

HERBAL MEDICINES

Notes for Common Remedies

Please Note-Herbal remedies like all medicine can have individual effects. Before using any of the below, research the individual herbs and talk to knowledgeable people and herbalists.

Herbs or Conventional Drugs?-Herbal medicines are not drugs as they are not one specific chemical (as most conventional drugs are). They contain a multitude of constituents, meaning that the potency of different batches can vary. In general they are not as strong as conventional drugs.

A few reasons why herbal medicines may be suitable for you;

- 1) Herbal remedies are generally well-tolerated with few side-effects
- 2) They can help with short and long-term health issues. Many of these are taken for a while (as a tonic) and can help reduce symptoms so that eventually you may need less drugs or herbs.
- 3) No prescription needed
- 4) Many are readily available
- 5) They are generally less sedating (do not make you as tired)
- 6) They are not as addictive as some drugs (such as Vicodin)
- 7) They are often more affordable than drugs. (A difficulty is that they are not covered by insurance.)
- 8) Herbal medicines are generally easier to alter your dosage. You may need to use more than is commonly recommended to get the relief you seek.

Herbal Categories- There are a number of categories to consider when choosing herbs. Herbs generally fit into a number of categories depending on what you are using them for.

Some common categories include;

- 1) **Acute**-For treating a current condition
- 2) **Tonic**-Taken for long-term health problems
- 3) **Anodyne**-General pain relief
- 4) **Antiinflammatory**-Reduces inflammation which may reduce pain
- 5) **Nervine**-Long-term tonic for the nervous system
- 6) **Sedative**-Reduces excitement, calming, relaxing
- 7) **Skeletal muscle relaxants**-Help with voluntary muscle pain (such as back and joint pain)
- 8) **Sleep aid**-Help with falling or staying asleep
- 9) **Smooth muscle relaxants**-Relieve smooth muscle pain (for example; menstrual or digestive cramps)

Dosage-Initially, try one to a few drops of any remedy to test for individual response. Dosage includes how much you take per time as well as how many times taken daily. Use a specific remedy for a while to how well it works for you, and increase or decrease dosage as you see fit.

Preparations -Below are a number of ways to purchase and take these herbs.

Tinctures-Plants extracted in alcohol.

- **Advantages**-This method can concentrate the medicine, making it more potent, and they last a long-time. You can prepare your own (and save money). Research or ask an herbalist how to do this.
- **Disadvantages**-Do not use if alcohol intolerant, they can be expensive, especially if needed over a long period of time, strong flavor

Teas-Plants extracted in water. These can either be in hot or cold water. Two main methods; **Infusion**-pour hot water on the herb (most common method);

Decoction-cook the plant in hot water (like soup).

- **Advantages**-Easy to prepare, inexpensive, easily tolerated.
- **Disadvantages**-May be hard to find quality herbs, do not last long once made, taste-you may not like the flavor, time-consuming to prepare.

Powders-Plants are prepared into a powder form.

- **Advantages**-Very easy to take (just stir into water), inexpensive.
- **Disadvantages**-Many plants don't last long in powder form, strong flavor, hard to find many plants in powder form.

Oils and Salves-External applications. Herbs extracted in oil, and with salves, then put into beeswax.

- **Advantages**-Can be applied locally, no worries about flavor.
- **Disadvantages**-Messy, can stain clothes, shorter shelf life.