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Lemongrass is used in traditional medicine and aromatherapy, but studies in humans are limited.

There are over 140 species of lemongrass that are prevalent in many parts of Africa and Asia. It is widely used as a flavoring agent in Asian cuisine, in perfumery, and as an insect repellent.

Lemongrass has been used in folk medicine for sleep, anxiety, and gastrointestinal problems. These effects have mostly been shown in animal studies. More research is needed to confirm such effects in humans.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To reduce anxiety
In clinical studies, lemongrass tea did not lower anxiety or produce calming effects.
- To improve sleep
Animal studies suggest sedative effects, but this has not been shown in humans.
- To prevent infections
Lab studies show that lemongrass has activity against various microorganisms. A few studies in humans suggest it may help as an antifungal treatment or with chronic gum disease, but more studies are needed.

What are the side effects?

Oral: Dizziness, drowsiness, dry mouth, excess urination, and increased appetite.

In high doses, lemongrass essential oil can damage liver and stomach mucous membranes.

Excessive intake of lemongrass tea may also affect kidney function.

Topical: Skin rash from lemongrass essential oils

Case report

Delayed skin rash from both topical and oral use: In a 52-year-old massage therapist who also practiced aromatherapy with essential oils including lemongrass. The rash also returned after she drank lemongrass tea.

What else do I need to know?

Do Not Take if:

- You are taking glutathione-S-transferase drugs: Although no interactions have been reported, ingesting amounts of lemongrass over standard culinary use may increase the risk of drug side effects.
- You are taking CYP450 substrate drugs: Although no interactions have been reported, ingesting quantities of lemongrass over standard culinary use may increase the risk of drug side effects.

Special Point:

Citral and myrcene, compounds present in lemongrass, caused birth defects in rats. Therefore, it may be advisable to avoid it during pregnancy.

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.

Lemongrass - Last updated on November 18, 2022

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