Dear Alice,

Is Tongkat Ali safe for men to take? If so, what are the recommended doses?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Looks like you’ve been rooting around for some in-tree-guing herbal supplements. Tongkat Ali comes from a shrub tree in the Southeast Asian rainforests, but it’s not widely available as a pill or an instant coffee additive. It was historically used to treat health problems ranging from fevers to intestinal worms but is most popularly known as an aphrodisiac for men. A quick note on gender: the studies on Tongkat Ali used the terms men and women, but didn’t indicate whether their participants identify as cisgender. Also known as Eurycoma Longifolia (EL), it hasn’t shown any severe health consequences in experiments conducted with rats. Additionally, it hasn’t yet been tested extensively in humans. Dietary supplements aren’t subject to approval from the Food and Drug Administration, which means there is less oversight of the product. Thus, it’s best to give careful consideration when using this product, while also consulting with a health care provider. If you do decide it’s an appropriate choice for you, they can help you find the appropriate dosage.

What research can tell us about this supplement is primarily derived from studies in rats. In one study, rats given various doses of Tongkat Ali were found to have increased sexual activity and greater sperm quality. Bigger effects were seen at higher doses, and doses ranged from 30 to 150 milligrams of drug per one kilogram of body weight (mg/kg). In another experiment with rats, administering doses of 1,200 to 2,400 mg/kg caused some liver damage in a few test subjects but didn’t otherwise harm them. While there aren’t studies of long-term use in animals or humans (including studies in women), researchers suggested further investigation of the impacts on the liver as well as research into sustained use.

While there are a number of anecdotal claims that Tongkat Ali has helped with libido (sexual desire), testosterone levels, fertility, and sexual performance, research cannot confirm any of the claims due to the lack of evidence at this point in time. There have been some limited studies on Tongkat Ali’s effects on humans, and they may point to an increased sexual desire and sperm
count, but there hasn't been enough definitive evidence to say for sure. Additionally, some studies have shown the supplement to have some positive effects on erectile dysfunction. However, the results are mixed, and thus, inconclusive. Claims that the plant increases testosterone and helps build muscle mass are also unconfirmed. Until more research is done on humans, it's best to proceed with caution if you're considering using Tongkat Ali. If you're looking to learn more about increasing sexual desire and performance, be sure to check out the Sexual Questions category of the Go Ask Alice! Sexual & Reproductive Health archives, as well as the related Q&As.

Wishing you safe and pleasurable experiences!

Alice!

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