



Poison HOTLINE

1-800-222-1222

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Did you know

Herbal supplements are not regulated by the FDA like prescription drugs or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. This is one of the many reasons why a person should be careful when choosing an herbal supplement.

The manufacturers of herbal or dietary supplements are responsible for evaluating the labeling and safety of their product prior to becoming available on the market. The FDA is responsible for taking action against any misbranded or adulterated product after it reaches the market.

Products with a Current Good Manufacturing Practice (cGMP) stamp on their label have had their manufacturing facilities inspected by the FDA. This states that they are produced safely, without contaminants, and are labeled accurately.

Herbal Supplements: “Thought safe, but are they?”

Many times herbal and dietary supplements get left off of a patient’s profile. When completing a medication reconciliation or medication review it is prudent to specifically ask if the patient is taking any herbal or dietary supplements. Herbal supplements are increasing in popularity and are often considered natural so patients do not always inform their health care provider of that they are taking them.

So are they safe? Not necessarily. Herbal supplements can exhibit strong effects in the body and can cause herbal-drug interactions. Some of these interactions can be dangerous. Many times supplement use increases with age. That being said, as supplement use increases prescription medication use increases as well. This then increases the risk of herbal-drug interactions. A very short list of some herbal-drug interactions are listed in the table below.

Herbal Supplement	Medications	Effect
Garlic	Aspirin, clopidogrel (Plavix®), warfarin	Increased bleeding risk
Ginkgo	Aspirin, clopidogrel, warfarin	Increased bleeding risk
Ginseng	Warfarin	Decreased warfarin effectiveness
St. John's Wort	Calcium channel blockers, digoxin, warfarin, statins (e.g. atorvastatin, lovastatin, and simvastatin)	Reduced drug effectiveness

Things to remember: Follow herbal supplement dosing instructions carefully. When completing a medication review make sure to ask about any supplement or herbal use. If your patient is considering herbal or supplement use make sure to do a thorough investigation of any possible herbal-drug interaction. Watch closely for any unusual signs or symptoms of adverse drug interactions such as lab abnormalities, blood pressure changes, changes in heart rate, blood sugar changes, and even mental status changes.

Susie Eades RN, CSPI
Certified Specialist in Poison Information



Hotline Editor: Kimberly Zellmer, PharmD; Deputy Editor: Edward Bottei, MD
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