Beware of These Potential Drug Interactions With Supplements

by BRENDA VANTA

Research-Based Herbs for Rheumatoid Arthritis and Possible Herb and Drug Interactions

- **Boswellia.** Used for hundreds of years in Ayurvedic medicine to treat joint pain and other inflammatory conditions, some research studies support Boswellia's efficacy for RA. Boswellia may interact with some prescription drugs, especially those used to decrease stomach acid (antiacids, H2-blockers, Proton pump inhibitors).

- **Ginger.** Another ancient herbal remedy, ginger is used for many conditions from arthritis to digestive complaints, heart diseases, and cancer. Studies show that the active ingredient in ginger, block COX- 2, is a compound occurring in the body that is responsible for pain sensation. Some conventional drugs (non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs or NSAIDs) work in a similar fashion, by blocking COX-2. High doses of ginger extracts may interfere with blood thinners (and increase the risk of bleeding); this herb also has blood thinning qualities.

- **Green tea.** A well researched herb used widely in Ayurvedic and Traditional Chinese medicine, green tea works by blocking certain inflammatory substances involved in RA. You can choose caffeine free formulas to avoid insomnia. It is safe to drink a few cups of green tea a day. You may need to use green tea extracts to achieve therapeutic benefits for RA. High doses of green tea may interfere with prescription drugs used for heart diseases, certain anti-depressants, antibiotics, and chemo drugs.

- **Cat's claw.** Scientifically known as Uncaria tomentosa, cat's claw is another anti-inflammatory, immune boosting herb that had been found to reduce pain and swelling in RA patients. Since it influences the function of the immune system, it should be used cautiously in combination with drugs that suppress the immune system (corticosteroids, biologic agents). Cat's claw can interfere with prescription drugs used for high blood pressure as well as blood thinners.

- **Curcumin.** The active ingredient from turmeric, curcumin, in supplement form, can be found alone or in combination with bromelain (a compound extracted from pineapple). Turmeric may increase the risk of bleeding and therefore should be used cautiously with blood thinner medications such as aspirin, non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), or warfarin. Bromelain may also interfere with some antibiotics, antidepressants, and chemotherapy drugs.

- **Devil's claw.** Found to decrease pain and swelling, devil's claw has also been proven to improve mobility in some research studies. Devil's claw may interact with some drugs including blood thinners, as well as drugs used for the management of diabetes and heart diseases.

- **Capsaicin.** The key ingredient of chili peppers, capsaicin can be used topically to great effect. It blocks the substance P, a compound associated with arthritic inflammation and pain. Studies found that RA suffers can experience a decrease in pain between three and seven days after starting the treatment with capsaicin. Make sure you wash your hands well, with vinegar, and avoid touching your eyes after using this cream.