

Sandalwood (tan xiang)

What is sandalwood? What is it used for?

Sandalwood is a type of tree that grows primarily in India and other parts of Asia. The wood is famous for its use in carving. From a perspective of health, however, the tree's volatile oil is of importance, as it is used in several herbal remedies.

Natural sandalwood oil contains a high amount of two molecules - alpha-santalol and beta-santalol - which have been shown to kill bacteria in laboratory studies. As such, it is valued throughout Asia as a topical treatment for a wide range of skin infections. Traditionally, herbalists have used sandalwood oil to treat acne and other skin diseases. Sandalwood oil can also be taken internally, and has been approved by the German Commission E to treat infections of the lower urinary tract (especially the urinary bladder).

How much sandalwood should I take?

The German Commission E suggests 1/4 teaspoon (1-1.5 grams) of sandalwood oil for urinary tract infections. However, it should be consumed under the supervision of a licensed health care provider, and treatment should last no longer than six weeks. Externally, sandalwood can be dissolved in water and applied to the skin several times per day.

What forms of sandalwood are available?

Sandalwood oil can be found at many herbal shops and Asian specialty stores.

What can happen if I take too much sandalwood? Are there any interactions I should be aware of? What precautions should I take?

Some people may experience a mild skin irritation from topical applications of sandalwood oil. People with kidney disease should not use sandalwood internally, nor should infants and children. The American Herbal Products Association has given sandalwood a class 2D rating; in this instance, it should not be used by people with parenchyma of the kidney, or for longer than six weeks consecutively. In addition, the German

Commission E recommends that women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should not take sandalwood oil internally until further research is conducted. As of this writing, there are no well-known drug interactions with sandalwood. As always, make sure to consult with a licensed health care provider before taking sandalwood oil or any other herbal remedy or dietary supplement.

References

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