As we begin to enjoy the warmer and sunnier weather many of us look forward to gardening. Some relatively easy plants to grow are herbs. For centuries herbs have provided flavor and aroma to foods and have been used for their medicinal properties.

Herbs have been used since prehistoric times. Romans used dill to clean the air; during the 5th Century Hippocrates listed about 400 herbs that were in common use; and during the Middle Ages herbs were used as a food preservative.

This issue of *Nutrition Nibbles* discusses herbal supplements. All articles, except Kids Corner and Recipe Box, have been written by Dr. Shawn Palmer. Shawn is a Naturopathic physician based in Laramie, WY. He received a BA in Chemistry from The Colorado College (Colorado Springs, CO), a MS in Physical Chemistry from UW and graduated from the National College of Naturopathic Medicine (Portland, Oregon). Shawn has been practicing in Laramie since 2006. In addition to his private practice Shawn teaches an Intro to Homeopathy class through UW Enrichment. I asked Shawn to write this issue given his expertise in this area. The supplements discussed were chosen because they are commonly used; not to suggest you add them to your daily routine.

As stated earlier, before adding any type of supplement (vitamin, mineral or herbal) you should talk with your health care provider and pharmacist. If you have questions regarding the content presented, please contact me (307-328-2647 or sfranci4@uwyo.edu).

Eat Well!

Sarah L. Francis, PhD, MHS, RD
Extension Nutrition and Food Safety Educator

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Super Size Me Supplements
How should I use a supplement?

A common question people have is how much of a supplement should you take? There are different schools of thought on the best approach to supplements. These are listed below.

**Mega-Dose School**
This school of thought believes more is better, for example taking 5 grams or more of vitamin C to stop a cold or flu. This approach is sometimes appropriate for *very* short periods for people who are already sick and/or to prevent an illness.

**Small-Dose School**
This school of thought likes much smaller doses. The idea is that you are already getting most of your vitamins or minerals from a good diet, and so you take a little extra, just to be sure. This is like topping off the gas tank when you refuel a vehicle.

I prefer the smaller dose approach for those using supplements long term. With this approach it is important to follow a healthy diet —then just add about an extra half of the daily value (DV as noted on supplement containers) for that supplement. This lower dose can be easier on the body in the long run when compared to using mega doses.

*Unless you are sick, you probably don’t need to be on more than 2-3 supplements at a time.*

If you find you are taking more than that, then you should look at your diet, make appropriate changes, and cut out the supplements that are unnecessary. It is generally better to get vital nutrients from a balanced well-rounded diet than to depend on a pantry of supplements.

**SUGGESTIONS**
1) Give your body a vacation from supplements 2-3 times a year.

2) Try not to take any one herb for more than a year to vary your regimen a little bit.
We like to think that everything that is “natural” is safe. Unfortunately that is not always so. Herbs and some supplements range between being very safe to being similar to drugs, with dangerous side effects and interactions. Think of it this way, celery found in the grocery store is natural, safe, and may help with some conditions like high blood pressure. On the other hand, snake venom has medical uses and is natural, but it will likely come back to "bite you" if you don’t know what you are doing.

In general most of what you find in health food stores tend to be safe, or at least as safe as over the counter medication. However, it is still wise to review with your doctor the herbs and other supplements you are taking to make sure everything is okay.

**Medications and Alternative Medicines**

Just as drugs can interact with other drugs, herbs can also interact with drugs (or other herbs), sometimes with dangerous consequences. Ask yourself these questions when using herbs.

- **Does my supplement do the same thing as my medication?** If so, then there could be an interaction. For example, if you are taking cholesterol lowering medication, avoid also taking red rice yeast to lower cholesterol, because your cholesterol might become too low.

- **Does my herb/supplement do the opposite thing my medication does?** If so this might also cause a problem.

