

THE FMWR FITNESS DEPARTMENT
PRESENTS...

BLACK HISTORY AND
NATURAL HEALTH PRACTICES

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Black History Month is an opportunity to reflect and remember. The FMWR Fitness Department takes this opportunity to bring a spotlight to health and wellness and the contributions made by Africans and African Americans in the Natural Health Industry. Today we have so many choices to help keep our bodies and minds healthy. We must remember how valuable this precious thing called good health is.

This booklet is just a small sample of a few of the numerous natural medical treatments they used to cure and heal. These healers were our first doctors in natural medicine. Today, plants and herbs are the foundation for making pharmaceutical medicines. Many of these plants come from Africa even until today.

We hope you enjoy how dedicated African Americans are to their health and how important it is to get your health under control. Get involved in your health. The Fitness Department offers a variety of fitness and wellness classes and programs. We are committed to providing the Fort Jackson community the best in fitness and wellness.

(Italic/bold writing are Pam's responses and suggestions)

LEGAL RESTRICTIONS ON SLAVE DOCTORS

If healing skills were an advantage to both slave and owner, they also posed a threat. Slaves who knew their plants had easy access to poison. This fear prompted the enactment of laws. As early as 1748, the colony of Virginia forbade “any negro, or other slave” to administer “any medicine whatsoever” under pain of death “without benefit of clergy”

“Slaves got sick often because of the conditions in which they had to live. But, the African root revealed skilled healers who knew their plants and knew which herbs did things like abort pregnancies, which herbs made you sick, which killed you suddenly. In this way, knowing health was a survival tool for slaves. This knowledge brought fear in slave owners who relied on and trusted slave healers, but also feared them.

Fact: “Even with these laws in place, slave medicine flourished on plantations. Slaves experienced a sense of freedom as healer and patient.”

Fact: “Slave owners feared slaves’ knowledge of natural healing with herbs and plants. In 1748 the colony of Virginia forbid slaves from administering any types of medicine. This law was enforced with the penalty of pain of death. “

“Knowing what helps our health naturally today (like hiking) should be celebrated because it is accessible to us.”

HUMAN LABOR

Slavery was an oppressive, destabilizing and deeply exploitative social system. It was a toxic method of using human labor. American slavery pretty much guaranteed negative health outcomes and unending health problems. The slave system relentlessly undermined physical, psychological, and emotional health. Being captured and brought to America brought about many health hazards that weaken immune systems.

Fact: "So much goes into better health beyond exercise. It is important to have family, friends, and the basic living necessities. Our forefathers suffered for things we might today take for granted. Having a cold glass of clean water, a nutritious meal or the opportunity to just rest are gifts of natural health and medicine. "

Slave living areas were crowded, void of windows for sunshine and the floors were made of damp dirt. These conditions are havens for environmental and physical health problems. Based on the conditions it was the perfect environment for bacterial growth, parasites, ringworm, lice and more. This exposure led to illness, intestinal disorders, respiratory disorders, tuberculosis and more. The environment placed a heavy toll on the health of slaves. Slaves heavily relied on slaves who knew natural medicines and healings. Just like other immigrants in this country, Africans came with their knowledge from their country.

Fact: "Today, we know how important sunshine is for health and clean water for bathing to fight bacteria. They went through something we cannot even imagine. That is why we must take charge of all aspects of our health and show our gratefulness to each and every slave that fought for better health conditions."

SLAVE AND HEALER

When it came to health care, slave communities maintained a long tradition of self-reliance. They preferred to treat themselves or receive treatment from another slave, rather than accept the therapies of slaveholders and white physicians. So, they cultivated herbs in their gardens, gathered plants in the wild and relied on the knowledge of friends and relatives. They had treatments for a wide variety of illnesses and injuries, including wounds inflicted by whippings.

Health issues often brought slaves into conflict with their owners, since they held very different beliefs about the causes and treatment of illnesses. Enslaved African Americans drew upon their own healing traditions. Many distrusted the harsh therapies used by white physicians in the 1800s and concealed ailments from their owners. It was one way they could maintain a degree of control over their bodies.

Fact: “We have a right to get control of our health and it is something we have wanted for a long time. This statement is validated with the above mentioned statement from ‘Health and Healing’ in North Carolina – Slave Medicine 1809”.

