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INTRODUCTION

“Nature to be commanded,” as Francis Bacon rightly said, “must be obeyed.”

The wise aphorism reflects a vision — of why and how our ancients derived healing benefits by using extracts from nature’s wondrous bounty — especially, herbs.

We can do the same thing today, thanks to emerging, new knowledge about their healing effects — and, with good reason and better intention.

To recall a lovely “song-like” poem:

*Wise folk say, every beginning
Implies an ending.
Not quite so, say the trees
As leaves drop from visible splendour
To the hidden roots they nourish.
While snow-quilted branches dream
All is renewed.*

But, before that — let’s first look at the basics. Pain is part and parcel of most health affections — from joint disorders to cancer. This explains why many researchers were hooked on trying to unravel the deep puzzle behind the pain mechanism, and also finding a better way to relieve it with medicines that went far beyond killing pain alone.

When a landmark outcome emerged and identified prostaglandins, the body’s chemical messengers, as the cause of inflammation, or pain, and that they could be blocked, it led researchers to a new

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frontier. The result? A novel pain-and-inflammation-relieving medicinal assembly line called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs [NSAIDs].

NSAIDs are a large group of medications. There are several types of NSAIDs, and aspirin, as you know, is the most common. Other examples of NSAIDs are ibuprofen, naproxen, piroxicam, nabumetone, and so on.

NSAIDs were predictably hailed as magic bullets to quash pain. Slowly, however, it dawned that NSAIDs were effective, all right, but caused unwanted side-effects.

This prompted researchers to think of alternatives — medicines that had all the good qualities of NSAIDs in the treatment of pain, but without their dangerous side-effects.

The emergence of cyclooxygenase-2 [COX-2] inhibitors, or coxibs, a new class of medications, provided the means to that end, if not the end to a means. Besides, the arrival of coxibs that works by inhibiting an enzyme known as COX-2, which triggers the release of prostaglandins, was a boon one thought — until experts warned people with heart problems to show caution and avoid their use.

COX-2 inhibitors were said to be superior to NSAIDs, in many ways. Labelled *Super Aspirins*, COX-2 inhibitors were found to be as effective as the wonder drug aspirin is in relieving arthritic pain, for instance, in clinical and patients' trials and treatment; they also had "comparatively" less tummy, or gastro-intestinal [GI], side-effects in comparison to conventional medications, like NSAIDs. Besides, they were thought to provide equivalent pain reducing and anti-inflammatory benefits associated with traditional NSAID use — but, without the inherent side-effects or platelet-related [blood-

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thinning] problems of conventional NSAID agents, or so one thought. In addition, some experts are of the opinion that they could be useful agents in the management of a host of general and specific ailments, including prevention and treatment of cancer.

This brings us to the foundation of this book. Is there something better than conventional COX-2 inhibitors?

Yes, there is!

Researchers assert that a natural herb, or herbs, selected carefully, and in sufficient concentrations, can offer substantial relief from the fury of COX-2 inflammation and related diseases, without some of the side-effects of conventional, or synthetic, or prescription COX-2 inhibitors.

Also, the best part is natural herbs come from nature — they inhibit the COX-2 enzyme, and powerfully balance platelet aggregation. They “kill” pain and inflammation; they heal ulcers; they also prevent clotting, and heart attacks.

Call it the “herbal aspirin” effect, or what you may — and, this comes without the solemn side-effects of conventional NSAIDs and/or COX-2 inhibitors. Besides, herbs offer us an added benefit — which is not confined only to relieving pain, or distress. They provide us a “holistic” medical tool-kit, not just for inflammatory relief, but also maintenance of optimal health.

More so, because “revamping” healthy articular cartilage is the key to restoring healthy, pain-free joint function? Yes, indeed.

Let’s now log on to the immense utility value of some of nature’s most-favoured herbal COX-2 inhibitors in the subsequent chapters

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— and, elicit maximum benefits Mother Earth has created in them for us.

But, before we embark on our journey to find out how these herbal wonders work, and how best we could make use of them, let us first look at the basics as to what makes natural, or herbal, COX-2 inhibitors a good choice in the treatment of inflammatory disorders. From arthritic pain — and, a host of health problems — to prevention of cancer.
