

Basil Basics by James Geiger MD

1. Would you describe why people are having increased awareness of the healing powers of herbs?

The “why” is easy – everyone wants to feel happy and healthy and if something is proven to be safe and it works, then they are willing to try it. Consider plants and foods as medicinal.

Why or how we’ve rediscovered our natural, ancient methods of achieving those goals is a longer story.

Think of it this way, you and your doctor should really only have the first true goal in mind – prevention, aimed at keeping you well and healthy so you can live a long life.

We are living at the beginning of a very necessary revolution in personal wellness. Although in a way, it really is more of a common sense revolution. Realistically, I see it as more of a reawakening. We are now rediscovering, or relearning, many of the things we’ve either forgotten or dismissed for generations.

Today we are approaching wellness in a new way but with an age-old wisdom.

Chances are, your great grandmother may have dispensed daily doses of cod liver oil to her children to prevent everything from the common cold to heart disease. The numbers of various omega fish oils researchers and product developers are growing by leaps and bounds. We’re going back to our ancient, natural roots for health and disease prevention rather than waiting for a disease to strike.

Prevention, as we all know, should be a way of life.

Who could argue that it’s better to prevent a disease or a health issue, than to wait until you get sick to try and cure the problem? It simply made more sense to live a life of wellness in those days when doctors were even scarcer than healthcare plans.

A growing number of doctors and healthcare professionals worldwide, from among the most the prestigious medical communities have announced promising breakthroughs, acknowledging the health benefits and the natural healing values of nutritional foods as medicine. In fact, many people now recognize that these amazing natural discoveries, when combined with traditional medicine, are already drastically improving – essentially revolutionizing – the traditional family approach to good health.

There is still much to learn and relearn just as there are old attitudes and notions the medical community at large needs to unlearn.

What we already know to date is beyond fantastic.

For many years traditional folkloric remedies using herbal plants and other foods have been keys to living healthier? Did you know that ginger works for migraines and turmeric is for arthritis, and that there is natural help out there so you can reduce the symptoms of inflammatory bowel problems and dispel mosquitoes with basil?

You asked me why people have an increased awareness of the healing powers of herbs. I hope I'm not being facetious by answering with a question of my own:

Based on what I've just told you here, how could anyone possibly dismiss the healing powers of herbs?

2. Since BasilBasics is about basil, can you tell us about some common ways basil has been used internally and externally to obtain some of these health benefits?

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), from the Greek word basilikon means "royal".

It is commonly used in Mediterranean and Asian cuisine. The basil plant belongs to the Lamiceae family, which includes thyme, oregano, marjoram and rosemary.

These plants are rich in aromatic terpene essential oils, which the plant produce to defend itself from predators (bacteria and mold) and to attract pollinating insects. Laboratory research has shown that plants' essential oils are toxic for microbes, but safe for people.

Cooks have been able to take advantage of their best properties, using the herbs to enhance food flavors with health benefits. Markets have used essential oils in packaging to help naturally preserve fresh foods. One example of that is preventing mold from growing on berries. I should point out that when you're cooking with essential oils for flavoring, usually one drop is equal to one teaspoon. Additionally, basil's aroma is destroyed during cooking but the fresh herb's properties remain unchanged.

Three of the most common compounds found in basil – eugenol, rosmarinic acid, and ursolic acid – have powerful anti-inflammatory properties. The essential oil of basil can be diffused into air you breathe, absorbed through the skin using a few drops diluted in your favorite massage oil.

Plants such as herbs like basil can be considered an integral part of a wellness program.

3. Despite the large volumes of documented evidence to the contrary, some medical doctors remain skeptical about the concept of food as medicine. What can patients tell their doctors to convince them they should consider using the basic applications of foods like basil for remedies?

An anesthesiologist friend of mine “caught” MRSA in the hospital and nearly died. For those who don't know the term, it is better known as a deadly flesh-eating disease. While

he was in the intensive care unit (ICU), I gave him essential oils to use in massage therapy and mangosteen juice with vitamins and minerals, plus some relevant medical reference papers.

This is not the first time I've had to make a choice about suggesting integrating natural remedies to physicians. I did the same thing for my father – a retired heart surgeon – when he had significant complications of heart surgery requiring extended rehabilitation.

Skepticism is a tough thing for anybody to overcome, most especially doctors. The only cure for that sort of disbelief is real, documented evidence.

Basil like other herbal plants and natural foods have healing properties that have not been determined to be unsafe for integration with medical prescriptions drugs. Although, under some circumstances it is recommended that herbs and supplements be stopped a week to ten days prior to surgery and anesthesia; also, antioxidants should be avoided when undergoing certain types of chemotherapy. Perhaps natural remedies should not be judged with the same scientific methodology used for the clinical analysis of prescription medications. As far as efficacy is concerned, employing the logic that herbs are “at least as likely as not to help” is probably enough analysis to suggest health benefits.

Here is a brief review, for example, of the current evidence on the influence of essential oils and juice therapy on the process of wound healing for cases such as my doctor friend's MRSA:

This excellent paper in the *Journal of Wound Care* reports on a literature review of evidence on the influence of essential oils on wound healing and their potential application in clinical practice. The paper focuses mainly on tea tree, lavender, chamomile, thyme, and ocimum (basil) oils (Woollard 2007).

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a major nosocomial pathogen which causes severe morbidity and mortality worldwide. *Garcinia mangostana* was identified as the most potent Thai medicinal plant investigated for its activity against MRSA. The antibacterial activity was traced to the prenylated xanthone, a-mangostin (Chomnawang 2009).

Here are two quality papers which, instead of making excuses for the lack of human studies in the current state of wellness research, reveal two preliminary studies suggesting it could be possible to provide solid evidence of efficacy – the capacity to produce an effect – and safety in order to justify their integrative approach for wound care and many other areas in need of improved health.

1: The influence of essential oils on the process of wound healing: a review of the current evidence. Woollard AC, Tatham KC, Barker S. *J Wound Care*. 2007 Jun;16(6):255-7.

2. Antibacterial activity of Thai medicinal plants against methicillin-resistant, *Staphylococcus aureus*. Chomnawang MT, Surassmo S, Wongsariya K, Bunyaphatsara N. *Fitoterapia*. 2009 Mar;80(2):102-4.

4. If someone is interested in using the healing power of herbs, how would you recommend they find out more?

Bookmark and Subscribe to Basil Basics for ongoing education. Updates and new information will be provided as more discoveries and breakthroughs become available over time.

It would also help to keep updated on the art and science of anesthesia and integrative medicine as summarized on JamesGeigerMD.com

5. What are your credentials, Dr Geiger?

I am a Board Certified Anesthesiologist with more than 25 years experience. I'm also a certified Clinical Aromatherapist and Massage therapist, as well as the author of a unique new book for both doctors and patients alike called, *The Sweet Smell of Success: Health and Wealth Secrets*.

I am also the Chief Wellness Officer of oilMD.com.

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