

What You Should Know About Herbal Use and Anesthesia

Stop all Herbs 10 days prior to surgery

Do I need to tell my doctor about all of the herbal products and other supplements that I take?

Yes. It is absolutely essential that you tell your doctor about any treatments that you are using. These include the use of herbal medicines, vitamins, nutritional supplements or any other prescribed or over-the-counter drugs. Many of the popular herbal products on the market can cause harmful side effects or interact with your other medicines.

Could herbal medicines affect my anesthesia if I need surgery?

Anesthesiologists are conducting research to determine exactly how certain herbals interact with certain anesthetics. They are finding that certain herbal medicines may prolong the effects of anesthesia. Others may increase the risks of bleeding or raise blood pressure. Some effects may be subtle and less critical, but for anesthesiologists, anticipating a possible reaction is better than reacting to an unexpected condition. So it is very important to tell your doctor about everything you are taking before surgery.

There are thousands of herbal products currently on the market. Listed below are examples of some commonly used herbal medicines and their possible problems. Not all herbs are listed. Check with your doctor if you have any questions about the prescription or nonprescription medications that you are taking.

List of Possible Side Effects and Drug Interactions*

Herb	Common Uses	Possible Side Effects or Drug Interactions
Echinacea	Boosts the immune system helps fight colds and flu; aids wound healing	May cause inflammation of the liver if used with certain other medications such as anabolic steroids, methotrexate or others.
Ephedra (also called Ma-Huang)	Used in many over-the-counter diet aids as an appetite suppressant; also for asthma or bronchitis.	May interact with certain antidepressant medications or certain high-blood pressure medicines to cause dangerous elevations in blood pressure or heart rate. Could cause death in certain individuals.
Feverfew	Used to ward off migraine headaches and for arthritis, rheumatic disease and allergies.	May increase bleeding, especially in patients already taking certain anticlotting medications.
Garlic	For lowering cholesterol, triglyceride levels and blood pressure.	May increase bleeding, especially in patients already taking certain anticlotting medications.
Ginger	For reducing nausea, vomiting and vertigo.	May increase bleeding, especially in patients already taking certain anticlotting medications.
Ginkgo (also called ginkgo biloba)	For increasing blood circulation and oxygenation and for improving memory and mental alertness.	May increase bleeding, especially in patients already taking certain anticlotting medications.
Ginseng	Increases physical stamina and mental concentration.	May cause decreased effectiveness of certain anticlotting medications. May see increased heart rate or high blood pressure. May cause bleeding in women after menopause.



Vital Health

I N S T I T U T E

Goldenseal	Used as a mild laxative and also reduces inflammation.	May worsen swelling and/or high blood pressure.
Kava-kava	For nervousness, anxiety or restlessness; also a muscle relaxant.	May increase the effects of certain antiseizure medications and/or prolong the effects of certain anesthetics. Can enhance the effects of alcohol. May increase the risk of suicide for people with certain types of depressions.
Licorice	For treating stomach ulcers.	Certain licorice compounds may cause high blood pressure, swelling or electrolyte imbalances.
Saw Palmetto	For enlarged prostate and urinary inflammations.	May see effects with other hormone therapies.
Valerian	Mild sedative or sleep-aid; also a muscle relaxant.	May increase the effects of certain antiseizure medications or prolong the effects of certain anesthetic agents.

*This is only a partial listing of herbs that could cause problems if taken before surgery.

"What You Should Know About Herbal Use and Anesthesia" is reprinted with permission of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, 520 N. Northwest Highway, Park Ridge, Illinois 60068-2573.

For more information, go to the American Society of Anesthesiologists website at www.asahq.org/patientEducation/insideherb.htm.