St John's Wort and Depression

url: https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/st-johns-wort-and-depression-in-depth  
  
  
St. John's Wort and Depression: In Depth  
What s the Bottom Line?  
How much do we know about St. John s wort for depression?  
We know a fair amount about the short-term effects of St. John s wort on depression but less about its long-term effects.  
What do we know about the effectiveness of St. John s wort for depression?  
St. John s wort isn t consistently effective for depression. Do not use it to replace conventional care or to postpone seeing your health care provider.  
What do we know about the safety of St. John s wort for depression?  
St. John s wort limits the effectiveness of many prescription medicines.  
Combining St. John s wort and certain antidepressants can lead to a potentially life-threatening increase in your body s levels of serotonin, a chemical produced by nerve cells.  
Don t try to treat depression on your own. Depression can become severe if you don t get effective, professional help. For some people, depression can increase the risk of suicide. Talk to your health care provider if you or someone you know may be depressed.  
About St. John s Wort  
St. John s wort (Hypericum perforatum), a plant that grows in the wild, has been used for centuries for mental health conditions. It s widely prescribed for depression in Europe.  
St. John s wort is sold as a dietary supplement in the United States, where the standards for selling supplements are less strict than the standards for prescription or over-the-counter drugs.  
For more information, see the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) Web page about St. John s wort.  
  
About Depression  
Depression (major depressive disorder or clinical depression) is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working. In 2015, almost 7 percent of U.S. adults had at least one episode of major depression in the past year. Symptoms of depression vary but can include  
  
Feeling sad or anxious often or all the time  
Not wanting to do activities that used to be fun  
Feeling irritable easily frustrated or restless  
Having problems with sleep and feeling tired  
Eating more or less than usual or having no appetite  
Experiencing pain that doesn t improve with treatment  
Having trouble concentrating, remembering details, or making decisions  
Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless  
Thinking about suicide or hurting yourself.  
Antidepressants and certain types of psychotherapy help treat depression.  
  
For more information on depression, visit the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) webpage on depression.  
  
What the Science Says About the Effectiveness of St. John s Wort for Depression  
The results of studies on the effectiveness of St. John s wort for depression are mixed.  
  
In a 12-week, 2011 clinical trial with 73 participants, neither St. John s wort nor a standard antidepressant medication called citalopram, a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI), decreased symptoms of minor depression better than a placebo. The study was funded by NCCIH and NIMH.  
In a 26-week clinical trial with 124 participants, St. John s wort, a standard antidepressant (sertraline, an SSRI), and a placebo were similarly effective in treating major depression of moderate severity. NCCIH and NIMH funded this 2012 analysis of data collected in 2002.  
A 2008 review of 29 international studies suggested that St. John s wort may be better than a placebo and as effective as different standard prescription antidepressants for major depression of mild to moderate severity. St. John s wort also appeared to have fewer side effects than standard antidepressants. The studies conducted in German-speaking countries where St. John s wort has a long history of use by medical professionals reported more positive results than those done in other countries, including the United States.  
St. John s wort was no more effective than placebo in treating major depression of moderate severity, an NCCIH- and NIMH-funded study of 340 participants reported in 2002.  
The Placebo Effect  
The placebo effect is when patients health improves because they think that an intervention a pill, procedure, or injection, for example will help. In a clinical trial of St. John s wort for major depression, what participants guessed they were taking may have affected their recovery from depression more than what they actually received. A health care provider s style in talking with patients also may have a positive effect on patient health that is separate from the treatment.  
What the Science Says About the Safety and Side Effects of St. John s Wort for Depression  
Combining St. John s wort with certain antidepressants can lead to a potentially life-threatening increase of serotonin, a brain chemical targeted by antidepressants. Symptoms occur within minutes to hours, and may include agitation, diarrhea, fast heartbeat, high blood pressure, hallucinations, increased body temperature, and more.  
There are case reports of St. John s wort having dangerous side effects, such as worsening of psychotic symptoms in people with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.  
Taking St. John s wort can weaken many prescription medicines, such as:  
Antidepressants  
Birth control pills  
Cyclosporine, used to prevent the body from rejecting transplanted organs  
Digoxin, a heart medication  
Oxycodone, a pain medicine  
Some HIV drugs, including indinavir  
Some cancer medications, including irinotecan  
Warfarin, an anticoagulant (blood thinner).  
Other side effects of St. John s wort are usually minor and uncommon. They may include upset stomach, dry mouth, headache, fatigue, dizziness, confusion, sexual dysfunction, or sensitivity to sunlight. Also, St. John s wort is a stimulant and may worsen feelings of anxiety in some people.  
NCCIH-Funded Research  
NCCIH is studying the potential drug interactions of different herbs, including St. John s wort.  
  
More To Consider  
Depression can be a serious illness and lead to an increased risk of suicide. If you or someone you know may have depression, talk to a health care provider. Don t try to treat depression on your own.  
Do not use St. John s wort to replace conventional care or to postpone seeing a health care provider about a mental health problem.  
Dietary supplements can cause medical problems if you use them incorrectly or in large amounts. Some may interact with medications you take. Your health care provider can advise you.  
Many dietary supplements haven t been tested in pregnant women, nursing mothers, or children. We have little safety information on St. John s wort for pregnant women or children. Talk with health care providers if you re pregnant or nursing or are considering giving a dietary supplement to a child. To learn more, see NCCIH s fact sheet Using Dietary Supplements Wisely.  
Take charge of your health talk with your health care providers about any complementary health approaches you use. Together, you can make shared, well-informed decisions.  
For More Information  
NCCIH Clearinghouse  
The NCCIH Clearinghouse provides information on NCCIH and complementary and integrative health approaches, including publications and searches of Federal databases of scientific and medical literature. The Clearinghouse does not provide medical advice, treatment recommendations, or referrals to practitioners.  
  
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Website: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/  
  
MedlinePlus  
To provide resources that help answer health questions, MedlinePlus (a service of the National Library of Medicine) brings together authoritative information from the National Institutes of Health as well as other Government agencies and health-related organizations.  
  
Website: https://www.medlineplus.gov  
  
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)  
The National Institute of Mental Health s mission is to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illnesses through basic and clinical research, paving the way for prevention, recovery, and cure.  
  
Depression  
  
Toll-free in the U.S.: 1-866-615-6464  
  
Website: https://www.nimh.nih.gov/  
  
Email: nimhinfo@nih.gov(link sends email)  
  
NIH Clinical Research Trials and You  
The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has created a website, NIH Clinical Research Trials and You, to help people learn about clinical trials, why they matter, and how to participate. The site includes questions and answers about clinical trials, guidance on how to find clinical trials through ClinicalTrials.gov and other resources, and stories about the personal experiences of clinical trial participants. Clinical trials are necessary to find better ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat diseases.  
  
Website: https://www.nih.gov/health-information/nih-clinical-research-trials-you  
  
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