

OPINION COLUMN

No proof rhino horns, tiger bones increase performance

Melissa Carr, 24 hours

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Queen's University biologist Peter de Groot was called by officials after a rare one-horned Javan rhinoceros was found dead in a Vietnamese game preserve several years ago. WWF-Greater Mekong

Tiger bones, rhinoceros horn and bear bile, oh my! Unfortunately, sometimes these things come to mind when people hear about traditional Chinese medicine. While it's true that these have all been used as TCM herbs, thankfully in North America they are illegal to use or sell.

Rhino horns are thought to improve virility for men. It doesn't. But, some things that do have similar characteristics to human anatomy do have actual physical effect on the twin part. For example, walnuts look like brains, and their omega-3 fatty acids do support brain health. The diuretic Chinese herb qu mai is the stem of a plant that looks like a urinary tube and thus, it is used to treat urinary tract infections. But rhino horns are best left on the magnificent beasts.

Some herbs are chosen because it's thought that they will impart their observed qualities to the user. People thought they could become strong and powerful by eating tiger bone. There is no evidence that this works. Instead, check out the morinda plant. Its root is a Chinese herb called ba ji tian, which translates as "never withering and falling" because it has been observed as a vine that hangs on persistently. It's considered a longevity herb that has now been found to have components that help manage stress and reduce 1 of depression. Not coincidentally, its fruit, the noni fruit, is also a popular energy supplement.

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Other herbs that may bring medicinal benefit are harvested unethically. Bear bile has been used for centuries to treat pain, inflammation

and liver health issues. However, the method of extraction is cruel and painful to the animals. There are many other herbs and treatments that are safe, effective and ethical, so there's no justification for its use.

Walk into any grocery store and notice that there are often dozens of options for any particular food category. Some foods are certified organic, non-GMO, fair trade, grass fed, wild grown, free range and/or ethically managed. Others are not.

Chinese herbology, however, has options too. In this province Chinese herbalists, TCM practitioners and TCM doctors have a minimum of 1,900, 2,600, and 3,250 hours, respectively, of training. With a 'grocery store' of hundreds of herbs to choose from, suitable and ethical alternatives are available.

Melissa Carr is a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.

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