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Memorial Sloan Kettering  
Cancer Center

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There is no evidence that sheep sorrel can treat diarrhea, cancer, or any other medical condition.

Sheep sorrel is a flowering plant considered a perennial weed. It is native to Europe, Russia, and the Middle East and North Africa, and is prevalent in the United States. Historically used to treat inflammation, scurvy, cancer, and diarrhea, sheep sorrel is also one of four ingredients in [Essiac](#), an alternative cancer treatment.

Scientific research has not been conducted on sheep sorrel, but there is familiarity with how some of the compounds in this plant work. Anthraquinones might produce a laxative effect by stimulating movement in the GI tract and increasing fluid levels in the intestines. These compounds are also considered antioxidants that may be able to neutralize free radicals, which can cause cellular and DNA damage in the body.

## What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To treat cancer  
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.
- To treat diarrhea  
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.
- To reduce fever  
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.
- To reduce inflammation  
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.
- To treat scurvy  
Sheep sorrel contains vitamin C, which helps prevent scurvy, but there are no clinical data to support use.

## What are the side effects?

- Upset stomach
- Abdominal cramps
- Diarrhea, possibly leading to dangerously low blood potassium levels
- Kidney and liver damage

## What else do I need to know?

Do Not Take if:

- You have a history of kidney stones: The oxalate content in sheep sorrel may contribute to kidney stone formation.
- You are taking diuretics: Most diuretics cause the body to lose potassium, an effect that could be made worse from the laxative effects of sheep sorrel, and increase risks for dangerously low blood potassium levels.

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.

Sheep Sorrel - Last updated on February 24, 2022

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