component to give as medicine. Herbalists, while aware of these individual prominent components of a plant, find that they work best when they stay with their natural molecular companions.

This **synergy** – the combined effect of all the parts working together being greater than the sum of the parts working individually – helps keep herbal medicines free from damaging side effects.

With whole-plant medicine, one component affect one body part, while another component simultaneously affects a different part, both moderating each others' influences, balancing each other and creating a more balanced effect on the body.

The healer within

The body's internal environment is maintained within narrow limits, and this fairly constant state is called **homeostasis**.

Literally, this term means ‘unchanging’, but in practice it describes a dynamic, ever-changing situation kept within very narrow limits – or the condition of **perfectly balanced body chemistry**. When this balance is threatened or lost (an imbalance is created), there is a resulting risk to the well-being of the individual.

The great physiologist Walter Cannon, MD Sc.D, of Harvard University explained how, regardless of conditions that may vary widely, the “**body wisdom**” works constantly to maintain homeostasis.

Herbalists sometimes describe this “body wisdom” as the “**healer within**”, and all their efforts are focused on mobilizing the body’s own innate healing capacity.

It can also be described as “restoring health to the whole, not relieve to the part”, or as “treating the underlying cause, not the symptoms.”

It also represents a **fundamental difference** between the philosophies and intent with which herbs and drugs are used.

Kindly note that it is possible to use herbs only to treat a symptom and not the pathological process or imbalance that’s triggering that symptom. But such use will usually be part of the initial treatment for immediate relief.

Other herbs, and/or therapies will be used simultaneously to address the body’s proper function.

In herbal medicine it is always preferable to **eliminate** the symptom by eliminating its cause. It’s also preferable to **activate** the body’s own functioning, rather than to replace a function. A good case in point of the latter is HRT (hormone replacement therapy).

In summary we can say that herbs are **health enhancers**, while drugs are treatments. They support the “healer within”, while drugs beat it into submission.

According to Robyn Landis “*Drugs are not designed to restore balance or enhance the whole body in any way. They cannot be expected to do so because drugs themselves are not balanced.*

They are only taken as a treatment when you are sick, never when you are well.

Drugs developed out of a model that is focused on disease treatment, usually at a point where people are already very sick.

If the doctor sees the patient after he or she is very broken, the doctor will need and demand only tools that fix what is very broken.”

Drugs are easier – or are they?

Nobody will argue the fact that the main advantage of drugs is **convenience**.

When you have a headache you can simple take two paracetamol tablets and the headache goes away fast. Contrast that with brewing two cups of feverfew or willow bark tea. Firstly it requires more time to make and secondly it may take more time to work.

But there are **costs and payoffs** to everything. Drugs are not only exorbitantly expensive to buy, they also create further costs down the road because of the way they work (or don’t).

That’s simply because they ignore the problem causing the symptoms; thus the real problem persist, get worse, and require more treatment.

Then there is the serious issue of **drug side effects**.

Paul Bergner, editor of the journal *Medical Herbalism*, recently pointed out...

“Approximately 8% of all hospital admissions in the U.S. are due to adverse reactions to synthetic drugs.

That’s a minimum of 2,000,000. At least 100,000 people a year die from them.

That’s just in the U.S., and that’s a conservative estimate.

That means at least three times as many people are killed in the U.S. by pharmaceutical drugs as are killed by drunken drivers. Thousands die each year from supposedly ‘safe’ over-the-counter remedies.

Deaths or hospitalizations due to herbs are so rare that they are hard to find.

The U.S. National Poison Control Centres does not even have a category in their database for adverse reactions to medicinal herbs.”

It is in your interest to use medicines that boost your own healing mechanisms. Herbs are so effective, cost-efficient, nontoxic, and noninvasive that the personal effort required is worth it.

How to use herbs safely

Most popular medicinal herbs, including all the herbs discussed in this manual, are reasonably safe for most people most of the time when taken in recommended amounts.

But **remember** herbs do contain pharmacologically active compounds that have drug effects on the body when taken in medicinal doses. They therefore can potentially cause harm – allergic reactions, side effects, possible fetal injury, interactions with other herbs and drugs, and death.

Overall, **herbs are safer than drugs**, but they are **potent medicine**, and anyone who uses them should do so cautiously and responsibly. Fortunately you don’t need to be a master herbalist to use medicinal herbs safely. All you need is a little information and some common sense.

The following **sage advice** on using herbs safely comes mostly from Michael Castleman’s bestseller *The New Healing Herbs*:

Before you take any herb, read up on it

Don’t just listen to friends and relatives. Do your own research. The information in these notes is a good starting point. Take any warnings seriously. When in doubt about the appropriateness of the herb for your condition, don’t use it. Limit your use to those herbs that are widely recommended in popular herb books.

Don’t take herb identity for granted

Only buy herbs and herb products that identify the herb by its Latin binomial name – that is, genus and species. For example, thyme’s binomial name is *Thymus vulgaris*. You will learn more about botanical names in the next section of this lesson.

Stick with the recommended dosage, and never exceed it

Some people assume that if a little herb is good, more must be better. Wrong. Herbal dosage recommendations are based on centuries of clinical experience and, often, scientific research.

If you are over age 65, start with a low dose. As we grow older, we become more sensitive to medicinal herbs and drug effects. In addition, older people often take other medications. You don't want to risk adverse herb-drug interactions. Rather increase the dose gradually. You will study dosages in depth later.

Respect your individuality

We are all different. You may be allergic to one or more herbs or you may develop other unusual reactions. Stay alert for any adverse reactions such as abdominal upset, diarrhea, itching, rash, headache – anything out of the ordinary. If you notice any unusual symptoms that appear to be linked to the herb, stop taking it and discuss your reaction(s) with your health care provider.

Even if you are not allergic, you may still be unusually sensitive to one or more medicinal herbs. Doctors refer to this as an idiopathic reaction. *Idiopathic* means “for unknown reasons” – in other words just one of those things. Out of the blue, you may react badly to a herb that's generally considered safe. It happens.

If you are pregnant or nursing, use herbs with caution

It is a persistent medical principal that one should refrain from giving medicines to a pregnant woman unless absolutely necessary.

Fortunately, the issues are less worrisome for the use of herbal remedies than they are for conventional drugs.

Nevertheless, herbalists still refrain from medicating where possible, and then they prefer herbs that are positively vetted as good. Again, do your research.

Don't give herbal remedies to children under age 2

While some herbalists contend that herbal remedies are okay for children 6 months and older, we take a more conservative position. Use your discretion and apply the recommendations discussed in the section on dosages.

Think twice before jumping on a herbs bandwagon

Be cautious about unusual or new foreign remedies that have not stood the test of long-term use. Be extra careful when taking an old popular herb with a new “breakthrough” use. A good case in point is St. John's wort which flew off the shelves of stores when it was shown to have an important new benefit as an antidepressant. What people did not know was the adverse interaction of St. John's wort with drugs like protease inhibitors and cyclosporine.

Never on Sunday's

Always challenge a treatment: if after several weeks it is thought that the herb is useful, or even if there are doubts, stop the herb for a period of time and see if it is still necessary. Take the herb for six days, then break a day. Or take it for four weeks and then break a week. Whichever time scale you decide on, you must challenge the treatment.

Use your common sense

Never persist with any herbal remedy after a moderate period of time (preferably no more than several weeks, a couple of months at the outside) if it is not clearly improving the condition concerned. Contrary to popular belief, most herbs do not take months to work, it is the condition that sets the pace; if it is going to take months to correct professional advice would in any case be preferable.

Consult your health care provider

In most cases you can safely treat any ailment for which you normally would have opted for over-the-counter remedies, without getting professional advice, with herbal remedies. But you have to draw the line somewhere. Our position is that you should in all cases consult your doctor. Be especially careful of self diagnosis. It may land you in hospital and/or cost you your life.

Learning botanical names

In 1737 Swedish naturalist Carl Linne, also known as Carolus Linnaeus (1707 – 1778), developed his Latin binomial genus-and-species system based on reproductive characteristics. To this day, according to internationally accepted rules, all species is always identified by two technical names. With plants this is known as the botanical name or the species name.

Botanical names are in Latin and they are used uniformly all over the world. For example, a species of hedge roses is called *Rosa multiflora*. Such species names should always be either underlined or printed in italics and the first word, which identifies the genus to which the species belong, should be capitalized.

The reason why botanical names is so important to herbalists is that they are used uniformly all over the world, whilst the common names are not. For example, if I speak of thyme you would not know if I refer to *Thymus vulgaris* or *Thymus citriodorus*.

As the English language contains many words from Latin a lot of these botanical names look quite familiar. For example, the English word “foliage” comes from the Latin *folium*, meaning “leaf”. When you see the botanical name *Trifolium pratense* (red clover) you can quickly figure out that this is a three-leaved plant. The same goes for *Morinda citrifolia*, whose name means “citrus leaved”.

One word you will often see in the species name is *officinalis*. This Latin word means “of a storeroom” and it is related to our “office” and “official”. *Officinal* herbs were “authorized herbs” so to speak, or herbs “officially recognized” for their medicinal use, and today the word simply means “medicinal”. When you see this word appears in a botanical name you therefore know that this herb has a long history of medicinal use.

Sometimes the botanical name will indicate where the plant originates from. The botanical name of *Hydrocotyle asiatica* (gotu kola or pennywort), indicates that the herb originates from the continent of Asia. Others that you will see quite often are “canadensis” – from Canada, and “africana”, “affra” and “caffra” – from Africa.

For a few herbs the botanical name reflects one of the traditional uses for the herb. For example, *Turnera aphrodisiaca* (damiana) is noted for its ability to increase sex drive. Safflowers have been used since antiquity to make a yellow dye. This is indicated by its botanical name, *Carthamus tinctorius*. “Tinctorius”, which is related to our word “tincture”, means “used for dyes”. The botanical name for valerian, *Valeriana officinalis*, comes from the Latin “valere”, which means “to be in good health”.

The botanical name for garlic, *Allium sativum*, contains the Latin “sativum” which means cultivated or planted deliberately. Others, such as saffron (*Crocus sativus*), and alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*) contains the designations “sativus” and “sativa. All indicating that these plants are cultivated.

Unless you are a botanist, or horticulturist, it is not necessary to know every botanical name you come across. However, if after working through the above section you find yourself paying a little more attention to the botanical names of herbs, our goal will have been met. As time goes by you will be surprised at how many you will remember.

Kindly note that we are not advocating the use of botanical names to the exclusion of common names. Common names are very useful, often even more descriptive than the botanical names, and at times even poetic. But botanical names are extremely useful to prevent confusion and to delineate exactly which plant we mean.

Lesson 2: Approaches to using and studying herbal remedies

“The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest his patient in the care of the human frame, in diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease” – Thomas Edison

There are a number of ways in which to use herbs in health and healing.

Nothing inherent in the plant defines its use and so they must be studied and used within some sort of model. In this section we will identify a number of quite different approaches.

None of these approaches are better or worse than the others, just different.

It is however important to note that herbs used in these different ways and contexts can have **quite marked differences** in effect. This shows that healing is much more than the impact of drug or herb; it is a much broader and deeper phenomenon that involves all of what we are.

Now let's look at these approaches in more depth.

Traditional Knowledge

It is from tradition that we in the 'scientific' west have received most of our knowledge about what each remedy can do, which illnesses it may be used for and its actions.

Through traditional knowledge most people first come in contact with herbalism.

For example. There are snippets of information passed between people, reading popular books on herbal remedies. These books are usually written by journalists who have culled the information from much older books. All of this is fine and good, but it is inherently **limited**.

Traditional knowledge have its roots in a time when herbs were extensively used in the healing arts of that time, but now such knowledge is nothing more than '**organic drug therapy**' if used as it is.

Simply using remedies for symptomatic relief or to treat a named disease ignores all the insights of holistic medicine and the other philosophical systems. However, it is a valid way to start.

Pharmacology of Active Ingredients

It is not realized by many that herbs are the **foundation** of much of modern medicine.

This is the result of many years of scientific research into the active ingredients of plant remedies.

A wide range of potent drugs have been produced in this way.

To name a few:

- aspirin came from Willow Bark
- digoxin for heart failure from the Foxglove
- steroids from the Wild Yam
- the anti-leukemia drugs vinblastine and vincristine from the Madagascan Periwinkle.

The list is so long that **70 per cent** of the drugs in the British Pharmacopoeia have their origins in plants.

The search for active ingredients in plants has been most successful, but it is limited by the very nature of the perceptions behind it. Using plants as sources of drugs limits their healing power to that of the context within which they are used.

That is **pathology-based medicine**, focused on illness and the disease process rather than on health and wholeness.

In this way the herbs are used to provide drugs in the fight against pathological processes, ignoring their potential for augmenting the inherent wholeness of the life within us. It also ignores the synergistic effect of using ‘whole herbs’ as discussed in the previous lesson.

