

Alfalfa

Medicago sativa, commonly known as Alfalfa, is a purple plant that has many benefits to the human body. The name Alfalfa translates to “father of all food” in Arabic due to its high concentration of protein, minerals and vitamins. Alfalfa was originated in South and Central Asia and has been a renowned herbal medicine for over 1,500 years. Its pharmacologic classification is to prevent cholesterol absorption in the gastrointestinal tract. It also has a mild hypoglycemic effect and treating menopausal symptoms. Alfalfa is available in various forms such as fresh sprouts, tea, seeds, powder, dried leaves, extract, and capsules.

The product label use for Alfalfa is a nutritional abundant herbal supplement. Alfalfa also offer a few other off-labeled benefits. It contains phytoestrogens, which is often used to ease symptoms of menopause. Alfalfa is an antioxidant and a neuroprotective agent. However, these off-labeled benefit has only been proven in vivo clinical trials and independent studies on mice, not on human. Long term Alfalfa use may cause significant adverse effect on people who are immunocompromised, elderly or children. Possible drug interactions may occur with diabetic patients who are on diabetic medication. The combination may induce an unintended hypoglycemic effect, which may lead to dizziness. Alfalfa is also not proven to be safe when used during pregnancy. Because Alfalfa is rich in Vitamin K, it may reduce the effectiveness of blood thinning medications such as Warfarin. Meanwhile, Alfalfa can possibly reduce the effectiveness of oral contraceptive as it contains estrogen.

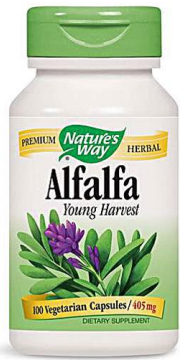
Like Alfalfa, bile acid sequestrants such as Cholestyramine promotes the excretion of cholesterol through bile. They both have the effect of lowering absorption of cholesterol.

Alfalfa is appealing to consumers because it is a natural vegan herbal supplement with high protein content. Based on the necessity, consumer should assess whether they have a medical need to take prescribed medication to effectively lower their blood cholesterol level, or to take Alfalfa as a herbal supplement to promote their overall health by lowering cholesterol absorption. As a health educator, it is important to have general knowledge of the effects of the variety of natural products available in the market. There are free peer-reviewed journals such as the Herbal Medicines Journal available online for subscription, which will allow us to have a steady reliable source to acquire knowledge of the latest update on herbal medicines.

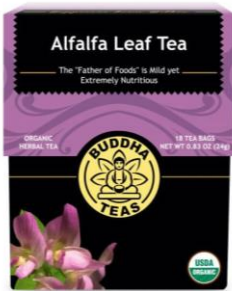
MedlinePlus.gov is also a great reliable website that allows healthcare providers to look up information about a herbal supplement when necessary. It is a dependable resource because MedlinePlus belongs to the National Institutes of Health of the United States, which is a government agency. While it is impractical to know every supplement available in the market, it is necessary for us to have some knowledge of the most common supplements available as a dental hygienist. After learning about Alfalfa and its effect, I would advise my patient to discuss with his/her physician prior taking this herbal supplement. This applies in particular to patients who are diabetic, pregnant, immune compromised, on birth contraceptive medication or are taking anticoagulant medication.



Alfalfa plant



Alfalfa capsules



Alfalfa Leaf Tea



Alfalfa Extract

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