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Herbal cardiotoxicals I

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Introduction: Herbal products are commonly used by patients with cardiovascular diseases but most of them do not share this information with their physicians. Although often considered harmless, herbal medicines may cause adverse cardiovascular effects from an ingredient, a contaminant or herb-drug interaction. Ignorance and or misinformation is largely responsible for this potentially dangerous situation. This abstract reviews the known cardiovascular dangers of commonly used herbal cardioceuticals.

Methods: PubMed interrogation revealed 65,034 entries under 'herbal medicines', 2,963 under 'herbal and cardiovascular' and 3,750 under 'herbal toxicity'. Relevant citations were reviewed. Other pertinent published scientific material was also consulted.

Results: Digoxin (*Digitalis purpurea*) may cause bradycardia, heart block and ventricular tachyarrhythmias. These can be potentially fatal. Dan-shen (*Salviae miltiorrhizae*): Potentiates blood thinner warfarin activity; may lower blood pressure. Garlic (*Allium sativum*): Increases the risk of bleeding especially when ingested as fresh garlic and when taken with blood-thinning drugs may also lower blood pressure. Maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*): Increases the risk of excess bleeding when taken with blood-thinning drugs. May abnormally raise or lower blood pressure. Hawthorn (*Crataegus*): Increases the risk of bleeding when taken with blood-thinning drugs may potentiate *Digitalis* effect.

Conclusions: There has been an extensive evidence based review of the potential adverse effects of herbal remedies in the recent years. Some of these have identified dangerous cardiovascular effects. Dissemination of this information is critical. Patients should disclose herbal remedy use and health care workers should discuss adverse effects of these naturoceuticals and monitor and identify possible herb-drug interactions.

Biography

Shashi K Agarwal has obtained his Board Certification in Internal Medicine in 1979 and Cardiovascular Diseases in 1981. He is also Board Certified with the American Board of Integrative Holistic Medicine and the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine. He has been awarded Fellowship of the American College of Cardiology, American College of Physicians and the American College of Nutrition. He has presented over 150 scientific abstracts and published over 30 scientific papers in peer reviewed journals. His interest is in scrutinizing and disseminating evidence based data regarding the therapeutic role of various complimentary modalities and encouraging their integration into contemporary medicine.

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