



## Are Herbal Supplements Safe?

### Introduction

Although herbal medicine have been used by traditional healers and physicians for thousands of years, these herbs are still being probed by researchers hoping to unlock their full therapeutic potentials. There is still much to learn about the biochemical and clinical effects of the individual constituents and of the various parts (petals, stigmas, leaves, and roots) of these plants. Many of today's synthetic drugs originated in the plant kingdom, and less than two hundred years ago, the major pharmacopoeias of the world were dominated by herbal drugs. Nevertheless, the United States Food and Drug Administration regulates herbs and other dietary supplements differently from conventional medications. Herbal remedies are everywhere these days, often promoted as safe alternatives to prescription medicines (1). However, many are not manufactured consistently, and can have severe side effects on the body. Herbal

medicines are not always the harmless nostrums that many patients and even some physicians think, but may actually contribute to morbidity and mortality. In other words, herbs seem harmless, some can be potentially dangerous, especially to anyone taking medication for a cardiovascular problem. Herbal medicines do not undergo rigorous scientific study using randomized, controlled clinical trials that are designed to measure objective efficacy. Sometimes, even fatal, interactions have been reported between cardiovascular medicines and some herbal supplements. For example, kava root, one of the top ten selling herbal supplements, potentially causes liver damage. Furthermore, even if the herbal supplements do not cause side effects per se in themselves, they may still have negative interactions with other drugs. For instance, taking Saint-John's worth can prevent human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) medications from working, as well as some heart drugs (2).

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### References

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