



## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Huanglian

This information describes the common uses of Huanglian, 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?

Data are lacking on whether huanglian can help prevent or treat cancer.

Derived from the rhizome of the perennial herb *Coptis chinensis*, huanglian is used in traditional Chinese medicine for diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal fullness, jaundice, high fever, toothache, diabetes, and eczema.

Preclinical studies suggest antimicrobial, antidiabetic, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anticancer effects. Alkaloids that include **berberine** are considered to be the active components.

Studies in humans are quite limited. Preliminary data suggest huanglian and berberine may lower blood sugar levels. Well-designed clinical trials are needed.

## What are the potential uses and benefits?

- **To treat infections**

Lab studies suggest that berberine, a compound in huanglian, stops the growth of bacteria. Human data are lacking.

- **To treat diarrhea and other GI symptoms**  
Lab studies support this claim, but clinical data are lacking.
- **To lower high blood pressure**  
Lab studies support this claim, but human data are needed.

## What else do I need to know?

### Do Not Take if:

- You are taking CYP450 substrate drugs: Huanglian may increase the risk of side effects from these drugs. However, another study suggests huanglian can also induce CYP3A4, which may decrease the concentration of drugs metabolized by this enzyme. Clinical significance is not known.

### Special Point:

- Huanglian displaces bilirubin and should not be administered to jaundiced neonates.
- Berberine-containing botanicals may prolong QTc in patients with underlying heart disease.

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.

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