

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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Peppermint is used as a remedy for a variety of ailments including irritable bowel syndrome, general gastrointestinal (GI) discomfort, and respiratory difficulties. It has not been shown to treat or prevent cancer in humans.

Peppermint is an herb prevalent in Europe and North America and has been used as medicine for several centuries. It is taken orally as a carminative to treat digestive problems, applied topically as a counter-irritant for aches and cold symptoms, and its essential oil is used in aromatherapy. Peppermint is also widely used to flavor candies and oral hygiene products. Clinical studies have shown that peppermint is useful for headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, dyspepsia, and colonic/gastric spasms. Studies done in the lab and in animals have shown that peppermint has anticancer properties, but human data are lacking.

Patients with a history of gallstones, gallbladder inflammation, hiatal hernia, or gastroesophageal reflux disease should consult a physician before consuming peppermint.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- Colonic and gastric spasms
Clinical studies have demonstrated peppermint's effectiveness in reducing colonic/gastric spasms.
- Gastrointestinal discomfort
Peppermint was shown effective in reducing dyspepsia and general gastrointestinal discomfort.
- Headache
Topical use of peppermint oil was shown to reduce headaches.
- Inflammation
Laboratory studies showed that peppermint has anti-inflammatory effects.
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Peppermint has been reported beneficial for alleviating the symptoms associated with IBS.

- Nausea

inhalation of peppermint oil was shown useful in controlling nausea and vomiting in pregnant women. But more studies are needed to determine its benefits for postoperative nausea and vomiting.

What are the side effects?

- Heartburn, nausea, and vomiting in patients with IBS, after taking peppermint oil.
- Dermatitis following external application of peppermint oil.
- Toxicity: Acute lung injury has been reported following intravenous injection of peppermint oil.

What else do I need to know?

Do Not Take if:

- You are taking felodipine: Peppermint oil has been reported to increase bioavailability and can increase side effects of this drug. Clinical significance is not known.
- You are taking cyclosporine: Peppermint oil increases the bioavailability of cyclosporine in rats. Human studies have not been conducted.
- You are taking cytochrome P450 substrates: Peppermint oil was shown to inhibit CYP1A2/2C8/2C9/2C19/2D6 and 3A4 enzymes and may increase the risk of side effects of these drugs. Clinical significance is not known.
- You use topical 5-fluorouracil: Peppermint can increase absorption of 5-fluorouracil. Clinical significance is not known.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

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

Peppermint - Last updated on November 16, 2023

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