

- Long-term use may result in dependence.
- May discolour urine (pink, red, orange or yellow–brown).¹⁸

Contraindications

- Avoid in intestinal obstruction, ulcerative colitis, appendicitis, abdominal pain of unknown origin or irritable or spastic bowel associated with constipation.
- Avoid in children younger than 12 years of age.

Pregnancy

Insufficient reliable data; the use of bulk-forming or surfactant laxatives is preferred.

Breastfeeding

Cascara constituents are excreted into breast milk and may cause gastrointestinal upset or diarrhoea in the infant. Avoid use.¹⁸

Interactions

Corticosteroids: Prolonged use of cascara may compound diuretic-induced potassium loss.¹⁸

Digoxin and other cardiac glycosides: Prolonged use of cascara may cause potassium depletion and hypokalaemia, increasing the risk of digoxin toxicity. Restrict to use for short-term symptomatic relief; if long-term therapy is necessary, maintain adequate fluid intake and monitor potassium concentration to avoid potential adverse effects of digoxin.²⁰

Stimulant laxatives: Concomitant use increases the risk of potassium depletion.²⁰

Thiazide diuretics: Prolonged use of cascara may compound diuretic-induced potassium loss.¹⁸

Common dosage ranges

Preparations containing non-standardised anthraquinones may cause unpredictable effects and should be avoided. The appropriate amount of cascara is the smallest dose required to maintain soft stools.²⁰

Tablets/capsules: equivalent of 20–30 mg hydroxyanthracene derivatives (calculated as cascaroside A) daily.

Infusion: 1.5–2 g daily of dried bark taken in 150 mL hot water.

celery

Apium graveolens (seed)

Common uses

Celery seed is often used to relieve arthritis, rheumatism, gout, urinary tract inflammation, nervousness and loss of appetite; however, there are currently no published clinical trials investigating efficacy.

Notes

- May cause central nervous system depression (large doses), dermatitis (allergic reaction), hypersensitivity reactions and phototoxicity (avoid large doses prior to ultraviolet radiation exposure).

Pregnancy

Celery seed oil is reputed to have a uterine stimulant, or abortifacient, action. Avoid high-dose preparations.^{3,18,20}

Breastfeeding

Conflicting advice is found in many texts regarding safety of use. There are insufficient reliable data for a clear recommendation.

Interactions

Anticoagulants (e.g. warfarin), antiplatelet drugs (e.g. aspirin, clopidogrel) and NSAIDs (e.g. ibuprofen): Celery constituents can theoretically exert an anticoagulant effect due to the naturally occurring coumarins.³ Monitor INR if warfarin is used and for possible signs of bleeding (e.g. bruising).

Thyroxine: There are two Australian case reports of lowered T₄ levels in female patients taking thyroxine and celery seed tablets. Monitor thyroid function if this combination is taken.²⁷

Common dosage ranges

Seed (fruit): 0.5–2 g of dried seed as a decoction (1:5) three times daily.^{18,20}

Liquid extract (1:1 in 60% alcohol): 0.3–1.2 mL three times daily.¹⁸

chamomile, German

Matricaria recutita (flower heads)

Common uses

Topical anti-inflammatory

Evidence: A clinical trial comparing chamomile with hydrocortisone 0.5% cream found some improvement after two weeks, although both were only marginally better than placebo. The study was considered poorly designed and poorly reported.^{15,16,28}

Insomnia

Evidence: Small, poor-quality studies report possible sedative properties, although results in animal studies have been favourable.³ There have been no well-designed clinical trials in humans.¹⁶

Oral mucositis

Evidence: Conflicting results have been found with studies on oral mucositis caused by radiation therapy and chemotherapy. It is unclear if chamomile is beneficial for this condition.¹⁶