

Psst!

Plan to Stay in Shape Today



NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

*A guide to using them
for common health problems*



In collaboration with:



Natural health products (NHPs) raise several questions. Are they effective and safe? Can they interact with drugs or can they be taken despite certain health conditions?

With the various sources of information available today, it is not always easy to find your way around and distinguish between what is true and what is false.

This guide is designed to help you better understand the natural health products that are available for various common health problems. You will find important elements to consider in making informed decisions. After all, isn't your health the most precious thing you have?

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What is an NHP?

Historically, **natural health products (NHPs)** are the ancestors of modern medicine. For example, Aspirin® is the result of the transformation of a molecule found in the bark of willow trees. It was already used for pain and fever in the time of the Egyptians and Greeks. NHPs are still used in some treatments, particularly in the East.

In Canada, NHPs are managed by the Natural and Non-prescription Health Products Directorate and are available without prescription. This regulatory body reports to Health Canada and authorizes the sale of these products according to standards of safety, effectiveness and quality.

NHPs are often made from plants, microorganisms and marine or animal resources. Health Canada considers the following products to be NHPs:

-  **Medicinal plants**
-  **Vitamin supplements**
-  **Mineral supplements**
-  **Homeopathic medicines**
-  **Probiotics**
-  **And other products such as amino acids and essential fatty acids**

We find them marketed in various forms: tablets, capsules, dyes, syrups, creams, ointments or drops.

What is an NPN?

Have you ever noticed NPN, followed by numbers, on each container of a natural health product?

NPN means: Natural Product Number.

As of January 2004, natural health products must obtain a product licence from Health Canada before they can be marketed. Therefore, companies attempting to market an NHP must submit a list of the medicinal and non-medicinal ingredients contained in the product, disclose their origin, dose, recommended use and effectiveness. If the product meets Health Canada's requirements, it will receive an NPN.



The NPN principle was put in place to better protect consumers. In other words, if a product's packaging does not display an NPN, there is no guarantee that it includes what it claims to contain on its label.



At this time, it should be noted that prescription drugs are subject to much more stringent controls and measures than NHPs. Their approval also includes the evaluation of the results of clinical trials, details related to their production, packaging, labelling, and verification of their therapeutic claims and side effects.

Did you know that you are invited to participate in the safety process of natural health products by reporting any adverse reactions you may have experienced as a result of their use? To do so, you must use the MedEffect Canada form available at this address: hpr-rps.hres.ca/static/content/form-formule.php?lang=en

“Natural” DOES NOT ALWAYS RHYME WITH SAFETY



Many poisons, such as cyanide, come from nature. Some potentially deadly toxins are produced by bacteria!



The concept of “natural” tends to evoke a certain sense of security in most people. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and it may happen that an NHP is not right for you. Indeed, NHPs may be safe for some people and not for others. For example, an NHP may not meet certain people’s needs, may cause adverse reactions, or negatively interact with medications or health conditions.

For example, some NHPs may exacerbate the symptoms of a chronic disease, such as hypertension, and lead to complications.

Other NHPs may compete with certain drugs, with the effect of decreasing or increasing the latter’s effect.

Natural health products can interact with your regular medications. These interactions may increase or decrease their effects, which can result in more side effects or less effective treatment. That’s why your pharmacist is a trusted health professional who can do the necessary checks to prevent these incidents.



Consult a healthcare professional to find out if the product is right for you and get personalized advice!

Yes, but my friend's aunt's cousin told me that a natural product changed her life!

It's possible (and it's great!) if an NHP worked for this cousin! However, in reality, miraculous products are often the result of popular beliefs. It is therefore important to always **keep realistic expectations** about the effectiveness of NHPs and not delay in consulting your doctor if the health problem you wanted to treat persists.

Your pharmacist's advice is based on the results of the scientific data of current medicine.

Remember: Natural health products also have an expiry date. It is recommended that you regularly sort through your medications and other products that you keep at home. Return expired ones to your pharmacy for environmentally safe disposal.

