

Chasteberry

This fact sheet provides basic information about the herb chasteberry—common names, uses, potential side effects, and resources for more information. Chasteberry is the fruit of the chaste tree, a small shrub-like tree native to Central Asia and the Mediterranean region. The name is thought to come from a belief that the plant promoted chastity—it is reported that monks in the Middle Ages used chasteberry to decrease sexual desire.

Common Names—chasteberry, chaste-tree berry, vitex, monk’s pepper

Latin Name—*Vitex agnus-castus*

What It Is Used For

- Chasteberry has been used for thousands of years, mostly by women to ease menstrual problems and to stimulate the production of breast milk.
- Chasteberry is still used for menstrual problems, such as premenstrual syndrome, as well as for symptoms of menopause, some types of infertility, and acne.

How It Is Used

The dried ripe chasteberry is used to prepare liquid extracts or solid extracts that are put into capsules and tablets.

What the Science Says

- A few studies of chasteberry for premenstrual syndrome have found a benefit. However, most of these studies were not well designed, so firm conclusions about chasteberry for premenstrual syndrome cannot be drawn.
- Small studies suggest that chasteberry may help with breast pain and some types of infertility, but there is not enough reliable scientific evidence to determine whether chasteberry has any effect on these conditions.
- NCCAM is funding studies on chasteberry. Recent projects have explored how chasteberry works in the body and how it might affect symptoms of premenstrual syndrome.

Side Effects and Cautions

- Chasteberry has not been associated with serious side effects. However, it can cause gastrointestinal problems, acne-like rashes, and dizziness.
- Chasteberry may affect certain hormone levels. Women who are pregnant or taking birth control pills or who have a hormone-sensitive condition (such as breast cancer) should not use chasteberry.

- Because chasteberry may affect the dopamine system in the brain, people taking dopamine-related medications, such as selegiline, amantadine, and levodopa, should avoid using chasteberry.
- 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

Chasteberry (*Vitex agnus castus*). In: Coates P, Blackman M, Cragg G, et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of Dietary Supplements*. New York, NY: Marcel Dekker; 2005:95-103.

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

Chasteberry (*Vitex agnus-castus*). Natural Standard Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturalstandard.com> on July 3, 2007.

Chaste tree fruit. In: Blumenthal M, Goldberg A, Brinckman J, eds. *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E Monographs*. Newton, MA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2000:62-64.

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

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

