

Answers from Amy

110 S. Wall., Floydada, TX 79235

(806) 983-4912

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~~doctor or pharmacist right away.~~

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE USING AN HERBAL SUPPLEMENT

Nearly 15 million Americans use herbs to improve their health. Although some herbs have potential health benefits, others may cause serious harm to our health, especially if taken with prescription medications. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service does not endorse the use of herbal medicine, but does offer some sensible advice to individuals interested in using herbs to improve their health. In no way is this advice intended as a substitute for a physician or health care provider.

1. Discuss ALL medications you use, including prescription drugs, herbal supplements, vitamin and mineral supplements and over-the-counter medications with your physician or health care provider. If you cannot remember all of the prescriptions, supplements, and over-the-counter medications you use, then take them with you the next visit or check-up.

Let your pharmacist know as well.

2. Make sure you get an accurate diagnosis before using any herb.

3. Be aware of any possible side effects the herb may have BEFORE you take it. If you experience any of these side effects, stop taking the herb and tell your

4. Make sure that you get information about herbs from unbiased and scientifically-based sources. When receiving advice about herbal supplements from an individual, ask about that individual's training and experience in herbal medicine.

5. Avoid herbal preparations that contain more than one herb, since possible interactions may exist between herbs.

6. Buy your herbal products from reliable sources. Remember, price is not always the best indicator of quality.

Reference: O'Hara M, Kiefer D, Farrell K, Kemper K. A Review of 12 Commonly Used Medicinal Herbs. Arch Fam Med. 1998; 7:523-536.

THE HYPE ABOUT HYPERTENSION

More than half of Americans over age 60 have high blood pressure; but, that does not mean it is part of normal aging. High blood pressure, or hypertension, is sometimes called the "silent killer" because you cannot necessarily see or feel any of its symptoms. You can have hypertension and still feel just fine. However, hypertension is a major health problem. If not treated, it can lead to stroke, heart disease, eye

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problems or kidney failure, among other things. The good news is that there are ways you can prevent and/or control high blood pressure.

Whether going in for a check-up or major surgery, having your blood pressure checked is a standard procedure for health providers. But, what exactly do those numbers mean and why are there two of them? The first, or top, number is your systolic pressure. This tells you how much your blood pushes against the blood vessel walls as your heart beats. The second, or bottom, number measures the pressure while the heart relaxes between beats. This is the diastolic pressure. If your blood pressure is normal, according to current recommendations, your systolic pressure is less than 120 and your diastolic pressure is less than 80.

For older people, the first number (systolic) often is high (greater than 140), but the second number (diastolic) is normal (less than 80). This problem is called isolated systolic hypertension. Isolated systolic hypertension is the most common form of high blood pressure in older people. Isolated systolic hypertension can lead to serious health problems. If you are diagnosed with hypertension, your health care provider will probably want you to make changes in your daily habits to try and lower those numbers.

He or she may also ask you to check your blood pressure at home at different times of the day. If the numbers are still high after several checks, your health provider will probably suggest medication, changes in your diet and exercise.

Try these healthy habits recommended by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute to help you control or prevent high blood pressure:

- Keep a healthy weight. Being overweight adds to your risk of high blood pressure. Ask your health provider if you need to lose weight.
- Exercise every day. Moderate exercise may lower your risk of hypertension and heart disease. Try to exercise at least 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week or

more. Check with your health provider before starting a new exercise program.

- Eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy foods. Also, make sure you are getting enough potassium. Fresh fruits and vegetables are high in potassium. If using packaged foods, read the nutrition labels to choose those that have more potassium.
- Cut down on salt and sodium. Most Americans eat more salt and sodium than they need. A low-salt diet might help lower your blood pressure. Talk with your health provider about your salt intake.
- Drink less alcohol. Drinking alcohol can affect your blood pressure as it decreases the amount of water in your body. As a general rule, men shouldn't have more than two drinks a day; women not more than one drink a day.

If lifestyle changes alone do not control your high blood pressure, your health provider may tell you to take blood pressure pills. You may need to take medicine for the rest of your life. It is important to note any significant changes in your health or level of functioning once you start taking blood pressure medication. The dose may need to be adjusted to suit your needs and this may take several attempts.

