Milk Thistle

url: https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/milk-thistle  
  
  
Milk Thistle  
Common Names: milk thistle, Mary thistle, holy thistle  
  
Latin Names: Silybum marianum, synonym Carduus marianus  
  
Background  
Milk thistle is native to Europe and was introduced into North America by early colonists. Milk thistle is found throughout the eastern United States, California, South America, Africa, Australia, and Asia.  
The terms milk thistle and silymarin are often used interchangeably.  
Historically, people have used milk thistle for liver disorders and gallbladder problems.  
Milk thistle is promoted as a dietary supplement for hepatitis, cirrhosis, jaundice, diabetes, indigestion, and other conditions.  
How Much Do We Know?  
We know little about whether milk thistle is effective in people, as only a few well-designed clinical studies have been conducted.  
What Have We Learned?  
Results from clinical trials of milk thistle for liver diseases have been conflicting or haven t been clinically meaningful. Some of the studies have been of poor quality, too.  
Although some studies have shown positive results on milk thistle for people with chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection, the overall research does not show a benefit.  
A small number of studies have suggested that milk thistle extract might be beneficial for diabetes, but the conclusions about its effectiveness are not definite.  
It s not known whether milk thistle is helpful for other conditions.  
What Do We Know About Safety?  
In clinical trials, milk thistle appears to be well tolerated in recommended doses. Occasionally, people report various digestive side effects.  
Milk thistle may produce allergic reactions, which tend to be more common among people who are allergic to plants in the same family (for example, ragweed, chrysanthemum, marigold, and daisy).  
Milk thistle may lower blood sugar levels in people with type 2 diabetes. People with diabetes should use caution.  
Little is known about whether it s safe to use milk thistle during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.  
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)  
  
Key References  
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