With their years of experience in delivering and treating children, enslaved midwives and older women often had extensive knowledge about herbal and home remedies. Many became midwives to their mistresses and other white women as well—a valuable service for which the slave owner would be paid.

“Our contribution to Natural Health Care was massive. Enslaved women became natural doctors and treated themselves and other slaves. They grew herbs, gathered plants in the wild and got information from other slaves on what worked and what did not. This is early physician consultations to gain knowledge to treat a wide variety of illness and injuries including wounds from whippings. Today, African Americans have a strong connection with natural health and remedies. We have always maintained its value and today natural health is more popular than ever.”



Emma Dupree (1897 – 1995), an herb doctor who received the North Carolina Folk Heritage Award in 1992

From the abuse slaves endured, I want to share the health concerns they faced and how we today must be better stewards of our health which is a very precious thing. If we embrace healthy living, life quality is amazing.”

THE UNDERGROUND HOSPITALS

For many reasons, slaves often preferred their own system of medical care. In addition to the treatments of the doctors sanctioned by slaveowners, there was a separate system of healing present in the slave quarters. Many slaveowners found slave medical practices useless.

James Henry Hammond was a slave owner and a doctor who denounced negro doctors and the underground medical practices slaves were providing. However, Hammond in the 1830s adopted botanic practices believing heroic treatments caused more harm to patients. These botanical treatment was similar to the slave practices he denounced which were also largely botanical in nature.

Fact: "Healing plants, herbal teas, tinctures, poultice and more are the foundation of today's medicine. African Americans used the knowledge learned about healing plants and provided a kinder, more gentle treatment approach for themselves and their slaveowners."

THE AFRICAN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

The use of medicinal plants as a fundamental component of the African traditional healthcare system is perhaps the oldest and the most assorted of all therapeutic systems. In many parts of rural Africa, traditional healers prescribing medicinal plants are the most easily accessible and affordable health resource available to the local community and at times the only therapy that exists.

“Africa is a rich resource and home of 10 promising medicinal plants packed with biodiversity to be developed as future medicines in the phytopharmaceutical industry to treat and/or manage chronic conditions. This is a real breakthrough and continued proof of what Africa can contribute to the Natural Health and Allopathic Health Industries.”

According to The World Health Organization (WHO); 90% of the population in Ethiopia use herbal remedies for their primary healthcare. African traditional medicine is the oldest, and perhaps the most assorted, of all therapeutic systems. Africa is considered to be the cradle of mankind with a rich biological and cultural diversity marked by regional differences in healing practices. Africa is blessed with enormous biodiversity resources and it is estimated to contain between 40 and 45,000 species of plant with a potential for development and out of which 5,000 species are used medicinally.

“African traditional medicine uses the holistic approach; involving both the body and the mind. The healer typically diagnoses and treats the psychological basis of an illness before prescribing medicines, particularly medicinal plants to treat the symptoms. The entire health is looked at before any forms of medicinal plants are prescribed. This is a better way to treat which focuses on wellness; not masking pain.”

PLANT LIFE –

“What I mention here just barely scratches the surface of the many uses of each of the following plants for healing.”

Acacia Senegal (gum Arabic)

Acacia senegal, also known as gum Arabic, is native to semidesert and drier regions of sub-Saharan Africa, but widespread from Southern to Northern Africa. It is used as a medicinal plant in parts of Northern Nigeria, West Africa, North Africa, and other parts of the world

Currently, A. senegal is an important naturally occurring oil-in-water emulsifier, which is in regular use in the food and pharmaceutical industries. Medicinally, gum Arabic is used extensively in pharmaceutical preparations and is a safe, approved food additive

It has been used as skin protective agent, and pharmaceutical aids such as emulsifier and stabilizer

It is sometimes used to treat bacterial and fungal infections of the skin and mouth. It has been reported to soothe the mucous membranes of the intestines and to treat inflamed skin.

ALOE FEROX

Aloe Ferox is native to South Africa and is considered to be the most common Aloe species in South Africa. Aloe Ferox has been used since time immemorial and has a well-documented history of use as an alternative medicine.

The use of Aloe Ferox as a multipurpose traditional medicine has been translated into several commercial applications and is a highly valued plant in the pharmaceutical, natural health, food, and cosmetic industries. Aloe Ferox is considered South Africa's main wild harvested commercially traded species.

