Ready to start planning your care? Call us at 800-525-2225 to make an appointment.
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Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

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Give to MSK

Pokeweed has toxic effects and should not be used to attempt to treat any medical condition.

Pokeweed products are extracts from all parts of the plant: leaves, root, and berries. Pokeweed contains chemicals that are known toxins, but several of its other components have shown biological activity in lab experiments. For example, pokeweed antiviral protein is able to stop replication of viruses such as herpes simplex, influenza and poliovirus in the test tube, while pokeweed anti-fungal protein does the same to fungi. Certain saponins from pokeweed also reduce inflammation in rats. None of these effects have been seen in the human body.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To treat cancer
  There are no data to back this claim.
- To treat infections
  Lab studies suggest pokeweed extracts may stop the growth of certain fungi and viruses, but human

data are lacking.

- To reduce inflammation
  Although pokeweed extracts reduced inflammation in an animal study, clinical trials are lacking.
- To treat tonsillitis
  There are no data to support this claim.

What are the side effects?

- Nausea, vomiting
- Stomach cramps
- Diarrhea
- Weakness
- Vomiting blood
- Low blood pressure
- Fast heart rate
- Toxicity from high doses or prolonged use of pokeweed can cause protracted vomiting, bloody diarrhea, difficulty breathing, muscle spasms, convulsions, and death.

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

- Significant toxicity results from taking pokeweed by mouth or applying it topically.

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.
Pokeweed - Last updated on February 19, 2021

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