



Information sheet: Herbal Medicine

What is Herbal Medicine?

Herbal medicine (phytotherapy) is the practice of using plant material for food, medicine and health promotion, and is the oldest form of healing. The actions of the herb are considered in terms of their unique chemical components. It is this specific combination of different chemical components within the herb which is directly responsible for the actions of that herb on the body. There are a number of different types of herbal medicine practised in the UK including Western, Chinese, Ayurvedic and Tibetan. Each of these is voluntarily regulated by different practitioner associations such as the CPP, URHP, RCHM, BATTM, NIMH and AMH.

What does the therapy do?

Herbal medicine is used to treat both the symptoms and underlying causes of different disease states, by aiding the body's fundamental self-healing response and helping to restore its normal equilibrium (homeostasis).

Is there an evidence base?

There is a large body of published research (including randomised clinical trials) that supports the use of various herbal medicines for a range of minor, self-limiting conditions

including:

- o back pain
- o depression
- o functional dyspepsia
- o irritable bowel syndrome
- o migraine
- o osteoarthritis
- o premenstrual syndrome
- o colds and 'flu'-like illnesses

Are there any safety concerns?

Herbal medicines can directly interact with some prescription medications in a negative way, so care must be taken before taking them. Some herbs can also be contraindicated for certain health conditions. THR licensed herbal medicines are available to buy over the counter from pharmacies and contain a patient information leaflet that will outline any potential interactions or contraindications – look for the THR logo on the product label (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/herbal-medicines-granted-a-traditional-herbal-registration-thr>).

If in any doubt, it is always worthwhile seeking a suitably qualified medical herbalist for a consultation before taking a herbal medicine. Herbalists are highly trained to recognise potential risks and will be able to prescribe a safe, alternative herbal medicine product if necessary.

What are the required standards of training?

A BSc (Hons) degree qualification or equivalent is needed to belong to a herbal medicine practitioner association.

Is Herbal Medicine under any regulatory process?

Following the findings of the Walker Report published in March 2015, Her Majesty's Government has regrettably decided not to proceed with the regulation of herbal medicine practitioners by the Health and Care Professions Council.

For more information please see:

<https://bhma.info/legislation-on-herbal-medicines/>



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How do I find a medical herbalist (phytotherapist)?

There are currently a wide range of professional bodies in the UK who are responsible for voluntarily regulating herbal medicine practitioners. A list of suitably qualified practitioners can be found on their websites eg

<https://thecpp.uk/find-your-local-herbalist/>

<https://rchm.co.uk/find-a-practitioner>

https://www.urhp.com/find_herbalist.php

<https://nimh.org.uk/find-a-herbalist/>