

10 Herbs for Optimal Health

By Ryan Harrison, MA

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1. Aloe is an ancient medicinal plant that is said to have been part of Cleopatra's beauty regimen. The sap of the aloe plant is an excellent first aid remedy for minor burns and infections. You can take aloe internally as a laxative – it's commonly found in over-the-counter laxatives, as it stimulates intestinal activity. Plus, if your appetite has waned, aloe tincture can stimulate it. You can also apply the gel externally to promote regeneration of the skin and speed healing of minor wounds. It inhibits inflammation, stops minor bleeding and helps cure eczema, sunburn, and minor burns. Finally, aloe moisturizes dry sensitive skin.



2. Astragalus has been valued in China for thousands of years as a nourishing food and medicinal herb. It strengthens the immune system to fight colds, flu and respiratory ailments. Herbalists also recommend it during convalescence to relieve fatigue, general weakness and poor appetite. Astragalus helps strengthen and support the immune system's ability to combat illness and speed recovery. It is especially effective as a preventive measure during cold and flu season. In addition, Astragalus is beneficial for upper respiratory conditions such as bronchitis and coughs. The plant is also a common ingredient in creams, ointments and salves designed to keep the skin healthy. An excellent tonic herb that enhances overall health, Astragalus can relieve fatigue and general weakness after a prolonged illness. Current research indicates that Astragalus may also be a beneficial supportive therapy during cancer treatments, as well.



3. Dandelion is a plant that we usually think of as a weed, especially when it pops up on our lawns. However, this ubiquitous plant not only provides a tasty salad treat, but has a strong diuretic effect, which can be beneficial to liver function. Because of its well-balanced therapeutic ingredients, dandelion has played an important part as a healing supplement in herbalism. It is a mild stimulant for the gallbladder and liver, helping them get rid of waste products and increasing bile flow; its effect on the liver makes dandelion beneficial for treating gout, rheumatism and skin diseases. Dandelion is useful in treating acne, eczema and psoriasis, as it reduces the body's efforts to eliminate toxins through the skin. In addition, dandelion relieves digestive complaints, such as bloating and flatulence; as an aromatic bitter, it stimulates appetite and promotes digestion. As a diuretic, the dandelion leaf alleviates fluid retention.



4. Lemon Balm has been appreciated therapeutically since the first century, and to this day this sweet-smelling herb is used to treat mild anxiety and depression. Although traditionally used to attract bees, lemon balm is considered in herbalism to be a reliable remedy for some herpes viruses. The volatile oils in lemon balm – which, contrary to their name, have a calming effect -- make it a potent remedy for stomachaches and other stress-related conditions such as anxiety, headache and depression. In addition, lemon balm is antiviral and therefore useful in treating chickenpox, shingles and the herpes simplex virus; it is known to reduce the frequency of herpes outbreaks. It also relieves menstrual cramps, toothaches and neuralgia.



5. Rosemary is a favorite herb of many herbalists. It is known as an all-around stimulant that uplifts and revitalizes. Rosemary is used internally for problems of the digestive tract, particularly bloating and cramps; the herb's anti-spasmodic properties come into play here. In addition, by increasing production of stomach juices, it stimulates the appetite and promotes digestion. Rosemary oil applied topically increases blood flow and relieves sore, aching muscles.



6. Milk Thistle is an exceptionally safe herb which stimulates breast milk production and promotes healthy liver and gallbladder function. Milk thistle is used to treat inflammatory liver ailments, especially chronic illnesses such as hepatitis and cirrhosis. And gallbladder ailments and related digestive symptoms, varicose and spider vein problems in the legs and jaundice are helped by milk thistle treatment, as well. Milk thistle is especially important today, as many of us take prescription medications or other substances into the body that weaken or otherwise damage the liver. A good milk thistle supplement can truly improve a person's health.



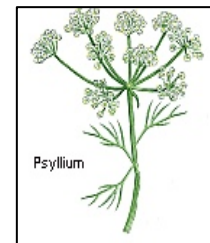
7. Oregano is familiar to most people because of its aromatic flavor and use in Italian cuisine. However, herbalists have long recognized its therapeutic value, as well. Oregano is a potent antibacterial herb that alleviates digestive complaints, respiratory ailments and skin conditions. Considered an excellent digestive herb, oregano stimulates a poor appetite and promotes digestion. It can also relieve bloating, belching, flatulence, diarrhea and intestinal cramps. The plant's antibacterial and expectorant properties make it a great remedy for respiratory ailments, such as bronchitis, coughs and asthma. When it is applied topically, oregano helps heal cuts, scrapes, rashes, eczema and pollutants. It can be used as a gargle for inflamed gums, as well.



8. Peppermint is valued by herbalist for a variety of reasons. To begin with, peppermint leaves have both sedative and antispasmodic qualities. When taken internally, peppermint may ease the pain of acute and chronic inflammation of the intestinal walls and relieve diarrhea, flatulence and nausea. Peppermint can also promote the function of the digestive system. Take it after a heavy meal to stimulate the production and flow of bile, which eases digestion. Used topically, the plant may counteract nerve pain, headache, migraine and inflammation of the gums. Finally, when you have a cold, inhale the scent of peppermint to clear a stuffy nose and help break up congestion in the respiratory tract.



9. Psyllium husks and seeds swell to a large extent when they're softened in water, so when they are ingested they stimulate the intestinal walls to produce contractions, which help regulate digestive function. They also facilitate bowel movements in people suffering from constipation or anal fissures caused by hemorrhoids. Because the husks and seeds absorb the fluids, they are a useful supportive treatment for cases of diarrhea and colitis. In addition, psyllium compresses are helpful for inflamed skin ailments.



10. Siberian Ginseng aids the body in adapting to stressors, both mental and physical. It improves concentration and boosts mental and physical performance. It is an especially useful rejuvenating remedy for convalescence, as it combats weakness and exhaustion. An immune strengthener, Siberian ginseng helps reduce susceptibility to infection. The plant may also provide support during radiation therapy and benefit those with arteriosclerosis and low blood pressure.



Disclaimer: Herbal remedies come in many different forms and potencies. Though they can help promote wellness and treat common ailments, they should never be considered a replacement for proper medical care. If you would like to explore herbal remedies and how they can enhance your life, contact a qualified herbalist or holistic health practitioner and always check with your physician before using them.