

Center for Integrative Medicine

Dietary Supplements: Elderberry

Elderberry is the common name for *Sambucus nigra* (or European elder) berries. The plant is part of the honeysuckle family

Dietary sources: Elderberries are consumed as part of the normal diet in some parts of Europe.

Uses. In traditional European herbal medicine, elderberry is used to treat coughs, fevers, as a laxative, and as a food flavoring and wine. It is also consumed as a drink like blueberry juice. Several studies have shown that taking elderberry syrup at the first sign of infection can significantly reduce the length of influenza symptoms.

Dose. Elderberry products can be variable in the amount per ‘serving’ and the amount used in different studies. The most common dose in adults is 2 tablespoons twice daily of SAMBUCOL syrup (the brand tested in Israeli studies).

Safety: As with any product taken by mouth, elderberry can cause an upset stomach. There are no known herb-drug interactions with elderberry. Do not give elderberry wine to children. Raw berries eaten in excess can cause diarrhea, so most people cook the berries. Allergies to any herbal substance are possible. There are no studies evaluating the safety of elderberry products for women who are pregnant or nursing.

Duration: Elderberry is generally safe for short-term use

The US **National Library of Medicine** does not have a patient handout about elderberry.

Quality: No government agency routinely tests elderberry products. Dietary supplements like elderberry are regulated more like food than like drugs. There is variability in the quality of elderberry products, and you cannot always tell what is in a product from reading the label, even the fine print. We recommend using brands that have the USP stamp of approval or are approved by ConsumerLab in their independent testing. **ConsumerLab has not evaluated elderberry products.**