

CLINICALJUDGE[™] • STUDY GUIDE

HERBAL SUPPLEMENTS

Every botanical the 2026 NGN NCLEX-RN can test — organized by what they're used for, what they harm, and (most testable of all) how they interact with prescription drugs. Bleeding risk, serotonin syndrome, hepatotoxicity, hypokalemia, and CNS depression are the patterns that win points.

2026 NGN BLUEPRINT

PHARMACOLOGICAL & PARENTERAL THERAPIES

30 HERBALS

INTERACTION TABLES

"NATURAL ≠ SAFE"

RED
ADVERSE / TOXICITY

BLUE
USE / INDICATION

GREEN
NURSING CARE

ORANGE
DRUG INTERACTIONS

YELLOW
MUST-KNOW FACT

PURPLE
CATEGORY

TEAL
PATIENT TEACHING

00

UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

WHAT'S TRUE FOR EVERY SUPPLEMENT



THE THREE BIGGEST TEST THEMES

- ① **Bleeding risk** — many herbs ↑bleeding with anticoagulants/antiplatelets & before surgery.
- ② **St. John's Wort** — serotonin syndrome + induces metabolism of many drugs.
- ③ **"Natural ≠ safe / not FDA-regulated"** — purity & potency vary; clients must disclose all supplements.

REGULATION & SAFETY

The framing every question assumes

TEACH

Supplements are **not FDA-regulated like drugs** — content, purity, and potency are not guaranteed. "Natural" does not mean safe or harmless.

RISK

Can interact with prescription meds, cause toxicity, and mask or worsen disease.

KEY

Always ask clients about **all herbal/OTC supplements** during med reconciliation — many won't mention them unless asked.

SURGERY & SPECIAL POPULATIONS

When to stop & who to caution

TEACH

Stop bleeding-risk herbs roughly **1–2 weeks before surgery** (per provider) to reduce hemorrhage risk.

CAUTION

Generally avoid in **pregnancy, breastfeeding, and children**; caution with chronic disease (liver, bleeding, cardiac, autoimmune, diabetes).

KEY

When unsure, the safe answer is usually: **discuss with the provider/pharmacist before use.**

01

BLEEDING-RISK HERBALS

THE "G's" + FRIENDS — ↑BLEEDING WITH ANTICOAGULANTS



MEMORY HOOK

The **"G" herbs all increase bleeding**: Garlic, Ginger, Ginkgo, Ginseng — plus Feverfew, Fish oil, Turmeric, Dong quai, Bilberry, Saw palmetto, and Vitamin E. Avoid with warfarin, heparin, aspirin, NSAIDs, and other antiplatelets.

GARLIC

BLEEDS

Allium sativum

USE

↓Cholesterol/BP, antiplatelet, "heart health."

ADVERSE

↑Bleeding, GI upset, body/breath odor, hypotension.

INTERACTIONS

Anticoagulants/antiplatelets (↑bleed); may ↓ effect of some HIV/antiretroviral drugs; potentiates antihypertensives.

GINKGO BILOBA

BLEEDS

Ginkgo

USE

Memory/cognition, dementia, peripheral circulation, tinnitus.

ADVERSE

↑Bleeding (incl. intracranial), GI upset, headache, **seizure risk** (esp. raw seeds).

INTERACTIONS

Anticoagulants/antiplatelets, NSAIDs (↑bleed); lowers seizure threshold (caution with anticonvulsants).

GINGER

BLEEDS

Zingiber

USE

Nausea/antiemetic (motion sickness, pregnancy, post-op), anti-inflammatory.

ADVERSE

↑Bleeding at high doses, heartburn, GI upset.

INTERACTIONS

Anticoagulants/antiplatelets (↑bleed); may affect glucose & BP.

GINSENG

BLEEDS

Panax

USE

Energy, stress/immune support, glucose control.