Studying the pharmacology of active ingredients does however have its advantages.

- Firstly it allow those who are ‘scientifically orientated’ to **‘prove’** why a specific herbal remedy will work for a specific ailment.
- It also enables herbalists to **explain**, and sometimes predict, some of the adverse herb-drug interactions.
- Lastly it helps herbalists to **avoid bad tincture formulations**. In tincture form tannins generally bind with alkaloids to form insoluble compounds, rendering, for example, your Golden Seal / Oak Bark mouthwash rather inert.

Used Within a Philosophical System

The approach described above is herbalism within a rational, reductionist, scientific ‘philosophy’, but this is rarely expressed as a philosophy of life.

In this present section the approaches to herbalism we mean are profound and **all-encompassing philosophical/spiritual world views** that provide a model for health as well as guidelines for life.

The two most significant systems still thriving today are Indian **Ayurvedic** medicine and **Chinese** traditional medicine.

In addition to such approaches we must also recognize the philosophical integration of herbal medicine into healing techniques that use astrology, and the whole anthroposophical vision of Rudolf Steiner.

It is beyond the realms of a manual such as this to give these profound systems adequate expression.

Within a Holistic Framework

There is a growing awareness that the perspectives of scientific medicine do not provide us with an adequate framework for health.

There can be no doubt that drug therapy and surgical technology have provided us with miracles of treatment. Much suffering has been relieved and countless lives saved. This cannot be denied and we would not want to belittle the value within high tech medicine.

The limits of treating illness are fast being reached, however. There is a need to **focus on prevention** and, even more importantly, on health and wellness.

The World Health Organisation defines health as: *“More than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being.”*

It is this kind of health that holistic medicine addresses itself to, and it potentially goes well beyond the confines of a pathology book!

It is an appreciation of patients as mental and emotional, social and spiritual, as well as physical beings.

It respects their capacity for healing themselves and regards them as **active partners** in, rather than passive recipients of, health care.

Let’s consider some of the implications of such an approach. It is often called the paradigm of Holistic Medicine, paradigm being the Greek word for pattern. This recognizes that a whole new pattern of thought, assumptions and perceptions is arising.

The Paradigm of Holistic Medicine

- Holistic medicine addresses itself to the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of those who come for care.
- Holistic medicine emphasizes each person’s genetic, biological, and psychosocial uniqueness as well as the importance of tailoring treatment to meet each individual’s needs.
- A holistic approach to medicine and health care includes understanding and treating people in the context of their culture, their family, and their community.
- Holistic medicine views health as a positive state, not as the absence of disease.
- Holistic medicine emphasizes the promotion of health and the prevention of disease.
- Holistic medicine emphasizes the responsibility of each individual for their own health.
- Holistic medicine uses therapeutic approaches that mobilize the individual’s innate capacity for self-healing.
- While not denying the occasional necessity for swift and authoritative medical or surgical intervention, the emphasis in holistic medicine is on helping people to understand and to help themselves, on education and self-care rather than treatment and dependence.
- Holistic medicine makes use of a variety of diagnostic methods and systems in addition to and sometimes in place of the standard laboratory examinations.

- Good health depends on good nutrition and regular exercise.
- Holistic medicine views illness as an opportunity for discovery as well as a misfortune.
- Holism includes an appreciation of the quality of life in each of its stages and an interest in improving it as well as knowledge of the illnesses that are common to it.
- Holistic medicine emphasizes the potential therapeutic value of the setting in which health care takes place.
- An understanding of and a commitment to change those social and economic conditions that perpetuate ill health are as much a part of holistic medicine as its emphasis on individual responsibility.
- Holistic medicine transforms its practitioners as well as its patients.

These broad outlines, suggested by Dr James Gordon M.D., provide the beginnings of a framework within which any therapy can be placed and so turned into a tool for personal health and transformation. Yes, even drug therapy.

Herbs and holism

As will become apparent throughout this manual, herbal medicine is a healing technique that is inherently in tune with nature. Some herbalist's also describe it as **ecological healing** as it is due to our shared ecological and evolutionary heritage with the plant kingdom that herbal remedies work.

At the moment much thought is going into marrying herbalism and holism. On a simple level it is easy because **we instinctively feel it**.

But our Western minds tends to develop (and in most cases needs) clear ideas and patterns of explanation and approach.

One such approach is to consider them in terms of their actions on the body. (We will discuss the actions of herbs in more detail in lessons 3 and 4.) But even this approach still needs a “framework” to work within and this framework should preferably be a “holistic framework.”

The nature cure

Fortunately, the nature cure (or **naturopathy**) provides us with a very handy and workable holistic framework within which to use our herbal remedies. It is a method of healing that employs various natural means to empower the individual to achieve the highest possible level of health and wellness.

The basic tenets of naturopathy are summarized by Benedict Lust in his book *The Principals, Aim, and Program of the Nature Cure*:

The natural system for curing disease is based on a return to nature in regulating the diet, breathing, exercising, bathing, and the employment of various forces to eliminate the poisonous products in the system, and so to raise the vitality of the patient to a proper standard of health.

THE PROGRAM OF NATUROPATHIC CURE

1. **ELIMINATION OF EVIL HABITS**, or the weeds of life, such as overeating, alcoholic drinks, drugs, the use of tea, coffee, and cocoa that contain poisons, meat eating, improper hours of living, waste of vital forces, lowered vitality, social and sexual aberrations, worry, etc.
2. **CORRECTIVE HABITS**. Correct breathing, correct exercise, right mental attitude. Moderation in the pursuit of health and wealth.
3. **NEW PRINCIPLES OF LIVING**. Proper fasting, selection of food, hydrotherapy, light and air baths, mud baths, osteopathy, chiropractic and other forms of mechanotherapy, mineral salts obtained in organic form, electropathy, heliopathy, steam or Turkish baths, sitz baths, etc. . . .

Modern naturopathy is based on seven time-tested medical principals. These are summarized by Murray and Pizzorno in their *Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine*:

1. First, do no harm (*primum no nocere*). Meaning – seek to do no harm with medical treatment by employing safe and natural therapies.
2. Nature has healing powers (*vis medicatrix naturae*). Naturopaths believe that the body has considerable power to heal itself. They see their role as facilitating and enhancing this process with the aid of natural therapies.
3. Identify and treat the cause (*tolle causam*). Seek the underlying cause of the disease rather than simply suppressing the symptoms. Symptoms are viewed as expressions of the body’s attempt to heal, while the causes can spring from the physical, mental-emotional, and spiritual levels.
4. Treat the whole person. The individual is viewed as a whole, composed of a complex set of physical, mental-emotional, spiritual, social, and other factors.
5. The physician is a teacher. The role of the physician is primarily that of teacher - educating, empowering, and motivating patients to assume more personal responsibility for their health by adopting a healthy attitude, lifestyle and diet.
6. Prevention is the best cure. This is accomplished through education and encouraging life habits that support health and prevent disease.
7. Establish health and wellness. The primary goals of naturopathy are to establish and maintain optimum health and to promote wellness. While “health” is defined as the state of optimal physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, “wellness” is defined as a state of health, characterized by a positive emotional state. Naturopathy strives to increase the patient’s level of wellness, regardless of the level of health or disease. Even in cases of severe disease, a high level of wellness can often be achieved.

Which approach is best?

As stated in the introduction to this lesson none are better or worse than the others. They are just different. It is also interesting to note that the modern herbalist will use all four

approaches when **studying** herbalism, but that he or she will use the last approach when **practicing** herbalism.

We encourage you to do the same.

Lesson 3: Understanding how herbs heal

“All living beings are inherently self regulating; and in health their functions are totally integrated and barely identifiable; disorders, however, manifest as patterns of dysfunction that can be recognized, charted and interpreted, to the benefit of any healing intervention.” – Simon Mills

Why study how your body functions?

Plants are complex living entities. When they are used in healing, they are interacting with another complex living entity, the human body. Your body needs to break down the plant’s identity and assimilate it into its own.

To be able to understand how herbs will assist your own “body wisdom”, you need a basic understanding of how your body functions.

In some ways the herbalist’s interest in medical sciences is actually quite **limited**. (Which may be a plus to some of us – as we don’t want to engage in serious scientific study of the human body.)

Anatomy and histology, the structure of the human body and its tissues, are not serious fields of study for the herbalist. Nor is pathology, the study of disease processes. To the herbalist these are all best left to those for whom it is a specialty.

It is the study of body function – **physiology** – that captures the herbalist’s imagination.

Simply because herbal remedies are used with the aim of affecting the behavior (homeostasis) of the body and mind.

Not with the intent of attacking a disease.

Simon Mills in *The Essential Book of Herbal Medicine* says that what seems to be required by the modern herbalist, as far as studying the human body is concerned, are:

- a way of **charting** the whole pattern of human illnesses, before they became pathologies;
- a working physiology that could help him/her really **interpret disorders** as disturbances of homeostasis, or diseases as manifestations of a long story of difficulty;
- an approach to human functions that could actually be understood by ordinary humans themselves, and thus perhaps the beginning of an answer to the client’s most pressing question about his or her illness: ‘**Why me?**’

As this is just an introductory manual we cannot possibly cover the above in detail. I do however feel that you should be aware that studying the human body is part and parcel of the modern approach to herbalism.

Survival needs of the body and their associated systems

In *Anatomy and Physiology in Health and Illness*, Ross and Wilson suggests a working physiology based on the survival needs of the body. It provides a **useful framework** for

studying the body as a whole, and its constituents. It looks at the overall processes in your body rather than at discrete mechanical functions.

They identified **seven survival needs** and as you will see in the table below, some systems contribute to a number of survival needs. This stresses the point that all the systems are necessary to maintain homeostasis and health.

	Survival needs	System(s) involved
1	Internal transportation	Circulatory, Lymphatic
2	Communication With the outside world	Nervous, special senses, respiratory (voice reproduction), skeletal, muscular, joints.
	Within the body	Nervous, endocrine
3	Intake of raw materials Food	Digestive
	Oxygen	Respiratory
4	Elimination of waste materials	Respiratory, urinary, digestive, skin (sweat glands)
5	Protection against the external environment	Skin, membranes lining passages which open on to the surface of the body
6	Movement within the external environment	Skeletal, muscular, joints, nervous, special senses
7	Reproduction	Male and female reproductive, endocrine (hormones)

(Adapted from Anatomy and Physiology in Health and Wellness by Ross and Wilson)

A traditional physiology

For the purpose of these notes we can summarize the above into three ‘primary processes’.

As you work through this simplified model please bear in mind that it is intended as exactly that. **A simplified model.**

The purpose of this section is to introduce you to the concept that...

The processes in our body’s can be understood, even felt, by anyone.

You will also find that it presents a model for understanding how herbs may facilitate health and wellness.

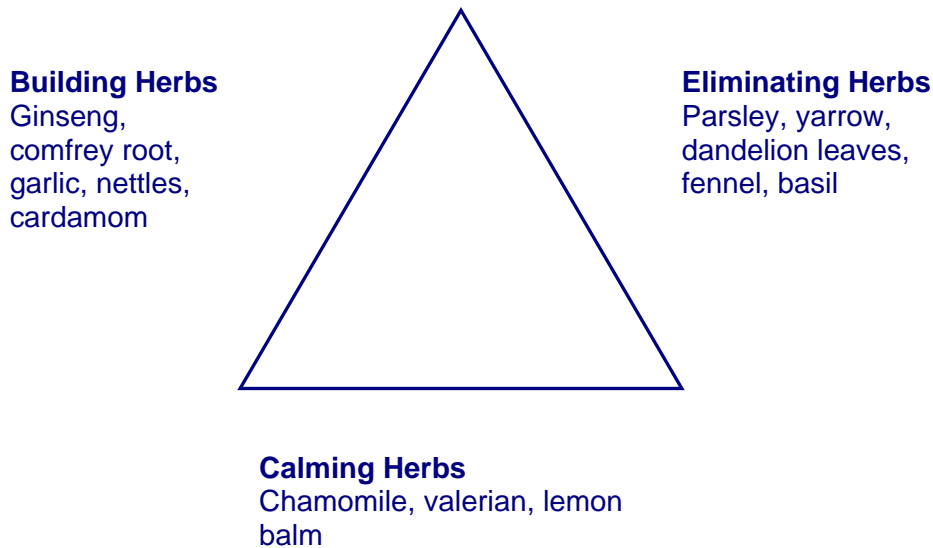
You need not be a rocket scientist to acknowledge that at any time the body is:

- Breaking down food and air, and building new cells and tissues.

- Resting and recuperating, and repairing.
- Eliminating waste by-products of metabolism and digestion.

These three bodily functions can be viewed as a **triad of balanced health**, each side of which should be roughly equal to the other two.

It is also an active, dynamic balance – adjusting itself constantly in response to the changing inner and outer environment.



If the building or the eliminating side becomes either deficient or too dominant, or there is not adequate rest and repair, the health of the person suffers.

