

Herbal Products: In the News

When you see an herbal product on the shelf do you assume it is safe to use? If you said "yes," read on.

Concerns About Herbal Products

1. Herbal products are not checked carefully to make sure they are safe to use. They are considered "dietary supplements." A manufacturer does not have to prove they are safe or that they work.
2. What is in the pill may not be what is on the label. There are no standards for herbal products with regard to how they are harvested from the field, processed or packaged. This can cause a lot of variability in the final product or pill that is sold. In fact, two of the same plants may have different amounts of the herb they contain! Some labels may inaccurately list the contents or potency (strength) of the herb being sold.
3. Herbal products can state health claims on the label that have are not proven or not generally accepted as true.
4. Herbal products may contain other ingredients that are not listed on the label that you may not want to take or may be harmful to you.

What Should You Do?

Below are some suggested guidelines to keep you safe:

- Don't take herbs if pregnant, nursing or attempting to become pregnant.
- Don't give herbs to infants or children.
- Check with your doctor before taking any product - the herb you choose may interact with other drugs you are taking, causing serious results.
- Don't take large amounts of herbs for long periods of time.

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- References:
1. Consumer Reports, Herbal Supplements, 11/95, www.ConsumerReports.org/Special/Samples/Reports/9711heb0.htm
 2. National Council Against Health Fraud Position Paper on Over-The-Counter Herbal Remedies, 1995, www.hcrc.org/ncahf/newslett/nl18-4.html#herbalpp

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