

# Are herbal remedies safe for cancer treatment?

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## Abstract

There are various herbal medicines for cancer treatment in the market nowadays, therefore it seems worth to discuss their safety and effectiveness.

## Introduction

This article is summary of discussion via researchgate.net. Hopefully it will stimulate further discussion and research.

I once had a colleague in a university, he was a professor of postgrad studies. About three years ago he suffered a bladder cancer, see for example: <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/bladdercancer/>. Then he took a surgery abroad, but it seemed that the cancer was spreading. So he decided to take herbal remedies besides taking chemotherapy.

I am not sure what happened then, except the fact that two years ago he passed away. I dont know exactly if his condition worsened because of cancer grew or not. But this story makes me ask about the safety and effectiveness of herbal remedies. Some people think that herbal remedies have better credibility over other alternative medicines.

So do you agree that herbal remedies are safe for cancer treatment? Do you have experience. Thank you.

For a background on herbal use for cancer, see for instance: <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-help/about-cancer/treatment/complementary-alternative/about/harm/the-safety-of-herbal-products-and-medicines>

## Answer:

### [1] [Shervin Ghorab](#)

I am currently writing an opinion paper on the regulations of Nutraceuticals that would include herbal remedies and thought that this publication may be of interest to you. The journal article is from 2001 but it might get you on the right path.

Understanding the perceived need for complementary and alternative nutraceuticals: lifestyle issues. (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11899764>)

### [2] [Victor Christiano](#)

Dear Shervin, thank you for your answer. I tried to read that 2001 journal, but cannot find the pdf version. Can you please send me the paper? Thanks.

Other paper which you may also find interesting is: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11694644>.  
Best wishes

### [3] [Dr. Devang Pandya](#)

According to Ayurveda, herbal medicines have been used in cancer since millenia. If the dosage regime is followed, they are definitely safe.

But is till dont get the word 'Nutraceuticals'. There are so many herbs which we use in India as medicine having a fixed dosage regime, which is used in West as 'nutritional supplements'!

[4] [Riad Dada](#)

This not easy to anwser. Herbal medicine could be good alternative for school medicine if a.e. cancer treatments failed. It can play an acceptable pscycological support for pts. and relatives. However, there are some herbals with toxic substances and due the general lack of regulation authorities on marketing and import it is very difficult to decide whether a certain herbal medicine can be safly taken or not.

[5] [Rahman Heshu](#)

Dear now i am doing research on natural product for cancer therapy and I found a very good result and outcome both in vitro and in vivo. However, all natural plant metabolite should be checked first for their toxicity then can be used for human trial. TQ

[6] [Rohan Chaubal](#)

What you must understand is that there is a reason the pharmaceutical industry is called "big pharma". along with all the bullying that goes along, nobody can deny the fact that whatever drugs are approved for use in the market, are done so after a very very stringent development and testing cycle. clinical trials in 3 phases, which need to show the efficacy of a drug in a patient, in response to the ailment, without causing toxicity or very harmful side effects to develop in the patient, are a must before any chemical qualifies as being a drug. All chemotherapeutic and targeted therapies available for cancer in the market, have passed these very stringent trials, and moreover, their adherence and manufacture according to acceptable standards, is adhered to and supervised by the US FDA and their likes. Having said these, herbal drugs, even though they MAY be beneficial, have not gone through any of these rounds of testing, neither does one know whether they will have any side effect on the patient. In such an uninformed scenario, it is best if traditional remedies and herbal treatments (even if they are beneficial!) should be avoided actively, till the time as such the biological and molecular mechanisms underlying their effectiveness is not studied and proven.

<http://goo.gl/7OjV4V>

[7] [Rafid Jabir](#)

Dear Victor,

Herbal remedies have been there for thousands of years and many of the currently used drugs are derived from plants, e.g. Quinine from (Cinchona ledgeriana) for treatment of Malaria and paclitaxel from (Yew trees) for treatment of cancer. However, safety comes first in all modes of treatment and every single natural product (even those consumed by people in their daily food) should be tested for its safety. Interestingly, drug-drug interaction and drug-food interaction are serious problems that may arise on taking herbal products with standard medication or food. Hence, approval of regulatory bodies is required for any product to be used as a treatment.

In conclusion, herbal products can be beneficial in treatment of cancer but can be harmful and lethal as well. Therefore, no consumption is advised without going through proper in vitro, in vivo and clinical trial testing that gives the certificate of approval to the drug.

[8] [Mohammad Amin](#)

Herbal products may be beneficial for cancer treatment. Due to it's low side effects it is more safer than other types of treatment. But dose maintenance is essential.

[9] **Barbara Wider**

Our international research collaboration CAM-Cancer ([www.cam-cancer.org](http://www.cam-cancer.org)) is addressing the question of efficacy and safety of complementary and alternative medicine for cancer. We have an overview of around 70 treatments including herbal medicines on our website which is based on the latest research evidence and compiled using very rigorous methods.

[10] **Victor Christianto**

@Barbara. Here is one example: phaleria macrocarpa ( mahkota dewa). See Pharmacogn Rev. 2013, at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3731883/>. I see this one is not included yet in your database of herbs. Best wishes

[11] **Arvind Kumar**

Cancer spread after surgery to the same organ and also in other organs due to spread of cancer antigens. Chemotherapy along with radiation therapy and combination of other is beneficial to control the disease. However, it kills normal non-cancerous cells also. But is known that herbal extract having anticancer properties in control doses are beneficial to control the disease. Herbal extract also prevents and cure DNA mutations caused due to carcinogenes. Although more research work is required to be done that what is chemical composition of herbal extract that is beneficial. Potency could be increased by removing antagonistic chemicals from the extract or making formulation of chemicals having synergistic effects.

[12] **Victor Christianto**

@Arvind. Thank you for your answers. Yes chemotherapy has side effects. I have read somewhere that chemotherapy's success rate is only around 50%. The meaning is that there is chance that 50% of all patients taking chemotherapy may die. Therefore new ways to treat cancer is needed. I think Barbara Wider is doing research in the right direction. Best wishes

[13] **Aldo Dettino**

Some may be, but its the molecule or some of them that may be active, such as chemo as paclitaxel, which now is completely sintetyzed. They may not be effective at all, or worse: either toxic or increase toxicity of conventional treatment , or interect for ex with chemo and decrease its efficacy... Regards

### **Concluding remarks**

While not conclusive yet, herbal remedies can be effective for cancer treatments. However their safety and toxicity need to be studied carefully. This is not to say the last word on this issue, and apparently in the future there will be more research and studies on the possible use of herbal remedies for cancer treatments. A useful website in this regard is <http://www.cam-cancer.org>

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