

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

Patient Fact Sheet

SHARK CARTILAGE

SHARK CARTILAGE comes from spiny dogfish sharks and hammerhead sharks in the Pacific Ocean. Sharks do not have bones, so their whole skeleton is made of cartilage. Shark cartilage products are available in capsules or powders.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

- ◆ Shark cartilage is used as an alternative treatment for some kinds of cancer.
- ◆ It is also sometimes used for arthritis, psoriasis and diabetic retinopathy.

WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ Some ingredients in shark cartilage prevent new blood vessels from growing. Solid tumors (most kinds of cancer) need new blood vessels to grow.
- ◆ In some adults with terminal **cancer**, a few patients taking shark cartilage had remissions (their tumors decreased) or stabilization (their tumors stopped growing for a time). There have not been any controlled studies (when patients taking shark cartilage are compared to patients not taking it), but the National Cancer Institute plans to start one in 1999.
- ◆ Shark cartilage contains glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate, which may help **arthritis** symptoms. But there have not been any studies of shark cartilage's use for arthritis.
- ◆ In one study, people taking shark cartilage had decreased **psoriasis**.
- ◆ There have not been any studies of its use for **diabetic retinopathy**.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Side effects may include:

- ◆ Nausea, vomiting, and constipation.
- ◆ Low blood pressure.
- ◆ High blood sugar.
- ◆ Confusion
- ◆ Weakness
- ◆ Hepatitis

It is not known whether there are any long-term problems with taking shark cartilage.

(continued)

IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

No. Shark cartilage is not safe for children or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, because it could interfere with the new blood vessels needed for growth.

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

- ◆ Shark cartilage should not be used by people who are having surgery, because new blood vessels are needed for healing.
- ◆ Diabetics should check their blood sugar often when taking shark cartilage, because it can cause high blood sugar.
- ◆ There are no studies of shark cartilage's interactions with other medicines.

WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

- ◆ Doses for adults with cancer are 1 to 2.5 grams per kilogram of body weight per day. (A kilogram is 2.2 pounds.) This amount is divided into 2 or 3 doses per day and taken by mouth (mixed with juice) or rectally.
- ◆ Doses used for arthritis, psoriasis and diabetic retinopathy are much lower.
- ◆ Follow your health care provider's instructions.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

- ◆ By itself, shark cartilage is not an effective treatment for cancer. Cancer patients taking shark cartilage need to be under a doctor's care, even if they are not getting any other treatment.
- ◆ Always tell your doctor or nurse practitioner if you are taking any dietary supplement or natural product, and before starting any new one. Your health care provider needs to know everything you are taking in order to help you make decisions about your health care. Dietary supplements can cause problems with other dietary supplements, herbs, or medications.
- ◆ Shark cartilage products may contain cartilage from cows, or fillers to reduce the cost.

SEE ALSO:

- ◆ Shark Cartilage Complete Monograph:
<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/sharkcartilage/sharkcartilage.pdf>
- ◆ Shark Cartilage Clinician Information Summary:
<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/sharkcartilage/sharkcartilage.cis.pdf>
- ◆ University of Texas Center for Alternative Medicine Research in Cancer:
<http://www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/utcam/therapies/crtlg.htm>