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# Are You Depressed?

## St. John's Wort may be your solution

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According to the National Foundation for Brain Research, 22% of U.S. women and 16.7% of U.S. men suffer from anxiety disorders.

The National Institute of Health reports that 60% of American adults experience some degree of insomnia due to anxiety.

This translates to millions of Americans each year who suffer from anxiety, mild to moderate depression, and a variety of secondary effects such as sleep disturbances, fatigue, and headaches.

St John's wort extracts are widely prescribed in Europe for the treatment of mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

Certainly, St John's wort is a safer and less toxic alternative to many prescription antidepressants. It does not cause serious side-effects, dependence, or addiction.

Historically, St John's wort was used to relax tension and anxiety, uplift the spirits, and help regulate the nervous system, and alleviate emotional problems during menopause. It was also used as a mood elevator in cases of depression and other mental illnesses.

In 1984, researchers confirmed that active constituents in St. John's wort positively alter brain chemistry in a way that improves mood

The herb contains the active constituents Hypericin, pseudohypericin, flavonoids, and Xanthones. Most of the research has focused on hypericin because of its beneficial effect

Both as an antidepressant and an antiviral component. The best St. John's wort extracts contain a .3% standardized amount of hypericin.

As a therapist I frequently recommend SL John's wort extract along with other natural substances, for mild to moderate depression, anxiety, and for panic disorders. I have observed people who take it on a regular basis get excellent results.

An excellent preventative dosage level of hypericin is 9 mg per day whereas a therapeutic amount would be about 1.8 mg of hypericin per day. St John's wort extract should not be



taken while using prescription antidepressants.

Since a good therapist should be conservative, I discourage the use of St. John's wort extracts by pregnant or lactating women.

Because of its photosensitizing properties, you are best advised to minimize your unprotected exposure to strong sunlight, tanning beds, and other sources of ultraviolet light

People with food sensitivities may wish to minimize tyramine-containing foods such as red wine, cheese, yeast products, and pickled herring.

It is important to note that generally St John's wort is quite safe and effective.

### Life Changes

**Menopause** Women either took forward to it or dread it because of the side effects associated with hormone fluctuations.

Some of the physical changes are menstrual irregularities, hot flashes, dizziness, headaches, breast tenderness, vaginal discomfort, and rapid or irregular heartbeat.

There are also emotional changes that include tension, anxiety, sleeping difficulties, and mood swings To avoid the unpleasantness of these changes, many women consider hormone replacement therapy or HRT. However, this avenue is not without its pitfalls, such as breast cancer.

With controversy surrounding HRT, women are turning to natural options to ease them through this important life cycle.

Two groups of plants have attracted notice: "Women's herbs" used historically for reproductive events from the onset of menstruation through childbirth to menopause, and the newly coined "phytoestrogens".

Phytoestrogens are plants containing compounds that help balance hormone levels, or have estrogen-like actions.

In women with low estrogen levels, phytoestrogens mildly elevate them. Conversely, in women with high estrogen levels, phytoestrogens lodge at estrogen

bonding sites and reduce estrogen levels.

Although this may sound contradictory, phytoestrogens promote balanced estrogen levels, similar to the Western medical concept of equilibrium.

An Australian study in 1994 looking into the benefits of soy supplementation to reduce hot flashes, concluded "soy flour supplementation produced a rapid response over six weeks which continued over the subsequent six weeks decreasing hot flashes by 40%."

Wild yam is another phytoestrogen that has gained popularity recently. Until 1970, it was the only source of natural diosgenin, a hormone material used in birth control pills. This suggests a significant effect on hormone balance. But its ability to ease irritable and excitable conditions in the body makes it particularly valuable during menopause.

Vitex or Chaste Tree berries stimulate and balance the function of the pituitary gland in its relationship to female hormones, producing more luteinizing hormones (LH) which then causes greater production of progesterone during the second half (luteal phase) of the menstrual cycle. This increase in progesterone thus produces a normal balance between estrogen and progesterone.

### Other Herbs In The News

**YOHIMBINE** - A derivative of the Yohimbe bark can be effective in treating erectile dysfunction.

**NONI** - A 'new' herb from the South Sea islands contains xeronine, an alkaloid that helps activate enzymes, energize and regulate the body.

**KAVA-KAVA** - Another "new" South Pacific herb, with 3,000 years of usage, relaxes without dulling the mind, and eases muscle tension.

