



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Mistletoe (European)

This information describes the common uses of Mistletoe (European), 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?

Mistletoe is a plant that grows on different types of trees. For example, mistletoe can grow on apple, oak, or pine trees. The leaves, berries, and stem of the mistletoe plant are used in traditional medicine for a variety of issues.

Mistletoe extracts come in supplements as capsules, liquid extracts, teas, and powder. Mistletoe injections are used in scientific research.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Mistletoe is used to:

- Treat asthma (a condition in which your airways narrow and swell, which makes it difficult to breathe)
- Treat epilepsy (a brain disorder that causes people to have seizures)
- Treat headaches
- Treat arthritis

Mistletoe has other uses, but doctors haven't studied them to see if they work.

Talk with your healthcare provider before taking mistletoe supplements. Herbal supplements are stronger than the herbs you would use in cooking.

Supplements 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 mistletoe injections include:

- Fever
- Chills

- High white blood cell counts
- Reaction at injection site (swelling, reddening of skin)
- Hypersensitivity (when your immune system overreacts to a substance)

What else do I need to know?

- Talk with your healthcare provider if you're pregnant. Mistletoe may increase your risk of abortion.
- Do not eat raw mistletoe. It can cause vomiting, seizures, slow heart rate, and even death.
- Mistletoe is used as a cancer treatment in Europe. But the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not approved mistletoe as a treatment for cancer or any other medical condition.

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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