

Flax

Linum usitatissimum L.

[Fam. *Linaceae*]

OVERVIEW

Flax has become popular in the mainstream market in many forms: raw seeds; expressed oils; and as an ingredient in breads, muffins, cereals, and breakfast bars. Flaxseed oil provides the beneficial essential fatty acids in which 80% of Americans are deficient. Flax oil contains 50–60% alpha-linolenic acid and is also one of the most concentrated sources of lignans (phenolic resins found in many plants), containing 100 to 800 times the amounts found in other foods.

USES

Internal

Elevated lipid levels (e.g., high cholesterol); breast cancer (risk reduction); osteoporosis; lupus nephritis; rheumatoid arthritis, atherosclerosis; chronic constipation; irritable bowel and other colon disorders.

External

Local inflammation.

DOSAGE

Flax can be used long-term as a bulk laxative and as a nutritional supplement.

BRUISED OR WHOLE SEED: 1 tablespoon (5 g) of whole, “bruised,” or ground seed soaked in water and taken with a glassful of liquid 3 times daily. Grinding the seeds improves absorption of plant nutrients.

MUCILAGE (GRUEL): Soak 2–3 tablespoons of milled flaxseed in 200–300 ml water, strain after 30 minutes.

OIL: 1–2 tablespoons daily.

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.

FLAX OIL CAPSULES: 3–6 capsules containing 1,000 mg oil each for general health maintenance.

GROUND SEED: 2.5 teaspoons, 2–3 times daily.

COMPRESS OR FOMENTATION: Saturate cloth with a hot, semisolid preparation containing 30–50 g flaxseed flour. Fold and apply firmly for a moist-heat direct application to the skin to relieve pain or inflammation.

NOTE: Store flax oil and ground flaxseeds in air tight containers in a cool area away from direct sun light. Store flax oil soft-gel capsules at room temperature in air tight bottles.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

Consult with a healthcare provider in cases of obstruction of bowels or painful, distended abdomen (ileus of any origin).

PREGNANCY AND LACTATION: There are no known restrictions for use during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

ADVERSE EFFECTS

There are no known adverse effects for individuals using flaxseed at the suggested dosages when directions are followed [e.g., take with plenty of liquids (1 part flaxseed to 10 parts liquid)].

DRUG INTERACTIONS

Whole or crushed seeds produce a thick substance called mucilage which may affect the absorption of drugs or other nutrients taken simultaneously. There are no known drug interactions with flax oil.



The information contained on this sheet has been excerpted from *The ABC Clinical Guide to Herbs* © 2003 by the American Botanical Council (ABC). ABC is an independent member-based educational organization focusing on the medicinal use of herbs. For more detailed information about this herb please consult a qualified healthcare provider. To view updates and corrections to *The ABC Clinical Guide to Herbs*, to order a copy, or become a member of ABC, visit www.herbalgram.org.