The different categories of NHPs

Medicinal plants	Plants used for their health benefits. They can be used whole or in parts (leaves, stem, roots, etc.) for healing purposes.
Vitamin supplements E.g.: vitamins A, B, C, D, E, etc.	Substances necessary for the proper functioning and survival of the human body, but which either cannot be synthesized by the body itself or simply cannot be synthesized in sufficient quantities.
Mineral supplements E.g.: magnesium, calcium, zinc, etc.	A mineral-based nutrient necessary for the life of an organism, but in very small quantities. It is sometimes also called a trace element. The human body has several control mechanisms to maintain optimal concentration by excreting or retaining them as needed.
Homeopathic medicines	A product containing a highly diluted substance that, according to the theory of its founder, would help to cure or relieve the symptoms that the substance would cause if administered in a concentrated form.
Probiotics	These are living microorganisms such as bacteria and yeasts that have the potential to have positive health effects beyond nutritional benefits.



Insomnia

WHEN COUNTING SHEEP NO LONGER WORKS.

The benefits of a good night's sleep are many: a better mood, a better ability to concentrate and better resistance to disease. But what to do when insomnia strikes us? Although the best way to solve insomnia is to have a good sleep hygiene first, there are many NHPs available to improve sleep.

But which ones really work? Let's look at two of these products in more detail:

MELATONIN

Melatonin is perhaps the most well-known NHP in this category. Melatonin is secreted naturally by the brain and associated with circadian rhythm (wake-sleep cycle). This molecule therefore seems logically very interesting. However, as reported in current studies, it is potentially effective but not as effective as prescription drugs.

The main mechanism of action demonstrated so far with melatonin is to accelerate sleep induction. In other words, it would allow you to fall asleep more quickly. We are talking about a gain of about ten minutes or a little more. Although some people report other possible benefits, such as better sleep quality in general, these are currently not considered to be widespread.



Melatonin is considered safe in the short term for both children and adults. It would be interesting if future studies could confirm the possibility of using it for long-term use. It's well-tolerated, and its reported adverse effects are mild and resolvable. As a precautionary measure and because of the lack of data on the subject, pregnant women are advised against taking it.

Melatonin can be a good try to reduce insomnia problems. However, realistic expectations must be set for this product, given that its effectiveness is difficult to predict and rather variable from one individual to another. For more sustained results throughout the night, choose the extended-release formula.



Activities requiring alertness, such as driving after taking sleep aids should be avoided.



VALERIAN

As for valerian, its sedative and calming properties are said to promote sleep. Its effectiveness, in proportion, would be lower than melatonin. To date, its mechanism of action is not yet fully understood. Since there were few subjects in valerian studies, it is difficult to apply their findings in a generalized way to all. It has been found that the effects of valerian can be felt in some people even in small doses.

Valerian can be an alternative to melatonin. Its use should remain occasional. Again, if you are taking medication, you must first make sure that there is no risk of interaction. It is recommended to take valerian 1 hour before bedtime. It should never be combined with alcohol.





Depressive mood

There is a growing awareness of mental health issues. And more and more people are abandoning taboos and looking for solutions. This change in the general public's mindset is for the best. One of these issues is symptoms of depression.

If you think you may have a mood disorder, we encourage you to consult a doctor first. For your own good, this situation requires a diagnosis and medical follow-up.

ST. JOHN'S WORT

St. John's Wort has been shown to be effective in relieving the symptoms of mild to moderate depression. It is one of the NHPs with the most data and would be comparable to small doses of antidepressants. Adverse reactions are relatively uncommon; however, it can cause mild headaches, dizziness and fatigue. What is most worrying about St. John's Wort is that it interacts significantly with many drugs. This, in some cases, could have major health consequences.

Caution: St. John's Wort can significantly reduce the effectiveness of the following medications:

-  Drugs to thin the blood
-  Anti-rejection drugs
-  Oral contraceptives
-  Drugs for HIV/AIDS
-  And many others





St. John's Wort could be considered among the alternatives for symptoms associated with mild depression. It should be considered with personalized non-pharmacological measures, such as psychotherapy or physical exercise. Do not stop using St. John's Wort abruptly. To prevent withdrawal symptoms, it is suggested to gradually reduce the dose over 1 to 2 weeks.

OMEGA-3

Scientific evidence suggests that an omega-3 deficiency may contribute to mood disorders. To date, the well-documented benefits of omega-3 dietary supplements are in improving depressive symptoms. The benefits were seen 3 to 4 weeks after the start of their intake. In some study groups, they were also combined with pharmacological treatments to reinforce or complement their action.

