

Horse Chestnut

This fact sheet provides basic information about horse chestnut—common names, uses, potential side effects, and resources for more information. Horse chestnut trees are native to the Balkan Peninsula (for example, Greece and Bulgaria), but grow throughout the northern hemisphere. Although horse chestnut is sometimes called buckeye, it should not be confused with the Ohio or California buckeye trees, which are related but not the same species.

Common Names—horse chestnut, buckeye, Spanish chestnut

Latin Name—*Aesculus hippocastanum*

What It Is Used For

- For centuries, horse chestnut seeds, leaves, bark, and flowers have been used for a variety of conditions and diseases.
- Horse chestnut seed extract has been used to treat chronic venous insufficiency (a condition in which the veins in the legs do not efficiently return blood to the heart). This condition is associated with varicose veins, pain, ankle swelling, feelings of heaviness, itching, and nighttime leg cramping.
- The seed extract has also been used for hemorrhoids.

How It Is Used

Horse chestnut seed extract standardized to contain 16 to 20 percent aescin (escin), the active ingredient, is the most commonly used form. Topical preparations have also been used.

What the Science Says

- Small studies have found that horse chestnut seed extract is beneficial in treating chronic venous insufficiency and is as effective as wearing compression stockings.
- There is not enough scientific evidence to support the use of horse chestnut seed, leaf, or bark for any other conditions.

Side Effects and Cautions

- Homemade preparations of horse chestnut should not be used. Raw horse chestnut seeds, leaves, bark, and flowers contain esculin, which is poisonous.
- When properly processed, horse chestnut seed extract contains little or no esculin and is considered generally safe. However, the extract can cause some side effects, including itching, nausea, or gastrointestinal upset.

- Tell your health care providers about any herb or dietary supplement you are using, including horse chestnut. This helps to ensure safe and coordinated care.

Sources

Horse chestnut. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturaldatabase.com> on May 3, 2006.

Horse chestnut. Natural Standard Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturalstandard.com> on May 3, 2006.

Horse chestnut seed extract. In: Blumenthal M, Goldberg A, Brinckman J, eds. *Herbal Medicine Expanded Commission E Monographs*. Newton, MA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2000:201-204.

For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at nccam.nih.gov and view:

- “What’s in the Bottle? An Introduction to Dietary Supplements” at nccam.nih.gov/health/bottle/
- “Herbal Supplements: Consider Safety, Too” at nccam.nih.gov/health/supplement-safety/

NCCAM Clearinghouse

Toll-free in the U.S.: 1-888-644-6226

TTY (for deaf and hard-of-hearing callers): 1-866-464-3615

E-mail: info@nccam.nih.gov

CAM on PubMed

Web site: nccam.nih.gov/camonpubmed/

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements

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

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