



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Spilanthes acmella

This information describes the common uses of *Spilanthes acmella*, 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?

Spilanthes, also known as the “toothache plant”, may have numbing and pain-relieving effects, but human data are lacking.

Spilanthes is an herbaceous plant that belongs to the daisy family. It is recognized in traditional medicine throughout Asia and South America for a variety of properties including anti-inflammatory, diuretic, and aphrodisiac effects. The leaves are used as food sources. The flowers of *Spilanthes* have earned it the name “toothache plant” for their numbing and pain-relieving effects.

Spilanthes has also been noted to stimulate taste and improve saliva flow. Therefore, whether it could help side effects from cancer treatments such as dry mouth, mouth sores and inflammation, or changes in taste sensation may be of interest to researchers. However, very few studies have been conducted and none of them have yet been done in humans.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Toothache or gum infections

Lab studies suggest Spilanthes may protect against certain bacterial and dental infections, but there are no human data.

Sore throat or sore mouth

Lab studies suggest Spilanthes may have a numbing effect and reduce inflammation, but studies have not yet been conducted in humans.

Inflammation and wound healing

Animal studies suggest that compounds in Spilanthes may protect against or heal ulcers.

What are the side effects?

In general, human data are lacking.

Case report

Painful lip swelling: In a 42-year-old man who went to the emergency department. The suspected cause was an appetizer of “Szechuan buttons” ingested several days earlier, in the absence of any other explanation.

What else do I need to know?

Do Not Take if:

- You are using **diuretics (water pills)** for blood pressure or **swelling**: Animal studies show *Spilanthes* can promote urination and may increase the risk of adverse effects.
- You have **prostate cancer**: Animal studies show that *Spilanthes* stimulates male hormone production, especially at high doses. This may affect the actions of drugs used to treat prostate cancer.
- You are **pregnant**: Animal studies suggest the potential for birth defects with high doses of this botanical.

Special Point:

Spilanthes, an herbaceous plant that grows in tropical and subtropical regions, should not be confused with jambu madu or wax jambu, which are names for the wax apple fruit tree that is widely cultivated in Southeast Asia.

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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