

The Longwood Herbal Task Force
(<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/default.htm>) and
The Center for Holistic Pediatric Education and Research

Clinician Information Summary

CAT'S CLAW

(*Uncaria tomentosa*)

SUMMARY

The primary traditional uses of cat's claw in Peru are as an anti-inflammatory, contraceptive and anti-cancer remedy. The research on cat's claw in animal and *in vitro* studies is very preliminary; there are no controlled trials evaluating its clinical effects in humans. Products marketed as cat's claw may include a variety of related and unrelated species with widely varying amounts of the active alkaloids or may be contaminated with other species. Herbalists recommend that cat's claw be avoided during pregnancy, lactation, or in children less than three years old; patients undergoing grafts and organ transplants; hemophiliacs; or patients receiving vaccines, sera, immune globulin, insulin or thymus extracts. Aside from mild nausea, it appears to have few side effects; there is one case report of acute renal failure in an adult with systemic lupus erythematosus who took cat's claw. Poisoning is possible due to contamination with *Acacia gregii*, which contains a cyanide-based compound.

POPULAR USES: Cancer remedy (sometimes included in Essiac formulas); immune stimulant (HIV disease); traditional remedy for arthritis, gastritis, atopic disorders.

CHEMICAL CONSTITUENTS: Oxindole sesquiterpene alkaloids, phytosterols, quinovic acid glycosides, catechin tannins, flavonoids. Amounts of active alkaloids vary tremendously between species and by growing, harvesting and processing conditions.

SCIENTIFIC DATA

In Vitro: Pentacyclic oxindole alkaloids are immunostimulatory; the alkaloids and triterpenes exhibit antileukemic activity *in vitro*. Quinovic acid glycosides and phytosterols are anti-

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inflammatory. Some phytosterols inhibit cholesterol synthesis. Some glycosides exhibit antiviral effects.

In Animals: In rat's paw models, phytosterols had anti-inflammatory effects. Mice given root bark extracts exhibited increased macrophage activity.

In Humans: Historical and case series report beneficial effects on HIV and cancer; patients received other therapies concurrently. There are no reported randomized clinical trials evaluating any effects of cat's claw.

TOXICITY AND SIDE EFFECTS

Side effects are rare and usually mild. There is one case report of acute renal failure in a woman with systemic lupus erythematosus taking cat's claw. Diarrhea may occur in the first few days of treatment. Misidentification of species may lead to side effects such as hypotension and sedation. Poisoning is possible due to contamination with *Acacia gregii*, which contains a cyanide-based compound.

Interactions with other medications: Herbalists recommend avoiding concurrent use with insulin, thymus extracts, vaccines, and immune globulin or sera. No clinical studies.

Contraindications: Typically contraindicated in patients with autoimmune disorders, multiple sclerosis, tuberculosis, and organ transplants. No clinical studies.

Pregnancy: Traditionally contraindicated due to use as an abortifacient. No clinical studies.

Lactation: No clinical studies.

Pediatric use: No clinical studies or systematic surveillance.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES OR RESOURCES

- NapralertSM, maintained by the Program for Collaborative Research in the Pharmaceutical Sciences in the Department of Medicinal Chemistry at the University of Illinois at Chicago
- HOME: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/default.htm>