- **Am I on a medication that by itself could be dangerous and so needs to be carefully controlled?** If so, then you will need to talk with a health professional before adding any herbs or supplements. *One of the most common medications with this problem are blood thinning medications which need to be tightly controlled.* If a drug or supplement makes a small change it could become a big deal. As a side note, I am also very cautious of drugs that help with mood, since these drugs have potentially lethal interactions with a few supplements and herbs. Always check with your doctor before adding herbs and supplements to your daily routine.
Garlic

If you have watched enough horror movies, you will know the importance of garlic in Transylvania. However, garlic fights off more than just vampires. Garlic is actually an alternative treatment for fungus and yeast. Tory Hudson, the author of the Encyclopedia of Women’s Natural Health recommends garlic to treat candidal (yeast) infections. It also has some mild anti-bacterial and anti-viral properties. In the earlier times, people treated wounds with garlic to prevent infections.

Other Possible Uses

Traditional cough syrups

Treats middle ear infections

Treats stomach problems due to a virus or bacteria.

May prevent heart disease by lowering cholesterol and triglyceride levels and blood pressure.

I have seen a few patients lower their cholesterol using only garlic capsules.

May reduce risk of intestinal cancer.

Cooking does reduce garlic’s health benefits, so raw garlic is better. If the thought of eating raw garlic is a bit much, then try garlic pills.

The Scoop on Heavy Metals and Supplements

A new concern about supplement and herb safety this year is contamination with heavy metals (e.g. arsenic). Heavy metals are a concern because too much in our blood can cause serious health complications. There are two main places to watch out for this:

Supplements from China- These may contain heavy metals. This may be hard to know since a company can reprocess and re-label the supplement so it looks like it came from the U.S.

Aryvedic Medicine Tradition- This is a form of medicine from India. A few of these supplements purposely contain heavy metals like arsenic and mercury. This can be true even for U.S. sources.

Always ask if the supplement has been tested to be free of heavy metals.
Dear Nutrition Nibbles Reader,

This will be the last issue of Nutrition Nibbles as I am resigning as the Nutrition and Food Safety Extension Educator for Carbon and Albany counties August 3, 2009. I have accepted a position as Assistant Professor in Food Science and Human Nutrition at Iowa State University. In this role I will be developing statewide nutrition education programs and conducting nutrition education research for their Extension Service.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the past couple of years providing nutrition and food safety programming based on your needs and preferences, writing news articles and creating Nutrition Nibbles. As an Educator my goal is to present nutrition information in a way that speaks to people and helps them adopt healthier lifestyle practices. Thank you to those who have written letters and emails, completed surveys and/or called letting me know that this goal was met.

The very first Nutrition Nibbles included this quote: “To eat is a necessity; to eat intelligently is an art.” (La Rochefoucauld). This spoke to me as an educator and I hope that through my nutrition and food safety programs and materials you have gained the skills needed to continue practicing the art of eating intelligently.

Thank you again for being so open and receptive to learning how through healthy eating you can achieve better health.

Eat Well!

Sarah L. Francis, PhD, MHS, RD
REFERENCES

TRADITIONAL USES OF HERBS


MODERN SOURCES FOR HERBAL MEDICINE


RECOMMENDED HERBAL MEDICINE TEXT FOR THE PUBLIC
Herbal Medicine From the Heart of the Earth by Sharol Tilgner
Fish oils are one of the few supplements I recommend taking on a long term basis. Fish oils are very safe and are usually fine to take with most medications. The main medication to be cautious about is blood thinning medication because fish oils can thin the blood a little bit.

**Possible Benefits**
- Decrease inflammation in the body
  
  *(Research now suggests that most major chronic diseases are linked to inflammation)*
- Protect against heart disease
- Decrease the risk of Alzheimer’s
- Provide some protection against bone loss
- Improve your mood

**CAUTION**

If you need surgery, tell your doctor you are taking fish oil because it can thin your blood, which could lead to excess bleeding.

*Do not take fish oil supplements if you are pregnant because it is high in Vitamin A. High Vitamin A levels have been linked to birth defects.*

**Stinging Nettle**

This perennial plant, as its name suggests, can sting if you touch it. Luckily, the stinging nettle found in the store won’t sting your mouth! It is a very safe, food-like herb that is used to improve overall health.

