



Herbs, Herbs, Herbs

What are herbs? Herbs include flowering plants, shrubs, trees, moss, fern, algae, seaweed or fungus. In most cultures, including the Western culture, herbs are used not only as a part of the treatment of disease, but also in the enhancement of life, physically, emotionally and spiritually. **Plant parts, including flowers, fruits, leaves, twigs, bark, roots or seeds, are all considered usable.**

Herbs are available in many forms, depending on the type of plant and its use.

- Fresh are highly perishable.
- Dried, chopped or whole herbs can be steeped as teas (infusions) or simmered over low heat (decoctions). Some fresh and/or dried herbs are preserved in alcohol (tinctures), while others are better suited in vinegar extracts (acettracts), syrup, glycerites (in vegetable glycerine) or miels (in honey).
- Freeze-dried or herbal powders come in bulk, tablet, capsule, paste or concentrate.

Other ways to administer herbs may be by suppositories, creams, gels, liniments, oils, compresses, steams, aromatics (oils) or baths.

Like drugs or foods medicinal plants (herbs) have many actions in the body. Sometimes, even if you take an herb for one certain reason, there can be other unintended reactions. Natural doesn't necessarily mean safe. Herbs have chemical properties just as manufactured drugs do. Like anything that we ingest (eat) or apply (like a salve), there can be side effects. One of the major problems with many of the herbs on the market today is that the **amount and the purity of their active ingredients vary** so greatly from product to product. www.consumerlab.com can assist with product reports.



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Herbal Medicines and Anesthesia

When preparing a patient for surgery, anesthesia providers will ask patients what medications they are taking. It is **important to tell the anesthetist about both prescription and non-prescription medications**, because all of them may have implications for anesthesia. Especially important, and often overlooked, are herbal medicines, many of which have important interactions with anesthesia.

- Feverfew, garlic, ginger and ginkgo may interfere with blood clotting and may cause excessive bleeding during surgery.
- Echinacea, used to boost the immune system, may cause inflammation of the liver if used with steroids or allergic reactions.
- Ginseng, used to increase physical stamina and mental concentration, may decrease the effectiveness of certain anti-clotting medicines and increase the heart rate or elevate the blood pressure.
- Kava-kava, used as a muscle relaxant, may increase the effects of certain anti-seizure medicines and alcohol or prolong the effects of certain anesthetics.
- St. John's Wort kava or valerian, used for depression, restful sleep, or anxiety, may prolong the effects of certain anesthetic agents.
- Ephedra or ma huang, used as an appetite suppressant, may interfere with certain antidepressant medications or cause dangerous elevation of the heart rate or blood pressure, especially with general anesthesia.

In general, the taking of all herbal preparations should be **discontinued at least one week prior** to anticipated surgery. Stopping the long term use of valerian may result in withdrawal symptoms for some people, and is best done under a physician's supervision prior to surgery.

Provided by Paul Bennetts, CRNA and
American Society of Anesthesiologists

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