ADVERSE

↑Bleeding, insomnia, headache, **hypertension/tachycardia**, hypoglycemia, nervousness.

INTERACTIONS

↓**Warfarin effect**; additive with antidiabetics (hypoglycemia); **MAOIs** (mania/HTN); stimulants.

FEVERFEW

BLEEDS

Tanacetum

USE

Migraine prophylaxis, fever, arthritis.

ADVERSE

↑Bleeding, mouth ulcers, GI upset, rebound headache if stopped abruptly.

INTERACTIONS

Anticoagulants/antiplatelets (↑bleed); ragweed-family allergy cross-reactivity.

TURMERIC / CURCUMIN

BLEEDS

Curcuma

USE

Anti-inflammatory, joint pain, GI.

ADVERSE

↑Bleeding, GI upset; may lower glucose.

INTERACTIONS

Anticoagulants/antiplatelets; antidiabetics (additive glucose lowering).

FISH OIL / OMEGA-3

BLEEDS

EPA/DHA

USE

↓Triglycerides, cardiovascular/anti-inflammatory.

ADVERSE

↑Bleeding at high doses, fishy aftertaste/burp, GI upset.

INTERACTIONS

Anticoagulants/antiplatelets (↑bleed).

BILBERRY & DONG QUAI

BLEEDS

Vaccinium • Angelica sinensis

USE

Bilberry → vision/circulation. Dong quai → menopausal/menstrual symptoms.

ADVERSE

↑Bleeding; dong quai → **photosensitivity**, avoid in pregnancy.

INTERACTIONS

Both potentiate anticoagulants/antiplatelets (↑bleed).

02

MOOD, SLEEP & ANXIETY

SEROTONIN • SEDATION • CYP450

ST. JOHN'S WORT

Hypericum • the highest-yield herb

USE

Mild–moderate **depression**, anxiety.

ADVERSE

Serotonin syndrome (agitation, hyperthermia, clonus, tachycardia), **photosensitivity**, GI upset.

INTERACTIONS

Adds serotonin with **SSRIs/SNRIs/MAOIs/triptans** → serotonin syndrome. **Potent CYP450 inducer** → ↓effectiveness of **warfarin, oral contraceptives, digoxin, cyclosporine, antiretrovirals, anticonvulsants**.

KEY

The #1 herb to know. Causes serotonin syndrome AND reduces blood levels of many drugs (contraceptive failure, transplant rejection, lost anticoagulation).

KAVA (KAVA-KAVA)

Piper methysticum

USE

Anxiety, insomnia, relaxation.

ADVERSE

Hepatotoxicity (can be severe), sedation, dizziness, impaired motor function.

INTERACTIONS

Additive CNS depression with **alcohol, benzodiazepines, opioids, sedatives**; other hepatotoxic drugs.

KEY

Liver toxicity is the headline — avoid in liver disease & with alcohol/hepatotoxins.

VALERIAN

Valeriana

USE

Insomnia, anxiety (sedative).

ADVERSE

Drowsiness/sedation, morning grogginess, headache; possible hepatotoxicity.

INTERACTIONS

Additive CNS depression with **alcohol, benzodiazepines, barbiturates, opioids, anesthetics**.

KEY

Don't combine with other sedatives; caution before driving/surgery.

MELATONIN & CHAMOMILE

sleep • calming

USE

Melatonin → sleep/jet lag. Chamomile → calming, GI, sleep.

ADVERSE

Sedation, drowsiness; chamomile → **↑bleeding** & ragweed-family allergy.

INTERACTIONS

Additive CNS depression with sedatives; chamomile potentiates anticoagulants.

03

IMMUNE & COLD HERBALS

UPPER-RESPIRATORY • IMMUNE SUPPORT

ECHINACEA

purple coneflower

USE

Prevent/shorten colds & upper-respiratory infections; immune stimulation.

ADVERSE

Allergic reactions (ragweed/daisy family), GI upset; possible hepatotoxicity with long-term use.