Herbs can be said to nourish, support or activate each of these three functions and herbalists describe them as tonifying, calming and eliminating.

Tonifying (Building)

Herbs can improve the body's ability to perform its task of building and strengthening cells and tissues. Certain herbs act on specific organs and tissues to stimulate, nourish and strengthen them and thus to 'tonify' their function.

For example, herbs which tonify the stomach improve digestion, and thus the amount of energy we derive from food.

Herbs which stimulate bodily processes, such as blood and lymph circulation, keep the flow of energy free and ensure it is available to every cell.

Herbs which improve the strength of cells overcome weakness or flaccidity of muscles, nerves and membranes.

Some special herbs or herbal combinations have the ability to tonify the essential energy of the body and these are called Energy tonics. Ginseng is one such herb.

Calming

Complete relaxation allows the body to rest and repair, to return to a state of equilibrium, to recover from exertion.

This is accomplished primarily through the parasympathetic nervous system (nerves leaving the lower end of the spinal cord connected with those in or near the soft internal organs) in concert with the hormones.

Over stimulation or overwork of any organ, tissue or system, will eventually weaken function and insidiously undermine health.

Even emotional upheavals may lead to stress and tension which can stay locked in the body. Herbs which support the nerves and endocrine glands allow the body to recuperate and renew its energy.

Eliminating

Elimination and internal cleansing is as important to health as building.

The elimination and cleansing in the body is the responsibility of the kidneys, liver, lungs, skin, lymph and colon. If any one of these systems becomes overburdened by excess and cannot complete its cleansing functions, the body tissues gradually become toxic with the rubbish.

Herbs have the ability to enhance the cleansing processes of the body: to break up congestion, neutralize toxins and to promote their elimination. Used in conjunction with good diet they will keep this important aspect of the health triad fully functioning.

Levels of activity

In reality the bodily functions cannot be separated but **overlap** and are dependent on each other.

For example: to provide proper elimination, the kidneys must be both in good tone and have periodic ‘rest’, and a hyperactive nervous system can over stimulate metabolism generally.

Herbs have the ability to support more than one of these aspects at the same time.

When using whole herbs, healing is therefore accomplished by a **combination** of multiple effects.

A single herb can interact with several different aspects of the body simultaneously because of its complex energy and variety of biochemical constituents.

The body has its own intelligence, or wisdom, and from among the different effects will take what it needs, eliminating the rest safely.

Thus, herbalists say, the overall effect of using herbs will be one of regulating bodily activity because they act to **support homeostasis** - the body’s regulating mechanism.

It also means that when used properly herbal remedies are very unlikely to seriously imbalance the body.

Herbalists consider this a **tremendous advantage** over drug therapy because while one constituent gives the plant a characteristic action, such as a diuretic one, others are simultaneously affecting other aspects of the body and serve to round out the main action.

This multiple effect also means that several herbs may be used successfully for the same ailment, so our range of choice is very wide indeed.

Herbalists also recognize that herbs can affect the body on several different levels:

The nutritional level

Many herbs can be used as **foods**. Others can supply significant quantities of nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, and starches. These include lemons, dandelion roots and leaves and garlic.

Herbs can actually be combined to give an excellent natural mineral and vitamin supplement. Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) for example, known for its relaxing effects on the nervous system, contains a high proportion of the mineral calcium needed by the body for healthy nerve function.

Consuming herbs regularly in small amounts along with meals helps preserve health and prevent disease.

Kindly note that herbs used in this sense are not normally regarded as remedies as you will, literally, need to consume buckets full of a herb to achieve a therapeutic effect through diet.

More and more nutritionist and herbalists are however recommending that herbs be a **regular part of the diet**.

The bio-chemical level

Plants, whether medicinal herbs or foods, are complex chemical packages. For example, the potato contains over one hundred and fifty identified substances, as well as numerous others which remain unidentified.

The same is true of medicinal herbs. While science has elucidated many of their most important **active constituents**, no doubt new ones will continue to be discovered.

The main active constituents often explain a herb's most characteristic action: tannins, for example, are responsible for astringent, antiseptic and wound-healing actions; some glycosides have sedative, others purgative, effects. The main medicinally active constituents are the tannins, alkaloids, volatile oils, mucilages, acids, glycosides, and bitters.

But understanding the activity of herbs according to this paradigm is less useful than understanding that a herb is a complex of many different compounds. It is the known therapeutic effects of all these together – **the synergistic effect** – which is the best guide to its use.

For this reason most modern herbalists have adopted the model of **therapeutic actions** to explain how herbs effect the body on a bio-chemical level. In the next lesson you will study the specific therapeutic actions of herbs in more detail.

Psycho-emotional level

According to our holistic framework, herbal medicine aims to treat the whole person, including their mental and emotional aspects.

In general herbs which are **cooling and/or heavy** are used to ground, calm and sedate. Those which are light and stimulating are used to clear stagnation, to uplift and invigorate.

For example, when the fluid congestion and bloating that can accompany the menstrual period is reduced, symptoms of irritability and anxiety are relieved.

Herbs which are **sweet** nourish, strengthen and comfort. Aromatic herbs also affect the mental-emotional level and play an important role in treatment of psycho-emotional problems.

Often when congestion and blockages at the physical level are cleared, through the appropriate herbal strategy, mental-emotional clarity and peace are restored.

Flower remedies are a good example of remedies aimed at this level, but they also affect the body on the next level.

The energetic level

In a sense when we take herbs they are transferring to us the harmonious flow of **Vital Force** which they have developed in order to survive, and it is their energy that resolves the disharmony in ourselves causing disease.

The recognition of this phenomenon is at the foundation of traditional medicine systems – Tibb (Greek-Islamic), Chinese, Ayurvedic, American Indian and our own African Traditional Healers.

It is important to note that although this knowledge may be in one sense pre-scientific, it is not necessarily unscientific. It includes scientific understanding but also goes beyond that.

Energetic understanding of herbs is a holistic, comprehensive understanding because it takes into account all dimensions of a plant's nature not just the biochemical-physical.

Understanding the energetics of herbs and how these harmonize the energetic pattern of the particular individual, enables us to create the most effective herbal preparations and **heal at the deeper levels**.

Flower remedies are a good example of remedies working purely on the energetic level, and aromatherapy also recognizes this phenomenon.

Sometimes, when we are faced with a choice between two or more herbs for a specific disorder, we instinctively feel that one specific herb will serve our purpose better than any one of the others. To a certain degree this can also be described as choosing a herb on the energetic level.

Lesson 4: The therapeutic actions of herbal remedies

“They (tonic herbs) truly are gifts of Nature to a suffering humanity – whole plants that enliven whole human bodies, gifts of Mother Earth to her children. To ask how they work is to ask how life works. If anyone knows the answer to that one please let me know . . .”

– David Hoffmann

Introduction

According to David Hoffmann in *The Herbal Handbook* the therapeutic actions of herbs are one of the most comprehensible ways of coming to terms with the vast range of herbal remedies available to us.

In this lesson we will introduce you to just a few of the therapeutic actions that fits into our model of the triad of bodily functions.

Please make a mental note that:

- any herb can produce several of these therapeutic actions
- that may simultaneously affect your body and
- which are moderated by your body’s energetic pattern.

Don’t lose sight of the above.

To a large extent we are merely **creating artificial divides** when we start grouping herbal remedies according to their therapeutic actions.

Nevertheless, it allows us to:

- **make sense** of the vast range of herbal remedies and
- form a **successful herbal strategy**

The subtle therapeutic effects of herbs

Before we get into the real nitty gritty of the therapeutic actions, it is important to point out that herbal remedies also have more subtle effects. These are perhaps best described by Vicki Pitman in her book *Herbal Medicine*:

“In using herbs medicinally, you are connecting with the fundamental energies of nature, of the earth, of the seasons and the weather. You are interacting with your environment, rather than just passing through life living in protective bubbles of convenience, distracting entertainments and stimulations. Using herbs engages you in communicating with your self, leads to more self-awareness and challenges you to learn. It may happen that you notice you have a particular affinity for one or more herbs. You may be drawn to them because of their colour, taste, form, by some association, or through seeing a particular beautiful or interesting plant in a garden or in the wild. One or two herbs may

seem to work better than others for a particular ailment to which you are especially prone. It's lovely to develop such as relationship with plants.

The cycle of birth, growth, decay and death in plants can give a new perspective to the same processes in our lives. How much are we clinging to what has turned into a burden for us, sapping our energy? Can we let go of the past, as a tree releases its leaves when the time comes, using the experience to nourish future growth?

Plants are quietly, modestly getting on with their lives and providing for our survival. When we open our hearts and our minds to the healing herbs we find they enrich our lives in many unexpected ways.”

Sooner or later you will start to recognize these subtle therapeutic effects in your own life.

The Tonics

By nourishing your tissues and energy the tonics help combat disease, increases immunity and enhances the quality of your life.

Thus one definition of a tonic – the criterion used in most ethnic healing systems – is a herb that, with long term use is “**building**” in some way.

Don't confuse the tonics with the adaptogens.

Some, but not all, tonics are adaptogens. Adaptogens increase resistance and adaptation to all stresses and build stamina and vitality.

Tonics may **generally support** a specific organ or system – i.e., a herb may be a tonic for the heart or lungs, but that doesn't make it an adaptogen.

David Hoffmann, in *The Elements of Herbalism*, writes of tonics:

“Western medicine has neglected such ideas as having no basis in fact. This is not so; rather it was a reflection of research procedures that could not recognize such complex and multifactorial processes.”

In addition, the tonic concept doesn't fit into the orthodox scientific model of useful substances. According to this model a substance must have very narrow and targeted mechanisms of action – a tonic's **lack of specificity** bespeaks the lack of an underlying mechanism.

And that could mean, as Dr. Andrew Weil wryly points out in *Spontaneous Healing*, “the substance could be – perish the thought! – merely a placebo.”

Herbalists know from experience that the tonic herbs are not merely placebo's.

They value the tonics because they represent **the very essence** of what herbs are about, first and foremost: prevention. Their focus is primarily on keeping you well – although many have secondary uses as remedies for already sick people.

Tonic herbs are also a **great way to begin** with herbal remedies, to try something new and see what it does for you. And they can be taken throughout life. We live in such a toxic and disease-filled world that it cannot hurt to strengthen our “shields.”

But a word of warning...

If you venture into herbal remedies by using the tonics, you have to be prepared not to experience a necessarily dramatic result. One of the ironies of striving for better-than-average health and wellness is the “**no-result**” **result**. We are simply not accustomed to measuring our success by what doesn’t happen.

A shift in thinking is in order here: No news is good news.

Your best tonics

Robyn Landis, in *Herbal Defence Against Illness and Ageing*, presents two practical strategies for choosing your tonics:

“Just as some herbs have affinity for particular organs, systems, or body processes, and are best utilized for healing in those areas, many tonic herbs “specialize” in balancing a specific system or systems.

Because everyone has a limit for daily herb consumption in terms of time, convenience, tolerance, and money, it’s not necessary to try to take four or five herbal tonics all the time and work on all body systems and processes at once. It wouldn’t hurt you, but it’s simply not practical. One or two at a time is sufficient.

One way to choose your tonics is to think in terms of individual areas of weakness. If you have a family history of heart disease and did not adopt heart-healthy habits until recently, hawthorn berry might be a good tonic for you. If you tend to have respiratory infections and are a former smoker, a lung-affinity tonic such as thyme would be good. If a constant string of varying infections is your complaint, tonics that specifically increase cell-mediated immunity should be included.

If you can’t think of a specific area that would help you counter individual disease tendencies, another way to approach tonic use is by rotation. Use one or two for a couple of months, then switch to another one or two, so that every year you are nourishing and balancing two to four major systems.”

Listed below are some tonics for specific areas or issues.

When selecting a herb for its tonic effects the herbalist will always take into account the broader picture of the individual’s personal needs and the individual herb’s range of actions. It needs this breadth of vision to enable a coherent choice to be made.

Circulatory system: Cayenne, hawthorn berries, garlic, ginger, ginkgo, ginseng, motherwort, turmeric

Respiratory system: Angelica, aniseed, cayenne, coltsfoot, comfrey, garlic, hyssop, licorice, thyme, yarrow

Digestive system: Angelica, aniseed, chamomile, clove, comfrey, dandelion, garlic, ginger, mugwort, rue, turmeric

Urinary system: Buchu, parsley, yarrow

Reproductive system: Black cohosh

Muscles and skeleton: Alfalfa, angelica, black cohosh, comfrey, nettles

Nervous system: Black cohosh, lemon balm, motherwort, mugwort

Skin: Calendula, comfrey, echinacea, dandelion, garlic, gotu kola (a.k.a. pennywort), nettles, turmeric

Immune system: Echinacea, garlic, ginger, ginseng, licorice,

The nervines

The nervines are herbal remedies that have a beneficial affect upon the **nervous system** in some way.