**May Help:**
- Decrease the symptoms of allergies during the hay fever season. *You should take this before the allergy season starts to get the most benefit.*
- Lessen symptoms related to an enlarged prostate.
- Ease the pain and discomfort of arthritis.
- Treat childhood eczema.
- Stop bleeding because it is high in Vitamin K, which helps our blood clot. *If you take blood thinners you should avoid using stinging nettle.*
- Keep blood sugar levels within a normal range.

**NOTE:**

For some of these conditions it is necessary to take this herb for several months before you see the maximum benefit.
Echinacea is a popular herbal cold and flu remedy. There is still debate in current research as to whether Echinacea really helps to stop colds and the flu. You can find research that both supports its use and research that suggests that it isn’t effective. From what I have seen in my practice, Echinacea can help stop an illness if you take relatively high doses the moment you feel sick. As with all cold and flu treatments, once the illness has settled in, it is very hard to shake regardless of the medicine or herb you use. Echinacea has other uses that are not as well known and are listed below.

Other Potential Uses of Echinacea

Prevents infections from spreading or becoming worse
Treats snake and insect bites as well as stings
(\textit{So keep some handy when you are doing outdoor activities})
Used as a topical treatment for poison ivy rashes
Used internally and externally for boils, abscesses, and some kinds of skin ulcers (deep skin sores)

\textit{Echinacea has a great safety record, although a few people have had allergic reactions to it.}

\textbf{RECIPE BOX: Tossed Herb Salad with Vinaigrette Salad Dressing}

I recently attended a conference co-taught by the Culinary Institute of America, which is the leading culinary school in the country. During one of the sessions a chef gave us a tip on how to ”spice” up a salad. She told us to put fresh herbs in with the lettuce leaves. This was a delicious addition. Another tip was to use a light vinaigrette that provides a hint of flavor without overwhelming the taste of the salad itself. Below is a recipe for tossed herb salad with a delicious garlic vinaigrette.

\textbf{Ingredients:}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Mixed Spring Green Salad
  \item Basil Leaves, fresh
  \item 1/2 cup Water, or more if needed
  \item 1/4 tsp Honey
  \item 1/2 tsp Black Pepper
  \item Mint Leaves, fresh
  \item 1 bulb Garlic, separated into cloves, peeled
  \item 1 Tbsp Red Wine Vinegar
  \item 2 Tbsp Virgin Olive Oil
\end{itemize}

\textbf{Salad:}

Clean the salad and herbs with cold water. Pat dry with a paper towel. In a large bowl mix the salad and herbs together, breaking the leaves into bite-size pieces if needed.

\textbf{Dressing:}

Place garlic cloves into small sauce pan and pour in enough water to cover them. Bring water to boil, then reduce heat and simmer until garlic is tender (about 15 minutes). Reduce liquid to 2 tablespoons and increase heat for 3 minutes. Pour contents into small sieve over bowl. With wooden spoon, mash garlic through sieve. Whisk vinegar into garlic mixture, then mix in oil, honey, and seasoning. Pour over salad and toss until leaves are well-coated.

Source: \textit{Keep the Beat, Heart Healthy Recipes from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute}
St. John’s Wort gained popularity as a way to treat mild to moderate depression and anxiety. This is a relatively new use for the herb. Originally, St. John’s Wort was used to help with bruises and some kinds of nerve pain. So when someone got a little banged up, this was one of the herbs people turned to and still use.

St. John’s Wort has also traditionally been used in helping with pain from shingles. This is an application I have seen work very well for some patients.

**CAUTION**
St. John’s Wort interacts with many medications, so ALWAYS check with your doctor before taking St. John’s Wort. Drug interactions are particularly a concern when you combine St. John’s Wort with mood altering medications—often a dangerous combination.

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**Diabetes and Herbal Supplements**

*The most important treatment for any person with diabetes is to eat a healthy diet of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and lean protein while controlling the intake of total carbohydrates.*

Once you are able to control your blood sugar levels through lifestyle changes you and your health care provider might consider adding supplements including: bilberry (similar to a blueberry), cinnamon, alpha lipoic acid, Vitamin B12, and inositol.

**Bilberry may:**
Lower blood sugar.
Keep blood vessels and arteries healthier which can prevent heart and circulation problems. This is particularly good because people with diabetes have a higher risk of heart disease.

