



## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Neem

This information describes the common uses of Neem, 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?

Neem has been used in traditional and Ayurvedic medicine, but studies on safety and effectiveness are lacking.

Neem is an herb that is used as food, in traditional medicine for skin conditions, and for stomach ailments. It is also used as a disinfectant against pests and parasites. Some lab studies show that neem extracts have anticancer activities by inhibiting cancer cell growth. However, there are no human studies showing it to be an effective cancer treatment.

Although rare, serious adverse reactions caused by swallowing neem oil have been reported in both children and adults.

## What are the potential uses and benefits?

- **Ulcers**

A small study found neem bark extract effective in reducing stomach acid secretion without any adverse effects. More studies are needed in humans.

- **Cancer**

In vitro studies suggest that neem can inhibit cancer cell growth. It has not been studied as a treatment for cancer.

- **Antiviral**

Neem extract increased CD4+ cell count and bodyweight in a small number of HIV+ volunteers. More studies are needed.

- **Oral hygiene**

Neem can reduce oral plaque and bacterial count. It is used as mouth rinse in traditional medicine.

## What are the side effects?

**Oral (Rare case reports):** Vomiting, drowsiness, diarrhea, vision loss, toxicity to the nervous system, poisoning, seizures, and brain damage from swallowing neem oil.

**Topical:** Rash; itchy, dry or reddened skin

## What else do I need to know?

### Patient Warnings:

Swallowing neem oil has caused severe poisoning in both children and adults.

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.

Neem - Last updated on April 11, 2023

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