

herbs at a glance

Peppermint Oil



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This fact sheet provides basic information about peppermint oil—common names, what the science says, potential side effects and cautions, and resources for more information.

Common Name—peppermint oil

Latin Name—*Mentha x piperita*

The herb peppermint, a cross between two types of mint (water mint and spearmint), grows throughout Europe and North America. Peppermint is often used to flavor foods, and the leaves can be used fresh or dried in teas. Today, peppermint oil is used as a folk or traditional remedy for nausea, indigestion, cold symptoms, headaches, muscle and nerve pain, stomach problems, and bowel conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome.

Essential oil of peppermint may be found in very small doses in capsule or liquid forms. The essential oil can also be diluted with another oil and applied to the skin.

What the Science Says

- Results from several studies suggest that peppermint oil may improve symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome.
- A few studies have found that peppermint oil, in combination with caraway oil, may help relieve indigestion, but this evidence is preliminary.
- Although there are some promising results, there is no clear-cut evidence to support the use of peppermint oil for other health conditions.

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Side Effects and Cautions

- Peppermint oil appears to be safe for most adults when used in small doses. Possible side effects include allergic reactions and heartburn.
- Capsules containing peppermint oil are often coated to reduce the likelihood of heartburn. If they are taken at the same time as medicines such as antacids, this coating can break down more quickly, thus increasing the risk of heartburn.
- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary health practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care. For tips about talking with your health care providers about complementary and alternative medicine, see NCCAM's Time to Talk campaign at nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/.

Sources

Peppermint. In: Blumenthal M, Goldberg A, Brinckman J, eds. *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E Monographs*. Newton, MA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2000:297-303.

Peppermint. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at www.naturaldatabase.com on July 22, 2009.

Peppermint oil (*Mentha x piperita* L.). Natural Standard Database Web site. Accessed at www.naturalstandard.com on July 22, 2009.

For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at nccam.nih.gov and view *Using Dietary Supplements Wisely* (nccam.nih.gov/health/supplements/wiseuse.htm).

NCCAM Clearinghouse

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Peppermint Listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/705.html

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