

The GALE
ENCYCLOPEDIA *of*
ALTERNATIVE
MEDICINE

FOURTH EDITION



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MEDICINE

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VOLUMES

1
A–C

2
D–K

3
L–R

4
S–Z
ORGANIZATIONS
GLOSSARY
INDEX

LAURIE FUNDUKIAN, EDITOR



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CONTENTS

Alphabetical List of Entries.....	vii
Introduction.....	xvii
Advisory Board.....	xix
Contributors	xxi
Entries	
Volume 1: A–C	1
Volume 2: D–K	713
Volume 3: L–R	1397
Volume 4: S–Z	2111
Organizations.....	2623
Glossary.....	2639
General Index	2719

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF ENTRIES

A

5-HTP
Abscess
Açaí berry
Acidophilus
Acne
Aconite
Acudetox
Acupressure
Acupuncture
Ademetionine
Adie's pupil
African pygeum
Agastache
Aging
AIDS
Alcoholism
Alexander technique
Alfalfa
Alisma
Allergies
Allium cepa
Aloe
Alpha-hydroxy
Alzheimer's disease
Amenorrhea
Amino acids
Andrographis
Androstenedione
Anemarrhena
Anemia
Angelica root
Angina
Anise

Ankylosing spondylitis
Anorexia nervosa
Anthroposophical medicine
Anti-aging diet
Anti-inflammatory diets
Antioxidants
Anxiety
Apis
Apitherapy
Apple cider vinegar
Applied kinesiology
Apricot seed
Arginine
Arka
Arnica
Aromatherapy
Arrowroot
Arsenicum album
Art therapy
Artichoke
Ashwaganda
Asthma
Astigmatism
Aston-Patterning
Astragalus
Atherosclerosis
Athlete's foot
Atkins diet
Atractylodes
Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder
Aucklandia
Auditory integration training
Aura therapy
Auriculotherapy

Autism
Avenar
Ayurvedic medicine

B

Bach flower essences
Balm of Gilead
Barberry
Barley grass
Bates method
Bayberry
Bedsores
Bedwetting
Bee pollen
Beetroot
Behavioral optometry
Behavioral therapy
Belladonna
Beta carotene
Beta-hydroxy
Betaine hydrochloride
Beta-methylbutyric acid
Bhakti yoga
Bilberry
Binge eating disorder
Biofeedback
Bioflavonoids
Bioidentical hormone therapy
Biota
Biotherapeutic drainage
Biotin
Bipolar disorder
Bites and stings

Bitter melon
 Bitters
 Black cohosh
 Black cumin seed extract
 Black currant seed oil
 Black haw
 Black walnut
 Bladder cancer
 Bladder infection
 Bladderwrack
 Blessed thistle
 Blisters
 Blood clots
 Blood poisoning
 Bloodroot
 Blue cohosh
 Body odor
 Boils
 Bone spurs
 Bonemeal
 Boneset
 Borage oil
 Boron
 Boswellia
 Botanical medicine
 Breast cancer
 Breastfeeding problems
 Breath therapy
 Breema
 Brewer's yeast
 Bromelain
 Bronchitis
 Bruises
 Bruxism
 Bryonia
 Buchu
 Buckthorn
 Bugleweed
 Bulimia nervosa
 Bunions
 Burdock root
 Burns
 Bursitis
 Butcher's broom
 Buteyko

C

Cadmium poisoning
 Caffeine
 Calcareo carbonica
 Calcium
 Calendula
 Cancer
 Cancer treatments, biological
 Cancer-fighting foods
 Canker sores
 Cannabinoids
 Cantharis
 Capsicum
 Carnitine
 Carotenoids
 Carpal tunnel syndrome
 Cartilage supplements
 Castor oil
 Cataracts
 Catnip
 Cat's claw
 Cayce systems
 Cayenne
 Celiac disease
 Cell salt therapy
 Cell therapy
 Cellulite
 Cerebral palsy
 Cerebral vascular insufficiency
 Cervical dysplasia
 Chakra balancing
 Chamomile
 Charcoal, activated
 Chasteberry tree
 Chelated minerals
 Chelation therapy
 Chelidonium
 Chemical poisoning
 Cherry bark
 Cherry juice
 Chickenpox
 Chickweed
 Chicory
 Childbirth

Childhood nutrition
 Chills
 Chinese foxglove root
 Chinese massage
 Chinese system of food cures
 Chinese thoroughwax
 Chinese yam
 Chiropractic
 Chlamydia
 Chlorella
 Cholesterol
 Choline
 Chondroitin
 Christian Science healing
 Chromium
 Chronic fatigue syndrome
 Chronobiology
 Chrysanthemum flower
 Chymotrypsin
 Cicada
 Cinnamon bark
 Cirrhosis
 Club moss
 Cnidium seeds
 Codonopsis root
 Coenzyme Q10
 Coix
 Colchicum
 Cold sores
 Coleus
 Coley's toxin
 Colic
 Colitis
 Colloidal silver
 Colonic irrigation
 Color therapy
 Colorectal cancer
 Colostrum
 Coltsfoot
 Comfrey
 Common cold
 Complementary/alternative medicine and surgery
 Conjunctivitis
 Constipation
 Contact dermatitis

Copper
 Coptis
 Cordyceps
 Corns and calluses
 Cornsilk
 Cornus
 Corydalis
 Cotton root bark
 Cough
 Cradle cap
 Cramp bark
 Cranberry
 Craniosacral therapy
 Creatine
 Crohn's disease
 Croup
 Crystal healing
 Cupping
 Curanderismo
 Curcumin
 Cuscuta
 Cuts and scratches
 Cymatic therapy
 Cyperus

D

Damiana
 Dance therapy
 Dandelion
 Dandruff
 Deglycyrrhizinated licorice
 Dementia
 Depression
 Dermatitis
 Detoxification
 Devil's claw
 DHEA
 Diabetes mellitus
 Diamond diet
 Diaper rash
 Diarrhea
 Diathermy
 Diet and disease prevention
 Diets
 Digestive enzymes

Digitalis
 Diverticulitis
 Dizziness
 Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)
 Dolomite
 Dong quai
 Dry mouth
 Dysbiosis
 Dyslexia
 Dysmenorrhea

