

# Witch Hazel: Uses and Risks

Native Americans have long used the leaves and bark of the witch hazel plant as a folk remedy.

As it turns out, witch hazel contains tannins, oils, and other substances that appear to:

- Lessen inflammation
- Draw tissue together
- Slow bleeding

## Why do people take witch hazel?

Today, you can find witch hazel in your local drugstore. People often use it as an astringent, which draws tissue together and constricts [blood](#) vessels.

People apply witch hazel to the [skin](#) for a variety of problems, such as:

## IN THIS ARTICLE

---

[Why do people take witch hazel?](#)

---

[Can you get witch hazel naturally from foods?](#)

---

[What are the risks of taking witch hazel?](#)

---

ADVERTISEMENT



- [Itching](#)
- Inflammation
- Injury
- [Insect bites](#)
- [Bruises](#) and minor burns
- [Varicose veins](#)
- [Hemorrhoids](#)

Applying witch hazel to the skin is the most common way it is used -- and the safest.

People sometimes take witch hazel by [mouth](#). When taken that way it is used to try to treat conditions as varied as:

CONTINUE READING BELOW

- [Diarrhea](#)
- [Vomiting](#) or [coughing up blood](#)
- [Colitis](#)
- [Colds](#) and [fevers](#)
- [Tuberculosis](#)
- Tumors
- [Cancer](#)

There is no proof that taking witch hazel by mouth helps with these or any other conditions.

Witch hazel may bring some relief from [hemorrhoids](#) or skin irritations and lessen minor bleeding. Witch hazel extracts contain [antioxidant](#) compounds that may protect against [sunburn](#) and aging from the sun.

But the evidence is thin on its use for other conditions. Researchers have more work to do to demonstrate its effectiveness.

These are typical dosages of witch hazel:

- **On the skin:** 5 to 10 grams of leaf and bark simmered in 250 milliliters of water or undiluted
- **As an alcohol extract** (commonly available in pharmacies): Saturate a piece of cloth and apply to the affected area.
- **Rectal area.** By suppository, use 0.1 to 1 gram leaf and bark applied one to three times daily. When applied to anal area, witch hazel water may be applied up to six times a day or after [bowel movements](#).

### Can you get witch hazel naturally from foods?

Witch hazel is not found naturally in foods.

### What are the risks of taking witch hazel?

Witch hazel is relatively safe.

**Side effects.** [Stomach](#) upset may result from taking witch hazel by [mouth](#). When you apply it to skin, it may, rarely, cause inflammation (contact [dermatitis](#)). But even children tend to tolerate it well on the skin.

**Risks.** If you use witch hazel in appropriate amounts, your risks are relatively minor. But if you take high doses by mouth, it may cause [kidney](#) or [liver](#) damage.

Although witch hazel contains a known [cancer](#)-causing ingredient, there's likely no need for concern unless you regularly use high concentrations. The amounts are very small.

Because studies are limited, avoid using witch hazel if you are [pregnant](#) or [breastfeeding](#).

**Interactions.** There aren't any known interactions with drugs, foods, or other herbs and [supplements](#).

**Dietary supplements** are not regulated by the FDA in the same way that food and drugs are. The FDA does not review these supplements for safety or efficacy before they hit the market.

Be sure to tell your doctor about any **supplements** you're taking, even if they're natural. That way, your doctor can check on any potential side effects or interactions with medications, foods, or other herbs and supplements. He or she can let you know if the supplement might raise your risks.

WebMD Medical Reference Reviewed by [Melinda Ratini, DO, MS](#) on February 19, 2020

---