

herbs at a glance

Cranberry



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

Common Names—cranberry, American cranberry, bog cranberry

Latin Name—*Vaccinium macrocarpon*

Cranberries are the fruit of a native plant of North America. These red berries are used in foods and in herbal products. Historically, cranberry fruits and leaves were used for a variety of problems, such as wounds, urinary disorders, diarrhea, diabetes, stomach ailments, and liver problems. More recently, cranberry has been used as a folk or traditional remedy for urinary tract infections or *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) infections that can lead to stomach ulcers, or to prevent dental plaque. Cranberry has also been reported to have antioxidant and anticancer activity.

The berries are used to produce beverages and many other food products, as well as dietary supplements in the form of extracts, capsules, or tablets.

What the Science Says

- There is some evidence that cranberry can help to **prevent** urinary tract infections; however, the evidence is not definitive, and more research is needed. Cranberry has not been shown to be effective as a **treatment** for an existing urinary tract infection.
- Research shows that components found in cranberry may prevent bacteria, such as *E. coli*, from clinging to the cells along the walls of the urinary tract and causing infection. There is also preliminary evidence that cranberry may reduce the ability of *H. pylori* bacteria to live in the stomach and cause ulcers.
- Findings from a few laboratory studies suggest that cranberry may have antioxidant properties and may also be able to reduce dental plaque (a cause of gum disease).
- NCCAM is funding studies of cranberry, primarily to better understand its effects on urinary tract infection. The Office of Dietary Supplements and other National Institutes of Health (NIH) agencies are also supporting cranberry research; for example, the National Institute on Aging is funding a laboratory study of potential anti-aging effects.

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Side Effects and Cautions

- Drinking cranberry juice products appears to be safe, although excessive amounts could cause gastrointestinal upset or diarrhea.
- People who think they have a urinary tract infection should see a health care provider for proper diagnosis and treatment. Cranberry products should not be used to treat infection.
- There are some indications that cranberry should be used cautiously by people who take blood-thinning drugs (such as warfarin), medications that affect the liver, or aspirin.
- 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

Cranberry. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at www.naturaldatabase.com on May 11, 2009.

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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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Web site: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements

Web site: www.ods.od.nih.gov

NIH National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus

Cranberry Listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/958.html

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