E

Ear infection
 Earache
 Eat Right for Your Type Diet
 Echinacea
 Eczema
 Edema
 Elder
 Electroacupuncture
 Elimination diet
 Emphysema
 Endometriosis
 Energy medicine
 Environmental therapy
 Enzyme therapy
 Ephedra
 Epididymitis
 Epilepsy
 Epimedium
 Escharotic treatment
 Essential fatty acids
 Essential oils
 Essiac tea
 Eucalyptus
 Eucommia bark
 Eupatorium
 Euphrasia
 Evening primrose oil
 Evodia fruit
 Exercise
 Eyebright

F

Facial massage
 Fasting
 Fatigue
 Feldenkrais
 Feng shui
 Fennel
 Fenugreek
 Ferrum phosphoricum
 Fever
 Feverfew
 Fibrocystic breast disease
 Fibromyalgia
 Fish oil
 Flaxseed
 Flower remedies
 Fo ti
 Folic acid
 Food poisoning
 Fractures
 French green clay
 Fritillaria
 Frostbite and frostnip
 Fructooligosaccharides
 Fungal infections

G

Gallstones
 Gamma-linoleic acid
 Gangrene
 Ganoderma
 Garcinia
 Gardenia
 Garlic
 Gas
 Gastritis
 Gastrodia
 Gastroenteritis
 Gelsemium
 Genital herpes
 Genital warts
 Gentiana
 Geriatric massage

Gerson therapy
 Ginger
 Ginkgo biloba
 Ginseng, American
 Ginseng, Korean
 Ginseng, Siberian
 Glaucoma
 Glucosamine
 Glutamine
 Glutathione
 Gluten-free diet
 Glycemic index diets
 Goldenrod
 Goldenseal
 Gonorrhea
 Gotu kola
 Gout
 Grains-of-paradise fruit
 Grape seed extract
 Grape skin
 Grapefruit seed extract
 Green tea
 Guggul
 Guided imagery
 Gulf War syndrome
 Gum disease
 Gymnema

H

Hair loss
 Halitosis
 Hangover
 Hashimoto's thyroiditis
 Hatha yoga
 Hawthorn
 Hay fever
 Headache
 Hearing loss
 Heart attack
 Heart disease
 Heartburn
 Heavy metal poisoning
 Heel spurs
 Hellerwork
 Hemorrhoids

Hepar sulphuris
 Hepatitis
 Herbal cold remedies
 Herbalism, traditional Chinese
 Herbalism, Western
 Herniated disk
 Hesperidin
 Hiatal hernia
 Hibiscus
 Hiccups
 High sensitivity C reactive protein test
 High-fiber diet
Hirudo medicinalis
 Hives
 Hodgkin's disease
 Holistic dentistry
 Holistic medicine
 Homeopathy
 Homeopathy, acute prescribing
 Homeopathy, constitutional prescribing
 Honeysuckle
 Hoodia
 Hops
 Horehound
 Horse chestnut
 Horsetail
 Horticultural therapy
 Hot flashes
 Hoxsey formula
 Humor therapy
 Huna
 Hydrotherapy
 Hypercortisolemia
 Hyperopia
 Hyperparathyroidism
 Hypertension
 Hyperthermia
 Hyperthyroidism
 Hypnotherapy
 Hypoglycemia
 Hypothyroidism
 Hyssop

I

Iceland moss
 Ignatia
 Immuno-augmentation therapy
 Impetigo
 Impotence
 Indigestion
 Infant massage
 Infections
 Infertility
 Inflammatory bowel disease
 Influenza
 Ingrown nail
 Inositol
 Insomnia
 Insulin resistance
 Interstitial cystitis
 Iodine
 Ipecac
 Ipriflavone
 Iridology
 Iron
 Irritable bowel syndrome
 Ischemia
 Itching

J

Jamaica dogwood
 Jaundice
 Jet lag
 Jock itch
 Jojoba oil
 Journal therapy
 Juice fasts
 Juice therapies
 Juniper
 Juvenile rheumatoid arthritis

K

Kali bichromicum
 Kampo medicine
 Kaposi's sarcoma

Kava kava
Kegel exercises
Kelley-Gonzalez diet
Kelp
Kidney infections
Kidney stones
Kirlian photography
Knee pain
Kneipp wellness
Kola nut
Kombucha
Kudzu

L

Labyrinth walking
Lachesis
Lactobacillus species
Lacto-ovo vegetarianism
Lactose intolerance
Laryngitis
Lavender
Lazy eye
Lead poisoning
Learning disorders
Lecithin
Ledum
Lemon balm
Lemongrass
Leukemia
Lice infestation
Licorice
Light therapy
Linoleic acid
Lipase
Livingston-Wheeler therapy
Lobelia
Lomatium
Lomilomi
Lou Gehrig's disease
Low back pain
Lung cancer
Lutein
Lycium fruit
Lycopene
Lycopodium

Lycopus
Lyme disease
Lymphatic drainage
Lysimachia
Lysine

M

Macrobiotic diet
Macular degeneration
Magnesium
Magnetic therapy
Magnolia
Maitake
Malaria
Malignant lymphoma
Manganese
Mangosteen
Manuka honey
Marijuana
Marsh mallow
Martial arts
Massage therapy
McDougall diet
Measles
Meditation
Mediterranean diet
Medium-chain triglycerides
Melatonin
Memory loss
Ménière's disease
Meningitis
Menopause
Menstruation
Mercurius vivus
Mercury poisoning
Mesoglycan
Metabolic therapies
Metamorphic technique
Methionine
Mexican yam
Microbiome
Migraine headache
Milk thistle
Mind/body medicine

Mindfulness-based stress reduction
Mistletoe
Modified citrus pectin
Mononucleosis
Morning sickness
Motherwort
Motion sickness
Movement therapy
Moxibustion
MSM
Mugwort leaf
Mullein
Multiple chemical sensitivity
Multiple sclerosis
Mumps
Muscle spasms and cramps
Music therapy
Myopia
Myotherapy
Myrrh

N

Narcolepsy
Native American medicine
Natrum muriaticum
Natural hormone replacement therapy
Natural hygiene diet
Naturopathic medicine
Nausea
Neck pain
Neem
Nettle
Neural therapy
Neuralgia
Neurolinguistic programming
Niacin
Night blindness
Noni
Nosebleeds
Notoginseng root
Nutmeg
Nutrition
Nux vomica

