

herbs at a glance

Asian Ginseng



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

Common Names—Asian ginseng, ginseng, Chinese ginseng, Korean ginseng, Asiatic ginseng

Latin Name—*Panax ginseng*

Asian ginseng is native to China and Korea and has been used in various systems of medicine for many centuries. Asian ginseng is one of several types of true ginseng (another is American ginseng, *Panax quinquefolius*). The herb called Siberian ginseng or eleuthero (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) is not a true ginseng.

Treatment claims for Asian ginseng are numerous and include the use of the herb to support overall health and boost the immune system. Traditional and folk uses of ginseng include improving the health of people recovering from illness; increasing a sense of well-being and stamina; improving both mental and physical performance; treating erectile dysfunction, hepatitis C, and symptoms related to menopause; and lowering blood glucose and controlling blood pressure.

The root of Asian ginseng contains active chemical components called ginsenosides (or panaxosides) that are thought to be responsible for the herb's claimed medicinal properties. The root is dried and used to make tablets or capsules, extracts, and teas, as well as creams or other preparations for external use.

What the Science Says

- Some studies have shown that Asian ginseng may lower blood glucose. Other studies indicate possible beneficial effects on immune function.
- Although Asian ginseng has been widely studied for a variety of uses, research results to date do not conclusively support health claims associated with the herb. Only a few large, high-quality clinical trials have been conducted. Most evidence is preliminary—i.e., based on laboratory research or small clinical trials.
- NCCAM supports studies to better understand the use of Asian ginseng. Areas of recent NCCAM-funded research include the herb's potential role in treating insulin resistance, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease.

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Side Effects and Cautions

- Short-term use of ginseng at recommended doses appears to be safe for most people. Some sources suggest that prolonged use might cause side effects.
- The most common side effects are headaches and sleep and gastrointestinal problems.
- Asian ginseng can cause allergic reactions.
- There have been reports of breast tenderness, menstrual irregularities, and high blood pressure associated with Asian ginseng products, but these products' components were not analyzed, so effects may have been due to another herb or drug in the product.
- Asian ginseng may lower levels of blood sugar; this effect may be seen more in people with diabetes. Therefore, people with diabetes should use extra caution with Asian ginseng, especially if they are using medicines to lower blood sugar or taking other herbs, such as bitter melon and fenugreek, that are also thought to lower blood sugar.
- 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).

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Ginseng Listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/1000.html

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