

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

HCV & CAM: *Dietary Supplements to Avoid*

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“NATURAL” DOES NOT MEAN SAFE. The following contains some natural substances that are potentially harmful. This list is by no means exhaustive. **Supplements that are specifically associated with hepatotoxicity (liver poisoning) are designated with an “*”.**

Substances on this list are referred to in their oral form only.

Any herb containing pyrrolizidine alkaloids should be avoided by those with liver disease. It is important to use supplements from trustworthy sources. All sorts of contaminants have been found in Chinese herbs, such as arsenic, cadmium, lead, mercury (sometimes in the form of calomel or cinnabar) and thallium.

Ackee (*Blighia sapida*)*
Aconite (*Aconitum carmichaeli* and *A. kusnezoffi*)
Aflatoxins*
Amanita Phalloides, also known as “death cap mushrooms”*
Androstenedione
Aristolochic acid, also known as “mu tong,” “guan fang ji” or “snakeroot”¹
Arnica (*Arnica montana*)*²
Barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*)
Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*)
Bilberry (*Myrtilli folium*)
Birch oil (*Betula lenta*)*
Bitter Orange (*Citrus aurantium*)
Bittersweet (*Solanum dulcamara*). See “Nightshade”
Black Cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*)*³

Black Root (*Symphytum officinale*)*⁴
Blessed Thistle (*Cnicus benedictus*)⁵
Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*)⁶
Blue Cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*)
Blue-green Algae (*Spirulina*)*
Boldo (*Peumus boldo*)⁷
Borage (*Borago officinalis*)*
Boran, also known as “boric acid” and “borax”
Bryony (*Bryonia alba*)
Buckeye (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), also known as “horse chestnut”*
Bupleurum (*Bupleurum chinense*, *B. falcatum*, *B. scorzoneraefolium*)*⁸
Bush Tea (*Crotalaria*)*
Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*)*
Calamus (*Acorus calamus*)
Cascara Sagrada (*Rhamnus purshianus*)*
Celandine (*Chelidonium majus*)*
Chaparral (*Larrea tridentata*)*
Chaso*⁹
Colloidal Silver
Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*)*
Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*, *S. asperum* and *S. uplandicum*)*
Creatine*
Delphinium (*Delphinium consolida*)
DHEA (Dehydroepiandrosterone, 5-androsten-3)*
Dogbane (*Apocynum cannabinum*)
Elder, Elderberry (*Sambucas nigra*)¹⁰
Ephedra (*Ephedra*)¹¹
Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*)
Germander (*Teucrium chamaedrys*)*
Ginkgo seeds and fruit pulp (*Ginkgo biloba*)¹²
Glue Thistle (*Atractylis glummifera*)*
Gotu Kola (*Centella asiatica*)
Groundsel (*Senecio jacobea*, *S. vulgaris*, *S. spartoides*, etc.)*
Heliotrope (*Heliotropium*)
Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*)
Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*)
Hepatica (*Hepatica triloba*)
Herbal Ecstasy*
Holly (*Ilex paraguayensis*)*
Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*)*
Horsetail (*Equisteum arvense*)
Hound’s Tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*)*
Indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*, *I. oblongifolia*)¹³
Iron*¹⁴

Jimson Weed (*Datura stramonium*)
 Jin Bu Huan (*Lycopodium serratum*)*
 Kava (*Piper methysticum*), also known as “kava kava”^{*}
 Khat (*Catha edulis*)
 Kombucha mushrooms and tea*
 Lepiota Helveola mushrooms*
 Liqiang 4 Dietary Supplement Capsules, also known as
Liqiang Xiao Le Ling
 Life Root (*Senecio aureus*)*
 Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majalis*)
 LipoKinetix*
 Lobelia (*Lobelia inflata*)*
 Madder root (*Rubia tinctorum*)*
 Ma Huang (*Ephedra*)
 Male Fern (*Filicis maris*)
 Magnolia (*Magnolia liliflora*)
 Mandrake, American (*Podophyllum pelatum*)
 Mandrake, European (*Mandragora officianarum*)
 Margosa Oil
 Marsh Tea (*Ledum palustre*)
 Mate (*Ilex paraguayensis*)*
 May Apple (*Podophyllum pelatum*)
 Mistletoe (*Phoradendron leucarpum*, *Viscum album*, *V. coloratum*)¹⁵
 Monkshood (*Aconiti tuber*)
 Mu Tong (*Clematis armandi*)
 Niacin, also known as “vitamin B-3,” “niacinamide,”
 “nicotinic acid”^{*}¹⁶
 Nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*)
 Nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*)¹⁷
 Nux Vomica (*Strychni semen*)¹⁸
 Oleander leaf (*Oleandri folium*)
 Onshido*¹⁹
 Paraguay tea (*Ilex paraguayensis*)*
 Parsley Seed (*Petroselinia fructus*)²⁰
 PC-SPES²¹
 Pennyroyal (*Hedeoma pulegiodes*, *Mentha pulegium*)*
 Periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*)*
 Peppermint Oil (*Mentha piperita*)*
 Petasites leaf (*Petasitidis folium*)*
 Pleurisy root (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
 Poke Root/Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*)
 Pride of Madeira (*Echium fastuosum*)*
 Ragwort (*Senecio aureus*, *S. jacoboea*, *S. vulgaris*, etc.)*
 Rue (*Ruta graveolus*)*
 Sarsaparilla root (*Sarsaparillae radix*)
 Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)*

Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*)
 Senna (*Cassia Species* and *Senna alexandrina*)²²
 Shark Cartilage*
 Sho-saiko-to, also known as “Xiao Chai Hu Tang.”^{*} – See
 “bupleurum”
 Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*)*
 Snakeroot (*Aristolochia serpentaria*)
 Spirulina, also known as blue-green algae*
 Stephania (*Stephania tetrandra*), also known as “han fang ji”
 Sweet Clover (*Melilotus officinalis*)
 Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*, *Chrysanthemum vulgare*)*
 Tansy Ragwort (*Senecio jacobea*)*
 Tiratricol, also known as “triiodothyroacetic acid” or “TRIAC”
 Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)*²³
 Tu-san-chi (*Gynura segetum*)*
 Usnic acid (*Usnea Lichen*)*
 Uva Ursi (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)*
 Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*)*²⁴
 Vitamin A*²⁵
 White Chameleon (*Atractylis gummifera*)*
 Woodruff (*Asperula odorata*)
 Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*)
 Yerba Mate Tea (*Ilex paraguayensis*)*
 Yellow jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*)
 Yohimbe (*Pausinystalia yohimbe*)*

¹See FDA website for a list of botanicals that contain this substance:

www.cfsan.fda.gov/%7Edms/ds-warn.html

²Diluted homeopathic and topical forms are generally safe.

³There have been at least 5 reports of severe hepatitis linked to black cohosh use. Two of these cases resulted in liver failure requiring transplant surgery. These cases involved the use of herbal blends mixed with other ingredients besides cohosh. Experts do not know if the problem was due solely to black cohosh or the combination of ingredients.

⁴There is at least one other herb called “black root.” The comfrey variety is toxic.

⁵Contains tannins and may be hepatotoxic if large amounts are used.

⁶Diluted homeopathic form is generally safe.

⁷Essential oil and leaf distillates are toxic.

⁸Bupleurum has been linked to at least one case of hepatotoxicity. When used with interferon, it has been associated with at least 74 cases of interstitial pneumonitis, with at least 16 of these resulting in death. However, these reports are being called into question since bupleurum was combined with other ingredients when administered. Bupleurum is the main ingredient

in Sho-saiko-to, also known as Xiao chai hu tang. Until these associations can be verified or refuted, it is recommended that HCV patients avoid concurrent use of interferon with this herb. Also recommended is to use this herb under strict supervision with a licensed practitioner.

⁹Herbal Weight Loss Aid

¹⁰Cooked elderberry as a food source is likely safe. Risk of cyanide poisoning from uncooked berries and the rest of the elder plant.

¹¹The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has concluded that ephedrine alkaloids pose a serious risk.

¹²Fruit pulp and seeds can be toxic. The leaves have a good safety record when used as recommended.

¹³Some indigo may be safe and some species are toxic.

¹⁴Those with liver disease should avoid excess iron unless directed otherwise by their medical practitioner.

¹⁵Mistletoe is being researched in Europe as a treatment for HCV. Mistletoe is toxic and should not be used outside of a clinical research setting.

¹⁶There were multiple reports of hepatotoxicity when niacin was used in large doses (3000 mg or more daily or lower dose sustained-release form. Neurological damage may occur at 100 mg or more a day. The Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of niacin is not only safe, but also a necessary nutrient. The RDA is 16-18 mg for adults. Only exceed 35 mg if medically prescribed.

¹⁷Large amounts of nutmeg can cause hallucinations and psychosis. Eating as few as two whole nutmegs can cause death. Safe if used in small amounts as a spice.

¹⁸Risk of central nervous system poisoning from strychnine. Pre-existing liver disease increases toxicity risk.

¹⁹Herbal Weight Loss Aid

²⁰High doses of essential oil are associated with fatty liver, abortion and other risks.

²¹The FDA has recalled this botanical blend.

²²This strong laxative may deplete electrolytes and lead to cardiac arrhythmia.

²³Turmeric (curcumin) is probably safe for liver patients unless taken in large doses. Turmeric (curcumin) is being studied as a possible treatment for hepatitis, but until the evidence is in, avoid or use cautiously.

²⁴May be liver toxic, especially if taken long-term. Some doubts surround other claims of its hepatotoxic qualities, since all the reports used valerian in combination with other herbs. Until safety reports are verified or disputed, it is recommended that people with liver disease avoid valerian.

²⁵Those with liver disease should avoid vitamin A supplementation unless under medical supervision. Likely safe for healthy people if daily consumption does not exceed 4,000 IU retinol or 15,000 IU beta-carotene.

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