



HERBAL MEDICINES AS AN ALTERNATIVE SOURCE OF THERAPY: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

According to WHO Herbal medicines include herbs, herbal materials, herbal preparations and finished herbal products that contain as active ingredients parts of plants, or other plant materials, or combination. Since prehistoric times, indigenous plants have been used for the cure of various ailments in different parts of the world. In nature, there is enormous variety of herbs, having medicinal properties and are used to prepare the herbal medicines. Herbal medicine is an alternative treatment that involves using of different plants and plant extracts. Herbal medicines combine with immune system of the human body to create an even detoxification process. Herbal medicines are obtained from relatively harmless plant matter that the human body can easily

digest. In recent years there is a renewed interest regarding survival of Ayurvedic forms of medications. In the global perspective, there is a renewed shift towards the use of medicine of herbal origin as the dangers and shortcoming of modern medicine have started getting more apparent. In this review, we will briefly provide information about various aspects of Herbal medicines.

KEYWORDS: Herbal drugs, Ayurvedic preparations, Ailments.

INTRODUCTION

Mother Nature has provided various avenues to maintain our health. One among them is the herbal drugs. Herbal drugs have been used to treat various types of diseases for thousand of years. The people are getting more attracted towards the use of herbal drugs to cure various ailments. For treatment of several ailments of human beings, plant drug rasayana has always played an important role. According to World health organization (WHO) more than 80% of the world population depends upon traditional medicine for their primary health care needs.^[1] Herbal medicine, refers to the use of a plant's seeds, barriers, roots, leaves, bark, or flowers for medicinal purposes. Use of herbal drugs is becoming more and more streamlined as improvements in analysis and quality control along with advances in clinical research show their value in the treatment and prevention of disease.^[2] As per WHO Herbal medicines include herbs, herbal materials, herbal preparations and finished herbal products that contain as active ingredients parts of plants, or other plant materials, or combinations.^[3] Since ancient times, indigenous plants have been used for the treatment of various ailments in different parts of the world.^[4] Naturally, there are a huge variety of herbs, having medicinal properties and used to prepare the herbal medicines. Herbal medicine is an alternative treatment that includes a use of different plants and plant extracts for their therapeutic use.^[5] The use of recorded herbal medicines dates about 5000 years ago when the Sumeran's used plants such as thyme and laurel as a remedy for diseases. The marshmallow root was a common grass that was chewed thoroughly to get relief from stomach upsets.^[6]

History of Herbal Medicine

Herbal medicine is a age old form of healing and had been used by all the ancient civilizations such as; Chinese, Egyptian, Greek, Indian, Mesopotamian and Roman. The first famous Herbalist was Hippocrates, named as the 'Father of Medicine' who stressed the importance of nature in healing.^[7] The first Chinese book on herbal medicines Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing, was written during the rule of the Han Dynasty and dates back to a period that is believed to be 2700 BC.^[8] The ancient Greek Physician, Hippocrates, who is considered an accomplished figure in the —History of Medicine, propagated the use of herbal drugs supplemented with proper rest and diet.^[9] —Dioscoride another Greek Physician wrote —De material Medica, which is one of the most important books. It was observed in ancient times that the grand old ladies of a community —often termed to as; Wise-Women prescribed Herbal Medicine for treatment of disorders that promised to heal people with demonic spirits.

In 1597, English Herbalist —John Gerard wrote a book called —The Herball: or General History of Plants which become largely popular.^[10, 11]

Herbal medicine has played an integral part in the development of modern civilization. The primitive man observed and appreciated the great variety of plants available to him.^[12] Herbal medicines have fallen in and out of favour with man throughout the ages.^[13] Much of the medicinal use of plants seems to have been developed through observations of wild animals and by trial and error method. As time went on, each tribe added the medicinal power of herbs in their area to its knowledge base. They methodically collected information on herbs and developed well-defined herbal pharmacopoeia.^[14] Indeed, well into the 20th century much of the pharmacopoeia of scientific medicine was derived from the herbal lore of native people.^[15] The herb has been practiced for several centuries to cure a number of diseases. The herb can be used as dried plant, or a specific part like a leaf, a stem, a root, a seed, a fruit, a flower or bark used for its medicinal properties. These may be used in many forms e.g. fresh, dried, ointment, tincture, or oil extract or made into liquid by infusion or decoction.^[16] Some of commonly used herbs are Turmeric, Soy Isoflavones, White Yellow, American ginseng, Bee pollen, Cat's Claw, Bladder Wrack, Chamomile, Flaxseed, Saw Palmetto, Schizandra etc.^[17] An archaeological estimate suggests that the civilization of the bygone era used herbal plants as a part of traditional medicine.^[18]

