



Depression: Nutritional Supplements... and You? by award-winning author / stress-relief expert **Susie Mantell**

Q: Dear Susie, Is it safe to use herbs and supplements to treat depression?

A: This is a realm of healing potential in which many find benefits and among other cultures, millions have for centuries. In traditional western medicine, there is still very little known about some of the effects of preparations people are using to self-medicate without a doctor's supervision. That is a matter of great concern. There are several over the counter (OTC) nutritional supplements and herbal preparations recommended for depression by responsible and well-informed health care professionals of various disciplines but just as with prescription medications, depending upon the cause of depression, interactions, sensitivities, etc., what is an excellent preparation for one person, may be lethal for another. While some of these supplements and herbals are sold over the counter and may be very helpful, it is essential that we recognize them as active chemical compounds that may indeed produce powerful positive outcomes, and may also carry dangerous side-effects, with contraindications for any individual based upon body chemistry, age, allergic reactions, dosage, etc. (*CAUTION: Many may even be labeled "all natural." Remember--so is Poison Ivy. Anyone who gets asthma or itchy eyes from cats or feathers or roses knows how silly it is to think that "all natural" means it is safe for everyone. Some labels call the contents "a food substance," but so is caffeine which for some can be hazardous, or lactose, which for some can cause great digestive distress.*) Dosage is another important question.

One frightening example in the news concerned a prescription drug, phenylpropanolamine, found in many decongestants, stimulants and diet preparations. In some people it has been found to have potentially life-threatening side-effects. This drug is closely related to a plant used in some herbals called Ephedra, (Ma-Huang in Chinese medicine), and "Herbal Ecstasy" in pop culture, which has had devastating results in teens thinking it was "just an herb" that they took for a recreational high.

I do not mean to discourage use of OTC supplements, vitamins and herbals by any means. I use some of each myself with great success, but always with my physician's guidance and careful personal observation of how they affect me.

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Some pharmacists, who are becoming better informed in integrative health care can be helpful in decision-making, but it is always essential to be fully evaluated by a health care professional who knows your history before beginning a preparation, and then to monitor its effects over time as well. Because some countries do not yet have standardization of nutritional supplements' manufacturing and packaging, it is perhaps best to stay with large, well-known brands that are more likely to use pharmaceutical-quality procedures and conditions and truly contain 100% of what it says is in each dose on the label, no more/no less.

You may have been hoping I would be able to recommend specific preparations with anti-depressant properties. I am not a medical professional. You will need the advice of a licensed health care professional who can work with you over time in person, and prescribe based on your unique chemistry, history, and needs. In some communities it is easier than others to find progressive conventional allopathic physicians, naturopaths, homeopaths, chiropractors, osteopaths, doctors of oriental medicine (many of whom are also acupuncturists) and master herbalists. If you cannot easily find a doctor working in this arena, perhaps try a large teaching hospital near you. They will likely be doing research - - or at least reading the research. It is both irresponsible and potentially dangerous to take preparations without professional advice and supervision, but with good health care guidance, there are some exciting and very positive outcomes using OTC's as well.

Become an informed health care consumer, ask lots of questions, and take notes for future reference.

You might want to check out various websites created to help consumers like: www.consumerlab.com

In the meantime, for some possible relief of some stress symptoms associated with depression, take a look at the tips page on my site for some techniques that may also be helpful:

<http://www.relaxintuit.com/tips.asp>

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