

herbs at a glance

Chamomile



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

Common Names—chamomile, German chamomile

Latin Names—*Matricaria recutita*, *Chamomilla recutita*

Two types of chamomile have been used for health conditions: German chamomile and Roman chamomile. While the two kinds are thought to have similar effects on the body, the German variety is more commonly used in the United States and is the focus of this fact sheet.

Chamomile has been widely used in children and adults for thousands of years for a variety of health conditions. Today, chamomile is used as a folk or traditional remedy for sleeplessness, anxiety, and gastrointestinal conditions such as upset stomach, gas, and diarrhea. It is also used topically for skin conditions and for mouth ulcers resulting from cancer treatment.

The flowering tops of the chamomile plant are used to make teas, liquid extracts, capsules, or tablets. The herb can also be applied to the skin as a cream or an ointment, or used as a mouth rinse.

What the Science Says

- Chamomile has not been well studied in people so there is little evidence to support its use for any condition.
- Some early studies point to chamomile's possible benefits for certain skin conditions and for mouth ulcers caused by chemotherapy or radiation.
- In combination with other herbs, chamomile may be of some benefit for upset stomach, for diarrhea in children, and for infants with colic.
- NCCAM-funded research includes studies of chamomile for generalized anxiety disorder and abdominal pain caused by children's bowel disorders.

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Side Effects and Cautions

- There are reports of allergic reactions in people who have eaten or come into contact with chamomile products. Reactions can include skin rashes, throat swelling, shortness of breath, and anaphylaxis (a life-threatening allergic reaction).
- People are more likely to experience allergic reactions to chamomile if they are allergic to related plants in the daisy family, which includes ragweed, chrysanthemums, marigolds, and daisies.
- 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 to 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

Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*, *Chamaemelum nobile*). Natural Standard Database Web site. Accessed at www.naturalstandard.com on May 8, 2009.

Chamomile flower, German. In: Blumenthal M, Goldberg A, Brinckman J, eds. *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E Monographs*. Newton, MA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2000:57-61.

German chamomile. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at www.naturaldatabase.com on May 8, 2009.

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

Roman Chamomile Listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/752.html

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