O

Oak
 Obesity
 Obsessive-compulsive disorder
 Oleander
 Olive leaves
 Omega-3 fatty acids
 Omega-6 fatty acids
 Ophiopogon
 Oregano essential oil
 Organic food
 Ornish diet
 Ortho-bionomy
 Orthomolecular medicine
 Osha
 Osteoarthritis
 Osteopathy
 Osteoporosis
 Ovarian cancer
 Ovarian cysts
 Oxygen/ozone therapy

P

Pain
 Paleolithic diet
 Panchakarma
 Pancreatitis
 Panic disorder
 Pantothenic acid
 Parasitic infections
 Parkinson's disease
 Parsley
 Passionflower
 Past-life therapy
 Patient Protection and Affordable
 Care Act (PPACA)
 Pau d'arco
 Pelvic inflammatory disease
 Pennyroyal
 Peppermint
 Perillyl alcohol
 Peripheral neuropathy
 Periwinkle
 Pet therapy

Phlebitis
 Phobias
 Phosphorus
 Phytolacca
 Pilates
 Pinched nerve
 Pine bark extract
 Pinellia
 Pityriasis rosea
 Placebo effect
 Plantain
 Pleurisy
 Pneumonia
 Polarity therapy
 Polycystic ovary syndrome
 Polysaccharopeptide
 Pomegranate
 Positive emotions
 Postpartum depression
 Post-traumatic stress disorder
 Potassium
 Pranic healing
 Prayer and spirituality
 Prebiotics
 Pregnancy
 Pregnancy massage
 Premenstrual syndrome
 Prickly heat
 Prickly pear cactus
 Prince's pine
 Pritikin diet
 Probiotics
 Progressive muscle relaxation
 Prolotherapy
 Prostate cancer
 Prostate enlargement
 Psoralea seeds
 Psoriasis
 Psychoneuroimmunology
 Psychophysiology
 Psychosomatic medicine
 Psychotherapy
 Psyllium
 Pulsatilla
 Pulse diagnosis
 Pyridoxine

Q

Qigong
 Quan yin
 Quercetin

R

Rabies
 Radiation injuries
 Radiesthesia
 Radionics
 Rashes
 Raspberry
 Raw foods diet
 Raynaud's syndrome
 Red cedar
 Red clover
 Red yeast rice extract
 Reflexology
 Reiki
 Reishi mushroom
 Relaxation
 Rescue Remedy
 Restless leg syndrome
 Resveratrol
 Retinal detachment
 Retinopathy
 Rheumatic fever
 Rheumatoid arthritis
 Rhinitis
 Rhodiola rosea
 Rhubarb root
 Rhus toxicodendron
 Riboflavin
 Roling
 Rosacea
 Rose hip
 Rosemary
 Rosen method
 Royal jelly
 Rubella
 Rubenfeld synergy
 Russian massage
 Ruta

S

Saccharomyces boulardii
Safflower flower
Saffron
Sage
Saliva sample testing
Sargassum seaweed
Sassafras
Saw palmetto
Scabies
Scallion
Scarlet fever
Schisandra
Schizophrenia
Sciatica
Scoliosis
Seasonal affective disorder
Selenium
Senior nutrition
Senna
Sensory deprivation
Sensory integration disorder
Sepia
Sesame oil
Sexual dysfunction
Shamanism
Shangri-la diet
Sheep sorrel
Shepherd's purse
Shiatsu
Shiitake mushroom
Shin splints
Shingles
Shintaido
Sick building syndrome
Sickle cell anemia
Silica
Sinus infection
Sjögren's syndrome
Skin cancer
Skullcap
Sleep apnea
Sleep disorders
Slippery elm
Smoking

Sneezing
Snoring
Sodium
Somatics
Sore throat
Sound therapy
South Beach diet
Soy protein
Spearmint
Spinal manipulative therapy
Spirulina
Sports massage
Sprains and strains
Squawvine
St. John's wort
Staphylococcal infections
Stevia
Sties
Stomachaches
Stone massage
Strep throat
Stress
Stroke
Substance abuse and dependence
Sulfur
Suma
Sunburn
Sun's soup
Swedish massage
Sweet clover
Swimmer's ear
Syntonic optometry
Syphilis
Systemic lupus erythematoses

T

T'ai chi
Tangerine peel
Tea tree oil
Teenage nutrition
Teething problems
Temporomandibular joint syndrome

Tendinitis
Tennis elbow
Tetanus
Thai massage
Theanine
Therapeutic touch
Thermography
Thiamine
Thuja
Thunder god vine
Thyme
Tibetan medicine
Tinnitus
Tonsillitis
Toothache
Tourette syndrome
Toxic shock syndrome
Traditional African medicine
Traditional Chinese medicine
Trager psychophysical integration
Trans fats
Tremors
Trepanation
Trichomoniasis
Trigger point therapy
Triglycerides
Triphala
Tuberculosis
Turkey tail mushroom
Turmeric

U

Ukrain
Ulcers, digestive
Unani-tibbi
Urinary incontinence
Urine therapy
Usnea
Uterine cancer
Uterine fibroids
Uva ursi

V

Vaginitis
 Valerian
 Vanadium
 Varicose veins
 Veganism
 Vegetarianism
 Venom immunotherapy
 Vitalistic approach
 Vitamin A
 Vitamin B complex
 Vitamin B12
 Vitamin C
 Vitamin D
 Vitamin E
 Vitamin K
 Vitamins
 Vomiting

W

Warts
 Wasabi
 Water and nutrition
 Wheat germ
 Wheat grass therapy
 Wheezing
 White peony root
 White willow
 Whole foods vs. processed foods
 Whole grains
 Whooping cough
 Wigmore diet
 Wild oat
 Wintergreen
 Witch hazel

Worms
 Wormwood
 Wounds

Y

Yarrow
 Yeast infection
 Yellow dock
 Yerba santa
 Yoga
 Yohimbe
 Yucca

Z

Zinc
 Zone diet

PLEASE READ—IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The *Gale Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine, 4th Edition* is a health reference product designed to inform and educate readers about a wide variety of alternative and complementary medical therapies, including herbal remedies and treatments for prevalent conditions and diseases. Cengage Learning believes the product to be comprehensive, but not necessarily definitive. It is intended to supplement, not replace, consultation with physicians or other healthcare practitioners. While Cengage Learning has made substantial efforts to provide information that is accurate, comprehensive, and up-to-date,

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INTRODUCTION

The *Gale Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine (GEAM)* is a one-stop source for alternative medical information that covers complementary therapies, herbs and remedies, and common medical diseases and conditions. It avoids medical jargon, making it easier for the layperson to use. The *Gale Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine* presents authoritative, balanced information and is more comprehensive than single-volume family medical guides.