If you have high blood pressure, remember that:

- I. High blood pressure may not make you feel sick, but it is serious.
- II. You can lower your blood pressure by changing your daily habits and, if needed, by taking medicine. If you need to take high blood pressure medicine, lifestyle changes may help lower the dose you need and reduce side effects.
- III. If you have hypertension but are controlling it through diet, exercise and/or medication, that's great!. But if another health provider asks if you have high blood pressure, the answer is "yes, but it is being treated."

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IV. Tell your health provider about all the drugs you take. Don't forget to mention over-the-counter drugs, vitamins and dietary supplements. They may affect your blood pressure and may change how well your blood pressure medicine works.

V. Blood pressure pills should be taken at the same time each day. If you miss a dose, do not double the dose the next day. Contact your health provider if you have any questions.

VI. If you have high blood pressure, test it at home between check-ups. Ask your health provider to show you how. Make sure you are seated with your feet on the floor and your back has something to lean against. Relax quietly for 5 minutes before checking your blood pressure. Your arm should be resting on a support at the level of your heart. Keep a list of the results to share with your health provider.

With a little effort and attention, you can make great strides in preventing hypertension from affecting you and your family. You may also be able to effectively control your or your loved one's hypertension. For more information, contact your County Extension Agent. You may also visit the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/index.htm>.

Source: Andrew B. Crocker, Extension Program Specialist
– Gerontology Health

SNACKING YOUR WAY TO GOOD HEALTH

It's a new year, and many people have goals to make this one healthy! Snacks are a big part of a healthy eating plan, and if you choose wisely, snacks can help you reach your health goals.

"Too often, people grab calorie-dense snacks, such as chips or a cookie, because they are hungry between meals," says Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agent Amy Kress. However, if you plan ahead, you can have a variety of healthy and nutritious snacks ready to grab and go. Choosing healthy

snacks from the grains, fruit, vegetables, dairy, and protein food groups can boost your energy between meals and keep your hunger in check so you don't overeat at meal time. In fact, you can think of snacks as "mini-meals" and view them as opportunities to eat more fruits, vegetables, and calcium-rich dairy foods, which are often under-consumed by Americans.

It's no secret that many people are trying to lose weight. Therefore, there are a few tips you should follow when choosing to include snacks into your day. First, most people do not need more than one or two snacks per day. You should never snack if you are not hungry, and always avoid the urge to eat if you are bored, stressed, worried, or angry. Next, if you do choose to include snacks in your day, keep snacks to less than 200 calories, and be sure that you do not exceed the total number of calories you need. To help you control snack portions, measure out your foods, or choose foods that are pre-portioned, such as yogurt or canned fruit. Some stores even offer snacks that are pre-packaged in 100-calorie portions.

Many foods make great snacks! Some snacks may just be a single food, such as an apple or popcorn, while others maybe a combination of foods from several food groups, such as fat-free yogurt with fresh berries. Whatever snack you choose, be sure that you choose foods low in solid fat, salt, and added sugar, but high in nutrients and fiber. When planning your snacks, you'll need to consider whether you need access to a refrigerator to safely store your snack foods. Here are a few ideas for healthy snacks:

VII. Whole wheat crackers and low fat cheese;

VIII. Fresh vegetables, such as cucumbers and cherry tomatoes, with low-fat salad dressing;

IX. Fruits canned in their own juice, such as pineapple or pears;

X. "Grab and Go" fresh fruits, such as bananas, apples, and peaches;

XI. Nuts, such as almonds or walnuts;

XII. Granola bars;

XIII. Low-fat popcorn;

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XIV. Peanut butter and celery sticks; and

XV. Bell peppers and hummus.

Whichever snack you choose, remember to keep it healthy and low in calories!

Written by Amanda R. Scott, MS, RD, LD, Program Specialist, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, College Station, Texas. January 2015.

SLOW COOKING

Do you remember when you were younger and coming home to the smell of a home-cooked meal? Was it cooked in a slower cooker? Slow cookers are a great way to prepare food and can be used throughout the year. Using a slower cooker saves on electricity and could avoid unwanted heat from the oven in the kitchen. Another advantage to using a slower cooker is that it can save time, allowing you more time to enjoy your family. Let's look at how to properly use a slow cooker.

First, you want to make sure your cooker, utensils, and work area are cleaned and sanitized. Be sure to keep all perishable foods refrigerated until right before you need them to be placed in the cooker. If you have previously cut up foods, keep those foods stored separately in the refrigerator, as well. Keeping foods cold prior to using them assures that bacteria will not be growing on the foods, thus not having a "head start" if they are left out at room temperature.

