

New Herbal World

Most people come across herbs in daily life and don't even realize it--from coffee to toothpaste to lotions to laxatives. For thousands of years cultures have been using herbal "remedies." Now as companies emerge promoting and selling medicinal amounts of herbals in a bottle, this calls for the public to familiarize themselves with the use of herbs.

Although herbals are marketed to improve the body, herbals are not tested by the FDA. Once an herbal is on the market, the FDA must prove it harmful before imposing any restrictions on its use. Ephedra, also marketed as Ma Huang, has been linked to heart attack, stroke, and death. The FDA followed these reports by requesting limits on the amounts provided in supplements and by providing warnings to consumers. Keep in mind herbs are marketed as being natural; however, they may cause allergic reactions.

Some of the most commonly used herbal remedies are tea tree oil, peppermint oil, saw palmetto, flax seed, echinacea, ginkgo biloba, kava, ginseng, and St. John's wort.

General guidelines to follow when using herbals:

- Follow directions on dosage.
- Begin with a lower dose than directed if you have responded in the past to low dosages of medicines.
- Check for incompatibilities with any medications you are currently taking.
- If you are pregnant or nursing, you should avoid medicinal herbals.
- Children under the age of two should not be given medicinal herbals.
- Make sure the herbal is from a reputable company.
- Research side effects and incompatibilities with medical conditions before taking an herbal.
- Tell your physician when you are using herbal medications.
- Never take an herb and a prescription medication for the same ailment.

