

herbs at a glance

Saw Palmetto



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This fact sheet provides basic information about saw palmetto—common names, what the science says, potential side effects and cautions, and resources for more information.

Common Names—saw palmetto, American dwarf palm tree, cabbage palm

Latin Names—*Serenoa repens*, *Sabal serrulata*

Saw palmetto is a small palm tree native to the eastern United States. Its fruit was used medicinally by the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Saw palmetto is used as a traditional or folk remedy for urinary symptoms associated with an enlarged prostate gland (also called benign prostatic hyperplasia, or BPH), as well as for chronic pelvic pain, bladder disorders, decreased sex drive, hair loss, hormone imbalances, and prostate cancer.

The ripe fruit of saw palmetto is used in several forms, including ground and dried fruit or whole berries. It is available as liquid extracts, tablets, capsules, and as an infusion or a tea.

What the Science Says

- Several small studies suggest that saw palmetto may be effective for treating BPH symptoms. However, a 2011 NCCAM-cofunded study in 369 older men demonstrated that saw palmetto extract administered at up to three times the standard daily dose (320 mg) did not reduce the urinary symptoms associated with BPH more than placebo. In addition, a 2009 review of the research concluded that saw palmetto has not been shown to be more effective than placebo for this use.
- In 2006, an NIH-funded study of 225 men with moderate-to-severe BPH found no improvement with 320 mg of saw palmetto daily for 1 year versus placebo.
- There is not enough scientific evidence to support the use of saw palmetto for reducing the size of an enlarged prostate or for any other conditions.

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- Saw palmetto does not appear to affect readings of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels. PSA is a protein produced by cells in the prostate. The PSA test is used to screen for prostate cancer and to monitor patients who have had prostate cancer.
- An NCCAM-funded study is looking at the effects of saw palmetto extract on prostate cancer cells.

Side Effects and Cautions

- Saw palmetto appears to be well tolerated by most users. It may cause mild side effects, including stomach discomfort.
- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary health practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care. For tips about talking with your health care providers about complementary and alternative medicine, see NCCAM's Time to Talk campaign at nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/.

Sources

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For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at nccam.nih.gov and view *Using Dietary Supplements Wisely* (nccam.nih.gov/health/supplements/wiseuse.htm).

NCCAM Clearinghouse

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Saw Palmetto Listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/971.html

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