

COM 7 Nutritional Supplement: St. John's Wort



What is it? St. John's Wort is a popular herb aimed at teens. The flowers and leaves are used to make the medicine. St. John's Wort is most commonly used to treat mild depression, and is occasionally used to treat anxiety, lethargy, loss of appetite and trouble sleeping. It is usually taken in pill form, but some people apply the oil on their skin to treat inflammation and muscle pain.

Is it Effective? The results are mixed. In 2009, a systematic review of 29 international studies, concluded that St. John's Wort may be more effective than a placebo and as effective as standard prescription for antidepressants for the treatment of mild to moderate

depression. According to this review, St. John's Wort also appeared to have fewer side effects than standard antidepressants (Linde, 2009). However, a large randomized control done in 2002 found that St. John's Wort was no more effective than a placebo in treating moderate depression (Hypericum Depression Trial Study Group, 2002).

Side Effects and Cautions: Combining certain antidepressants and St. John's Wort can lead to potentially life threatening increases in serotonin levels. Psychosis is a rare, but possible side effect for those who have or are at risk for mental health disorders (NCCAM). Finally, St. John's Wort can limit the effectiveness of many prescription medicines such as antidepressants, birth control pills, cyclosporine (prevents the body from rejecting transplanted organs), digoxin (heart medication), some HIV drugs including indinavir, some cancer medications including irinotecan, and warfarin or similar blood thinning medications. Other more minor side effects include upset stomach and sensitivity to light. It may also worsen feelings of anxiety in some people. St. John's Wort is not recommended for pregnant women, children or the elderly (NCCAM).

Other considerations: St. John's Wort has been banned in France by the French health Product Safety Agency and several other countries such as the United Kingdom and Canada are in the process of including drug-herb interaction warnings on St. John's Wort. Furthermore, the US Food and Drug Administration has not approved its use as an over the counter or prescription medicine for depression (NCCAM).

Doses by Mouth: For mild to moderate depression

- When using St. John's wort extract standardized to 0.3% hypericin content: 300 mg three times daily.
- When using a St. John's wort extract standardized to 0.2% hypericin: 250 mg twice daily.
- When using a St. John's wort extract standardized to 5% hyperforin: 300 mg three times daily.
- For children under 12 years of age with depression: St. John's wort extract standardized to 0.3% hypericin 300 mg daily (National Library of Medicine).

Bottom Line: St. John's Wort is not to be used to replace conventional care for depression treatment. Before taking St. John's Wort, the patient needs to discuss any drugs they use with their doctor to prevent any dangerous drug-herb interactions.

References:

Hypericum Depression Trial Study Group. [Effect of *Hypericum perforatum* \(St. John's wort\) in major depressive disorder: a randomized controlled trial.](#) *Journal of the American Medical Association.* 2002;287(14):1807–1814.

Linde K, Berner MM, Kriston L. St. John's wort for major depression. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews.* 2009;(4):CD000448.

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM). St. John's Wort and Depression. Last reviewed 10/15/13. Accessed from <<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/stjohnswort/sjw-and-depression.htm>>.

National Library of Medicine & National Institute of Health. St. John's Wort. Last reviewed 12/8/12. Accessed from <<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/329.html>>.