The finished product obtained from aloe tapping, aloe bitters, has remained a key South African export product since 1761 when it was first exported to Europe. The aloe tapping industry is the livelihood of many rural communities and formalization of the industry in the form of establishment of cooperatives and trade agreements. It has been suggested that its trade may have an extensive poverty alleviation effect in Africa.

Aloe Ferox has many traditional and documented medicinal uses. It is most popularly used for its laxative effect and as a topical application to the skin, eyes, and mucous membranes. Scientific studies conducted have verified many of the traditional uses. More recently, the cosmetic industry has shown interest in Aloe Ferox gel. It has been reported that Aloe Ferox gel contains at least 130 medicinal agents with anti-inflammatory, analgesic, calming, antiseptic, germicidal, antiviral, antiparasitic, antitumour, and anticancer effects encompassing all of the traditional uses and scientific studies done on Aloe Ferox

ROOIBOS

South African fynbos species, is cultivated to produce the well-known herbal tea, also commonly known as rooibos. Its caffeine-free and comparatively low tannin status, combined with its potential health-promoting properties, most notably antioxidant activity, has contributed to its popularity and consumer acceptance globally. The utilization of rooibos has also moved beyond a herbal tea to intermediate value-added products such as extracts for the beverage, food, nutraceuticals and cosmetic markets.

Rooibos is used traditionally throughout Africa in numerous ways. It has been used as a refreshment drink and as a healthy tea beverage. It was only after the discovery that an infusion of rooibos, when administered to her colicky baby, cured the chronic restlessness, vomiting, and stomach cramps that rooibos became well known as a “healthy” beverage, leading to a broader consumer base. Many babies since then have been nurtured with rooibos—either added to their milk or given as a weak brew.

The bronchodilator, antispasmodic, and blood pressure lowering effects of rooibos tea have been confirmed in vitro and in vivo. Rooibos is becoming more popular in western countries particularly among health-conscious consumers, due to the absence of alkaloids and low tannin content. It is also reported to have a high level of antioxidants such as aspalathin and nothofagin.

PLANTS BRING LIFE

Medicinal plants are an integral part of the African healthcare system since time immemorial. Interest in traditional plant medicine can be explained by the fact that it is a fundamental part of the culture of the people who use it. It is accessible to everyone and the richness and diversity of the fauna and flora of Africa are an inexhaustible source of therapies for panoply of ailments.

During the last few decades, it has become evident that there exists a plethora of plants with medicinal potential and it is increasingly being accepted that the African traditional medicinal plants might offer potential template molecules in the drug discovery process. Many of the plants above show very promising medicinal properties.

INTRODUCED BY A SLAVE



Inoculation was introduced to America by a slave.

Few details are known about the birth of Onesimus, but it is assumed he was born in Africa in the late seventeenth century before eventually landing in Boston. One of a thousand people of African descent living in the Massachusetts colony, Onesimus was a gift to the Puritan church minister Cotton Mather from his congregation in 1706.

Onesimus told Mather about the centuries old tradition of inoculation practiced in Africa. By extracting the material from an infected person and scratching it into the skin of an uninfected person, you could deliberately introduce smallpox to the healthy individual making them immune. Considered extremely dangerous at the time, Cotton Mather convinced Dr. Zabdiel Boylston to experiment with the procedure when a smallpox epidemic hit Boston in 1721 and over 240 people were inoculated. Opposed politically, religiously and medically in the United States and abroad, public reaction to the experiment put Mather and Boylston's lives in danger despite records indicating that only 2% of patients requesting inoculation died compared to the 15% of people not inoculated who contracted smallpox.

Onesimus' traditional African practice was used to inoculate American soldiers during the Revolutionary War and introduced the concept of inoculation to the United States.

DID YOU KNOW...

Of the 12.5 million Africans shipped to the New World during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, fewer than 388,000 arrived in the United States.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade was underway from 1500-1866, shipping more than 12 million African slaves across the world. Of those slaves, only 10.7 million survived the dreaded Middle Passage. Over 400 years, the majority of slaves (4.9 million) found their way to Brazil where they suffered incredibly high mortality rates due to terrible working conditions. Brazil was also the last country to ban slavery in 1888.



FIGHTING CHILDHOOD OBESITY



Michelle Obama has worked for nearly eight years to reduce childhood obesity by working with schools, communities and families to eat healthier and move more. – get photo of Michelle Obama