



Milk Thistle

Milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*) was used in classical Greece to treat liver and gallbladder diseases and to protect the liver against toxins. Centuries ago, Romans recognized the value of this herb for liver impairments. They routinely used the seeds and roots of the plant to restore and rejuvenate a diseased liver. Pliny the Elder, ancient Roman recorded how the juice of milk thistle, when mixed with honey was used for carrying off bile. Dioscorides extolled the virtues of milk thistle as an effective protector against snakebites. Historically, the seed of milk thistle was used as a cholagogue which stimulated the flow of bile. The seed was also used to treat jaundice, dyspepsia, a lack of appetite and other stomach disorders. Homeopathic uses included: peritonitis, coughs, varicose veins and uterine congestion.



Milk Thistle contains some of the most potent liver protecting substances known. For this reason, it is an invaluable herb for the treatment of hepatitis, cirrhosis, jaundice and fatty degeneration of the liver. Studies have indicated that milk thistle has valuable therapeutic merit for severe liver disorders and acts as liver restorative as well. Not only does it promote new cell growth in the liver it also prevents the formation of damaging leukotrienes. Because the liver plays a vital role in maintaining a healthy immune system, milk thistle can contribute to an increased disease resistance. This link may explain why it also has value for anyone suffering from psoriasis or chronic fatigue syndrome.

Pharmacology: The flavonoids contained in Milk thistle have a strong liver protective action and have been extensively used in Europe as pharmaceutical preparations for liver disorders. These include: silibin, silydianin and silychristin, which combined create silymarin. Clinical trials have shown that silymarin can protect the liver by counteracting a number of toxic substances including alcohol, acetaminophen, carbon tetrachloride and the Amanita mushroom poison. Apparently, silymarin actually alters liver cell membranes, which prevent toxins from passing through the cell. It inhibits the release or the synthesis of certain enzymes, which are toxic to liver tissue. In addition, these compounds stimulate cellular growth and reproduction by boosting protein synthesis.

In addition, milk thistle is an antioxidant. It helps protect the cells from free radicals by scavenging them before they can cause cellular damage. The flavonoid-like compounds of this herb help to promote cell membrane integrity and to reduce its permeability. The antioxidant bioactivity of the silymarin compounds contained in milk thistle have been generally overlooked by experts who suggest taking vitamin E, C, A, beta-carotene and selenium supplements. Adding milk thistle to this complement of antioxidants is strongly recommended, especially for anyone who smokes, consumes alcohol or must take drugs on a continual basis. The hepato-protective properties of silymarin combined with its free scavenging action make it an invaluable defense against many toxins that pollute our bodies. Studies suggest that taking milk thistle may provide the liver with protection against heavy metals, environmental pollutants and dietary toxins. Silymarin having significant antioxidant capabilities, it can help reduce inflammation by inhibiting certain enzymes.

A number of studies have suggested that silymarin is an anti-inflammatory. It regulates inflammatory mediators and these effects suggest a possible role in preventing or treating infectious disease. Milk thistle also acts to protect the kidneys, brain and other vital organs from toxin damage, treats allergic reactions, reduces inflammation and promotes healing. It also helps to emulsify fats and enhance bile flow, making it a good remedy for indigestion.

Milk thistle recently has been investigated for use as a cytoprotectant, an anti-carcinogen, and a supportive treatment for liver damage from *Amanita phalloides* poisoning. The *A. phalloides* mushroom, called the “death cap, produces severe nausea, vomiting, and watery diarrhea within five to 12 hours of ingestion. In the case of mushroom poisoning, the herb is administered intravenously. Found primarily in the seeds, silymarin undergoes enterohepatic recirculation, which results in higher concentrations in liver cells than in serum.



High fat, high sugar, high protein diets stress the liver. Overeating, especially over cooked, fatty foods puts added strain on the liver. In addition, lack of exercise has an indirect effect on the liver. Lack of sufficient exercise allows an excess of toxins to build up which have to be dealt with by the liver.

Typically, chemical exposure can injure the liver decreasing the amount of glutathione in the liver. When this substance is reduced, the liver becomes susceptible to damage. The Silymarin content of milk thistle keeps concentrations of glutathione in the liver elevated by up to 35%. The ability of the liver to detoxify the system is largely dependent on the presence of glutathione.

According to the American Liver Foundation, liver diseases are the fourth leading cause of death up to the age of 65. In the past, liver disease was only associated with chronic alcoholics. Now, however, liver disease strikes obese people, social drinkers and people who eat poorly. Milk thistle can help expedite the removal of fat from the liver. Poor liver function is usually not implicated as a causal factor for obesity in the first place. O. Nomura and Y. Satomura in the 1986 edition of *Int. J. Obesity* stated, “Liver function is disturbed in a large percentage of overweight individuals.” The liver also plays a role in stabilizing blood sugar levels, which can contribute to food cravings and appetite surges.

Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*)

Common names: Christ’s Crown, Holy Thistle, Venus Thistle, Heal Thistle, Wand of God’s Grace, Milk Thistle is also known as Marian Thistle, Wild Artichoke, Variegated Thistle or St. Mary’s Thistle.

Milk Thistle is frequently confused with Blessed Thistle, which acts to stimulate the production of mother’s milk. Milk thistle does not.

PRIMARY APPLICATIONS

- CIRRHOISIS
- GALLSTONES
- HEPATITIS
- JAUNDICE
- KIDNEY DISORDERS
- LIVER DISEASE
- PSORIASIS

secondary applications

- alcoholism
- chemotherapy

- chronic fatigue
- fatty deposits
- gas
- heartburn
- hypoglycemia
- indigestion
- obesity
- toxin exposure
- varicose veins

Theoretically, milk thistle may lower blood sugar levels, so people with diabetes, hypoglycemia and those taking medications or supplements that affect blood sugar levels should use it with caution.

There is a theoretical risk that milk thistle could have an estrogen-like effect, so people with hormone-sensitive conditions such as endometriosis, uterine fibroids or cancers of the breast, uterus and ovaries should avoid milk thistle, particularly the above ground parts of the plant.

Milk thistle may reduce the effectiveness of oral contraceptives. One constituent of milk thistle can inhibit an enzyme called beta-glucuronidase, which is involved in the activity of oral contraceptives.

Be sure to try the [Milk Thistle Combo](#), [Super Antioxidants](#) or the [Enviro Detox](#) from Nature's Sunshine. All three contain Milk Thistle. You can see other products that contain Milk Thistle by [clicking here](#).

References

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Sincerely,

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The Back to Herbs Team

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