To avoid the unpleasant aftertaste of fish oil, take supplements at the beginning of a meal or prefer enteric-coated capsules that release fish oil farther into the intestine. It is important to read the labels carefully to check the omega-3 (EPA/DHA) content of a product. For depressive symptoms, products with a high concentration of EPA and very low DHA content should be used, with a ratio of 7:1 or 20:1.





Nausea

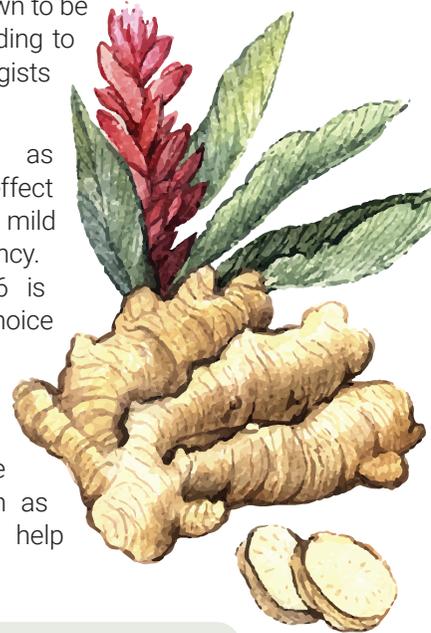
Nausea can occur in many different contexts. Whether during pregnancy, during transport or after medical treatments, nausea can sometimes become very uncomfortable.

GINGER AND VITAMIN B6

By calming the stomach, ginger has been shown to be effective against nausea in pregnancy. According to the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, its use appears to be safe.

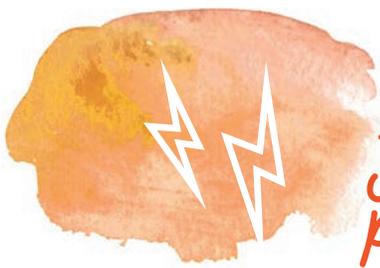
Vitamin B6 supplements (also known as “pyridoxine”) are believed to have an effect comparable to ginger and may help relieve mild to moderate nausea associated with pregnancy. Safe and without side effects, vitamin B6 is also found in the combination of first choice prescription treatment.

As for the effectiveness of ginger for motion sickness, it would be more as a preventive measure. It should therefore be taken before departure. For other types of nausea, such as chemotherapy treatments, ginger may also help to reduce it.



These natural health products are an alternative to the more common anti-nausea drugs, and may be used in the presence of mild to moderate nausea symptoms.

To reduce the risk of diarrhea associated with ginger, start with a small dose and gradually increase according to tolerance. Ginger is not without interaction; if you are taking oral anticoagulants and antiplatelet drugs (blood thinners), check with your pharmacist first.



Joint pain

Joint pain usually occurs with age. It is not uncommon for this form of pain to manifest itself in a persistent manner, which will impact the quality of life of people who suffer from it. Among other things, joint pain makes it more difficult to carry out everyday activities.

GLUCOSAMINE

Glucosamine has been shown to be effective in relieving mild to moderate pain associated with osteoarthritis. In many studies, it helped to relieve the pain associated with osteoarthritis in the knee area. However, its impact in slowing the progression of the disease has not yet been confirmed.

It is recommended to opt for glucosamine sulphate, rather than glucosamine hydrochloride, for best results.

*The effects can take from 2 to 6 weeks to be felt.
You will have to be patient!*

To improve stomach tolerance, simply divide the dose into 2 to 3 doses per day and take them with food.

There may be an interaction between oral anticoagulants (blood thinners) and glucosamine, so caution should be exercised. If necessary, talk to your pharmacist.

With reasonable expectations, glucosamine is a good alternative to try to reduce the pain caused by mild to moderate osteoarthritis. However, make sure that these contraindications do not apply to you. You should avoid the use of glucosamine if you have asthma or glaucoma, or during pregnancy.



