



Herbal Products, Supplements, and Anesthesia

When you're getting ready to have surgery or another medical procedure that requires anesthesia, your provider will ask you questions about medications you may be taking. While most people will immediately think of their prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications, it is important to remember that herbal and dietary supplements—even vitamins—are just as important to consider. Like prescription and OTC medications, these can potentially react with the anesthesia you are given to cause unexpected results.

The possibilities for interactions are endless, and the risks increase with the number of products you are taking. Regardless of how long you've been taking them and even if you've never had problems, some supplements can increase surgical or procedural risks by:

- Prolonging the effects of anesthesia
- Increasing the risks of bleeding
- Raising blood pressure
- Interfering with other medications
- Causing heart problems

Here are some general pre-anesthesia guidelines if you are taking herbal or dietary supplements:

- When asked about your medication history, disclose ALL over-the-counter drugs, herbal products, dietary supplements, minerals, and teas you are taking.
- If you are not sure of the contents of an herbal product, bring it and its container to your preoperative anesthesia interview.
- Stop taking the herbal product at least 1-2 weeks prior to the scheduled procedure/surgery to prevent side effects.
- Make sure that your spouse, a friend, and/or a family member is aware that you take an herbal product. In the event that you need emergency care, s/he will need to share this information with your healthcare providers.

Some common herbs and supplements are listed here, as well as their potential risks. Note that this list is by no means comprehensive and is meant only to be illustrative of familiar scenarios.

- Black Cohosh: Decreases blood pressure decrease; may increase bleeding.
- Echinacea: Suppresses immunity; may cause liver inflammation.
- Ephedra (Ma-Huang): May interact with some blood pressure medication to cause dangerous increases in blood pressure or heart rate.
- Feverfew: May cause migraine, insomnia, anxiety and joint stiffness; may increase risk of prolonged bleeding.



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- Garlic: Some people take it to lower their cholesterol and blood pressure, but it can increase bleeding.
- Ginger: May cause sedative effects and increase the risk of bleeding, especially if taken with aspirin and ginkgo.
- Ginkgo: May increase the risk of bleeding and/or blood pressure changes.
- Ginseng: May can increase heart rate and the risk of bleeding; may cause insomnia and irritability.
- Kava: May increase the effect of anesthesia; increases the risk of liver toxicity.
- St. John's Wort: May prolong the effects of anesthesia as well as blood pressure changes.
- Valerian: May prolong the effects of some types of anesthesia.
- Vitamin E: May increase bleeding and cause blood pressure problems.