



## Safety with Supplements

"The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack." Psalm 23:1

In searching for optimal health, herbal supplements and holistic medicine are more popular than ever these days. Many of us have heard of the importance of providing all your doctors with an updated list of prescription and over the counter medications. You may not always think to tell them about the nutritional and herbal supplements, too. Some people are reluctant to share this list with doctors since not all doctors approve of supplement use. They may feel the benefits of an herbal remedy and fear that their doctor will disapprove of them or say that they are wasting their money.

Many herbal supplements can interact with prescription medications by canceling, reducing or exaggerating the effect of the prescription drug. It is very important to talk with your doctor about the supplements that you are presently taking or are thinking about adding to your daily routine. Some pharmacists are also able to tell you if there are any interactions with herbal supplements and medications that you are presently taking.

The following are some commonly used herbal supplements and list possible interactions with prescription drugs.

**Echinacea** - Echinacea is an herbal supplement that is taken to strengthen the immune system. This supplement should not be taken with heart medications, anti fungal medications, HIV medications or medications taken to reduce anxiety.

**Ephedra** - This herbal supplement is a powerful decongestant. It contains ephedrine, which can elevate blood pressure. Ephedra should not be used with any heart medications or if you are being treated for high blood pressure, glaucoma or thyroid problems.

**Ginkgo** - Some studies believe that Ginkgo improves blood flow and circulation and also increases memory. Ginkgo may interact with anticoagulation medications such as aspirin, coumadin, heparin and warfarin. Combining these medications with ginkgo may cause bleeding problems.

**Garlic** - Garlic supplements claim to lower cholesterol and blood clots and be important to heart health. It may also increase the blood thinning effects if you are already taking an anticoagulant such as coumadin. In diabetics it may also drop blood sugars.

**Ginseng** - Ginseng is taken by many to decrease stress, increase energy and also decrease cholesterol. It may also cause nervousness, headaches, insomnia, palpitations and increase blood pressure. It is not advised to take with blood pressure problems or medications or if you are on anticoagulant such as coumadin.

**St. John's Wort** - This supplement is taken for its natural antidepressant effects. It is recommended that St. John's Wort is not taken with any other prescription antidepressants, HIV medications, oral contraceptives, some heart and blood thinning medications and Tamoxifen (a cancer medication).

**Hawthorn** - Hawthorn is marketed to decrease blood pressure and cholesterol and assist with angina symptoms. It is not recommended to take with digoxin since it may lower your heart rate to a dangerous level.

If you are using coumadin or other blood thinners it is recommended that you not take co enzyme Q10, garlic, ginger, Omega 3 Fish Oil, or Vitamin E without discussing with your doctor first. Since some supplements have a blood thinning effects it is important to share your supplement list with your doctor especially if surgery is planned.

Remember that supplements are usually not approved or regulated by the FDA and there can be many claims about the effectiveness of such supplements. To play it safe always talk with your doctor and pharmacist about the herbal supplements that you are taking or are considering.

Resources: HealthCastle.com, "Herb Drug Interactions"; American Council on Science and Health, "Drug-Herbal Health Supplement Interactions", 1995, Fall 2001.

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**Blood Pressure  
Screening:**

Sun., March 16

9:00 AM

**Office Hours**

Tuesday 1-3 p.m.

except March 25