Elderberry

url: https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/elderberry  
  
  
Elderberry  
Common Names: European elder, black elder, elderberry, elder flower, sambucus  
  
Latin Names: Sambucus nigra  
  
Background  
Elderberry is the dark purple berry of the European or black elder tree, which grows in the warmer parts of Europe, North America, Asia, and Northern Africa.  
Elderberry has been used in folk medicine to treat colds and flu.  
Elderberry is promoted as a dietary supplement for colds, flu, and other conditions. It has also been promoted for COVID-19 (the disease caused by the new coronavirus), but there is no good evidence to support its use.  
How Much Do We Know?  
A small number of studies in people have evaluated elderberry for flu and other upper respiratory infections. Little research has been done on other uses of elderberry.  
What Have We Learned?  
Some preliminary research suggests that elderberry may relieve symptoms of flu or other upper respiratory infections.  
No published research studies have evaluated the use of elderberry for COVID-19. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Federal Trade Commission have taken action against companies that marketed products with unsubstantiated claims of effectiveness for COVID-19.  
There s not enough information to show whether elderberry is helpful for any other health purposes.  
What Do We Know About Safety?  
Raw unripe elderberries and other parts of the elder tree, such as the leaves and stem, contain toxic substances (e.g., sambunigrin) that can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea; cooking eliminates this toxin. Large quantities of the toxin may cause serious illness.  
Little is known about whether it s safe to use elderberry during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.  
Keep in Mind  
Don t rely on elderberry or other dietary supplements for prevention or treatment of COVID-19. They have not been shown to be effective.  
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.  
  
Toll-free in the U.S.: 1-888-644-6226  
  
Telecommunications relay service (TRS): 7-1-1  
  
Website: https://www.nccih.nih.gov  
  
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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)  
  
Key References  
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