Before You Try a Herb: A Safety Checklist

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Use this checklist every time you try a new herb. Five minutes of checking keeps gentle remedies safe.

Natural does not always mean harmless. Herbs contain active substances, so they can cause side effects and can interact with medicines. As a former nurse, these are the questions I always ask first. Tick each one off before you start.

Step 1: Ask Yourself

If you answer **yes** to any of these, speak to your GP or pharmacist before trying the herb.

- [ ] Am I pregnant, trying to get pregnant, or breastfeeding?
- [ ] Do I take any prescribed medicines, including the contraceptive pill?
- [ ] Do I take other herbal remedies or supplements?
- [ ] Do I have a long-term condition, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, epilepsy, or a heart, liver or kidney problem?
- [ ] Do I have any allergies, especially to daisy-family plants such as ragweed, chamomile or chrysanthemums?
- [ ] Am I having an operation or a procedure soon?
- [ ] Is this herb for a child? Herbal remedies are not generally recommended for children without professional advice.

Step 2: Ask Your GP or Pharmacist

Pharmacists are free to talk to and are experts in medicine interactions. Take the herb's name, or the packet, with you.

- [ ] "Is this herb safe with the medicines I take?"
- [ ] "Is it safe with my health condition?"
- [ ] "How much is a sensible amount, and for how long?"
- [ ] "Are there side effects I should watch for?"
- [ ] "Should I stop it before my operation or procedure?"

Medicines that commonly need extra care with herbs: blood thinners such as warfarin, diabetes medicines, blood pressure medicines, antidepressants, the contraceptive pill, epilepsy medicines and medicines that affect the immune system. Always tell any doctor, nurse or pharmacist treating you about the herbs you take.

Step 3: Know Your Plant and Start Safely

- [ ] I am **100% sure** what the plant is. It came from a labelled garden centre plant, seed packet or trusted supplier.
- [ ] I am using the **right part** of the plant (leaf, flower, berry or root). Some plants are safe in one part and harmful in another.
- [ ] The plant has **not been sprayed** with pesticides and is not from a roadside.
- [ ] Bought products have a **THR number** on the label, which shows they meet UK quality standards.
- [ ] I am starting with a **small amount** or a weak tea.
- [ ] For skin products, I have done a **patch test** on a small area 24 hours before.
- [ ] I am trying **one new herb at a time**, so I know which one caused any reaction.

Step 4: Stop and Get Help If...

Call 999 straight away if you have:

- swelling of the lips, face, tongue or throat
- difficulty breathing or swallowing
- feeling faint, confused or collapsing

These can be signs of a serious allergic reaction.

Stop the herb and call NHS 111 or your GP if you have:

- a rash, itching or hives
- sickness, vomiting, diarrhoea or stomach pain
- headaches, dizziness or a racing heart
- any symptom that is new or worrying

You can also report a suspected side effect from a herbal remedy through the MHRA Yellow Card scheme.

My Herb Record

Keep a note of each herb you try. Show it to your GP or pharmacist if you need advice.

Date started	Herb and part used	How I used it	Amount	How I felt

Trusted Places to Check

- NHS: Herbal medicines
- MHRA: Herbal medicines with a Traditional Herbal Registration
- Yellow Card scheme: report a side effect
- More guides at elderberryherbal.com

Disclaimer: This checklist is for general education only and is not medical advice. Always speak to your GP or pharmacist before using any herbal remedy.

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