

# natural medicine

## Herbal Remedy Gets 15 Minutes of Fame

A television star's choice of cancer treatment brings attention, and criticism, to Iscador.

**L**AST MARCH, ACTRESS SUZANNE SOMERS SHOCKED SOME people when she announced that she not only had breast cancer, but she was using the popular European alternative remedy mistletoe (*Viscum album*), marketed as Iscador, to treat it. Oncologists sharply criticized Somers for her decision, and even alternative medicine advocate Andrew Weil, M.D., expressed his concern over her treatment choice.

But not everyone thinks Somers's course of action is dangerous. "As healthy as she is, I think she made a good decision," says Cheryl Deroin, N.D., a naturopath and head of the nutrition department at the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine in Tempe, Ariz. Deroin points to the dozens of studies

that show that mistletoe, in conjunction with conventional treatments, does help fight cancer. (Somers is combining mistletoe with conventional treatment.)

A study published this May in *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* followed more than 10,000 German cancer patients. About one-fifth used Iscador and a conventional treatment; the rest received only conventional care.

Researchers concluded that those who took Iscador lived 40 percent longer. For more herb research, compiled by the University of Texas Center for Alternative Medicine Research, visit [www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/utcam/therapies/mistletoe.htm](http://www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/utcam/therapies/mistletoe.htm).



Actress Suzanne Somers battles breast cancer.

## LAUGHTER MAY BE A BETTER ANTIBIOTIC

Recent research proves that humor can help you fight germs.

TWO SMALL TRIALS PUBLISHED earlier this year show that a good laugh can strengthen your immune system. In one, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, scientists exposed 26 men and women to common allergens, which produced allergy symptoms, and then showed them a 90-minute Charlie Chaplin film. Symptoms were reduced in all 26 subjects for four hours after the video.

The other, published in *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, looked for an increase in immune function. Fifty-two healthy men watched an hour-long comedy video, before, during, and after which immunity markers like their T cell counts were



Lightening up may boost your immunity.

measured. It turns out that just one hour of laughter boosted their immune function for up to 12 hours.

Stress reduction seems to be the key, say experts. Even a few hearty chuckles a day can do the trick. —Julia Tolliver Maranan

## St. John's Wort Under the Microscope

A new study claims that America's favorite herbal antidepressant doesn't work after all. But is the report legitimate?

A RECENT STUDY OF ST. JOHN'S WORT (*Hypericum perforatum*) funded in part by pharmaceutical giant Pfizer has natural medicine practitioners up in arms. The study, published in April's *Journal of the American Medical Association*, reported that the herb is no more effective than a placebo in treating major depression. But according to Aviva Romm, director of the

American Herbalists Guild in Canton, Ga., "[herbalists] never said it was effective for severe depression." It's intended, she says, for *mild to moderate* depression.

"People are already confused about whether herbs work," she laments. But she asserts that historical, clinical, and scientific evidence shows that St. John's wort is effective when used appropriately. "This

Herbalists say St. John's wort has been misrepresented.

[new study] shouldn't invalidate the other studies." (Pfizer, by the way, is the maker of Zoloft, an antidepressant drug.) —J.T.M.

