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# Using Herbs Safely

Herbal medicine, also known as botanical medicine, has been used in both Western and Eastern cultures for centuries. Herbal therapy is designed to prevent long-term (chronic) and acute disease, treat illness, and enhance overall health and well-being. This natural healing method is based on the belief that nature provides therapies for many ailments and for supporting wellness.

## The healing power of plants

Herbal medicine makes use of all parts of the plant. This includes the root, leaf, stem, flower, and sometimes even the pollen. Many herbs may be mixed into one formula. This is for a more complex and holistic effect. The combined herbs may work together to reduce or even prevent possible side effects and strengthen the formula.

Use herbal treatments as carefully as you would take prescription medicines. Only take them under the advice of a qualified herbalist or provider who is trained and certified in botanical medicine. Don't use herbs without professional help. Always tell all your healthcare providers, including your primary care practitioner, about any herbal treatments you are using.

## Myths and facts about herbs

**Myth:** Herbs are all natural, so they can't harm you.

**Fact:** Herbs are powerful substances. They should be overseen by professionals and used with respect.

**Myth:** All over-the-counter herbs are the same.

**Fact:** Herbal remedies don't have production guidelines like those of prescription medicines. A trained professional can help ensure that you use only high-quality, safe products.

**Myth:** The more herbs you take, the better the results.

**Fact:** Some herbs are toxic in high doses and can make you sick. More is not always better. Take only as directed.

**Myth:** Herbs can be taken at any time, with any medicine, and even when you are pregnant or nursing.

**Fact:** Many herbs may be harmful if taken with certain prescription medicines. Also, many herbs are not safe to take when pregnant or nursing. Always talk with a trained professional before combining herbal medicines with your prescription medicines, or if pregnant or nursing.

## Questions for the herbalist

Before you decide to use herbal therapy, talk with a trained professional. Asking them some of these questions may help you make a more informed decision:

- What is your training? How long have you been practicing?

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- Do herbs have side effects? Will they interact with other medicines I take?
  - Have you treated problems like mine?
  - Will you work with my healthcare provider?
  - What will a typical visit be like?
  - How long will treatment take and how much will it cost?
  - Where do you get your herbs?

## **To learn more**

Find more information at:

- [Herb Research Foundation at www.herbs.org](http://www.herbs.org)
- [American Herbal Products Association at www.ahpa.org](http://www.ahpa.org)
- [The American Botanical Council at www.herbalgram.org](http://www.herbalgram.org)
- [National Center for Complimentary and Integrative Health \(NCCIH\) at www.nccih.nih.gov](http://www.nccih.nih.gov)