**Cinnamon may:**
Lower blood sugar.
Help improve digestion and so may help prevent stomach problems due to diabetes.

**Alpha Lipoic Acid and Vitamin B12 may:**
Help reverse nerve problems caused by high blood sugar levels. I sometimes have patient’s take these two supplements to help prevent nerve issues.

**Inositol (found in beans) may:**
Help improve blood sugar control.
Currently being tested as a treatment for nerve pain associated with diabetes.

Since many of these treatments do affect blood sugar, make sure you are checking your blood sugar so it stays in a safe range and doesn’t go too low.
Growing an Herb Garden

**Materials**
- Assorted herb seeds
- Small clay flower pots
- Potting soil
- Popsicle sticks

**Directions**
1. Fill the pots three-fourths full with potting soil.
2. Pour water on top to moisten the soil.
3. Sprinkle five or six seeds on top of the soil and lightly cover with more potting soil.
4. Label popsicle sticks with the name of the herb and insert sticks in the appropriate pots.
5. Place pots on a window ledge.
6. They will not take long to start growing.
7. Keep the soil moist.
8. After the herbs are a few inches high, they can be snipped and added to food dishes.
9. Later, the herb plants can be moved to the garden.
10. Good herbs to include are lemon balm, mint, parsley, chives, thyme, basil, and scented geraniums.

*Note: If popsicle sticks are not available, cut narrow strips from a plastic milk carton. Make pointed ends and label with a marker.*

What Do Your Pizza Herbs Mean?

**Basil:** Love or Hate

**Oregano:** Joy of the mountain

**Thyme:** Activity, Bravery

**Rosemary:** Rememberance

Kitchen Cupboard

**Safety Tips:**
- Wash fresh herbs in water to remove dirt and germs!
- When drying herbs in the oven, be sure to wear oven mitts to prevent getting burned.
- When using a mortar and pestle place it on a kitchen towel to prevent it from sliding away from you.

**Cooking Terms**
- **Dry**—To remove moisture. Plants, including herbs, have water inside. Drying removes the water so that they can be stored longer. It takes less dry herbs in a recipe than it does fresh herbs.
- **Crush**—To break a food into tiny pieces. Crushing herbs can be done with a rolling pin or mortar and pestle.

**Kitchen Utensils**
- **Mortar and Pestle**—The mortar is a small smooth bowl. The pestle is a handle that is used to crush the food. The grinding surface should be a little rough to stop the food from sliding away from the pestle.
- **Cheesecloth**—A loosely woven cotton cloth that is often used in cheese making. It can also be used to dry herbs.
**Herb and Spices Word Search Game**

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<td>TARRAGON</td>
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**What is a pirate's favorite herb?**

*Parsley*

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**Potato Salad**

A popular summer dish is potato salad. This recipe uses fresh herbs to make it extra tasty! Ask an adult to help you make this dish for your next cookout!

**Ingredients:**

- 8-10 Small Potatoes, cut into cubes
- 1/2 cup Green Onions, chopped
- 1/2 cup Low-fat Mayonnaise
- 2 teaspoons Dijon Mustard
- 1 tablespoon Fresh Mint, chopped*
- 1 tablespoon Fresh Parsley, chopped*
- 1 tablespoon Fresh Chives, chopped*
- Salt and Pepper to taste

**Directions:**

1. Place the potatoes in a saucepan. Cover with water. Add 2 teaspoons of salt. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes or until a fork can pierce the potato. Do not over cook.

2. Drain the potatoes in a colander and place in a salad bowl. Let cool for 15 minutes.

3. In a small bowl, combine the mayonnaise, mustard, mint, parsley, chives, salt and pepper. Stir.

4. Spoon the mayonnaise mixture over the potatoes. Toss gently. Serve hot or chill in the refrigerator and serve cold.

*An easy way to chop herbs is to roll the leaves up in a ball. Then cut the herbs with a sharp knife. Be sure to ask an adult to help you!
CENT$IBLE NUTRITION PROGRAM

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2. Cookbook
3. Nutrition and cooking lessons adapted to your needs.

The Cent$ible Nutrition Program empowers individuals and families to select foods that fit within their budget, and are nutritionally sound choices.

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