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Q: I love growing herbs in my garden, and I often read how herbs can be used to help people feel better. How can herbs from my garden support my family's health?

A: Herbs have been used for thousands of years in all parts of the world to support well being. Having your own backyard "medicine chest" is a way to connect to the earth and the chain of herbalists through the millennia.

To better clarify how you can use herbs medicinally every day, we'll take an imaginary woman, let's call her Jane, and follow her through a typical day. We'll see where she uses herbs to support her health. All mentioned herbs can be grown in gardens in Frederick County.

Jane wakes up in the morning and would like to get her digestive juices flowing, so she tiptoes out to her garden and picks tender spring dandelion leaves. If she's feeling more motivated, she might pull out a few dandelion plants, wash the roots and use a few roots in her tea. Either way, she takes the leaves and/or roots, and makes a hot cup of tea.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) is a rich source of minerals and vitamins and is used for digestive support, especially to the liver and gallbladder. Dandelion increases the flow of bile, which helps with detoxification and elimination.

Jane drinks her dandelion tea with a steamy bowl of oatmeal (super whole grain and support for the nerves) with fresh blueberries (excellent antioxidant and source of flavonoids) and chopped walnuts (great source of omega-3 essential fatty acids). Jane is energized and ready for her day.

She heads to her office and hits bumper-to-bumper traffic going south. She arrives at work somewhat tense with jangled nerves. She makes herself a delicious tea of lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) with a bit of local honey. She feels much calmer after the tea. Lemon balm leaves help relieve nervousness and reduce restlessness and overexcitability.

Jane works hard all morning on an important report and presentation. She is anxious about completing the report on time. She needs something to help her deal with the stress, stay on top of her game and reduce anxiety. She does some relaxation breathing exercises and takes some tincture of holy basil (*Ocimum sanctum*) and skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*).

Holy basil is considered an adaptogen, increasing endurance and helping balance the nervous system. Adaptogens help the body/mind deal with stress in a more balanced way. Holy basil is used to support memory, energy and digestion. Skullcap is supportive to the nervous system, helping calm nervous excitability, restlessness and anxiety.

Jane finishes the report; however, all the pressure of the day gave her a bit of a residual headache. She takes a few capsules of feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*) to help relieve the pain. Feverfew leaf supports inflammatory tone and is considered a bitter tonic, helping with digestion. Feverfew may be beneficial in migraine and tension headaches.

With her head feeling better, Jane makes the long drive back to her home. Her husband makes her a meal, and dessert is a special cheesecake. The rich cheesecake just sits in her stomach, and she starts to feel bloated. She makes herself a cup of fennel and peppermint tea. Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) seed is considered a carminative, reducing gas. It is helpful for digestion, helping relieve bloating. Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) leaf is also carminative and helps relieve bloating and nausea. Peppermint also supports the nervous system to help the body relax.

Jane is relaxing during the evening, her body physically tired. After watching American Idol, she finds herself a bit revved up by the judges' comments to the contestants, especially that cantankerous Simon Cowell. She's also thinking about work the next day. She decides to give her body/mind a little nudge toward sleep and has a nice cup of chamomile tea and a steamy bath with epsom salts and lavender essential oil.

Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) flower supports both the gastrointestinal system and digestion and the nervous system. It helps relax, calm anxiety and restlessness. Lavender (*Lavendula officinalis*) flower is another herb supportive to the nervous system, helping reduce restlessness, insomnia and anxiety. It is also a lovely aromatic plant.

Jane heads to bed, feeling ready for a good night's sleep. She sprays lavender essential oil spray around her bed, puts her lavender sachet under her pillow, climbs into her warm and cozy bed and falls into a deep, dreamy sleep. Sweet herbal dreams, Jane! Herbs are wonderfully supportive to health, each containing hundreds of interrelated compounds, all working in synergy to promote optimum well being.

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Suggested reading "Family Herbal" (Rosemary Gladstar, 2001) "Essential Guide to Natural Home Remedies" (Penelope Ody, 2002) "Flower Power" (Anne McIntyre, 1996) "Herbal Tea Gardens" (Marietta Marcin) "Growing 101 Herbs That Heal" (Tammi Hartung, 2000)

For more information about horticulture or the Master Gardener Program in Frederick County, contact Nancy Adamson, horticulturist and Master Gardener coordinator, at the Frederick County Extension Office at 301-694-1596 or by e-mail at nadamson@umd.edu or visit www.agnr.umd.edu/Frederick.

