

## ASK YOUR PHARMACIST

Your pharmacist is your medication expert and can provide advice and information on a wide range of health issues.



# Herbal and Natural Health Products

**There has been a virtual explosion in the use of herbal and natural health products. Many people are turning to these “natural” remedies hoping to prevent sickness, treat symptoms of disease, enhance their quality of life and maintain wellness. More and more, Canadians are taking an active role in their health care and are considering new ways to treat illnesses.**

Although the trend toward herbal products is recent, some of these remedies have been around for hundreds of years. Still, for many products, there is little scientific data that prove that they work. To make an informed decision when choosing herbal remedies, you need to be aware of their risks and benefits.

### “Natural” May Not Mean “Safer”

- ◆ Just as many drugs come from natural or herbal sources, many herbal products are drugs and should be treated as such.
- ◆ Herbal products can interact with other medications; tell your doctor or pharmacist of any herbal products that you’re taking.
- ◆ The effectiveness of an herbal remedy may depend on which part of the plant it was extracted from; for example, a root extract may be effective, while the leaf extract is not.
- ◆ In Canada, natural health products are not strictly controlled. The quality and safety of these products can vary depending on which brand you buy.

### Be Cautious when Choosing an Herbal Product

- ◆ Avoid any product that makes outrageous claims. If it sounds too good to be true, it likely is.
- ◆ Buy herbals only from reputable companies. Your pharmacist can help you make the proper selection.
- ◆ Know the adverse effects before taking an herbal or natural product.
- ◆ Do not use herbals in pregnancy; the effects of herbal products on an unborn child are unknown.
- ◆ Do not use herbal products in children; often the effects and proper dosage are not known.
- ◆ Some people think they can replace their conventional medications with herbal and natural health products. This can compromise your health. “Natural” remedies are rarely replacements for existing prescription medications.

### Questions for Your Pharmacist

**Your pharmacist can help you wade through all the pros and cons about the natural health product you’re considering to help you make the best choice for your health.**

- ◆ What can I expect this product to do for me?
- ◆ What side effects might I expect?
- ◆ I am taking other medications. Is it safe for me to take this product too?
- ◆ Should I tell my doctor that I’m taking this product?
- ◆ Can I drink alcohol while I’m taking this product?

***For more information  
ASK YOUR PHARMACIST!***