



The importance of Herbs - an interview with Patricia Ferguson

What do you think about our community's understanding of herbs?

The NHS was created in 1945. At the same time the manufacturing of chemical drugs began. Before then people relied on medicinal herbs. The prescription drugs we take now such as Aspirin are manufactured from an isolated chemical, salicin, extracted from the bark of the Willow plant. Isolated chemicals become more powerful, but often have accompanying side effects, without the balancing effects of the whole plant.

Our parents and generations before them used herbs, but somehow there is an impression that today's trained herbalists are doing something new. In Jamaica where my parents are from, there is no NHS and medicines and treatment is expensive. Many people continue to use herbal remedies to self-medicate with great success, but we seem to have lost that connection due to our dependence on prescription drugs.

In addition to my herbal medicine practice, I have worked for the NHS for many years. I notice that many patients place responsibility for their wellbeing entirely in the hands of doctors. They will often be taking medication for many years to control symptoms. Polypharmacy (taking many medications at once) is quite common, as more drugs are prescribed to counter the increasing side effects. It is impossible to assess all the drug interactions from taking so many different drugs.

Prescription drugs (and any food lacking in minerals and enzymes) require the presence of heavy minerals like calcium and magnesium to be metabolized. If these minerals are not sufficient in the diet they will be taken from the body, i.e. bones and body tissue in order to break down these chemical drugs. Over time, this compromises health. It is not surprising then that continued long-term use of prescription drugs and a poor diet can lead to side effects and deterioration in health.

Fundamentally, anything that heals and returns balance and vitality must have nutritional value. Drugs work in the short term, by treating symptoms of disease, but don't cure. The body naturally works to heal itself with the innate intelligence that it has, but needs the right materials to work with.





A lot of black people, especially the older generation see their doctors as infallible and almost god-like and have total faith and trust in them, but doctors are only human. Many people I see are not happy with how they are treated by their GP / Consultant, they do not have the confidence to confront their GP, which is a problem in itself. Many people are looking for the quick fix, the easy answers or the pill they can just pop and don't want to take responsibility, make the changes and do the work to maintain their own health.

I notice an absence of self-esteem in our community. We do not value ourselves the way we should, which is not helped by a society which is not geared towards our wellbeing. It is good to see some proactive groups who are organised and promoting holistic health and raw food, as I am trying to do. It would be good to see a nationwide campaign to empower and motivate on a large scale.

Why are herbs so important for our health?

Firstly, plants absorb nutrition from the soil. B12 is found in organic soil so organically grown food, including medicinal plants are a good source, as well as trace minerals like copper, zinc and germanium. Herbs work to harmonise metabolic imbalances like diabetes. Herbalists use the whole plant as medicine so the effects are gentle, working in synergy with the body. Plants are not magic bullets and very few remedies have immediate effects. They work consistently over time. It is also very important to emphasize that diet and lifestyle are key and must be addressed first of all. There is also a deep spiritual connection between man and his natural environment.

What is your advice to those on what we can do to incorporate herbs into our life?

The best way of getting plant nutrients i.e. vitamins and minerals is juicing. Juicing is very effective, as it does not tax the digestive system. Celery has high levels of sodium and kale is rich in calcium. Green juices are a good way to replenish the heavy minerals which we may lack, especially on long term medication.





I do not believe in taking or prescribing medicinal herbs unless for specific reasons. However I use some of these herbs habitually for specific purposes. Diet and lifestyle must always be addressed.

Peppermint

Great for any kind of travel sickness. Settles the stomach really quickly.

Ginger

Effective for cold hands and feet. It opens up the peripheral circulation and encourages blood flow.

Burdock and Nettle - These are detoxifying, herbs and good blood cleansers.

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I provide herbal medicine consultations for health recovery at Greenleaves in South London. Telephone consultations and home visits within South London are also available. I run raw food preparation classes at my home and classes in the principles and practice of herbal medicine.

My herbal medicine practice is general and covers health problems related to the respiratory, digestive, skin, musculoskeletal, nervous, cardiovascular, urinary and reproductive systems. I have a special interest in treating liver disorders.

As part of my practice, I write magazines articles on herbal medicine and raw food. To date I have written for Holland & Barrett's Healthy magazine, Cook Vegetarian, You and Your Family, The Royal College of Midwives and the Women's Institute Journal.

