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There is limited mixed evidence on whether wild yam might be helpful for menopausal symptoms.

Wild yam contains a compound called diosgenin that mimics estrogen and progesterone in animals. Diosgenin can be converted into active steroid compounds in the lab.

Studies in humans are quite limited. Data show mixed results on menopausal symptoms in a few small studies that use different species and formulas of wild yam extract. Another small study suggests that increasing yam intake through diet may improve sex hormone and cholesterol levels.

A lab study showed that wild yam extract has weak hormonal activity against human breast cancer cells, but this does not mean it can prevent or treat cancer.

More studies are needed to confirm whether wild yam or its extract actually has any benefits. Because wild yam has estrogenic effects, patients with hormone-sensitive cancers should talk to their physicians before consumption.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To relieve menopausal symptoms

Wild yam has had mixed results in small studies. More research is needed.

- To improve cough

Supporting evidence is lacking.

- To treat rheumatoid arthritis

Supporting evidence is lacking.

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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