

Mail Online

Herbal medicines banned as EU directive comes into force

By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)

Last updated at 8:35 AM on 30th April 2011

Patients have lost access to hundreds of herbal medicines today, after European regulations came into force.

Sales of all herbal remedies, except for a small number of popular products for 'mild' illness such as echinacea for colds and St John's Wort for depression have been banned.

For the first time traditional products must be licensed or prescribed by a registered herbal practitioner.



The Government allowed access to some unlicensed manufactured herbal medicines via a statutory register

Both herbal remedy practitioners and manufacturers fear they could be forced out of business as a result.

Some of the most commonly used products were saved after the Health Secretary Andrew Lansley approved a plan for the Health Professions Council to establish a register of practitioners supplying unlicensed herbal medicines.

However, many remedies were lost as it was only open to those who could afford the licensing process which costs between £80,000 to £120,000.

At least 50 herbs, including horny goat weed (so-called natural Viagra), hawthorn berry, used for angina pain, and wild yam will no longer be stocked in health food shops, says the British Herbal Medicine Association.

The 2004 EU directive demands that a traditional herbal medicinal product must be shown to have been in use for 30 years in the EU – or at 15 years in the EU and 15 years elsewhere – for it to be licensed.

The UK drug safety watchdog, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Agency, has issued more than a dozen alerts in the past two years, including a warning last month over a contaminated weight loss pill called Herbal Flos Lonicerae (Herbal Xenicol) due to concerns over possible side-effects.

Mr Lansley, in a written statement, said the Government wanted to ensure continuing access to unlicensed herbal medicines via a statutory register for practitioners 'to meet individual patient needs'.

Acupuncture falls outside the EU directive and so remains unaffected.

Prince Charles, a long-standing supporter of complementary therapies, has voiced his support for formal regulation of herbal practitioners.

Up til now the industry has been covered by the 1968 Medicines Act. This was drawn up when only a small number of herbal remedies were

available.

But recent studies show that at least six million Britons have used a herbal medicine in the past two years.

Professor George Lewith, professor of health research at Southampton University, said: 'Evidence for the efficacy of herbal medicines is growing; they may offer cheap, safe and effective approaches for many common complaints.'

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Funny how other news sites report this story as good news; ensuring the safety of herbal medicines, but DM has decided to put a decidedly anti-EU spin on it to make it sound like it's a bad thing. Personally I'd much rather herbal medicines were regulated. Playing around with things you don't understand can have some nasty consequences.

- Kate, Southampton, 30/4/2011 20:08

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- Triinu, tallinn, estonia, 30/4/2011 11:53 Triinu, a brilliant comment, very well put! Definitely recommended reading!!!

- Roger, Carmarthen, West Wales., 30/4/2011 19:46

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Just as an example, did you know that ASPIRIN is a salicylic acid derivative which was originally extracted from WILLOW BARK. But that's to good scientific method we now understand it. - Med student, South, 30/4/2011 17:43 Yes, I did know, and have used the alternative on many occasions, when out walking without any medication. I chewed willow bark. Now, apparently, I am not allowed to use it. It worked well in the past! Why not permit it in the future? Will this make me a criminal? I intend to continue, as with other remedies that I know work. Whilst I am not suggesting we go back to leeches, etc.,you seem to forget that until only a few decades ago, all medicines were natural remedies. The big Pharma companies improved on the preparations, but the old ones still worked.

- Roger, Carmarthen, West Wales., 30/4/2011 19:22

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Too many EU officials have shares in major pharmaceutical companies..... But this "ban" only applies in countries where the EU is recognised and accepted.....and there really aren't that many any more..... ARE there.....

- (Old) Robert, Worcester UK, 30/4/2011 19:19

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We do NOT have comeback to pharmaceutical companies when you get a problem. You have to prove the problem was theirs. At how much cost and time against their huge legal Depts? When I was 20 I took an over the counter sinus remedy (Big Pharma one). After 2 weeks until a funny 'episode' that left me numb down one side of my body, disorientated and getting my words mixed up. I went to the doctor and was told I had 'made it up'. Five years later I saw a legal notice about a class action law suit in the USA, from girls aged 18-22 who'd suffered strokes from the same product. It took 50 of them to even try it. Don't think it would be easier here. Cheap herb remedies will be squeezed out leaving you to your GP. As privatization of drug buying in the NHS gets pushed through, you'll get whatever your GP gets a kickback from, as happens now in the US. This is twofold attack on patients' own care choices. So now we get what we're given and if you're ill from a kickback Drug, tough.

- Thoughts from a Modern Woman, Tyne and Wear, England, 30/4/2011 19:00