

## COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES: VITAMINS & HERBS



*People living with a chronic illness often need to make changes to their everyday lives. The examples in this brochure are meant as a guide only. We hope that you find some of these useful.*

Complementary medicines are those used in conjunction with conventional medicine, while alternative medicines are used in preference. Many complementary and alternative medicines have been used for centuries; in fact herbal medicines can be traced back over 4000 years.

Examples of complementary and alternative therapies include massage, Reiki, acupuncture, Tai Chi, yoga, vitamin and dietary supplements, herbal medicines, Bach flower remedies and aromatherapy. Provision of these therapies is through practitioners such as naturopaths, herbalists and acupuncturists. Most complementary and alternative therapies take a holistic approach, working on the belief that for good health there must also be balance of mind, body and spirit.

### HERBAL MEDICINES

Research into the effectiveness of alternative and complementary herbal therapies is limited. Evaluation of herbal medicines is problematic, given the use of concoctions (mixed extracts) and variation in the harvest as well as the preparation and extraction methods used. These variations can dramatically alter the levels of certain compounds in the herbs, making it difficult to achieve standardisation of drug levels for scientific study and for comparison between studies. This lack of scientific evidence leads many people to dismiss these remedies as 'quackery'. Many people receive great benefit from these medicines, while others gain little or no benefit.

**Caution:** Not all herbs, or combinations of herbs, are good for the liver and caution should be exercised when using herbal remedies. As is the case in pharmaceutical medications, interactions between herbal drugs or herbals and pharmaceuticals can reduce the effectiveness of the medications or lead to drug levels that could be dangerously toxic. Just because it is 'natural' doesn't make it 'safe'.

Some of the herbs commonly used by people living with hepatitis C include:

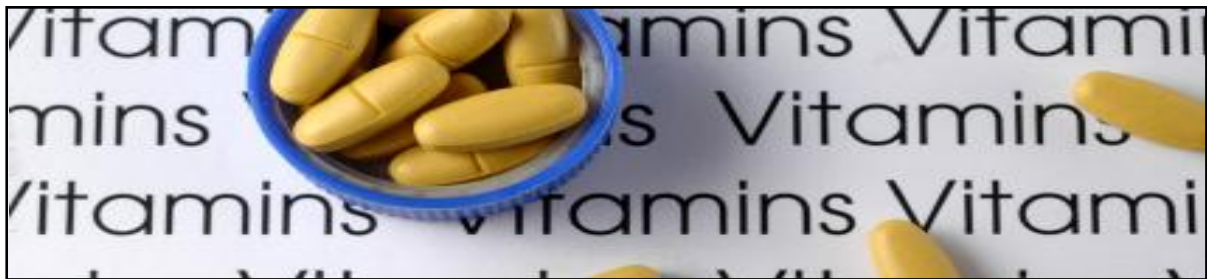
- St Mary's Thistle (Silymarin)
- Licorice
- Dandelion
- Garlic
- Elder Flowers
- Psyllium
- St John's Wort



Above: St. Mary's Thistle

Herbs known to be potentially toxic to the liver include:

- Barberry
- Black cohosh
- Chaparral
- Chinese ginseng
- Comfrey
- Creosote bush
- Germander
- Gordolobo yerba tea
- Greasewood
- Greater celandine
- False pennyroyal
- Jamaican bush tea
- Jin Bu Huan
- Kombucha tea
- Korean ginseng
- Mistletoe
- Pennyroyal oil (Squawmint oil)
- Sassafras
- Senna
- Skullcap and Valerian combined
- White chameleon



### VITAMIN & MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS

People usually obtain an adequate supply of vitamins and minerals from their diet. Illness, environment and lifestyle factors may, however, affect their quality, quantity or uptake.

Again, caution must be exercised, as excessive levels of vitamins and minerals can be harmful. Helpful vitamins and minerals include:

- B complex vitamins
  - B1 (thiamin)
  - B5 (Pantothenic acid)
  - B6 (pyridoxine)
  - B12
- Biotin
- Vitamin C
- Calcium
- Calcium Magnesium Caprylate
- Choline
- Cobalt
- Coenzyme Q12
- Vitamin E (tocopherol)
- Folic acid
- Germanium sesquioxide
- (NOT germanium oxide)
- Glucosamine
- Inositol
- Iodine
- Vitamin K
- L-Glutamine
- Magnesium
- Manganese
- Niacin
- Potassium
- Selenium
- Superoxide dismutase
- Zinc

Most of these vitamins and minerals are found in the reputable brand multivitamin formulations. Fat soluble vitamins such as A, D, E and K may not be well absorbed in some people with hepatitis C, therefore it is better to have a water-soluble formulation where possible.

Also, be cautious in the use of vitamin supplements containing high levels of vitamin A and D, as excessive amounts of these vitamins can be particularly harmful to the liver. If iron or ferritin levels are high, such as when cirrhosis or hepatocellular carcinoma is present, it is advisable to use multivitamins that do not contain additional iron.

Some vitamins, listed below, should be avoided or taken with caution.

- Vitamin A - It is best to obtain vitamin A from food sources such as carrots. Other anti-oxidants could be used in supplement form, including vitamin C and E or N-Acetyl Cysteine. Avoid food supplements such as cod liver oil which may contain high levels of vitamin A and D.
- Vitamin D - This vitamin is the most potentially toxic of all the vitamins and should be treated with great caution. Again, natural sources are best. Avoid food supplements such as cod liver oil which may contain high levels of vitamin A and D.
- Iron supplements - People with cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma may have higher levels of iron in the liver than is desirable. It is important to maintain a balanced and nutritious diet and use supplements only where necessary.

Contact the Information & Support Officer at HepatitisWA on (08) 9328 8538 (metro) or 1800 800 070 (country) for further information on complementary and alternative therapies.

### **Bibliography**

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