



The Canadian Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine is a must have resource for anyone looking for reliable, science-based information for the prevention and management of today's most pressing health concerns (to purchase the book please [click here](#) >>). With a strictly Canadian content this book offers readers the latest information on both conventional and complementary medicine for over eighty health conditions including arthritis, cancer, cold, diabetes, fibromyalgia, heart disease, osteoporosis and more. Author Sherry Torkos says, *"As a traditionally trained pharmacist with a complementary background in natural health, nutrition, and fitness, my goal is to bridge the gap between the two worlds and in doing so, help people along their journey to optimal health."*



There are thousands of nutritional supplements on the market and Canadians are inundated with advertisements, claims and unfortunately misinformation. Now, instead of relying on over-hyped marketing messages or word-of-mouth to make health decisions, Canadians can refer to this trustworthy resource with comprehensive information on natural medicine. Sherry's recommendations reflect the most recent scientific research on the benefits and appropriate use of vitamins, herbs and other nutritional supplements. Inside you will find information on recommended nutrient intakes, interactions between drugs and nutritional supplements, including a list of drugs that deplete nutrients from our body, and guidelines on how to create a supplement program.

Highlights of ***The Canadian Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine*** include:

- **Prescription for Successful Living** includes information on nutrition, functional foods, exercise, and the role of sleep and stress management for better health.
- **The Natural Pharmacy** is a reference guide to dietary supplements, such as vitamins, minerals, herbal remedies and branded ingredients. This section also includes the principles of safe supplementing and a special homeopathy section contributed by Dr. Bryce Wyld
- **Common Health Concerns and Conditions** is an A-Z guide to the top health concerns. Each condition is described in details including signs and symptoms and risk factors, as well Doctor's Orders, which includes the most common medical treatments available. Sherry's Natural Prescription outlines dietary recommendations, lifestyle suggestions, top recommended supplements and complementary supplements.

The Canadian Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine was reviewed by a medical advisory board of top Canadian health experts including, Dr. Elvis Ali, Sam Graci, Brad King, Lorna Vanderhaeghe, Dr. Michael Lyon, Dr. Joey Shulman and Farid Wassef.

The Canadian Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine is a definitive resource on complementary health care, combining everything you need to know about diet and lifestyle, supplements, and nutrition with reliable medical information. This handy household reference will help Canadians make the very best choices for their health and well-being.

Feature Interview

Sherry Torkos is a holistic pharmacist, practising in the Niagara, Ontario area. She has authored 11 books, including *The Canadian Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine*. We recently spoke with her about this comprehensive guide and about her thoughts on natural medicine in general.

Q. What was your main goal in writing this book?

The goal was to provide readers with factual, science-based information on both conventional and complementary medicine. If you look at the statistics from Health Canada, over 70% of Canadians are taking some form of alternative medicine -- whether it's supplements, vitamins, herbs, acupuncture, massage therapy, aromatherapy, etc. I think we've come a long way in the past few decades with our understanding of the benefits and applications of natural medicine, but I think there are still a lot of questions and mysteries surrounding the validity of some of these therapies, so I really wanted to sort out fact from fiction and put together an easy-to-use reference guide to give people guidance on the appropriate use of natural therapies.

So really, the goal is education, and I think it's good for people to be aware of their options. Certainly pharmaceutical products can play a role, but there's so much we can do from a lifestyle perspective with regard to not only management, but also prevention of health problems.

Q. Over 70% using natural health products -- that's a lot!

It's a pretty good chunk of our population, but Canada's a very diverse population, so if you look at the historical perspective, people have migrated here from places such as China and Japan, and herbal medicines are very popular there. In Germany, a lot of the over-the-counter supplements that we use here today are actually prescribed by doctors there. Many Europeans are very open-minded and embracing of natural medicine. And I think the fact that because Canada's so multicultural, we really do see people using traditional Chinese medicines, Ayurvedic medicines which are common among the East Indian population, and there are a lot of the modern-day nutritional supplements as well.

