



Let Food Be Your Medicine

Using Food and Culinary Herbs to Heal Disease

Over two thousand years ago, the famous Greek physician Hippocrates said, “Let your food be your medicine, and your medicine be your food.” This is still good advice. After all, one of the primary ways you can maintain good health is through nutrition. Many ailments are nothing more than deficiencies of the vital nutrients and phytochemicals found in food.

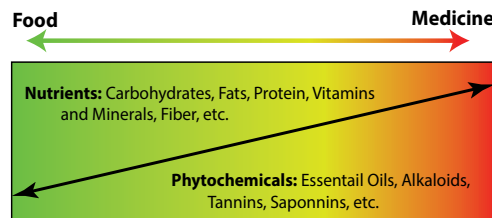
All plants, including medicinal herbs, contain nutrients—carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals. Healing herbs are typically considered medicinal because of the phytochemicals they contain, such as tannins, essential oils, mucilaginous fiber, alkaloids, saponins, and glycosides.

All foods contain these types of phytochemicals. Even a fairly simple food, like a potato, which is primarily used as a source of carbohydrates, has over 150 identified phytochemicals, including solanine alkaloids, oxalic acid, tannins and nitrate. Furthermore, all medicinal herbs contain nutrients, such as essential fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals. This raises the question:

Where Does Food End and Medicine Begin?

In many ways herbal medicine is nothing more than an extension of nutrition because there is no clear line where food ends and medicine begins. Herbs are considered medicines because they contain more of these phytochemicals but less nutritional value. Perhaps it’s best to think of food and medicine as a continuum as shown in the diagram below.

How a plant is grown will effect its medicinal value. This is true for both using foods as medicine and the potency of medicinal herbs. Wild foods and foods raised in quality soil will have a stronger flavor than foods raised with chemicals as is done in modern agriculture. This is due to a higher content of the phytochemicals that are associated with a plants medicinal properties.



This was noted by Masanobu Fukuoka, a retiree from the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture who developed methods of growing grain, fruits and vegetables without cultivation, weeding or fertilizing. He claimed that vegetables grown in this semi-wild manner had a higher nutritional content and were also more suitable as medicines.

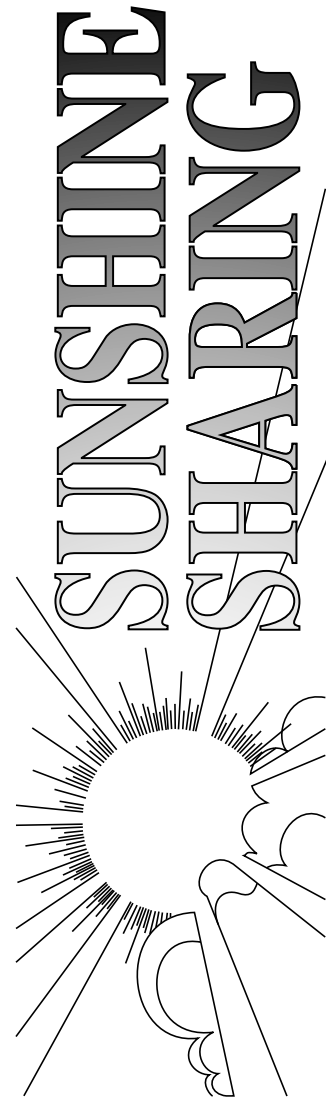
Edible herbs and wild vegetables, plants growing on the mountain and in the meadow, are very high in nutritional value and are also useful as medicine. Food and medicine are not two different things: they are the front and back of one body. Chemically grown vegetables may be eaten for food, but they cannot be used as medicine.

– Masanobu Fukuoka. *The One-Straw Revolution*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1978. p. 100

This is why organically-grown herbs are not superior to wild-crafted herbs, which are harvested from their native environment. It’s also why properly raised organic food will likely have better medicinal properties than conventionally grown food.

The truth is that most common health problems could be solved with a prescription to be filled at the grocery store or farmer’s market. So, wouldn’t it be great if the first thing doctors prescribed were medicinal foods and common kitchen herbs? While this is unlikely to happen, it is the central idea in this issue of *Sunshine Sharing* where we’ll discuss the healing power of common fruits, vegetables, and kitchen spices.

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Your guide to better health the natural way.

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Important Notice

The information in *Sunshine Sharing* is for educational purposes only and should not be used to diagnose and treat diseases. If you have a health problem, we recommend you consult a competent health practitioner before embarking on any course of treatment.

