

Using Herbal Products Safely

The dietary and herbal supplement industry is unregulated. Safety and effectiveness are largely unstudied. To use an herbal product as safely as possible:

- Consult your doctor first.
- Do not take a bigger dose than the label recommends.
- Take it under the guidance of a trained professional.
- Be especially cautious if you are pregnant or nursing.



Recognize that the supplement you take may have various additives that can interact with anesthesia, or may harm you and your baby.

Internet Resources

For links to websites with additional information visit the For Patients section on the AANA website at www.aana.com.

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Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists

A Tradition of Quality Care

Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) are anesthesia specialists who administer more than 32 million anesthetics to patients in the United States each year. The nurse anesthesia specialty has a history of nearly 150 years.

CRNAs represent a commitment to high standards in a demanding field. The educational requirements to become a CRNA are extensive. Prior to applying for admission to a graduate program in nurse anesthesia, a candidate must have a four-year bachelor of science degree in nursing or other appropriate baccalaureate degree, a current license as a registered nurse, and a minimum of one year of acute care nursing experience. The master's degree nurse anesthesia program itself is 24-36 months, depending on university requirements. CRNAs are board certified, and mandatory continuing education is required for recertification every two years.

Nurse anesthetists provide high-quality anesthesia services combined with personal concern for the health and welfare of patients. They are happy to assist you and offer information about what to expect with your anesthesia.



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Herbal Products



and Your
Anesthesia

Information You
Will Want to Share

What are Herbal Products?

Medical herbs have been used since the beginning of time. In fact, many of the prescription drugs on the market today are derived from plant products. Herbal products are also known as dietary supplements, alternative therapies, complementary medicine, and homeopathic or holistic healthcare.

Some of the most common include: Echinacea, Feverfew, Garlic, Ginger, Ginkgo Biloba, Ginseng, Hoodia, Kava, St. John's Wort, and Valerian.

Herbal products are available as tablets, liquids, granules, or powders, and are commonly contained in herbal teas. They may be available in their natural state as well.

The Dietary Supplemental Health and Education Act of 1994 recognizes "herbal products" as foods or dietary supplements. Therefore, they are not regulated by the FDA. There are few instructions on proper use, dosage requirements, possible side effects, toxicity and possible drug interactions. This makes it difficult to predict the patient's reaction or to know whether the herbal products are working.

What are the Concerns?

People believe if something is natural, it is safe. That is not necessarily true.

While many herbal products offer noticeable health benefits when used correctly, taking herbal products right up until the day of your surgery or diagnostic procedure may have an impact on the success of your anesthetic and procedure. Herbal products may interact with anesthetics.

Some of the potential side effects are



increased surgical bleeding, heart and blood pressure effects, reactions with sedatives, and changes in the body's interactions with other medications.

Unlike Western medicine, traditional Chinese herbal remedies often consist of mixtures of herbs, making it difficult to determine the exact amounts of each herb you are taking.

Use of herbal medications is not an absolute contraindication for surgery and anesthesia. It is absolutely essential that you tell your anesthesia professional and your surgeon about all the herbal products and other supplements you may be taking.

Before Having an Anesthetic

- Stop taking the herbal product at least 1-2 weeks prior to the scheduled procedure/surgery to prevent side effects.
- Inform your surgeon and anesthesia professional that you are taking an herbal product.
- When asked about your medication history, disclose ALL over-the-counter drugs, herbal products, dietary supplements, minerals, and teas you are taking.
- If you are not sure of the contents of the herbal product, then bring it and its container with you for your preoperative anesthesia interview.
- Make sure that your spouse, a friend, and/or a family member is aware that you take an herbal product. In the event that you need emergency care, he/she will need to share this information with your healthcare providers.
- Realize that herbal products need to be treated as medicine. Even if the product is natural, it still may be harmful.
- Possibilities for interactions are endless, and the risks increase with the number of products you are taking.

Popular Herbal Products and Possible Side Effects or Interactions with Anesthetics

Black Cohosh

Blood pressure decrease; may increase bleeding.

Echinacea

Immune suppression; liver inflammation.

Feverfew

Migraine, insomnia, anxiety and joint stiffness; risk of prolonged bleeding.

Garlic

Blood pressure changes; risk of prolonged bleeding.

Ginger

Sedative effects; risk of bleeding, especially if taken with aspirin and ginkgo.

Ginkgo Biloba

May increase bleeding.

Ginseng

Insomnia and irritability; risk of cardiac effects.

Hoodia

Changes in blood sugar; possible arrhythmia.

Kava

Sedative effects; potential liver toxicity; risk of additive effect to medications.

St. John's Wort

Sedation; blood pressure changes; risk of interaction with other medications that prolong effects of anesthesia.

Valerian

Increased sedative effects.