The nervine herbs are antispasmodic and release muscular **tension**, both conscious and unconscious, some reduce and relieve **pain** by their analgesic and sedative action, and some **calm** nerves and induce relaxation and sleep.

Some nervines can **nourish** nerve tissues, strengthening the system generally and counteracting stress.

Some have a **lightening quality** that lifts lowered spirits while calming anxiety, and some have an earthy quality which grounds nervous excitability and spaciness.

As you can see from the above, the word nervine is a bit of a **catch-all expression** and to study them properly some herbalist's differentiate between nervine relaxants, nervine stimulants and nervine tonics.

The importance of healthy nerves

It has been estimated that 75% of all disease is due in part to **stress** which affects primarily the nervous and endocrine systems.

From the herbalist's point of view, feelings of isolation, anxiety, ungroundedness, or physical symptoms of spasm, pain and tension indicate the involvement of the nerves and endocrine glands.

Examples

Black cohosh, catnip, chamomile, ginger, lavender, lemon balm, motherwort, mugwort, thyme, valerian

The carminatives

This action affects the **digestion** and assimilation of foods and the elimination of digestive residues such as gas.

The carminatives are usually **flavourful** and most of the herbs and spices we use in our home cuisine are carminatives.

To a large extent, the mode of action of the carminative herbs is the result of the volatile oils they contain.

Through the activity of these oils the digestive system is stimulated to work properly and with ease. They also soothe and settle the gut wall, thereby easing griping pains and helping the removal of gas from the digestive tract.

To a certain degree the carminatives are digestive tonics and digestive nervines as well. You could also say that they are digestive eliminators. As such they could have an effect on all three legs of our triad.

Our main purpose with including them here is just to emphasize the point that we are often creating artificial divides when trying to explain herbal remedies, and when we are building models to explain one of the wonders of Nature – the human body.

The importance of digestion

Through the process of digestion your body converts and assimilates the energy needed for life from the food you eat.

Even the highest quality food, unless well prepared and then well digested and assimilated, can lead to imbalances in the system and blockages in circulation of blood and nutrients.

Herbalists also believe that if we eat while feeling strong emotions: grief, anger or irritability, depression or anxiety, we are in a sense eating these emotions along with our food and this too affects digestion.

Apart from improving and strengthening digestion carminatives, if used on a daily basis, will also balance the overall energetic effect of food on our bodies.

Examples

Allspice, caraway, cardamom, cayenne, chamomile, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, dill, fennel, ginger, marjoram, rosemary, thyme, sage

Cleansing and eliminating actions

Next to good digestion and assimilation, good elimination of waste and the by-products of metabolism is extremely important to maintaining or recovering good health. From lesson 3 you will remember that elimination and cleansing in the body is the responsibility of the liver, colon, kidneys, lungs, skin and lymph.

There are different therapeutic actions that the herbalist will use for each of them:

Hepatics

In treating the whole body, it is often beneficial to aid the **liver** and its functions as this most important organ is intimately involved in all body functions and the health of all tissues.

Hepatics are herbs that **strengthen, tone and stimulate** the secretory activities of the liver. This causes an increase in the flow of bile. Remedies that also promote the discharge of bile into the duodenum are called *cholagogues*.

There are many hepatic herbs available to us: Aloe vera, celery, dandelion root, horseradish, lemon balm, yarrow.

Laxatives

Many herbs can promote the **evacuation of the colon**, ranging from very mild laxatives to more violent and drastic purgatives.

Herbalist's seldom use purgatives.

They prefer laxatives, especially those that stimulate the natural secretion of digestive juices such as bile (the cholagogues), thus promoting evacuation.

Two popular herbs that have a mild laxative action are dandelion root and licorice.

Diuretics

In a strict sense, a diuretic is a remedy that increases the excretion and flow of urine.

However, the term tends to be used more generally for any herb that acts on the **kidneys and bladder**. Herbalist's will often use diuretics as part of a cleansing (detoxification) strategy.

Examples are: Borage, celery seed, dandelion, parsley, yarrow

Expectorants

These are remedies that help the body to **remove excess mucous** from the lungs.

However, the word is often used to mean a remedy that is a tonic for the respiratory system.

We prefer to use the word in the strict sense and to use *pectoral* for those remedies that tend to strengthen the lungs.

Herbalist's differentiate between stimulating, relaxing and normalizing expectorants.

The **stimulating expectorants** work by chemically irritating the lining of the bronchioles to stimulate the expulsion of material. A good example is horehound.

The **relaxing expectorants** will soothe bronchial spasm and loosen mucous secretions. This loosening is occasioned by producing a thinner mucous, lifting the stickier stuff up from below. This also makes them useful in dry, irritating coughs. Good examples are aniseed, comfrey, hyssop, and licorice.

The **normalizing expectorants** work in both ways and are especially valuable in a broader treatment of the lungs. Good examples are elderflowers, garlic, lovage and mullein.

Diaphoretics

This is an action that produces or **promotes sweating**.

This has the value of helping the skin eliminate waste from the body. The skin is one of the major ways in which the body ensures a clean and harmonious inner environment. With diaphoretics herbalist's help this function.

Some diaphoretics produce an actual observable sweat, while others just aid the sub-sensible sweating that goes on all the time.

Traditionally the diaphoretics are used to increase **sweating during fevers** in the belief that this will help the body throw off the problem.

Good examples of diaphoretics are: Cayenne, garlic, ginger, peppermint, rosemary, thyme and yarrow.

Alteratives

The alteratives were at one time know as '**blood cleansers**' – a term you will often see in popular herb books.

The idea of a blood cleanser, while hinting at much says little. If the blood was indeed in need of cleansing then there would be a major medical emergency afoot.

The alterative action aids the 'blood' either by purifying and strengthening the liver and lymphatic system or by increasing the number and activity of the body's own immune cells.

As such they will gradually restore the proper functioning of the body and increase health and vitality.

Good examples are: echinacea, garlic, nettles, thyme and turmeric

Lesson 5: Herbal therapeutics

“The history of mankind is an immense sea of errors in which a few obscure truths may here and there be found” – Cesare Beccaria

Herbs and the stages of disease

Herbal medicine recognizes that the body has its own wisdom, its own healer within; inherently trying to stay healthy it chooses the best path available.

It deals with disease or imbalance by a distinct pattern of response ranging from acute, through sub-acute to chronic and degenerative.

The following description of these stages are from Vicki Pitman’s *Herbal Medicine*:

Acute stage

The acute stage is an initial reaction phase to localize and eliminate pathogenic factors and excesses, and to recover from stress and trauma. In this stage the body’s energy is strong and it may try to rebalance by creating a short-term, self-limiting crisis which is experienced as perhaps a cold, flu, earache, headache, skin eruptions or inflammation.

Such things may sometimes be needed to force us to listen and pay attention to ourselves, to rest, or to adjust our diet. Although we call such experiences minor illnesses, they are the sign of a healthy body coping as best it can with the situation and signalling that things are out of balance, not right within.

If we repeatedly ignore the signals, suppress the discomforts with drugs so we can carry on, without sorting out the underlying cause or imbalance, the disease may be driven deeper into the body and begin to affect more important organs.

Antibiotics and other blocking drugs are strong medicines, very valuable in a life-threatening crisis, but the tendency to use them for every minor acute crisis is misguided because in suppressing the natural immune response they deplete the body’s immune strength, leaving it weaker and actually contributing to imbalance.

Sub-acute stage

The sub-acute stage occurs when the body, by repeated efforts, has not successfully resolved its situation. Acute symptoms may have disappeared or appear only infrequently but the person will generally feel more tired and not quite right and lack zest for life. Here the body is containing the situation, using energy to compensate in various ways and may even continue for many years to maintain a ‘balanced imbalance’, but its immunity is gradually depleted and organ functions weakened.

Chronic stage

The chronic stage results if acute and sub-acute stages are not resolved; a more serious illness manifests itself and may become degenerative. The negative energy of the disease overcomes the positive efforts by the body. Organ functions become so weakened that the body cannot maintain itself properly.

Even in serious chronic diseases a person sometimes finds an unexpected source of healing energy and experiences a remission or cure. Such a source can be from the emotional or even spiritual dimension. It can also come from the energy of herbs. Herbalists recognize and try to work with these dynamics of the healing process, using herbs to support the body's efforts, clear the causes of disease and to be the catalysts for positive change.

The scope of this introductory course is that of the acute stages of short-term illness. If symptoms persist, and in all other stages, please consult a qualified health practitioner.

For the minor upsets and symptoms of daily life, herbs are not only effective medicine, they help maintain the body's overall energy and strength, connect us to our wider environment, and enhance our self-awareness and the development of our intuitive nature.

Therapeutic approaches to acute conditions

From the above it should be apparent that the nature of any treatment will depend considerably on the extent to which the problem has 'penetrated' the system.

A passing cough, cold, headache or stomach upset can be treated very simply and usually safely with home remedies, such as might be described in the average herb book (using traditional knowledge as discussed in lesson 2).

These treatments often combine reasonable efficacy with a lack of interference in vital processes. Most such problems are **self-limiting** anyway: they would pass on whether they were treated or not.

Generally it may be said that at the early, acute or superficial stages of disease the body can be expected to defend its integrity stoutly.

As this defense is often uncomfortable or distressing it is often thought of the illness itself. Herbalists will never try to suppress these mechanisms (or **symptoms**) unduly. They might try to reduce the ferocity of the symptoms: make a cough more productive, reduce the inflammation by stimulating extra blood flow to the area, and so on.

The priority is always management rather than suppression, and the need to see such symptoms as signs of healthy resistance to attack rather than as an illness.

According to Simon Mills in *The Essential Book of Herbal Medicine*, treatment of acute conditions can be divided into four main strategies:

1. To maintain and if necessary increase elimination(s) from the body;
2. To make such functional adjustments as may seem indicated to reduce distress and improve the body's capacity to manage the problem, while avoiding undue suppression;
3. To balance up the final prescription so that its temperament best counters the temperament of the illness;

4. To ensure that there is adequate time planned after the illness for full convalescence and recovery.

Elimination(s)

It is difficult to overstate how important this stage is in herbal tradition.

Improving elimination means using those remedies you've learned about in the previous lesson.

Let's recap: to induce perspiration (diaphoretics), remove material from the airways (expectorants), the bowel (laxatives), the urinary system and kidneys (diuretics), and the liver (hepatics and cholagogues), as well as non-specifically 'cleansing' the tissues and blood stream (alteratives).

Functional adjustments

Making functional adjustments in the context of Mill's four strategies could be described as fine tuning.

Mostly this is not critical and beyond the vision of the newcomer to herbal remedies, but nevertheless it may be necessary.

You might want to include a herb to support a flagging circulation system or excessive gastric activity might need to be reduced. We could also say that functional adjustments will **address the underlying cause** of the illness, if not already covered efficiently by the eliminating remedies.

Temperament

Not all modern herbalist's use the temperaments of remedies.

But those who do can generally claim much more effective, or holistic, attempts at supporting the healer within.

The discussion of the temperaments of plant remedies is beyond the scope of an introductory manual such as this.

Restoration

The need for adequate time for recovery after an acute illness is barely accepted in modern medical care.

On the other hand, taking time off work in today's manic economic society makes you feel like a social failure. Yet, it is most likely that the earlier view still holds. That an acute illness needs to be treated with respect, that several days' or a week's recovery should be accepted as the true cost of an acute illness.

To the traditional herbalist the principles of convalescence and restorative regimes are still important and are elaborated on in full in our advanced home-study program.

Choosing your herbal remedies

By now it should be clear that when choosing which remedies to use, we decide which therapeutic actions, or combination of actions, will best **support the body's own healing activity**. This means that to an extent you need to know what actually causes the disease or illness.

You will also be guided by what is available to you at the time – it may be in the middle of the night when you need them.

Remember that several herbs can be used for the same condition. If you don't have a particular one that is recommended, don't worry: choose one with similar therapeutic actions that you do have.

Simples

How many herbs to use? For short-term, one-off ailments a single herb can be very effective, provided it is taken strongly and often enough. Such a herb which is taken singly as a remedy is called a simple.

A good, and popular, example of **simpling** is taking echinacea at the first sign of a cold or flu.

Eating raw garlic paste or drinking copious amounts of elderflower tea for the same problem will also be good examples.

These remedies will either prevent the condition worsening or lighten its course. Nothing further needs to be done, except to continue with the one herb (simple) for a few days extra to thoroughly clear the condition.

You will have to try several simples to find the one that works best for your condition.

But it's worth the effort.

You may be pleasantly surprised when you find that rosemary taken as a simple, will cure your headache associated with irritability, even quicker than a paracetamol tablet.

Blends

At times when you don't have the patience or time to experiment with different simples, it is better to use herbs in blends or formulas.

The same applies to ailments that have perhaps happened regularly before or have been around vaguely for a while before they manifest strongly.

