



### Herbal Misuse

We've heard the news about how taking some herbs prior to surgery can be dangerous. Now, the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* provides some specifics about the herbs echinacea, garlic, ginseng and St. John's wort. In many cases the effects can be threatening on a number of levels. Echinacea can affect liver function, cause allergic reactions and lessen the effectiveness of immunosuppressive drugs. Doctors warn echinacea use should be stopped as soon as possible once learning of an impending surgery. Garlic and ginseng, meanwhile, can increase the risk of bleeding, and ginseng also has the potential to cause low blood sugar. Both should be discontinued at least a week ahead of surgery. And St. John's wort, which can inhibit other drugs' effectiveness, should be discontinued at least five days before surgery. If you have any questions regarding these or any other herbs, including ginkgo, kava, ephedra or valerian, contact your primary care provider.



### Being There

According to a study published in *Psychosomatic Medicine*, quiet time isn't just for your kids. Apparently, "down" time with a spouse or significant other can lower blood pressure. Research suggests perhaps the predictable setting of a long-standing relationship sends a safety signal to the body, allowing it to relax. Regardless, we all know it's a good thing to be with the ones you love.

### Chaste Away PMS

According to the *News Straits Times-Management Times*, the herb chaste tree proved effective in relieving symptoms associated with pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). Of the more than 1,500 women who participated in the survey, one-third experienced complete relief, while 57% reported significant improvement, including progress in controlling acne associated with PMS. Researchers have shown that taking chaste tree over a period of several months can help normalize hormone levels by imitating the action of estrogen and progesterone.



### Light Therapy Helps Eczema

Light Therapy (treatment with a light box that emits either a narrowband ultraviolet-B, broadband ultraviolet-A, or visible fluorescent light) can benefit people with eczema, the itchy rash that can cover substantial areas of the skin. According to a study published in *Lancet*, 60 people with moderate to severe cases were tested twice weekly for a duration of 12 weeks. The results showed a lower disease-severity rating among those who received UV-B and UV-A exposure in combination with skin creams containing small doses of steroids. However, researchers warned too much exposure to UV-B and UV-A light can be a harbinger for skin cancer.

