



HEALTH FOR LIFE

Using Herbs and Dietary Supplements

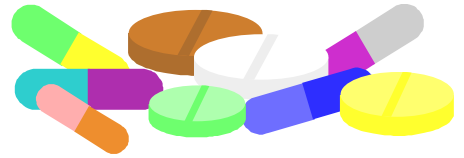
For thousands of years, people have used herbs to try to improve their health or treat their ailments. Since we know many medical conditions are related to a person's diet, many people also eat or drink certain foods to try to control disease and feel better. Stores everywhere sell herbs and special diet products and claim that they work. Some herbs have been scientifically shown to work. However, many of the claims for herbs and dietary supplements have not been fully tested. Claims about how well they treat medical conditions are not yet proven.



Using these products may help you feel better, however, they also may affect the treatment given by your doctors and nurses. Please read this information on what you should know about herbs and dietary supplements.

What are Herbs and Diet Supplements?

Most herbs and diet supplements are natural products often made from plants. People eat or drink these products to try to improve their health. People buy them "over the counter" in health food stores, supermarkets and drug stores. This means you do not need a prescription from a doctor to buy them. Some still look "natural" as leaves, bark, fruit, stems, or flowers. Others are processed and made into tablets, capsules, gelcaps, or liquids.



Why is this Information Important to me?

- Herbs and dietary supplements may not be safe even though they come from natural sources.
- They may not work the way they claim to. Many have not been tested in a scientific way.
- They may interact with your other medications and treatment. Sometimes herbs or supplements are combined together in one product. This can complicate how they interact.
- They may be very expensive. There may be a lot of cost over time for an unproven treatment.



What You Need to Know

- **Being interested in and wanting to improve your health is an important first step.**
- **Talk about herbs and diet supplements you use with your doctors, nurses, pharmacist, dietitian**

All the medicines and remedies you use, including over-the-counter herbal and diet products should be discussed. It is most helpful to show your doctor and nurse the herbs or nutritional supplements in their original containers. Let them know of any other ways you are trying to improve your health. They may have new information on how these herbs and dietary supplements may interact with other medications.

If you and your doctor decide that you should continue to take an herbal remedy or supplement, review your decision in a few weeks. If you have not seen results in a reasonable time, stop taking it.

Just because it's natural does not mean it's safe

- Many powerful drugs come from natural sources, but many natural things are not safe. If someone says "It's OK, it's natural," remember a snake bite is natural too.

- **Herbs or dietary supplements might affect other ways of treating your condition**

Gingko biloba, one of the more commonly used herbs, for example, may increase your risk of bleeding since it interferes with blood clotting. Relaxants like Kava may increase the effect of sedatives used before surgery.

- **Many herbs and dietary supplements haven't been studied in a scientific manner**

More and more research is now being done on these products. However, many products that you can buy in health stores have not been scientifically tested at all. This is changing since the National Institutes of Health budget for Complementary and Alternative Medicine is now over \$68 million every year. Scientific studies are now testing green tea, saw palmetto extract, melatonin, Gingko, shark cartilage, St. John's wort, and more.



- **Don't be fooled by advertising, especially if you see it on the Internet**

Be smart and be skeptical ! A product being tested in a lab or on animals is not the same as being tested in a controlled clinical trial on people.

- **Herbs and dietary supplements are not regulated or controlled like drugs**

Claims of how well they work and what conditions they help do not have to be proven. The purity of the products does not have to be tested.

- **Ask questions**

Ask your doctors, nurses, pharmacist, or dietitian questions you might have about herbs and dietary supplements. They may have more and new information about using these products. They will talk with you about whether you should keep using them.



- **The Bottom Line is to talk about using herbs and dietary supplements with your health care professionals.**

How Do I Find Out More?

If you would like to learn more about herbs and dietary supplements, here are some places to start:

- Call or stop by the **Center for Health Information** in the first floor lobby of Doan Hall.

This is a library of information on how you can improve your health. Plus the staff there can help you find answers to your questions. Please call (614) 293-3707 to request information and the hours of operation. The Center is open Monday – Saturday during daytimes and some evenings.

- **Stop by a library or bookstore and pick up a copy of:**
 - ▶ The Alternative Medicine Handbook: A Complete Reference Guide to Alternative and Complementary Therapies, by Barrie Cassileth, 1998
 - ▶ Alternative Medicine for Dummies, by James Dillard and Terra Ziporyn, 1998

- **Surf the Internet for:**
 - ▶ The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine: <http://nccam.nih.gov>
 - ▶ Oncolink: <http://www.oncolink.org>
 - ▶ Health Web: <http://healthweb.org/index.html>
 - ▶ New York Online Access the Health: <http://www.noah.cuny.edu>

- **Ask for related materials produced by OSU Medical Center:**
 - Making the Most of Visits with Your Doctor
 - Information for My Doctor