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## **ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF VARIOUS HERBAL PRODUCT FORMS & HOW THEY ARE CREATED**

### **Grazing:**

#### Advantages:

- Free in your backyard or forest.
- Very fresh and vibrant.

#### Disadvantages:

- You have to go to the herb, identify the herb, and the herb has to be in season.

### **PREPARED PRODUCTS**

#### Advantages:

- Can be stored and used at a later date

#### Disadvantages:

- Never as fresh as grazing

### **Teas:**

#### Advantages:

- Inexpensive
- Easy to make
- Imposes a ceremonial process and rest time for individuals.
- Allows the person to take a larger part in their healing process. - Self-empowering.

#### Disadvantages:

- Dry herb only last for one year - roots and seeds may last a little longer.
- They are bulky.
- Takes time to make them.
- Teas have to be stored in the refrigerator and can only store for 48 hours.
- If they taste bad, there is a lot to drink.
- Some herbs will not extract well. An example would be resinous herbs.

### **Liquid extracts:**

#### Advantages:

- Alcohol is a great extracting medium.
- Long shelf life.
- Easy digestion and assimilation

#### Disadvantages:

- Tastes bad
- Not suitable for alcoholics.
- Not suitable for water soluble constituents such as polysaccharides.

**Elixirs:**Advantages:

- Taste great.
- Kids will take them.
- Easy digestion and assimilation
- Convenient packaging.

Disadvantages:

- If made with honey they should not be given to children under 1 year of age d/t botulism.
- Not suitable for alcoholics.

**Glycerites:**Advantages:

- Taste great.
- Kids will take them.
- Convenient packaging.

Disadvantages:

- Shelf life short.
- Too much glycerin can irritate digestion
- May not extract the full spectrum that is available in liquid extracts.
  - Many products extracted in chemicals and then distilled, This subjects the product to high temperatures for long periods.
  - If glycerin is used for extraction it may not extract as much as alcohol. Need research on comparison. Physicians comments are, "They work."

**Capsules:**Advantages:

- Easy to carry and use for most adults.
- Patient compliance better when they don't have to taste herbs.

Disadvantages:

- Hard for kids to consume.
- Hard for elders to consume.
- May have fillers in the capsule.
- Shelf life short.

**Tablets:**Advantages:

- Easy to carry and use for most adults.

Disadvantages:

- Hard for kids to consume.
- Hard for elders to consume.
- Have binders – non herb material that may be something you don't want to consume.
- Dissolution time may be a problem.
- May be harder to digest for individuals with compromised digestion.
- Shelf life short.

**Essential oils:**

Advantages:

- Very concentrated, makes it easy to carry small amounts and very little is necessary for desired effect.

Disadvantages:

- Can be abused and dangerous if too much is used.

**Salves:**

Advantages:

- Nice vehicle for external use on the skin.
- Salves are easier to apply than oils in many cases.

Disadvantages:

- Salves can destroy the head of ultrasound machines.
- Heat (even for one day in a hot car in the summer) can destroy the product quickly.

**Oils:**

Advantages:

- Nice vehicle for external use on the skin.
- Can use warm oil enemas.

Disadvantages:

- Salves are easier to apply than oils in many cases.
- Oils can destroy the head of ultrasound machines.
- Heat (even for one day in a hot car in the summer) can destroy the product quickly

**Solid extracts:**

Advantages:

- Some constituents are more concentrated.
- Fruits taste good in this form (Hawthorne, Rose hips)

Disadvantages:

- Some constituents are lost d/t extensive periods of heating.
- If it is a bad tasting herb, the bad taste will be intensified.
- Shelf life short, like glycerites.
- Make sure the solid extract was extracted with something you would want to consume.
- Some solid extracts in a base of propylene glycol.
- Some solid extracts have honey in them, don't give honey to infants under 1 year.

**Suppositories:**

Advantages:

- Application allows direct herb contact with mucous membranes.

Disadvantages:

- Vaginal suppositories often stain clothing, must wear pad and old underwear.
- Need to be kept cool or the product melts. Should be kept under 85 degrees F.

**Douches and enemas:**

Advantages:

- Application allows direct herb contact with mucous membranes.

Disadvantages:

- Requires effort on the users part as there are very few premade herbal douches and enemas.

## **THE CHOICE OF STANDARDIZED OR WHOLE PLANT PRODUCTS**

I strongly believe in and prefer whole plant extracts. I want plant extracts in their freshest, whole, form possible, but I intend to describe those situations where standardized plant extracts are useful and even valuable.

- Standardization is in its infancy. There are many kinks to be worked out.  
Valerian (essential oils, Valepotriates, Valerenic acid)  
Hypericum (hypericine, hyperforin and bioflavones)  
Testing for constituents (various tests for constituents and they can not be compared with each other, Disagreement as to what is being tested i.e.) valerenic acid)
- The constituent being tested may be active but is it the most active ingredient, are there other active ingredients, are other constituents necessary for full effect. I believe there is an undeniable loss when the rest of the herb is discarded
- Wholism/reductionism: Wholism is represented by the whole herb where the integrity of the plant is preserved. Reductionism is represented by the standardized product the plant has been reduced to a single constituent or a few chosen constituents.
- Active constituents in a base of whole herb: Good if whole herb is a vital herb and usually they are not due to cost and lack of knowledge or concern on part of manufacturer.
- Plants have an innate vitality to them that is maintained when they are grown, harvested and extracted with attention to preserving as many innate aspects of their being as possible. The processing in standardized products does not allow for that.
- Using whole herb extracts is similar to eating whole foods. I believe whole foods are a preferred mode of nutrition and life sustenance. The same goes for the use of whole herbs. They are a preferred mode of sustaining health.
- Whole herbs support the vital force of the human being or animal that consumes the herb. They support health and maintain quality of life. They are used in naturopathic health care to treat the individual as opposed to treating a disease. The standardized product has been reduced to a single chemical or group of chemicals and can no longer support the vital force. It is limited to acting on a chemical or pharmaceutical level. As a pharmaceutical it fits more into the allopathic rather than naturopathic model of medicine. Therefore it is often used to treat illness rather than treat the individual.

