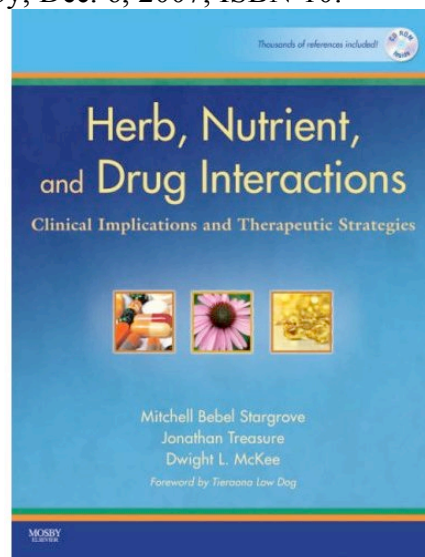


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Herb, Nutrient, and Drug Interactions: Clinical Implications and Therapeutic Strategies. by Mitchell Bebel Stargrove, Jonathan Treasure, and Dwight L. McKee. Mosby, Dec. 6, 2007; ISBN-10: 0323029647; 932 pages.

As one observer who has been somewhat aware of the effort behind this book, it is a relief to see it finally realized. These authors had been toiling on this important work for years. Perhaps it took so long because they realized the significance of the area (current market for dietary supplements estimated at \$20 billion), knew the potential impact it could make, and wanted to get it right. The book is arranged in monographs that cover the most common herbs and nutrients and interactions that a clinician would most commonly see and need to understand. Also included are drug-induced nutrient depletions, and how to compensate for them. While the total number of herbs covered is fairly limited (n=30), the most important ones are there. St. John's wort may be the best example of an herb that has the potential to interact with large numbers of pharmaceuticals due to its rather unique chemistry and ability to induce several cytochrome P450 enzymes as well as drug transporter proteins such as P-glycoprotein (P-gp). This monograph covers a full 20 pages. Each section has summary tables and practical suggestions to bring the information into context. In addition to the botanicals, there are 12 vitamins, 9 minerals, 6 amino acids, and 12 other "nutraceuticals" such as alpha-lipoic acid and omega-3 fatty acids. Each monograph provides a basic background on the physiology and functional effects of the agent, followed by a summary of actual, established interactions and an integrated review of the clinically relevant data.



An interaction probability guide is used throughout with classifications of 1 (certain) to 6 (unknown). Also coded in each section are the interaction type (each with its own symbol) and clinical significance from one X (potential or theoretical of uncertain severity) to three X's (potentially harmful or serious). The strength of the evidence is also rated from "consensus" to "inadequate." Anecdotal evidence in the mainstream literature seldom contains information on identification of the supplement or the patient history, comedications, and chronology of the event. For the discerning user, pharmacokinetics, pharmacogenomics and nutrigenomics are discussed. As the authors have considerable experience in working in conjunction with conventional (allopathic) physicians, they are well aware of the concerns and biases that may need to be addressed. And the concerns are addressed with a reason and clarity that would be difficult to refute. Also addressed are situations where the interaction may have a desirable result, rather than an undesirable one. This is more often the case when the interaction is predicted in advance. Surprise interactions are seldom seen as desirable! There are several cross-indexes at the end to aid in finding a particular interaction. This is especially helpful since there is such a high degree of overlap between the

categories that finding a single reference or example could otherwise be quite challenging. Users of the CD would not have that problem since they can always do a character-string search.

While the book is written primarily for health-care practitioners, other serious students of medicinal plants and nutritional medicine will also find this book of great value. Certainly researchers and other enthusiasts of botanical medicine should make room on their shelf for this book. It is free from the “knee jerk” reactions so prevalent in the scientific literature today regarding potential adverse effects of dietary supplements. In fact, most widely cited papers on this subject are little more than laundry lists filled with biased anecdotal accounts of purported interactions. This type of information may ultimately do more harm than good. Not so with this book. It also comes with a CD that contains all the information in electronic format (though you must insert the CD each time you use it). The science behind the book is solid and references to everything are readily available (on the CD). Perhaps the most important aspect of this book is the emphasis on integration of conventional medicine with botanical and nutritional medicine. Despite having a negative connotation in some circles, a truly integrated, transdisciplinary approach to medicine is the only unwavering path to better health and better therapeutic outcomes. It will surely be of value to general practice physicians who are trying to safely add elements of natural medicine to their repertoire. It goes to a level of detail not found in other references on this subject, so it will be should receive a warm welcome even in academia and specialty clinics. Other practitioners who have not yet taken the step of integrating their own practice will find information to enable them to deal with their patients who have already began their dietary supplement regimens. With this book in hand they may be able to breath easier when they see their patients lists of pills, or in some cases calmly and logically advise if a change might be needed. It is clear that to engage a patient in a discussion about a dietary supplement they are currently using requires some actual knowledge, or else any recommendations will likely go unheeded. Understanding of the subject matter by the physician will also make it much more likely that patients will be more forthcoming about their use of supplements and be more willing to discuss them.