



## Toxicity and Adverse Health Effects of Some Common Herbal Medicines

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### DESCRIPTION

In most countries, herbal and related products are marketed without mandatory safety or toxicological evaluation. Many of these countries also lack effective machinery to regulate manufacturing processes and quality standards. These herbal products are almost always offered to consumers without a prescription, and hardly are known about the potential dangers of inferior products.

It is important to reiterate the staggering rate of increasing interest and use in herbal medicine. Over the last decade, herbal medicine use has accounted for about 40% of all healthcare care provided in China, while in Australia, Canada, the United States and Belgium, 48% of the population has used herbal medicine at least once and France is estimated at 70%, 42%, 38% and 75%, respectively. Despite the patient's positive perception towards the use of herbal medicine and allege of satisfaction with the outcome of the treatment but it is coupled with the patient's disappointment with the efficacy and/or safety of conventional allopathic or orthodox medicines, the safety of herbal medicine remains as a major concern.

Not only is the general perception that herbal remedies and medicines are very safe and free of side effects is wrong, but they can also be misleading. Herbs have been shown to cause a variety of undesirable or adverse reactions. Some of them can cause serious injuries, life-threatening conditions, and even death. Many and irrefutable cases of addiction have been reported in the literature. Yo-Yo "Cleanser" Bitters® is one of the widely advertised herbal remedies in various media in Nigeria and has become widely accepted over time, especially among consumers in the Southwest.

According to a study, this herbal formula was capable of increasing plasma levels of liver enzymes and induces hypokalemia in rats after 30 days of administration. In their observations, the main risk associated with this herb during this subacute exposure or toxicity study was potassium loss (which can predispose to dangerous arrhythmias). Prior to this study, they evaluated the safety of "Super B Blood Purifier" and "Super B Seven Keys to Power" mixtures in an experimental model over 10 years ago. These herbal mixtures were marketed by a Nigerian registered company that cultivated medicinal plants and manufactured herbal preparations.

Herbal blood tonics are well-supported by the general public claiming their effectiveness, according to the manufacturer's statement that "they are safe, give strength, and purifying the blood and body of infectious diseases." They obtained herbal constituents (*Entandrophragma utile* and *Anacardium occidentale*) and studied individual plant extracts and herbal tonics made from them. Acute toxicity studies have shown that all extracts and tonics are safe, while chronic toxicity studies have shown *E. utile* hypertrophy was shown in 10% of mice treated with tonics and one of the lungs. A recent study reported an association between the use of traditional herbal medicines and the development of liver fibrosis in Ugandan study participants.

A number of Chinese herbal medicines and other herbal medicines from different parts of the world have also been implicated in cases of poisoning. Many of them have been shown to contain toxic compounds which are capable of reacting with cellular macromolecules including DNA, causing cellular toxicity, and/or genotoxicity.

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