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Natural Notes on Health

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Natural notes on health--Milk Thistle

Your liver plays a major role in health because of the hundreds of things it does in and for your body. The liver helps with digestion because it produces bile to break down fat, while it helps metabolize carbohydrates and proteins. It creates important nutrients and can store them for years, and after a meal, the liver converts amino acids to glucose, proteins, or urea.

Your liver produces albumin to help with water balance, proteins crucial to the immune system, coagulation factors and globin for hemoglobin, which carries oxygen in the blood. The liver also produces cholesterol.

As a filter, your liver works hard to break down from food additives, alcohol, pollution, organophosphates, pharmaceuticals and other unfriendly substances that constantly bombard us.

To serve as a liver helper in today's toxic world we can rely on Milk Thistle.

Milk Thistle has been used for liver problems for over 2,000 years, and that's why it is the liver-protecting herb of choice. In ancient Rome, Pliny suggested that it carries off bile. English herbalist Culpepper suggested it was good for jaundice and for removing liver obstructions.

All parts of the milk thistle are said to be edible, and has long been used for food in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean. Young leaves can be trimmed of prickles and added to salads or steamed for a vegetable. They taste a little bitter and astringent and sort of get gummy as you chew.

The roots can be prepared and cooked like salsify or eaten raw. Young flower buds can be steamed and eaten like those of the globe artichoke, a close relative.

Like many members of the daisy family, the scorched roots and seeds of milk thistle have been used as a coffee substitute, the seed cake cattle fodder, and the seed oil for food or lubrication.

Milk thistle has been used for centuries to help support the liver and gall bladder. A key substance found in the seeds is called Silymarin which is a "group of flavonoids that is beneficial to the liver's ability to effectively work with a myriad of impurities. Flavonoids are antioxidants.

Silymarin prevents free radical damage to the liver by acting as an antioxidant. In research Silymarin has been



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found to be at least 10 times more potent in antioxidant activity than vitamin E.

Using properly prepared and high quality Milk thistle products you find it is helpful for preventing and eliminating gall stones; reducing cholesterol levels while improving the "good" kind; in cirrhosis and psoriasis; for hepatitis, diabetes, fatty liver and chemical exposure. Milk thistle is a good companion when you are getting chemo or taking a wide array of prescription drugs.

Milk thistle is believed to possess very little toxicity. Animal studies have not shown any negative effects even when high doses were administered over a long period of time. There is a low incidence of side effects, limited mainly to mild gastrointestinal disturbance.

Used extensively as a food, Milk thistle is believed to be safe for pregnant or nursing women. However, safety in young children, pregnant or nursing women, and individuals with severe renal disease has not been formally established.

No drug interactions are known. However, one report has noted that silybinin (a constituent of silymarin) can inhibit a bacterial enzyme called beta-glucuronidase, which plays a role in the activity of certain drugs, such as oral contraceptives. This could reduce their effectiveness.

The milk thistle is part of one of the largest plant families, the Asteraceae, or Compositae. This family includes everything from lettuce to sunflowers. People with allergy to members of this family (Daisy) are cautioned in its use.

For medicinal purposes are liquid extracts and capsules standardized at 80 percent silymarin. The recommended average daily dose is 200 to 400 milligrams. In some instances, mainly in Europe, intravenous silymarin is used.

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[The Rural thinking man](#)

[The Counseling Corner](#)

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