

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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Safrole and oil of sassafras has been banned as a food additive by the FDA due to carcinogenic concerns, and should not be used to treat medical conditions.

Sassafras is a perennial tree native to Eastern United States. Native Americans used infusions made from the root bark as a remedy to treat fevers, diarrhea, and rheumatism. Sassafras was even used as a flavoring for root beer decades ago. However, sassafras contains safrole, a volatile oil, which has been classified as a likely carcinogen to humans, and banned as a food additive by the FDA.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

There is no scientific evidence to support the claims below:

- To detoxify
- For general health maintenance
- To reduce inflammation, including mucositis (sores in the mouth and throat)
- To treat arthritis
- To treat sprains
- To treat syphilis
- To treat urinary tract disorders

What are the side effects?

- Hot flashes
- Profuse perspiration

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

- Sassafras is classified as a carcinogenic substance. It caused liver cancer in laboratory animals. The risk of developing cancer increases with the amount consumed and duration of consumption.

Do Not Take if:

- Safrole and oil of sassafras has been banned as a food additive by the FDA due to carcinogenic concerns, and should not be used to treat any medical conditions.

Special Point:

- Sassafras was once used as flavoring agent in root beer and candies, but the Food and Drug Administration has prohibited the use of sassafras as a food additive due to its carcinogenic effects.

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.

Sassafras - Last updated on June 20, 2023



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