Using Herbs and Dietary Supplements

People have used herbs and remedies to improve their health or treat their ailments for thousands of years. Today stores everywhere sell herbs and special diet products “over the counter” that claim health benefits. While some of these products may help you feel better, they may also affect the treatment given by your doctor. Below are some helpful guidelines about herbs and dietary supplements.

What are Herbs and Dietary Supplements?

- Most herbs are natural or made from natural products. They are often made from plants.
- Many are sold in health food stores, supermarkets, drugstores, and over the internet.
- You do not need a prescription to buy them.
- Some still look “natural” as leaves, bark, stems or flowers.
- Some may be processed and made into tablets, capsules, gelcaps, or liquids.

What information do I need to know?

- Herbs and dietary supplements may not be safe to use even though they come from natural sources.
- They may not work the way they claim to. Many have not yet been tested in a scientific way.
- They may interact with your other medicines and treatment.
- They may be very expensive and may not give you much benefit.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

What do I need to know about herbs and supplements?

- **Always talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, and dietitian about the herbs and diet supplements you are taking.**

- It is helpful to show your doctor and nurse the herbs or nutritional supplements in their original containers.

- Check to see if you are getting a health benefit. If you have not seen results in a few weeks, stop taking it.

- Herbs or dietary supplements may cause complications for people having surgery or other treatments. A few are listed here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antioxidants</th>
<th>Ginko Biloba</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Echinacea</td>
<td>Ginseng</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ephedra</td>
<td>Kava</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feverfew</td>
<td>St. John’s Wort</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fish Oil</td>
<td>Valerian</td>
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<td>Garlic</td>
<td>Vitamin E</td>
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- One example, Gingko Biloba may increase the risk of bleeding since it interferes with blood clotting.

- Remember that some herbs are known by other names.

Does the government regulate these products?

- Herbs, dietary and nutrition supplements are not controlled in the same way as prescription medicines. Some herbs manufactured outside of the United States have been found to contain harmful substances.

- Many herbs and supplements have not been studied in a scientific manner.

- Some have been tested on animals or in the lab, but not on people.

- The quality, purity and strength of the herbs in each dose can be different or have other products in them.

- “Mega Dose” does not mean Mega-Health.

- Be smart and do your research.
Where can I get more information?

**Patient and Family Resource Center**

The Patient and Family Resource Center is located on the ground floor of The James near the grand staircase. Staff at the center can prepare a packet of information with answers to your health-related questions. To make a request for health information, you may:

- Visit the center during business hours
- Call 614-366-0602
- Send an email to [cancerinfo@osumc.edu](mailto:cancerinfo@osumc.edu).

If you are unable to visit the center, the information will be delivered to your hospital room or mailed to your home address at no charge.

**Websites**

- **National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine**
  
  Go to [http://nccam.nih.gov](http://nccam.nih.gov) for research based information on treatments and conditions.

  - For a NCCAM list of clinical trials, click on the “Research” tab at the top of the homepage. Next click on “Clinical Trials”.

- **National Institute of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements**
  

- **The U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institute of Health, MedlinePlus**
  