



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Huperzia serrata

This information describes the common uses of *Huperzia serrata*, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

What is it?

Huperzine A may help improve memory, but studies are limited with mixed results.

Huperzine A is extracted from *Huperzia serrata*, an herb used in Chinese medicine. It is marketed as a dietary supplement to improve brain function. It may help to improve memory by protecting nerve cells and has been used as a treatment for Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia in Asia. However, larger well-designed studies are needed.

Although some cancer patients use huperzine to reduce chemotherapy side effects, no clinical studies have been conducted to show it is safe and effective for such use. It may also interact with many drugs and can cause mild adverse effects.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- **To treat cognitive disorders**

Studies on whether huperzine may benefit patients with Alzheimer's disease are mixed. It may improve cognition in patients with vascular dementia, but additional studies are needed.

- **To treat myasthenia gravis**

Cases of this neuromuscular disease have been reported as being treated with huperzine.

- **To relieve neuropathy**

Although there are claims of effectiveness against neuropathy, clinical data are lacking.

What are the side effects?

Mild: Nausea, thirst, abdominal pain, anorexia, dizziness, vomiting, constipation, diarrhea, insomnia, excitability, hyperactivity, sweating, slow heart beat, drowsiness, nasal blockage, swelling

What else do I need to know?

Do Not Take if:

- You are taking **acetylcholinesterase inhibitor drugs like donepezil, galantamine, or rivastigmine**: Huperzine works by the same mechanism and may increase the risk of adverse effects.
- You are taking a **dopamine D2 receptor blocker**: Huperzine may cause symptoms of Parkinson's disease.
- You are using **calcium channel blockers or beta adrenergic antagonists**: Huperzine may lower heart rate.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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