

HERB AND FOOD SUPPLEMENT INFORMATION

Dear Dr. McCrummen, From time-to-time you have a column with a variety of very interesting information that you have called, "Tidbits" or a "Mélange"! Would you please update your readers with the latest information about foods and herbs? I take many medications and supplements. J.S.

This is not in my field of expertise, but here we go! About herbs: If you are taking blood thinners, or even aspirin regularly, beware of the 4-G's; ginseng, garlic, ginko, and ginger. They can increase bleeding time dangerously, and make surgery risky. Echinacea boosts your immune system for about the first 6 weeks of use. After that, it actually suppresses your immune system, so it should only be taken only for a short time. Kava is a sedative that can damage the liver, and increases sedation if taken with antihistamines, anti-anxiety drugs, or anti-depressants. St. John's Wort is supposed to reduce stress and depression; however, it is an enzyme inducer, meaning it reduces the effectiveness of other medicines. Consider the possible side effect if taking it with birth control pills. Grapefruit has even been shown to alter the effectiveness of certain drugs, and there are likely many other things that do. Valerian helps some people sleep but it can also increase the effects of other drugs that depress the activity of the Central Nervous System. Almost every herbal formula said to provide energy or weight loss has caffeine in it, often in the form of Green Tea Extract.

Websites of interest: *The Nutrition Action Newsletter* is the *Consumer Reports* of food and dietary substances and can be purchased at www.cspinet.org. A good myth-busting web site, that debunks things like 'underarm deodorant causes breast cancer', is www.snopes.com. Very good is www.consumerlab.com, and for science based information www.quackwatch.com. If you wish to subscribe to one of these use the discount code, "OPRAH".

Things to look into: *Tri-Omega* fish oil is high in strength but low in reflux (fewer fish burps, a common side-effect). It is good to take the fish oil at dinner time, and freezing or refrigerating it helps prevent spoiling. To get fish oil naturally, fish should be eaten about three times a week, but only twice a week if you are pregnant. Know the fish that are high in mercury and avoid them, especially if family planning. Vacuum packed Alaskan salmon and tuna are a healthy source of Omega-3. Fish oil is good for cholesterol problems, sore joints (especially with osteoarthritis), and can help elevate or stabilize moods. Calcium helps reduce risks and severity of osteoporosis, helps stabilize bone, and is thought to reduce colon polyps. Folic acid can lower triglyceride's 20-40%, but use the recommended dosage.

What is bad for us: Way too many things that we enjoy! "*Super Size Me*", a recent documentary, is worth watching. The white filling in Oreo cookies is a huge source of the bad, trans-fatty acids, as is the white covering on yogurt dipped raisins. Alfredo sauce is very high in saturated fats. The popular, deep fried *Blooming Onion* is in the top of the saturated fat category with about 120 grams (roughly 5-7 days worth of normal fat intake) and is about the equivalent of eating four *Big Mac's*. One of *Mrs. Field's Cookies* can have about 30 grams of fat.

I am happy to pass on new things that I learn at Continuing Education Courses and from my personal research. Please consult with your physician, dietician, and/or nutritionist, and read as much as you can about the things you put into your body. Cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and other ailments are on the rise. What we consume can play a major role in our demise. It is important for your health to stay informed.