

Patient Fact Sheet

WILD YAM

WILD YAM, or *Dioscorea*, refers to a family of vines native to North America. Herbal medicines are made from the roots of *Dioscorea*, and are available in pills, tinctures, and creams. The main active ingredient is called *diosgenin*.

African “wild yam” has different active ingredients and different effects. Also, the yams sold in grocery stores are really a kind of sweet potato, and not related to wild yam.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

Wild yam is used for many medical problems, but it is usually recommended for menstrual cramps and symptoms of menopause.

WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ One study found that wild yam may help decrease menopausal symptoms, but this study was small and the patients were also taking other herbs. More information is needed before it can be recommended for menopausal symptoms.
- ◆ There is no evidence that wild yam prevents bone loss or wrinkles.
- ◆ There is little evidence that it helps arthritis, intestinal problems, or menstrual cramps.
- ◆ It may improve cholesterol levels.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Side effects are rare, but may include:

- ◆ Allergic reaction, including itching or hives.
- ◆ Nausea, especially in large doses.

No long-term problems have been found from wild yam.

IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

It is traditionally not recommended for children, or for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, but there are no studies to support this recommendation.

WILL IT INTERFERE WITH MY OTHER MEDICATIONS OR MY MEDICAL

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CONDITION?

- ◆ Wild yam is traditionally not recommended for people with intestinal and liver problems, although no studies have evaluated this.
- ◆ It is traditionally not recommended during pregnancy, because it might cause contractions.
- ◆ There are no studies of interactions with medications.

WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

There are no standard doses. The amount of diosgenin, the active ingredient, can vary widely depending on the species and growing conditions. Follow your health care provider's instructions.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

- ◆ Some wild yam creams have synthetic progesterone added to them. Read labels carefully and talk with your doctor or nurse practitioner before substituting wild yam for a regular medicine.
- ◆ There are no studies showing whether the active ingredient in wild yam can be absorbed through the skin.
- ◆ 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.