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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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The safety and efficacy of lycium for chronic diseases has not been established.

Lycium berries, commonly referred to as goji berries, are used in traditional medicine to treat inflammation, skin irritation, nose bleeds, aches, and pains. Lycium is also used as a sedative. In Chinese medicine, it is commonly used with other botanicals for poor vision, anemia, and cough. As Goji berries, they are marketed as a superfood that are high in antioxidants.

Lab studies have identified polysaccharides from the plant that may improve immune response and effects of radiation therapy. Other experiments suggest Lycium may inhibit the growth of some cancer cells.

In humans, a few small studies suggest potential benefits in helping to lower cholesterol or blood sugar. However, data are limited and it has not been studied for cancer prevention or treatment. Well-designed clinical trials are needed to determine any benefits Lycium may have against chronic diseases.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To treat aches and pains
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.
- To prevent or treat cancers
Clinical studies have not been conducted to evaluate the anticancer potential of lycium.
- To improve the effects of a specific cancer therapy
A small observational study showed benefits, but further well designed trials are necessary.
- To support cardiovascular health
Limited data suggest potential benefit, but additional studies are needed.
- As a sedative
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.

What are the side effects?

Case reports

Allergic reactions: After eating Lycium berries, in people with plant-based food allergies considered to be at high risk for a reaction.

What else do I need to know?

Do Not Take if:

You have lipid transfer protein food allergies: Hypersensitivity reactions have been reported in patients at high risk of plant-based food allergies.

You are taking warfarin or other anticoagulants: A few cases of elevated INR were reported in patients on anticoagulant therapy following consumption of Lycium products.

You are taking CYP 3A4, 2C9, or 2C19 substrate drugs: Lycium extract may influence how these drugs are metabolized.

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.

Lycium - Last updated on December 10, 2021

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