

Evening Primrose Oil

Oenothera biennis L.

[Fam. *Onagraceae*]

OVERVIEW

Evening primrose is a plant native to North America, with its therapeutic use stemming from American indigenous medicine. Evening primrose oil (EPO) from the plant's seeds has been the subject of hundreds of scientific studies, which has led to it becoming one of the most widely prescribed botanical medicines. Evening primrose oil (EPO) is relatively high in essential fatty acids, which play a major role in its effectiveness. In 2000, evening primrose oil ranked 10th of all herbal dietary supplements in U.S. food, drug, and mass-market retail outlets.

USES

Atopic dermatitis; painful breasts during menstruation; lactation; uremic skin symptoms; nutritional deficiencies (essential fatty acids); atopic dermatitis in infants; seborrheic dermatitis (milk crust); infant formula fortification; dry eyes associated with Sjögren's syndrome; Raynaud's disease; PMS symptoms; diabetic neuropathy; rheumatoid arthritis.

DOSAGE

ATOPIC DERMATITIS: 4–6 capsules (500 mg) twice daily [containing 40 mg GLA (gamma-linolenic acid) per capsule].

BREAST PAIN RELATED TO MENSTRUAL CYCLE: 6 capsules (500 mg) daily for four to six months [40 mg GLA per capsule].

DIABETIC NEUROPATHY: 8–12 capsules (500 mg) daily.

LACTATION AID: 4 capsules (500 mg) twice daily.

RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS: 10–20 capsules (500 mg) daily.

UREMIC SKIN SYMPTOMS: 2 capsules (500 mg) twice daily [45 mg GLA per capsule].

NOTE: EPO may be swallowed directly or may be taken with milk, another liquid, or with food. EPO taken with food may minimize any potential gastrointestinal side effects. Concurrent ingestion of the antioxidant vitamin E will protect essential fatty acids

(EFAs) from free radical damage and also prevent creation of counterproductive substances. Concurrent ingestion of a daily multiple vitamin may also provide nutritional cofactors (e.g., B6 and magnesium) required for EFA metabolism.

NOTE: EPO is a long-term therapy, so immediate results should not be expected. A patient may need to use EPO regularly for up to four months before a clinical response is observed. EPO appears to be safe for long-term use of at least one year.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

Some reports suggest that individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia and/or those already receiving epileptogenic drugs such as phenothiazines should consult a healthcare provider before using EPO. However, a recently published analysis of clinical trials involving polyunsaturated fatty acids in the treatment of schizophrenia indicates no clear positive effects of EPO supplementation on schizophrenic patients, but no adverse effects either.

PREGNANCY AND LACTATION: There are no known restrictions during pregnancy or lactation, and GLA, the essential fatty acid that EPO contains, is considered an important substance in human breast milk. According to the World Health Organization, 5% of pregnant women's total caloric intake should be from essential fatty acids.

ADVERSE EFFECTS

Adverse effects are rare at recommended dosages. Occasionally, headache, mild nausea, and abdominal bloating may occur. Overdose symptoms include loose stools and abdominal pain.

DRUG INTERACTIONS

There are no known drug interactions. Steroids and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs may potentially interfere with essential fatty acid metabolism.

Comments

When using a dietary supplement, purchase it from a reliable source. For best results, use the same brand of product throughout the period of use. As with all medications and dietary supplements, please inform your healthcare provider of all herbs and medications you are taking. Interactions may occur between medications and herbs or even among different herbs when taken at the same time. Treat your herbal supplement with care by taking it as directed, storing it as advised on the label, and keeping it out of the reach of children and pets. Consult your healthcare provider with any questions.



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