

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO MEDICINES

Medicines are substances that alter the normal body functions and are intentionally used for **therapeutic** reasons.

*Therapeutic comes from the word **therapy**, which means treatment and healing of disease or disability and includes control of disease.*



Medicines are a very important **part** of therapy, however therapy also includes non-medical interventions.

The words *medicine* and *drug* really mean exactly the same thing. However nowadays the word 'drug' is often used for substances that some people take for non-therapeutic purposes. Drugs taken to prevent or cure a disease or other body disorder

are often called medicines to distinguish them from addictive substances, such as narcotic analgesics, taken illegally for some other purpose. Terms such as 'injecting drug use' or 'drug abuse' are often heard and they are applied to the illegal use of substances like heroin, cocaine or amphetamines.

This book is about improving the health and wellbeing of people in our community. The word 'medicine' is used instead of the word 'drug' so there will be no confusion with the illegal use of these substances. The word 'drug' still appears in older documents.

1.2.1 What are medicines?

For many centuries people all over the world have discovered and used natural products to treat illnesses. Many have been products from plants. Since the early 1900s people have been learning how to make **synthetic** versions of these medicines.

The bark of a willow tree was used in 400BC to help ease aches and pains. Much later salicin was found in the bark. This substance formed the basis of what we now know as aspirin, which was developed in 1897.



White willow (*Salix alba*) is a natural source of aspirin.