

Herbal Health Products

What are herbal health products?

Herbal products are a form of dietary supplements that come from plants and are marketed to improve or maintain one's health. They can come in the form of pills, capsules, powders, gel tabs, creams, or liquids. Most often you do not need a prescription from your doctor to buy them.

Some common examples include:

- Black cohosh
- Coenzyme Q10
- Cranberry
- Echinacea
- Feverfew
- Garlic
- Ginseng
- Ginkgo biloba
- Kava
- Primrose oil
- Saw palmetto
- St. John's wort
- Turmeric
- Valerian
- Yohimbe

Why do people use herbal products?

- To protect and improve their health
- The desire for a "natural" treatment
- Ease of purchase without a prescription

These products are not meant to treat, diagnose, prevent or cure disease. It is not wise to self-diagnose or treat any health problem. Talk to your health care team before treating yourself.

Are they right for me?

There are many factors that you will want to think about before you buy and begin taking an herbal product.

- What is the benefit that you hope to receive?
- What other medicines or supplements are you taking?
- Have you done research or talked with someone in healthcare?
- Have you talked with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about wanting to start this herbal product?

Why talk to your health care team?

Always check with your health care team before taking the herbal product. You will want to make sure that it will not cause problems with any of your medicines or with any health problems that you might have. Some herbal products can be unsafe when they are combined with prescription medicines.

They should not replace your prescribed medicine without first talking with your doctor. Do not delay seeing your doctor just because you are taking an herbal product.

If you are having surgery, you must discuss the herbal products you are using with your doctor. You may need to stop taking them for a period of time prior to the procedure.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, talk to a member of your health care team before starting an herbal product. Some may affect the amount of breast milk made or even be harmful to you or your baby.

Are all herbal products the same?

Factors like price, quality and ease of finding the product will help you decide on a product. Unlike medicines, herbal products are **not** required to go through quality testing. Under current law, it is up to the manufacturer to make sure that the product contains the ingredients on the label.

One study showed that less than half of the products sampled were correctly labeled for strength and content. You may consider choosing a product made by a company that is known to make products free of contaminants and contain what the label states it does. If you have questions, please ask your pharmacist. He or she would be happy to help you select a product.

How do I know which brands have been tested?

Many groups have begun to test products for quality and consistency. They have designed programs that certify that the ingredients are as the label states. When a product passes the tests, the company is allowed to label the product with a seal of approval.

This process only confirms that the product does indeed contain the ingredients as the label states. This seal does not always mean that the product is safer nor works better than other products.

Brands that display one of these seals show that it's met quality standard testing:



Important Points

- Natural products may have side effects. Just because it is “all natural” does not mean it cannot hurt you.
- Make sure you follow the instructions on the label and to not take more than the suggested dosage.
- Let your doctor, pharmacist, nurse, and dentist know about all the herbal products that you are using. This will help you avoid unsafe combinations of medicines and herbal products.
- Herbal products have drug-like effects and should be thought of as drugs.
- Seek advice and information from healthcare providers who have knowledge about herbal products and avoid taking advice from people who lack training.
- If there is a change in the state of your health, see your doctor right away.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©2/2020. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5720.