



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Sassafras

This information describes the common uses of Sassafras, 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?

Safrole and oil of sassafras has been banned as a food additive by the FDA due to carcinogenic concerns, and should not be used to treat medical conditions.

Sassafras is a perennial tree native to Eastern United States. Native Americans used infusions made from the root bark as a remedy to treat fevers, diarrhea, and rheumatism. Sassafras was even used as a flavoring for root beer decades ago. However, sassafras contains safrole, a volatile oil, which has been classified as a likely carcinogen to humans, and banned as a food additive by the FDA.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

There is no scientific evidence to support the claims below:

- To detoxify
- For general health maintenance
- To reduce inflammation, including mucositis (sores in the mouth and throat)
- To treat arthritis

- To treat sprains
- To treat syphilis
- To treat urinary tract disorders

What are the side effects?

- Hot flashes
- Profuse perspiration

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

- Sassafras is classified as a carcinogenic substance. It caused liver cancer in laboratory animals. The risk of developing cancer increases with the amount consumed and duration of consumption.

Do Not Take if:

- Safrole and oil of sassafras has been banned as a food additive by the FDA due to carcinogenic concerns, and should not be used to treat any medical conditions.

Special Point:

- Sassafras was once used as flavoring agent in root beer and candies, but the Food and Drug Administration has prohibited the use of sassafras as a food additive due to its carcinogenic 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.

Sassafras - Last updated on June 20, 2023

All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center