

# HERBALISM

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## INTRODUCTION TO HERBALISM

Like most traditional remedies, herbalism, which treats illness with preparations made with wild herbs, dates back thousands of years. In the days before conveniently- packaged bottles of conventional medicines, people took their aches and pains to the village wiseman or wisewoman, who knew the local plant life and its therapeutic effects.

Many modern medicines have their origins in the plant world. Aspirin for example is synthetically produced but based on the chemical structure of salicylic acid found in white willow, and some heart drugs are naturally found in the foxglove.

There are written records of Chinese herbal therapies dating back 5000 years. The first major Egyptian work on herbism was compiled in 1500 BC. We also know that herbs were used medicinally in the ancient civilisations of India, the Middle East and America.

In the West, we knew little about the benefits of the plants growing wild in our hedgerows until the Crusaders brought news of them in the Middle Ages. It wasn't until the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the invention of the printing press that this knowledge was passed on - largely through 'The English Physician and Complete Herbal' written by the famous herbalist Nicholas Culpeper.

Herbalism remained popular until the development of modern medicine with its huge advances in surgical techniques and orthodox medication. Like many complementary therapies it regained popularity again in the 1960's.

## USING HERBAL REMEDIES

### **How may herbalism help?**

There is no doubt that herbs produce substances that can be beneficial in treating illnesses. There is a wide range of herbal remedies available for you to use at home.

**Which conditions may be helped?**

Herbal remedies can be used for many conditions including stress, insomnia, digestive disorders, water retention, constipation, catarrh, coughs and colds, skin problems like spots and eczema, rheumatism, cystitis and menopausal symptoms.

**Should I tell my doctor I'm taking a herbal remedy?**

Yes. If you are taking medicine prescribed by your doctor, tell him or her before trying herbal treatment. In other cases, it is a good idea to show your doctor the bottle or packet when you next see them. Do not stop taking a prescribed medicine without telling your doctor.

**Do herbal remedies have any side effects?**

All herbal medicines and remedies have the potential to cause side effects and should be used with due care. If you experience any strange feelings you should stop taking the medicine and consult your doctor or a pharmacist.

**Are herbal remedies the same as homœopathic remedies?**

No. Homœopathic remedies use weak dilutions of plants and minerals that trigger the body's ability to heal itself. Herbal remedies are taken in greater concentrations - in doses similar to conventional medicine.

**Can pregnant women or breastfeeding mothers take herbal remedies?**

It is best to avoid any medication including herbal remedies during pregnancy or whilst breastfeeding but consult your doctor or pharmacist if you need advice.

**Can I give herbal remedies to my children?**

The pack instructions will tell you if the herbal remedy is suitable for children and if you need to reduce the dose. Ask your doctor for advice before treating children under 5.

**For how long should I take a herbal remedy?**

Take the medicine for as long as you're seeing an improvement, or for the length of the course. If symptoms persist consult your doctor.

**Will increasing the dosage make me better quicker?**

No. Follow the dosage instructions exactly.

**How do I store herbal remedies?**

Herbal remedies have a shelf life marked clearly on the label. They should be kept in their tightly closed original container and will last until the expiry date on the packaging. Dispose of out-of-date or unwanted remedies carefully and keep all remedies and medicines out of the reach of children.