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Medicinal Fruits

Fruits are generally cooling and cleansing and many are best eaten when they're in season. To have potent medicinal value, fruits should be organically grown or harvested from the wild. They also need to be picked when fully ripe.

Apples: It's fitting that we should start our discussion with apples. After all, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." Apples are an alkalizing food that is very helpful for a congested and overworked liver. Apples and apple sauce can help the body digest fatty foods. Freshly juiced apples (containing some of the fiber) are a good remedy for constipated children and can aid the passing of gallstones in adults (along with olive oil and lemon juice). The pectin in apples is helpful for lowering cholesterol.



Bilberries and Blueberries: Bilberry is a popular herb for the eyes. It is a species of blueberry (*Vaccium genus*) and all blueberries contain antioxidants that can protect the eyes against diseases like macular degeneration and retinopathy. These same antioxidants also aid circulation. Eating a half cup of blueberries daily can help with both atherosclerosis and varicose veins.

Grapes: The famous herbalist, Juliette de Bairacli Levy, recommended the grape cure "when the human body has become sick almost beyond reasonable hope of recovery." It consists of living off of fresh, unsprayed grapes (and a few leaves and tendrils). Grapes help cleanse and alkalize the body to restore good health.

Using grapes medicinally requires you to eat grapes that contain seeds rather than the seedless varieties. You should chew up and eat the seeds, too. Grape seeds contain oligomeric procyanidins (OPCs) which are powerful antioxidants for reducing inflammation and pain. Grape skins are also loaded with antioxidants. The leaves are also edible, mildly astringent, and act as a mild diuretic.



Lemons: Like grapes, lemons have also been used in a fast to cleanse and alkalize the body. *The Master Cleanse*, a book by Stanley Burroughs popularized fasting on fresh lemonade sweetened with maple syrup and many people report that

a lemon fast has reduced pain and inflammation and increased energy. You can also benefit from lemon as a medicine by drinking a glass of water with fresh lemon juice and no sweetener first thing in the morning. It is recommended that you use organic lemons when doing a fast.

Lemon is a lithotriptic agent that dissolves calcium deposits and kidney stones. To aid in the passing of stones, put the juice of four lemons in a gallon of distilled water and drink the water frequently over the course of a day. It also helps to take 2 capsules of hydrangea every 2-3 hours.

Fresh lemon juice has been used to help fight colds and flu, especially when combined with a little fresh ginger and honey. The lemon peel is an immune tonic. It helps to strengthen the

capillaries and weak tissues (similar to rose hips). However, only use the peelings from organic lemons.

Papaya: Papaya fruit contains a protein-digesting enzyme, papain. If you have a problem digesting proteins try eating some raw papaya with them. Papaya is also used to expel intestinal worms. For expelling parasites eat some of the papaya seeds in addition to the fruit.

Pineapple: This fruit contains a protein digesting enzyme called bromelin. Bromelin helps with protein digestion and reduces inflammation and allergic reactions. Use fresh, organic pineapple or pineapple juice for healing, never canned or frozen.

Watermelon: While seedless watermelons are very popular, it's the seeded watermelons, like the seeded grapes that have medicinal value. You should always eat a few seeds when eating the fruit as well as some of the white rind. The seeds are a mild diuretic and kidney tonic, and the watermelon and rind are helpful for cooling the body and relieving thirst during hot weather.

Medicinal Vegetables

One of the best things you can do for your health is to eat more fresh vegetables. In the documentary *How to Live to 100, Wherever You Are in the World*, one of the secrets to a long life revealed in the research is to eat a primarily plant-based diet, with vegetables being a very important component of the diet. When considering vegetables to support health and healing, try to get organically, in season, and preferably locally grown vegetables.



Asparagus: Asparagus is a tonic for the kidneys and helps them to flush acid waste from the system. This makes it helpful for gout and rheumatism. It also contains starches that stimulate the growth of *Bifidus* bacteria which can help

to combat intestinal dysbiosis and tone up leaky gut. Although the root is a more powerful medicine than the stems, the stems still have medicinal value in chronic illness.

Barley: Barley has long been used to promote health. The seeds (grain), sprouts, and grass have all been used for healing. Fresh barley grass and sprouts are loaded with antioxidants, which promote general health. Barley grain contains beta-glucans, a polysaccharide found in medicinal mushrooms that helps to boost immunity. Barley can also help to regulate blood sugar, reduce cholesterol, and help prevent bowel cancer.

Barley water is a healing drink that is cooling and soothing to irritated tissues. It has been used for fevers, inflamed or irritated intestinal systems, diarrhea, dry cough, cystitis and irritable bladder. You make it by simmering barley in water for about 30 minutes, then straining it. You can add lemon, ginger, or other herbs to it.