CHONDROITIN

Chondroitin is also one of the components of cartilage, the tissue that serves as a cushion between the bones in the joints. On store shelves, it can be found alone or in combination with other natural health products that potentially have the same virtues. People use it to reduce the pain of non-severe osteoarthritis and slow the progression of the disease. Studies that provide us with scientific information on chondroitin are unfortunately considered of poor quality. If we review them nevertheless, they have a higher effectiveness than a placebo, thereby reducing mild to moderate pain. As for its adverse effects, it is mainly reported that mild digestive disorders can occur. Like glucosamine, it is not recommended to use this product with an anticoagulant.

If you have no contraindications, chondroitin can be considered as glucosamine. In addition, a combination of glucosamine and chondroitin would be interesting to try out if glucosamine alone does not work after a few weeks. Before using it for the long term, it is recommended to discussing with your healthcare professional.

Use caution with combination products for osteoarthritis that include glucosamine, chondroitin, NEM, and other added ingredients like turmeric. The more ingredients there are, the greater the risk of side effects and interactions.



COLLAGEN

Collagen is the most abundant protein in the human body (+/- 25 to 35% of the body's proteins). It is mainly found in connective tissue, skin, ligaments and tendons. There are claims that collagen can be used for joint pain, supporting cartilage functions, and reducing inflammation. It should be noted that collagen is a very large molecule. The body is unable to absorb it in its entirety and must therefore cut it into very small pieces when digested. Since there is no known mechanism in our body that would reassemble all these little pieces together, its effectiveness seems difficult to imagine.

For the reasons mentioned above, the benefits of collagen are not based on logical evidence. Before incurring expenses to test it, focus on other NHPs with which there is more certainty.

NEM (NATURAL EGGSHELL MEMBRANE)

NEM is an ingredient derived from the inner membrane of the egg between the shell and the egg white. It contains collagen, chondroitin and glucosamine. According to small studies, NEM would provide pain relief after only a few weeks with a very low probability of adverse reactions. However, more research is currently required to confirm this information. Its side effects are potentially similar to those of glucosamine and chondroitin.

The eggshell membrane is garnering more interest and has been added to the list of available options for joint pain. Its effectiveness would be faster than its counterparts. As a precaution, you should not take it if you are allergic to eggs.





NHPs AND PAIN CREAMS CAMPHOR, EUCALYPTUS AND MENTHOL

These products are considered as counter-irritants. What the hell does that mean? A counter-irritant is a substance that causes irritation in the area of application and will alter the perception of pain in the brain. This will reduce or even mask the real feeling of pain.

Camphor, eucalyptus and menthol also give off a feeling of cold in the areas where they are applied. In other words, they do not contribute to the healing of pain, but to its relief.

It is generally recommended to apply them 3 to 4 times a day. Although their effectiveness is still being determined by the scientific community, these products remain popular options that have been passed on for several generations. The undesirable effects of these products include local skin irritation and a very characteristic smell. Therefore, it is important to avoid applying them to damaged skin.



Camphor, eucalyptus and menthol based NHPs should be used for short-term and occasional use. Do not add heat to the skin after application (e.g.: a heating bag). If you notice any adverse reactions on the skin, stop using them immediately.



CAPSAICIN

Did you know that capsaicin is a molecule found in peppers?

Capsaicin not only alters the perception of pain but also has the interesting property of reducing substance P after an application of a few days. Substance P is particularly associated with the transmission of the pain signal to the brain.

It is recommended to apply capsaicin-based creams up to 3 to 4 times a day to the affected areas. In order to obtain all the beneficial effects, it should be used regularly for 3 to 4 weeks. Its short-term effectiveness is still unclear. Undesirable effects include burning, tingling and redness. It should be noted that the first two adverse reactions generally decrease after 72 hours of application.



Always wash your hands thoroughly after use to avoid accidentally rubbing your eyes with the cream.

Capsaicin is an alternative to reducing the sensation of mild pain, especially if you have a contraindication to use anti-inflammatory drugs. It should be remembered that the beneficial effects can take several days to manifest themselves. It should therefore not be your first choice. Data for children (under 2 years of age) as well as pregnant and nursing women are unknown. As a safety measure, don't use capsaicin with young children or pregnant or nursing mothers.



Colds and influenza

Everyone has already been told about a magic bullet to protect against colds and flu. But is it an old wives' tale or effective treatment? First of all, let's remember that colds, although uncomfortable, are often mild with symptoms that will pass after 7 to 10 days. As for influenza, the symptoms are more severe and the consequences for some people are potentially more serious. The annual vaccine only protects against certain strains of influenza.

