Herbs can be helpful in addressing many muscle or joint problems, specifically: herbs to reduce inflammation; herbs to reduce pain; and herbs used as antispasmodics.

Usually, along with a sore muscle comes some degree of inflammation. Essential oil herbal solutions are easy to apply directly on the inflamed area. One of the best herbs for this is arnica, purchased as oil and applied topically. This is especially effective on muscles strained after long or strenuous work days.

Internal use of herbs—for both inflammation and pain relief—is fairly common. Perhaps best known historically is meadowsweet. From its botanical name, Spirea, the term aspirin was derived. It contains a substance similar to the compound in aspirin that relieves pain and inflammation. Unlike aspirin, meadowsweet reduces irritation and ulcers of the stomach. A cup or two of tea or a bit of extract can provide relief after a long day.

Turmeric is gaining popularity for its ability to reduce inflammation. It’s easy to use in cooking, which makes the old adage, “Your food is your medicine,” ring true. It can be added to stir-fried veggies, soups and many baked foods. It has a subtle flavor, so it’s easy to use in large quantities.

Two herbs stand out for their ability to help reduce muscle spasms: valerian and kava. Valerian is believed to be an excellent herb for relaxing muscles. Note that it may not be the best-tasting tea; adding peppermint and honey helps a lot. Kava is also known to relax muscles, and it can be tried for many spasmodic or anxiety-related problems. Try it as tea for some welcome relief. Again, you may need some flavor enhancement. You can add it to apple juice to make it more palatable.

As an aromatherapist, herbalist and educator for Aura Cacia (www.auracacia.com), Tim Blakley has taught extensively throughout North America for 30 years. His experience includes authoring Medicinal Herbs in the Garden, Field and Marketplace. Blakley has traveled worldwide, researching essential oil plants and herbs. He played an integral part in Frontier Natural Products Co-op’s herb-growing programs, including managing the National Center for the Preservation of Medicinal Herbs. He has also held positions with the California School of Herbal Studies and Herb Pharm.
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