Cabbage: Cabbage is one of the vegetables in the mustard family, which are commonly known as cruciferous vegetables. Like other cruciferous vegetables, it contains sulfur compounds that aid liver detoxification and help the body get rid of cancer-causing chemicals. Cabbage also stimulates protein digestion and metabolism, so it helps people who have problems digesting meat.



Cabbage also has a mild inhibiting effect on thyroid function, so it can be a helpful medicine for hyperthyroid conditions like Grave's disease. Cabbage juice has been used to help heal stomach ulcers. Bruised cabbage leaves have

also been used as poultices to the chest to aid respiratory congestion and to the breasts for easing mastitis.

One of the best ways to use cabbage is to ferment it and eat it in the form of raw, not canned or bottled, sauerkraut. Raw sauerkraut will help you digest heavy protein foods and helps with the proper balance of microbes in the intestines. It can help heal leaky gut syndrome and boost natural immunity by overcoming intestinal dysbiosis.

Mushrooms: Many mushrooms contain beta-glucans, the same immune-boosting compounds found in barley. Any mushroom with a significant amount of beta-glucans will help boost the body's immune defenses to protect against wintertime colds and flu or to help the body fight an active viral or bacterial infection. Many varieties of grocery-store mushrooms will do this, including cremini, portobello, shiitake, and even the common white or button mushrooms. In Chinese herbalism, button mushrooms have been used to regulate body energy and remove phlegm from the body. Add fresh, dried, or even powdered mushrooms to soups, stews, or other foods for an immune-boosting effect.

Onions: Onions have antibacterial and antiviral properties similar to garlic. The antimicrobial action of onion is strongest in freshly cut, raw onions. Onions, like cabbage and garlic, also contain sulfur compounds that aid liver detoxification. Onions are also a good source of the flavonoid quercetin, which helps zinc get into cells and inhibit viral reproduction. Quercetin also helps to calm down allergic reactions.

Onions can help to relieve earaches. One method is to cut the onion in half, coat the cut edge with olive oil to reduce irritation to the skin, and hold it against the infected ear for about 20-30 minutes. You can also press some liquid from a baked or steamed onion, cool it to body temperature, and use it as ear drops.

Onions can also be used to make a cough syrup. Peel and thickly slice the onion (more pungent varieties work best). Place a slice in a glass container and sprinkle a little raw sugar over it. Then add another slice, sprinkling more sugar on that slice. Continue until all the slices have been lightly coated with the sugar. Cover and allow the onion slices to sit for an hour or two, then squeeze all the juice out to make the cough syrup. This onion syrup will loosen mucus and help to expel it as well as helping to fight any infection present.

Zucchini and Summer Squash: Dr. Henry Bieler, author of *Food is Your Best Medicine*, recommended a diet of non-starchy vegetables like zucchini to help balance blood sugar and rebuild a stressed and depleted liver, something many people have because of all the chemicals to which they're exposed. He said, "the organic sodium in zucchini, as well as in summer and crook-necked squash, is the most ideal source of replenishing a sodium-exhausted liver."¹

Medicinal Culinary Herbs

Many common herbs and spices have wonderful medicinal properties, especially those you can obtain fresh, like ginger and garlic. However, many grocery store spices are not very useful medicinally because they often sit on the shelf for too long. The essential oils in them evaporate rapidly after they are ground to powder. Many are also irradiated, rendering them useless medicinally.

For medicine, use fresh herbs where possible, or get whole, organically grown, non-irradiated spices and grind or crush them just prior to use. If you can't do this, stick to encapsulated herbs produced by a reputable company with high standards of quality control.



Black Pepper: Besides being a staple in most kitchens, black pepper has many health benefits. It contains a potent antioxidant called piperine, which has anti-inflammatory properties. Studies show that black pepper may reduce your risk of Alzheimer's,

cancer, and blood sugar problems.

Like most spices, it stimulates digestion and eases gas and bloating. In Ayurvedic medicine it is considered a catalyst, a remedy that enhances the benefits of other herbs like turmeric. In Russia, vodka infused with black pepper or garlic is a common folk remedy for colds. If you want to use black pepper medicinally, use freshly ground peppercorns.

