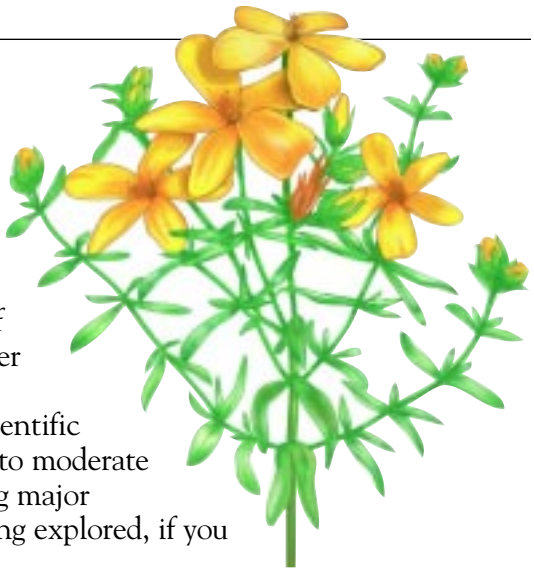
FROM THE OFFICE OF **DR.**

Straight talk about St. John's wort



St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) is a wild yellow flower that has been used for medicinal purposes in other parts of the world for thousands of years. Today, its herbal form is sold over the counter as a dietary supplement. Consumers are increasingly using it as a "natural" way to treat depression. Although some scientific evidence suggests that St. John's wort can successfully treat mild to moderate depression, other studies suggest that it is of no benefit in treating major depression. While the true benefits of St. John's wort are still being explored, if you do choose to use it, there are some things you need to know.

It can cause side effects:

- Nausea
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Rashes
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Restlessness
- Sweating
- Sensitivity to sunlight

Other things you need to know

- Not all preparations contain as much St. John's wort as the label states. The strength and quality of the products can vary from brand to brand and from batch to batch.
- If you are taking St. John's wort or any other over-the-counter herbal preparation, tell your doctor.
- If you have been diagnosed with depression, do not try to self-medicate with St. John's wort. Be sure to take any prescription medication that you have been prescribed.
- Do not combine St. John's wort with a serotonin reuptake inhibitor.
- If you feel that you must take St. John's wort, purchase research-grade hypericum, which is available in drug stores. It generally takes 2 to 3 weeks for a clinical effect, if any, to develop.

It can increase or decrease the effect of certain drugs you may be taking, including:

- Digoxin
- Cyclosporine
- Birth control pills
- Serotonin reuptake inhibitors (antidepressants) such as Paxil, Prozac, and Zoloft
- Anti-epilepsy drugs such as phenytoin (Dilantin), carbamazepine (Epitol, Tegretol), and phenobarbital
- Anti-AIDS drugs such as indinavir
- Theophylline—used to treat asthma
- Warfarin (Coumadin)—an anticlotting drug used to prevent strokes and heart attacks
- Chemotherapy agents
- Thyroid-stimulating hormone
- Monoamine oxidase inhibitors

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