Q. How long did it take to complete this encyclopedia?

More than three years. I started off thinking I could write it in one or two years, but once I got into it, there was so much time that was spent in research and writing, and also I had put together an expert advisory panel -- a panel of doctors, naturopaths, dieticians and pharmacists -- that reviewed various aspects of the book and provided some guidance throughout. I think it's very important to have that second person to look at things and make sure I hadn't missed anything, and that I was pretty thorough in my research. There are thousands and thousands of dietary supplements out there, but when it comes down to science, that really makes a difference about what to include in the book. Obviously I didn't want to include things that were just based on marketing hype or hearsay, I really wanted to look at what supplements are going to offer value.

Q. What was the biggest challenge you faced in the writing of this book?

Keeping it to 400 pages [laughs]. It was really hard, because with each topic, I had to keep it to about 1,500 to 2,000 words, and that's really tough, because when you're writing about some of the big conditions like cancer or diabetes, there's just so much that you want to include. So the biggest challenge of this book was to make the material concise. I have some great editors that I worked with too. They were very helpful.

Q. What do you think is the biggest misconception about natural medicine?

One of the biggest misconceptions is that it has no science. Sometimes doctors will say that if they're not informed. A patient is asking them about natural therapies, and they'll just say 'oh, there's no science, there's no research on that,' when the fact is that there is mounting clinical evidence on the benefits of natural therapies. Every week we're learning something new. For example, just this summer there have been some interesting studies that have come out on the benefits of lycopene, which is an antioxidant found in tomatoes, showing that it can reduce free radical damage to the skin. We're learning about green tea; it's popular as an antioxidant, but there's a component of green tea that contains an amino acid called L-theanine, and that's been researched recently here in Canada and found to benefit children with ADHD. So there's a lot of interesting science.

Garlic has been used for thousands of years, but now modern science is finally proving its benefits for heart health. Garlic has actually been shown to lower multiple risk factors for heart disease. It can lower blood pressure, cholesterol, reduce plaquing in the blood vessels and improve oxygenation and circulation.

So there is a lot of science to natural products. But also, there are a lot of products out there still that may be promoted through multilevel marketing companies or by word of mouth that maybe don't have the research behind them, so unfortunately it's sometimes those products that give the others a bad name.

Q. Obviously, maximum health involves attending to multiple areas -- diet, exercise, sleep -- but what area of people's health is the one area people should pay more attention to?

Stress management. Stress is such a huge factor today. In my book, I talk about the fact that stress-related ailments account for over 70% of visits to doctors. That's huge. And stress is linked to some of our biggest killers: heart disease, cancer, depression, anxiety. It causes insomnia. Stress can affect your immune system. It can cause weight gain. It can affect so many different aspects of health. I think that today we've become such a super-busy population -- we're always running around from one thing to the next, people seem to be constantly under deadlines, taking on more work; in a lot of families, both parents are working. In the pharmacy, I see more and more people complaining about stress, and I see more and more people coming in, getting prescriptions for anti-depressants, tranquilizers, sedatives, sleeping aids, and so I really do think stress is taking a toll on our health, and it's something that we don't pay enough attention to.

We often think we can get by with a few hours sleep; in fact, some people brag about surviving on four or five hours of sleep! We think we are, but we really are not, because sleep deprivation really does take a toll and we can't catch up for it on the weekend. And stress, even when we think we're managing it, sometimes we're not managing it effectively, and that continual stress really increases our chances of heart disease, cancer and a lot of other problems. I think it's important for people to find healthy ways to manage stress through meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, etc. Nutritional supplements can help as well. In my book, I talk about some of the supplements that can help.

Stress can actually deplete nutrients in your body. It can deplete your B vitamins, vitamin C, and when your B vitamins become depleted, that can actually make you more reactive to stress, and you can't cope as well, and it affects your nervous system, so it becomes a bit of a vicious cycle. Magnesium is also depleted by stress.