ZINC TABLETS

Zinc is probably not the first option that comes first in people's minds, but it is one of the options for which there is the most positive data. Zinc tablets are said to reduce duration of colds by up to 3 days and somewhat mitigate their intensity.



These tablets are not candy! Their consumption should be limited to 5 times a day!



Health Canada recommends that you do not exceed 50 mg/day. As for the side effects, you may experience an unpleasant taste and nausea. Be careful! This tablet may interact with several medications, such as antibiotics, anticonvulsants and antihypertensives. Check with your pharmacist first!



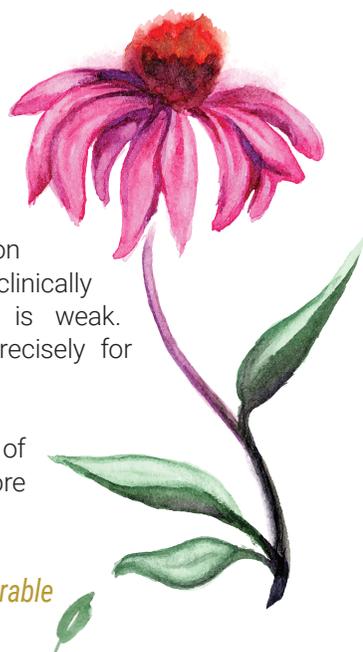
ECHINACEA

The composition of echinacea products varies greatly depending on the parts of the plant used and the production methods. This makes it difficult to obtain a consensus on its effectiveness. In general, the evidence of the clinically significant therapeutic effects of echinacea is weak. Moreover, the benefits reported were more precisely for the prevention of colds.

In addition, the long-term effects of the use of echinacea are unknown. Therefore, use for more than 10 days is not recommended to treat a cold.



When using echinacea to prevent colds, it is preferable to take a cyclical dose with periods of cessation.



As a precaution, echinacea supplements should be avoided by people with autoimmune diseases (e.g.: lupus, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis).

COLD-FX®

The active ingredient in Cold-FX® is a molecule extracted from North American ginseng. Studies have shown that it slightly reduces the frequency, duration and severity of cold and flu symptoms. Its effectiveness would come from its ability to stimulate the activity of the immune system. For this reason, this product would reach its full potential when taken as a preventive measure.

Depending on whether it is used for prevention or symptom management, the dose and dosage differ. There would be no adverse reactions related to this product. However, theoretically, there could be interactions with oral anticoagulants. People with kidney and liver problems as well as people allergic to ginseng should refrain from taking the product.



SALINE WATER NASAL SOLUTIONS

There are some medications available for nasal congestion. Unfortunately, they bring their share of constraints and restrictions. However, saline solutions are an excellent natural and gentle alternative for nasal congestion. They are composed only of water and salt. Some are even available without preservatives. They do not have any contraindications. The only adverse reaction is local irritation that can be caused by repeated use. Saline solutions can be used for everyone, regardless of age and including pregnant women. They simply improve the nasal mucosa by mechanically removing mucus from the sinuses. For more comfort, the container of the different products offers variable jet forces.

Here is the recipe for preparing a saline solution at home:

- 🌿 2.5 ml table salt
- 🌿 2.5 ml baking soda
- 🌿 250 ml boiled water that has been cooled or bottled water





Urinary tract infections

Urinary tract infections in women are common and frequent. They can go unnoticed, cause some discomfort, and sometimes even become complicated or, in some cases, come back repeatedly. Is there a way to prevent these infections?

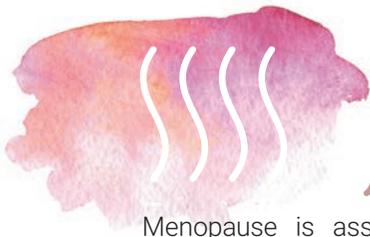
CRANBERRIES

Cranberry-based NHPs are often the first that come to mind when a urinary tract infection arises. Its mechanism of action is believed to come from the fact that it prevents bacteria from sticking to the urinary walls. Although controversial, there are still studies supporting this effectiveness as a preventive measure. Tangible evidence that cranberries can help to treat urinary tract infections is still lacking, including information on the dose and duration of treatment. With the exception of possible mild digestive discomfort, the adverse event profile is very favourable. This gives the consumption of cranberry supplements a positive risk/benefit ratio.



