Where Do Medicines Come From?



Sometimes laughter is the best medicine!

Sharon Parsons

Nelson Literacy Directions

Where Do MEDICINES Come From?

For teachers' inspection ONLY



Dear Reader

The well-known saying, "laughter is the best medicine" is one that many people would identify with. We all feel better when we're laughing and having fun. In this book, you'll read about research confirming that laughter really is the best medicine. In Chapter 2, find out about an amazing organisation in Texas, the USA, that takes patients' dogs on hospital visits. Also, the Clown Doctors show how regular doses of laughter and fun in hospitals brighten up the days of patients.

> "WHEN SICK PEOPLE SEE THEIR OWN DOG OR CAT, THEIR FACES LIGHT UP, THE PAIN IS GONE AND THE SMILES ARE BRIGHT."
>
> DONNA DISHMAN, PAWS

You'll find out about where some well-known medicines, such as aspirin and penicillin, come from. We also feature some observant and clever scientists who have discovered medicines that have restored health to many millions of people.

I hope you enjoy the book.

Sharon Parsons

My sincere thanks to the following people for their time, information, images and enthusiasm for this book:

Donna Dishman, PAWS Houston, Texas, USA

Clown Doctors and The Humour Foundation, Sydney, Australia

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1 Ancient Medicines



papyrus plants growing in the Nile River, Egypt, Africa

At the University of Leipzig, in Germany, there is an ancient Egyptian papyrus scroll called the "Ebers Papyrus". Written 3 500 years ago on the dried pulp of the papyrus reeds that lined the Nile River, the Ebers Papyrus is one of the earliest records of traditional medicines in the world.

Fully unrolled, the scroll is about 20 metres long. It contains chapters on many medical conditions, including intestinal disease, diseases caused by parasites, eye and skin problems, dental conditions and burns.

The scroll shows that the ancient Egyptians used a number of plants and other natural substances to prevent and treat illnesses and to maintain wellbeing. Among the 700 formulas and remedies outlined in the scroll are: a mixture of herbs that can be warmed on hot bricks to help alleviate the symptoms of asthma, a recipe for preparing clover, dates and oils to ease upset stomachs, and one section even prescribes half an onion mixed with the froth of fermented barley as a reliable remedy against death!



People all around the world have been using medicines in many forms for thousands of years.

Ancient India

In India, around 2 500 years ago, early writings on medicines appeared and were followed by the first encyclopedias about Ayurveda: the science of traditional Hindu medicine. Ayurveda, which is still practised today, uses hundreds of plant-based medicines, including spices such as cinnamon and cardamom, to cleanse the body.



cinnamon sticks



green cardamom pods (seeds)

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Ancient China

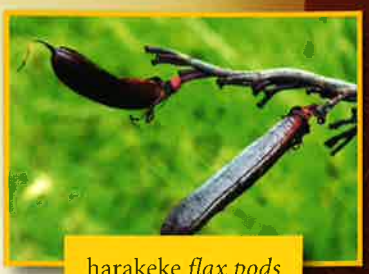


a ginseng root

In China, traditional medicines based largely on plants have been used for over 2 500 years. Chinese herbalists believe that illnesses are caused by an imbalance in one or more physical or spiritual influences within the body. To correct these imbalances, the Chinese combine herbs, minerals and animal parts to make natural medicines. Over 100 000 herbal remedies are listed in ancient Chinese medical writings. One of the most commonly used plants in Chinese medicine is the dried or fresh root of the ginseng plant.



Indigenous Cultures



harakeke *flax pods from New Zealand*

Most indigenous cultures in Africa, North America, South America, the Pacific Islands and Australia developed their own systems of traditional medicine as well.

In New Zealand, traditional Māori medicines, or *rongoa*, were based around native plants such as *koromiko* (used for ulcers, sores, headaches, diarrhoea and dysentery), *harakeke* (used to disinfect and heal skin wounds and treat some stomach complaints) and *puriri* (for sore throats, backaches and muscle sprains).

The rainforests around the Amazon River in South America contain millions of species of plants, many of which have been used for years for medicinal purposes by the local indigenous people. Plants such as cashews, peppers, cacao beans and papaya are still commonly used. Nowadays, there is growing interest in traditional South American medicine, as the Amazon is an immensely biodiverse region. Based on the success of plant-based traditional medicines in different cultures around the world, there is much hope that many of the plants in the Amazon region could provide cures or treatments for many illnesses.



the Amazon River at Amazonia, Brazil, South America