

Senna

Senna is an herb. The leaves and the fruit of the plant are used to make medicine.

Senna is an FDA-approved nonprescription laxative. It is used to treat constipation and also to clear the bowel before diagnostic tests such as colonoscopy.

Senna is also used for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), hemorrhoids, and weight loss.

Senna fruit seems to be gentler than senna leaf. This has led the American Herbal Products Association (AHPA) to warn against long-term use of senna leaf, but not senna fruit. The AHPA recommends that senna leaf products be labeled, "Do not use this product if you have abdominal pain or diarrhea. Consult a healthcare provider prior to use if you are pregnant or nursing. Discontinue use in the event of diarrhea or watery stools. Do not exceed recommended dose. Not for long-term use."

How does it work?

Senna contains many chemicals called sennosides. Sennosides irritate the lining of the bowel, which causes a laxative effect.

Likely Effective for:

Constipation. Taking senna orally is effective for short-term treatment of constipation. Senna is an FDA-approved nonprescription drug for adults and children ages 2 years and older. However, in children ages 3-15 years, mineral oil and a medication called lactulose might be more effective. In elderly people, senna plus psyllium is more effective than lactulose for treating ongoing constipation.

Possibly Effective for:

Bowel preparation before colonoscopy. Taking senna by mouth might be effective for bowel cleansing before colonoscopy; however, sodium phosphate or polyethylene glycol are more effective.

Insufficient Evidence for:

Hemorrhoids. Irritable bowel disease. Losing weight.

Senna is **LIKELY SAFE** for most adults and children over age 2 when used short-term. Senna is an FDA-approved nonprescription medicine. Senna can cause some side effects including stomach discomfort, cramps, and diarrhea.

Don't use senna for more than two weeks. Longer use can cause the bowels to stop functioning normally and might cause dependence on laxatives. Long-term use can also change the amount or balance of some chemicals in the blood (electrolytes) that can cause heart function disorders, muscle weakness, liver damage, and other harmful effects.

Special Precautions & Warnings:

Pregnancy and breast-feeding: Senna is POSSIBLY SAFE during pregnancy and breast-feeding when used short-term. It is POSSIBLY UNSAFE when used long-term or in high doses. Long-term, frequent use, or use of high doses has been linked to serious side effects including laxative dependence and liver damage.

Although small amounts of senna cross into breast milk, it doesn't seem to be a problem for nursing babies. As long as the mother uses senna in recommended amounts, senna does not cause changes in the frequency or consistency of babies' stools.

Electrolyte disturbances, potassium deficiency: Overuse of senna can make these conditions worse.

Dehydration, diarrhea or loose stools: Senna should not be used in people with dehydration, diarrhea, or loose stools. It can make these conditions worse.

Gastrointestinal (GI) conditions: Senna should not be used by people with abdominal pain (either diagnosed or undiagnosed), intestinal blockage, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, appendicitis, stomach inflammation, anal prolapse, or hemorrhoids.

Heart disease: Senna can cause electrolyte disturbances and might make heart disease worse.

Moderate Interaction Be cautious with this combination

Digoxin (Lanoxin) interacts with SENNA

Senna is a type of laxative called a stimulant laxative. Stimulant laxatives can decrease potassium levels in the body. Low potassium levels can increase the risk of side effects of digoxin (Lanoxin).

Warfarin (Coumadin) interacts with SENNA

Senna can work as a laxative. In some people senna can cause diarrhea. Diarrhea can increase the effects of warfarin and increase the risk of bleeding. If you take warfarin do not to take excessive amounts of senna.

Water pills (Diuretic drugs) interacts with SENNA

Senna is a laxative. Some laxatives can decrease potassium in the body. "Water pills" can also decrease potassium in the body. Taking senna along with "water pills" might decrease potassium in the body too much.

Some "water pills" that can decrease potassium include chlorothiazide (Diuril), chlorthalidone (Thalitone), furosemide (Lasix), hydrochlorothiazide (HCTZ, Hydrodiuril, Microzide), and others.

How to take:

Senna is an FDA-approved nonprescription drug.

For constipation in adults and children age 12 and over: the usual dose is 17.2 mg daily. Don't take more than 34.4 mg per day.

For constipation in children: 8.5 mg daily increased just enough to cause one bowel movement daily has been used.

For constipation in elderly people: 17 mg daily has been used.

For constipation following pregnancy: 28 mg in 2 divided doses has been used.

Adopted from WebMD, 8/15/2014