

## Patient Fact Sheet

# BLESSED THISTLE

**BLESSED THISTLE** (*Cnicus benedictus*) is a thistle plant native to southern Europe. The leaves, stems, and flowers are used as herbal medicine. Blessed thistle has been used traditionally for several medical problems, but there are no research studies showing whether it helps. It is available as the dried herb for making tea, and in alcohol tinctures. The main active ingredient is called *cnicin*.

### WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

- ◆ Blessed thistle is mostly used for upset stomach, digestive problems and poor appetite.
- ◆ It is also used as a liver tonic, to strengthen the liver and increase the flow of bile.
- ◆ It is sometimes added to the anti-cancer herbal mixture, Essiac.

### WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

There are no studies of blessed thistle's effects in people.

### WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

- ◆ Allergic reactions, including rash, itching, and hives, are possible.
- ◆ Upset stomach and vomiting are possible with large doses of blessed thistle.

No long-term problems have been found from taking blessed thistle.

### IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

Blessed thistle is not traditionally used for small children. It is also not recommended for pregnant women because it is thought to cause contractions. There is no information about the safety of blessed thistle for women who are breastfeeding.

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

- ◆ Blessed thistle is not recommended for people with stomach or intestinal irritation, or stomach ulcers.
- ◆ Tinctures are not recommended for children, alcoholics, or people with severe liver disease because they contain alcohol.
- ◆ There is no information about blessed thistle's interactions with any medication.

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## WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

Typical doses for adults are:

- ◆ Tea made with 1-2 tsp of dried herb in 1 cup boiling water, steeped for 5-15 minutes and taken 2-3 times per day before meals. The tea is very bitter.
- ◆ 1-2 milliliters (mL) of alcohol tincture three times per day.

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:

Blessed Thistle Complete Monograph:

<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/blessedthistle/blessedthistle.pdf>

Blessed Thistle Clinician Information Summary:

<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/blessedthistle/blessedthistle.cis.pdf>

OnHealth.com: <http://onhealth.com/ch1/resource/herbs/item,15953.asp>