SCOPE

More than 800 full-length articles are included in the *Gale Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine*. Many prominent figures are highlighted as sidebar biographies that accompany the therapy entries. Articles follow a standardized format that provides information at a glance. Rubrics include the following (if applicable within an entry):

Therapies

- Origins
- Benefits
- Description
- Preparations
- Precautions
- Side effects
- Research and general acceptance
- Resources
- Key terms

Herbs/remedies

- General use
- Preparations
- Precautions
- Side effects
- Interactions

- Resources
- Key terms

Diseases/conditions

- Definition
- Description
- Causes and symptoms
- Diagnosis
- Treatment
- Allopathic treatment
- Expected results
- Prevention
- Resources
- Key terms

INCLUSION CRITERIA

For the first edition, a preliminary list of therapies, herbs, remedies, diseases, and conditions was compiled from a wide variety of sources, including medical professionals, guides and textbooks, as well as consumer guides and encyclopedias. For this updated edition, the advisory board, made up of three medical and alternative healthcare experts, evaluated the topics and made suggestions for inclusion and deletion. Final selection of topics to include was made by the medical advisors in conjunction with Cengage editors.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

The essays were compiled by experienced medical writers, including alternative healthcare practitioners and educators, pharmacists, nurses, and other healthcare professionals. *GEAM* medical advisors reviewed completed essays to ensure that they are appropriate, up-to-date, and medically accurate.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The *Gale Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine* has been designed with ready reference in mind:

- Straight **alphabetical arrangement** allows users to locate information quickly.
- **Bold-faced terms** function as *print hyperlinks* that point the reader to related entries in the encyclopedia.
- A list of **key terms** is provided where appropriate to define unfamiliar words or concepts used within the context of the essay. Additional terms may be found in the **glossary**.
- **Cross-references** placed throughout the encyclopedia direct readers to where information on subjects

without their own entries can be found. Synonyms are also cross-referenced.

- A **Resources section** directs users to sources of further complementary medical information.
- An appendix of alternative medical organizations includes valuable **contact information**.
- A comprehensive **general index** allows users to easily target detailed aspects of any topic, including Latin names.

GRAPHICS

The *Gale Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine* is enhanced with more than 500 color images, including photos, tables, and customized illustrations.

ADVISORY BOARD

Experts in the medical community provided invaluable assistance in the formulation of this encyclopedia, and the editor would like to express her appreciation. The advisory board performed myriad duties, from defining the scope of coverage to reviewing individual entries for accuracy and accessibility.

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5-HTP

Description

5-HTP is the acronym for 5-hydroxytryptophan, also called 5-hydroxy-L-tryptophan. 5-HTP is found primarily in the brain. This compound is made from tryptophan, a natural amino acid found in foods. Tryptophan is an essential amino acid, which means that it cannot be made by the body; it must be obtained from food, particularly proteins. In the liver and brain, 5-HTP is converted to an important monoamine neurotransmitter called serotonin. Neurotransmitters are chemical messengers that transmit signals between neurons (nerve cells).

Taking 5-HTP increases the body's supply of the compound, which leads to higher serotonin levels in the brain. Serotonin, also called 5-hydroxytryptamine or 5-HT, plays an important role in controlling behavior and moods. It influences many normal brain activities and also regulates the activity of other neurotransmitters. Having adequate levels of serotonin instills a feeling of **relaxation**, calm, and mild euphoria (extreme happiness). Low levels of serotonin, serotonin deficiency syndrome, leads to **depression**, anxiety, irritability, **insomnia**, and many other problems.

Conditions associated with low levels of serotonin include:

- anxiety
- attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- bulimia
- depression
- epilepsy
- fibromyalgia
- headaches
- hyperactivity
- insomnia
- obesity

- obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
- panic attacks
- premenstrual syndrome (PMS)
- schizophrenia
- seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

5-HTP has other effects on the body. It is an antioxidant that protects the body from damage by substances called free radicals (unstable, toxic molecules). In this role, 5-HTP may help slow the **aging** process and protect the body from illness. Because serotonin is used to make **melatonin**, taking 5-HTP may help achieve some of the same benefits as melatonin, such as treating **jet lag**, depression, and insomnia. There is some evidence that 5-HTP can replenish the supply of the pain-relieving molecules called endorphins. Studies have shown that low levels of endorphins are associated with **chronic fatigue syndrome**, **fibromyalgia**, **stress**, and depression. In addition, 5-HTP affects other neurotransmitters, including norepinephrine and dopamine.

General use

In studies, 5-HTP has been proven effective in the treatment of carbohydrate cravings and binge eating, chronic headaches, depression, fibromyalgia, insomnia, anxiety, and panic disorders.

Much of the clinical research with 5-HTP focused on the treatment of depression. In 15 separate studies, 5-HTP was tested on a total of 511 patients with different kinds of depression. Over half (56%) of these patients had significant improvement in depression while taking 5-HTP. The compound was found to be as effective as the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) fluvoxamine and the tricyclic antidepressants, chloripramine and imipramine. Many of these studies used relatively high doses ranging from 50–3,250 mg daily.

Three clinical studies found that 5-HTP can significantly improve the **pain**, anxiety, morning stiffness, and **fatigue** associated with fibromyalgia. The doses ranged from 300–400 mg daily. In one study, 5-HTP treatment was as effective as a tricyclic antidepressant (amitriptyline) and monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOI; pargyline or phenelzine).

Three clinical studies found that 5-HTP use led to decreased intake of food and subsequent weight loss in obese patients. The dose used in one study was 900 mg daily, which initially caused **nausea** in 80% of the patients.

