



FACT SHEET

HERBAL TEA

- Made from mixtures of leaves, flowers, roots, stems or bark of various shrubs and plants.
- Traditionally used in many parts of the world for their refreshing qualities and medicinal effects.
- Are no more natural than other teas. May contain naturally occurring toxic substances with undesirable effects on the body.

Peppermint	Volatile oil; contains tannin
Lady's Mantel	Contains tannin; may have constipating effect when used regularly; may also affect absorption of minerals
Uva-Ursi	Contains tannin; toxic to liver in large amounts
Liquorice	Large doses may cause swelling because of potassium loss and sodium retention; can cause high blood pressure
Eucalyptus	Volatile oil, Gastro intestinal tract irritant
Raspberry	Contains a uterine stimulant
Chamomile	Can cause anaphylactic reaction
Senna	Can cause diarrhoea and stomach cramps
Pennyroyal	Volatile oil; strong infusion can cause nausea, vomiting, kidney and liver problems
Comfrey, Larkspur	Contains alkaloids; causes liver damage.

- **CAUTION IS RECOMMENDED during pregnancy, while breast feeding or for infants and young children, and avoidance is best encouraged.** Infancy is a vulnerable time and all recommendations should be to minimize risk. When discussing nutrition and diet, health professionals should routinely question mothers on their own use and whether the infant or child is taking a herbal tea. Unfortunately the composition and safety of many herbal preparations is unknown and the scientific evidence for their benefits is often lacking. They may also contain potentially toxic compounds as well as undesirable natural ingredients such as caffeine and tannin. The tea preparation (depending on where purchased and made) may also be contaminated with other herbs, weeds, flowers, bacteria and pollutants.
- Infant Feeding Guidelines for Health Workers state that *"herbal teas are of no known benefit to an infant and could possibly be harmful"*
- The Food Standards Code, produced by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) prohibits the use of certain plants in foods because they are potentially dangerous when consumed (*Standard 1.4.4 Prohibited and Restricted Plants and Fungi*). While the list excludes the most dangerous plants, other herbs are permitted which are unsuitable during pregnancy or infancy. Despite the Food Standards regulations, the misidentification of a dangerous herb for a safe one, together with the difficulties of regulating herbs sold loose from market stalls and herbalists, pose potential problems.



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- A small amount of herbs can have a large effect on a baby's small body. Babies lack the liver enzymes necessary to detoxify the chemical components.
- Many plant chemicals cross the placental barrier during pregnancy. As is the case with alcohol, tobacco and caffeine, what is potentially harmless to a mother may be TOXIC to the foetus.
- Constituents of herbal teas will pass through mother's milk and reach the infant with resultant effects. Nursing mothers should be aware of the potential dangers of indiscriminate use of herbal teas for their babies eg a breast feeding mum taking senna will pass on the laxative substance to the baby via breast milk which may cause the baby discomfort and diarrhoea.
- Some herbal teas have traditionally been used by certain cultures for generations. These include chamomile, given to unsettled babies, and fennel and aniseed given as remedies for stomach gas. While these are generally safe, if given to an infant they should be very dilute (1 teaspoon or less of leaves in 250mls of water) and only given in **small amounts**, about 30-60mls. Such herbal teas should be in filtered tea bags, purchased as a pre-packaged product from the supermarket and be of a well known brand. The ingredient list should be checked to ensure that other herbs and black tea leaves are not present. Using a plant from the garden to make the tea poses the risk of mistaking an unsafe plant for a safe one. Chamomile should not be given if there is a history of allergy in the family as it has been known to cause an anaphylactic reaction.
- If herbal teas are used by adults, it is recommended that they be taken in moderation ie no more than 2 cups per day. Some 'SAFE' teas are:- Alfalfa, Chamomile, Fennel, Lemon Grass, Rosehip, Peppermint, Spearmint, Red and Black Raspberry, Lemon balm, Orange peel.

References.

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6. Laquatra I.M. *Herbal Remedies: Cause or Cure of Ailments*. Heinz Infant Nutrition Institute, Fall 1999. www.hini.org/HINI/herbal
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