

From our friends at "Back to Herbs"



eFlash



Red Clover

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Common Names:

Cow clover, Wild clover, Purple clover, Beebread, Cow grass, Meadow clover.

This plant grows in Europe and North America. The flowering tops are used in botanical medicine. Another plant, white clover, grows in similar areas. Both have white arrow-shaped patterns on their leaves. *Trifolium pratense* (red clover) is a medicinal herb, which contains at least four estrogenic isoflavones: formononetin, biochanin A, daidzen and genistein. The liver metabolizes all four isoflavones. Supplements containing isoflavones derived from red clover isoflavones that act as phytoestrogens are promoted worldwide for the treatment of menopausal symptoms and the maintenance of health and welfare after the menopause.



Research has focused on a red clover extract high in isoflavones as a possible treatment for symptoms associated with menopause and cardiovascular health in menopausal women. Compared to soy, red clover has four isoflavones recognized for supporting both female and a male hormone level, soy has two.

Because certain aspects of the isoflavone molecules found in herbs such as red clover, soy, and kudzu resemble estrogens at the molecular level, they can weakly bind to the estrogen receptors found in different target tissues in the body. They are not, however, the same as human estrogen; they are synthesized along different pathways and, as a biochemical class, they are actually polyphenols, not steroids like estradiol and other human hormones.

Historically, red clover has been used for cancer and respiratory problems, such as whooping cough, asthma, and bronchitis. Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western folk medicine used this plant as a diuretic, a cough expectorant (an agent that promotes discharge of mucus from the respiratory passages), and an alterative agent (i.e., one that produces gradual beneficial changes in the body, usually by improving nutrition; also known as a "blood cleanser"). It is a traditional remedy for psoriasis and eczema. However, the mechanism of action and constituents responsible for red clover's purported benefit in skin conditions are unknown. Alterative plants were considered beneficial for chronic conditions, particularly those afflicting the skin. Current uses of red

clover are for menopausal symptoms, breast pain associated with menstrual cycles, high cholesterol, osteoporosis, and symptoms of prostate enlargement.

NCCAM (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine) is studying red clover to learn more about its active components and how they might work in the body, including how red clover isoflavones may affect human prostate cells and the safety and effectiveness of red clover for menopausal symptoms.

Studies show that certain types of estrogen receptors are more active in certain tissues in the body. Scientists believe this has a bearing on the various balancing and protective effects of phytoestrogens. These isoflavones are said to work in an adaptogenic way, such that when estrogen levels are low or in decline, such as in menopause or perimenopause, they exert weak estrogen-like, (up-regulating or agonistic) actions, serving as a “stand-in” molecular substitute or mimicking some of the effects of estrogen. A decrease in frequency and severity of hot flashes is believed to be, at least in part, the result of this mechanism.

In the setting of high levels of estrogen, on the other hand, phytoestrogens such as red clover isoflavones are said to exert a down-regulating, or antagonistic effect, by taking up the receptor sites and blocking the endogenous estrogen. This is one way in which these phytoestrogens — in particular biochanin, the main red clover isoflavone — appear to have antimutagenic/tumor inhibitory properties.

Though not as widely studied as soy for menopausal symptoms, red clover has shown positive results in numerous smaller studies. In a 2007 review of the literature, the authors found evidence that women getting between 40 and 80 mg of red clover isoflavones a day experienced relief from hot flashes. In addition, there have been many studies designed to evaluate its ability to improve bone health and cardiovascular function, as well as its anti-cancer properties, all of which continue to show promise for women interested in healthy aging.

In vitro studies indicate that red clover extract acting as an estrogen agonist stimulates proliferation of estrogen receptor (ER) positive breast cancer cells. In other studies, isoflavone-enriched extracts of red clover demonstrated neuroprotective effects in human cortical neurons and reduced skin aging in mice by increasing the amount of collagen. Clinical trials in humans showed that red clover isoflavone supplementation decreased menopausal symptoms compared to placebo. Red clover isoflavones may improve bone loss but more studies are needed. In a small study, dietary isoflavone intake improved arterial compliance, an index of the elasticity of large arteries, which is an important cardiovascular risk factor.

A double-blind trial found that red clover improved cardiovascular function in menopausal women. Various laboratory studies and one case report of a man with prostate cancer suggest red clover isoflavones may help prevent cancer. In another case study, use of red clover by a man with prostate cancer led to noticeable anticancer effects in his prostate after the cancer was surgically removed.

Red clover was shown to inhibit growth of normal prostate cells and increase resistance of prostate cancer cells to high dose radiation, in vitro. Patients should avoid use of red clover during radiotherapy for prostate cancer.

Although the isoflavones in red clover may help prevent certain forms of cancer (e.g., breast and prostate), further studies are needed before red clover is recommended for cancer patients. Though red clover has not undergone extensive testing in longer-term studies (over 12 months), there have been no adverse side effects reported in the

shorter studies to date. Nevertheless, variation among red clover formulations and extracts exists, and there may be situations when consultation with a healthcare provider before use is recommended. For instance, chemicals in red clover known as coumestans may have blood-thinning properties. Women on hormones, even birth control, may also want to review the use of red clover with a qualified practitioner before adding it or changing their regimen.

Pregnant or breast-feeding women should avoid red clover supplements and their safety has not been established in young children and infants.



Be sure to try NSP's Red Clover (100 caps), Red Clover Blend (2 fl. oz.) or LBS II® (100 caps).

References:

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Yours in Good Health!

Sincerely,

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