A few clinical trials have found that 5-HTP can effectively prevent chronic headaches, including **migraine headache** and tension **headache**. In addition, 5-HTP compared favorably with propranolol and methysergide, drugs commonly used to prevent migraines.

In treating insomnia, 5-HTP is effective because it increases the length of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which improves sleep quality.

The symptoms of anxiety may be significantly reduced by 5-HTP. In studies, it instilled a sense of relief in patients with panic disorders.

Other conditions that may be treated with 5-HTP, but for which no studies exist, include chronic fatigue syndrome, **premenstrual syndrome**, **Parkinson's disease**, and seizure disorders (such as **epilepsy**).

Although 5-HTP may be a useful alternative to conventional antidepressant drugs, one study indicated that it may be of no value for patients who have failed to respond to traditional drugs. In this study, patients who failed to respond to tricyclic antidepressants were treated with either 5-HTP or a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAO-I). Half of the patients improved with the MAO-I treatment, while none showed any benefit from 5-HTP treatment.

Some uncertainty remained about the efficacy of 5-HTP. In reviewing the evidence about the use of 5-HTP in 2008, the Internet source SupplementWatch.com concluded that “The overall scientific evidence for the effectiveness of 5-HTP is not very strong.”

Preparations

The 5-HTP preparation available commercially is isolated from the seed of an African plant called *Griffonia simplicifolia*. It is available as an enteric coated tablet, which does not break down until it reaches the intestine.

The recommended starting dose for headaches, weight loss, depression, and fibromyalgia is 50 mg

three times daily. It can be taken with food. However, for weight loss it should be taken 20 minutes before eating. If it is not effective after two weeks, the dose may be increased to 100 mg three times daily, but only with the recommendation of a physician. Insomnia is treated with 25 mg (which may be increased to 100 mg after a few days) taken 30–45 minutes before bedtime.

Precautions

The Mayo Clinic detected, and the U.S. Federal Drug Administration (FDA) confirmed, the presence of a contaminant (peak X) in 5-HTP produced by six different manufacturers. This contaminant is similar to one found in L-tryptophan, which in 1989 caused the potentially fatal eosinophilia myalgia syndrome (EMS) in some persons. The L-tryptophan supplements were subsequently banned by the FDA. There have been 10 reports of EMS associated with 5-HTP use. The 5-HTP contaminant was not at levels high enough to cause illness. However, taking excessive doses of 5-HTP may lead to toxic levels of peak X.

Long-term studies on the safety of 5-HTP use had not been conducted as of 2013. To be safe, 5-HTP should be considered a short-term remedy.

Pregnant women should not take 5-HTP because there are no clinical studies on the compound's use among this population.

Side effects

Side effects associated with 5-HTP are rare but may include headaches, mild stomachaches, nausea, nasal congestion, and **constipation**. There are anecdotal reports that taking high doses of 5-HTP causes nightmares or vivid dreams. Side effects may be minimized by starting with a low dose of 5-HTP and taking it with food.

Interactions

It is theorized that the effectiveness of 5-HTP may be enhanced by taking vitamin B₆ and niacinamide. The action of 5-HTP may be enhanced by extracts of **ginger**, **passionflower** (*Passiflora incarnata*), **St. John's wort**, and *Ginkgo biloba*.

Dopa-decarboxylase inhibitors, such as carbidopa or benserazide block the enzyme that is responsible for the destruction of dopamine. However, a study by the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences demonstrated that 5-HTP reaches the brain without the use of a dopa-decarboxylase inhibitor and will produce the benefits of stress reduction and reduced food intake even when used alone.

KEY TERMS

Eosinophilia myalgia syndrome (EMS)—A chronic, painful disease of the immune system that causes joint pain, fatigue, shortness of breath, and swelling of the arms and legs. EMS can be fatal.

Monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI)—An antidepressant drug that prevents the breakdown of monoamine neurotransmitters (such as serotonin) in the gaps between nerve cells. Nardil and Parnate are common MAOI brands.

Neurotransmitter—A chemical messenger that transmits signals between nerve cells.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI)—A family of antidepressant drugs that block the reabsorption of serotonin by nerve cells. Prozac, Zoloft, and Paxil are common brand names for these drugs.

Serotonin syndrome—A syndrome characterized by agitation, confusion, delirium, and perspiration, which is caused by high levels of serotonin in the brain.

Tricyclic antidepressant (TCA)—A group of antidepressant drugs that all have three rings in their chemical structure. Their mechanism of action is not fully understood, but they appear to extend the duration of action of some neurohormones, including serotonin and norepinephrine. They have also been used to treat some forms of chronic pain. Common brand names are Aventyl, Elavil, Surmontil, and Vivactil.

There is a chance of developing serotonin syndrome when taking 5-HTP with an antidepressant drug. Serotonin syndrome was seen in patients taking high doses (greater than 1,200 mg daily) of L-tryptophan and MAO inhibitors. Combining 5-HTP with a MAOI or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor antidepressant should be done with caution, under the supervision of a physician.

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Abdominal pain see **Stomachaches**

Abscess

Definition

An abscess is a place of accumulation of the creamy white, yellow, or greenish fluid, known as pus, surrounded by reddened tissue. It is the result of the body's inflammatory response to a foreign body or a bacterial, viral, parasitic, or fungal infection. An abscess usually dries out and resolves when it is drained of pus. The most common parts of the body affected by abscesses are the face, armpits, arms and legs, rectum, sebaceous glands (oil glands), and the breast during lactation.

Description

Most abscesses are septic, which means they are the result of an infection. Abscesses occur when white blood cells (WBCs) gather in response to an infection. They produce oxidants (for example, superoxide radical) and enzymes to digest the invading bacteria, viruses, parasites, or fungi. The infective agents are then broken down by the WBCs into small pieces that can be transported through the bloodstream and eliminated from the body. Unfortunately, the enzymes may also digest part of the body's tissues along with the infective agents. The resulting liquid of this digestion is pus, which contains the remains of the infective agents, tissue, white blood cells, and enzymes.

A sterile abscess is one that is not produced by an infection. It is caused by irritants, such as foreign bodies or injected drugs, and medications that have not been totally absorbed. Sterile abscesses quite often heal into hardened scar tissue.



