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Time for another cup of coffee ... or two

Nutrition enthusiasts have been saying for years that “we are what we eat.” In this issue of *JFP*, Drs. Malone and Tsai review the evidence regarding the medicinal properties of certain herbal and botanical supplements. (See page 10.) Although there are many unfounded claims about the health effects of a wide variety of supplements, increasing evidence from well-conducted randomized trials and large epidemiologic studies demonstrates that certain items we ingest have therapeutic value for a variety of conditions.

However, as Dr. Malone points out, herbal supplements and botanicals are not regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration, so manufacturers are not required to provide proof of effectiveness or safety to market their products. Some of

these products have adverse effects. For example, butterbur can cause liver toxicity.¹

Because about 38% of Americans use supplements, all primary care clinicians should know which products do—and do not—have evidence of efficacy.² I suggest you read Dr. Malone’s 2-part article (part 2 is available at

jfonline.com), but I can’t resist highlighting several of my favorites:

■ **Coffee.** Coffee used to be maligned because of its caffeine content, but more recent evidence suggests it protects against liver disease and has positive effects on cardiovascular disease and even mortality. (See Dr. Malone’s article for references.) There are no randomized trials, however, so we can’t be entirely sure if these associations are causal, but at least I can feel better about the 4 cups of coffee I drink every day!

■ **Tea,** especially green tea, appears to have many positive effects on health, including potential roles in reducing the risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and even dementia. As with coffee, these associations are based on large observational studies and not randomized trials.

■ **Chamomile.** If your coffee gives you too much of a buzz and causes you to feel anxious, calm down with chamomile tea or oil. Evidence from randomized trials indicates it has positive effects on insomnia and anxiety.

■ **Peppermint oil.** The data for calming irritable bowel syndrome is fairly strong, and it may be effective in aborting migraines when applied to the forehead. It’s certainly worth a try for these difficult-to-treat conditions.

When patients ask you about botanicals and herbals, a great resource is the Natural Medicine Database (<https://naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com>).

Now I will finish my fourth cup of coffee . . .

1. Daniel O, Mausek A. Nutraceuticals in acute and prophylactic treatment of migraine. *Curr Treat Options Neurol.* 2016;18:14.
2. National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. The use of complementary and alternative medicine in the United States. Available at: https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/2007/camsurvey_fs1.htm. Accessed December 14, 2017.

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