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Prescription or Poison? The Benefits and Dangers of Herbal Remedies

Amitava Dasgupta
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Even as the use of prescription drugs grows in the United States, the sale of herbal remedies, vitamins, and minerals is skyrocketing. Ironically, while some herbal remedies are thousands of years old, it is only now that modern science is beginning to understand their benefits and, at the same time, recognize their dangers, particularly in combination with other substances.

This is why Amitava Dasgupta's well-researched and well-written book, *Prescription or Poison?* will be of great value to consumers. Using published articles in medical literature as well as his own research, the author aims to provide "an unbiased view of the benefits and dangers of herbal remedies."

Dasgupta begins with a review of complementary and alternative medicines and includes an important discussion of the role of the US Food and Drug Administration in controlling herbal supplements. The author addresses some of the benefits of such alternative medicines as acupuncture, yoga, and meditation before turning his attention to herbal supplements. A chapter on ayurvedic medicine offers a welcome explanation of this Indian system of medicine.

Dasgupta then provides a thorough and comprehensive review of herbal supplements that are considered relatively safe and effective, those that may boost the immune system, and those that are moderately toxic or severely toxic. A chapter on homeopathic remedies is included. One of the most important chapters in the book details how herbal remedies interact with traditional medicines. The chapter concerning food and alcohol interactions with common drugs is equally useful.

Also included is a discussion of essential oils and fish-oil supplements with some up-to-date research, as well as a complete discussion of vitamins, minerals, and vitamin/mineral supplements.

Throughout the book, the author includes charts that offer explanatory detail. For example, one chart presents the "tolerable upper intake level" of specific vitamins and minerals, while several others show the interactions of specific herbal supplements with common traditional medications. Included is an appendix that matches the generic drug names discussed

in the book with common trade names.

Prescription or Poison? is written in layman's terms, is based on current information and research, includes complete descriptions of common herbs, and uses several case studies that demonstrate benefits and dangers in real-life terms. This book is a superb reference tool for the consumer who takes prescription drugs and wants to avoid conflicts with herbs, food, alcohol, and other substances. It is just as valuable for anyone who wants an authoritative overview of the benefits and dangers of herbal remedies.

Barry Silverstein