INTERACTIONS

Other hepatotoxic drugs; **immunosuppressants** (counteracts).

KEY

Avoid in autoimmune disease & immunosuppression (stimulates the immune system); limit to short-term use.

GOLDENSEAL & ELDERBERRY

Hydrastis • Sambucus

USE

Goldenseal → colds/GI (often combined with echinacea). Elderberry → cold/flu symptoms.

ADVERSE

Goldenseal → may raise BP; GI upset. Raw/unripe elderberry → nausea (must be cooked).

INTERACTIONS

Goldenseal may affect drug metabolism & BP meds; elderberry may stimulate immunity (caution in autoimmune).

04

CARDIOVASCULAR HERBALS

BP • HEART • ELECTROLYTE EFFECTS

HAWTHORN

Crataegus

USE

Heart failure symptoms, mild HTN, "heart tonic."

ADVERSE

Hypotension, dizziness, GI upset.

INTERACTIONS

Potentiates **cardiac glycosides (digoxin)**, antihypertensives, nitrates, beta-blockers (additive effects).

KEY

Can intensify digoxin & BP-lowering drugs — monitor HR/BP.

COENZYME Q10

ubiquinone

USE

HF, statin-associated muscle symptoms, BP, "energy."

ADVERSE

GI upset, mild hypotension, headache.

INTERACTIONS

May **↓warfarin effect** (vitamin-K-like); additive with antihypertensives.

LICORICE ROOT

Glycyrrhiza • not licorice candy flavoring

USE

GI upset/ulcers, cough, "adrenal support."

ADVERSE

Pseudoaldosteronism: hypokalemia, hypertension, edema, fluid retention.

INTERACTIONS

Hypokalemia → **↑digoxin toxicity**; counteracts antihypertensives & diuretics; additive K loss with loop/thiazide diuretics & steroids.

KEY

Causes low potassium & high BP — dangerous with digoxin and in heart/kidney disease.

EPHEDRA (MA HUANG)

banned in the U.S. — still tested

USE

Historically weight loss, energy, decongestant.

ADVERSE

Hypertension, tachycardia, dysrhythmias, MI, stroke, seizures — banned by the FDA in dietary supplements.

INTERACTIONS

Dangerous with stimulants, MAOIs, caffeine, cardiac/HTN drugs.

KEY

Classic "do not use" herb — serious cardiovascular/CNS danger.

05

GI & URINARY HERBALS

BOWEL • BLADDER • STOMACH

ALOE VERA (ORAL)

Aloe barbadensis

USE

Topical → burns/wound healing. **Oral** → **stimulant laxative**.

ADVERSE

Oral: cramping, diarrhea, **hypokalemia & electrolyte loss** with overuse.

INTERACTIONS

Hypokalemia → **↑digoxin toxicity**; additive K loss with diuretics/steroids.

KEY

Topical is benign; **oral aloe as a laxative** can drop potassium.

CRANBERRY

Vaccinium macrocarpon

USE

UTI prevention (helps prevent bacterial adherence; not a treatment).

ADVERSE

GI upset; high oxalate (kidney-stone caution).

INTERACTIONS

May **↑warfarin effect** (↑INR/bleeding) — monitor.

PEPPERMINT

Mentha piperita

USE

IBS, indigestion, nausea, gas.

ADVERSE

Worsens GERD/heartburn (relaxes lower esophageal sphincter), allergic reactions.

KEY

Helpful for IBS but can aggravate reflux — avoid in GERD.

PROBIOTICS & SENNA

Lactobacillus • Senna (stimulant laxative)

USE

Probiotics → gut flora, antibiotic-associated diarrhea. Senna → constipation.

ADVERSE

Probiotics → caution in immunocompromised/critically ill. Senna → cramping, electrolyte loss, dependence.

KEY

Senna (stimulant) for short-term use; watch electrolytes with overuse.

