

Patient Fact Sheet

BILBERRY

BILBERRY (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) is a berry plant that grows in Europe and North America. It is related to the cranberry. The berries, and sometimes the leaves, are used as herbal medicine. They are available in capsules and as whole dried berries which can be eaten or used for tea. Standardized extracts are also available. The main active ingredients are called *anthocyanosides* and *bioflavonoids*.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

- ◆ Pilots in World War II believed that eating bilberry jam helped their night vision, and bilberry is still used for this purpose.
- ◆ It is also used in Europe for other eye problems including cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, and macular degeneration.
- ◆ It is sometimes recommended to help circulation in people with problems such as easy bruising, hemorrhoids, and varicose veins.
- ◆ Dried bilberries are sometimes used for diarrhea.
- ◆ Bilberry leaves are sometimes used for diabetes.

WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ In some small Italian studies, bilberry extracts improved night vision and adjustment to changes in light.
- ◆ Some Italian studies suggest that bilberry extracts might prevent cataracts or diabetic retinopathy from getting worse, but these were small studies that did not compare bilberry to a placebo; more studies are needed.
- ◆ There are no studies of bilberry's use for other eye problems including macular degeneration.
- ◆ Bilberry extracts may help decrease problems like easy bruising, hemorrhoids, and varicose veins, but more studies are needed.
- ◆ There are no studies in humans of bilberry's use for diabetes or diarrhea.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

- ◆ Large amounts of bilberry may cause upset stomach.
- ◆ Large amounts of bilberry extract might prevent the blood from clotting.

No long-term problems have been found from bilberry.

(continued)

IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

In the amounts that would be used as food, bilberries are believed to be safe for children and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. However, there are no studies of the safety of large amounts of bilberries, or concentrated bilberry extracts, for children or pregnant women. No problems have been reported.

WILL IT INTERFERE WITH MY OTHER MEDICATIONS OR MY MEDICAL CONDITION?

- ◆ Bilberry might lower blood sugars in people with diabetes or hypoglycemia, or people who take medications that lower their blood sugar.
- ◆ Bilberry may keep the blood from clotting, so it may not be safe for people with bleeding problems, people who take other herbs or medicines (including aspirin) that prevent blood clotting, or people expecting to have surgery.

WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

Doses vary, but some herbalists recommend the following doses for adults:

- ◆ Standardized extract containing 25% anthocyanosides: 80 to 160 mg two to three times per day, by mouth.
- ◆ Capsules of dried, powdered bilberries (not extract): 1000 mg twice per day, by mouth.
- ◆ Dried berries: 1 to 2 teaspoons twice daily, or
- ◆ Tea: 1 to 2 teaspoons in one cup of water, boiled for ten minutes and strained, taken up to six times daily.

Follow your health care provider's instructions.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

- ◆ Always tell your doctor or nurse practitioner if you are taking any herb, and before starting any new herb. Your health care provider needs to know everything you are taking to help you make decisions about your health care. Herbs can cause problems with other herbs, dietary supplements, or medications.
- ◆ Herbal products may contain chemicals or other species of plants.

SEE ALSO:

Bilberry Complete Monograph: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/bilberry/bilberry.pdf>

Bilberry Clinician Information Summary: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/bilberry/bilberry.cis.pdf>