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What is Microcredential?

By Azlini Ismail | December 31, 2022 | Health and Wellness, Uncategorized | alternative medicine, herbal medicine, herbal product, herbal remedy, natural remedy, traditional medicine

What is traditional herbal medicine?

Traditional herbal medicine is made of medicinal herbs/plants, either involving the whole part of the herbs/plants or some part of it (*i.e.*, leaves, roots, fruits, flowers). It is usually prepared based on traditional practice and is customized to its intended use.



How to prepare it?

The method of preparation varies for each medicinal herb/plant, but generally, they are dried and powdered or crushed into small pieces before being added to a liquid mixture or immersed in water. Herbs/plants may also be cooked in oil or fat, heated with an alkali such as lime, or prepared as a cold infusion which involves soaking the herbs in water for a certain period.

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The more advanced preparatory steps can also be done to extract the intended bioactive compounds tailored as therapeutic measures for any specific ailments. Herbal medicine can be used alone or in combination with other herbs/plants and/or with conventional medicine (prescription drugs).

History of traditional herbal medicine

The traditional practice of using herbal medicine is deeply rooted in many cultures around the world, such as Chinese traditional medicine, Indian Ayurvedic, Arabic Unani, Japanese Kampo, and Malay traditional medicine. These traditional medicinal systems have adopted many herbs/plants to treat various types of ailments and disorders.

For example, ginseng is consumed for its ability to improve mental clarity and boost energy levels while ginger is used to help reduce inflammation in the body. The traditional use usually has been transcending many generations for centuries, and up till now, it is still currently being widely used by many people around the globe.

Commercial drugs from traditional herbal medicine

Interestingly, there are many commercial pharmaceutical drugs that are based on plant compounds discovered through traditional herbal medicine practice. Some of the important examples of modern commercial drugs that have a history routed from their traditional use are aspirin and morphine.

Aspirin which is derived from the bark of the willow tree has been used for thousands of years for relieving pain and reducing fever. Now aspirin is widely accepted as a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug that is used as a painkiller, antipyretic agent (reduces fever), and as anti-inflammatory agent for various inflammatory conditions.

Another important example of modern medicine with a history routed from traditional use is morphine. History has recorded that it has been used for thousands of years as a painkiller. Morphine is currently recognized as an opioid analgesic drug that reduces chronic pain for example in cancer patients.

Other than these two, there are many other modern drugs sharing the same historical use and have undergone vigorous preclinical and clinical trials and reached this ultimate stage of being marketed as a commercial drugs.

Homemade traditional herbal medicine and herbal products

Apart from those that are marketed as commercial pharmaceutical drugs, there are still remaining of many other traditional herbal medicines that have not been tested up till that stage but remain available either as homemade preparations or in various forms of herbal medicinal products.

Herbal medicinal products are widely available in food stores, supermarkets, as well as in health and beauty shops worldwide, vastly marketed under the 'health products' section. There is a huge market for herbal medicinal products across the globe, indicating a good demand for such products.

The upsurging trend of use

The upsurging trend of consuming traditional herbal medicine (homemade or product) occurs across the globe showing that its use remains significant to this date. This escalating trend of use is presumably owing to the following reasons.

Firstly, the common public perception is that traditional medicine is always made of purely natural plants or herbal ingredients only and/or is organic. Some found that it is much cheaper than conventional modern medicine, even though that is not usually applicable in all cases (*i.e.*, ginseng).

Another main reason would be the easy accessibility of traditional herbal products in the market which can be purchased without any doctor's prescription, and on top of that, some of them can be easily homemade.

In addition to that, people often perceived traditional herbal medicine as a much safer option for treating any ailments and at the same time, it will not pose any pertinent side effects as much as the conventional prescribed medicine.

Overall, this increasing trend of consuming traditional herbal medicine is good in a way that it can support the conventional medicinal system. However, is it undeniably true that these herbal medicines are always safer than conventional medicine (prescription drugs)?

To be continued in [Part II -Traditional herbal medicine: Is it always safer than conventional medicine?](#)

Asst. Prof. Ts. Dr. Azlini Ismail (B.Biotech Hons, Ph.D. Pharmacology, P Tech) – Basic Medical Science Unit, Department of Fundamental Dental and Medical Sciences, Kulliyah of Dentistry, IIUM.



Author: [Azlini Ismail](#)

Asst. Prof. Ts. Dr. Azlini Ismail is a senior lecturer at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in the Department of Fundamental Dental and Medical Sciences, Kulliyah of Dentistry. She is currently the Head of Responsible Research and Innovation, Kulliyah of Dentistry, Executive Committee of the Malaysian Society of Pharmacology and Physiology (MSPP), Deputy Editor-in-Chief for IIUM Journal of Orofacial and Health Sciences, member of IIUM Animal Care and Use Committee, and the Program Coordinator for Master of Dental Sciences program. Her keen research interests are in the fields of pharmacology and pharmacognosy (natural products) in which she has vast research experience in conducting natural product research using in silico, in vitro, and in vivo animal study approaches related to antihypertensive, antioxidant, antiviral, anti-inflammatory activities, etc.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Asst. Prof. Ts. Dr. Azlini Ismail is a senior lecturer at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in the Department of Fundamental Dental and Medical Sciences, Kulliyah of Dentistry. She is currently the Head of Responsible Research and Innovation, Kulliyah of Dentistry, Executive Committee of the Malaysian Society of Pharmacology and Physiology (MSPP), Deputy Editor-in-Chief for IIUM Journal of Orofacial and Health Sciences, member of IIUM Animal Care and Use Committee, and the Program Coordinator for Master of Dental Sciences program. Her keen research interests are in the fields of pharmacology and pharmacognosy (natural products) in which she has vast research experience in conducting natural product research using in silico, in vitro, and in vivo animal study approaches related to antihypertensive, antioxidant, antiviral, anti-inflammatory activities, etc.

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Microcredential Unit
Centre for Professional
Development
International Islamic University
Malaysia
P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur

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