WellNews: Herbaloney - Effects of herbal supplements

by Scott_LaFee

Lots of people swear by herbal supplements. Last year, Americans spent $22.3 billion on herbs like echinacea, ginkgo biloba, Saint-John's-wort and goldenseal.

But a new study, published in the Mayo Clinic Proceedings, indicates many people also have no idea whether these touted remedies are effective. Worse, they're largely ignorant of the potential health risks.

HERBALONEY - A new study shows that many people have no idea whether herbal remedies are effective. Worse, people are largely ignorant of the potential health risks they pose. CNS Photo. MEDTRONICA - The Beauty Brains Web site at http://thebeautybrains.com isn't filled with subjects about life or death, but if you have questions or concerns about beauty products and practices, this is an interesting site to surf. CNS Photo. The most common mistake, scientists said, is assuming herbal supplements actually work. Nineteen percent of Americans, according to studies, take herbal supplements. More than half use them to treat specific health conditions.

And yet, more than two-thirds of supplements have never been clinically proven to be effective for the specific conditions they're advertised to ease or cure.

Supplements that offer no benefit but also do no harm are merely a waste of money. More worrisome, said Dr. Aditya Bardia of the Mayo Clinic, are supplements that can actually produce adverse effects, from nausea and vomiting to liver and kidney dysfunction.

Generally speaking, herbal supplements aren't regulated like traditional drugs. Randomized, controlled clinical trials aren't mandated before they can be sold. The researchers advise patients to always inform their doctors (and doctors should always ask) about herbal supplement use, because interaction with therapeutic drugs can result in worse health and, on occasion, death.

MEDTRONICA

The Beauty Brains http://thebeautybrains.com

The subject isn't life or death (well, not usually), but if you have questions or concerns about beauty products and practices, this is an interesting site to surf. It's not clear who exactly the "Beauty Brains" are, but their responses to e-mailed questions are generally reasoned and informed.

BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

A human hair is 10,000 times thicker than the film of a soap bubble.

GET ME THAT. STAT!

In 1990, no state reported more than 14 percent of its population being clinically obese. In 2005, all 50 do, according to the U.S. Census. Of the 16 Southern states, 12 report more than 25 percent of all adults are clinically obese. Only five other states outside the South report a similar percentage.

NEVER SAY DIET

The world's speed record for eating grilled cheese sandwiches is 26 in 10 minutes.

OBSERVATION

Doctor, feel my purse.

- Jane Ace

CURTAIN CALLS

In 2004, laptop computer-related distractions killed 1,761 American motorists.

STORIES FOR THE WAITING ROOM

The manual "Creative and Sexual Science," published in 1876, offered this advice to women seeking to lose weight: "Bear as many children as often and for as long as possible."

DOC TALK

Crump - a verb meaning to have a sudden change for the worse, as in "After the breakfast, the patient crumped."

PHOBIA OF THE WEEK

Caligynephobia - fear of beautiful women.

BEST MEDICINE

First man: "I woke up this morning and felt so bad that I tried to kill myself by taking a thousand aspirin."

Second man: "What happened?"

First man: "After the first two, I felt better."

FOOT PROBLEMS IN OBESE KIDS

Add foot problems to the growing list of ailments for obese children. The American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons says more overweight children have foot and ankle pain. The vicious circle of foot pain and

obesity may hinder some children from progressing. Researchers say childhood obesity changes foot structure and results in instability when walking. Being overweight flattens the foot, causing heel pain. It also can increase the risk of stress fractures in the heel bones.

CAFFEINE AND WORKOUTS

While caffeine may offer a boost in long-distance activities, when it comes to short-term, high-intensity workouts, it may hurt performance, an International Journal of Sport Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism study says. Exercisers were given either caffeine (equivalent of three cups of coffee) or a placebo and evaluated on 60-second maximum-effort cycling tests. The caffeine group had higher blood levels of lactic acid produced by overworked muscles and took longer to reach peak power.

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