Herbal Medications and Vitamins

Michele Caliva RN MA CSPI
Director
Upstate New York Poison Center
Upstate Medical University
What Does Herbal Mean?

- Leafy Plant?
- "Natural Medication"
- Alternative Therapies?
Classification

- Dietary Supplements
- Also included are:
  - Vitamins
  - Minerals
  - Food additives
Food and Drug ADMINISTRATION (FDA)

- Not regulated as strictly as medication
- Increase in oversight
- Still issues......
  - Labeling
  - % of active ingredients
  - Variations in product based on cultivating and manufacturing process
Most Commonly Used

- Cranberry
- Soy
- Saw palmetto
- Garlic
- Ginkgo
- Milk Thistle
- Echinacea
- Black cohosh
- St. John’s Wart
- Ginseng
- Valerian
- Green Tea
- Evening primrose
Cranberry Juice

- Urinary Tract Infections..
  - Does it work?
  - Is it safe?
  - Adverse effects?
Soy

- Menopause
  - Plant estrogens (isoflavones)
- To Lower cholesterol
- Safe
  - High doses may increase risk of breast cancer in women past menopause
Saw palmetto

- Benign prostatic hypertrophy
  - Does it work?
  - Is it safe?
  - Adverse effects?
Garlic

- Infections
- High blood pressure
- Colic
- Cancer
- Effective-
  - Have been used throughout history
- Safe
  - May increase bleeding in people on blood thinners
  - Nausea and Vomiting
  - Rash on contact
Ginkgo biloba

- Alzheimer Disease
- Circulation Disorders
- Effective
  - Limited data
- Safe
  - May cause bleeding if on blood thinners
Milk Thistle

- Liver failure
- Mushroom poisoning
Echinacea

- Colds
- Safe
  - Allergic Reactions
Black Cohosh

- Premenstrual symptoms
- Menopause
  - Used instead of estrogen
- Arthritis
- Sleep aide
St. John’s Wart

- Depression
- Wounds
  - Limited effectiveness
- Safe
  - Interacts with other antidepressant medications
  - Sensitivity to the sun
Ginseng

- Used widely in China
  - Stomach disorders
  - Respiratory symptoms
  - Stress
  - Fatigue
  - Safe
- Used here as a treatment for inflammation
- Safe
  - May increase blood pressure, heart rate
  - Decrease glucose
Ginseng Abuse Syndrome

- High Blood Pressure
- Agitation
- Insomnia
- Diarrhea
Valerian

- Anxiety
- Sleep problems
- Safe
  - May make you more drowsy in combination with other sleep aids
Green Tea

- Prevents Chronic Disease
- Weight Loss
- Cancer
- Decrease Cholesterol levels
- Japan Study 2006
  - Decrease in deaths associated with heart disease
- Safe
  - Cases of liver failure
Evening Primrose

- PMS
- Diabetes
- Arthritis
- Rashes
- Safe
  - If have epilepsy it may lower the level where it is likely to occur
Chamomile Tea

- Relaxation
- Stress Reducer
- Safe
  - Allergic reactions
Kava Kava

- Relaxation
- Colds
- Induce Labor
- Aphrodisiac
- Safe
  - Muscle Weakness
  - Liver problems
  - Skin discolorations
Vitamins

- Water soluble and safe
  - Thiamine
  - Riboflavin
  - Folic Acid
  - Biotin

- Water soluble but may cause toxicity
  - Vitamin C
  - Vitamin B6
Vitamin A

- **Safe**
  - If you are a smoker avoid large ingestions of Vit A
    - May increase risk of lung cancer
- **Overdose**
  - Headache
  - Seizures
  - Nausea and vomiting
  - Liver failure
- **Chronic Use**
  - Hair loss
  - Nail changes
  - Bones and skin changes
Vitamin K

- Safe
  - Avoid supplements if on a blood thinner
Vitamin D

- Safe
  - Accumulates in the body
    - Off balance when walking
    - Muscle weakness
    - Muscle and bone pain
    - Headache
    - More serious long term effects
Vitamin E

- Essential for all body functions
- Safe
  - Nausea
  - Vomiting
  - Diarrhea
  - May decrease absorption of blood thinner agents and Vit K
Vitamin C

- GI irritation
Niacin

- What about the flushing?????
- Does a small dose of aspirin help?
- What else helps..
  - No alcohol
  - Not showering close to taking it
  - Food but not spicy food
Energy Drinks
What is in Them

- Caffeine
- Stimulants
- Safe
  - Increase in heart rate
  - Increase in blood pressure
  - Agitation
  - Potential for seizures
Powdered Caffeine

- Safe Dose is 1/16 of a tsp
  - Comparable to a cup of coffee
Clinical Effects

- Vomiting
- Hypotension
- Dysrhythmias
- Seizures
Safe Use of These Products

- Always check with your health care provider before taking these products.
- Always tell your health care provider that you are taking these products.
  - Own doctor
  - Covering doctor
  - Emergency department staff
  - Specialists
- Add them to your list of medications.
Safe Use of These Products

- Know the side effects
- Know if they are dangerous taking with your medications
- Take only the recommended amount
Safe Use of These Products
Questions
Contact

Upstate New York Poison Center

www.upstatepoison.org

We are only a phone call away!

1-800-222-1222