

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Like other medications, treatments and therapies for chronic pain, plant-based supplements will not cure the condition.
- Like standard pain medication, herbals are most effective for chronic pain when used in combination with daily exercise, relaxation techniques, or other medical treatments recommended by your health care provider.
- Like standard pain medication, plant based supplements can cause unwanted side effects and interfere with the actions of other medications. Death can result from overdosing on certain plant based supplements just as it can from standard medications.
- Unlike standard medication, plant based pain relievers are sold as dietary supplements. Although the Federal Food and Drug Administration strictly regulate standard medications, the makers of herbal supplements are not required to supply proof that the products are safe and effective.
- Herbal supplements are generally not as fast acting as standard pain relievers.

Questions?

If you are interested in an herbal supplement that was not mentioned in this publication or if you have more questions, the National Center for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine is a reliable resource for information about plant-based supplements and other non-traditional strategies for the treatment of chronic pain and other conditions. Information can be accessed at: <http://nccam.nih.gov/>

LIVING HEALTHY WITH CHRONIC PAIN



HERBAL SUPPLEMENTS

the power of plants



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THE POWER OF PLANTS

By Patricia Tomshine, CNP and Diane Budnick, CNP

Plants have been a source of remedies to treat pain and other ailments for centuries. Herbs are probably most well known for their potential benefits to health, but nature has provided other sources of medicine such as the pain-reliever salicin from the white willow. In case you aren't familiar with it, salicin was used to make the first aspirin. Although aspirin is now synthetically made, many herbs are still sold as extracts or natural supplements. The problem for those living with chronic pain is to know which products are effective and safe to use. The following information provides answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about herbal supplements for the treatment of chronic pain and associated conditions.

What is healthy about plants?

Chronic inflammation is at the core of many pain-causing conditions. Certain herbs produce substances known as phytochemicals are thought to decrease inflammation and help the body's natural defense system with healing and prevention of disease.

Which herbs are best for treating inflammation?

Manufacturers of supplements are not required to research the product before offering it for sale. Therefore knowledge about which herbs are effective is limited. In recent years, medical researchers have taken on the task of finding proof to support (or reject) the use of herbs. The following tables list herbs with strong evidence for effectiveness and those for which there is not yet enough research to be certain.

Melatonin and Valerian

Many chronic pain sufferers also have problems with sleep. Valerian has shown some benefit as a

sleep aid with few side effects. Melatonin, a synthetic hormone, also produced naturally by the body, may be effective for certain types of sleep disorders. A good evaluation of factors that may be affecting your sleep is the first step in getting a better nights rest. While an herbal supplement may be helpful, it is unlikely to be the only answer to poor sleep.

Kava

Kava is used as a sleep aid though there is no proof that it is of benefit. More importantly, the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a warning that Kava has been linked to severe liver damage and abnormal muscle spasm. The FDA does not recommend its use.

St. John's Wort

There has been a great deal of public interest in the use of St. John's Wort for the treatment of depression and anxiety. While some research has been done on St. John's Wort, the results have differed among studies as to the effectiveness of the herb. What is known is that St. John's Wort can interact with certain other drugs, making them less effective. If you are suffering from anxiety or depression, it is best to consult a professional for advice in the treatment that is best for you.

Routes & Amounts

Some herbal remedies are most effective when taken in pill or liquid form. Others, such as Comfrey and Capsicum are best applied topically (to the skin) as creams or gels. The recommended amounts vary depending on the condition for which the herb is used. For example, higher amounts of Omega-3 fatty acids may be necessary for pain relief than for other conditions. Dosages may also need to be adjusted based on a person's age, weight and other medications. It is always important to consult a pharmacist or health care professional about the best route and amount of any medication that you use.

CAUTION

Herbal supplements are generally not recommended in pregnancy or while breast feeding. If you are taking prescription medications, especially blood-thinning medications, it is important to know whether the herbal supplement will change the effect of your other medications. Certain herbs can worsen medical conditions including, but not limited to heart, kidney disease, liver disease, high blood pressure, stomach disorders, ulcers, blood clotting abnormalities or depression. ALWAYS CONSULT YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER BEFORE STARTING AN HERBAL SUPPLEMENT.

Herbal Supplement	How Used
Avocado-Soy (ASU)	Osteoarthritis
Bromelain <i>Extracted from the stem and fruit of the pineapple</i>	Treatment of inflammation
Capsicum <i>Bell pepper, chili pepper, paprika. Commonly know as Capsaicin</i>	Post-herpatic neuralgia, rheumatoid arthritis, complex pain syndromes
Clove	Dental pain
Comfrey	Anti-inflammatory. Used in cream form it has been found to reduce pain and inflammation associated with muscle injuries and sprains.
Devil's Claw	Osteoarthritis, acute low back pain. Equivalent to NSAIDs in effectiveness.
Omega-3 and Omega 6	Inflammation, pain, morning stiffness of rheumatoid arthritis
SAMe <i>A synthetic supplement</i>	Relief of osteoarthritis pain. Treatment of depression. May be effective for fibromyalgia.
Willow Bark	Anti-inflammatory. Low back pain. Fever reducer.