

## A note about quality

In Canada, herbal and NHPs are not strictly controlled. The quality and safety of these products can vary depending on which brand you choose to buy. There are no restrictions on where these products can be sold, but they are most often sold in pharmacies, health food stores, bulk food shops or grocery stores.



According to a recent report by *Canadian Health Monitor*, 65% of all herbal products purchased by Canadians (\$62.2 million in 1998) are bought in a pharmacy.\* These Canadians know that the pharmacy is the logical place to buy these products. Why? Because the pharmacy is where you buy medications. And herbal and NHPs are medications.

## Why go to the pharmacy when you can buy herbal and NHPs anywhere?

In a pharmacy, you have easy access to your pharmacist, who is the drug expert of the health care system and, as such, has a unique knowledge of medications and their interactions with each other, food, alcohol, disease and lifestyle, as well as their effects on the human body.

Your pharmacist is in the best position to help you assess whether an herbal or NHP would be effective and safe for you to take and to help you make an informed choice based on your overall health and lifestyle.

\*Source: *Canada Health Monitor*, Survey #16/June-July 1997

## More about your pharmacist

### Your Pharmacist

- is a licenced health care professional with a minimum of 4 to 5 years of university training and practical experience
- is a medication expert and the right health professional to help you get the best from your medicine
- is an expert resource for you, your doctor, your nurse and other health professionals
- keeps a computer record of all your prescription medications and checks your prescription to make sure the drug, dose and instructions are best for you.

### Pharmacists practise in many settings:

- community pharmacies (drug stores)
- hospitals ● nursing homes ● universities
- pharmaceutical companies ● governments.

## Your health checklist

Your pharmacist can help you make the best choices for your health. Here are a few other important steps you can take to help you enjoy better health:

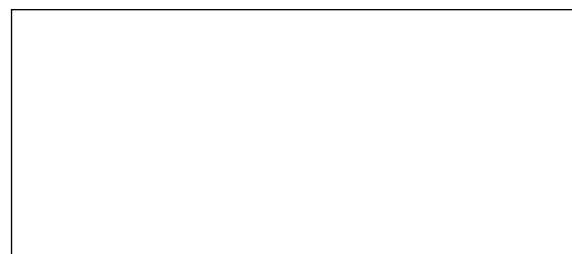
- Choose a pharmacy that meets your needs and continue to use that pharmacy.
- Take your medications as directed.
- Keep your pharmacist up to date on any prescription, nonprescription or herbal or natural health products you are taking.
- Talk to your pharmacist if you are unsure about how to take or store your medications or if you are having any problems with your medications.
- Ask your pharmacist to help you select nonprescription medications.



Your pharmacist can help you make the best choices for your health.

Have you talked with your pharmacist lately?

Compliments of your pharmacist



and ...



Canadian Association of Chain Drug Stores



Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns



Canadian Pharmacists Association



Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists

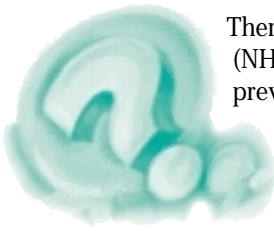
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# Thinking About Herbal and Natural Health Products?

## Talk to your Pharmacist

# Thinking about herbal and natural health products?



There has been a virtual explosion in the use of herbal and natural health products (NHPs). Canadians are turning to these “natural” or “complementary” remedies hoping to prevent sickness, treat symptoms of disease, enhance their quality of life and maintain wellness.

It’s not surprising that so many Canadians are trying these remedies. More and more, Canadians are taking an active role in their health care and are considering new ways to treat old illnesses.

## The great debate

Although the trend toward herbal and NHPs is recent, these remedies have been around for thousands of years. Still, there is little hard, scientific data that prove that these products work.

Debate rages around these remedies. On the one hand, some people believe these products should not be available until there is much more scientific evidence that they work as claimed. On the other hand, some believe that they should be freely available to consumers to use at their discretion.

## Where does that leave you?

Whatever you choose to do — to take an herbal or NHP or not — your decision should be based on the best available information.

That’s where your pharmacist can help.

Working with you, your pharmacist will share information that will help you make an informed choice about whether to take the product.

In some cases, you may learn that the scientific evidence available does not support the claims you have read or heard about a product that you would like to try. Or, you may learn that there is little or no information with which you can base an informed decision. You may also find out how a product you are interested in might affect your health.

Certain herbal and NHPs may be effective for some people, but you should always make sure you are considering the right product for the right reasons.

**Your Pharmacist can help**

## What you don’t know might hurt you...

Your pharmacist will help you wade through all the pros and cons about the herbal or NHP you are considering, taking into account all the factors that will help you make the best choice for your health. These might include:

- Whether you have other health concerns. As with regular prescription and nonprescription medications, some herbal or NHPs cannot be taken if you have certain existing medical conditions. Your pharmacist can help to ensure that the product is safe for you.
- Whether other medications you are taking might interact badly with the herbal or NHP you are considering. For example, St. John’s Wort cannot always be taken with a prescription antidepressant that your doctor may have already prescribed.

Your pharmacist may also suggest additional sources of information for you to consult, or another health professional who may have more knowledge about the particular remedy you are exploring.

## Safety is an issue — “Natural” does not necessarily equal “safer”



You should treat herbal and NHPs with the same respect with which you treat your prescription medication.

Think of it this way: by considering an NHP to treat symptoms or a disease, you are demonstrating a belief that the substance has medicinal qualities. Why then, would you take it with any less consideration than when you take other medication?

Some Canadians believe they can replace their conventional medications with herbal and NHPs. Never do this without first discussing it with your pharmacist or doctor. You may be compromising your health. “Natural” remedies are rarely replacements for existing prescription remedies.

Because there are possible consequences with all medications —whether synthetic or natural — it is always best to collect all the information you can before proceeding with any new treatment.

*When it comes to your health, leave nothing to guesswork. Talk to your pharmacist.*



### Examples of questions to ask if you are thinking about taking an herbal or NHP...

If I take St. John’s Wort for my depression, should I continue the antidepressant medicine I am already taking?

Can I drink herbal teas if I am pregnant or breastfeeding my baby?

Can I take ginger to cure morning sickness? Is it true that ginger mixes badly with aspirin?

Will echinacea really stop me from catching a cold?

Do zinc lozenges really cure a sore throat?



### Before choosing to take an herbal or NHP, ask your pharmacist...

What can you tell me about the product?

I read about the product on the Internet/in the newspaper. Can I trust this information?

What can I expect this product to do for me?

What side effects might I expect?

I am already taking X and Y prescription medications, and regularly take a nonprescription pain medicine and a daily multiple vitamin. Is it alright to add this product?

I am taking medication for [diabetes, asthma, allergies, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, cancer, heart disease]. Is it okay to take this product too?

My doctor does not know that I will be taking this. Should I tell her?

Can I drink alcohol while taking this product?

Can I continue to take the product if I become pregnant?

**Talk to your Pharmacist**