

# Different Drummer Acupuncture

An Occasional Newsletter



## Herb and Drug Interactions

More than 18% of Americans take herbs and drugs concurrently. Many people assume that since herbs are “natural” they are not dangerous and pose no risk with other medications. Others feel that since herbs haven’t been put through the Western model of clinical trials that they are not safe and/or effective. Both of these are naïve views. In my practice I use herbs conservatively and try to err on the side of caution, especially when prescribing herbs to patients on prescription medication.

### Absorption in the Body

There are some interactions that we know about or that can be predicted based on the mechanisms of either the herb or the prescription drug. How the drugs and herbs are absorbed into our system is an important factor in interactions. Many of the antacid and cholesterol-lowering drugs will slow the absorption of food and nutrients. They will also decrease the absorption of herbs.

If you take prescription drugs and herbs separately, by at least 2 hours, you’ll get better absorption of the herbs. Otherwise, the dosage will need to be increased for the herbs to be effective.

### Danger ...

Coumadin, which many people take to prevent blood clots, has a very narrow range of safety. It also has negative interactions with many drugs, herbs, vitamins and foods. If you’re taking Coumadin you need to be very careful if you are taking herbs.

Liver and kidney metabolization also play a large role in drug and herb interactions. Some drugs such as Dilantin and phenobarbitals increase liver metabolism, so herbs will be less effective and their dosage may need to be increased. Other drugs such as Tagamet and erythromycin slow liver metabolism, therefore herb dosages may need to be lowered. The kidneys are responsible for eliminating herbs and drugs from the body. If the kidneys are damaged, herb doses may need to be lessened.

Herbs help  
with my  
hip pain!



### Inside the Body

Another factor in herb and drug interactions is how they actually work inside the body. Many people are on diuretic drugs to control high blood pressure. There are several Chinese herbs that are also diuretics, and careful monitoring is necessary if they are given together.

### Ma Huang

Caution: Some drugs and herbs can speed up or slow down respiration, heart rate and blood pressure. The most abused herb in this category is herba ephedrae or ma huang. In Chinese medicine we use this herb sparingly for asthma and other respiratory conditions. Pseudoephedrine is derived from the active ingredients in ma huang and is the main ingredient in Sudafed, which is used for sinus congestion. However, ephedra is also used in the West for weight loss and as a “natural” energy enhancer. The doses are much higher than used in a Chinese formula and I strongly advise against using ma huang for these purposes. Ephedra is also used illegally in the manufacture of methamphetamine (speed) and in the so-called party or designer drugs like ecstasy. For anyone suffering from hypertension, seizures, diabetes or thyroid conditions, ma huang should be used with caution or not used at all.

In general, be cautious when combining herbs and drugs. It is important to let your doctors and pharmacists know what herbs and prescription drugs you are taking. A few precautionary steps such as separating herbs and drugs by 2-4 hours, starting with low dosages and paying special attention to any unwanted side effects can also help reduce or eliminate unwanted herb and drug interactions.

### Different Drummer Acupuncture

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## Recipe of the Month

### Spring Tonic Tea

	For 1 cup of tea:	For a bunch of tea:
Dandelion root	1 tsp	¼ cup
Red clover tops	2 tsp	½ cup
Nettle leaf	1 tsp	¼ cup
Alfalfa leaf	1 tsp	¼ cup
Peppermint	½ tsp	2 Tbsp
Licorice root	¼ tsp	1 Tbsp

Place 1 heaping Tbsp. of herbs in a teapot and add 8 oz. of boiling water. Cover and steep for at least 15 minutes to get the most therapeutic benefit; often I just steep for 3-5 minutes.

This tea is good for the liver, helps digestion and has mild effects on inflammation. The specific actions of each herb are listed below. Thanks to Chris Kowalczyk, L.Ac. for passing on this recipe and information.

### Herb Uses

**Dandelion root**—Chinese medicine uses the whole plant for clearing heat and toxins from the blood. Western medicine uses the root and leaves, usually separately. The root is a liver tonic, diuretic, mild laxative and anti-rheumatic.

**Red clover**—This herb has a long history of use in Europe for stimulating the liver and appetite and maintaining healthy skin; some anticancer activity is reported.

**Nettles**—When dried or cooked, nettles do not have the notorious stinging action. They have anti-inflammatory properties, may be useful in allergies and are high in minerals and vitamins A, B and C.

**Alfalfa leaf**—The alfalfa is a digestive stimulant; it may be useful preventing atherosclerotic plaques and treating menopausal symptoms. Alfalfa contains vitamins A, B, C, E and K and calcium, potassium, iron and zinc.

**Peppermint**—Chinese medicine reports cooling properties for certain headaches, sore throats and eye inflammation. Liver tonic is reported in both Eastern and Western medicine.

**Licorice root**—Chinese medicine uses the licorice root for the spleen and as a stomach tonic. Western medicine uses it as an anti-inflammatory, tonic stimulant for adrenal cortex and gastric membranes. Caution: Because it may cause fluid retention, use cautiously in cases of high blood pressure.

Anyone with gallstones, bile duct obstructions or on diuretics, anticoagulants, corticosteroids or digoxin should use care with these herbs because of their specific actions.



Marcia Mueller  
Lic. Acupuncturist

**About Different Drummer Acupuncture**—From Bandit's Perspective Marcia gives me herbs all the time, she hides them in my food. She thinks I don't know because I eat so fast, but I do, and I still love her because they really help my sore hip. She competes as a race walker in road races, relays and marathons and is a proponent of cross training (she was injured from over training), so she swims, weightlifts and does yoga. Often, I like to take her for long walks to the park. Athletes are a large part of her practice. Acupuncture is a midlife career change for her. Previously Marcia worked at Nike. During this time she used acupuncture for a back injury and from personal experience discovered the power in this ancient medicine. She is a graduate of Lewis and Clark College and the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine where she received a Masters degree in Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. Marcia has been in practice since 1998.