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The Benefits of Alternative Medicine Compared to Pharmaceutical Drugs

Throughout time, natural medicines have become the 'alternative' while pharmaceutical drugs have risen to the front-line of public health, particularly in developed Western societies. Alternative medicines include modalities such as naturopathy, nutritional therapies, herbalism, massage, energy healing, Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine. Many of these healthcare approaches have been passed down through history for thousands of years, holding ancient wisdom, and many are still being discovered and researched today using modern science. Here, I will explore some of the differences between pharmaceutical and alternative medicines, highlighting some of the many benefits of using alternative medicine in comparison to pharmaceutical drugs.

While the administration of pharmaceutical drugs is focused on symptom management, many alternative practitioners work using a holistic approach that considers the whole being. Many factors are involved in the development of disease; therefore, many factors should be considered in the restoration of health. All areas of wellbeing including the physical, mental, social and spiritual may need to be addressed, and using this true holistic approach supports a deeper healing than symptom- suppressing pharmaceutical medications that do not work to address the root cause.

Foods and herbs contain the naturally occurring cofactors and enzymes required for full utilisation in the body. Pharmaceutical compounds produced by chemists often mimic the molecular structure found in plants, but lack the supporting co- factors and do not work in synergy with the body causing undesired side effects, deeming synthetic medications second-rate to natural products. Tuning into this synergistic relationship between humans and plants supports our connection with the earth allowing the earth to care for us.

The convenience and availability of pharmaceutical medicines is causing a great disconnect between individuals and their bodies. Many people make poor lifestyle choices without associating them with the health concerns they're experiencing. When one visits their trusted GP, they are often seen for 15 minutes and usually prescribed pharmaceutical drugs. While there are some major advantages of pharmaceutical medications, their over-administration and lack of patient education may be destroying people's accountability of their own health and lifestyle choices.

Pharmaceuticals create side effects that are managed by issuing more pharmaceuticals. An example of this is the commonly prescribed NSAIDs which weaken the stomach lining, increasing the risk of ulcer therefore requiring a proton-pump inhibitor to reduce stomach acidity. Low stomach acid impairs digestion and increases the risk of infection. Alternatively, nature has provided its own anti- inflammatories such as curcuma longa (turmeric), containing the active ingredient curcumin. Natural treatments recommended by alternative medicine practitioners support many body systems simultaneously, rather than supporting one organ at the detriment of another.

The ancient wisdom of 'alternative' medicine should not be underestimated and is rising again in popularity as people are becoming increasingly disappointed by the pharmaceutical industry. Alternative medicine uses the synergistic relationship between humans and the earth to support a truly holistic wellbeing with reduced risk of side effects. It is often focused towards discovering the underlying cause of disease rather than merely suppressing symptoms. The Earth can provide all that we need to support life and remain in good health, and in choosing alternative medicine we support the Earth, we support our health and we support our communities.