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FILE: **St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)**

DATE: December 21, 1998

HC 041582

RE: **Prof. Tyler Reviews St. John's wort in *Prevention***

Tyler, V. The Honest Herbalist: The Secrets of St. John's Wort. *Prevention*, February 1997, pp. 74-79.

St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) was a hot topic at a number of symposiums on European phytotherapy during the fall of 1996. In Germany St. John's wort is indicated in the treatment of mild depression, anxiety, and nervous unrest. In this article, Dr. Tyler examines the research and methods of action of St. John's wort.

An estimated 17.6 million Americans are affected by depression each year. Symptoms range from despondency and loss of interest to irritability and disturbances in sleeping and eating patterns. Clinical trials involving 3,250 patients have documented improvement or alleviation of the symptoms of mild depression in 80 percent of patients treated with St. John's wort.

St. John's wort has several methods of action which make for fewer side effects, as its efficacy is not due to a single strong action. St. John's wort inhibits MAO (monoamine oxidase), an enzyme that destroys amines which promote feeling good, such as serotonin, epinephrine, and dopamine. People taking MAO inhibitors should avoid foods containing tyramine, such as red wine, strong cheese, some beans, and ephedra, as serious side effects could occur. St. John's wort also inhibits COMT (catechol-O-methyltransferase), another enzyme that destroys the "feel good" amines. The herb also works by suppressing interleukin-6 release which also affects mood.

An extract of St. John's wort standardized for hypericin content is recommended. Dosages vary according to hypericin concentration but should equal two to four grams of dried herb per day. It normally takes two to six weeks of treatment to achieve results. The consumption of St. John's wort could theoretically result in photosensitivity, so excessive sun exposure should be avoided.

Dr. Tyler recommends that patients see a doctor before self-medicating with St. John's wort. The condition should be professionally diagnosed to rule out medical problems, and the herb is not effective in the treatment of severe

depression. Little is known about drug interactions with this herb, but no contraindications or serious side effects have been reported.

—*Leela Devi, MSN, RN*

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