

Asian Ginseng

This fact sheet provides basic information about the herb Asian ginseng—common names, uses, potential side effects, and resources for more information. 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*). An herb called Siberian ginseng or eleuthero (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) is not a true ginseng.

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

Latin Name—*Panax ginseng*

What It Is Used For

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 modern uses of ginseng include:

- Improving the health of people recovering from illness
- Increasing a sense of well-being and stamina, and improving both mental and physical performance
- Treating erectile dysfunction, hepatitis C, and symptoms related to menopause
- Lowering blood glucose and controlling blood pressure

How It Is Used

The root of Asian ginseng contains active chemical components called ginsenosides (or panaxosides) that are thought to be responsible for the herb's 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.
- To date, research results on Asian ginseng are not conclusive enough to prove health claims associated with the herb. Only a handful of large clinical trials on Asian ginseng have been conducted. Most studies have been small or have had flaws in design and reporting. Some claims for health benefits have been based only on studies conducted in animals.
- NCCAM is supporting research studies to better understand the use of Asian ginseng. NCCAM is studying how Asian ginseng interacts with other herbs and drugs and exploring its potential to treat chronic lung infection, impaired glucose tolerance, and Alzheimer's disease.

Side Effects and Cautions

- When taken by mouth, ginseng is usually well tolerated. Some sources suggest that its use be limited to 3 months because of concerns about the development of side effects.
- The most common side effects are headaches and sleep and gastrointestinal problems.
- Ginseng can cause allergic reactions.
- There have been reports of breast tenderness, menstrual irregularities, and high blood pressure associated with ginseng products, but these products' components were not analyzed, so effects may have been due to another herb or drug in the product.
- 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.
- It is important to inform your health care providers about any herb or dietary supplement you are using, including Asian ginseng. This helps to ensure safe and coordinated care.

Sources

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Ginseng, *Panax*. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturaldatabase.com> on August 18, 2005.

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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: 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: www.nlm.nih.gov/nccam/camonpubmed.html

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements

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

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