

[IMAGE]

Safer Alternatives

The herbal supplement ephedra has been used for thousands of years to treat asthma and similar respiratory problems. Ephedra elicits physiological responses, such as increased blood pressure and heart rate and constriction of blood vessels, which led to its introduction to the U.S. in the 1920s to treat nasal decongestion and to stimulate the nervous system. More recently, the herb became extremely popular in supplements used for weight loss and increased energy, but its safety has been called into question after numerous reports of negative side effects.

Herbs are considered dietary supplements in the U.S., and are thus sold without the Food and Drug Administration approval required for pharmaceutical drugs. A recent study estimated the safety of ephedra by comparing the frequency of negative reactions per unit sold between this and other supplements, a method often used for gauging the safety of pharmaceuticals. Information on adverse reactions to ephedra and other herbs in 2001 was available through the American Association of Poison Control Centers.

Ephedra-containing products were responsible for 64% of all negative reactions to herbal products, although they made up less than 1% of herbal supplement sales. The odds for an adverse reaction to ephedra were at least 100 times higher than for reactions to any other herbal supplement, ranging from 100 times more likely compared to kava to 720 times more likely compared to Ginkgo biloba.

Even when considering ephedra's extremely high share of the herbal market, risks for negative reactions to supplements containing the herb remained 10-40 times higher compared to other products. Possible negative reactions to this herb range from increased blood pressure to life-threatening heart attack or stroke.

Considering that the American Medical Association and the organization Health Canada have recommended banning legal sales of ephedra, there are certainly safer weight-loss options. Talk to your chiropractor for information on which supplements can help you achieve long-lasting health and wellness.

Reference:

Bent S, Tiedt TN, et al. The relative safety of ephedra compared with other herbal products. *Annals of Internal Medicine* 2003;138(6), pp. 468-471.

To learn more about herbs and supplements, go to www.chiroweb.com/find/tellmeabout/.

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