Chili Peppers: Red pepper, also known as capsicum or cayenne, is the most commonly used medicinal hot pepper, but all varieties have similar health benefits. The substance that makes the pepper hot is capsaicin; the hotter the pepper the more capsaicin it contains. Capsaicin helps to relieve pain because it depletes the chemical messengers that signal pain. Hot peppers also stimulate blood flow, having a modest hypotensive effect, especially when combined with garlic. Use fresh, organic peppers to promote circulatory health, choose peppers with a heat level you can tolerate—from the mildly spicy, like ancho, poblano, anaheim, and pepperoncini, to the hotter peppers like jalapeno, serrano, cayenne, or habanero.

Garlic: Freshly cut or crushed raw garlic has been called nature's Penicillin, because it is highly antimicrobial. It helps the body get rid of infections of all kinds, viral, bacterial, and fungal. It can even help eliminate parasites. Taken internally, garlic works best on infections in the lungs and intestines. It can also be helpful for ear infections, sore throats, dental abscesses, and infected wounds.

The most difficult thing about using raw garlic for infections is figuring out how to take it. Here are a couple of options. First, thinly slice pieces of garlic clove and eat them with some crackers or toast and a little butter or cheese. Second, crush or mince some garlic and mix it with honey or yogurt and eat it.

A third way is to make garlic lemonade, which tastes better than it sounds. Remove the yellow peel from one whole, organic lemon, keeping the white part. Cut the lemon into pieces and put them in the blender with one or two cloves of raw garlic, a tablespoon of honey, and a pint (two cups) of water. Blend it all together and strain it before drinking it.

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Another trick is to use garlic oil. Crush garlic and put it in olive oil for a couple of hours. It can then be refrigerated for up to two days. Take it a spoonful at a time. You can also purchase shelf-stable garlic oil. Garlic oil can be used in the ears for earaches (warm to body temperature first), rubbed on the throat for sore throats, or massaged onto the back and chest for respiratory congestion.

Garlic also has benefits for the circulatory system. It helps to reduce cholesterol and triglycerides, lower blood pressure, improve blood flow (especially in combination with chili peppers), and may even help prevent or reverse hardening of the arteries. For this purpose you can use raw, cooked, or even dried garlic.



Ginger: Ginger enhances the movement of food through the GI tract, which relieves gas, bloating, and nausea. It's also well-documented as a remedy to relieve motion sickness, morning sickness and other conditions where

a person develops nausea. Like chili peppers and garlic, it is also a circulatory stimulant, especially helpful for improving blood flow through the abdominal area. Both dried and fresh ginger have these actions.

Ginger is also helpful for colds and flu. It is often used with lemon and honey for this purpose. Drinking warm ginger tea and soaking in a hot bath with some ginger sprinkled in the water will boost the immune system and aid recovery for all acute viral ailments.

Fresh ginger is more anti-inflammatory than dried ginger and is better for easing joint pain or intestinal inflammation. A great way to get this anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving benefit from ginger is to juice four apples with a one inch piece of fresh ginger rhizome and half of an organic lemon. Drink this juice to alkalize the system and ease painful muscles and joints.

Parsley: Parsley is a mild diuretic and kidney tonic. It's a good source of mineral electrolytes to clear lymphatic congestion (swollen lymph glands or breast swelling) and reduce water retention. It also aids digestion. Fresh parsley juice can also be helpful for relieving congestion in the lungs associated with asthma and bronchitis. Parsley helps dry up breast milk, so nursing mothers should avoid it.

Rosemary: Besides its use as a seasoning, fresh or dried rosemary has a powerful antioxidant effect making it useful as an anti-aging herb. It helps protect the brain and memory and also helps promote healthy circulation, reducing atherosclerosis, reducing blood pressure, and promoting heart health. It is also a helpful herb both topically and internally for creating healthy hair, skin, and fingernails.

Vanilla: Anybody who likes to bake is probably going to have real (not imitation) vanilla extract in their kitchen, but they are probably unfamiliar with its medicinal uses. For starters, it helps heal burns. Simply apply it topically to ease the pain and speed healing. Vanilla has long been regarded as an aphrodisiac. It appears to increase levels of dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain, both of which increase energy and drive.

You can drink vanilla tea or add few drops of real vanilla extract to a cup of warm water and sip it to ease indigestion and settle the stomach. It can help ease nausea and prevent vomiting. You can also add it to peppermint or chamomile tea for a soothing effect on the nervous system.

Additional Help and Information

These are just a few of the fruits, vegetables, and spices used as medicines. For more information, contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

Strategies for Health by Steven Horne

Diet and Nutrition by Rudolph Ballentine

Footnotes

¹Dr. Henry Bieler. *Food is Your Best Medicine*. New York: Random House, 1965. p. 204