

Using Natural Ingredients

Herbs, Remedies and Oils

This book offers a cornucopia of natural remedies to enhance health, prevent illness and address niggling health problems. Many of these remedies can be taken daily in supplement form, others can be used as and when they are required, and some can be used externally in the form of creams and ointments. Essential oils, herbs, vitamins and minerals and homœopathic remedies can all help you to age gracefully. Here we look at how to use them and explain how you can make your own herbal remedies at home.



Herbal medicine gently stimulates the body to return to health by strengthening and balancing its systems and encouraging good physical and emotional health, as well as attacking the cause of any illness. Herbs are also a rich source of vitamins and minerals and can be an important part of your daily diet, eaten fresh, or drunk as a tisane. A herbal tonic is useful, for example, in the winter months, when locally grown, organic fruits and vegetables are not so readily available, while echinacea or garlic can be taken regularly to boost the immune system.

A herb is any part of a flower, tree or other plant – so you may be using flowers, leaves, bark, buds, fruits, roots, seeds or even resin. The fresher or more recently picked the herb is, the stronger its active properties. However, in some cases dried herbs are more therapeutic and are used in preference.

TINCTURES

Powdered, fresh or dried herbs are placed in an airtight container with alcohol and left for up to eight weeks. Alcohol extracts the essential parts and preserves them for the longest possible time.

DECOCTIONS

The roots, twigs, berries, seeds and bark of a plant are used, and, much like an infusion (see right), they

are boiled in water to extract the ingredients. The liquid is strained and taken with a little organic honey or raw sugar to make it palatable. Decoctions should be refrigerated and will last about three days.

INFUSIONS

Effectively another word for tea, an infusion uses dried herbs, or in some instances fresh, which are steeped in boiled water for about



CALENDULA flowers can be used to make a range of remedies

ten minutes. Infusions are most suitable for plants from which the leaves and flowers are used, since their properties are more easily extracted by gentle boiling.

TISANES

Tisanes are mild infusions, often pre-packaged and sold in the form of a teabag (such as chamomile or peppermint), which are steeped for a shorter time than an infusion.

INFUSIONS are made using dried herbs in a similar way to tea

HOW TO MAKE HERBAL TINCTURES

- 1 Coarsely chop stems, leaves and roots. You can leave flowers whole.
- 2 Put your herbs in a clean, dry glass jar and fill with half water and half pure alcohol, such as vodka (if you want to avoid alcohol, use apple cider vinegar instead). The herbs need to be completely immersed in liquid.
- 3 Seal the jar with an airtight lid.
- 4 Label with the ingredients and date and store in a dark place for six to eight weeks, shaking occasionally.
- 5 Strain out the herbs and pour the tincture into clean, dry bottles.

POWDERS

Herbs in this form can be added to food or drinks, or put into capsules for easier consumption. You can make your own powder by crushing dried plant parts with a mortar and pestle or chopping them finely in a food processor or coffee grinder.

SYRUPS

Some herbs are available in syrup form, which makes them particularly suitable for children.

CAPSULES

Some herbal remedies may be obtained over the counter as capsules, and for some people this is the easiest way to take them. Read the label, and take only the dosage suggested.

COMPRESSES AND POULTICES

Compresses and poultices are for external use, and can be extremely effective, since the active parts of the herb are able to reach the affected area without being altered in any way by the digestive tract.

Compresses are usually made from infusions or decoctions that are used to soak a linen or muslin cloth. The cloth is then placed on the affected area and held in place by a bandage or cling film. Compresses can be hot or cold and are generally milder than poultices.

A poultice is made up of a plant that has been crushed and then applied whole to the affected areas. You can also boil crushed plant parts for a few minutes to make a pulp or use a powdered herb and mix

with boiling water. Because they are often applied with heat and use fresh parts of the plant, poultices are more potent than compresses.

OINTMENTS AND CREAMS

For external use, herbal ointments and creams are often suggested. You can make your own by blending tinctures with coconut oil (which solidifies), aqueous cream or even another gentle herbal cream, such as calendula. Creams and ointments should be kept in the refrigerator.

FOR THE BATH

Tie a handful of herbs into a square of muslin and place under the hot tap when running your bath to help with external symptoms, such as skin conditions.



