

a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

Women and HCV: Supplements Commonly Used by Women

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HEPATITIS C (HCV) IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY VIRUS.

It affects men and women from all ethnic backgrounds. In the United States, there is a higher prevalence of HCV among men. Although more people will die *with* HCV than *of* HCV, it is still a complicated disease with a challenging treatment regimen. Women living with HCV have issues that differ from men's.

Some people use herbs and other supplements. Tell your provider about all the herbs and supplements you take, even if you think he or she might disapprove. Although they may seem appealing, a number of herbs can cause harm. Herbs can cause hepatotoxicity (poisoning of the liver), so people with HCV should avoid herbs or use them cautiously with the advice of a health-care provider. Drugs, herbs, and supplements can interact with each other, and may affect various health conditions. People with decompensated cirrhosis should never use herbs.

It is not known whether it is safe to take herbs or other supplements while undergoing HCV treatment. It is also not known if herbs can interfere with HCV medications, possibly affecting the treatment outcome. Until more is known about this, the safe choice is to refrain from herb use until treatment is completed.

If you do use dietary supplements, get informed and be sure your information is current. Before you take an herb or supplement, find out if it is compatible with other drugs or supplements you are taking. Verify that the supplement is not contraindicated for any other condition you may have. Apply the same caution and commonsense approach to supplements that you would to any drug.

Never take high doses of vitamins, minerals, or other supplements unless you do so under medical care and it has been cleared by the specialist who is following your liver disease.

Multivitamins and minerals – Choose a no or low iron version unless your medical provider wants you to have the additional iron. Do not take extra just because you think you need it. More is not better. Never take more than 25,000 IU of vitamin A. The best way to take vitamins and minerals is by eating a nutritional diet.

Calcium – It will not damage your liver if you take the recommended daily allowance of calcium. Talk to your medical provider about the correct dose for your needs.

Black Cohosh – This herb has been approved by Germany's prestigious Commission E for premenstrual complaints, painful periods, and management of menopause symptoms. In Australia, there were 3 reports of severe hepatitis linked to black cohosh use. Two of these cases resulted in liver failure requiring transplant surgery. Since these cases involved the use of herbal blends mixed with other ingredients besides cohosh, experts do not all agree about this risk. Gastric discomfort is the most common side effect. Black cohosh should not be taken by pregnant or lactating women. Safety is unknown for women with endometriosis, breast or uterine cancer. Black cohosh may interact with a number of other drugs, herbs and dietary supplements.

For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

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The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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