

Botanical Medicine

Botanical medicine is the use of plants or substances derived from the plants to treat or prevent disease. It is the oldest form of health care, dating back to the beginnings of civilization and is the foundation of modern pharmacology. It is also the most widely used system of medicine used in the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 4 billion people which is 80% of the world population use herbal medicine for some aspect of primary health care. WHO notes that of 119 plant-derived pharmaceutical medicines, about 74 percent are used in modern medicine in ways that correlated directly with their traditional uses by native cultures. Major pharmaceutical companies are currently conducting extensive research on plant materials gathered from the rain forests and other places for their potential medicinal value.

There are many ways in which herbs can be prepared to be used for medicinal purposes, some are the following:

Tincture: A tincture is an herbal preparation of dried or fresh herb mixed with alcohol or distilled water. Alcohol dissolves the active properties out of the plant and acts as a preservative, allowing the tincture to retain its effectiveness for up to two years.

Capsules: The useful part of the herb is ground into a powder and packed inside a standard size gelatin or vegetarian (V) capsule.

Essential Oil: An essential oil is a concentrated liquid that contains volatile aroma compounds from plants. There are various methods to extract essential oils from the plants; these are steam distillation, carbon dioxide extraction, cold press extraction, use of solvents etc. Essential oils are used in aromatherapy. They have many therapeutic uses such as for muscle pain and stiffness, nausea, flatulence, indigestion, anxiety, stress, insomnia, oral health, memory, and concentration. For more information on essential oils you may want to check some sites like:

http://www.youngliving.com/en_US/index.html

Infusion: An infusion is a beverage made like a tea by combining boiling water with the plants and steeping to extract their active ingredients. This method is best for extracting the medicinal constituents from the more delicate parts of the herbal plant with a high concentration of volatile oils, such as fruits, flowers and leaves.

Decoction: Boiling a substance in water to extract its essence. Decoctions are used to extract the medicinal constituents from the more tenacious plant material such as the bark, nuts, non-aromatic seeds, and roots. The exception to this general rule is for those roots that are high in volatile oils, such as Hydrastis & Valerian. These roots are better infused than decocted because their delicate oils are easily destroyed with high temperatures.

Compresses: A compress is made by dipping a cloth into an herbal decoction, squeezing out the excess and applying the hot cloth to the affected area. It is used for treatment of wounds, infections, sore throat and associated hoarseness, neck pain, tense muscles and any inflammation or infection of the throat, and muscular, joint, skin, or glandular conditions. Compresses can also be used as just hot and cold compresses without dipping it in an herbal decoction.

Plasters: Plasters are herbal powders mixed with cornstarch or flour and applied to the affected area wrapped in a cloth to provide heat, reduce swelling, or allow for absorption of the herb into the chest or other area. Usually left in place for 10-20 minutes; but checked periodically to make sure it is not burning the skin.

Poultices: A solid plant material is placed in a cloth or gauze and applied onto a skin surface to aid in healing process. Some examples of poultices are mustard plaster, charcoal poultices, clay dressings, and herbal compresses. Poultices are used to relieve pain and congestion, reduce inflammation, promote absorption, diminish tissue swelling and tension, relax muscles, etc.

Topical botanicals: Topical botanicals can be used in the form of creams, ointments, and lotions. They are used for relief of joint and muscle pain, for inflammation, as anti-microbial, etc.

Steam Inhalation: Used for acne, sinus and lung issues