

## Patient Fact Sheet

# DEVIL'S CLAW

**DEVIL'S CLAW** (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) grows in Southern Africa, where people have long used it to treat joint pain and digestive problems. It is available as the powdered root for making tea, in capsules or tablets, and as a tincture (concentrated in alcohol). The tea has a very bitter taste. The main active ingredient is called *harpagoside*.

### WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

Devil's claw is commonly used to:

- ◆ Decrease pain from arthritis and other joint problems.
- ◆ Treat other pains, including back pain, headache, and menstrual pain.
- ◆ Stimulate the appetite.

### WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ Several studies have shown that Devil's claw can improve pain from arthritis, tendonitis, and low back problems.
- ◆ The amount of pain relief depends on the amount of active ingredient, which varies widely between products.
- ◆ One small study showed that Devil's claw may improve digestive problems like poor appetite, constipation and gas.

### WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Side effects are rare, but may include:

- ◆ Allergic reaction, including itching or hives.
- ◆ Upset stomach.
- ◆ Very rarely, headache or ringing in the ears.

No long-term problems have been found from taking Devil's claw

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

There are no studies to show whether Devil's claw is safe for children or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

(continued)

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

- ◆ Devil's claw is traditionally not used in people with stomach ulcers.
- ◆ It can stimulate the gallbladder, so it is not recommended for people with gallstones.
- ◆ It may interact with some heart medications, so heart patients should consult their doctor.
- ◆ Tinctures are not recommended for people with severe liver disease because they contain alcohol.

## **WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?**

- ◆ Doses for adults range from 400 to 750 mg of Devil's claw extract, or 0.5 to 1 ml of tincture, three times per day.
- ◆ Products vary widely. Look for products that are standardized to contain at least 1.2% harpagosides.
- ◆ The active ingredients in Devil's claw may be destroyed by stomach acid. Enteric coated products may be more effective.
- ◆ Doses for children are unknown.

Follow your health care provider's instructions.

## **WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?**

- ◆ It may take up to one month of regular dosing before Devil's claw causes improvement in pain.
- ◆ 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:**

Devil's Claw Complete Monograph: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/devilsclaw/devilsclaw.pdf>

Devil's Claw Clinician Information Summary:

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