

Benefits, Adverse Effects and Drug Interactions of Herbal Therapies With Cardiovascular Effects

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Because the use of herbal therapies in the U.S. is escalating, it is essential to be aware of clinical and adverse effects, doses and potential drug-herb interactions. A consumer poll in 1998 indicated that one-third of respondents use botanical remedies, and nearly one in five taking prescription medications also used herbs, high-dose dietary supplements or both. An estimated 15 million adults are at risk for potential adverse interactions involving prescription medications and herbs or vitamin supplements, yet most practicing physicians have little knowledge of herbal remedies or their effects. Herbal products are marketed without the proof of efficacy and safety that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires of drugs. The Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act of 1994 allocates responsibility to manufacturers for ensuring safety and efficacy with no specific requirements to submit documentation. Manufacturers may state a product's physiologic effects but may not make claims for the treatment or cure of specific diseases. Consumers and practitioners have little information about product safety, contraindications, interactions or effectiveness and are reliant on manufacturers to provide accurate labeling. Recently, the growing number of foods with herbs has raised concerns at the FDA, which requires evidence that food additives are safe. Considering that the growing appeal of herbal remedies is likely to continue, physicians, particularly cardiologists, must become familiar with the available cardiovascular information on herbs. This review highlights the existing data on the efficacy, adverse effects and interactions for herbal therapies that impact on the cardiovascular system. (J Am Coll Cardiol 2002;39:1083-95) © 2002 by the American College of Cardiology Foundation
