

BLACK COHOSH

(*Actaea racemosa*)

Clinical Summary

Actions

- Anodyne
- Antispasmodic
- Sedative
- Hormone Balancer
- Anti-inflammatory
- Antirheumatic
- Uterine Tonic

Indications

- For the relief of menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes, sweating, mood swings, depression, anxiety, vaginal dryness, insomnia
- Premenstrual syndrome, painful menstruation, ovarian and uterine pain, PCOS, infertility, miscarriage
- Childbirth and as a partus preparator in the final trimester of pregnancy, mastitis
- Nerve and muscle pain including rheumatic pain, musculoskeletal pain, sciatica and neuralgia
- Headaches, tinnitus
- Respiratory disorders such as whooping cough and asthma

Traditional Use

Black cohosh was used by North American indigenous people, and the Eclectics, for gynaecological conditions such as pain associated with premenstrual syndrome, pain during childbirth and menopausal complaints, including migraines. It has traditionally been used in China, Europe and North America for centuries to treat a variety of illnesses, including menopausal symptoms and osteoporosis.

Energetics

Cooling.

Constituents

Triterpene glycosides including actein and cimigloside, resins, volatile oil, tannin, salicylates, ranunculin which yields anemonin.

Use in Pregnancy

Not recommended in the first and second trimester of pregnancy. Can be used as a partus preparator and during childbirth however there are no clinical trials to support the safety of this practice.

Contraindications and Cautions

Several case reports link black cohosh to liver failure or autoimmune hepatitis however there is no conclusive evidence that black cohosh is the cause of liver damage in these patients. Until more is known monitor liver function in patients who take black cohosh. American herbalist Jim McDonald says that hepatotoxicity has been associated with standardised extracts however this has not been associated with the plant. He also says if too much black cohosh is taken, particularly the standardised, it can cause a dull aching headache.

Drug Interactions

Possible beneficial interaction with anticancer treatments such as tamoxifen so women on these medications may require lower doses. It is recommended that patients taking the chemotherapy medications cisplatin or doxorubicin should avoid black cohosh until safety can be confirmed. A beneficial interaction with the fertility drug clomiphene citrate is possible under professional supervision.

Administration and Dosage

Liquid extract 1:1 in 73% alcohol
5 to 40mL weekly