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# African herbal medicines in the treatment of HIV: *Hypoxis* and *Sutherlandia*. An overview of evidence and pharmacology

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## Abstract

In Africa, herbal medicines are often used as primary treatment for HIV/AIDS and for HIV-related problems. In general, traditional medicines are not well researched, and are poorly regulated. We review the evidence and safety concerns related to the use of two specific African herbals, which are currently recommended by the Ministry of Health in South Africa and member states for use in HIV: African Potato and *Sutherlandia*. We review the pharmacology, toxicology and pharmacokinetics of these herbal medicines. Despite the popularity of their use and the support of Ministries of Health and NGOs in some African countries, no clinical trials of efficacy exist, and low-level evidence of harm identifies the potential for drug interactions with antiretroviral drugs. Efforts should be made by mainstream health professionals to provide validated information to traditional healers and patients on the judicious use of herbal remedies. This may reduce harm through failed expectations, pharmacologic adverse events including possible drug/herb interactions and unnecessary added therapeutic costs. Efforts should also be directed at evaluating the possible benefits of natural products in HIV/AIDS treatment.