

skullcap, American/scutellaria

Scutellaria lateriflora (leaf)

There are over 200 members of the genus *Scutellaria*. Different species have different flavonoid profiles and are not considered interchangeable.

Common use

Anxiety

Evidence: A very small 2003 study reported a reduction in general anxiety levels¹⁸³, although further research is needed before skullcap could be considered effective for this indication.

Other reported uses: Ischaemic stroke, insomnia and epilepsy.

Notes

- Very little is known about the safety of American skullcap, although high doses may cause giddiness, stupor, confusion, limb twitching and seizures.
- Fatal hepatotoxicity has been reported, possibly related to contamination with germander from *Teucrium* species, a contaminant often found in skullcap preparations.¹⁸

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Due to insufficient reliable data and the risk of contamination, use should be avoided.²⁰

Interactions

Reliable information is not available.

Common dosage ranges²⁰

Dried herb: A common recommendation is 1–2 g infused in 150 mL of boiling water for five to 10 minutes, strained and taken three times daily. Some references suggest up to 6 g daily may be used.¹⁸⁴

Liquid extract (1:1, 25% ethanol): 2–4 mL three times daily.

skullcap, Chinese/baical skullcap

Scutellaria baicalensis (root)

There are over 200 members of the genus *Scutellaria*. Different species have different flavonoid profiles and are not considered interchangeable. Baical skullcap differs substantially from American skullcap (*S. lateriflora*) and is one of eight ingredients of a herbal combination that is widely promoted and sold over the internet for the treatment of prostate cancer, marketed under the trade names *PC-SPES*, *PC PLUS* and *ProstaSol*.

Common use

Prostate cancer

Evidence: Early uncontrolled studies of *PC-SPES* found positive reductions in prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels, although a 2002 Food and Drug Administration investigation discovered ongoing contamination with indomethacin, diethylstilboestrol and warfarin. No rigorous research has been carried out on the combination since the withdrawal of the proprietary product involved.¹⁶ In view of the possibility of contamination and lack of supporting pharmacological data, its use by patients undergoing treatment for cancer cannot be recommended.²⁰

Other reported uses: Allergic rhinitis, bronchiolitis, and psoriasis.

Notes

- Generally well tolerated, but there has been one case report of hepatitis.
- Theoretically, an additive sedative effect may occur when taken with other sedating medicines.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Due to insufficient reliable data and the risk of contamination, use should be avoided.²⁰

Interactions³

None documented, although very preliminary data suggest possible inhibition of cytochrome P450 CYP1A2.

Common dosage ranges^{3,18}

The studies of baical skullcap have generally focused on the flavonoid constituents baicalin, wogonin and baicalein, rather than the whole herb. Baical skullcap, like most traditional Chinese medicines, is often used in combination with other CAMs and in personalised doses.

Dried herb: 6–15 g daily.

Standardised extract (baicalin): 500 mg three times daily has been used for viral hepatitis. Two to three tablets containing 50 mg in combination with 100 mg of shung hua taken four to six times daily has been recommended for upper respiratory tract infection.

Liquid extract (1:2): 4.5–8.5 mL daily in divided doses.

slippery elm

Ulmus rubra (inner bark)

Common uses

Traditionally, slippery elm has been recommended for dyspepsia, gastritis, reflux, irritable bowel syndrome and Crohn's disease and as an antitussive agent and skin emollient. There is insufficient reliable clinical evidence to support any of the reported uses.