The amounts of the different herbs to include in your blends is important and there are some general guidelines you should follow:

- **The primary action**

The greater part of your blend should be given to the herb that **most directly affects** the condition.

For example in a cough this would be the expectorant herb. This herb can then be reinforced by including the same amount of an extra herb or two with the same primary action.

These herbs should also have secondary actions different from that of the main herb but which complements or extends the primary action.

Often these two or three herbs are enough for simple conditions.

▪ **Secondary actions**

At times you will feel that your condition involves some **greater imbalance**, weakness or excess.

Then a more complex blend might be your answer. In this case you will again choose two or three primary, but complementary, herbs.

Then you would consider which additional aspects of your body needs support, and choose one or two other herbs which extend the action of your blend to this area.

▪ **Supporting actions**

As a rule of thumb herbalist's will include:

- a **circulation-stimulating** herb, either mild or strong depending on the individual, which will help carry the action of the other herbs through to the tissues efficiently, and
- a **relaxing herb** which will help relieve residual tension and allow the tissues to be more receptive to the herbal effects.
These herbs are usually added at half the amount of the primary herb.

Sample blend

Before we consider a sample blend to help you get a feel for making your own blends let's write our blend formula in recipe format:

Primary herb – the herb that most directly affects the condition – 1 part

Secondary herb – to support additional aspects – 1 part

Optional: one or two additional primary herbs, which have complementary actions – 1 part each and/or 1 part of one more secondary herb. Circulation stimulating herb – ½ part and Relaxing herb – ½ part

You can use any measure for your 'parts' but weight is the most accurate.

Headache blend

Lets consider a blend for a headache *associated* with sinus congestion, dull ache, and sluggish digestion or bowels.

As our primary herb we choose 2 parts rosemary for its stimulating, circulating, warming and pain relieving action.

To this we add 2 parts basil which is also stimulating, warming and pain relieving but it also clears congestion in the head.

As a secondary herb we choose 1 part fennel which improves digestion and helps liquify and remove mucous.

Finally we add ½ part ginger for its circulating, warming and antispasmodic effect.

Dosages

The effects of herbs depends to an extent on how often they are taken. For acute ailments, in general it is best to take the herbs quite frequently, every hour or even half

hour, until some relief appears in the symptoms. Then continue the dose at gradually longer intervals up to two or three times a day until the condition clears.

Herb teas and decoctions

Adults should take 1 cup every hour or so to relieve symptoms for short-term, acute conditions then 1 cup three times a day for follow-up or longer-term treatment.

Capsules or pills

Adults take 2 capsules or 4 pills every hour as needed in acute conditions, or three times a day with meals for follow-up and longer-term treatment.

Tinctures

Adults take 1 tsp or 5ml every hour as needed, or three times a day for follow-up or longer-term treatment.

Poultices or external applications

Judge according to the situation, and use the same general guideline – apply frequently until relieved, then less often.

Long-term imbalances

For imbalances that have been present for some time, though are not manifesting acutely at the moment, dosage would be 1 cup, 1 tsp or 2 capsules three times a day for three weeks. Rest one week, then re-assess, and repeat if needed.

Children

For children, the adult dose is reduced proportionately according to age; this is based on weight, so make adjustments if the child is not average weight for age. Dilute with water or juice.

- Nursing infants – mother to take the herbs. Their effects will pass through the milk to the baby.
- 6 month – 1 year: 1/8 or less (depending on weight) of adult dose.
- 1-2 years: ¼ of adult dose
- 3-7 years: ½ of adult dose
- 7-12 years: ¾ of adult dose

Elderly

For elderly patients, adjust the dose according to how frail they are. If they are hardy and sturdy, even if old, the adult dose can apply. If frail and weak, use the doses for small children under seven.

Lesson 6: The green pharmacy

“There are many different ways of taking herbs, from simply eating them raw as a nourishing supplement to brewing a delicious aromatic tea or applying them as an oil or ointment. The kitchen becomes a veritable pharmacy in itself!” – Vicki Pitman

Infusions

If you know how to make tea, you know how to make an infusion.

It is perhaps the most simple and common method of taking a herb and fresh or dried herbs can be used to prepare it.

However, where one part of dried herb is prescribed, it can be replaced by three parts of the fresh herb, the difference being due to the higher water content of the fresh herb. Therefore, if the instructions call for one teaspoonful of dried herb, it can be substituted by three teaspoonfuls of fresh herb.

To make larger quantities to last for a while, the proportion should be 30g of herb to 500ml of water. The best way to store it is in a sealed bottle in the refrigerator. However, the shelf life of such an infusion is not very long, as it is so full of life-force that any micro-organism that enters the infusion will multiply and thrive in it.

If there is any sign of fermentation or spoiling, the infusion should be discarded. Whenever possible, infusions should be prepared when needed.

Infusions are most appropriate for plant parts such as leaves, flowers or green stems, where the substances wanted are easily accessible. If you also want to infuse bark, root or seeds it is best to powder them first, to break down some of their cell walls and make them more accessible to the water.

Seeds, for instance, such as Fennel and Aniseed, should be slightly bruised before being used in an infusion to release the volatile oils from the cells. Any aromatic herb should be infused in a pot that has a well-sealing lid, to ensure that only a minimum of the volatile oil is lost through the process of evaporation.

When you are working with herbs that are very sensitive to heat, either because they contain highly volatile oils or because their constituents break down at high temperature, you can also make a cold infusion. The proportion of herb to water is the same but in this case the infusion should be left for six to twelve hours in a well-sealed earthenware pot. When the liquid is ready, strain and use it.

As an alternative, cold milk can also be used as a base for a cold infusion. Milk contains fats and oils which aid the dissolution of the oily constituents of plants. These milk infusions can also be used for compresses and poultices, adding the soothing action of milk to that of the herbs. There is however one contra-indication for the use of milk in an infusion: if there is any evidence of an internal reaction to milk in the form of over-sensitivity or allergy, or if the skin becomes irritated when it is applied externally, then avoid such infusions.

The infusions made as directed below will be the base for many other preparations described later.

To make an infusion

Infusions may be drunk hot – which is normally best for a medicinal herb tea – or cold. You can even put ice in. They may be sweetened with licorice root, honey or even brown sugar.

Herbal teabags can be made by filling little muslin bags with herbal mixtures. Remember how many teaspoonfuls herb have been put into each bag.

1. Take a china or glass teapot which has been warmed and put one teaspoonful of the dried herb or herb mixture into it for each cup of tea you intend making.
2. Add a cup of boiling water for each teaspoon herb and then put the lid on.
3. Leave to steep for ten to fifteen minutes. Strain and drink.

Infusions are not only a way of preparing herbal remedies, they are delicious teas in their own right. Whilst each person will have favourite herbal teas, here is a list of some suggested herbs, each of which make delicious teas, either singly or in combination: Chamomile, lemon balm, lemon verbena, lemon grass, peppermint, rosemary, sage, spearmint, and thyme.

Decoctions

Whenever the herb to be used is hard and woody, it is better to make a decoction rather than an infusion to ensure that the soluble contents of the herbs actually reach the water.

Roots, rhizomes, wood, bark, nuts and some seeds are hard and their cell walls are very strong, so to ensure that the active constituents are transferred to the water, more heat is needed than for infusions and the herb has to be boiled in the water.

When preparing a mixture containing soft and woody herbs, it is best to prepare an infusion and a decoction separately to ensure that the more sensitive herbs are treated accordingly. When using a woody herb which contains a lot of volatile oils, it is best to make sure that it is powdered as finely as possible and then used in an infusion rather than a decoction, to ensure that the oils do not boil away.

To make a decoction

A decoction can be used in the same way as an infusion.

1. Use a glass, ceramic or earthenware container. If metal it should be enameled. Never use aluminium.
2. Put one teaspoonful of herb for each cup of water into the pot.
3. Add the water to the herbs in the pot.
4. Bring to the boil and simmer for ten to fifteen minutes.
5. Strain while still hot and drink.

Alcohol-based tincture

In general, alcohol is a better solvent than water for the plant constituents. Mixtures of alcohol and water dissolve nearly all the relevant ingredients of a herb and at the same time act as a preservative. Alcohol preparations are called tinctures, an expression that is occasionally also used for preparations based on glycerine or vinegar, as described below.

We can use tinctures in a variety of ways. They can be taken straight or mixed with a little water, or they can be added to a cup of hot water. If this is done, the alcohol will partly evaporate and leave most of the extract in the water, which with some herbs will make the water cloudy, as resins and other constituents not soluble in water will precipitate. Some drops of the tincture can be added to a bath or foot bath, or used in a recipe to make an ointment. Suppositories and lozenges can be made this way too.

Another most pleasant way of making a kind of alcohol infusion is to infuse herbs in wine.

Even though these wine-based preparations do not have the shelf life of tinctures and are not as concentrated, they can be very pleasant to take and most effective in some conditions.

There is a long history of using wine in this way, and in fact most aperitifs and liqueurs were originally herbal remedies, based on herbs such as wormwood, mugwort and aniseed, to aid the digestive process.

You can also ferment the herbs themselves; after all, even grapes are herbs. All the aromatic herbs make exquisite wines, and Elderberry and Dandelion are especially useful – and delicious – as medicinal wines.

To make an alcoholic tincture

The method given here for the preparation of tinctures show a simple and general approach; when tinctures are prepared professionally according to descriptions in a pharmacopeia, specific water/alcohol proportions are used for each herb, but for general use such details are unnecessary.

For home use it is best to use an alcohol of at least 30%, vodka for instance, as this is about the weakest alcohol/water mixture with a long-term preservative action.

Tinctures are much stronger volume for volume, than infusions or decoctions. The average normal dose is 1 teaspoon three times a day.

1. Put 120g of finely chopped or ground dried herbs into a container that can be tightly sealed. If fresh herbs are used, use 240g - about a cupful.
2. Pour 500ml vodka on the herbs and then close the container tightly.
3. Keep the container in a warm place for two weeks and shake it well twice a day.
4. After decanting the bulk of the liquid, pour the residue into a muslin cloth suspended in a bowl.
5. Wring out the liquid. (The residue makes excellent compost.)

6. Pour the tincture into a dark bottle. Keep it well sealed.

Vinegar-based tincture

Tinctures can also be made using vinegar, which contains acetic acid that acts as a solvent and preservative in a way similar to alcohol. Whenever you make a vinegar tincture, it is best to use apple cider vinegar, as it has in itself excellent health-augmenting properties.

Synthetic chemical vinegar should not be used.

The method is the same as for alcoholic tinctures and if you steep spices or aromatic herbs in vinegar, the resulting fragrant vinegar will be excellent for culinary use.

Ointments

Ointments or salves are semi-solid preparations that can be applied to the skin. Depending on the purpose for which they are designed, there are innumerable ways of making ointments; they can vary in texture from very greasy to a thick paste, depending on what base is used and what compounds are mixed together.

Any herb can be used for making ointments, but Arnica, Chickweed, Comfrey Root, Cucumber, Elder Flower, Marigold Flower, Marshmallow Root and Yarrow are particularly good for use in external healing mixtures.

Note that Arnica is not advisable on open wounds.

The simplest way to prepare an ointment is by using petroleum jelly (Vaseline) as a base. Whilst this has the disadvantage of being an inorganic base, it also has a number of advantages. Petroleum jelly is easy to handle so a simple ointment can be made very quickly.

Besides this it has the advantage of not being absorbed itself by the skin, making it useful for instance as the base for the anti-catarthal balms. Here the petroleum jelly acts merely as a carrier for the volatile oils, which can thus evaporate and enter the nasal cavities without being absorbed through the skin.

The basic method for a petroleum jelly ointment is to simmer two tablespoonfuls of a herb in 200g of petroleum jelly for about ten minutes. A single herb, or a mixture of fresh or dried roots, leaves or flowers can be used.

In more traditional ointments, instead of using petroleum jelly a combination of oils is used that acts as a vehicle for the remedies and helps them to be absorbed through the skin, plus hardening agents to create the texture desired.

The following example is the prescription for ‘Unguentum Simplex’, a simple ointment from the British Pharmacopoeia of 1867:

White wax 60g

Lard 90g

Almond oil 90ml

‘Melt the wax and lard in the oil on a water bath, remove from heat when melted, add almond oil and stir until cool’.

In this basic recipe, the lard and the almond oil facilitate the easy absorption of the herbal remedies through the skin. Instead of these carriers you could use one or more of lanolin, cocoa butter, wheat germ oil, olive oil and vitamin E. The wax thickens the final product, and for this effect you could also use lanolin, cocoa butter or, most ideally, beeswax, depending on the final consistency you want to achieve.

Compresses

A compress or fomentation is an excellent way to apply a remedy to the skin to accelerate the healing process.

