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# Herbal Products: What You Should Know

## Are They Safe Because They Are Natural?

You may think that herbal products are safe because they are made from plants. Many prescribed drugs used today were originally made from plants. And just like prescribed drugs, herbal products can be safe at one dose and harmful at another dose. Herbal products can also cause harmful side effects and allergic reactions. A natural product is not always safe. The same caution that is used with prescribed medications should be used with herbal products.

## Can Herbal Products Affect the Way Prescribed Medications Work?

If you take herbal products while taking other medications, they may react with each other. Sometimes this can cause serious side effects or prevent the medications from working effectively.

Many herbal products can react with cardiac medications. For instance, if you are taking **Warfarin** or **Coumadin** you should avoid taking certain herbal products. These products can either cause bleeding or prevent the medication from working properly. Some herbal products such as feverfew, garlic, and ginger can cause bleeding. Ginseng and ginkgo biloba can interfere with Warfarin.

## Can Herbal Products Affect You During Surgery?

Some herbal products can raise or lower your blood pressure and heart rate or increase your risk of bleeding. It is important for you to tell your surgeon or doctor what medications and herbal products you are taking. The recommendation is to stop taking herbal products 10 - 14 days before surgery due to the risk of bleeding. Check with your doctor to find out when you need to stop taking herbal products before your surgery.

## What You Can Do

- Inform your doctor and nurse of all herbal products you are taking.
- Talk to your doctor and pharmacist **before** using any herbal product.
- Keep track of all herbal products and prescribed medications that you are taking.
- Report any side effects to your doctor.
- Learn as much as you can about the herbal product you are taking or want to take.
- If you use the Internet to search for information, use sites that you can trust.
- Avoid herbal products if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

## Tips For Finding Useful Information

- Talk to your doctor and pharmacist.
- Contact your local or hospital library.
- Use Internet sites that you can trust such as those listed below.
- Watch out for Internet sites that are selling products or making claims that sound too good to be true.

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

[www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)

Health Canada

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

Canadian Health Network

[www.canadian-health-network.ca](http://www.canadian-health-network.ca)

Your Health Website  
(Calgary Health Region)

[www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/yourhealth/](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/yourhealth/)

Integrative Health Clinic  
#100, 2310 - 2 St SW  
Calgary, Alberta, T2S 3C4  
(403) 209-1777

[www.integrativehealth.ca](http://www.integrativehealth.ca)

Links, Herb Research  
Foundation

Mayo Clinic Health Information  
American Internet site

[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

