Bilberry

url: https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/bilberry  
  
  
Bilberry  
Common Names: bilberry, European blueberry, whortleberry, huckleberry  
  
Latin Names: Vaccinium myrtillus  
  
Background  
The bilberry bush is native to northern areas of Europe and Asia, the northern United States, and Canada. Its dark berries resemble blueberries.  
Its name is derived from the Danish word bollebar, which means dark berry.   
Bilberry has been used for medicinal purposes since the Middle Ages. The berries and leaves are the parts of the plant that are used. Historically, bilberry has been used for a variety of conditions, including diarrhea, inflammation of the mouth, urinary problems, and diabetes. It s also been used traditionally to prevent scurvy, due to its high vitamin C content. During World War II, British pilots ate bilberry jam, thinking it would improve their night vision.  
Today, bilberry is promoted as a dietary supplement for night vision, cataracts, varicose veins, and other conditions such as atherosclerosis (in which plaque builds up in arteries).  
How Much Do We Know?  
There are few high-quality clinical trials (studies in people) of bilberry supplements.  
What Have We Learned?  
There s little scientific evidence to support the use of bilberry for many health conditions.  
A few recent studies have suggested possible beneficial effects of bilberry. However, these studies involved small numbers of people. More research would be needed to confirm these findings.  
Results from a small clinical study (24 people) suggest that consuming bilberries may reduce gum inflammation and bleeding.  
Data from a Japanese study with 88 office workers suggest that a bilberry extract helped with eye fatigue.  
Data from a small study with 21 people suggest that consuming bilberry juice for 5 days before and 2 days after a half-marathon may lead to small to moderate transient increases in muscle soreness and inflammation in recreationally trained runners.  
The berries have a high concentration of polyphenols called anthocyanins, which some studies suggest may have health benefits.  
What Do We Know About Safety?  
Bilberry fruit is considered safe when consumed in amounts typically found in foods, or as an extract for 6 months to a year.  
Bilberry leaves may be unsafe when taken orally (by mouth) in high doses or for long periods of time.  
Little is known about whether it s safe to use bilberry during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. (Consuming amounts typically found in foods is considered safe.)  
Bilberry may interact with a cancer drug called erlotinib (Tarceval), antidiabetes drugs, or medications that slow blood clotting. If you re taking medicine, talk with your health care provider before taking bilberry supplements.  
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  
  
Email: ods@nih.gov(link sends email)  
  
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