

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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Licorice comes from the root of the licorice plant. It's commonly used to flavor and sweeten foods and drinks. The herb is also an important part of traditional Chinese medicine and traditional Indian medicine, known as Ayurveda.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Licorice is used to treat:

- Gastrointestinal problems such as bloating, discomfort, nausea, and burping
- Peptic ulcers (sores in your stomach lining)
- Hepatitis (swelling of the liver)
- Bronchitis (when the tubes that carry air to your lungs are swollen)
- Inflammation (swelling)

Licorice also has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

It's generally safe to use licorice in food and tea. Talk with your healthcare providers before taking licorice supplements. Herbal supplements are stronger than the herbs you would use in cooking.

Supplements can also interact with some medications and affect how they work. For more information, read the "What else do I need to know?" section below.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of licorice may include:

- High blood pressure
- Lethargy (lack of energy)
- Muscle pain
- Cardiac arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat)
- High sodium retention
- Low blood levels of potassium
- Reduced desire to have sex
- Decreased oil on your scalp
- Low blood platelet count
- Heavy licorice use can cause early pre-term births

What else do I need to know?

Do not take licorice if:

- You're taking cardiac glycosides (medications used to treat heart failure and irregular heartbeat). Licorice may increase their effects which can be harmful.
- You're taking diuretics (medications that make you urinate often). Licorice may lower your blood potassium level.
- You have hypertension (high blood pressure) and take medication to treat it. Licorice causes hypertension and may reduce the effectiveness of hypertension medication.
- You're taking cortisol acetate. Licorice was reported to increase levels of cortisol in a patient with Addison's disease (disease where your body doesn't make enough cortisol) who took cortisone acetate. Higher levels of cortisol can lead to increased side effects.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Licorice - Last updated on September 12, 2023

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