

Cranberry

This fact sheet provides basic information about cranberry—common names, uses, potential side effects, and resources for more information. Cranberries are the fruit of a native plant of North America. These red berries are used in foods and in herbal products.

Common Names—cranberry, American cranberry, bog cranberry

Latin Name—*Vaccinium macrocarpon*

What It Is Used For

- Historically, cranberry fruits and leaves were used for a variety of problems, such as wounds, urinary disorders, diarrhea, diabetes, stomach ailments, and liver problems.
- Recently, cranberry products have been used in the hope of preventing or treating urinary tract infections or *Helicobacter pylori* infections that can lead to stomach ulcers, or to prevent dental plaque. Cranberry has also been reported to have antioxidant and anticancer activity.

How It Is Used

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

What the Science Says

- Some studies testing cranberry products for their ability to **prevent** urinary tract infections have shown promise. These studies have generally been small in size, and some were not randomized or controlled; therefore, the results are not conclusive.
- Cranberry products have not been adequately tested to see if they can be used to help **treat** 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. However, the mechanism of action of cranberry is not fully understood.
- NCCAM, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, and the National Institute for Dental and Craniofacial Research are funding studies to understand whether and how cranberry might work to:
 - Prevent urinary tract infection
 - Prevent the formation of dental plaque

Side Effects and Cautions

- Eating cranberry products in food amounts appears to be safe, but drinking excessive amounts of juice 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.
- It is important to inform your health care providers about any herb or dietary supplement you are using, including cranberry. This helps to ensure safe and coordinated care.

Sources

Cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*) Aiton. In: Coates P, Blackman M, Cragg G, et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of Dietary Supplements*. New York, NY: Marcel Dekker; 2005:143-149. Accessed at <http://www.dekker.com> on September 8, 2005.

Cranberry. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturaldatabase.com> on September 8, 2005.

Cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*). Natural Standard Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturalstandard.com> on September 8, 2005.

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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