To make a compress, use a clean cloth – made either of linen, gauze, cotton wool or cotton – and soak it in a hot infusion or decoction. Place this as hot as possible upon the affected area. As heat enhances the action of the herbs, either change the compress when it cools down or cover the cloth with plastic or waxed paper and place on it a hot-water bottle, which is changed when necessary. All the vulnerary herbs make good compresses, as do stimulants and diaphoretics in many situations.

Poultices

The action of a poultice is very similar to that of a compress, but instead of using a liquid extract, the solid plant material is used for a poultice. Either fresh or dried herbs can be used to make a poultice.

With the fresh plant you apply the bruised leaves or root material either directly to the skin or place them between thin gauze.

Dried herbs must be made into a paste by adding either hot water or apple cider vinegar until the right consistency is obtained.

To keep the poultice warm, you can use the same method as for the compress and place a hot-water bottle on it.

When you are applying the herb directly to the skin, it is often helpful first to cover the skin with a small amount of oil, as this will protect it and make removal of the poultice easier.

Poultices can be made from warming and stimulating herbs, from vulneraries, astringents and also from emollients, which are demulcents that are soothing and softening on the skin, such as Comfrey Root.

Poultices are often used to draw pus out of the skin and there are a multitude of old recipes. Some of them use cabbage, which is excellent, others use bread and milk, some even soap and sugar.

Liniments

Liniments are specifically formulated to be easily absorbed through the skin, as they are used in massages that aim at the stimulation of muscles and ligaments.

They must only be used externally, never internally.

To carry the herbal components to the muscles and ligaments, liniments are usually made of a mixture of the herb with alcohol or occasionally with apple cider vinegar,

sometimes with an addition of herbal oils. The main ingredient of a liniment is usually Cayenne, which may be combined with Lobelia or other remedies.

Lesson 7: Putting theory into practice

“The disgrace of medicine has been that colossal system of self-deception, in obedience to which mines have been emptied of their cankered minerals, the entrails of animals taken for their impurities, the poison bag of reptiles drawn for their venom, and all the inconceivable absurdities thus obtained thrust down the throats of human beings suffering simply of some want of organization, nourishment or vital stimulation.

If all drugs were cast into the sea, it would be so much better for man, and so much worse for the fishes” – Oliver Wendell Holmes

4 Steps to better-than-average health and wellness

Any home-treatment plan should preferably follow a systematic approach. The approach outlined below consists of four simple steps that you can adapt to your own needs.

Step 1 – Diagnosis

The first step in any self-treatment program is always diagnosis.

That means consult your physician if you are not absolutely sure.

Discuss the illness, and the possibility of alternative approaches with your physician. Some diseases are self-limiting and can safely be treated at home, others can lead to serious complications and are best treated by a professional.

Step 2 – Research the disorder

Always do some research on the illness. Ask as many questions as possible. What causes it, who gets it, how serious is it, is it normally acute or chronic, how it is treated, and how long does it normally take to recover – the prognosis.

Step 3 – Research treatment options

Lifestyle changes – these can include changes to your lifestyle and diet. For a simple approach to a healthy lifestyle refer to the 11 simple, universal guidelines for good health.

Herbs – by now you know that herbs have much to offer to help with the stresses and strains of daily life. Choose the ones for yourself by their effect on you. Taste and general intuition may tell which would be the best for you. Do some research on them before you start using them.

Other therapies – don't limit yourself to herbs, they are just one of the tools you can use in your quest for better-than-average health and wellness.

Step 4 – Plan and implement a treatment plan

Don't try to include too many options in your treatment plan. Rather focus on a few and see how they work for you. Gradually include more options. Use a holistic approach.

Don't expect immediate results, but if you don't see any improvement within a reasonable time, it's time to rethink your approach. Including a revisit to your physician.

Example 1: Research the disorder

In this example you will get an idea of what we mean with doing proper research on a disorder such as sinusitis. Obviously you won't always go into such detail and there might be other cases where the research below might be totally insufficient. We've specifically left out one common cause of sinusitis. See if you can spot it.

The purpose of doing proper research is twofold:

1. For starters you would like to find out whether you can safely treat this condition at home. From our research below we can see that it might not be such a good idea to treat sinusitis at home without consulting our health care provider.
2. The next purpose is to try to find out what causes the disorder. This will help us focus on the underlying causes and not the symptoms. From our research it becomes quite clear that if we can improve our immune system and ensure that our eliminatory organs are functioning properly we might be able to prevent our sinusitis problems. That is to say, if we don't have a physical deformity of the nasal septum.

Description

Sinusitis is an inflammation of the sinuses caused by an allergy or a viral, bacterial, or fungal infection.

Symptoms

Frontal headaches, pain, pressure and runny nose, blocked nose, nasal discharges, possibly fever, voice can become husky or nasal. A person may feel generally sick (malaise).

Causes

Due to factors such as allergens, environmental irritants, bacterial infections and colds, the sinuses may become clogged, swollen or infected. Deformity of the nasal septum.

In people with poorly controlled diabetes or an impaired immune system, fungi can cause severe and even fatal sinusitis.

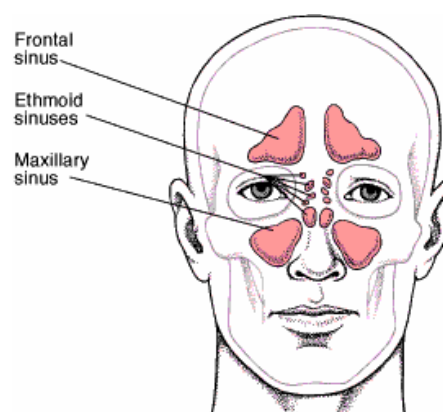
One of the axioms of traditional medicine is that a symptom in the upper body can be caused by an imbalance in the lower part, and vice versa.

In the case of sinusitis the problem has its origins in the intestines, which are blocked and unable to fully eliminate waste.

Waste is reabsorbed by the lymph and the function of the system becomes impaired (clogged up).

An overly acidic diet causes the spleen to become imbalanced and swollen, which causes sinuses to become inflamed.

Traditional therapies therefore aim at supporting the functions of the large intestine and spleen and/or avoiding possible food allergens.



Prognosis

Prognosis from a medical point of view is good if you don't mind taking antibiotics. If they don't help there is always surgery to improve sinus drainage and remove infected material.

Example 2: Research treatment options

In this example we will consider the treatment options for acid reflux, or heartburn. Our purposes when researching treatment options is to find out whether a simply lifestyle change might not improve or prevent the disorder; and to help us formulate a treatment plan, the last of our four steps.

Description

A back flow of stomach contents upwards into the oesophagus.

Symptoms

Acid reflux, or heartburn, is a burning sensation in the stomach and/or chest. People with hiatal hernia often experience heartburn.

NB! The early symptoms of angina and heart attack sometimes mimic those of “acid stomach.” If symptoms persist, if the pain begins to travel down into the left arm, or if the sensation is accompanied by a feeling of weakness, dizziness, or shortness of breath, emergency medical help should be sought at once.

BROADER CONTEXT OF TREATMENT

Affirmation

I breathe fully, trusting life and releasing fear.

Western medicine

The lining of the stomach protects the stomach from the effects of its own acids. Because the oesophagus lacks a similar protective lining, stomach acids that refluxes into it causes pain, inflammation (oesophagitis), and damage.

Acid refluxes when the lower oesophageal sphincter isn't functioning properly. The force of gravity contributes to reflux when the person is lying down. The degree of inflammation caused by reflux depends on the acidity of the stomach contents, the volume of the stomach acid in the oesophagus, and the ability to clear the regurgitated fluid from the oesophagus.

Several measures may be taken, the most popular being antacids. These are aimed at addressing the symptom and does not take the underlying causes into consideration.

Herbal medicine

The standard recommendation is to simply place 10cm blocks under the bedposts at the head of the bed. This elevation of the head is very effective in many cases. An effective tea, taken half an hour before meals, consists of equal parts meadowsweet, peppermint and catnip and ½ a part rosemary. Aloe vera juice aids healing of the intestinal tract. Catnip, fennel, ginger and marshmallow root tea all aid in proper digestion and act as a buffer to stop heartburn.

General recommendations and considerations

- Do not consume carbonated beverages, fats, fried foods, processed foods, sugar, or spicy or highly seasoned foods. These seem to be the main cause of heartburn.

- At the first sign of heartburn drink a large glass of water. This often helps.
- Try raw potato juice Do not peel the potato – just wash it and put it into the juicer. Mix the juice with an equal amount of water. Drink immediately after preparation, three times a day.
- Sip 1 tablespoon of apple cider vinegar, mixed with a glass of water, while eating a meal. Do not drink any other liquids with the meals.
- Estrogens can weaken the oesophageal hiatus muscle, which keeps stomach acids in the stomach. Women who are pregnant and women who take birth control pills that contain estrogen and progesterone are therefore more likely to suffer from heartburn.
- People with certain illnesses, such as cancer, often have excessive amounts of acid in their systems.
- The consumption of too much processed and cooked food can also create an acidic environment in the body.
- Aspirin and ibuprofen can cause heartburn.
- Lying on your left side can help relieve heartburn, as it keeps the stomach below the oesophagus, helping to keep it acid-free.
- Antacids often provide relief of symptoms. However in doing so, they may mask an underlying problem. In addition many over-the-counter antacids contains excessive amounts of sodium, aluminum, calcium and magnesium. With prolonged use of these products, dangerous mineral imbalances can occur. Excess sodium can aggravate hypertension, and excess aluminum has been implicated in Alzheimer’s disease.
- Although many people treat their own heartburn, they'd be better off seeking medical attention for symptoms that last longer than 2 weeks.

Armed with research such as the above you should be able to choose a few options that best fit your individual body and circumstances for this particular condition.

Appendix 1: Herbs for common ailments

The following remedies are suggestions to get you started using herbs. Try them and also feel free to experiment and adapt them according to your experience. Creating your own blends and discovering what works for you or your family is also enjoyable and satisfying.

11 simple, universal guidelines for good health

1. **“Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”** This advice is good for women, too!
2. **“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”** Take care of yourself and your family!
3. **Get enough rest.** Rest is the basis of activity. You can never perform at your best when you are tired. Pushing yourself eventually wears down the body and creates fertile ground for disease.
4. **Get enough exercise.** Everyone needs some exercise every day. For most people, half an hour of walking – not strolling! – everyday will take care of it. It will make you more clear-minded and energetic, and is a definite mood-booster.
5. **Eat your largest meal at mid-day**, and take some time to eat it in a relaxed manner. If you eat a large meal late at night it will take a long time to digest, will probably disturb your sleep, and may create heartburn; chances are you will wake up feeling stiff and sluggish.
6. **Restrict your fat intake.** A vegetarian or almost-vegetarian diet, with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and lots of grains such as rice, oats and whole wheat and only a little bit of chicken, fish or turkey, is an ideal low-fat, high-fiber diet.
7. Whenever possible, **eat fresh natural food.** Stay away from packaged, frozen, and canned food. They are full of chemical additives and have lost their Life Energy. Leftovers likewise have little life in them.
8. **Minimize or eliminate your use of stimulants and drugs.** Coffee, tea, alcohol, cigarettes, and other drugs are harmful to the body’s vital organs. Cigarettes ravage the heart and lungs; caffeine weakens the kidneys; alcohol gradually destroys the liver.
9. **Manage stress.** Practice some form of relaxation or meditation.
10. **Dissolve negative emotions.** Anger, worry, anxiety, disappointment, grief, depression, and other negative feelings and reactions are emotional forms of stress which take a toll on our nervous systems. The Oriental approach to these negative emotions is to observe them, without judgement, and simply allow them to be. When you do this, you will find these feelings simply quiet down and dissolve away.
11. **Be Happy.** Make a conscious choice to be as happy as you can. Get plenty of exercise, listen to music, dance, sing, visit friends, meditate – take some time every

day to do whatever it takes to make yourself happier. As a bonus you will be healthier and you will have more to give to the people around you.

Herbs for Digestive Ailments

There are a multitude of herbs that have a use in the treatment of digestive disorder. Herbalist's group them into *digestive stimulants* - those that stimulate various parts of the system to increase or better activity, and *digestive relaxants* – those that relax the tissue or reduce over-activity in the system.

Digestive stimulants

Bitters – While having a large range of other properties and chemical constituents all the bitters have an intensely bitter taste in common. This bitterness promotes appetite and in a complex way aids digestion. If these herbs are taken in capsule form and cannot be tasted, their digestive properties do not come into play. They are proof that bad tasting 'medicine' is good for you. Good examples are mugwort, rue, southernwood, wormwood and yarrow.

Sialogogues – The importance of saliva in the digestive process cannot be overstated. Digestion starts in the mouth when the saliva breaks down large carbohydrates into smaller units. If time is not taken to chew food properly the saliva is not able to mix with it properly and the whole digestive process is affected. Besides the bitters, which all stimulate saliva, other sialogogues are cayenne, ginger and licorice.

