Herbal Medicines: Real medicines that are frequently found in local supermarkets and pharmacies
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**Introduction**

Traditional medicines form part of integrated systems of health care delivery in today’s societies, especially in the third world, where there is restricted access to modern medication. Herbal medicine in Kenya is widely adopted as a cultural norm and has been integrated into homes in this modern era due to their retail price, availability, and perceived therapeutic benefits. Since vendors such as supermarkets and pharmacies in Kenya sell these herbs over the counter, herbs like *Moringa oleifera* (Moringa), *Zingiber officinale* (Ginger), and Aloe vera are well known and used for several purposes(Kosea et al.,2024). These herbs have not only been valued for their nutritional and medicinal values but also as an addition to the conventional medical procedures.

*Moringa oleifera* is known as the “miracle tree” due to its nutritional benefits and usefulness in combating malnutrition across rural Kenya (Kosea et al.,2024). Ginger, scientifically named Zingiber officinale is widely used due to its ability to reduce inflammation and improve digestion (Ballester et al.,2022). Aloe vera with uses ranging from skincare to digestive health remains on demand in the arid and semi-arid regions of Kenya where it is grown for both commercial and medicinal value.

The following three commonly used herbal medicines are discussed in this paper; specifically, composing of the medicines, why people use them, and do they really work? The discussion also assesses their position in the context of the Kenyan situation, where they are seen to provide adequate healthcare needs while a word of caution is given about dependence and misuse of technology. In this regard, this paper brings to light the possibilities and drawbacks of these remedies in a bid to encourage the wise and judicious use of herbal medicines in Kenya’s dynamic care environment.

1. ***Moringa Oleifera* (Moringa)**

*Composition and origin*

*Moringa oleifera* is a fast-growing drought tolerant tree species from the family of Moringaceae that originated from India but is now grown in most parts of Kenya including the Rift Valley and Coastal provinces. The leaves, seeds, and pods are good source of nutrients like vitamin A, vitamin C and vitamin E, calcium, potassium, iron, protein, and antioxidants such as quercetin and chlorogenic acid. Such components make it to be among the most essential dietary supplement and a source of medicine to many families in Kenya (Kosea et al.,2024).

*Reason for use*

In Kenya, Moringa comes in a form of tea, powder or can be added to most traditional Kenyan dishes. Some of the effects associated with the use of the plant include; boosting the immune system, increased energy, controlling diabetes and increased milk production in lactating mothers (Onteri et al.,2023). Also, its function in eradicating malnutrition in children and low-income households has attracted the attention of governmental health programs. Moringa also has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory effects that can be of benefit in the treatment of minor infections and injuries (Kosea et al.,2024).

*Effectiveness*

Some of the benefits attributed to Moringa by manufacturers have been proven scientifically. Some research studies by the Kenya Medical Research Institute confirm its role in decreasing blood sugar as well as mitigating oxidative stress, which are significant to diabetic patients (Onteri et al.,2023). Additionally, studies conducted at Egerton University have shown that Moringa could be used to treat and prevent anemia and malnutrition because of the high iron and protein content. It also has the capacity to shield cells from damages, thus reducing chances of chronic diseases (Kimondo,2020). However, there are many other claims and some of them include the capability of eliminating diseases outright which are still unproven scientifically.

*Critical Analysis*

Due to its availability across most regions in Kenya and the relatively cheaper prices for its products, Moringa plays a vital role as a resource for several Kenyan communities. However, the role played by Moringa in contributing to nutritional needs is well understood, but then there is need to exercise due diligence when it comes to therapeutic claims of the medicine. Some chronic diseases like diabetes can be managed using Moringa but this indicates that the patient may neglect necessary medical treatment. Due to this, there is a need to ensure the public is educated on how to properly use it in order to get the best out of it and also avoid cases of its misuse.

1. ***Zingiber Officinale* (Ginger)**

*Composition and Origin*

Ginger is a flowering plant that is widely consumed as a spice and medicinal preparation, and is grown from the rhizome. With gingerol, shogaol, and paradol among its contents, the spice shows potent anti-inflammatory and antioxidant activities (Ballester et al.,2022). In Kenya, it is grown in regions like Kericho and Murang’a and is easily accessible in fresh, powdered or processed forms from supermarkets, chemist shops and other related stores.

