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There is no scientific evidence on usnic acid for weight loss, and supplements containing it have been associated with severe liver toxicity.

Usnic acid is a compound found in lichens. It has been used as a preservative in moisturizing creams, and as an ingredient in toothpastes, mouthwashes, and deodorants because of its antibacterial properties. Dietary supplements that contain usnic acid are promoted for weight loss, but scientific evidence is lacking. The supplements have also been associated with liver toxicity.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- Weight loss

This claim is not supported by scientific evidence.

- Antibacterial

Usnic acid has been used in moisturizing creams, toothpastes, mouthwashes, and deodorants because of its antibacterial properties.

- Antiviral

In one small study, an intravaginal formulation of usnic acid and zinc showed favorable results when used along with radiosurgery for HPV infection.

- Fever

This claim is not backed by scientific studies.

- Pain relief

This use is not supported by scientific evidence.

What are the side effects?

- Usnic acid can cause liver damage when used in high doses.
- Allergic reactions have been reported with topical use.

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

Weight loss supplements containing usnic acid are associated with severe liver toxicity.

Do Not Take if:

You are taking anticoagulants: Theoretically, usnic acid may have additive effects with anticoagulant medications.

You are taking CYP450 3A4 substrate drugs: Animal studies suggest usnic acid can decrease the effects of such drugs. Clinical relevance is not known.

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.

Usnic acid - Last updated on February 19, 2021

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