

Patient Fact Sheet

HORSE CHESTNUT

HORSE CHESTNUT (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) is an ornamental tree grown in Northern Europe and North America. Horse chestnut seeds are not the same as the sweet, edible chestnuts sold as food. Horse chestnut seeds are poisonous before they are processed, but after proper preparation the extract can be used safely. Horse chestnut seed extract is available in capsules, tinctures (in alcohol), teas, and creams. The main active ingredient of horse chestnut seeds is called *aescin*.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

- ◆ Horse chestnut seed extract is used to decrease swelling of the feet and legs from poor circulation (chronic venous insufficiency).
- ◆ It has also been used to decrease swelling from surgery or injury.
- ◆ It has been recommended to prevent blood clots while on bedrest after surgery.

WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ People with **poor circulation** (chronic venous insufficiency) who take horse chestnut seed extract may have less lower leg and foot swelling and less leg pain.
- ◆ Horse chestnut seed extract decreases leg swelling as well as compression stockings (TEDs™).
- ◆ Patients with **swelling** around the brain caused by surgery, injury, or stroke had faster healing when they received IV aescin injections (not available in the United States.)
- ◆ Most studies of horse chestnut seed extract after surgery showed that it did not prevent blood clots.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Side effects are rare, but may include:

- ◆ Allergic reaction, including rashes from creams containing horse chestnut seed extract.
- ◆ Nausea and stomach discomfort, especially from large doses.
- ◆ Dizziness, headache and itching.
- ◆ No long-term problems have been found from horse chestnut seed extract.

No long-term problems have been found from taking horse chestnut seed extract.

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

- ◆ Horse chestnut seed extract may have a mild blood-thinning effect. People who take medicines (including aspirin) that prevent blood clotting should check with their health care provider before taking horse chestnut seed extract.
- ◆ For the same reason, people who are expecting to have surgery should not take horse chestnut seed extract for a few days beforehand.
- ◆ Horse chestnut seed extract may affect the blood levels of other medications as well (because it binds to proteins in the blood that other medications bind to as well). If you take any medication, check with your health care provider to find out whether it might be affected by horse chestnut seed extract.
- ◆ Tinctures are not recommended for people with severe liver disease because they contain alcohol.

IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

There are no studies to show whether horse chestnut seed extract is safe for children or for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. No problems have been reported. Horse chestnut seed extract is not usually recommended for children.

WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

The normal adult dose of standardized horse chestnut seed extract is 600 mg (containing 100 mg of aescin) per day. Controlled-released pills are available that cause less stomach upset than the regular form.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

- ◆ Horse chestnut seeds that have not been prepared for medicinal use are poisonous and should not be used. Poisonings from horse chestnut seeds can be very serious and may cause death. If you have eaten raw horse chestnut seeds, contact your poison control center or a health care provider immediately.
- ◆ 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:

Complete Monograph: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/horsechestnut/horsechestnut.pdf>

Clinician Information Summary:

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