

## THE TRUTH ABOUT HERBS

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While conversing with a colleague, the talk turned to herbs. He claimed that herbs helped only two percent of the people who use them. I took that as an ignorant statement, because my experience with herbs proved differently. As a result, I decided to write an essay to dispel some of the misinformation about the effects of herbs.

Herbal medicine is the use of leaves, flowers, fruits, stems, barks and roots of plants to prevent, relieve, and treat illnesses. Herbal medicine, also called herbalism, herbology, and botanical medicine, is the oldest form of health care known to humanity.

My younger brother is a herbalist, and over the years he has shared quite a bit of information with our family. One of his patients was my mother, who suffered from high blood pressure and occasional constipation. For her blood pressure, he used to make her a drink of lemon and garlic. The look on her face while drinking it, and the smell of her breath afterward, weren't pleasant. But the drink kept her blood pressure in check.

The near consensus on the value of garlic in the diet comes from both culinary artists and medical practitioners. Garlic has been found to be effective in treating a myriad of conditions in the circulatory, urinary, and respiratory systems, as well as the digestive track. Thus, garlic is effective against conditions in the circulatory system by lowering blood sugar, blood lipids, free cholesterol, and blood pressure.

For my mother's constipation, my brother recommended cascara sagrada, a natural purgative made from the bark of the cascara plant. It is also used

to treat dry stool, obesity, fever, and liver dysfunction. Because it contains bitter compounds, my mother would run it through a blender and put the powder in capsules, then we could take it without the bitter taste. My mother was a creative genius.

In her landmark book, The Herbal Medicine Chest, author Nancy Evelyn, who earned her degree at Dorothy Hall School of Herbal Medicine in Sydney, Australia, offers some dramatic, first-hand accounts of herbs in action. She points out that the common dandelion has a composition of minerals, vitamins, enzymes, and active ingredients almost identical to the human liver. "A number of doctors," she writes, "refer their hepatitis patients to me because they have seen the results of dandelion in action. After three weeks of dandelion tincture treatment (ten drops taken four times a day), [these] hepatitis patients are well enough to go out dancing" (p.7).

Dr. Evelyn further points out that it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that marigold (calendula) is antiseptic. "You simply put it on a festering wound and watch the wound heal within twelve hours." She maintains that herbal medicine is "the medicine of the people, and despite the sophistication of modern western medicine, it is still the preferred medicine of ninety percent of the world's population" (p.8). The ten percent who don't use herb live in the United States, where the pharmaceutical society has a strong political influence that extends into South America and beyond.

Eduardo Galenao relates an interesting example of pharmaceutical overreach in his book, Up Side Down. He calls the International Plant Medicine Corporation bio:pirates for seizing the seeds of the sacred plant ayahuasca and patenting them. This act of "bio:piracy" triggered four

