

Botanical Medicine: The Healing Power of Plants and Naturopathic Medicine

Did you know that many pharmaceutical drugs are the synthetic derivatives isolated from the active constituents in plants? For example, Aspirin is the common drug name for Acetylsalicylic Acid (ASA). Aspirin is derived from the plant *Salix alba* (white willow) as the salicylate constituent from the bark of white willow is isolated and concentrated for use in anti-platelet therapy, and pain relief. It is often the case that modern medicine and pharmacology uses the isolated extracts from plants to specifically treat one or two condition. Over time, medicine has evolved from using whole plants to single plant extracts for healing purposes as diseases and their biochemical interactions have become more understood. This is the most common approach used in the modern pharmacy today.

Another approach used for thousands of years involves understanding the purpose of the whole plant in balancing a person who is unhealthy. Botanical medicine is a natural and primary therapy used for all illnesses. In comparison, where pharmaceutical isolates of plant constituents are excellent for short-term conditions and acute pain, the use of botanical medicine involving the whole plant is both a humanistic and wholistic approach to healing the cause of the illness. Using the whole plant involves the energetic and pharmacological properties for the promotion of health in all levels: mental, spiritual, and physical. Healing involves the utilization of living plants to promote life and wellness. Naturopathic Medicine uses the healing power of botanicals and the effects are profound when it is used to treat the whole person.

The understanding of the whole plant does involve breaking down the active constituents into their chemical composition, and then basing our understanding of these chemical interactions with those of the human body. Further, it involves understanding the whole plant and its energetic and physical properties. These properties can be described as cooling, heating, pungent, tonifying, astringent, diuretic, hypnotic, narcotic, styptic, emetic, anti-asthmatic, expectorant, diaphoretic, and on and on. Often a botanical can have two or three actions based on the evaluation of the whole plant properties. It is therefore best to take a good case history of the condition(s) being treated and to best match the whole plant to those presented. This is the wholistic model of understanding and applying botanical medicine for health promotion and maintenance. The active constituents work individually for specific conditions. When the whole plant is used correctly, it can affect the entire person on a physical, mental and spiritual level. It is up to your Naturopathic Doctor to create such a profound change in a person's health.

Your Naturopathic Doctor has the prescribing skill and knowledge of both Pharmacology and Botanical Medicine to understand interactions between the active constituents in each. Further, your Naturopathic Doctor must maintain current knowledge to both pharmacology and botany as new drug approaches are presented to patients. Naturopathic Doctors are able to treat many common and acute conditions with Botanical Medicine, and can be adjunctive to treatment during congestive heart failure, chronic fatigue, and cancer treatments. Its efficacy is reported in managing fertility and pregnancy, as well as post-partum conditions such as depression, lactation, and uterine healing and repair. From the common pain relief to the most specific ailment, you will most likely find botanical medicine therapy to be responsible for improving your health.