

Patient Fact Sheet

PEPPERMINT

PEPPERMINT (*Mentha piperita*) is a common garden herb. Peppermint leaves are often used as an herbal tea, and peppermint oil is used as a flavoring and scent for food, cosmetics, and other products. Both peppermint leaves and oil are also used as medicine. The main active ingredient is called *menthol*.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

- ◆ Peppermint tea is used for upset stomach and indigestion.
- ◆ Peppermint oil is used for coughs and stuffy noses from colds. It can be inhaled or taken in a lozenge. (Using a menthol chest rub such as Vicks Vapo-Rub® is one method of inhaling peppermint oil.)
- ◆ Enteric-coated capsules of peppermint oil are used to treat irritable bowel syndrome.

WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ Several studies show that enteric-coated peppermint oil capsules may decrease symptoms such as abdominal pain and gas in people with **irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)**. (“Enteric-coated” capsules have a special coating to keep them from dissolving in the stomach.) In other studies, peppermint oil did not help patients with IBS.
- ◆ Small studies show that peppermint and peppermint oil may decrease nausea and stomach cramps.
- ◆ Inhaling peppermint oil does NOT help clear a stuffy nose, but it makes people FEEL that they can breathe easier.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

- ◆ Allergic reactions, including rash, itching, and hives, are possible.
- ◆ Peppermint oil can cause heartburn. Using enteric-coated capsules usually prevents this.
- ◆ Peppermint oil can also cause abdominal pain and perianal irritation (pain in the rectal area).
- ◆ Breathing peppermint oil can cause newborn babies to slow down their breathing, and even stop breathing temporarily. Products with peppermint oil or menthol should NOT be near the noses of newborn babies.

No long-term problems have been found from taking peppermint.

(continued)

IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

There are no studies showing whether or not peppermint is safe for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. However, no problems have been reported, and the FDA and herbalists consider peppermint safe.

Peppermint oil is not safe to use near the noses of newborn babies because it might make them stop breathing.

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

- ◆ Peppermint oil may make reflux and heartburn worse, so people with these problems should avoid peppermint oil.
- ◆ Herbalists recommend that people with liver and gall bladder problems such as bile duct obstruction, gallbladder inflammation and severe liver damage avoid peppermint oil.
- ◆ There is no information about peppermint's interactions with any medication.

WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

Typical doses for adults are:

- ◆ Tea: 1-2 tsp of dried herb steeped in 1 cup water, taken as often as needed.
- ◆ Peppermint oil capsules: 0.2-0.4 mL three times daily, often before meals.
- ◆ Inhalation: 3-4 drops of peppermint oil added to hot water.

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 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:

Peppermint Complete Monograph:

<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/peppermint/peppermint.pdf>

Peppermint Clinician Information Summary:

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

OnHealth.com:

Peppermint leaf: <http://onhealth.webmd.com/alternative/resource/herbs/item,16039.asp>

Peppermint oil: <http://onhealth.webmd.com/alternative/resource/herbs/item,77175.asp>