



## **FACT SHEET**

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# **St. John's Wort and Depression**

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- St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) has been used for centuries to treat mental disorders as well as nerve pain. Ancient herbalists also wrote about its use as a sedative, antimalarial agent, and a balm for wounds, burns and insect bites.
- More than 30 clinical studies support the effectiveness of St. John's wort in managing the symptoms of mild to moderate depression.
- In Germany, doctors recommend St. John's wort about four times more often than Prozac, one of the most widely prescribed antidepressants in the United States.
- The 1999 Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality ([www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov)) report on depression concluded, "Hypericum (St. John's wort) appears to be more effective than placebo for short-term treatment of mild to moderately severe depressive disorders."
- The active ingredient(s) of St. John's wort remains unidentified. Recent research suggests that the substance hyperforin may play a significant role in the herb's antidepressant effect.
- Reported side effects of St. John's wort include only mild problems such as dry mouth, gastrointestinal upset, dizziness, fatigue, and increased sensitivity to sunlight.
- St. John's wort can interact with prescription drugs; two documented interactions are with indinavir (for HIV patients) and cyclosporin (for transplant patients). Individuals taking prescription medications should consult with their healthcare professional before using St. John's wort.
- According to the National Institute of Mental Health, in any given one-year period, about 18.8 million American adults suffer from depression.
- An International Labor Organization report from 2000 states that each year the treatment of depression in the United States costs approximately \$40 billion and results in the loss of approximately 200 million working days.