

herbs at a glance

Lavender



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

Common Names—lavender, English lavender, garden lavender

Latin Name—*Lavandula angustifolia*

Lavender is native to the Mediterranean region. It was used in ancient Egypt as part of the process for mummifying bodies. Lavender's use as a bath additive originated in Persia, Greece, and Rome. The herb's name comes from the Latin *lavare*, which means "to wash."

Historically, lavender was used as an antiseptic and for mental health purposes. Today, lavender is used as a folk or traditional remedy for anxiety, restlessness, insomnia, depression, headache, upset stomach, and hair loss.

Lavender is most commonly used in aromatherapy, in which the scent of the essential oil from the flowers is inhaled. The essential oil can also be diluted with another oil and applied to the skin. Dried lavender flowers can be used to make teas or liquid extracts that can be taken by mouth.

What the Science Says

- There is little scientific evidence of lavender's effectiveness for most health uses.
- Small studies on lavender for anxiety show mixed results.
- Some preliminary results indicate that lavender oil, combined with oils from other herbs, may help with hair loss from a condition called alopecia areata.

Side Effects and Cautions

- Topical use of diluted lavender oil or use of lavender as aromatherapy is generally considered safe for most adults. However, applying lavender oil to the skin can cause irritation. There have been reports that topical use can cause breast growth in young boys.

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- Lavender oil may be poisonous if taken by mouth.
- When lavender teas and extracts are taken by mouth, they may cause headache, changes in appetite, and constipation.
- Using lavender with sedative medications may increase drowsiness.
- 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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Web site: www.ods.od.nih.gov

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Lavender Listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/838.html

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