Methicillin resistant *Staph aureus* skin abscess. (Scott Camazine/Alamy)

Common types of abscesses

- Boils and carbuncles. Sebaceous glands and superficial skin are the places usually infected.
- Dental abscess. An abscess that develops along the root of a tooth.
- Pilonidal abscess. People who have a birth defect involving a tiny opening in the skin just above the anus may have fecal bacteria enter this opening, causing an infection and a subsequent abscess.
- Retropharyngeal, parapharyngeal, peritonsillar abscess. As a result of throat infections like strep throat and tonsillitis, bacteria invade the deeper tissues of the throat and cause a parapharyngeal or peritonsillar abscess. A retropharyngeal abscess is a result of something usually blood-borne, and not from a direct spread of tonsillitis. These abscesses can compromise swallowing and even breathing.
- Lung abscess. During or after pneumonia, an abscess can develop as a complication.

- Liver abscess. Bacteria, parasites, or amoeba from the intestines can spread through the blood to the liver and cause abscesses.
- Psoas abscess. An abscess can develop in the psoas muscles, when an infection spreads from the appendix, the large intestine, or the fallopian tubes.
- Butin abscess. Any blood-borne feeding off bacteria that stimulate pus production (pyogenic organisms). Can cause abscesses in possibly many sites.

Causes and symptoms

Many different agents cause abscesses. The most common are the pyogenic, or pus-forming bacteria, such as *Staphylococcus aureus*, which is nearly always the cause of abscesses directly under the skin. Abscesses are usually caused by organisms that normally inhabit nearby structures or that infect them. For example, abscesses around the anus may be caused by any of the numerous bacteria found within the large intestine. Brain abscesses and liver abscesses are caused by the bacteria, amoeba, and fungi that are able to travel there through circulation.

Symptoms of an abscess are the general signs of inflammation. Symptoms that identify superficial abscesses include heat, redness, swelling, and **pain** over the affected area. Abscesses in other places may produce only generalized symptoms, such as **fever** and discomfort. A sterile abscess may present as painful lump deep under the site of an injection. A severe infection may bring on fever, **fatigue**, weight loss, and **chills**. Recurrent abscesses may indicate undiscovered **allergies** or decreased immune functioning.

Diagnosis

A general physical examination and a detailed patient history are used to diagnose an abscess. Recent or chronic disease or dysfunction in an organ suggests it may be the site of an abscess. Pain and tenderness on physical examination are common findings. There may also be a leakage of pus from a sinus tract connected to an abscess deep in the body tissue.

Treatment

Bentonite clay packs with a small amount of **goldenseal powder** (*Hydrastis canadensis*) can be placed on the site of a superficial abscess and used to draw out the infection. **Tea tree oil** (*Melaleuca* spp.) and **garlic** (*Allium sativa*) directly applied to abscesses may also help to clear them.

Applications of a hot compress to the skin over the abscess will hasten the draining or the reabsorption of

the abscess. Contrast **hydrotherapy**, using alternating hot and cold compresses, can also be used. Additionally, localized warm/hot soaks three to five times daily frequently brings an abscess to heal.

Homeopathic remedies that can be taken to help diminish abscess formation include **belladonna**, **silica**, **Hepar sulphuris**, and **calendula**. Also, **acupuncture** may be recommended to help treat pain caused by an abscess. In addition, **vitamins A and C**, **beta-carotene**, **zinc**, liquid chlorophyll, and garlic are useful as supportive daily nutrients to help clear up abscesses.

Allopathic treatment

Often, the pus of an abscess must be drained by a physician. Ordinarily, the body will handle the remaining infection. Sometimes antibiotics are prescribed. The doctor may often put a piece of cloth or rubber, called a drain, in the cavity of the abscess to prevent it from closing until all the pus has drained.

Expected results

Once the abscess is properly drained, it should clear up in a few days. Any underlying diseases will determine the overall outcome of the condition. Recurrent abscesses, especially those on the skin, return due to either defective/altered immunity, or staph overgrowth, where there is high bacterial colonization on the skin. The patient should consult a physician for treatment with which to wash the skin areas, and treatment to eradicate colonization.

If the abscess ruptures into neighboring areas or if the infectious agent spills into the bloodstream, serious consequences are likely. Abscesses in and around the nasal sinuses, face, ears, and scalp may spread the infection into the brain. Abscesses in the abdominal cavity, such as in the liver, may rupture into that cavity. **Blood poisoning**, or septicemia, is an infection that has spilled into the bloodstream and then spreads throughout the body. These are emergency situations where the patient needs to be seen by a physician as soon as possible.

It is important to take note that abscesses in the hand may be more serious than they might appear. Due to the intricate structure and the overriding importance of the hand, any hand infection must be treated promptly and competently.

Prevention

Infections that are treated early with heat, if superficial, or antibiotics, if deeper, will often resolve without the formation of an abscess. It is even better to

KEY TERMS

Bentonite clay—A green clay of aluminum silicate containing magnesium and trace minerals. The clay has the ability to attract and hold to its surface agents of infection from a wound.

Enzyme—A protein that can increase the rate of chemical reactions.

Sinus tract—A channel connecting a body part with the skin outside.

avoid infections altogether by promptly cleaning and irrigating open injuries, particularly **bites** and puncture **wounds**.

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Patience Paradox

Absinthe see **Wormwood**

Açaí berry

Definition

Açaí (pronounced ah-sah-EE) berry is the drupe, or fruit, of the açaí palm tree (*Euterpe oleracea*), a species of palm native to Central and South America. The name of the plant is the Portuguese form of its name in the Tupi language—a word that means “fruit that cries water.” At one time the açaí palm was cultivated primarily for hearts of palm, a vegetable obtained from the inner core and growing bud of the



Spoonful of acai berries. (Istockphoto.com)

tree. Since the early 2000s, however, the açaí palm has been cultivated primarily for its fruit while closely related species of palm are grown for hearts of palm.

Other names for açaí berry include Açaí Palm, Amazon Açaí Fruit, Assai, Assai Palm, Baie de Palmier Pinot, Cabbage Palm, Chou Palmiste, and Palmier d'Açaí.

