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# 'Less like a drug than a drug': The use of St John's wort among people who self-identify as having depression and/or anxiety symptoms



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Depression;  
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## Summary

**Objective:** St John's wort (SJW) is one of the most commonly used complementary medicines (CM) for the self-treatment of depression which can be accessed with or without health professional advice. While there is evidence to support its effectiveness in depression it has potential for serious side effects and interactions with many pharmaceuticals and herbs. Despite the potential risks, we know little about consumer perspectives on the use of SJW. Our research aimed to understand, from their own perspective, how and why people use SJW for management of self-identified 'depression, stress or worries'.

**Design:** A qualitative design, focusing on understanding the reasons for SJW use. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit 41 people who self-identified as having used SJW for 'depression stress or worries' from the community in Melbourne, Australia. In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted. Interviews were taped, transcribed and analysed thematically.

**Results:** Three themes emerged as to why participants used SJW – ease of access of SJW, perceptions of effectiveness and safety of SJW enabling control over its use, and the perceived benefits of using a natural product. Generally, participants did not reserve use of SJW only for mild depressive symptoms.

**Conclusions:** People use many self-care strategies to manage symptoms of depression, including more severe symptoms. While there is often a preference for more natural approaches like SJW, people experiment and continue to use what they perceive is most effective for them.

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