

BILBERRY

(Vaccinium myrtillus)

Clinical Summary

Actions

- Antioxidant
- Anti-inflammatory
- Astringent
- Hypoglycaemic
- Antiplatelet
- Vasoprotective
- Antiulcer
- Antidiarrhoeal
- Cytoprotective
- Apoptosis Inducing

Indications

- Chronic venous insufficiency, haemorrhoids, varicose veins, peripheral vascular disorders (such as Raynaud's syndrome) and capillary fragility
- Impaired night vision, retinopathy (diabetic and vascular), glaucoma, cataract and macular degeneration
- Fibrocystic breast disorder, dysmenorrhoea
- Cancer prevention, adjunct to chemotherapy
- Prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disorders
- Diarrhoea, ulcerative colitis
- Inflammatory disorders

Traditional Use

Bilberry has been used as food for centuries due to its high nutritive value. Bilberry's history of medicinal use dates back to the Middle Ages but it did not become widely known to herbalists until the 16th century, when its use was documented for treating bladder stones, biliary disorders, scurvy, coughs and lung tuberculosis.

Energetics

Cold, dry.

Constituents

Several active constituents have been isolated from the berries and leaves of the bilberry plant, including anthocyanoside flavonoids (anthocyanins), vitamins, sugars and pectins, which are found in the berries; and quercetin, catechins, tannins, iridoids and acids, which are found in the leaves. The berry's anthocyanoside content increases as the fruit ripens, while the reverse is true of its leaf constituents.

Use in Pregnancy

Likely to be safe when consumed in dietary amounts.

Contraindications and Cautions

A theoretical risk exists that high doses (>170 mg anthocyanidins) may increase bleeding risk, however this remains uncertain as there is inadequate clinical evidence. Use with caution in people with haemorrhagic disorders.

Drug Interactions

Monitor with antidiabetic drugs. Avoid use with topoisomerase chemotherapy drugs until safety can be established. Reduced absorption of iron is theoretically possible if taken at the same time because of the tannin content of the herb. Separate doses by two hours.

Administration and Dosage

Liquid extract 1:2 in 50% alcohol
20 to 80mL weekly