

Saw Palmetto

This fact sheet provides basic information about the herb saw palmetto—common names, uses, potential side effects, and resources for more information. Saw palmetto is a small palm tree native to the eastern United States. Its fruit was used medicinally by the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Common Names—saw palmetto, American dwarf palm tree, cabbage palm

Latin Names—*Serenoa repens*, *Sabal serrulata*

What It Is Used For

- Saw palmetto is used mainly for urinary symptoms associated with an enlarged prostate gland (also called benign prostatic hyperplasia, or BPH).
- Saw palmetto is also used for other conditions, including chronic pelvic pain, bladder disorders, decreased sex drive, hair loss, and hormone imbalances.

How It Is Used

The ripe fruit of saw palmetto is used in several forms, including ground and dried fruit or whole berries. It is available as a liquid extract, tablets, capsules, and as an infusion or a tea.

What the Science Says

- Several small studies suggest that saw palmetto may be effective for treating BPH symptoms.
- In 2006, a large study of 225 men with moderate-to-severe BPH found no improvement with 320 mg saw palmetto daily for 1 year versus placebo. NCCAM cofunded the study with the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.
- There is not enough scientific evidence to support the use of saw palmetto for reducing the size of an enlarged prostate or for any other conditions.
- Saw palmetto does not appear to affect readings of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels. PSA is protein produced by cells in the prostate. The PSA test is used to screen for prostate cancer and to monitor patients who have had prostate cancer.

Side Effects and Cautions

- Saw palmetto may cause mild side effects, including stomach discomfort.
- Some men using saw palmetto have reported side effects such as tender breasts and a decline in sexual desire.
- Tell your health care providers about any complementary and alternative practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care.

Sources

Saw palmetto. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturaldatabase.com> on July 5, 2007.

Saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens* [Bartran] Small). Natural Standard Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturalstandard.com> on July 3, 2007.

Saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*). In: Coates P, Blackman M, Cragg G, et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of Dietary Supplements*. New York, NY: Marcel Dekker; 2005;635-644.

De Smet PA. Herbal remedies. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2002;347(25):2046-2056.

National Cancer Institute. *The Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) Test: Questions and Answers*. National Cancer Institute Web site. Accessed at <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Detection/PSA> on July 10, 2007.

Saw palmetto berry. In: Blumenthal M, Goldberg A, Brinckman J, eds. *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E Monographs*. Newton, MA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2000:335-340.

Bent S, Kane C, Shinohara K, et al. Saw palmetto for benign prostatic hyperplasia. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2006;354(6):557-566.

For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at nccam.nih.gov and view:

- *What's in the Bottle? An Introduction to Dietary Supplements* at nccam.nih.gov/health/bottle/
- *Herbal Supplements: Consider Safety, Too* at nccam.nih.gov/health/supplement-safety/

NCCAM Clearinghouse

Toll-free in the U.S.: 1-888-644-6226

TTY (for deaf and hard-of-hearing callers): 1-866-464-3615

E-mail: info@nccam.nih.gov

CAM on PubMed

Web site: nccam.nih.gov/camonpubmed/

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements

Web site: www.ods.od.nih.gov

NIH National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus

Saw Palmetto Listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/patient-sawpalmetto.html

This publication is not copyrighted and is in the public domain. Duplication is encouraged.

NCCAM has provided this material for your information. It is not intended to substitute for the medical expertise and advice of your primary health care provider. We encourage you to discuss any decisions about treatment or care with your health care provider. The mention of any product, service, or therapy is not an endorsement by NCCAM.

National Institutes of Health



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

D275

Created May 2006

Updated March 2008

