



# HerbClip™

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**FILE: ■ Pregnancy**  
**■ Migraines**  
**■ Nausea**

**HC 020256-282**

**Date: June 15, 2005**

**RE: Recommendations of Health Food Stores for Pregnancy-related Migraines and Nausea**

Buckner KD, Chavez ML, Raney EC, Stoehr JD. Health food stores' recommendations for nausea and migraines during pregnancy. *Ann Pharmacother* 2005;39:epub 11 Jan.

Pregnant women frequently suffer from nausea/vomiting and migraine headaches. Many of these women seek out the advice of health food store staff for natural remedies to alleviate their discomfort. The authors of the current study surveyed health food stores to understand what recommendations are being given to pregnant women for the treatment of nausea and migraines during pregnancy.

The researchers conducted a telephone survey of 155 health food stores in the greater Phoenix, AZ area. Health food stores were located using the local Qwest Dex Phoenix Metro yellow pages by looking under the headings "vitamins and food supplements," "herbs," and "health and diet food." The survey occurred over four weeks in August 2003. Callers posed as women who were eight weeks pregnant searching for relief from their pregnancy-related migraines and nausea and vomiting. During the telephone survey, the caller asked the store employee 16 questions, including what he/she recommended for nausea/vomiting and migraines; what support from the literature was there for the recommendation; how the supplement should be taken and the risk of adverse events; and whether one brand was better than another brand for her condition. These questions were asked twice, once for the complaint of nausea/vomiting and again for migraines. The responses were then compared to published studies found by doing a MEDLINE search (1966–April 2004) for contraindications of use in pregnancy.

Out of the 155 stores contacted, 89% (148 stores) provided recommendations for nausea/vomiting and 82% provided recommendations for migraines. According to the authors, only 3 of the 148 (2%) recommendations for nausea/vomiting were contraindicated in pregnancy—bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa* syn. *Cimicifuga racemosa*), and aloe vera (*Aloe* spp. not reported). However, it is unclear how the

authors determined that bilberry is contraindicated. According to *The ABC Clinical Guide to Herbs*, bilberry has no contraindications during pregnancy. Eight percent of the migraine headache recommendations were contraindicated in pregnancy—feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*), white willow bark (*Salix alba*) [The German Commission E does not list pregnancy as a contraindication.], progesterone cream [The authors do not name the brand or contents of this cream.], ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) [Again, it is not clear why the authors consider that ginkgo is contraindicated as the German Commission E has not placed this restriction on the herb.], aspirin, Excedrin, ibuprofen, Advil, dong quai (*Angelica sinensis*), and Migra-X (contains feverfew, white willow bark, ginkgo, and gotu kola; Olympian Labs; Scottsdale, AZ).

The recommendation to take ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) for nausea/vomiting was given most frequently (n = 54), followed by no recommendation (n = 17) or the recommendation to take a combination of ginger, the amino acid l-methionine, vitamin B6 (pyridoxine), and magnesium (n = 16). When asked how the supplement for nausea/vomiting should be taken (i.e., capsule, powder, tablet, etc.), the advice corresponded less than 4% of the time to the form used in research studies. Personal experience by the sales staff was cited most often as their source of information for supplements to use for nausea/vomiting (43%; n = 64 stores), followed by the book, *Prescription for Nutritional Healing*, a popular and widely sold reference book in health food stores (37%; n = 55 stores). Callers were given the advice to "Talk to [their] doctor" 37% of the time (n = 55 stores), and "Come in to the store" 19% of the time (n = 28 stores).

According to the authors, the most frequent non-contraindicated advice for treating migraines was Migrastick™ containing 100% essential oils of peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*) and Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) (Health from the Sun, Arkopharma; France), which was recommended by 19% (23 stores). However, some websites that sell this product do caution that pregnant and lactating women should not use this product. Eighteen percent (23 stores) answered, "Don't want to recommend/talk to doctor." Potential adverse events were only mentioned 3% of the time (4 stores). Similarly to the sources for the recommendations for nausea/vomiting, personal experience and *Prescription for Nutritional Healing* were cited 44% (57 stores) and 38% (49 stores) of the time, respectively. Consult a physician was recommended 51% (43 stores) of the time.

Dietary supplements are not intended to treat, cure or prevent disease; although recommendations for nutritional therapies are appropriate from physicians. This survey showed that >80% of health food store employees in the greater metropolitan Phoenix, AZ provided recommendations for dietary supplements to treat nausea/vomiting and migraine headaches. And while relatively few recommendations were contraindicated during pregnancy, the consequences for recommendations of contraindicated herbs are high, including potential spontaneous abortion and birth defects. Since many people solicit advice for dietary supplement recommendations from retail outlets, training of store employee should be improved to decrease the likelihood that they will provide inappropriate or contraindicated advice.

—John Neustadt, ND4

Editor's note: In 2004 the American Botanical Council introduced its Herbal Education Course for health food store retailers and others, an online course and certification program designed to provide retail store clerks with science-based information for consumers on appropriate uses of herbal dietary supplements as well as contraindications, potential adverse effects, herb-drug interactions, etc. You can find out more at [http://www.nutrilearn.com/abc/abc\\_intro.html](http://www.nutrilearn.com/abc/abc_intro.html).

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