

Herbal therapies are increasingly popular. This coming year Americans are expected to spend somewhere between \$2 billion and \$5 billion on herbal remedies and therapies. Therefore, we have the responsibility to be more informed about these supplements. We need to take the same precautions with herbs as we do with prescription medications. After all many of our prescribed medications are herbal in origin, and herbs are a type of medicine .

There are many excellent approaches to helping ourselves be healthier and feel better. But we need to research the type of therapy we choose and be aware of possible benefits, interaction, and adverse effects.

A few examples of popular herbs and important considerations are given here:

Desired Action	Considerations
Garlic: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Lowers blood pressure (Antihypertensive)•Antibiotic•Lowers cholesterol	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Causes tendency towards bleeding•May cause GI upset•Decreases blood sugar
Ginger: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Prevents motion sickness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Causes tendency towards bleeding•Contraindicated for morning sickness
Ginkgo: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Increases circulation•Helps with dizziness and ringing in the ears	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Contraindicated if taking blood thinners (anticoagulants)
Ginseng Root: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Decreases fatigue•Increases stamina	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•May cause insomnia•Swelling in the tissues (edema)•Contraindicated if taking digoxin
St. Johns Wort: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Antidepressant•Anti-anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•May cause photosensitivity

If you are taking any prescription medications, you should consult with your health care provider before adding herbs to your regimen. Specific examples in which herbs may be contraindicated are: if you are taking digoxin, anticoagulants, prescribed anti-anxiety medications, or blood pressure medications; if you are to undergo surgery; if you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant. Also herbs are generally not recommended for infants, children, and the elderly without professional supervision. Remember “natural” does not necessarily mean safe.