

Herbs and Infections

Viral and bacterial infections have afflicted man since the dawn of time. Our bodies have developed the ability to fight off infections, but sometimes our body's resources are not enough to combat pathogens. Fortunately modern medicine has developed antibiotics that save countless lives.

In some cases, antibiotics are no longer effective due to the rise of more virulent, or extremely strong, strains of bacteria. In addition, antibiotics are not effective against viruses. There are very few anti viral drugs, and vaccinations are only available against a limited number of specific viruses.

The answer to this situation may lie in a return to ancient forms of medicine. Biomedical science is currently studying traditional herbs and their effects on infectious pathogens. Many traditional herbs have well-established antibiotic and anti viral properties. Traditional forms of herbalism have fixed diagnostic criteria on how to use certain herbs to fight infections.

Historically, herbalists have sought substances that help treat the many ailments that afflict their communities. They did not recognize bacteria or viruses, but they understood the dynamics of body symptoms and foods found in their environment.

Herbalists categorized symptoms of disease, and also symptoms associated with eating various substances. For example, a person may develop the symptoms of "heat." These symptoms may include fever, redness and swelling and are, by contrast, treated with herbs that are "cold" in nature. These "cold" herbs normally make a person develop symptoms associated with "cold," including a feeling of cold, pale color and a feeling of tightness.

Over many generations, herbal treatments were refined to a high degree. Symptoms were matched with specific formulations that mixed the main herb with other herbs to enhance or control the effects. Like many medicines, these herbs were only to be used as long as necessary to affect a change in the patient. The goal was to help the patient's own healing abilities to overcome the infection.

Traditional herbal systems such as Ayurvedic, Galenic and Chinese Traditional Medicine have specific diagnostic criteria for proper herbal use. These diagnostics do not coincide with modern biomedical disease definitions. As a result, it is important that an herbal practitioner is consulted. Proper herb use is determined by the rules of that herbal system, not the biomedical disease definitions that determine pharmaceutical treatment.

In some countries traditional and modern forms of medicine can coexist, providing patients with many options of care. In Germany and France, herbal and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by doctors. In China, modern research has confirmed the anti-viral properties of many herbs. As a result, herbal formulas are regularly used to treat the common cold, influenza, respiratory infections, chicken pox, mumps, measles and even ear infections. Chinese hospitals also use herbal treatments for more serious conditions such as herpes, hepatitis, encephalitis and meningitis.

While neither biomedical nor traditional medicines have all the answers to the many ailments that afflict man, understanding of strengths and weaknesses in various medical systems can help patients get the best possible care.

Bock Acupuncture & Herbal Medicine

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