

Dangerous Supplements

Supplements you should avoid

Name (also known as)	Purported uses	Possible dangers	Comments
ACONITE (aconiti tuber, aconitum, radix aconiti)	Inflammation, joint pain, wounds, gout.	Toxicity, nausea, vomiting, low blood pressure, respiratory-system paralysis, heart-rhythm disorders, death.	Unsafe. Aconite is the most common cause of severe herbal poisoning in Hong Kong.
BITTER ORANGE (aurantii fructus, Citrus aurantium, zhi shi)	Weight loss, nasal congestion, allergies.	Fainting, heart-rhythm disorders, heart attack, stroke, death.	Possibly unsafe. Contains synephrine, which is similar to ephedrine, banned by the FDA in 2004. Risks might be higher when taken with herbs that contain caffeine.
CHAPARRAL (creosote bush, Larrea divaricata, larreastat)	Colds, weight loss, infections, inflammation, cancer, detoxification.	Liver damage, kidney problems.	Likely unsafe. The FDA advises people not to take chaparral.
COLLOIDAL SILVER (ionic silver, native silver, Silver in suspending agent)	Fungal and other infections, Lyme disease, rosacea, psoriasis, food poisoning, chronic fatigue syndrome, HIV/AIDS.	Bluish skin, mucous membrane discoloration, neurological problems, kidney damage.	Likely unsafe. The FDA advised consumers about the risk of discoloration on Oct. 6, 2009.
COLTSFOOT (coughwort, farfarae folium leaf, foalswort)	Cough, sore throat, laryngitis, bronchitis, asthma.	Liver damage, cancer.	Likely unsafe.
COMFREY (blackwort, common comfrey, slippery root)	Cough, heavy menstrual periods, chest pain, cancer.	Liver damage, cancer.	Likely unsafe. The FDA advised manufacturers to remove comfrey products from the market in July 2001.
COUNTRY MALLOW (heartleaf, Sida cordifolia, silky white mallow)	Nasal congestion, allergies, asthma, weight loss, bronchitis.	Heart attack, heart arrhythmia, stroke, death.	Likely unsafe. Possible dangers linked with its ephedrine alkaloids banned by the FDA in 2004.
GERMANIUM (Ge, Ge-132, germanium-132)	Pain, infections, glaucoma, liver problems, arthritis, osteoporosis, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, cancer.	Kidney damage, death.	Likely unsafe. The FDA warned in 1993 that it was linked to serious adverse events.

GREATER CELANDINE (celandine, chelidonii herba, Chelidonium majus)	Upset stomach, irritable bowel syndrome, liver disorders, detoxification, cancer.	Liver damage.	Possibly unsafe.
KAVA (awa, Piper methysticum, kava-kava)	Anxiety (possibly effective).	Liver damage.	Possibly unsafe. The FDA issued a warning to consumers in March 2002. Banned in Germany, Canada, and Switzerland.
LOBELIA (asthma weed, Lobelia inflata, pukeweed, vomit wort)	Coughing, bronchitis, asthma, smoking cessation (possibly ineffective).	Toxicity; overdose can cause fast heartbeat, very low blood pressure, coma, possibly death.	Likely unsafe. The FDA warned in 1993 that it was linked to serious adverse events.
YOHIMBE (yohimbine, Corynanthe yohimbi, Corynanthe johimbi)	Aphrodisiac, chest pain, diabetic complications, depression; erectile dysfunction (possibly effective).	Usual doses can cause high blood pressure, rapid heart rate; high doses can cause severe low blood pressure, heart problems, death.	Possibly unsafe for use without medical supervision because it contains a prescription drug, yohimbine. The FDA warned in 1993 that reports of serious adverse events were under investigation.