*Reasons for Use*

In Kenyan homes ginger is used as a medicine for different ailments including nausea, colds as well as indigestion. Some women need ginger tea to ease the menstrual cramps, while athletes and seniors take it for joint pains and arthritis (WHO,2019). It is also used in preparation of soups and beverages especially when the flu season is evident.

*Effectiveness*

Scientific evidence also confirms the use of ginger in the therapeutic process. Research conducted at Egerton University has provided evidence on its use in the treatment of stomach related ailments like nausea and building up of gases in the intestine apart from its function as an anti-inflammatory agent for arthritis cure. Previous research indicates that ginger can help with nausea that stems from chemotherapy, pregnancy, or surgery. Furthermore, considering that gingerol – which is the primary bioactive component of ginger – has been identified to possess antibacterial capacity, providing protection against certain kinds of infections (Ballester et al.,2022).

*Critical Analysis*

These can partly explain why ginger has been adopted in the Kenyan market since it has been proven to be effective in the management of minor health ailments. In any case, its use should be seen as preventive and supplementary rather than having healing properties. For example, although it controls nausea and inflammation, it does not treat potential triggers of severe diseases. However, ginger consumption in large quantities can cause negative outcomes – for instance, heartburn or stomach upset. A lot of effort needs to be spent on educating patients as to the correct dosage and usage to prevent adverse effects.

**3*. Aloe Vera***

*Composition and Origin*

Aloe vera is a type of cactus plant, which grows in the dry climatic conditions of Kenya, especially in Turkana and Garissa. The gel component consists of polysaccharides, vitamins, (A, C, E), and enzymes that make it useful for therapeutic purposes (Kimondo,2020). Aloe vera gel inside the leaves is also consumed as a juice called Aloe vera gel for internal consumption with special focus on the digestive system.

*Reasons for Use*

In Kenya, aloe vera has been used by many for its skin-related reasons with more concentration on burnt skins, injuries, and acne. It is also also applied in many households as an herbal cure for constipation and stomach aches (Kimondo,2020). Its use has increased since it has been incorporated in most of the commercial skincare and health enhancing products that can be accessed from supermarkets and pharmacies.

*Effectiveness*

Research conducted at the University of Nairobi and KEMRI confirmed efficiency of Aloe vera as an agent that can enhance the process of wound healing and has anti -inflammatory properties (Kimondo,2020). The described polysaccharides contribute to skin moisturizing and regenerative processes, and that is why the seaweed is used in treatment of burns and eczema. Though, its application is quite similar in nature, internally it is more debatable. Although Aloe vera juice is sold as a cleanse product, consuming too much might lead to stomach irritation and some loss of electrolytes.

*Critical Analysis*

Due to the diverse uses of Aloe vera and their cheap availability in the market, makes it a popular choice especially for the rural population of Kenyans. While most of its applications are topical, it has been scientifically proven useful, although, its internal ingestion can lead to certain side effects. They both present challenges mainly because dosages are not well regulated, thereby calling for regulation in order to avoid the risk factor.

**Conclusion**

Traditionally used medicines including Moringa, Ginger, Aloe Vera among other herbs are key in Kenya’s health care sector as they are cheap health care products. There are scientific evidences in terms of their nutritional and therapeutic properties especially for diseases like malnutrition, inflammation, and simple ailments. Their application remains relative, required with prudence and within the understanding of their drawbacks.

These remedies can also provide important help in maintaining health, but they are not a replacement for specific medical care. This has resulted in delayed treatment of serious illnesses due to reliance on herbal remedies thereby underlining the need for a harmonized system of traditional and conventional medicine. Educational interventions, as well as the formulation of laws and policies at public health sector, are crucial in helping communities to understand the correct usage of herbal products and make them safe to the users. In this regard, designing and implementing best practices for using the obtained benefits is crucial to allow Kenya to safely and effectively incorporate herbal medicines into its culture and healthcare system.

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