- Using plants in the freshest, most vital form possible is life enhancing for the entire planet. The less we process and the more we use raw whole foods and herbs, the healthier the planet and we both are. The processing of standardized products involves chemicals and waste. There is generally a lack of concern for the environment.

The debate rages in the media and advertising, and “standardized” has become the buzzword for something supposedly superior. According to whom? The major forces behind standardization have been pharmaceutical companies and very large companies who have recently come into the herbal marketplace.

It is easy to manipulate inferior quality plants in a laboratory and come up with a product that reaches certain standards of a single chemical constituent. However, it is often shown that today’s favored constituent for standardization is proven not to be the important constituent tomorrow. What about the other constituents in the plant? Often they no longer exist in the product. Sometimes cornstarch or cellulose is used as a filler to fill the rest of the capsule. Sometimes inferior quality herb is used to fill the capsule. All the company is usually concerned about is that the standardized ingredient is there and in the amounts they claim. (Although no one is checking on this.) What about the energetic quality of the plant itself?

There are a few examples where standardization has yielded some truly beneficial results. An example is Silymarin, a complex of flavonolignans, that mostly consists of silybin = silibinin, silychristin and silydianin in Milk thistle. This standardized product has been used successfully in oral and injectable form to treat (I still prefer the whole seed that I powder as needed and use in powder form.) Amanita mushroom poisoning and other health conditions. Another standardized herb with a successful history is Ginkgo biloba where the principal constituents found to have appreciable medicinal effects are ginkgolide A, B, C and bilobalide.

In the pharmaceutical industries quest to sell all herb as standardized products, they are putting standardized product on the market before it is thoroughly tested by research or time for its efficacy.

Most standardized products get very close to being the “drugs” that herbal users have tried to get away from in recent years. It is possible some of the standardized herbs will take the place of drugs in the future.

Everything in existence has a time and place. Both crude herbs and “valid” standardized herbs are beneficial. They are both effective when used appropriately. My first choice is to use raw herbs. Just as the best way to eat a carrot is to eat a freshly harvested carrot, the best way to consume an herb, is to go out and graze. Although I have eaten canned, frozen and freeze dried carrots, they are not my first choice at a meal.

You can’t get any fresher or higher quality than harvesting the plant yourself. Many individuals who are sick are too ill or lack the time to harvest their own herbs. They may not even have the energy to make teas. The next resource is the use of liquid extracts or

capsules. I often use liquid extracts because they are convenient for people, easy to assimilate and I get desired results with them.

I have seen results with as much as two drops of unstandardized tincture or a few sips of tea. Giving a single drop of tincture is contrary to the idea of standardizing an herb to a particular constituent for an increase in activity. The ability of whole plants or whole plant extracts to effect the human body in very low doses is due to the energetic nature of the herb. The principles are similar to homeopathic principles. To get results with small doses of herb, you need to start with high quality herbs and be very specific in your treatment. Begin with a comprehensive understanding of the person you are treating. Next, you need to have a fundamental and extensive understanding of herbal medicine. You need to know how herbs effect individuals on the physical level as well as the spiritual level, emotional level, mental level etc. By becoming intimate with both your patient and the herbs you use, the two of them can be perfectly matched together. The better you are at making a match, the more you can rely on the energetic qualities of the plant.

Some patients respond more readily to small doses of herbs, while others need a physiological dose of a particular herb. This may be what is necessary for the particular individual using the herb or it may be due to a lack of knowledge on the prescribers part. All situations need to be analyzed on their own individual circumstances.

Crude products are effective in small amounts if the raw herb or crude product has maintained its energetic quality. Harvesting and growing techniques are as important as manufacturing techniques. Growing techniques, harvesting and processing can damage the energetic quality if the plants are exposed to harsh environments or processing with chemicals or excessive heat. If the plant is processed with respect for what it needs to maintain its integrity, the plant will provide the user with attributes beyond those explainable on paper.

It is important to remember to respect the plants and the earth we are harvesting from. By giving the plants their due respect we can receive the energetic gifts they have to offer.

Standardized products can be useful when you are interested in a chemical effect. They are generally used allopathically to treat a disease condition (as opposed to a person) that the constituent is known to eradicate. They are as much drug-like as they are herb-like. They can also be helpful when treating drug side effects.

Sometimes the most effective method of treatment in a situation is purely a physical interaction. In those cases I often give the individual larger amounts of crude herbs. Giving a standardized extract would be similar, but the person would not benefit from the activity of the whole plant. Occasionally standardized products are called for and even less occasionally drugs are called for.

***An inferior extract made from mediocre plants will yield mediocre results. A superior extract made from vibrant, life-supporting plants will yield superb results!***