Purpose

Açaí berries are a traditional food for the indigenous tribes of the Amazon rainforest; the berries were also used by the tribespeople to treat **diarrhea**. In Canada and the United States, the berries are most often sold in health food stores or specialty supermarkets as frozen pulp or used in juices and juice products, smoothie mixes, jellies, ice cream, liqueurs, and similar fruit-flavored products. Açaí berries may be blended with other fruits or berries in these products or used as the sole flavoring.

Açaí berries are also used in the manufacture of dietary supplements that include liquid tonics, tablets, shake mixes, and snack bars. These products claim to produce health benefits ranging from weight loss and boosting of the immune system to diabetes management and increased virility in men. However, no scientific studies provide any proof of these claims.

There were four clinical trials of açaí berries registered with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as of summer 2012: one study evaluated the effects of the berries when added to a high-antioxidant diet to slow the effects of **aging**; a second study concerned the effects of açaí in lowering risk factors for **atherosclerosis**; the third study was recruiting subjects for a study of the effectiveness of açaí in treating men with high levels of prostate-specific antigen; and the fourth

study evaluated a high-fiber product that contained açaí berries as a treatment for **constipation**. Açaí berries have been used as an ingredient in some skin care products, as the plant oils contained in the berries appear to be beneficial in reducing inflammation and hyperpigmentation. Açaí has also been used in a pilot study as a possible treatment for metabolic syndrome, a condition that is often a precursor of type 2 diabetes, but the authors recommend further study to replicate their tentative findings.

Description

The açaí berry itself is a small, round, blackish-purple fruit about an inch in diameter that grows in branched clusters of 500–900 fruits under the fronds of the açaí palm, a slender species of palm tree that ranges from 45 to 90 feet in height. Its dark color is caused by anthocyanins, a class of flavonoids or plant pigments. The berries resemble grapes in size and general shape but contain much less pulp; the seed of the açaí berry comprises about 80% of the fruit. Açaí berries are not naturally sweet.

According to a 2006 study published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, a standardized freeze-dried powder made from the skin and pulp of açaí berries contains 533 calories per 100 grams (about 3.5 ounces dry weight), 52.2 g carbohydrates, 8.1 g protein, and 32.5 g total fat. The carbohydrate portion of the pulp included 44 grams of dietary fiber and little sugar. Of the fat content, 56.2% is oleic acid (the same fat found in olive oil), 24.1% is palmitic acid, and 12.5% **linoleic acid**. With regard to **vitamins** and minerals, the **vitamin C** content of the powder is very low, but the preparation does contain 260 mg of **calcium**, 4.4 mg of **iron**, and 1,002 units of **vitamin A**.

Brand names

The most common brands of açaí berry products sold in the United States and Canada are marketed by Sambazon and MonaVie. The latter company, which also markets its products in Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Hungary, Japan, Israel, Singapore, Austria, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Thailand, and Taiwan, has been subjected to enforcement actions by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States for exaggerated health claims made about its products.

Sambazon primarily sells bottled juices, smoothie mixes, energy drinks, sorbet, and the freeze-dried powder. Its products include combinations of açaí berries and cranberries, pomegranates, and other fruits as well as pure açaí products. Although Sambazon describes

açaí as a “superfood,” it does not claim that its products will speed up weight loss, cure the **common cold**, or reverse the aging process.

As of 2013, neither the FDA nor any other government regulatory agency had evaluated açai berries as a foodstuff. The Academy of **Nutrition** and Dietetics (formerly the American Dietetic Association) considers açai to be as healthful as other fruits such as strawberries or blueberries, and safe to eat, but not as exceptional as it is made out to be in mass-market advertising.

Recommended dosage

There is no particular recommended dosage for açai berry products used in so-called functional foods or nutraceuticals in combination with other ingredients, including other fruits or fruit flavorings. The Sambazon freeze-dried açai berry supplement recommends adding one “scoop” (3 grams) to “your favorite smoothie, juice or milk.” There is not enough scientific information to provide guidance on appropriate dosages of açai as a dietary supplement.

Precautions

Açai berries used in beverages, smoothies, and similar products appear to be safe for most people to eat; a toxicology report published in 2010 found nothing harmful in the fruit itself. Because the berries are acidic like most other fruits, consumers who have gastric ulcers or recurrent problems with **heartburn** should be careful not to ingest them together with NSAIDs like aspirin or ibuprofen. Until açai dietary supplements have been evaluated for safety, they should not be used by children and pregnant or lactating women.

The chief danger for consumers of açai berry products is the risk of false advertising claims, contaminated or mislabeled products, and credit card scams. As early as 2007, the FDA sent a registered letter to one of the executives of MonaVie, warning the company that its advertising of açai as a fruit that can lower blood **cholesterol** levels, relieve the **pain** of arthritis, and relieve muscle pain was in effect to “establish the products as drugs” and violated the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. The company is largely responsible for the worldwide interest in açai berries, which began with its aggressive marketing of the fruit in 2005. In addition to making unsupported claims about the health benefits of its products, MonaVie sells its tonics, dietary supplements, shake mixes, and energy drinks at inflated prices: one bottle of MonaVie Active (a fruit drink) is priced at \$37, while

a case of four bottles sells for \$130. The dietary supplement, “designed to promote weight management success,” is \$65 for a one-month supply.

Other açai berry products have been found by the FDA to be mislabeled. In one case, a man developed rhabdomyolysis (a muscle disorder) after taking a product labeled as an açai berry dietary supplement. Chemical analysis revealed that the product did not contain any açai. In an October 2011 case, the FDA issued a public warning about an açai berry product, Açai Berry Soft Gel ABC, which contained sibutramine, a controlled substance removed from the market in 2010 for safety reasons. Sibutramine raises blood pressure and pulse rate and thus poses a risk to people with high blood pressure, **heart disease**, or a history of **stroke**. The FDA issued the statement “to inform the public of a growing trend of products marketed as dietary supplements or conventional foods with hidden drugs and chemicals.”

Credit card scams involving açai berry products first came to media attention in 2009, when the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) issued a warning about Web-based açai scams. The scams promise consumers a “free” trial of açai products provided the customer pays a \$5.95 shipping and handling fee, for which a credit card number must be supplied. The company then continues to charge the customer each month for a shipment of the product, and customers who try to cancel the shipments have difficulty stopping the recurrent charges. The Better Business Bureau (BBB) has specifically given “F” ratings to such companies as FX Supplements, which markets Açai Berry Maxx; Advanced Wellness Research, which sells Pure Açai Berry Pro and AçaiBurn; and SFL Nutrition.

