

Interactions between classical drugs and herbal medicines

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The use of herbs for medical reasons is very old, it is as old as the presence of man on earth. Nowadays, the use of such herbs are increasing throughout all countries, sometimes as the main drug, sometimes coupled with classical drugs.

Herbal medicine is not safe as most people and even some doctors think. Ginkgo bilba extract which improve cognitive function can cause spontaneous bleeding. Sifrol which is present in American tree called sassafras root bark, used as a herbal tea has a carcinogenic effect on liver cells. Chiari syndrome may result from the use of a bush tree through its active substance senecio.

In this part of the world and similar countries, with the increasing trend of use of herbal medicine, which is prescribed mostly by herbalist without serious control and lack of proper knowledge of their effects, and primitive preparations.

This was and still happening every where even in Europe, and that is why they have started recently to resist the usage of herbal medicines in an uncontrolled way, of course that was after lots and lots of published papers and books containing the observations and the poisonous effects and interactions of such herbs on the patients.

In UK few hundreds of herbs are studied fully and put in the market. But there are long lists of herbs to be studied. Take Dawood Al-antaki born 950h in his book : Al-tathkira, he gave names of over 1600 medical herbs.

Actually during the 4th-5th h century doctors in this part of the earth, gave rules of using medical herbs, like dose, actions, preparations, storage etc, but most important is how to relieve side effects, and they put rules to restrict and control their use. Ibn Jazla Albaghdadi died 473h, said in his book tackweem alabdan bi tadbeer alinsan:

If diet makes the patient get better do not give medicine .

If simple medicine is enough to make him good, do not give him compound one.

Unfamiliar drug should not be used, unless it has proved good with safe response.

The scientific way of using herbal medicine which had been used, in that time has been lost, and could not be applied for the timebeing as it should be modernised. One of such scientific way is to know the interactions with classical medicines, through lab procedures and clinical trials .

Examples of such interactions are as follows:

1-If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs:

- aloe
- cascara
- horehound
- plantain
- rhubarb

a)With digestive ulcer drug or anti-acid, it will cause an increase in the severity of the disease.

b)With laxative classical drugs, will cause severe hypotension and diarrhea with other complications.

2- If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs that have an “effect on the heart;

- broom
- calamus
- fenugreek
- figwort
- fumitory
- ginger
- parsley
- hawthorn

a)With cardiac glycosides will cause an increase in its effect with dangerous complications.

b)With anti arrhythmia drugs will stop their effectiveness of medicine

c)With depolarizing muscle relaxants will cause arrhythmia.

3- If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs “which cause polyuria”:

- artichoke
- broom
- burdock
- celery
- elder
- juniper

a) With diuretic drug will cause huge amount of urine production with decrease in potassium level in plasma.

b) With anti arrhythmia drugs, will stop its effect and decrease potassium level in plasma.

c) With anti hypertensive drugs will cause increase its effect.

d) With anti psychotic drugs will cause increase of its lithium activity and its toxicity.

e) With anti diabetic drug will cause antagonism effect.

f) With the cortisones will cause increase in potassium loss from the body.

4-If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs which reduces blood pressure”:

- agrimony
- asafetida
- avens
- fenugreek
- fucus
- fumitory
- garlic
- ginger
- hawthorn
- horseradish
- horehound
- nettle
- parsley
- wildcarrot
- yarrow

- a) With diuretics, will cause hypotention and difficulty to control diuresis.
- b) With anti hypertensive druges, will cause increase its effectiveness.
- c) With sympathomimetics will cause their antagonism.
- d) With general anesthetic drugs will cause an increase in their hypotensive effect.

5-If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs which “cause an increase in blood pressure”:

- capiscum
- ginger
- vervain
- broom
- coltsfoot

- a)With anti hypertensive drugs, will cause their antagonism.
- b) With sympathomimetics will cause an increase in level of hypertension.

6- If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs “that affect the clotting process of the blood”:

- alfalfa
- angelica
- aniseed
- asafetida
- celery
- chamomile
- clove
- fenugreek

- fucus
- ginger
- horseradish
- willow

- With anti coagulants will cause, an increase in their activities, meaning cause bleeding.
- With probenecid “a drug that causes decrease in the activities of musculo-skeletal system” and used for treatment of gout will cause their antagonism effect.
- With acetazolamine drug which is diamox “used for eye glaucoma” ,will cause increase in its action with toxicity.

7- If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs “affecting cholesterol level in the blood” meaning reducing it.

- alfalfa
- artichoke
- fenugreek
- garlic
- plantain
- tansy

- With cholesterol reducing drugs in the blood, will cause increase in their activities.
- With anti diabetic drugs will cause severe reduction in glucose level in the blood.

8- If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs “ with anti psychotic drugs”:

- calamus
- celery
- chamomile
- couchgrass
- elecampane
- nettle
- sage
- valerian
- wild carrot

- With antihypersensitivity drugs will lead to increase in their activity.
- With hypnotic and antianxiety drugs, will cause increase in their activities.
- With antidepressant drugs will cause increase in their activities.

9- If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs “that cause reduction in glucose level in the blood”

- alfalfa
- aloe

- burdock
- celery
- eucalyptus
- fenugreek
- garlic
- ginger
- juniper
- marshmallow
- myrrh
- nettle

a) With anti diabetic drugs, will cause increase their activities.

10- If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs “ that cause increase blood glucose level”:

- elecampane
- figwort

a) With anti diabetic drugs, will lead to decrease their activities.

11- If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs “that have hormonal effects”:

- alfalfa
- aniseed
- fucus
- horseradish
- wild carrot
- vervain

a) With cortisone will cause retention of water and sodium in the body.

b) With sex hormones, will have antagonism effect.

c) With contraceptive will cause decrease in their activities.

12-If one takes one or more of the following medical herbs” that lead to hypersensitivity”:

- angelica
- aniseed
- apricot
- arnica
- artichoke
- asafetida
- cassia
- celery

- chamomile
- cinnamon
- garlic
- juniper
- parsley

- a) With drugs that lead to skin allergy will cause severe hypersensitivity.
- b) To patient who has photosensitivity will cause severe hypersensitivity on exposure to light.
- c) To patient who has respiratory system allergy will cause severe hypersensitivity in respiratory system.

It is obvious that one herb may have many different actions in the different body organs, examples ,celery has a diuretic effect, a hypertensive effect, and antidiabetic effect.

It is also clear that the multiple effects of the medical herbs are due to many active principles in one herb. this will put more burden on the doctor when he prescribes a classical drug with herbal one.

Although in USA the medical herb products are not subjected to approval process of the FDA (food drug administration) and they are not fested with scientific rigor required of conventional drugs. Europe dealt with the problem with serious concern and accordingly in UK through the Traditional Herbal Medicine Registration Scheme established Oct 2005 put conditions to give license for any herbal medicine , actually herbal medicine can reach the market in UK in 3 ways:.

1. As unlicensed ones, the consumer can buy it by face to face consultation.
- 2.As unlicensed ones that try to comply with the requirement of the scheme mentioned above by April 2011.
- 3.As already licensed herbal medicine which reaches up to 500 ones, hold a product license which have met safety, quality and efficiency conditions of the THMRS.

Now, what is needed in this part of the world is to put into action steps that makes the use of the herbal medicine safe, good quality and effective, these steps may include:-

- 1.Control the activities of the herbalist.
- 2.Control the preparations of the medical herbs.
- 3.Start using the licensed herbal medicines according to the European and UK program, and to put in the market medical herbs comparable to those which are present in their market, having the conditions of safety, good quality and effective.

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