

Patient Fact Sheet

EVENING PRIMROSE OIL

EVENING PRIMROSE is a wildflower that is now grown commercially. The oil from the seeds is used as medicine. It contains *linoleic acid*, an essential fatty acid, and *gamma linoleic acid* (GLA). Many products are standardized, meaning they contain at least 8% GLA. Evening primrose oil (EPO) is available in capsules.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

- ◆ Evening primrose oil (EPO) has been recommended for many different problems. It is commonly used for inflammatory and allergic problems like eczema, asthma, and arthritis.
- ◆ It is also commonly recommended for sore breasts before and during menstrual periods, and for menopausal symptoms like hot flashes.

WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ Studies in adults and children with **eczema** have had mixed results. In some studies, those who took evening primrose oil had an improvement in their eczema. Other studies showed no effect. If evening primrose oil does help people with eczema, the effect seems to be mild, and to need large doses for several weeks before there is any change.
- ◆ There is only one small study of evening primrose oil's use for **asthma**, and it was not helpful for the patients in that study.
- ◆ Several studies of EPO in people with **rheumatoid arthritis** had mixed results. Some showed no effect, but in others the patients had less pain and needed less pain medicine. There are no studies of its use in children with arthritis, or in other kinds of arthritis.
- ◆ Evening primrose oil can help some women who have **sore breasts** before and during their menstrual periods. There are no studies of its use for sore breasts in adolescents.
- ◆ It does not help hot flashes or other symptoms of **menopause**.
- ◆ In one study, evening primrose oil helped symptoms of **peripheral neuropathies** (nerve damage in the hands and feet) in diabetics.
- ◆ In one study, it decreased **high cholesterol levels**.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Side effects are rare and usually mild. Nausea, diarrhea, and headache are possible. No long-term problems have been found.

(continued)

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

There are no reported problems with taking evening primrose oil with any medical condition. There are no known interactions with other medicines.

IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

Evening primrose oil is usually considered safe for children and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, but you should talk with your doctor if you are pregnant and thinking about taking EPO.

WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

Typical doses are:

- ◆ For eczema: 4 to 8 grams per day by mouth for adults, and 2 to 4 grams per day for children, divided into 2 or 3 doses.
- ◆ For sore breasts before and during menstrual periods: 3 to 4 grams per day by mouth for adults.
- ◆ For rheumatoid arthritis: 1 to 2.8 grams of GLA (gamma linolenic acid) per day by mouth for adults. (This is the amount of GLA in 10 to 30 grams of evening primrose oil, but it is also available by itself.)

Capsules usually contain 500 or 1000 mg (0.5 or 1 gram) of evening primrose oil.

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 be contaminated with chemicals or other species of plants.

SEE ALSO:

- ◆ Evening Primrose Oil Complete Monograph:
<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/epo/epo.pdf>
- ◆ Evening Primrose Oil Clinician Information Summary:
<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/epo/epo.cis.pdf>