06

WOMEN'S HEALTH HERBALS

MENOPAUSE • MENSTRUAL • HORMONAL

BLACK COHOSH

Actaea racemosa

USE

Menopausal symptoms (hot flashes), PMS.

ADVERSE

Hepatotoxicity, GI upset, headache; possible hormonal effects.

INTERACTIONS

Other hepatotoxic drugs; caution with hormone-sensitive conditions.

KEY

Avoid in pregnancy (can stimulate uterus) & liver disease; report jaundice/RUQ pain.

SOY & CHASTEERRY (VITEX)

phytoestrogens · PMS

USE

Soy isoflavones → menopausal symptoms/heart. Chasteberry → PMS, menstrual irregularity.

ADVERSE

GI upset; hormonal/estrogenic effects.

INTERACTIONS

Caution with hormone therapy, oral contraceptives, and **hormone-sensitive cancers** (e.g., estrogen-receptor-positive).

07 JOINT, LIVER & OTHER HERBALS

OSTEOARTHRITIS · HEPATIC · MISC

GLUCOSAMINE / CHONDROITIN

joint support

USE

Osteoarthritis joint pain & cartilage support.

ADVERSE

GI upset; may affect blood glucose.

INTERACTIONS

Chondroitin may potentiate anticoagulants; **shellfish allergy caution** (glucosamine often from shellfish); monitor glucose in diabetics.

MILK THISTLE

Silymarin

USE

Liver protection/support (hepatitis, cirrhosis adjunct).

ADVERSE

Generally well tolerated; mild GI upset, allergic reactions (ragweed family).

INTERACTIONS

May alter metabolism of some drugs (CYP enzymes); usually mild.

SAW PALMETTO

BLEEDS

Serenoa

USE

Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) urinary symptoms.

ADVERSE

↑Bleeding, GI upset, headache; hormonal effects.

INTERACTIONS

Anticoagulants/antiplatelets (↑bleed); hormonal/finasteride-type therapies.

CAPSAICIN (TOPICAL)

chili pepper extract

USE

Topical **pain relief** (arthritis, neuropathy, postherpetic neuralgia).

ADVERSE

Burning/stinging at site, skin irritation.

KEY

Wear gloves to apply & wash hands; avoid eyes/mucous membranes & broken skin.

YOHIMBE

Pausinystalia

USE

Erectile dysfunction, "performance/energy."

ADVERSE

Hypertension, tachycardia, anxiety, tremors, dysrhythmias.

INTERACTIONS

Stimulants, MAOIs, antihypertensives; risky in cardiac/psychiatric disease.

GREEN TEA EXTRACT

Camellia sinensis

USE

Antioxidant, weight management, "metabolism."

ADVERSE

Caffeine effects (insomnia, jitteriness, ↑HR); high-dose hepatotoxicity.

INTERACTIONS

Vitamin-K content may ↓**warfarin effect**; caffeine adds to stimulants.



MASTER REFERENCE TABLES

THE CONSOLIDATED HIGH-YIELD DATA

08 · MASTER HERB-DRUG INTERACTION TABLE

HERB	INTERACTS WITH	EFFECT TO KNOW
Garlic, Ginger, Ginkgo, Ginseng	Warfarin, heparin, aspirin, NSAIDs, antiplatelets	↑Bleeding risk
Feverfew, Fish oil, Turmeric, Saw palmetto, Dong quai, Bilberry, Chamomile	Anticoagulants/antiplatelets	↑Bleeding risk
Ginseng	Warfarin	↓Warfarin effect (↓INR)
Ginseng	Antidiabetics	Hypoglycemia (additive)
St. John's Wort	SSRIs/SNRIs/MAOIs/triptans	Serotonin syndrome
St. John's Wort	Warfarin, oral contraceptives, digoxin, cyclosporine, antiretrovirals, anticonvulsants	↓Drug levels/effect (CYP450 inducer)
Kava, Valerian, Melatonin, Chamomile	Alcohol, benzodiazepines, opioids, sedatives, anesthetics	↑CNS depression/sedation
Kava, Black cohosh, Echinacea (long-term), Green tea (high dose)	Hepatotoxic drugs / acetaminophen	↑Hepatotoxicity
Licorice, Oral aloe	Digoxin, loop/thiazide diuretics, steroids	Hypokalemia → ↑digoxin toxicity

