

Why Use Herbal Medicine?

There are many reasons for choosing herbal medicine, but it often comes down to a personal choice. Here is a list of why someone may choose herbal medicine:

1. It may be the form of medicine they are familiar and comfortable with.
2. It may have helped someone they know.
3. A health care practitioner may have recommended it.
4. No other treatments or pharmaceuticals have helped an individual health concern
5. They are readily available and can be purchased without a prescription
6. Plants can be gathered and grown and medicines can be made from these.
7. Herbal medicines can be specifically prepared for an individual
8. They may be looking for an alternative to conventional medications
9. Herbal medicine may be less expensive than other medicines.
10. They may have personal or political reasons for choosing herbal medicine.

What are Some Disadvantages of Herbal Medicine?

While there are many reasons to use herbal medicine, there are other considerations as well. The following are specific to herbal medicine:

1. Herbal medicine can be difficult to take due to its flavor.
2. There may be a lack of scientific evidence or clinical data supporting herbal medicines.
3. Herbal medicines can be of inconsistent quality in the marketplace.
4. They can be costly and are not covered by insurance.

5. It is difficult to find solid reliable information on herbal medicine.
6. By taking herbs, you may be putting off taking necessary drugs.
7. Risks and side effects of most herbal medicines are unknown.
8. Herbal medicines may interact with medications in negative ways.
9. There is risk of gathering the wrong and potentially dangerous plants.
10. The forms and ways of taking herbal medicines can be confusing.

What are the Risks Associated with Herbal Medicine

A person may have a negative reaction to a specific herbal medicine, as is common with other medications. If there is a negative response, it may be helpful to discontinue the herbal medicine and seek information. One of the potential risks of herbal medicine is not its side effect, but that an illness may get worse from not taking a stronger or a more suitable medicine. It is helpful to have an herbalist and/or knowledgeable health care practitioner to discuss this with.

Herbal Medicine and Pharmaceuticals

Many people take drugs that are important for their health. This is a significant consideration when using herbal medicine. The combination of herbs and drugs can have undesirable effects known as herb/drug interactions. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to know if this will be a problem, as there is very little research on the interactions of herbs and pharmaceuticals. The best approach is to work with a knowledgeable herbalist who can help assess any necessary considerations with your specific health needs and medications.

When to Use Herbal Medicine

Herbs are used for a wide range of health issues. Many herbal medicines fall somewhere between being a food and a drug. They are commonly used to support one's general health. They are also used for specific health conditions and chronic disorders as a primary medicine or in conjunction with other therapies and medications

For more serious conditions, an informed choice should be based on information from knowledgeable persons and resources. When looking to treat a serious health concern, consult an experienced herbalist and other health care providers.

What to Expect during an Herbal Consultation

Each herbalist's consultation may vary depending on their training. This includes how health conditions are assessed as well as treatment strategies.

Initial consultations are often an hour long and generally include a detailed intake. This involves asking questions concerning many aspects of a person's life such as diet, medications, exercise, stress levels, previous diagnoses, relevant lab tests, and health history. Other concerns such as sleep or digestive problems and mental and emotional health issues may be discussed to get an understanding of a patient's overall health.

At the end of the intake, the herbalist will generally prepare individual herbal remedies and discuss how to take them. They may also suggest lifestyle modifications such as dietary changes, movement and exercise programs, ways to reduce unhealthy patterns, and other health care protocols.

Taking Herbal Medicines

(Please see *A Basic Guide to*

Common Herbal Preparations) There are many different types of herbal medicine, and for those new to it and not being familiar with the various preparations can be daunting.

Herbal medicine comes in many forms, as there are many methods for extracting the medicinal constituents of each plant. These various preparations also allow different ways for these remedies to be used internally and externally.

An initial difficulty with many medicinal preparations can be their strong flavor. One way to make this easier is to dilute them. If they are too unpleasant, there may be other forms that are easier to take.

There are a number of variables with taking herbal medicine, including the *frequency* (how often) and *quantity* (how much) of each preparation. These differ depending on the strength of the medicine and the health condition being treated. There may be more than one herbal medicine given per consultation. It is important to understand the directions for taking each medicine. If the instructions are confusing, talk to your herbalist about ways to make it work better for you. It can be helpful to set up a schedule, such as taking them around mealtimes. For some medicines (especially for pain and anxiety) the medicines are taken on a regular basis *and* as needed for symptoms.

If a medicine causes undesirable effects, contact your herbalist. If the problem is not too severe, consider stopping the herbal medicine and then retrying it later to see if the medicine is causing the problem.

Common Herbal Medicines

Tincture-Plants extracted in alcohol

Glycerite-Plants extracted in vegetable glycerin

Tea-Plants extracted in water; hot water is either poured on the tea (infusion) or the tea is cooked in water (decoction)

Powder-Plants reduced to a powder and taken internally

Capsule-Powdered plants put into a capsule

Compress-A strong tea with a cloth soaked in it and applied externally

Infused Oil-Plants extracted in a fixed oil and applied externally

Salve-Plant infused oil with bees wax added as an external preparation

Preparing Your Own Herbal Medicines

Many people find it satisfying to make their own medicines, such as tinctures, salves, and teas. These preparations are fairly easy to make. Look for reliable information or ask an herbalist for tips. There may be local classes, or look for courses on-line.

If you are gathering plants, it is very important to learn accurate plant identification, and especially learning to recognize poisonous plants. If you are purchasing plants, search for reliable resources. Your initial costs may be higher when purchasing these ingredients, but you will usually save money making your own homemade preparations.

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What is Herbal Medicine An Overview

What is Herbal Medicine?

Herbal medicine is the use of plants and other natural substances to treat a wide range of health conditions. Its practitioners are called herbalists. There is an extensive worldwide history of people using plants as medicine. This practice continues today and plays an important role in many people's lives. Herbal medicines may be used by themselves or along with other treatments or therapies. Please see the handout *A Patient's Guide to Common Herbal Medicines* to learn more about specific herbal medicines.

What is an Herbalist?

An herbalist is a health care practitioner who uses plants, herbal preparations, and other natural products as medicine. Herbalists are generally holistic in their approach to health care. This entails looking at many aspects of a person's health with the goal of finding underlying causes and addressing them as well as treating symptoms.

Herbal medicine is not a licensed practice in the United States, and there is a lot of variation in education and practice among herbalists. Without a legal definition, anyone may call themselves an herbalist. When choosing an herbalist, ask questions to find one that suits your personal needs.