Herbal Supplements: Safety & Research Support

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Herbal Supplements

Extensive use worldwide
Considered a safe alternative by consumers due to natural ingredients
Many herbs can be traced to ancient times
Lack of awareness of research on efficacy, safety, interactions
Herb use is often not part of communication with health care providers.

Nurses & other health care professionals typically receive very little formal education about herbs.

Few pharmaceutical companies are involved in research due to inability to patent naturally occurring substances—often market combination products.
Some herbs are effective & can be used to maintain & enhance health alone or in conjunction with other therapies.

Others interact with prescription medication enhancing or inhibiting action which may be unintended & harmful\textsuperscript{2}

Current research findings demonstrate that costly supplements may be no better than a placebo\textsuperscript{3}
Purpose: fill a gap & provide evidence to inform practice

Evaluating research supporting commonly used herbs

Translating the information into an easily accessible format.

Focus: 55 commonly used herbs and essential oils

Reviewing of over 150 research studies, many meta-analyses
Quality of Research Evidence

Rated for each herb:
1 = Clinical trials or Meta-analysis
2 = Correlation, surveys
3 = Insufficient, animal studies

Variations for individual herbs:
Gamma linolenic acid for rheumatoid arthritis (1)
Type II Diabetes (2)

Side effects or precautions and drug interactions are also addressed.
Avocado\textsuperscript{5-6}

Generally safe

Recommended uses
(1) Abdominal fat deposits
   1-1.5 avocados q day x 2-4 weeks
(3) Decrease LDL, triglycerides & hypertension

No known precautions
Lavender EO\textsuperscript{7-10}

Generally safe

Recommended uses
(1) Antibacterial, antifungal, sleep quality, stress and anxiety, postpartum depression

Precautions
Inhaled oil bottle necklaces lack efficacy
Peppermint, leaf or EO$^{11-16}$

Generally safe

Recommended uses

(1) Antioxidant, IBS, dyspepsia

   Enteric coated caps TID 15 min a meals x 28 days

(1) Congestion 3-4 drops inhaled

(2) Antimicrobial, virucidal, nausea, tension headaches

Precautions

Contraindicated with GERD (due to GI relax), gallbladder disease, or liver disease
Milk Thistle

Generally safe

Recommended uses
(3) Chronic Liver Disease, Decrease Cholesterol, Renal Protective, Decrease Atherosclerosis Plaques, Decrease Blood Glucose

Precautions
Long-term effects not studied
Research limited to animal studies
Ginseng

Generally safe

Recommended uses
  (1) Peripheral Vasodilation
  (3) Regulate Glucose, Decrease Weight, Increase LBM

Precautions
  No Anticoagulation drugs
St. Johns Wart

Use with Caution

Recommended uses
(1) Mild to Moderate Depression

Precautions
Short term use only: less than 3 months

Drug Interactions
Use with Caution

Recommended uses
(1) Periodontitis
(2) Adjunct for Attention Deficit Disorder

Precautions
No Anticoagulants
No Thiazide Diuretics
Long-term use unknown
Goldenseal\textsuperscript{29-31}

Not Recommended

Commonly Used For
  Sore throat, gastrointestinal disease, wound healing

Precautions
  Increase risk of liver tumors
  DNA damage
Ephedra\textsuperscript{32-35}

Not Recommended

Commonly Used For
- Weight Loss
- Energy

Precautions
- Hypertension
- Stoke
- Heart attack
- Death
Our focus was adults age 18-65.

Usage recommendations are consistent with health authorities and specialty organizations.

Chart developed for use by nurses and other healthcare providers was piloted with health care providers for utility. It received favorable ratings with one recommendation to increase the font size which we did.
Providers have asked about my use of herbs

47% Disagree
17% Neutral
36% Agree
Regular Use of Herbs without Telling Provider

- 60% Disagree
- 13% Neutral
- 27% Agree
Most commonly used herbs by participants

- Green Tea
- Ginger
- Garlic
- Cinnamon
- Avocado
References