Homœopathic remedies

Homœopathy is a system of medicine that supports the body's own healing mechanism, using specially prepared remedies. It is 'energy' medicine, in that it works with the body's vital force to encourage healing and to ensure that all body systems are working at optimum level. A homœopathic remedy is an extremely pure, natural substance that has been diluted and potentized many times. In large quantities these substances would cause similar symptoms to those the patient is trying to cure. In small, potentized doses, it is safe and free from side effects and will trigger the body to heal itself.

- Remedies come in tablet form or as granules. Tinctures and creams are also available.
- One tablet (or a few granules) is enough for one dose – more does not increase the effect.
- Avoid eating, drinking, smoking and brushing your teeth for at least 15 minutes before and afterwards. Some homœopaths believe that strong substances can antidote the remedies.
- Store remedies in their containers away from direct light, heat and strong-smelling substances.

Essential oils

Essential oils are considered to be the 'life force' of aromatic flowers, herbs, plants, trees or spices,



ESSENTIAL OILS are made from aromatic plants such as lavender

which are extracted for therapeutic purposes. Essential oils enter the body by inhalation and by absorption through skin pores.

Once in the body they work in three ways: pharmacologically, physiologically and psychologically. The constituents of the oils are carried in the bloodstream around the body where they react with body chemicals, in much the same way that medication works. Some oils have an affinity with particular areas of the body where they may have a balancing, sedating, stimulating or other effect.

There are lots of ways to use essential oils at home.

MASSAGE

Dilute the essential oil in a vegetable carrier oil such as grapeseed, sweet almond, avocado or sunflower oil. Use two drops of essential oil to 5ml (one teaspoon) of carrier oil. Always dilute the oils for massage, as they can cause rashes and an uncomfortable reaction if used neat.

STEAM INHALATIONS

Add three or four drops of oil to a bowl of boiling water. Bend over the bowl, with your head covered with a towel, and breathe deeply for a few minutes. Alternatively, add the oil to a bowl of water and place by a radiator, or add water and six

to eight drops of oil to a vaporizer – these can be electric or a ceramic ring that is heated by a light bulb, but most are ceramic pots warmed by a small candle.

BATHS

Pre-dilute the essential oils of your choice by adding 4–6 drops to 10ml of base oil, add the mixture to the bath and swirl the water around with your hand so that the drops disperse before stepping in.

CREAMS, LOTIONS AND SHAMPOOS

Add one or two drops of essential oil to creams, lotions and shampoos and massage into the skin or scalp. Add a drop of chamomile oil to aqueous or calendula cream for eczema or itchy skin, or a drop of lavender to a gentle moisturiser to ease yourself off to sleep.

CAUTION

All natural remedies are powerful healers and should be used carefully. If you are taking other medication, see your doctor before adding herbs or supplements to your programme. Always follow the instructions on the label.



SUPPLEMENTS have many health benefits, but it is important that dosages are followed carefully

GARGLES AND MOUTHWASHES

Dilute one or two drops of essential oil in a glass of warm water and swish around the mouth or gargle before spitting out.

NEAT

A very few essential oils, such as lavender, Roman chamomile and rose, can be applied undiluted to small areas of skin (in the case of spots, for example, or cuts or buns).

HOT AND COLD COMPRESSES

Add one or two drops of essential oil to a bowl of hot or cold water. Soak a folded clean cotton cloth in the water, wring it out and apply over the affected area.

Supplements

Throughout this book we will be suggesting various supplements to

help encourage balance and achieve optimum health. It's important that you follow dosages carefully and do not exceed any recommendations. The European Union and other international bodies have produced guidelines on the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of vitamins and minerals that the average person, who is in good health and eating a balanced diet, needs to remain healthy. Therapeutic dosages may be considerably higher, as they are dealing with specific conditions or shortfalls that may come with ill health or age. Remember, however, that more is not always the best option.

Recommendations made in this book are based on sound research and should never be exceeded. Always read the cautions on the back of your supplement, as some health conditions may preclude their use. Finally, choose the best-quality products that you can.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

There are lots of nurturing, age-defying treatments throughout this book, many of which you can prepare yourself. It's a good idea to have some of the key ingredients to hand, including:

- Beeswax – for making candles, ointments, salves and balms
- Organic oils, such as grapeseed, avocado and olive – as a base for infused oils, massage oils and skin, hair and nail preparations
- Vitamin E capsules – to preserve the oils, creams and ointments you make
- Vegetable glycerine – for skin creams and conditioners.

