

herbs at a glance

Chasteberry



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

Common Names—chasteberry, chaste-tree berry, vitex, monk's pepper

Latin Name—*Vitex agnus-castus*

Chasteberry is the fruit of the chaste tree, a small shrub-like tree native to Central Asia and the Mediterranean region. The name is thought to come from a belief that the plant promoted chastity—it is reported that monks in the Middle Ages used chasteberry to decrease sexual desire.

Chasteberry has been used for thousands of years, mostly by women to ease menstrual problems and to stimulate the production of breast milk. Currently, chasteberry is still used as a folk or traditional remedy for menstrual problems, such as premenstrual syndrome, as well as for symptoms of menopause, some types of infertility, and acne.

The dried ripe chasteberry is used to prepare liquid extracts or solid extracts that are put into capsules and tablets.

What the Science Says

- A few studies of chasteberry for premenstrual syndrome have found a benefit. However, most of these studies were not well designed, so firm conclusions cannot be drawn.
- Small studies suggest that chasteberry may help with breast pain and some types of infertility, but there is not enough reliable scientific evidence to determine whether chasteberry has any effect on these conditions.
- NCCAM has funded studies on chasteberry. Projects have explored how chasteberry works in the body and how it might affect symptoms of premenstrual syndrome.

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Side Effects and Cautions

- Chasteberry has not been associated with serious side effects. However, it can cause gastrointestinal problems, acne-like rashes, and dizziness.
- Chasteberry may affect certain hormone levels. Women who are pregnant or taking birth control pills or who have a hormone-sensitive condition (such as breast cancer) should not use chasteberry.
- Because chasteberry may affect the dopamine system in the brain, people taking dopamine-related medications, such as certain antipsychotic drugs and Parkinson's disease medications, should avoid using chasteberry.
- 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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