



# Herbals, Natural Products and Dietary Supplements

## Do I need to tell my health care team about what herbal products I am taking?

Yes! It is vital that you discuss herbal use with your health care team. This is even more crucial if you:

- are taking any medications
- have diabetes
- have high blood pressure
- have heart disease
- have liver disease
- are having surgery



## Can herbals interact with the medications I am taking?

Yes! Herbals can interact with some of your prescription medications making them less safe and /or less effective.

## What do I need to know?

- Always remember to tell your healthcare team when you start or stop taking an herbal, natural product, or dietary supplement.
- The term “natural” does not mean that the product is safe.
- Follow the dosing guidelines. More is not better.
- Choose single herb products. Avoid mixtures.
- Choose only products marked with USP or Consumer Lab seals. These seals mean the products are tested for quality and content.



## Are herbal products safe with surgery?

No! All herbal products need to be stopped 10 days before surgery. Some products can increase your heart rate, blood pressure, and risk of bleeding.

## Who makes sure supplements are safe?

In 1994, Congress passed a law that made manufacturers responsible for the safety of their product. The Food & Drug Administration (FDA) becomes involved only after consumers report harmful side effects.

## What do I do if an herbal product I am taking makes me sick?

- Tell your health care team.
- Call the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088 to report it.

## Where can I find more information about herbals?

National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements  
Bethesda, MD 20892 <http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov>

U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA)  
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition  
5100 Paint Branch Parkway  
College Park, MD 20740  
Call 1-800-FDA-1088  
[www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/default.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/default.htm)



National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine  
P.O. Box 7923  
Gaithersburg, MD 20898  
1-888-644-6226  
[www.nccam.nih.gov/](http://www.nccam.nih.gov/)

**Contact your local VA dietitian for more information.**