

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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Chaparral has not been shown to treat any medical condition, and has been associated with cases of liver toxicity.

Chaparral is a plant that grows in the desert regions of Mexico and the southwest United States. It has a long medicinal history and has been used by Native Americans to treat skin sores, inflammatory disorders, rheumatism, diabetes, tuberculosis, colds, venereal disease, and cancer. Chaparral tea has been employed to treat kidney and gallbladder stones.

However, evidence on whether it can treat any medical condition is lacking. Although lab studies suggest an active compound in chaparral, nordihydroguaiaretic acid (NDGA), has antiviral, anticancer, and antiparasitic properties, a clinical trial found chaparral was ineffective as an anticancer agent.

Because several patients who regularly drank chaparral tea developed kidney cysts, kidney cancer, and liver damage, chaparral products are not recommended. The FDA removed NDGA, formerly used as a food additive in low concentrations, from its “Generally Recognized as Safe” (GRAS) substances list. Also Masoprocol, a topical cream containing NDGA for the treatment of actinic keratoses, was withdrawn from the US market in June 1996.

Chaparral is an ingredient in black salve, which is promoted as an alternative cancer treatment.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

There is no scientific evidence on the use of chaparral to treat:

- Arthritis
- Bronchitis or the common cold
- Cancer

- Inflammation
- Menstrual cramps
- Urinary problems
- Muscle spasms

What are the side effects?

- Fatigue
- Skin rash
- Stomach upset
- Yellowing of the skin
- Liver damage, cirrhosis, acute hepatitis
- Kidney failure

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

- Chaparral and products containing chaparral have been associated with severe liver damage, in some cases requiring liver transplantation.

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.

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