



A TO Z HEALTH GUIDE

Herbal Supplements and Kidney Disease

Is it safe to use herbal supplements if I have kidney disease?

No. You may think about using herbal supplements to help with any health concerns you may have, but as a patient with kidney disease, you should not use herbal supplements.

Use of herbal supplements is unsafe if you have kidney disease since some herbal products can cause harm to your kidneys and even make your kidney disease worse. Also, your kidneys cannot clear waste products that can build up in your body.

The herbal supplement market is a multi-million dollar business. You may hear from a friend or family member about an herbal supplement that they think has improved their health or well-being and they suggest it to you. While this advice may be fine for them, it can be dangerous for you with kidney disease.

What are the facts about herbal supplements?

The following facts about herbal supplements are true for everyone, with or without kidney disease. Herbal supplements often have more than one name: a common name and a plant name. Some common concerns include:

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not regulate herbal supplements for dose, content, or pureness.
- Some herbal supplements have *aristolochic acid*, which is harmful to kidneys.
- Herbal supplements made in other countries may have heavy metals.
- There are few studies to show if herbal supplements have real benefits and even less information in patients with kidney disease.
- Herbal supplements may interact with prescription medicines to either decrease or increase how the medicine works.

Which herbal supplements have potassium?

Potassium is a mineral that may need to be limited in the diet of people with kidney disease especially for those on dialysis. Herbal supplements that have potassium include:

Alfalfa	American Ginseng	Bai Zhi (root)
Bitter Melon (fruit, leaf)	Black Mustard (leaf)	Blessed Thistle
Chervit (leaf)	Chicory (leaf)	Chinese Boxthorn (leaf)
Coriander (leaf)	Dandelion (root, leaf)	Dulse
Evening Primrose	Feverfew	Garlic (leaf)
Genipap (fruit)	Goto Kola	Japanese Honeysuckle (flower)
Kelp	Kudzu (shoot)	Lemongrass
Mugwort	Noni	Papaya (leaf, fruit)
Purslane Sage (leaf)	Safflower (flower)	Sassafras
Scullcap	Shepherd's Purse	Stinging Nettle (leaf)
Turmeric (rhizome)	Water Lotus	

Which herbal supplements have phosphorus?

Phosphorus is a mineral that may need to be limited in the diet of people with kidney disease especially for those on dialysis. Some herbal supplements that have phosphorus include:

American Ginseng	Bitter Melon	Borage (leaf)
Buchu (leaf)	Coriander (leaf)	Evening Primrose
Feverfew	Flaxseed (seed)	Horseradish (root)
Indian Sorrel (seed)	Milk Thistle	Onion (leaf)
Pokeweed (shoot)	Purslane	Shepherd's Purse
Silk Cotton Tree (seed)	Stinging Nettle (leaf)	Sunflower (seed)
Turmeric (rhizome)	Water Lotus	Yellow Dock

Which herbal supplements should I avoid if I have kidney disease?

You should avoid all herbal supplements if you have kidney disease. Herbal supplements that are especially risky for patients with any stage of kidney disease, who are on dialysis or who have a kidney transplant include:

Astragalus	Barberry	Cat's Claw
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Apium Graveolens	Creatine	Goldenrod
Horsetail	Huperzinea	Java Tea Leaf
Licorice Root	Nettle, Stinging Nettle	Oregon Grape Root
Parsley Root	Pennyroyal	Ruta Graveolens
Uva Ursi	Yohimbe	

What about herbal supplements that act like a "water pill"?

Some herbal supplements that act like a diuretic or "water pill" may cause "kidney irritation" or damage. These include bucha leaves and juniper berries. Uva Ursi and parsley capsules may also have bad side effects.

Can herbal supplements interfere with the other medicines I take?

Many herbal supplements can interact with prescription drugs. A few examples are St. Johns Wort, echinacea, ginkgo, garlic, ginseng, ginger, and blue cohosh. If you have a kidney transplant you are especially at risk, as any interaction between herbal supplements and medicines could put you at risk for losing your kidney.

Are there other health related issues for herbal supplements?

As with anyone, patients with kidney disease may have other health related issues. If you have a history of a bleeding disorder you are at high risk for bad reactions to herbal supplements. Women who are pregnant or lactating, as well as children, are also at high risk.

What should I tell my doctor, dietitian or other healthcare provider?

Patients with kidney disease should not use herbal supplements, but if you choose to take one, always tell your doctor, dietitian, or other health care provider. Always update the use of herbal supplements at your visits to your healthcare provider as a medication change.

References:

- Herb-Drug Interaction Handbook, second edition. Sharon Herrr, RD, CDN. 2002 Consumer Lavs, www.consumerlabs.com National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. ncam.nih.gov
- Inker LA, Astor BC, Fox CH, et al. [KDOQI US Commentary on the 2012 KDIGO Clinical Practice Guideline for the Evaluation and Management of CKD](#). Am J Kidney Dis. 2014 Mar 16.

Content courtesy of Judy Kirk MS, RDN, CSR, CDN

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