

The Carlat Psychiatry Report

ST. JOHN'S WORT Fact Sheet

Indications:

- Not regulated by the FDA, considered a dietary supplement.

What It Is: St. John's Wort is a flowering herb (*Hypericum perforatum*) that blooms around June 24 (St. John's Day).

Mechanism: Mechanism of psychiatric effect is unclear. Active antidepressant ingredients likely are hypericin and/or hyperforin. Both may inhibit the reuptake of serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine, but other neurochemical effects have been suggested as well.

Evidence for Efficacy:

- Major Depression: About 30 randomized, double blind controlled trials have shown antidepressant efficacy, but most of these were published in European journals. U.S. trials have been mixed.

Dosing:

- Usual dose is 300 mg TID.
- The standard preparation used to be 0.3% hypericin, but now manufacturers are offering products standardized to 2% to 6% hyperforin, since many believe hyperforin is the most important antidepressant component.

Cost: Assuming 900 mg QD, the cost is usually in the range of 50 cents to \$1 per day.

Side Effects:

- Rate of side effects similar to placebo and lower than standard antidepressants in controlled trials. Mild GI side effects and sedation are possible. Photosensitivity in fair-skinned people. Switch to mania has been reported. No sexual side effects.

Drug-drug Interactions:

- Probably induces the 3A4 isoenzyme of the P450 family of hepatic enzymes.
- May decrease levels of the following drugs: cyclosporin (an immunosuppressive), indinavir (a protease inhibitor), warfarin, theophylline, digoxin, and oral contraceptives.
- May cause serotonin syndrome in combination with SSRIs, but this is rare.
- Little information is available on interaction with MAOIs, but most authorities recommend avoiding this combination.