

POISONology

SAFETY & FIRST AID TIPS FROM THE ARIZONA POISON AND DRUG INFORMATION CENTER

Herbals: Consider them drugs



It is always satisfying when callers have questions about drug interactions and general drug information because it shows that people are aware of their medication therapy. Recently we had a caller who had a question about medications interacting with the supplement St. John's Wort.

St. John's Wort is an herbal supplement that is most commonly taken for mild depression. Although some studies have shown that it may be as effective as some prescription medications used to treat depression, **St. John's Wort interacts with many other medications, making it unsafe for many people to take.**

St. John's Wort causes some other drugs to be broken down more quickly in the body and thus lessens their effects. The consequences of this can range from decreasing the effectiveness of oral contraceptives to interfering with medications used to prevent blood clots.

St. John's Wort and other **herbal supplements are available without a prescription; however, this does not mean that they are safe for you.** It is important to tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of the medications you are taking. This includes prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and dietary supplements.

A couple of safety tips for medications that do not go well together:

- **Avoid Benadryl (diphenhydramine)** if you take medicine for diabetes, high blood pressure, glaucoma, depression or prostate problems.
- **Avoid alcohol or aspirin** with any medications unless approved by your doctor.
- **Avoid all herbal remedies** unless approved by your doctor if you are **taking blood-thinners or are pregnant.**

Call the tollfree national hotline at 1-800-222-1222 to reach your local poison center. If you live in Arizona outside of Maricopa County, this number will get you to our experts at the Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center in Tucson.