

## bilberry

*Vaccinium myrtillus* (fruit)

### Common use

#### Effect on night vision

**Evidence:** A systematic review of 30 clinical trials (12 placebo-controlled, five RCT, seven non-RCT and six non-placebo controlled trials) found no improvement in night vision attributable to bilberry extract, although it was noted there was a wide variation in doses used.<sup>19</sup>

**Other reported uses:** Circulatory problems and diabetic retinopathy.

#### Notes

- May cause mild gastrointestinal upset.

### Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Insufficient reliable data about use in therapeutic doses.

### Interactions

**Anticoagulants (e.g. warfarin), antiplatelet drugs (e.g. aspirin, clopidogrel) and NSAIDs (e.g. ibuprofen):** Bilberry inhibits platelet aggregation, and it potentially has an anticoagulant effect.<sup>15,16</sup> Monitor for signs of bleeding and possible increase in INR if taking warfarin.

**Iron:** Theoretically, the tannins in bilberry may reduce iron absorption. Separate doses by two hours.<sup>3</sup>

### Common dosage ranges

Bilberry VMA (*Vaccinium myrtillus* anthocyanoside) may be standardised to contain 25% anthocyanidin. The optimal efficacious and safe dose has not been determined.

**Dried extract:** 50–288 mg anthocyanins daily.<sup>3</sup> 80–480 mg bilberry VMA daily in two or three divided doses has been used for circulatory and ophthalmologic problems.<sup>16</sup>

## black cohosh

*Cimicifuga racemosa* (rhizome and root)

### Common use

#### Menopausal symptoms

**Evidence:** Many trials have studied the safety and effectiveness of black cohosh<sup>16</sup>, although few have been well-designed RCTs with large numbers of participants or have been conducted for longer than six months.<sup>20</sup> Some black cohosh extracts have been modestly effective in reducing menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes,

although some trials also found improvement in 50% of the participants receiving placebo.<sup>15</sup> The most consistent positive evidence refers to the product *Remifemin*.<sup>18</sup>

There are contradictory findings for efficacy in managing chemically induced hot flushes such as those induced by tamoxifen.<sup>3,16</sup>

**Other reported uses:** Premenstrual syndrome, dysmenorrhoea and osteoporosis.

#### Notes

- Until further information is available, avoid use in patients with oestrogen-dependent tumours (e.g. certain breast or ovarian cancers), due to possible oestrogenic activity.<sup>20</sup>
- The TGA require the labels of black cohosh products to contain a 'black box'—"Warning: Black cohosh may harm the liver in some individuals. Use under the supervision of a healthcare professional". Monitor for signs of liver toxicity (e.g. nausea, fatigue, loss of appetite, itchy skin, pale stools, dark urine, jaundice or elevated liver function tests).
- Theoretically, taking black cohosh with other hepatotoxic drugs may increase the risk of liver damage.<sup>18</sup>
- Reported side effects include hypotension, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, headache, tremors, mastalgia and weight gain.
- Four to 12 weeks' continuous use may be required for symptom relief.

### Pregnancy

Avoid use due to purported uterine stimulant effects.<sup>9</sup>

### Breastfeeding

Insufficient reliable data.

### Contraindications

- Patients with previous or existing liver disease should avoid use.<sup>20</sup> Black cohosh has been associated with case reports of liver failure and auto-immune hepatitis, although, considering the widespread use, the incidence appears to be low.<sup>21</sup>
- Patients receiving chemotherapy or anti-oestrogenic treatment should consult their medical practitioner prior to use.

### Interactions

**Chemotherapeutic agents:** An in-vitro study demonstrated that black cohosh might alter the efficacy and toxicity of various chemotherapeutic agents on breast cancer cells. The clinical significance is, however, currently unclear.<sup>22</sup>