Some people believe that consuming açai berries will negate the effects of an unhealthy diet. This is not true, and eating açai berries or using açai berry products does not replace the need to consume a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, many of which are cheaper than açai.

Side effects

No serious side effects have been reported for açai berry functional foods and flavored beverages. The case of rhabdomyolysis concerned a patient who had used a dietary supplement mislabeled as containing açai when none was present in the product.

Interactions

Little information is available on interactions between açai berries and other drugs. People taking

KEY TERMS

Anthocyanins—A subgroup of flavonoids that cause the red, dark blue, or purple color of certain plants. Anthocyanins are responsible for the dark purplish color of açai berries.

Antioxidant—Any molecule that inhibits the oxidation of other molecules. Antioxidant compounds in dietary supplements or cosmetics are claimed to benefit health and slow down the aging process.

Drupe—Any fruit that contains a soft, fleshy pulp (mesocarp) surrounded by an outer skin (exocarp) and containing a central inner stone or pit (endocarp) that contains the seed. Açai berries are drupes.

Flavonoid—Any member of a large group of aromatic compounds that occur naturally in higher plants, mostly as plant pigments.

Functional food—A term used to describe a natural or processed food that contains biologically active compounds in sufficient amounts to benefit health.

Nutraceutical—A fortified food or dietary supplement that provides health benefits. Nutraceutical is often used as a synonym for functional food.

Rhabdomyolysis—A condition in which damaged skeletal muscle tissue breaks down and the breakdown products are released into the bloodstream.

Superfood—An unscientific term used largely in marketing to describe foods that have a high nutrient content or plant-derived compounds thought to be beneficial to health.

pain medications or **cancer** drugs should check with their doctor before using açai, however, as it may lower their effectiveness. It is a good idea for adults to check with their doctor before adding açai products to their diet.

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ORGANIZATIONS

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 120 South Riverside Plz., Ste. 2000, Chicago, IL 60606–6995, (312) 899–0040, (800) 877–1600, amaacunn@eatright.org, <http://www.eatright.org>.

Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1220 L St. NW, Ste. 300, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 332-9110, Fax: (202) 265-4954, <http://www.cspinet.org>.

Center for Science in the Public Interest (Canada), Ste. 2701, CTTC Bldg., 1125 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1S 5R1, (613) 244-7337, jefferyb@istar.ca, <http://www.cspinet.org>.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 10903 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20993-0002, (888) INFO-FDA (463-6332), <http://www.fda.gov>.

Rebecca J. Frey, PhD

Aches and pains *see* **Pain**

Acidophilus

Description

Lactobacillus acidophilus, commonly referred to simply as acidophilus, is a friendly inhabitant of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. It, as well as some related strains of bacteria, is known as a probiotic. Probiotic organisms secrete enzymes that support healthy digestion. They keep the flora of the intestines and vagina balanced and compete with some pathogenic organisms. When the probiotic population of the body is severely decreased, as can occur with treatment by many antibiotics, yeasts and harmful bacteria may take over and cause illness. Normal and healthy amounts of acidophilus can also be decreased by chronic **diarrhea**, **stress**, **infections**, and poor diet.

The species of *Lactobacilli* that inhabit the GI tract cause an increase of acidity. The bacteria do this by producing lactic acid from milk sugar (lactose). The increased acidity may promote the absorption of **calcium**, as well as of some other minerals. Lowered pH also discourages the growth of many pathogenic species of bacteria and yeasts. The hydrogen peroxide produced by the acidophilus also helps to suppress pathogens.

Acidophilus may function in the production of some of the B **vitamins**, such as **niacin**, **pyridoxine**, **biotin**, and **folic acid**.

General use

Yeast infections

Acidophilus may be used to reduce susceptibility to vaginal yeast infections, which are quite common. Symptoms including **itching**, burning, inflammation, and discharge occur due to an overgrowth of the yeast

Candida albicans, which is part of the normal vaginal flora. Some women are more prone to yeast infections than others. Antibiotics destroy the normal probiotic flora and may lead to yeast infections. High sugar levels are another predisposing factor. Diabetics, who tend to have high blood sugar, and persons who consume a processed diet that is high in sugar have more frequent problems with yeast as well. The hormonal states created by **pregnancy** or the use of oral contraceptives also contribute to yeast infections. IUD users can also have an increased rate of infection. In rare cases, *Candida* is sexually transmitted, and both partners may require treatment in order to control repeated overgrowth. Anyone who has **AIDS** or any other condition causing immunosuppression has increased susceptibility to *Candida* and other types of infections. Acidophilus is one of the organisms that competes with *Candida* and decreases its population. Many studies have shown that oral and topical use (by douching) of acidophilus are effective to prevent and treat this condition.

Systemic candidiasis, or yeast hypersensitivity syndrome, is a condition that is not recognized by many allopaths. It is acknowledged by some practitioners of alternative and complementary medicine as a problem with broad-ranging consequences. This theory holds that some people have an allergic reaction to the yeast and/or its toxins, and that they can experience serious symptoms when the organism multiplies in the body to an abnormal degree. **Fatigue**, diarrhea, **constipation**, muscle **pain**, thrush, itching, mood changes, endocrine dysfunction, headaches, and tingling or numbness of the extremities are some of the symptoms that are reportedly associated with systemic candidiasis. A weak immune system may be more prone to allowing yeast to multiply, and large numbers of yeast can act to further suppress the immune function. Acidophilus, in combination with such nutritional supplements as **essential fatty acids**, is often recommended for the prevention and treatment of this syndrome.

Gastrointestinal disorders

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a functional disturbance of the lower intestine that can cause bloating, cramping, abdominal pain, diarrhea, constipation, and painful bowel movements. This condition is also known as spastic colon. One small study of the use of acidophilus to treat IBS showed more improvement in the treated group than in those who took a placebo. This evidence is not conclusive evidence, but in view of the safety of the treatment and the scarcity of effective alternatives, acidophilus may be worth trying.