



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Lavender

This information describes the common uses of Lavender, 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?

Several studies suggest lavender may be helpful for anxiety, depression, and to improve sleep. In studies that use massage along with lavender aromatherapy, massage may be more responsible for some of the benefits.

Lavender has a long history as an herbal remedy in traditional medicine to improve mood and as a sleep aid. Several studies suggest that lavender may reduce anxiety, depression and pain, and improve sleep, but additional studies are needed. In other studies where lavender is used with massage, benefits may be due to the massage, rather than the lavender itself.

Lavender can cause allergic skin reactions and may increase sedative effects. It may also cause enlarged breasts in boys. Because it has weak hormonal activities, long-term oral or topical use of lavender should be avoided in patients with hormone-sensitive cancers.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- **Anxiety**

Some oral lavender formulations have been shown to relieve anxiety, but additional studies that confirm these effects are needed.

- **Cancer treatment**

Lab experiments have identified some properties in lavender that may be helpful against cancer, but no studies have been conducted in humans. A compound called **POH** that may have come from lavender or other plants was developed as a nasal spray and showed some benefit in palliative care patients with recurrent gliomas.

- **Cancer symptom control**

Lavender did not reduce anxiety during radiation treatment. Two studies that used lavender **aromatherapy** along with **massage** did not find an increased benefit because of the use of lavender. A hospital that allowed the use of aromasticks found that lavender was among the most popular, did not disturb others, and improved breathing and relaxation. Because lavender has weak hormonal effects, long-term oral or topical use should be avoided in patients with hormonal cancers.

- **Depression**

Several studies show that lavender may help with depression, but additional studies that confirm these effects are needed.

- **Insomnia**

Several studies show that lavender can improve sleep. For one study of lavender **aromatherapy** with **massage** in cancer patients, the massage itself was thought to be responsible for the benefits.

- **Migraines**

One study showed that inhaling lavender oil may reduce migraine headaches.

- **Pain**

A few studies show that lavender oil is effective in treating chronic pain, but the effects are not long-lasting. In two studies with children, inhaling lavender lowered heart rate and pain medication use. Other types of pain

relieved with the use of lavender include patients in labor and those who have suffered burns.

- **Spasms**

One study showed inhaled lavender relieved menstrual cramps and emotional symptoms, but the effects did not last long.

What are the side effects?

- **Oral:** Nausea, belching, confusion
- **Topical:** Allergic skin reactions and sensitivity to sunlight

Although lavender appears to be well tolerated, it may have weak hormonal effects.

Case Reports

Excessive breast development in preteen boys and early breast development in girls were reported with repeated application of lavender and [tea tree oils](#), as well as perfumes with lavender as a main component.

What else do I need to know?

Do Not Take if:

- **You are pregnant and nursing:** Excessive internal use of lavender should be avoided.
- **You are allergic to lavender:** Skin rash has been reported.
- **You have a hormone-sensitive cancer:** In lab studies, lavender showed weak estrogenic and antiandrogenic activities, and it is unclear whether this would lead to any positive or negative effects with long-term oral or topical use.
- **You are taking sedatives or hypnotic drugs:** Lavender may increase their effects.
- **You are taking CNS depressants, anticonvulsants:** Lavender may increase narcotic and sedative 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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