

Reap the benefits of herbal supplements

Herbs have been used to promote good health in different parts of the world for thousands of years.

Even today, many herbal products are widely used and studied for the health benefits they deliver. Michelle W. Book, in-house holistic nutritionist at the Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA), encourages Canadians to explore the aisles at their local natural health retailer and speak with a health-care practitioner to discuss how herbal supplements can contribute to our overall wellbeing.

What are the benefits? Some herbal supplements can contribute to overall good health, like milk-thistle extract with its antioxidant properties. Others have been shown to address more specific health concerns, like huperzia serrata extract's ability to protect neurons, an important factor when it comes to neuro-degenerative conditions like

dementia or Alzheimer's. Hawthorn extract can improve cardiovascular function in patients with chronic heart failure.

A major benefit of herbal supplements is that many of them will provide simultaneous benefits to different systems in our body, says Book. For example, ginger root extract can help with nausea and an upset stomach, but can also help to reduce inflammatory chemicals in the body.

Are they safe? Herbal products in Canada are regulated as natural health products under the Natural Health Products Regulations. This means that each product must carry an eight-digit Natural Product Number (NPN) on its label. Look for the NPN when choosing these products, including when shopping online, to be confident of their safety, efficacy and quality.

Canada's regulatory environment for natural health products is one of the best in the world, says Book. Every product is pre-approved before being made available for sale.

Always follow the instructions on the product's label, including dosage and possible interactions with medications you may be taking. And be sure to consult your health-care practitioner before making any changes to your health regimen.

Where can I get them? Visiting your local natural health retailer is a great way to explore herbal supplements. Many of these stores will also have a wide selection of fresh produce and other products to contribute to your wellbeing.

Find a CHFA Member natural health retailer near you by visiting chfa.ca and using the Find-A-Retailer tool.

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