

Patient Fact Sheet

ESSIAC

ESSIAC TEA is made from a combination of herbs that was first used by an Ontario nurse, Rene Caisse, in the 1920's. She heard about the combination from one of her patients, who had been given the formula by an Ojibwa medicine man. The traditional mixture contains burdock root, slippery elm bark, sorrel, and rhubarb root. Some brands also contain other herbs, such as red clover, kelp, nasturtium, watercress, and cat's claw bark. See the patient fact sheets for the individual herbs for more information. Essiac is taken as tea, and is available both as dried herbs for making tea, and as pre-made tea in bottles.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

- ◆ Essiac is an alternative treatment for cancer.
- ◆ It is also sometimes recommended to stimulate the immune system, and to treat AIDS and other chronic diseases like diabetes.

WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

One small study of patients who had taken Essiac showed no benefit in treating their cancers. There have not been any comparison studies, and there have not been any studies of the use of Essiac in people with other diseases.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Patients who have taken Essiac report that there are no serious side effects. However, some of the herbal ingredients can have serious side effects, including:

- ◆ Upset stomach
- ◆ Intestinal cramps and diarrhea
- ◆ Kidney stones
- ◆ Kidney and liver damage.

IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

- ◆ Essiac is usually not recommended for children less than two years old.
- ◆ It is usually not recommended for pregnant women or for women who are breastfeeding.
- ◆ There are no studies of Essiac's safety for children or pregnant women.

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

- ◆ Essiac may not be safe for people who have had kidney stones because it contains oxalic acid, which can cause kidney stones.
- ◆ It is not recommended for people with intestinal blockage because it can stimulate the intestine.
- ◆ It could decrease potassium levels in the body, so it is not recommended for people taking digoxin (Lanoxin) and some other heart medications.

WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

- ◆ The standard adult dose is 30 ml of tea (1 ounce or 2 tablespoons) one to three times a day.
- ◆ Doses for children are unknown.
- ◆ 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 herbal product, and before starting any new one. 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.