Clarification: Source: Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database, Professional Version, June 2010

SAME (ademetonine, adenosylmethionine, S-Adenosyl-L-Methionine, sammy)	Likely effective in reducing symptoms of major depression, reducing pain, and improving functioning in people with osteoarthritis.	GI symptoms, dry mouth, headache, insomnia, anorexia, sweating, dizziness, and nervousness, especially at higher doses. It can make some people with depression feel anxious.	Might lead to a toxic reaction when taken with the cough suppressant dextromethorphan, certain antidepressants, or narcotic pain relievers. Might worsen symptoms when taken with the Parkinson's drug levodopa.
ST. JOHN'S WORT (Hypericum perforatum, Saynt Johannes Wort, SJW)	Likely effective for improving symptoms of some forms of depression.	Insomnia, vivid dreams, anxiety, dizziness, headache, skin rash, and tingling. It can cause skin to become extra-sensitive to the sun.	Can decrease the effectiveness of a wide range of drugs, including birth-control pills, heart medications, HIV/AIDS drugs, and warfarin. Might also increase the effects or side effects of certain antidepressants or mania.

Melatonin Side Effects and Safety Concerns

Melatonin side effects may include drowsiness, dizziness, confusion, headache, irritability, vivid dreams, and a temporary reduction in attention and balance. People shouldn't drive or use machinery for several hours after taking melatonin. Melatonin may cause abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting, lower blood pressure, and rarely, **hallucinations or paranoia**.

Melatonin may increase the risk of blood clotting, so it should not be used by people using warfarin (Coumadin), other medications that influence blood clotting, or by people with clotting disorders.

Benadryl Oral Side Effects

Drowsiness, dizziness, **headache**, **constipation**, stomach upset, **vision** changes (e.g., blurred vision), irritability, decreased coordination, or dry mouth/nose/throat may occur. These effects may decrease as your body adjusts to the medication. If any of these effects persist or worsen, inform your doctor. To relieve dry mouth, suck on (sugarless) hard candy or ice chips, chew (sugarless) gum, drink water or use a **saliva** substitute. Diphenhydramine can dry up and thicken mucus in your **lungs**, making it more difficult to breathe and clear your lungs. To help prevent this effect, be sure to drink plenty of fluids unless otherwise directed by your physician. If your doctor has directed you to use this medication, remember that he or she has judged that the benefit to you is greater than the risk of side effects. Many people using this medication do not have serious side effects. Tell your doctor immediately if any of these rare but serious side effects occur: pounding/**irregular heartbeat**, ringing in the **ears**, **seizure**, difficulty urinating. A very serious allergic reaction to this drug is unlikely, but seek immediate medical attention if it occurs. Symptoms of a serious allergic reaction may include: rash, itching/swelling (especially of the face/tongue/throat), severe dizziness, **trouble breathing**.

This is not a complete list of possible side effects. If you notice other effects not listed above, contact your doctor or pharmacist.

Your healthcare professionals (e.g., doctor or pharmacist) may already be aware of any **possible drug interactions** and may be monitoring you for it. Do not start, stop or change the dosage of any medicine before checking with them first.

Before using this medication, tell your doctor or pharmacist of all prescription and nonprescription/herbal products you may use, especially of: antihistamines applied to the skin (such as diphenhydramine cream, ointment, spray), antispasmodics (e.g., atropine, belladonna alkaloids), drugs for Parkinson's disease (e.g., anticholinergics such as benzotropine, trihexyphenidyl), **MAO inhibitors** (isocarboxazid, linezolid, methylene blue, moclobemide, phenelzine, procarbazine, rasagiline, selegiline, tranylcypromine), scopolamine, tricyclic antidepressants (e.g., amitriptyline).

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you also take drugs that cause drowsiness such as: certain antihistamines (e.g., dimenhydrinate), **anti-seizure drugs** (e.g., carbamazepine), **medicine for sleep or anxiety** (e.g., alprazolam, diazepam, zolpidem), muscle relaxants, narcotic pain relievers (e.g., codeine), **psychiatric medicines** (e.g., chlorpromazine, risperidone, amitriptyline, trazodone). Check the labels on all your medicines (e.g., cough-and-cold products) because they may contain drowsiness-causing ingredients. Ask your pharmacist about the safe use of those products.

This document does not contain all possible interactions. Therefore, before using this product, tell your doctor or pharmacist of all the products you use. Keep a list of all your medications with you, and share the list with your doctor and pharmacist.