Astragalus

url: https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/astragalus  
  
  
Astragalus  
Common Names: astragale, astragale feuilles de r glisse, beg kei, milk vetch  
  
Latin Names: Astragalus membranaceus  
  
Background  
Astragalus has been used for centuries in traditional Chinese medicine in combination with other herbs.  
Its root is used for health care purposes.  
Commonly combined with other herbs, astragalus has been promoted as a dietary supplement for many conditions, including upper respiratory infections, allergic rhinitis (hay fever), asthma, chronic fatigue syndrome, and chronic kidney disease, among others. It s also promoted to strengthen and regulate the immune system. Topical use (application to the skin) of astragalus is promoted for improving blood flow and speeding wound healing.  
How Much Do We Know?  
There are no high-quality studies in people of astragalus for any health condition.  
What Have We Learned?  
Patients with nephrotic syndrome (health problems related to kidney damage) are susceptible to infections. A 2013 research review found that taking astragalus may be associated with a lower risk of upper respiratory tract infections in children with nephrotic syndrome than prednisone treatment alone. However, the review concluded the studies were of low quality.  
An astragalus-based herbal formula didn t extend the lives of people with advanced lung cancer, a small 2009 trial reported. The study (with 24 people) was supported in part by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH).  
What Do We Know About Safety?  
Astragalus may be safe when used orally and appropriately. (Doses up to 60 grams daily for up to 4 months have been used without reported adverse effects.) Some possible side effects with oral use include rash, itching, nasal symptoms, or stomach discomfort, but these are uncommon.  
Astragalus may interact with medications that suppress the immune system.  
Some astragalus species, usually not found in dietary supplements, can be toxic to livestock. Several species that grow in the United States contain the neurotoxin swainsonine and have caused locoweed poisoning in animals. Other species contain potentially toxic levels of selenium. Too much selenium can lead to diarrhea, irritability, nausea, skin rashes, and nervous system problems.  
Little is known about whether it s safe to use astragalus during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. Some research in animals suggests that astragalus can be toxic to the mother and fetus.  
Keep in Mind  
Take charge of your health talk with your health care providers about any complementary health approaches you use. Together, you can make shared, well-informed decisions.  
For More Information  
Using Dietary Supplements Wisely  
Know the Science: How Medications and Supplements Can Interact  
Know the Science: How To Make Sense of a Scientific Journal Article  
NCCIH Clearinghouse  
The NCCIH Clearinghouse provides information on NCCIH and complementary and integrative health approaches, including publications and searches of Federal databases of scientific and medical literature. The Clearinghouse does not provide medical advice, treatment recommendations, or referrals to practitioners.  
  
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Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS), National Institutes of Health (NIH)  
ODS seeks to strengthen knowledge and understanding of dietary supplements by evaluating scientific information, supporting research, sharing research results, and educating the public. Its resources include publications (such as Dietary Supplements: What You Need To Know) and fact sheets on a variety of specific supplement ingredients and products (such as vitamin D and multivitamin/mineral supplements).  
  
Website: https://ods.od.nih.gov  
  
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Zou C, Su G, Wu Y, et al. Astragalus in the prevention of upper respiratory tract infection in children with nephrotic syndrome: evidence-based clinical practice. Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine. 2013;2013:352130.  
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