



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Elderberry

This information describes the common uses of Elderberry, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

What is it?

Elderberry is the dark purple berry that comes from the European or black elder tree. Elderberry has many nutrients. It's used to make jams, syrups, and wine. Both elderberry flowers and fruits are used to help reduce cold and flu symptoms.

You can also take elderberry supplements as gummies, tablets, or syrup.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Elderberry is used to:

- Prevent and treat symptoms of cold and flu
- Boost the immune system
- Reduce inflammation (swelling)
- Lower cholesterol
- Relieve constipation (having fewer bowel movements than usual)

Elderberry also has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

It's generally safe to use elderberry in food and tea. But talk with your healthcare providers before taking elderberry supplements.

Herbal supplements are stronger than the herbs you would use in cooking. They can also interact with some medications and affect how they work. For more information, read the "What else do I need to know?" section below.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of using raw elderberries can include:

- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- Dizziness (feeling faint, woozy, weak or unsteady)
- Numbness (loss of feeling or sensation in a part of your body)

What else do I need to know?

- Raw or unripe elderberries have chemicals that can be harmful. It's important to cook them well before eating.
- Don't eat elderberry leaves and stems. They may have harmful chemicals.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you're taking laxatives (medications to help you have a bowel movement). Elderberry can increase their 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.

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