

# Herbal Safety

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Do you want to live a longer, more healthful life? All of us do and daily we are bombarded with information promoting products, which are advertised to help us improve our health. From the flashy television ads and full-color leaflets prepared by pharmaceutical companies to the radio ads and grocery store advertisements for supplements and herbal products the barrage of claims can be overwhelming.

The American consumer wants and demands a pill to cure every symptom. Many are turning to supplements and herbal therapies. Alternative medicine is growing at an incredible rate and has become a more than 49 billion dollar per year industry.

158 million Americans now take herbs and supplements. Vitamins, herbs and supplements are not regulated and their producers are not required to prove the safety or efficacy (usefulness) of their products.

Now, the goal of this article is now to discuss the issue of whether or not the FDA should regulate herbs or supplements, but I do want to say—consumer beware! To safeguard your wallet (not the mention the potential harmful effects on your health) you need to be a wise consumer.

There are many simple remedies that are useful, in combination with a healthy lifestyle, in helping the body combat disease and promote wellness! Many herbs have been thoroughly proven (when I say this I mean by double-blind studies which have been peer reviewed) to help with various health problems. For example, Valerian to help for mild insomnia, soy to decrease hot flashes and night sweats in peri-menopausal women and garlic to reduce cholesterol.

## Finding the Best Sources

However, how do you know that the Valerian, St. John's Wort or Garlic you buy really contains what the label says it does? Remember, it is not regulated and in-

dependent testing is not required. Many supplements contain a large amount of cheap fillers instead of the active ingredients claimed. A company called Consumer Lab has independently tested a variety of supplements to see if they contain what the label says they do and/or the amount of the product which has been shown to be effective in helping with a particular ailment. (For more information visit [consumerlab.com](http://consumerlab.com)) Here are some examples: When the numerous Valerian products were tested only 40% contained what the bottle said they did, the other 60% did not. And 20% of the products did not contain Valerian at all. There are at least 200 different St. John's Wort products on the market today. When these were tested only 21 said they contained the amount of the herb (and the correct part of the plant) that has proven effective. Out of these 21 products, seven did not contain what the label said and five of these contained Cadmium a substance that is harmful to your kidneys.

I encourage you to be your own health-keeper. No one else can do that for you. Learn about your body and how it works. When you talk to your health care provider or to a natural healing practitioner don't be afraid to ask questions and require answers. Many of us have let down our guard when it comes to herbs and supplements. We are willing to swallow most any concoction because it says it is all-natural or from a plant source. When you take any substance and refine and condense a large amount of it into a little pill or liquid it is hard to call that a "natural" herb—it is really a medicine.

## Truth or Fiction?

Before you buy a substance, I encourage you to learn everything you can about it. Here is a simple list that can help you weed out the ones you shouldn't waste your money on.

- 1) If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- 2) Listen carefully to all the information given in the

advertisement about the product. Does it leave you with questions?

3) Research before using a product. Has it been proven effective by reputable studies that have been peer reviewed? (Not studies funded or published by the company making the profits.)

4) Beware of “secret formulas,” “miracle cures” and “the cure of the century” claims.

5) Be skeptical of products that say they can cure or help a wide variety of illnesses. The “take two tablespoons for whatever ails you” formulas.

6) Beware of products promoted largely or exclusively by testimonials or celebrity endorsements.

7) Always tell your health care provider if you are taking an herb or supplement and are on prescription medication. Many herbs can cause harmful reactions when combined with various pharmacological medications.\*

## True Remedies

I urge you, if you are sick or if you wish to prevent disease—don’t look first to the medicine cabinet or the supplement section in your health food store. Take a look at your lifestyle. Are you following the simple laws given by our Creator for health? Pure air, sunlight, temperance, rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water and trust in divine power—these are the true remedies. If you want to live healthfully give up the idea of a quick fix or a miracle pill, put out the effort required to follow these true remedies. The results will be well worth your effort!

\*Adapted from a list by Dr. Walt Larimore in his book, *Alternative Medicine, the Christian Handbook*.