HERB	INTERACTS WITH	EFFECT TO KNOW
Hawthorn	Digoxin, antihypertensives, nitrates, beta-blockers	Additive cardiac/BP effects
Cranberry	Warfarin	↑Warfarin effect (↑INR)
CoQ10, Green tea	Warfarin	↓Warfarin effect (vitamin-K-like)
Echinacea	Immunosuppressants	Counteracts therapy; avoid in autoimmune
Ephedra, Yohimbe, Ginseng	Stimulants, MAOIs, cardiac/HTN drugs	HTN, tachycardia, dysrhythmias

09 · STOP BEFORE SURGERY (BLEEDING RISK)

CATEGORY	HERBS TO STOP ~1-2 WEEKS PRE-OP
The "G" herbs	Garlic · Ginger · Ginkgo · Ginseng
Other bleeders	Feverfew · Fish oil/omega-3 · Turmeric · Saw palmetto · Dong quai · Bilberry · Chamomile · Vitamin E
Also hold	St. John's Wort (anesthesia interactions) · Kava/Valerian (↑sedation, prolong anesthesia) · Ephedra (cardiovascular)



PRE-OP TEACHING

Tell clients to **disclose all supplements** and stop bleeding-risk & sedating herbs about **1-2 weeks before surgery** per provider instructions.

10 · CATEGORY SUMMARY — USE AT A GLANCE

PRIMARY USE	HERBS
Depression / mood	St. John's Wort
Sleep / anxiety	Kava, Valerian, Melatonin, Chamomile
Memory / circulation	Ginkgo biloba
Nausea	Ginger, Peppermint
Migraine	Feverfew
Colds / immune	Echinacea, Goldenseal, Elderberry
Cholesterol / heart	Garlic, Fish oil, Hawthorn, CoQ10
Energy / stress	Ginseng
BPH (prostate)	Saw palmetto
UTI prevention	Cranberry
Menopause / PMS	Black cohosh, Soy, Chasteberry, Dong quai
Osteoarthritis / joints	Glucosamine/Chondroitin, Turmeric, Capsaicin (topical)
Liver support	Milk thistle
Constipation	Aloe (oral), Senna
GI / IBS	Peppermint, Ginger, Probiotics



HERBAL MASTERY CHECKLIST

SELF-CHECK BEFORE TEST DAY

I CAN CONFIDENTLY... ✓

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Name the bleeding-risk herbs (the 4 G's + feverfew, fish oil, turmeric, dong quai, bilberry, saw palmetto, chamomile) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Explain St. John's Wort: serotonin syndrome + CYP450 induction (↓warfarin, contraceptives, digoxin, cyclosporine, ART) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ List hepatotoxic herbs: kava, black cohosh, echinacea (long-term), high-dose green tea | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identify CNS-depressant herbs: kava, valerian, melatonin, chamomile |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Connect licorice & oral aloe to hypokalemia → digoxin toxicity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Recognize cardiac-stimulant herbs: ephedra, yohimbe, ginseng |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ State which herbs affect warfarin and in which direction (↑ vs ↓ INR) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Match each herb to its primary use |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Advise stopping bleeding/sedating herbs ~1-2 weeks before surgery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Teach that supplements aren't FDA-regulated and "natural ≠ safe" |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Avoid echinacea in autoimmune/immunosuppression | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Caution pregnancy/breastfeeding/children and disclose all supplements to providers |

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