The James
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTER

Using Herbs and Dietary Supplements

People have used herbs and remedies to improve their health or treat their ailments for thousands of years. Today, stores everywhere sell herbs and special diet products "over the counter" that claim health benefits. While some of these products may help you feel better, they may also cause negative side effects and affect the treatment given by your doctor. Below are some guidelines about herbs and dietary supplements that can help you make an informed choice about these products.

What are Herbs and Dietary Supplements?

- Many herbs are made from plants, but that alone does not make them safe.
- Many are sold in health food stores, supermarkets, drugstores, and over the internet, making them widely available to consumers.
- You do not need a prescription to buy them.
- Some still look "natural" as leaves, bark, stems or flowers.
- Some may be processed into tablets, capsules, gel caps, liquids, or powders.

What information do I need to know?

- Herbs and dietary supplements may not be safe to use even though they come from natural sources.
- They may not work the way they claim. Many have not yet been tested in a scientific way.
- They may interact with your other medicines and treatment.
- They may be very expensive and may not give you much benefit.
- Some may be harmful.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

© September 10, 2026. The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center – Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute.

What do I need to know about herbs and supplements?

- **Always talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, and dietitian about the herbs and diet supplements you are taking.**
- It is helpful to show your healthcare team the herbs or nutritional supplements in their original containers.
- Herbs or dietary supplements may cause complications for people having surgery or other treatments. A few are listed here.

Antioxidants	Ginkgo Biloba
Echinacea	Ginseng
Ephedra	Kava
Feverfew	St. John's Wort
Fish Oil	Valerian
Garlic	Vitamin E

- One example, Gingko Biloba may increase the risk of bleeding since it interferes with blood clotting.
- Remember that some herbs are known by other names.

Does the government regulate these products?

- Herbs and dietary supplements are not controlled in the same way as prescription medicines. Some have been found to contain harmful substances.
- Many herbs and supplements have not been studied in a scientific manner.
- Some have been tested on animals or in the lab, but not on people.
- The quality, purity and strength of the herbs in each dose can be different or have other products in them.
- "Mega Dose" does not mean Mega-Health.

Where can I get more information?

Patient and Family Resource Center

A packet of information can be prepared for you to help answer some of your health-related questions. To make a request for health information, you may send an email to cancerinfo@osumc.edu.

Websites

- **National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health**

  Go to https://www.nccih.nih.gov/ for research based information on treatments and conditions.

  - For a NCCAM list of clinical trials, click on the “Research” tab at the top of the homepage. Next click on “Clinical Trails”.

- **National Institute of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements**

  Go to https://ods.od.nih.gov/ for health information on dietary supplement use and safety.

- **The U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institute of Health, MedlinePlus**

  Go to www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginformation.html for health information about drugs, supplements and herbals.