Utility of Herbal Medicine

Herbal medicines, in association with immune system of the human body tend to create an even detoxification process. Herbal medicines are derived from relatively harmless plant matter that the human bodies can easily digest.^[19] The implications of using herbal medications are that they are pretty easy to consume and can be taken frequently. The most important thing is that Herbal medications can never be fatal to a person.^[20] Sometimes, the conventional synthetic drugs which are used for treatment of patients with chronic ailments can be replaced by herbal medicines. This is vital as their synthetic counterparts often have considerable side effects. Herbal medicines facilitate the transition from acute short-term to chronic long-term treatment.^[21] One advantage of herbal products is its price. They are comparably cheaper than synthetic medicines commonly prescribed by doctors now-a-days. In fact, low budget consumers are opting for this solution to their health problems in order to get as much savings they can get to address their health related concerns.^[22] People have many and varied reasons for seeking out alternative remedies but often include dissatisfaction

with the more traditional health care treatments, although the efficacy of herbal medicines is mostly subjective to the patient. It is worth remembering that the benefits and effectiveness of alternative medicine like herbal is often individual to the health concern.^[23] It is generally understood that herbal remedies are free from side effects. With onset of scientific research in herbal medicine, data for side effects of herbal medicines is accumulating. It can be said that side effect profile of herbal medicines is however less as compared to synthetic drugs.^[24] There is no worry about what we eat and when we take the herbal products for our health problems. Since the ingredients are 100% natural and no need to take care about the meals causing allergic reactions that will compromise to the health.^[25]

Drawbacks of Herbal Medicines

Herbal medicines can't be used for cure of serious injuries. Sometimes self-dosing of various herbs can lead to serious implications among users. If required herbs are not identified properly, they can even lead to poisoning.^[26] As may be observed, herbal medicines are not effective in treating emergencies and any acute illness. As most of the medicines are designed to work at molecular level of physiology, the drug takes its time to deliver results. However there are few herbal medicines which work instantly in acute conditions like diarrhea etc. On the other hand, modern system of medicine has adequate paraphelia for management of acute conditions. It has already been established by virtue of its efficacy. It may be a futile exercise to investigate and discover such methods of acute medicinal care within the framework of herbal medicines.^[27] In recent years there is a spurt in the interest regarding survival of Ayurvedic forms of medications. In the global perspective, there is a renewed shift towards the use of medicine of herbal origin as the dangers and shortcoming of modern medicine have started getting more apparent.^[28-30]

Herbal drugs, as their name refers are always made from herbs and organic plants that have medicinal properties. Herbal drugs can be of two types, non prescriptive and prescriptive.^[31] Prescriptive are usually prescribed by doctors and must be taken under the prescription. And the non-prescriptive are usually produced by companies and that is called Hexbalife.^[32] It has been estimated that an average of 5,00,000 plant species on earth today, with the number varying depending on whether subspecies are included.^[33] It is noteworthy that 80% of the world's population still relies on plant remedies. There are many countries and cultures where people have inherited knowledge about plant medicine.^[34] Medicinal plants contain varying degrees of chemicals or antibiotics and they have direct impact on physiological activity.

When taken internally they activate overall body metabolism by providing a healing stimulus.^[35] A Common approach to choosing what herb may be right for a certain condition would be to categorized herbs by looking at what kind of problem can be treated by their help. However, a deep understanding of herbs should be obtained prior to their unassisted use.^[36] Although herbal medicines have potential to cure many ailments, the curing period is usually longer in comparison to conventional medication.^[37] Herbal medicines can lead to allergic reactions sometimes. Before resorting to herbal medication you need to ensure that you are not allergic to the particular herb that you will be consuming.^[38] Conventional medication can also cause allergic reactions, but they are usually taken upon a prescription which is why the chances of allergic reactions are less.^[39] It is usually consumed upon the person's own risk and when it comes to branded herbal supplements one can't expect any kind of quality assurance.^[40]

CONCLUSION

In the current decade, herbal medicines have provided many of the most potent medicines to the vast arsenal of drugs available to modern medical science, both in crude form and as a pure chemical upon which modern drugs are based. Though Herbal Medicines offer lots of advantages they have shortcomings too. So, the new therapy for curing disease is requiring which have low side effects and high effectiveness. The combinations of herbal medicines with allopathic drugs have new spark of treatment in medicinal world. The system behind natural remedies is that Nature has all the ingredients to treat the disease.

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