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Schisandra is a fruit extract used in traditional Chinese medicine, but few studies have been conducted in humans.

Schisandra has a long history of use in traditional Chinese medicine to treat liver conditions, stomach disorders, and as a tonic to improve vitality. It is also used in various formulas for fatigue and sleep. Its Chinese name, wu wei zi, means five-flavored fruit, to reflect the five flavors recognized in TCM: sour, bitter, sweet, salty, and pungent.

Scientists do not know how Schisandra works, but lab experiments have begun to identify some possible effects. Schisandra has antioxidant activity and appears to protect the liver and nervous system. Other animal studies suggest it may improve mental and physical functioning. Only a small number of studies have been conducted in humans and are too limited to draw any conclusions.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To treat lung problems and coughs

Although schisandra is used to treat some lung symptoms in traditional Chinese medicine, clinical trials have not been conducted.

- To treat gastrointestinal problems

The traditional use of schisandra to treat diarrhea and indigestion is not yet supported in clinical trials. A small study in liver transplant patients suggests schisandra may help with the side effect of diarrhea associated with immune suppressant medication.

- To treat liver disease

A small study in liver transplant patients suggests schisandra can improve liver function. Another small study indicates it may be helpful in combination with other treatments for chronic hepatitis. However, these uncontrolled trials are inconclusive and larger, more rigorous studies are needed.

- To increase strength and stamina

A small study in older adults doing regular [low-intensity exercise](#) suggests that a schisandra extract may enhance skeletal muscle strength, but it did not affect muscle mass. Additional studies are needed.

- To reduce sweating

A small trial in women suggests that schisandra may help menopausal symptoms including hot flashes and sweating.

What are the side effects?

No serious side effects have been reported, but schisandra is not well studied in humans.

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

Schisandra may reduce the effectiveness of some drugs or increase their adverse effects. Patients should talk with their doctors about the possibility of such drug interactions.

Do Not Take if:

- You are taking drugs that are substrates of CYP1A2, 3A4, or 3A5: In vitro and animal studies suggest schisandra can affect how these drugs are metabolized. Clinical relevance has yet to be determined.
- You are taking drugs that are substrates of P-glycoprotein: Schisandra may increase the risk of side effects of these drugs.

Special Point:

Schisandra can reduce the levels of certain liver enzymes on lab tests.

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.

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