

[IMAGE]

Dietary Supplements: Not Always Risk-Free

For more than 5,000 years, the Chinese have made extensive use of *ma huang*, primarily for respiratory conditions. In the United States, *ma huang* and a variety of dietary supplements that contain ephedra alkaloids are widely promoted and used as a means of losing weight and increasing energy.

Alkaloids are chemical substances that contain nitrogen. Some of the more familiar members of the alkaloid family include caffeine, cocaine, morphine, and nicotine. As you've probably already guessed, alkaloids may not be the safest of ingredients, a suggestion investigated in a recent study in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. The study revealed that cardiovascular and central nervous system side-effects were frequently attributable to use of dietary supplements containing ephedra alkaloids. Hypertension was the single most frequent side-effect, followed by heart palpitations; tachycardia (an abnormally fast heartbeat - more than 100 beats per minute); stroke; and seizures.

The authors concluded that the use of substances that contain ephedra alkaloids may pose a health risk to individuals, and that a better understanding of the adverse effects of such dietary supplements is needed. These recommendations echo other recent advisements from the health care community on the safety of dietary supplements. Talk to your health care professional about the pros and cons of dietary supplements before you begin taking any specific product.

For general information on herbal supplements, visit <http://www.chiroweb.com/tyh/herbs.html>.

Reference:

Haller CA, Benowitz NL. Adverse cardiovascular and central nervous system events associated with dietary supplements containing ephedra alkaloids. *The New England Journal of Medicine* 2000; Vol. 343, No. 25, pp 1833-1839.

Page printed from:

http://www.toyourhealth.com/mpacms/tyh/article.php?id=736&no_paginate=true&no_b=true