Q. As a pharmacist, what mistakes do you see people making consistently -- relying on certain pills or remedies perhaps, when other courses of action might be better?

Sometimes I think we rely too much on pills to fix our problems. It's part of our culture [to say] 'you've got this problem, take this pill.' We're looking at the quick fix when we should dig a little bit deeper and look at what is the underlying cause. Rather than taking a tranquilizer or a sedative to sleep, let's look at why you're not sleeping. Is it due to stress, is it due to your diet, maybe too much caffeine or too many high-glycemic carbohydrates, or do you have any nutritional deficiencies? Is it due to the side effects of medication even? So, as a pharmacist, I see too often people wanting to jump to taking prescription drugs.

Even at this time of year, as we're getting into the fall, colds and flu become very common, and there are some people out there that think that if they have a cold, they need an antibiotic. But antibiotics are only effective against bacteria; colds are caused by viruses. They offer no benefit, and it can actually do you more harm because when you take antibiotics when they're not necessary, it increases your risk of developing resistance, and they can cause a lot of side effects.

Q. With marketing and advertising being what they are, what can people do to make sure that what they're buying is a good, tested, proven product?

I think you need to ask questions and you need to research products before you take them. You really can't go by just the marketing information that you see on the advertisements. There are some good magazines that provide educational information on natural health. The one that I contribute to is called *Alive* magazine, and it's all educational. It's reviewed, scientific-based, and it provides great information on the proper use of natural supplements and other holistic therapies.

I think people should talk to their pharmacist -- I was going to say 'their doctor,' but unfortunately a lot of doctors don't know about natural products. Pharmacists are actually in a better position; if we don't know the answers, we have good resources where we can look up the information. And, "buyer beware." If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is. For example, with weight loss, we have no magic weight loss pills or potions. There are some supplements that can help, but always beware of cure-alls. We need to have some healthy skepticism when it comes to reviewing some of this information.

Q. What kinds of products/remedies in natural medicine do you think are over-hyped or marketing gimmicks?

Out of all the weight loss products that are out there, there are only maybe about six or eight that have some good science behind them. I've seen a lot of crazy marketing claims for products, not so much here in Canada, but in the States, and usually those companies end up getting sued by the FDA or FTC. In Canada, thankfully we have Health Canada's Natural Health Products Directorate which regulates claims that are allowed to be made on supplements. So, for example, in order to say that a product helps with weight management or weight loss, you have to send substantiation to Health Canada about that.

Q. What are some of your favourite products to recommend?

There are a few things that I do recommend. Green tea is one. Also, a healthy fat -- it's a fatty acid called conjugated linoleic acid (CLA). It can help. There's a kidney bean extract that I've written about in my book called Phase 2. It's a starch-neutralizer. It's been studied at UCLA and different places. It's been very well researched and it's really helpful.

Q. What about the Internet? Is it a good resource, or a breeding ground for misinformation and hypochondria?

There are some great websites, and there are some reliable places where you can get information, but you

also have to be careful if you're going to a site where a company has an agenda. If they're going to profit from promoting a certain product, then you have to be a little skeptical about that. But the government-based websites like the National Institute of Health or the Mayo Clinic, WebMD.com, they all have pretty good information for the public.

Q. *Do you see a greater acceptance of natural medicine within the traditional medical community?*

I do see it becoming more widely embraced. When I first started practicing with natural medicines back in 1995–96, there was a lot more skepticism among the medical community, but I think the fact that a lot of the clinical research on natural products is being published in mainstream medical journals, that has helped in terms of exposing the doctors to it. More and more patients are taking natural products and therefore they're going to their doctors saying 'Hey, I'm taking this and I'm getting great results.' In some cases the doctors will be interested and read a little bit more, and in other cases they just dismiss it and don't pay attention. Interestingly, a lot of doctors take vitamins themselves even though they may not necessarily recommend or prescribe them for their patients. But more doctors seem to be on board, and overall I have seen a big change in the past 15–20 years or so in the way people are embracing natural medicine.