

A detailed view of a herb shop counter. In the foreground, there are several glass jars and bottles containing dried herbs and oils. A large glass jar on the right is labeled 'COSTE DE TULIAR' and contains cinnamon sticks. In the center, there are three small glass bottles labeled 'FOREST' and 'RELAX'. To the left, a glass jar is labeled 'SCHOTT DURAN 600 ml'. In the background, there are more jars and bottles on a shelf. The overall scene is well-lit and organized.

New to Herbal Remedies? 7 Questions to Ask

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New to Herbal Remedies?

Are you new to using herbal remedies? You are not alone. As a health advocate, I consult with hundreds of clients every year about their use of herbal or traditional medicines. Many are seeking a beneficial natural alternative to a pharmaceutical medication. The reason? Commonly, it is to get unhooked from expensive prescription drugs and their numerous side effects.

I have learned that many people simply do not understand the use and benefits of herbal remedies — expressing uncertainty as to how they work and if they are safe. As a health educator, I try to help a person understand how plant remedies basically work: **as unique catalysts for the body's natural chemistry and immune system to aid health restoration in all three phases of healing: Inflammation, Repair, and Remodeling.**

Here are seven common questions often asked by newbies to herbal remedies. The answers are representative of common knowledge in herbalism and medicine.

1. Are herbal remedies safe?
2. What forms of herbal remedies are most effective and safe?
3. Do herbal remedies have side effects?
4. Will herbal remedies interfere with prescription medication?
5. How long can an herbal remedy be taken?
6. How do I know if an herbal remedy is effective?
7. How can I trust I am using a safely prepared herbal remedy?



Are herbal remedies safe?



Herbal medicine has been the most used form of self-care worldwide for thousands of years. However, remedies are not miracle cures or magic bullets. Science shows, instead, that the chemical composition (phytonutrients) of plants acts as a catalyst to stimulate an immune response in the body. This immune response primarily focuses on symptom, cause, and health restoration within the three phases of healing (inflammation, repair, and remodeling).

When properly prepared, the dosage amounts recommended for a remedy are generally very safe. These dosage amounts are based according to herbal pharmacopeia standards created after hundreds of years of study and observation. However, one should be aware of drug interaction effects if using herbal remedies along with prescription drugs.

TIP: It is always advisable to consult with a knowledgeable health practitioner, herbalist, naturopath, and the like. The Internet may have qualified information, but there are many unqualified claims, too!

What forms of herbal remedies are most effective and safe?

Herbal medicines commonly come in different oral and topical forms that support their safety. Historically, the first herbal remedies were probably as simple as chewing on a leaf or stem of a plant. Experimentation revealed which plants were useful and which were poisonous. A ground poultice of leaves and fruit was also an early creation - the effectiveness of a topical salve. Finally, the discovery of alcohol as both an extracting agent and preserver led to widespread creation of oral tinctures that lasted over time.

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- **Tincture.** A [tincture](#) captures the therapeutic qualities (phytonutrients) of the plant. A professionally prepared tincture is made in a pre-determined ratio of plant parts to an extracting solution, like alcohol, glycerin, or water. This ratio may be described on a bottle as 5:1, 4:1, 3:1, etc. Among herbal remedies, a tincture is considered a very effective choice.
- **Concentrate.** Medicine today is emphasizing concentrated liquids or capsules. Concentrated powdered herbs in a capsule may have ratios far higher than those of a tincture. Consequently, caution is advised because the potency can be excessive, causing some side effects, especially when taken over an extended period.
- **Topical.** Herbs are commonly used in topical remedies and cosmetics. They are infused with oils and other natural ingredients to create a salve, lotion, or liniment-type spray. A good, deep penetrating topical remedy is worth its weight in gold. Here is a good [READ](#) about what makes a good salve.
- **Tea & Tonic.** Teas and tonics are almost synonymous with herbs! Be it cold or hot-fused with water or other herbs, herbal teas and tonics are very regenerating to the body. Here is a great [ARTICLE](#) about creating an herbal tea:



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TIP: Remember, herbs are whole-food plant concentrates that happen to have health restorative nutrients. They can work well individually. However, greater benefits often occur when complimentary herbs are combined to create a formula. The increased combined effect is called **synergy**. Salves and tinctures often work well because of the multiple infused herbs.

Additionally, using varying forms of remedies together is quite effective. A topical remedy like a deep penetrating salve can move deeply into tissue, while a supporting oral tincture can enter the affected injury quickly via the bloodstream. Both methods together support an enhanced response from the immune system to initiate or continue cellular repair. (Learn more about these complimentary methods [HERE](#))

Do herbal remedies have side effects?

