

Medicine

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Learning From Chimpanzees How to Heal Ourselves

One-quarter of all modern medicines are derived directly from plants, and there are hundreds of thousands of other plant species yet to examine, each with dozens of unique chemical compounds that could prove of medicinal value. If one wanted to discover more valuable medicines, where would one start looking? It could take millions of years, literally, to sort through this enormous variety of plants and plant compounds to find ones with medicinal value. Fortunately, this is exactly what researchers have discovered that chimpanzees (*Pan spp.*) have already done, over millions of years of evolutionary time. By observing how chimps and other species cope with illness, researchers have acquired leads on plants with promising medical applications to human health. Trees from the *Vernonia* genus, for example, which chimpanzees regularly seek out when ill, have been found to contain chemical compounds that show promise in treating parasites such as pinworm, hookworm, and giardia in humans.