



## GROUP HEALTH CENTRE

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# Ontario Hepatitis Nursing Program What About Vitamins, Herbal and Alternative Therapies?

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You must talk with your doctor before using vitamins, herbs or natural therapies. Many herbs are highly damaging to the liver.

~ There is no scientific proof that alternative therapies can cure or even reduce symptoms of Hep C. Still, people use herbs to help with Hep C.

### **Caution:**

~ Substances that are labeled “natural” or “herbal” are not necessarily helpful or even safe to use.

~ Many herbal medicines have not been tested at all and this is why they can be unsafe to use.

The most commonly used herbal remedies for liver disease are Milk Thistle and Licorice Root. If you want to try them, it is important to consult a medical doctor first.

### **Milk Thistle (Sylmarin):**

~ It is the most common herb used for Hep C.

~ So far, studies show that it does not cure liver disease.

~ It might help a cirrhotic liver to function better.

~ So far, no negative side effects have been reported.

### **Licorice Root (*glycyrrhiza glabra*):**

~ It is the second most common herb used for Hep C.

~ Studies show it might have antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties.

~ Can cause serious side effects such as high blood pressure, fluid retention, and electrolyte imbalance.

Herbs that are known to damage the liver:

~ Artemesia

~ *Atractylis gummifera*

~ Bush Tea

~ *Callilepsis laureola*

~ Chapparal lead (creosote bush, greasewood)

~ Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*)

~ *Crotolaria*

~ Germander

~ Gordolobo herbal tea

~ Heliotropium

~ Jin-Bu-Huang

~ Kava (*Peper methysticum*)\*

~ Kombucha mushroom (tea)

~ Ma-Huang (*Ephedra sinica*)

~ Margosa oil

(continued on page 2)

- ~ Mate tea (Paraguay)
- ~ Mistletoe
- ~ Pennyroyal (squawmint oil)
- ~ Sassafras
- ~ Senecio aureus
- ~ Senna
- ~ Skullcap
- ~ Symphytum
- ~ Valerian root

\* - Health Canada has ordered a stop to the sale of all products containing kava because it is linked to serious liver problems.

For more information, the following book is available: *Herbs: Everyday Reference for Health Professionals*, Frank Chandler editor-in-chief. Published by The Canadian Pharmacists Association and the Canadian Medical Association c.2000.

### **Vitamins:**

- ~ If you have a balanced diet, you don't really need vitamins.
- ~ One multivitamin a day might help the liver.
- ~ Large doses of vitamins can be harmful to the liver.
- ~ Avoid high doses of vitamins A, C and D.
- ~ You should not take extra iron supplements unless prescribed by your doctor.

### **Other Therapies:**

Mind-body or energy based therapies such as: yoga, meditation, prayer, reiki, biofeedback, etc. can be very helpful for people with Hep C:

- ~ They can help to reduce stress and depression.
- ~ They can strengthen your immune system.
- ~ They can help you to cope with the side effects of Hep C drug treatment.
- ~ They can help you to feel that you have control over your life even though you have Hep C.
- ~ They can help you to make lifestyle changes such as quitting alcohol, drugs, smoking and maintaining a healthy weight.

Talking to a counselor can also help to reduce your stress levels, feel you have some control over your life and give you a better sense of well-being.