

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

## ESSIAC

### **SUMMARY**

Essiac herbal tea is one of the most commonly used complementary therapies for cancer in the United States and Canada. It has also gained some popularity as a treatment for other chronic and incurable conditions. Despite the plethora of testimonials concerning its use, there are no prospective controlled trials evaluating its effectiveness for any health condition. There are no reports of serious adverse effects with short term use. It is not recommended for use during pregnancy or lactation or in children less than two years old. Based on its constituent herbal ingredients, caution is suggested for use by patients with a history of renal stones, those with intestinal obstruction and in patients taking cardiac glycoside medications.

**POPULAR USES:** Cancer and other chronic or incurable conditions such as diabetes, AIDS, etc.

**HERBAL CONSTITUENTS:** Sorrel, burdock root, slippery elm bark, and medicinal rhubarb root.

### **SCIENTIFIC DATA**

*In Vitro:* No data.

*In Animals:* No data.

*In Humans:* Despite numerous testimonials, no controlled trials have been reported.

### **TOXICITY AND SIDE EFFECTS**

Death has been reported in one case in which Essiac tea was given by intravenous injection. There is the potential for allergic reactions to any of its constituents. Different products may contain different amounts of active ingredients, and there is potential for misidentification or contamination of any constituent.

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*Interactions with other medications:* May deplete potassium, potentiating toxicity of cardiac glycosides.

*Contraindications:* Renal stones, intestinal obstruction.

*Pregnancy:* Not typically recommended. No data evaluating safety.

*Lactation:* No clinical studies evaluating safety.

*Pediatric use:* Not traditionally used in infancy or early childhood. No clinical studies or systematic surveillance evaluating safety.

#### **ADDITIONAL REFERENCES OR RESOURCES**

- HealthCare Reality Check: <http://www.hcrc.org/faqs/essiac.html>
- Essiac Home Page: <http://essiac-info.org/index.html>
- Patient Information and Discussion group: <http://www/znet.com/~oct31/tea/old/index.shtml>
- Canadian Cancer Information Service: <http://www.breast.cancer.ca>
- University of Texas Center for Alternative Medicine: <http://www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/utcam/summary/essic.htm>
- HOME: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/default.htm>