

## **So you want to consult an herbal practitioner?**

### **Before you consult an herbal practitioner**

- Consult only qualified herbal practitioners.
- Ask for evidence of training or membership of reputable associations eg ATCM, RCHM, NIMH, CPP.
- Be cautious of statements such as “this remedy is 100% safe” or “this remedy has no side effects” or “this will not interfere with your prescribed medicines”. They are unlikely to be true.
- Tell your doctor if you plan to use herbal medicines.

### **What you should know about herbal practitioners**

- Herbal practitioners should always take a full medical history. Be cautious of taking a remedy supplied by a practitioner who has not first taken a full medical history.
- Reputable herbal practitioners should be willing to give you a list of the ingredients of remedies they supply. Be cautious of anyone who supplies herbal remedies but is unwilling or unable to provide written list of the ingredients.
- Reputable herbal practitioners should not advise you to stop or change the dosage of a medicine prescribed by your doctor. Only your doctor should change the medicines he or she has prescribed so be wary of any practitioner who tries to do this.

### **What to expect when you consult a herbal practitioner**

- During a first consultation a herbal practitioner will take a full medical history. This usually takes at least 30 minutes.
- You should tell the herbal practitioner about any medicines you are taking (including the contraceptive pill).
- Some herbal practitioners may recommend or carry out a liver function test before starting treatment. This may be done by a skin prick or blood tests. This is a relatively simple procedure to provide extra protection for the patient and should not cause undue alarm. Some patients may react badly to an herbal medicine as may happen with any medicine. The liver function test will identify any unwanted liver effects rapidly so that they can be treated promptly.
- Herbal medicines may affect the way some other medicines work. Also some other medicines may affect the way herbal medicines work. If you are taking other medicines you should consult your doctor before you start using herbal medicines.

**Taking herbal medicines**

- Follow the instructions supplied with the medicine. Do not take more than the recommended dose.
- You should tell your herbal practitioner if you start using any other medicines while taking your herbal treatment.

**Possible side effects**

- All herbal medicines can cause side-effects, although not everybody gets them.
- Many herbal medicines cause nausea and diarrhoea when you first start taking them, but this should not last longer than 1 or 2 days or be severe.
- The information supplied with the medicine should tell you what side-effects have been reported by other people who have used the medicine
- If you notice any side-effects not listed in the information supplied with the medicine, or if any of the side effects gets serious or lasts longer than a few days, tell your herbalist and consult your doctor. Stop the herbal treatment if you have any of the following side-effects develop after you have been taking a herbal medicine for some time:
  - tiredness
  - nausea
  - fever
  - itching
  - right upper abdominal discomfort
  - diarrhoea.

**Further information**

Ask your doctor, pharmacist or herbal medicine practitioner for more information and specific advice about using herbal medicines