The **Hepatics** and **Laxatives** which we discussed in lesson 4 are also digestive stimulants.

Digestive Relaxants

Demulcents – When the membranes of the digestive tract are irritated or inflamed, demulcent herbs can soothe and protect them. Out of the many demulcents that are active in different parts of the body, comfrey root is the most effective for the digestive system.

Astringents – The action of the astringents lies mainly in their ability to contract cell walls, thus condensing the tissue and making it firmer and arresting any unwanted discharge. Good examples for the digestive system are meadowsweet, nettles and sage.

Anti-spasmodics – These are herbs that rapidly relax nervous tension that may be causing digestive spasms or colic. Good examples for the digestive system are chamomile, dill, fennel and peppermint.

The last group of digestive relaxants is the **carminatives** which we discussed in lesson 4.

Acid stomach, indigestion, heartburn

Take one warm cup of any of the following half and hour before eating:

- Tea decoction of a sweet, warming blend: equal parts fennel, licorice, fenugreek, anise, ¼ part slippery elm or dandelion root.
- Light, minty tea: equal parts meadowsweet, peppermint or spearmint or catnip, ½ part rosemary.

- Slice of lemon squeezed in 227ml hot water.

Colic or cramping pains in the intestinal tract

Take the following half an hour before eating or when needed:

- Tea decoction of equal parts ginger, chamomile, catnip.
- For children and babies: equal parts catnip, spearmint or peppermint and fennel. Alternately combine dill with chamomile or lemon balm.

Flatulence

Take one of the following half an hour before eating:

- Tea decoction of equal parts licorice, fennel, fenugreek, ginger.
- Tea decoction of equal parts cardamon, cinnamon or nutmeg, dill and caraway.

Constipation

- Taking 3 tbsp of olive oil and 6 tbsp of lemon juice in grapefruit or orange juice first thing in the morning is helpful.

Nausea or vomiting

- Ginger tea from dry or sliced fresh ginger.
- Peppermint tea.
- Juice of a lemon slice in warm water.
- Tea of equal parts cinnamon, cardamon, peppermint or clove or nutmeg.
- Michael Tierra recommends the following combination: 3 parts cinnamon, 1 part each of clove, cardamon and nutmeg. Mix and use ¼ to ½ tsp per cup of water for the brew, or mix powders with honey and eat 1 tsp as needed.

Herbs for Respiratory Ailments

All aspects of the respiratory system can benefit from appropriate herbal remedies. In lesson 4 we discussed **expectorants**. **Demulcents** are also of huge value in respiratory disorders. Good examples of demulcent herbs for the respiratory system are comfrey, coltsfoot, licorice and marshmallow leaf.

Asthma

- Chronic cases should be referred to a professional herbalist. In mild cases or only occasional and mild crisis, refer to the remedies for colds and flu, and coughs.
- During an attack take a hot tea of ½ tsp each of ginger and licorice powder. Rub warm sesame oil into the chest.

- Between attacks cleanse the system with a tea of equal parts of thyme, nettle and skullcap. Drink 1 cup of tea ½ hour after meals.
- Make a herb pillow with nervine and aromatic herbs, for example lavender and basil.

Colds and flu

- Adopt a cleansing diet for 1-3 days. Take sweating therapy. Rest.
- Take a tablespoon of garlic oil, or garlic capsules every hour or take two echinacea, thyme or golden seal (singly or combined) capsules every two hours during the day.
- Trikatu blend, a combination derived from Ayurvedic tradition, is excellent and also useful for hayfever, sinus congestion and other respiratory allergies. To make trikatu (adapted by Michael Tierra) mix 2 parts anise, 1 part ginger and 1 part black pepper powder, blended with honey to form a paste. Take 1 tsp before meals.
- Tea of equal parts of the following: peppermint, thyme, ginger and yarrow. Add honey to taste.

Coughs

- A cough syrup made of a concentrated tea of thyme mixed with raw sugar and honey has been found effective in stubborn cases and in whooping cough: infuse 570ml of strong thyme tea and strain. Add 1 ¾ lb (0.79kg) of raw sugar, heat gently in a covered pot, stirring at intervals, until the sugar is dissolved. Skim off the surface accumulation. Cool and store. Take 1 tbsp as needed.
- Drink hyssop and/or sage infusion.

Bronchitis

- Follow the treatment for coughs. Blend trikatu (see colds and flu) with hyssop and thyme.

Respiratory allergies, hayfever

- Treat as for colds. Use trikatu blend. Drink hot lemon and honey.
- Another helpful combination, from David Frawley and Dr Lad, is turmeric powder warmed in butter with raw sugar; cool, and take one teaspoon of the paste every ½ - 1 hour during attacks.
- For red, itchy eyes, bathe eyes in a wash of chamomile. Soak a cotton wool pad in the tea and place over the eyes; even a cool black teabag can be used to great effect.

Sinus congestion

- Garlic in capsule form or raw taken regularly clears this condition for many people. Eat a paste with pressed raw garlic mixed with honey. Eat fresh parsley afterwards and a slice of lemon.

- A very strong combination is a blend of equal parts grated horseradish, chopped onion and garlic and a pinch of cayenne. Macerate in apple-cider vinegar for three days. Strain and take 1tbsp 1-3 times a day.
- Trikatu blend is effective. Take just before meals.

Sore throat

- Anti-infectious and lymph-clearing herbs are needed, along with soothing demulcents to allay pain. Follow a cleansing diet for one to three days. Rest.
- Gargle with a warm tea of sage leaves with honey. Drink the tea every ½ -1 hour. If possible, take echinacea capsules or tea every hour.
- A good sore throat blend from Farida Sharan is to combine in a blender: 4 tbsp honey, 6 tbsp lemon juice, 4 tbsp apple-cider vinegar, 1/3 clove garlic pressed or ¼ tsp powder, ¼ tsp ginger. Process to blend and take as a gargle or syrup. For a drink add hot water up to 227ml.

Herbs for Urinary Ailments

Considering the importance of the kidneys, it is not surprising that our ancestors found an abundance of herbs that can aid their functions. Looking at the role of the kidneys in our triad of body functions, it is obvious that the proper function of any part of the body is dependent on the effective elimination of waste products and toxins. Herbs that aid the kidneys are therefore not only useful for the urinary system, but they also aid the body's cleansing mechanism. This is important in treating the whole body, no matter what the problem.

Apart from the **diuretics** we discussed in lesson 4 herbalist's also make use of urinary **demulcents** such as marshmallow, and urinary **astringents** such as horestail.

Whenever you suspect a urinary problem adopt a cleansing diet for a few days, and drink lots of pure water.

Cystitis

- Drink a tea of diuretic and urinary cleansing herbs: equal parts dandelion root, nettles, parsley, chickweed, couchgrass, yarrow, cleavers.
- Along with the tea, take anti-microbials such as echinacea. Add to the tea demulcents like marshmallow root. Drink eight or more glasses of pure cranberry, coconut or pomegranate juice daily; and/or eat live, natural yoghurt. Rest.
- If the condition is recurrent and the person feels tired and has a low-grade fever, elimination and tonification treatment should be taken once the acute attack has cleared.

Water retention

The remedies suggested aim to improve kidney excretion to clear any fluid congestion, to promote assimilation of food and elimination of waste, and to clean the blood and lymph and promote circulation. Do not confuse it with the deeper oedema based on heart and kidney weakness for which professional treatment is needed.

- Take a digestion-promoting combination given under that section. Trikatu blend with meals is excellent.
- Drink teas of mild diuretics which will not over-stimulate the kidneys.
- Diuretic tea combinations: equal parts lemongrass, fennel or coriander or parsley; chickweed.

Herbs for Skin Ailments

Skin ailments usually indicate imbalances deeper in the system which the body is trying to resolve by elimination through the skin. Topical remedies must be combined with systemic treatment according to constitutional type.

Here we will only consider the **vulneraries**, or wound healing herbs. Some of the vulneraries are astringents, and part of their efficiency is based upon their ability to arrest bleeding and condense the tissue. Others have antiseptic properties as well. The most common vulneraries are aloe, chickweed, comfrey, and yarrow.

Acne

Contributing factors are poor diet (fried foods, coffee, tea, refined flour and sugar products), stress, liver congestion, and hormonal imbalance.

- Have daily steam facials with cleansing herbs such as sage, eucalyptus, rosemary and thyme.
- Apply soothing ointments of calendula or comfrey; antiseptic and cleansing aloe vera gel.
- Internally, take a tea of 1-3 of the following blood-purifying and kidney and liver cleansing herbs: alfalfa, echinacea, dandelion, licorice, nettle, yarrow. Drink 1 cup, 3 times a day.

Dandruff

- Correct the diet, cutting out junk and processed foods. Try a vitamin and mineral supplement or take kelp tablets. Check that your shampoo is mild and natural.
- After shampooing, rinse with a tea made with rosemary, nettles, nasturtium combined with half the amount of apple-cider vinegar. When possible massage scalp with warm olive oil combined with 2 drops of rosemary essential oil.
- Daily, drink nettle and sage or rosemary tea to cleanse the blood and improve circulation.

Insect repellants

- Massage into the skin a herbal oil of lavender, thyme, marjoram, basil, citrus lemon peel, rose geranium, bay leaves or even garlic. Use essential oil of citronella or the above herbs diluted into a carrier oil.

Wounds, infections, boils, abrasions

- Apply aloe vera gel or a poultice or ointment of comfrey, marigold, yarrow, lemon balm, chamomile, thyme.
- Pure raw (unprocessed) honey is another antiseptic first aid remedy.

Burns

- Aloe vera gel is excellent.
- Apply comfrey or marigold ointment.

Herbs for Circulatory and Lymphatic Ailments

As with all systems of the body, a grouping of herbs that affects these systems is a necessary simplification. The body is an integrated whole and our herbal approach to healing recognizes this. Any problems arising in a system may be caused by the state of health and vitality in any other part of the body, therefore any herb can have a role to play in the treatment of that system.

Nevertheless, herbalists categorize herbs into those that affect the heart directly and those that will affect the circulation. Hawthorn berry is a good example of a herb that affect the heart directly. For circulation both **diuretics** and **nervines** are employed.

Chilblains

- Take tepid footbaths with 2 tbsp ginger, mustard or cayenne powder. Apply crushed onion.
- Rub the area with comfrey, or calendula ointment. Avoid the temptation to immediately apply heat as this will only worsen the situation with sudden dilation. Gentle re-warming is called for.
- To strengthen the circulation and capillaries, drink a daily tea of ginger, marjoram, cloves, cumin, thyme, hawthorn berries, nettle or buckwheat. Take garlic capsules daily.

Swollen ankles or knees

- Lightly apply essential oil blends of cypress, cedarwood or fennel, diluted in vegetable oil.
- Apply a salt pack: warm the salt in the oven, enough to cover the area to 6mm; wrap it in a tea-towel and apply over the area. Leave for an hour or overnight.
- Take a diuretic tea blend to reduce excess damp such as ginger with dandelion.

Herbs for Nervous Ailments

See the discussion of **nervines** in lesson 4.

Anxiety

- Take a tea of borage, chamomile, and/or lemon balm.
- Basil tea and sandalwood essential oil used as a massage rub or room scent promote a calm but alert mind.

Depression

- Borage tea conveys courage. Lemon balm is traditionally good for melancholia, that feeling of dejection and withdrawal from the world. Lemon balm tea from fresh leaves is best; if this is not possible use 4 drops essential oil of melissa in a bath or footbath daily. Balm is both relaxing to the nerves and uplifting to the spirits as are most of the aromatic herbs – basil, rosemary, lavender and many others.

Headaches

- Internally, take a tea of 1-3 of the following: peppermint, chamomile, rosemary, ginger, valerian, basil, lemon balm or sage.
- A tea of cumin and coriander is also helpful for headaches based on liver congestion.

Fatigue and stress

- Take a nervine tea of 1-3 of the following: chamomile, catnip, lemon balm, rosemary.
- Herbs to build the quality of the blood may also be beneficial: take a daily tea, equal parts of 1-3 of the following: yarrow, alfalfa or comfrey leaves.

Insomnia

- During the afternoon and early evening drink a tea of 1-3 of the following: valerian, catnip, lemon balm, chamomile. Continue this for several days even after sound sleep returns.
- Apply a few drops of lavender or other relaxant essential oil (melissa, ylang ylang, frankincense, sandalwood, marjoram) on a handkerchief attached to the pillow.

Withdrawal symptoms

For those withdrawing from drugs – whether cigarettes, alcohol, narcotics, or tranquillizers – nervine herbs offer support and relieve symptoms. The following is a blend which is used by drug detoxification centres such as the Lincoln Clinic in New York City and the Gateway Centre in London.

- Equal parts chamomile, yarrow, hops, skullcap, catnip and peppermint. Take one cup of tea every hour when symptoms are acute along with frequent hot baths.

