



St. Mary's Church

Stewardship of the Body

“I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Ps. 139)

## Herbs

Many people now take herbal supplements. When used properly, many herbal supplements may be safe and possibly beneficial to your health.

However, a few can cause life-threatening problems such as liver or kidney damage, uncontrolled bleeding or heart arrhythmias. Herbal supplements contain ingredients that affect your body functions, much the same as prescription and nonprescription drugs.

Some types of herbs can interact with medications. Some herbs alter how your body metabolizes drugs, which can alter their potency. Some can add to a drug's actions, while others may interfere with its effects.

Some examples of herb-medication effects include:

- **St. John's wort:** Do not take this herb if you take antidepressants, anti-blood-clotting drugs, certain asthma drugs, immune-suppressing medications or steroids as it can greatly increase or decrease their potency and lead to serious side effects.
- **S-adenosylmethionine (SAM-e):** Do not take this herb with antidepressant medications of the type that affect serotonin as serious side effects can occur.
- **Garlic, ginseng, ginger and feverfew:** Do not take these herbs with anti-clotting medications, such as aspirin, warfarin (Coumadin) and clopidogrel (Plavix) as they can increase the risk of bleeding.
- **Glucosamine and chondroitin:** May interfere with the effects of warfarin.
- **Ginkgo:** Do not take this herb with anti-clotting medications as it may increase the risk of bleeding. Do not take it with thiazide diuretic drugs as it may counteract the blood pressure lowering effect. Do not take it with anti-seizure medications as it may interfere with the effect of the medications, thus increasing the risk of a seizure.
- **Kava:** Do not take this herb with cholesterol-lowering drugs or any other drugs that may affect the liver as it may further increase the risk of serious liver problems.

**Before surgery:** Discontinue the use of certain herbal supplements 2 to 3 weeks before having certain surgical procedures. Herbal supplements may affect blood clotting, your response to sedation, and blood pressure control. Make sure your doctor knows what you are taking.

**Bottom line:** If you use, or are planning to use herbal supplements you should:

- Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about them to make sure they will be compatible with your medications
- Follow the supplement instructions and talk to your doctor about proper doses for you. If you are over 65 you may need dose adjustments
- Be extra cautious about supplements manufactured outside the U.S. Herbal products from some European countries are regulated and standardized, but those from China, India and Mexico may contain toxic ingredients and prescription drugs. Source: Mayo Clinic Health Letter, Aug. 09