

Hops: What You Need to Know About Hops

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In herbal medicine, hops are said to offer a number of health benefits. The female flowers of the *Humulus lupulus* L. plant, hops are often used to treat arthritis, fibromyalgia, insomnia, diabetes, and menopausal symptoms. Although findings from lab experiments and animal research indicate that hops may possess certain health-enhancing properties, few studies to date have tested hops' potential benefits for human health.

The Science Behind Hops' Health Benefits

Here's a look at some findings from the available research on hops' health benefits:

1) Menopause

Test-tube research shows that 8-prenylnaringenin (a substance found in hops) may act as a phytoestrogen (a natural chemical known to mimic the action of estrogen). Since levels of estrogen are known to decline during menopause, some women take hops in order to soothe menopausal symptoms. Indeed, a 2006 study from the journal *Maturitas* found that daily intake of hops helped relieve menopausal symptoms (such as hot flashes). The study involved 67 menopausal women; treatment lasted 12 weeks.

2) Insomnia

Pairing hops with valerian may help treat insomnia, according to a 2010 research review published in *Australian Family Physician*. The review included 16 previously published studies, 12 of which found that the use of valerian on its own or in combination with hops helped improve sleep quality and lessened the amount of time it takes to fall asleep. Used as a bittering agent in beer, hops are thought to deliver sedative effects.

More Research on the Health Benefits of Hops

According to findings from tests on animals and on cells in culture, hops show promise as a natural means of preventing cancer, treating diabetes, and reducing obesity risk. However, these findings have yet to be explored in clinical trials.

Should You Use Hops for Health Purposes?

Little is known about the safety of long-term use of hops. However, people with hormone-sensitive conditions (such as certain forms of breast cancer) may need to avoid hops-containing supplements (due to hops' estrogen-like activity). If you're considering

the use of hops in treatment or prevention of any condition, talk to your doctor to weigh the potential risks and benefits.

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