

Pharmacognosy: The “Real” Health-Promoting Insurance

It used to be easy to tell the difference between food and medicine. Food was bought in a grocery store, prepared in the kitchen and gave you nourishment. Medicine was bought in a drug store, came out of a bottle and gave you relief when you were ill. But the line between the two has been blurring for three decades, and western scientists have been looking very seriously at how using certain foods and its constituents can correct the body's dysfunctional system(s) (e.g., immune, cardiovascular, nervous, endocrine, skeletal, pulmonary, etc.).

The name for this science is Pharmacognosy, or the study of food as preventative medicine. The therapeutic effect of food was once described by Hippocrates over 2500 years ago. He said, “Each one of us have substances in food we eat that act upon our body and change life in some way. And upon these changes one's whole life depends.” Like Hippocrates, who had incredible insight, the Eastern culture has understood the concept of using food as medicine for a long, long time. They look at many of their foods as being health promoting. For many westerners, we've only begun to accept the concept of using food as medicine. However, having practiced nutrition and behavioral counseling around the country for 16 years, I see that people are beginning to take more and more responsibility for their own health and are mindfully tuning into Pharmacognosy on a daily basis. In addition to looking at their diet, people are also looking at how they can supplement their diet with nutraceuticals (e.g., supplements) that are going to keep them healthier longer. So like Nietzsche said, “If you tell me why something works, I'll figure out the how by willing it into my life”. My belief is that knowledge is a great motivator and Pharmacognosy can help westerners activate their will in order to achieve better health!

Once a month, my articles will explore the science of Pharmacognosy on various foods and their healing constituents. The “why” or the physiological health-promoting mechanism will be given to help you activate your will. The goal is to “bathe your cells”© with health promoting food constituentswhich could turn out to be the best health insurance program you have ever subscribed to.