

## Functional Foods: The Food-Drug Continuum Part 2 of 4

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### ☀ The Other Hippocratic Oath

Functional food is recognized as having a tertiary function - the ability to go beyond sustenance and essential nutrition to a level of favorable intervention in bodily processes. From initial notion to current research findings, this concept is neither readily understood nor quickly accepted. That common oatmeal could, given optimum dietary conditions, reduce serum cholesterol levels, was unheard of until the last part of the 20C. Scientific evidence mounted and traditional thinking was challenged. The concept of a food-drug interface emerged, embodying a continuum of active substances from basic food to prescription drugs. A schematic of what this may look like is accessible from one of the links at the end of this article.

Someone, somewhere at sometime, came across a quote attributable to Hippocrates, the central, historical figure of Greek and traditional medicine: "Let food be thy medicine". Still used today, it became the rallying battle cry and justification of the Functional Foods revolution of the late 1990's. Proponents demanded that the healing properties of food be equated to those of drugs, and relied on the wisdom of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC Father of Medicine to further their aims. Hippocrates is an appropriate reference, worthy of reverence, as he was the first practitioner to methodically consider material examination and eliminate mythical explanations in the pursuit to understand human disease, illness and wellness. However, further inspection reveals that Hippocrates had a variety of opinions on food and medicine, such as: "It is better to be full of drink than full of food". Contemporary advocates of alternative medicine and champions of the right to self-care could certainly embrace: "A wise man ought to realize that health is his most valuable possession and learn how to treat his illnesses by his own judgement". As with so many quotes, they can be misleading if taken out of context.

### ☀ 20 Centuries Later

Medical knowledge and practice advanced. In 16C Germany, Paracelsus, also a pioneering physician and medical genius, offered a broader, more accurate teaching and a scientific challenge that rings true to this day: "Everything man needs to maintain good health can be found in nature...the true task of science is to find these things". Like Hippocrates, Paracelsus observed nature and therapeutics. He identified that nature has two kinds of influence - helpful (*essentia*) and harmful (*venena*). A chemist by formal training, he had a particular preference for native herbs and furthered the effective use of tinctures.

### ☀ The Food-Drug Interface is not New

Paracelsus was onto something. Many modern pharmaceuticals have their origins in the plant world. Aspirin® is synthetically produced but based on the chemical structure of salicylic acid found in white willow. Tanacet®, the prescription drug used for migraine prevention, draws its clinically-proven efficacy from *parthenolide*, the active ingredient extracted from the medicinal herb *Tanacetum parthenium*, long and commonly known as *Feverfew*. Cultivated in the Canadian province of Manitoba, the medicinal herb *Feverfew* has been used for centuries in Europe, where it now outsells aspirin for anti-migraine treatment. **FF**

### ☀ Link to the Food-Drug Interface

[http://www.foodfocus.on.ca/images/foodfocus/Food\\_Drug\\_Continuum.gif](http://www.foodfocus.on.ca/images/foodfocus/Food_Drug_Continuum.gif)

### ☀ Some Web sites

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/crops/medicinal/bkq00s13.html>

<http://www.alchemylab.com/paracelsus.htm>

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