Herbal preparations are effective when taken within dosage guidelines. Any side effects, like most medicines, are often individually unique and short-term, and/or related to the specific plants used, or to overdosing. However, common short-term side effects, if any, are like many medications: perhaps a little nausea, drowsiness, stomach upset, etc.

TIP: If experiencing a side effect from an herbal remedy (i.e., tincture), the most common strategy is to stop using for 1-2 days or so. Then, start again with a greatly reduced dosage, perhaps one-third to one-half. The tincture drops can also be placed in a cup of warm water, or a favorite herbal tea for sipping.



Will herbal remedies interfere with or replace prescription medication?

It is always advisable to consult with a health practitioner when using remedies with prescriptive medicines. Drug interaction of any kind is important to understand. Some herbs, for example, can be beneficial for heart health (regulating blood pressure), but may interfere with certain heart medications. If you are pregnant, have diabetes or a heart condition, understand the risks using any type of medication. People have reported being able to replace prescription medications with herbal remedies, but this is always a personal decision that should be made with the guidance of a health practitioner or advocate. **TIP:** Get needed support and reliable information from a health advocate you trust!

How long can an herbal remedy be taken?

Health restoration mostly takes place in three overlapping phases: **Inflammation, Repair, and Remodeling**. This may take place within days, weeks, months or longer, depending upon the injury. When starting the use of a remedy, observe these **3 Phases of Healing** and any effectiveness of your remedy within a timeframe.



I call the timeframe of initially using herbal remedies for an injury a **Healing Window** — about three months is key. This may seem like an arbitrary timeframe; however, science shows that within 90 days the body will have replaced most of its cells, and the replacing cells will need necessary nutrients that the herbal supplements may provide.

An herbal remedy, therefore, can be effective in a **Restoration** or **Maintenance** mode.

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The **Restoration Mode** is the general daily use during your Healing Window of time, and longer, if necessary. Restoration requires devotion to your healing protocol; many people fail to experience optimal healing because of irregular use of their remedies when their body needs them the most!

The **Maintenance Mode** is entered when you observe effective restoration and can now lower the regular use of herbal inputs. You may decide to lower your dose, or even use a remedy now-and-then for a little “tune-up” or if there is a flare-up.

TIP: When commencing herbs, treat your 3-month Healing Window as a needed time to really love yourself anew. Be regular, observant, patient, and dedicated toward healing. Always keep your remedies nearby or in your medicine cabinet.

How do I know if an herbal remedy is effective?

People have unique individual responses to medicines, no matter the form. Some people may experience immediate effects, while others may need days or longer. This is because of differences in the way the body is assimilating the nutrients in relation to diet, water intake, exercise, stress, or other medications.



Oftentimes, the effects of remedies are subtle and deep. These benefits require us to be especially observant without imagining. In any case, awareness of effectiveness is far more important than setting an artificial timeframe for healing that does not support restoration to the best of the body's ability.

Finally, just like their prescription drug counterparts, herbal medicines can be characterized by their **sedative** (sleep inducing), **vulnerary** (nerve calming), **demulcent** (mucilaginous), **tonic** (strengthening), **adaptogenic** (immune system support), or **diuretic** (laxative) qualities, to name a few. Understanding these qualities can help toward observing their effects as a remedy is taken over time.

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TIP: Healing takes focus, effort, and faith. Add a dose of knowledge and attitude and you're on your way! You will have also developed your sense of intuition about what works and what doesn't, when it works and how much makes it work for you. This is proactive self-care.

How can I trust I am using a safely prepared herbal remedy?

An herbal remedy in the form of a tincture is considered a dietary food supplement. Other remedy types (salve, lotion, etc.) are considered cosmetics. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and other agencies regulate each of these areas in the U.S. Ideally, the source (retailer, herbalist, and health store) has obtained their products from approved growers, manufacturing facilities, or distributor. However, numerous small home-based sellers may make very good remedies, but not follow specific FDA guidelines for labeling, manufacturing, or recordkeeping. So, consumers beware! Additionally, if herbal remedies are organic, there must also be certification. Here are some tips:

- The label of a remedy is important. Depending upon the remedy, it should have content and nutritional information, serving size, matrix ratio (if necessary), any cautionary and FDA disclaimer statement, manufacturer/distributor contact, and lot number (if required).
- Be cautious of exaggerated health claims for a remedy or ingredient.
- On the Internet, review the seller's website thoroughly to review any stated manufacturing process and FDA oversight of the facility or products.
- Buy from a retailer with whom you can trust and have a good discussion about herbal remedies. Online, reach out to the seller for further information about a product.
- Express caution if buying any raw herbs or remedies from Asia. Because of known corruption in farming practices, environmental pollution, and paperwork, ensure they are organic with certification.



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