Appendix 2: A basic Materia Medica

There is a saying among herbalists: ‘It is better to know a few herbs well than a smattering of many’. Since one herb can serve successfully in several conditions because of its multiple therapeutic effects, it is possible to have on hand relatively few herbs and yet be able to treat a wide variety of complaints.

Materia medica means the materials of medicine – a listing of herbs with a description of their characteristics, parts used and properties.

Basil / Basiliekruid

Ocimum basilicum

Parts used: leaves, flowering stem.

Properties: energy stimulant, respiratory decongestant, carminative, diaphoretic, nervine. Uplifts and clears the mind and head.

Energy: warming, clearing, dispersing.

Caution: avoid prolonged concentrated use during first trimester of pregnancy. Safe for occasional tea, culinary and short-term uses.

The Indian species of basil holds a high place in Ayurvedic medicine. It is planted around the doors of houses for its purifying effect both on the physical and the emotional and mental levels. All basilis reduce excess mucous, and improve digestion. They have a refreshing, uplifting and purifying quality. They are easy to grow annuals that should be used regularly in cooking as well as for medicine.

Catnip / Kattekruid

Nepeta cataria

Parts used: leaves, flowering stem.

Properties: nervine, reduces fever, gently carminative, diaphoretic, stomachic.

Energy: cooling and balancing.

Catnip is especially good for children and the elderly for its action is gently stimulating and clearing while still being effective. It is best combined with fennel for digestive and calming effects.

Cayenne / Brandrissie

Capsicum annuum var. annuum

Parts used: fruit

Properties: heating, stimulating, blood regulator/haemostatic, diaphoretic, anti-infectious, astringent, carminative, antispasmodic.

Energy: hot, stimulating.

Caution: avoid concentrated prolonged use in pregnancy, hypertension and peptic ulcers.

Cayenne is certainly a herb to have on hand for emergencies. It counters shock and can arrest bleeding by its astringency and ability to quickly penetrate tissue and to normalize blood flow – that is to channel its concentration away from the site, whether internal or external. Its warmth improves circulation to stiff joints, easing them. It benefits digestion and is powerful for clearing excess mucous from the stomach.

Dr Christopher used it for stomach ulcers. It normalizes both high and low blood pressure. Cayenne is often an ingredient in formulas for its ability to carry the other herbs quickly where they are needed. It can be taken on a daily basis of ¼-1 tsp taken at breakfast mixed with juice, water or yoghurt.

Chamomile / Kamille

Chamaemelum nobile and Matricaria recutita

Parts used: flowering heads.

Properties: carminative, aromatic, diaphoretic, nervine. Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) is more anti-inflammatory, German chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) is more antispasmodic.

Energy: cooling, calming.

For those who enjoy its soft apple-like flavour, chamomile is a good all-purpose remedy. It helps induce calmness and sound sleep. It clears digestive upsets. It helps clear mucous build-up, so can be used for colds, fever and flu. It is perhaps ideal for Fire types who, through stress, anger and overwork get digestive upsets, sleep poorly or come down with a bad cold. The flavour is often attractive to children making it an excellent choice when treating them for complaints such as poor sleep, upset stomach or colds.

Comfrey / Smeerwortel

Symphytum officinalis

Parts used: leaves and flowers. Root under direction of herbalist.

Properties: tonic, demulcent, blood regulator – arrests bleeding and builds blood; vulnerary (tissue healing). Especially good for respiratory system, weakness and anaemia, muscular system.

Energy: cooling, nutritive tonic.

There has been a lot of controversy over comfrey, as claims have been made, based on flawed research, that it is carcinogenic. Yet comfrey is one of those invaluable herbs. It can be used as an organic feed for garden plants when used as a green manure or after being composted. Its leaves can be eaten as a spring pot-herb vegetable.

As medicine it especially benefits the lungs, is soothing to coughs and bronchial inflammation. In wasting diseases the starchy root is used as a nutritive tonic and renewer of tissue. It can stop bleeding and heal external and internal tissues. So it is

beneficial where bleeding occurs from ulcers, lungs, kidneys or bowels. Comfrey is a tremendous healer of minor or severe burns and wounds, soothing the trauma and promoting growth of new, healthy tissue.

Fennel / Vinkel

Foeniculum vulgare

Parts used: seeds.

Properties: diuretic, demulcent, carminative.

Energy: warming, softening, moistening, balancing.

Caution: avoid prolonged or concentrated use during first trimester of pregnancy. Safe for occasional tea, culinary and short-term uses.

Fennel is an easily available culinary herb with good medicinal value. It improves digestion and thus helps clear toxic accumulations from the system. It is diuretic and helps remove excess damp and fat from the system. For gas, cramp or colitis upsets combine it with catnip, licorice, or anise. Fennel tea can be used externally to calm any skin inflammation. The seeds should be decocted, or powdered before infusing.

Hyssop / Hisop

Hyssopus officinalis

Parts used: flowering stem.

Properties: aromatic, diaphoretic, anti-infectious, circulatory stimulant, expectorant, nervine.

Energy: warming, drying.

Hyssop is a cleansing herb, especially of the respiratory tract. Traditionally associated with spiritual purity and cleanliness in the Old Testament, like all aromatic plants it is a powerful germicide and was once used to deter insects and vermin from homes and skin. Its mucous-clearing and nervine properties give it a place in treating bronchial congestion and even asthma. By releasing stagnation, it promotes the smooth flow of Vital Energy.

Lemon Balm / Sitroenkruid

Melissa officinalis

Parts used: leaves, flowering stem.

Properties: diaphoretic, stimulant, carminative, antiseptic, circulates energy. Blood purifier, uterine tonic and blood regulator.

Energy: cooling and balancing.

This herb's name says it all: the uplifting, purifying zest of lemon and a balm for troubles, whether those of a depressed mind, an upset stomach or an insect-bitten skin. Its Latin name, Melissa – from the Greek for honey – tells us it is loved by bees, who always seem to know the best healing plants in any vicinity. A women's friend, it can be used to ease cramps and pre-menstrual congestion and depression.

Marigold / Gousblom

Calendula officinalis

Parts used: flowers.

Properties: anti-inflammatory, blood purifying, diaphoretic, astringent, healing.

Energy: cooling, soothing.

Calendula's are among the most charming of flowers and should be in every garden; they quickly seed themselves and will grace your home year after year. Visually their very shape and colour capture and reflect the optimism and brightness of the sun and summer.

Calendula is used to quell excess fire in the form of inflammation. It soothes skin abrasions, burns, stings and bites. Have a pot of calendula ointment on hand in the first aid kit to soothe and promote the mending of tissue. Calendula tea is used for circulating energy and blood to dispel bruising, to regulate menses, as a diaphoretic to clear the heat of fevers and eruptive skin complaints. It combines well with comfrey or chickweed in oils or ointments.

Mints / Mente

Mentha species

Parts used: leaves, flowering stem.

Properties: carminative, stimulating, circulates energy, diaphoretic, liver cleansing, mucous reducing.

Energy: warming and cooling, drying with prolonged use. Balancing.

Caution: avoid prolonged concentrated use during first trimester of pregnancy. Safe for occasional tea, culinary and short-term uses.

The mints form a large group within the Labatae family and the majority of them are excellent medicinals. Their stimulating quality is unusual in being both energizing and calming at the same time. Their action is gentle yet still very effective for the stomach, liver, nerves, blood and lymph circulation.

They grow easily in gardens or on windowsills and should find a place in every home.

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) is the most strongly stimulating of the mints. It is excellent combined with yarrow at the first sign of cold or flu, or fever. As a digestive aid it helps soothe the stomach-based form of headache. Many find it an acceptable substitute for coffee, giving that extra pick-up without the harmful side effects. Its initial pungency stimulates metabolism and is followed by a mild coolness which refreshes, making its overall action balancing to all three humours. Excessive use however, may eventually dry and aggravate Air. Spearmint is very similar to peppermint, though milder.

Parsley / Pietersielie

Petroselinum crispum

Parts used: leaves, root.

Properties: diuretic, tonic, carminative, nutritive, emmenagogue.

Energy: warming, stimulating.

Caution: *Avoid prolonged concentrated use during first trimester of pregnancy. Safe for occasional tea, culinary and short-term uses.*

Most people don't realize how healing parsley is. The root is stronger than the leaves and better for more severe conditions. Parsley improves digestion and assimilation of food. It is an excellent diuretic and will help the body expel stones. It eases menstrual cramp, headache and tension. It supplies valuable minerals and vitamins and can be used regularly as a health tonic. However, in cases of inflammation of the kidneys it should not be used unless combined with marshmallow root.

Rosemary / Rosmaryn

Rosmarinus officinalis

Parts used: leaves.

Properties: aromatic-antiseptic, carminative, nervine-analgesic, circulatory stimulant, diaphoretic, blood regulator (emmenagogue).

Energy: warming, dispersing.

Caution: *avoid prolonged concentrated use during first trimester of pregnancy. Safe for occasional tea, culinary and short-term uses.*

Reach for rosemary as a convenient treatment for many common complaints. Use it for stomach aches, headaches, symptoms of flu, cold or fever and congestion such as constipation or pre-menstrual build-up. Use it generously in cooking to keep the system clean and free.

Sage / Salie

Salvia officinalis

Parts used: leaves.

Properties: astringent, aromatic-antiseptic, stimulant, diuretic, carminative, expectorant.

Energy: warming, dispersing, drying.

Caution: *avoid prolonged concentrated use during first trimester of pregnancy. Safe for occasional tea, culinary and short-term uses. Contraindications: nursing mothers.*

Sage has very strong astringent and drying properties which indicate its use to clear excess mucous from the nose and lungs, drain sores and ulcers and control bleeding. It is most specifically effective for swollen, sore throats used as a tea and gargle. Another indication is to allay hot flushes during the menopause; for this it can be mixed with rosemary, skullcap and raspberry leaves or motherwort.

The same actions mean sage should be avoided by nursing mothers, unless of course it is necessary to stop nursing. For this purpose, drink the tea and apply as a fomentation.

Thyme / Tiemie

Thymus vulgaris

Parts used: leaves, flowers.

Properties: diaphoretic, nervine, stimulant, carminative, respiratory and lymph cleanser, antiseptic.

Energy: warming, calming.

Caution: avoid prolonged concentrated use during first trimester of pregnancy. Safe for occasional tea, culinary and short-term uses.

There are many varieties of thyme but common thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) is best medicinally. Thyme is excellent when put to work at the first signs of colds or flu, and for any respiratory complaints, coughs and sore throats. It stimulates metabolism and strengthens nerves.

Yarrow / Duisendblad

Achillea millefolium

Parts used: leaves and flowers.

Properties: aromatic, bactericidal, diaphoretic, anti-inflammatory, astringent; blood regulating (haemostatic, tonic and emmenagogue).

Energy: warming, drying.

Yarrow has been used continuously since well before the Christian era. Its Latin name is from Achilles, the hero who could only be wounded in his heel, and the ancient Greeks used yarrow as a wound healing herb. Like plantain, it was taken to the Americas on the feet of settlers and the Indians soon appreciated its uses and found new ones as a blood tonic and regulator given to women after childbirth.

Yarrow clears excess damp mucous from the digestive tract and its diaphoretic and anti-inflammatory action makes it ideal for expelling colds and flu before they take hold. Like all herbs rich in aromatic essential oils, it kills infections and may be used as a tea or poultice on wounds and bleeding. Women may take it as a blood regulating tonic to ease cramps and excessive bleeding. It may be combined with peppermint for colds, with chamomile for digestive and nerve-calming purposes.

About the South African Herb Academy

Herbology, and its application to our modern lifestyles, is a rapidly growing and very exciting field.

The activities of the South African Herb Academy (SAHA) are aimed at those who dare to be different and who want to make a meaningful contribution to herbology.

The SAHA currently offer two membership communities:

Firstly there is the **Family Herb Advisors**. These are SAHA members who don't necessarily want to help others and they participate in SAHA activities simply to better their own lives and the lives of their family members.

Next there is the **Community Herb Advisors** community. These are members who want to share the knowledge, experience and wisdom they gain by participating in SAHA activities with others in their local community. Most of the members in this category have herb related businesses, or are planning to start a herb related business at some point in the future.

Benefits of membership include:

- Subscription to the **SAHA Electronic Newsletter** jam packed with health, fitness and herbology knowledge that YOU can use and apply to radically improve your health, vitality and longevity... Next to God, **what's more important than your health, and the health of your friends and family?!**
- **Substantially reduced fees** when you enrol in any of the official SAHA courses. Plus. You also get a substantial discount on all SAHA publications.
- The opportunity to get **reprint and resell rights** to selected SAHA courses and publications.
- Opportunity to **network with fellow SAHA members** at SAHA events. Plus a reduced rate at SAHA events. Members even get permission, and learn how, to **host their own SAHA events**.

SAHA membership is by invitation only. If you are interested in becoming a member kindly contact the SAHA member on the title page of this publication.

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