Herbal Product Safety

Using Ayurvedic and herbal products more safely

Natural does not always mean safe. Herbal and Ayurvedic products can cause side effects and can interact with medicines, and the FDA does not approve dietary supplements for safety or effectiveness before they are sold. These steps can help you use them more safely.

1 Tell all your doctors what you take

Keep a written list of every herb, Ayurvedic product, supplement and medicine you use, with doses. Share it with each of your doctors and your pharmacist, and bring it to every appointment, including visits with us.

2 Do not stop prescribed medicines

Do not stop, reduce or replace a prescribed medicine with an herbal product. Make any change with the doctor who prescribed it. Do not use Ayurvedic care as a reason to put off seeing a doctor about a medical problem.

3 Know about heavy metals

The FDA and NCCIH report that some Ayurvedic products have contained lead, mercury or arsenic at harmful levels. A CDC report described lead poisoning in pregnant women who had taken Ayurvedic medicines made in India. Metals may not be listed on the label. If you have used these products, ask your doctor whether a blood lead test makes sense.

4 Buy only third-party tested products

Buy only from sources whose products are independently tested. MedlinePlus suggests looking for a seal such as USP Verified or ConsumerLab.com Approved Quality. Be cautious with products bought abroad or from unfamiliar websites. The FDA says Ayurvedic products marketed to treat or cure a disease are sold illegally in the U.S.

Do not use herbal products if you:

- **are pregnant or breastfeeding.** Metals can pass into breast milk.
- **are having surgery.** Some raise bleeding risk or affect anesthesia.
- **are older than 65.** Talk to your doctor first.
- **want to give one to a child.** Talk to the child's doctor first.

Ask your doctor first if you:

- **take any medicine,** especially a blood thinner such as warfarin. Ginkgo or vitamin E can add to bleeding risk.
- **have liver or kidney disease.** Liver injury has been reported with ashwagandha and some turmeric products.

Stop the product and contact your doctor if you notice:

- Stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or constipation
- Unusual tiredness, weakness in the arms or legs, or dizziness
- Burning or tingling in the fingers or toes
- Dark urine, yellowing of the skin or eyes, or loss of appetite

Or any other side effect that worries you. Bring the package with you. You can also report a problem to the FDA.

POISON CONTROL

1-800-222-1222

Call for a possible poisoning, or if a child swallows a product. In an emergency, call 911.

Sources: National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) · U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) · Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), MMWR · MedlinePlus, National Library of Medicine

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This handout is general information. It is not a substitute for medical advice from your own doctor or practitioner.