It is important to drink plenty of water when taking cranberry supplements to protect your kidneys.

Avoid products in the form of “cocktails,” as they contain a lot of sugar. Choose pure capsules or juices. Once again, you must have realistic expectations for this product. Remember that it is not a drug! You should consult a healthcare professional if you have a fever, lower back pain or persistent urinary symptoms.



Menopause

Menopause is associated with more than twenty symptoms that, depending on their intensity, impact women's daily lives at different levels. Hot flashes are still the most characteristic symptom of this stage of life. Many women at first are reluctant to use hormone replacement therapy for this disorder. Is there a more "natural" alternative?

There are so-called "phytoestrogens". Phytoestrogens are molecules from plants that are very similar chemically to estrogens produced by a woman's body. They therefore have the ability to mimic some of their actions. It is the most studied NHP for menopausal disorders.

PHYTOESTROGENS

Isoflavones are one of the main groups of phytoestrogens. They are found in soybeans and red clover, for example. Despite the numerous studies conducted, the results are not conclusive enough to make generalized recommendations. The difficulties lie in the fact that there are several kinds of plant extracts. In addition, women has a different genetics. A number of published articles indicate modest effects on the alleviation of menopausal symptoms. Adverse reactions include possible digestive problems, such as constipation, diarrhea and bloating.



Various supplements contain very different levels of isoflavones. It is therefore important to read the product information so as not to consume excessive amounts.



In general, the consensus is that this product can be considered for mild to moderate symptoms given its possible efficacy. If you have a history or risk factors for hormone-dependent cancer, you should avoid phytoestrogen supplements unless your doctor tells you otherwise.



Lack of energy

Our hectic pace of life and busy schedules require us to be continuously productive. However, our body has its ups and downs. To remedy the situation, there are promising products on the market.

ENERGY PRODUCTS

In the form of drinks or tablets, energy products claim to increase energy, alertness and intellectual performance. If you look at the lists of their ingredients, they can be quite long! However, caffeine and all the substances that contain it, such as guarana are often used.



These products act in the brain as well as in other systems, such as the cardiovascular system.



Energy products are mainly used to fight fatigue and provide energy, both for sports and everyday life. Their stimulating effects can last up to several hours.

Caffeine intake above the recommended limits can lead to adverse effects ranging from simple nausea, dehydration and heart problems. These appear to be directly related to the dose you take. In addition, it is not uncommon for regular consumption to lead to physical and psychological dependence.

Despite its common use, from certain doses onwards, it must be considered that interactions with drug treatments are possible.



Be careful!

-  Beware of products with long lists of ingredients.
-  Limit the amount you consume in a day and choose small formats.
-  Do not boost your intake by drinking a coffee, for example, followed by an energy drink and a chocolate bar.
-  Avoid mixing with alcohol and other drugs.
-  Ask yourself: Do I really need it?





The promotion of natural health products is often supported by their traditional use. To be sure that they will have a positive influence on your health, consult with your pharmacist to make the best choices for your health.

USEFUL *sources and links*

American Botanical Council

herbalgram.org

Canadian Paediatric Society

cps.ca/en/documents/position/melatonin-sleep-disorders-children-adolescents

Knowledge Synthesis, Energy Drinks: Consumer Risks and Public Health Prospects

inspq.qc.ca/en/publications/1669

Natural Health Products Directorate, Health Canada

canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/natural-non-prescription.html

Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

"Menopause Management," Vol. 36, No. 9, September 2014.

The National Institute of Excellence in Health and Social Services

inesss.qc.ca/en/themes/medicaments/drug-products/frequently-asked-questions-about-prescription-medications/natural-health-products.html

In this **GUIDE**

Natural health products for:

- Insomnia
- Depressive mood
- Nausea
- Joint pain
- Colds and influenza
- Urinary tract infections
- Menopause
- Lack of energy



Only pharmacists are responsible for the professional activities of the pharmacy practice. They use various tools such as the PSST! (Plan to Stay in Shape Today) program.

In collaboration with:

