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Isatis leaf has not been shown to treat or prevent cancer.

Isatis leaf extract is derived from the same plant from which indigo dye is made. It is used in combination with [isatis root](#) and other herbs both in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and in [Ayurveda](#) to treat the common cold, sore throat, mumps, respiratory ailments, other febrile diseases, hepatitis, and malignant tumors. [Isatis root](#) has both similar and different properties from isatis leaf.

Isatis leaf has anti-inflammatory properties. Lab studies suggest that [indirubin](#), an active compound in isatis, stops cell duplication and therefore may be useful in cancer treatment, but studies in humans are lacking. Other lab experiments show that isatis extract can kill certain viruses and counteract some symptoms and tissue damage from bacterial infections.

Studies in humans are limited. Although it may be effective against ulcerative colitis, its use has been associated with a serious condition called pulmonary arterial hypertension. Therefore it should not be used outside of clinical trials. Additional studies are needed to determine safety and effectiveness.

## What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To prevent and treat cancer

Lab studies suggest an active compound in isatis stops cell duplication, but there is no evidence from clinical trials that it can prevent or treat cancer. In China, isatis is used in combination with other botanicals to treat chronic myelogenous leukemia.

- To treat diarrhea or GI disorders

Isatis extracts have anti-inflammatory activity in the lab setting. A pulverized version of the extract is used in China to treat ulcerative colitis, but additional studies are needed to determine safety and effectiveness.

- To treat hepatitis

Isatis extracts have anti-inflammatory effects, but clinical trials are lacking.

- To treat HIV and AIDS

There is no scientific evidence to support this claim.

- To treat respiratory infections

Although isatis has antiviral activity, there is no evidence from clinical trials that it can effectively treat infections.

## What are the side effects?

### Case reports

- Pulmonary arterial hypertension has been associated with use of Qing Dai in patients with ulcerative colitis.
- Wall thickening and swelling that affected the large bowel, abdominal pain, and bloody diarrhea were associated with use of Qing Dai in patients with ulcerative colitis.

## What else do I need to know?

### Do Not Take if:

You are taking CYP450 3A4 substrate drugs: Lab studies suggest that [indirubin](#), a component of the isatis plant, may affect how these drugs are metabolized. Clinical relevance has yet to be determined.

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](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

Isatis Leaf - Last updated on March 18, 2021

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