

Herbal Medicines and Anesthesia

When preparing a patient for surgery, anesthesia providers will ask patients what medications they are taking. It is **important to tell the anesthetist about both prescription and non-prescription medications**, because all of them may have implications for anesthesia. Especially important, and often overlooked, are herbal medicines, many of which have important interactions with anesthesia.

- Feverfew, garlic, ginger and ginkgo may interfere with blood clotting and may cause excessive bleeding during surgery.
- Echinacea, used to boost the immune system, may cause inflammation of the liver if used with steroids or allergic reactions.
- Ginseng, used to increase physical stamina and mental concentration, may decrease the effectiveness of certain anti-clotting medicines and increase the heart rate or elevate the blood pressure.
- Kava-kava, used as a muscle relaxant, may increase the effects of certain anti-seizure medicines and alcohol or prolong the effects of certain anesthetics.
- St. John's Wort kava or valerian, used for depression, restful sleep, or anxiety, may prolong the effects of certain anesthetic agents.
- Ephedra or ma huang, used as an appetite suppressant, may interfere with certain antidepressant medications or cause dangerous elevation of the heart rate or blood pressure, especially with general anesthesia.

In general, the taking of all herbal preparations should be **discontinued at least one week prior** to anticipated surgery. Stopping the long term use of valerian may result in withdrawal symptoms for some people, and is best done under a physician's supervision prior to surgery.

Provided by Paul Bennetts, CRNA and
American Society of Anesthesiologists

Herbal Medicines and Anesthesia

When preparing a patient for surgery, anesthesia providers will ask patients what medications they are taking. It is **important to tell the anesthetist about both prescription and non-prescription medications**, because all of them may have implications for anesthesia. Especially important, and often overlooked, are herbal medicines, many of which have important interactions with anesthesia.

- Feverfew, garlic, ginger and ginkgo may interfere with blood clotting and may cause excessive bleeding during surgery.
- Echinacea, used to boost the immune system, may cause inflammation of the liver if used with steroids or allergic reactions.
- Ginseng, used to increase physical stamina and mental concentration, may decrease the effectiveness of certain anti-clotting medicines and increase the heart rate or elevate the blood pressure.
- Kava-kava, used as a muscle relaxant, may increase the effects of certain anti-seizure medicines and alcohol or prolong the effects of certain anesthetics.
- St. John's Wort kava or valerian, used for depression, restful sleep, or anxiety, may prolong the effects of certain anesthetic agents.
- Ephedra or ma huang, used as an appetite suppressant, may interfere with certain antidepressant medications or cause dangerous elevation of the heart rate or blood pressure, especially with general anesthesia.

In general, the taking of all herbal preparations should be **discontinued at least one week prior** to anticipated surgery. Stopping the long term use of valerian may result in withdrawal symptoms for some people, and is best done under a physician's supervision prior to surgery.

Provided by Paul Bennetts, CRNA and
American Society of Anesthesiologists