It's important to remember slower cookers come in a variety of sizes, so the amount of food you place in them will vary depending on the size of the cooker. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines on the sizes and amounts of food that should be placed in your specific cooker. Keeping the lid closed at all times helps to keep the steam/moisture in and ensures the food is cooking properly.

The majority of cookers now have numerous settings. Different foods will take different amounts of time to cook. If you're leaving for the day, it is recommended that foods be cooked on the low setting; however, if you're at home and wish to cook it quickly, the high setting might be more appropriate for the meal you have selected. When possible, turn the cooker on high for an

hour or so and then turn it down to a lower setting. If you do not have time for this step, set the cooker on low, go to work, and come home to a deliciously cooked meal! Cooking less tender or larger cuts of meats on low heat for longer periods will allow the meat to become more tender.

Should the power go out while cooking in a slow cooker, it is important to remember a few things. If you are home, immediately pull the food out and continue cooking it by another method. If you are not home and the power goes out, throw away the food, even if it looks done.

Food safety should always be a top priority in your kitchen. Remember to always cook foods to proper internal temperatures, follow good personal hygiene, and clean and sanitize all food contact surfaces.

For more information on cooking with slow cookers or food safety, contact your local county AgriLife Extension agent, [insert agent's name here] at [insert contact information here].

Prepared by Rebecca Dittmar, Program Specialist, Food Protection Management, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, March 2013.

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Amy Kress
County Extension Agent - FCS
Floyd County

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Production: Donna Keaton

FAVORITE RECIPES

APPLE WALDORF SALAD

2 medium apples
1 tablespoon orange juice
½ cup chopped celery
½ cup raisins
¼ cup light mayonnaise

Wash your hands and clean your cooking area.
Wash, core, and dice the apples. Place the apples in a large mixing bowl with the juice and mix well.
Add all other ingredients to the apples and toss gently. Chill before serving.

SPINACH SQUARES

2 cups cooked rice
1½ cups thawed chopped spinach
1½ cups part-skim mozzarella cheese,
grated
Salt, pepper, and garlic to taste

Wash hands and any cooking areas. Preheat oven to 400°F. Mix all ingredients well. Pour into a 13 x 10 inch baking dish. Bake for 20-25 minutes. Cut into squares and serve warm.

EASY EGG SALAD

6 large hard-cooked eggs, peeled and
chopped
½ cup chopped celery
½ cup sweet pickle relish
¼ cup light mayonnaise

Wash hands and cooking area. In medium bowl, combine all ingredients. Cover and chill. When ready to eat, serve salad on bread slices for a delicious sandwich or for a light salad, top mixed greens and tomatoes with this egg dish.

POTATO-PLUS SOUP

3 cups cauliflower pieces or broccoli pieces or combination of both (3 cups is about 1 medium head of broccoli or cauliflower, fresh)

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1 tablespoon water
2 cups water
2 teaspoons or 2 cubes chicken bouillon
4 cups fat-free or low-fat milk
1 teaspoon crumbled dried parsley flakes
2 cups potato flakes
2 ounces or ½ cup reduced-fat, shredded cheese
Pepper as desired

Wash your hands and clean your cooking area. Wash cauliflower and/or broccoli. Cut into bit size pieces. Microwave cauliflower and/or broccoli pieces in a covered dish with 1 tablespoon of water until vegetables are tender. In a sauce pan, combine water, bouillon, milk, and parsley. Cook over low heat. Add potato flakes to sauce pan. Stir in cooked cauliflower and/or broccoli pieces. Top with shredded cheese. Heat until cheese is melted. Serve. Refrigerate leftovers

HOT & SPICY CORN DIP

1 small chopped tomato
½ tablespoon finely chopped pickled jalapeno peppers
1 cup frozen corn, thawed, well drained
½ package (4 ounces) fat free cream cheese
¼ cup reduced fat shredded cheese
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder

Wash your hands and clean your cooking area. Wash tomato under cool running water with a vegetable brush or hand. Chop tomato and jalapeno peppers. Combine all ingredients in blender and blend well. Serve with assorted vegetables, baked tortilla chips or on top of grilled chicken breast.

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