The Bad News: Antibiotics Are Not Working

Since the accidental discovery of penicillin in 1929 by Alexander Fleming, antibiotic use has saved countless lives. Unfortunately, antibiotics are losing their effectiveness. Today, modern medicine faces the challenge of antibiotic resistance, thanks to the overuse of antibiotic medication. One example is methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), which now accounts for approximately 20% of serious infections in some areas of the United States. MRSA is also now becoming resistant to vancomycin, the choice medication for this serious problem.

Interestingly though, back in the 1930s, Fleming lectured throughout the world, warning that less than judicious use of these drugs could lead to problems. He cautioned us not to give penicillin unless there was a clear need for it. Fleming noted in his early experimentation clear evidence of bacteria's ability to get around antibiotic exposure. This is because bacteria can quickly change its machinery to avoid the killing effects of the antibiotics.

Besides overuse, the addition of low-dose antibiotics in our animal feed is also to blame. Antibiotics are employed not so much to stop infection, but to make the animal grow faster artificially. Way back in 1977, the FDA concluded that adding low-dose antibiotics to animal feed raised the risk of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Despite this knowledge, we still continue this practice today.

The Good News: There Are Antibiotic Herbal Alternatives

We can help the situation and avoid antibiotic drugs by harvesting the powerful substances nature has given to us. Both animals and man have harnessed the medicinal power of herbs for at least as long as history has been recorded. Plant alternatives use different mechanisms of action. As such, herbal antibiotic choices can help without further contributing to resistance issues.

Many common ailments such as sinus problems, sore throats, simple urinary tract infections and superficial wounds do not necessitate drugs in most cases. Many times, these can be effectively treated with the right lifestyle changes and botanical medicine care.

Immune Support: Start With a Good Lifestyle

Antibiotics kill the vast majority of the bacteria, but it is up to our body's immune system to finish the job.
and get rid of the rest of the bugs. To use a military analogy, our immune system acts like the “ground troops” that come in to get germs that are still entrenched after the antibiotic “carpet bombing” has cleared out the larger mass.

Harnessing the healing power your body possesses requires taking good care of yourself. It is important to remember that in most cases, bacteria can take over only when the environment allows. My recommendations to keep your immune system strong include:

• Getting quality sleep (at least 8 hours)
• Exercising regularly
• Eating healthy whole foods and avoiding sugar intake
• Practicing relaxation, such as meditation or yoga
• Maintaining healthy relationships and following your passions

All of the above are important for a balanced body. These will help you prevent an infection – and help treat one most effectively if it occurs. These lifestyle recommendations will also help herbal antibiotic alternatives work their best.

**Antibiotic Alternatives: Four Herbs to Know**

The following plant medicines are very effective choices in helping us avoid pharmaceutical antibiotics. Along with many other botanicals, these have been used to fight infections for thousands of years. I see them work every day in my own practice. They have proven to be quite safe when used in the short term at standard dosage. When used in conjunction with the aforementioned health recommendations, these can be valuable allies to keep in your natural medicine cabinet.

- **Goldenseal (Hydrastis):** Hailing from the northwest United States, goldenseal is a potent antibiotic, well known to help treat sore throats as well as digestive infections which can cause diarrhea. The Native Americans taught us that goldenseal has the ability to soothe the linings of the mucous membranes of the respiratory, digestive and genitourinary tracts while effectively clearing bacterial invasion. A few drops locally can stop a sore throat in its tracks.

- **Oregon Grape (Berberis aquifolium):** Also from the Northwest, Oregon grape contains a substance known as berberine, which can stop bacteria from adhering to the walls of the intestine and urinary tract. When used as a tea, it is a wonderful way to wash away urinary tract infections; it can be used in dried capsules or liquid tincture to treat digestive tract conditions like infectious diarrhea.

- **Andrographis paniculata:** This Asian herb with thousands of years of traditional use is now being proven through modern research as being able to disrupt the quorum-sensing system of bacteria. This system helps bacteria attach to each other and thrive as a community. Andrographis basically helps break up the bacterial “party.” As a result, it is beneficial to treat symptoms of upper respiratory tract infections and sinus problems. Numerous studies report its ability to reduce upper respiratory infection symptoms, such as fatigue, sore throat, cough and headache.

- **Manuka honey:** The sweetness of Manuka honey is already being used in hospitals in protocols for wound care. You can place the honey directly on gauze and cover the wound. Typically, the bandage is replaced three times a day. Although studies show most honey has antibacterial activity, manuka honey seems to be especially potent due to a compound called methylglyoxal. In fact, studies have confirmed its activity against a wide range of medically important bacteria, including MRSA.