

Slippery Elm for Constipation and IBS

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Updated November 28, 2018

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Slippery elm is an [herbal supplement](#) that has been used over the centuries as a remedy for a wide variety of physical ills. Anecdotally, many people recommend it as a way to ease the symptoms of [chronic constipation](#), [chronic diarrhea](#), and [irritable bowel syndrome](#) (IBS). This overview will educate you as to what slippery elm is, what it is used for, its safety record, and what research has to say about its effectiveness so that you can make an informed decision as to whether or not it is the right supplement for you.

Overview

Slippery elm is an herbal preparation made from the inner bark of the slippery elm tree. Its botanical names are *Ulmus fulva* and *Ulmus rubra*. The slippery elm tree can be found primarily in North America.

Slippery elm has long been used by Native Americans for medicinal purposes. They used preparations made from the inner bark as a topical antiseptic treatment for wounds, burns, and skin irritations, and they ingested it as a treatment for coughs and respiratory problems.

Slippery elm is available in powder, capsule, tincture, and lozenge form. Slippery elm may be found in compound herbal preparations, where it is combined with herbs such as cranesbill and marshmallow.

Constipation

There is no direct research on the effectiveness of slippery elm in easing the symptoms of constipation. However, when taken orally, its mucilage-like consistency is thought to have a positive effect on stool formation. Slippery elm appears to add softness and bulk to the stool which may serve to promote more comfortable [bowel movements](#).

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

As with constipation, there is no direct research on the effectiveness of slippery elm in easing the symptoms of IBS. However, that same mucilage-like consistency is thought to be soothing to any irritated tissue lining the [digestive system](#). Interestingly, due to its effect on the stool, slippery elm is thought to be helpful for both constipation *and* diarrhea, as it softens and adds smooth bulk to fecal matter.

Therefore in addition to possibly being of help for [constipation predominant IBS](#) (IBS-C) and [diarrhea predominant IBS](#) (IBS-D), this dual action might make it a good option if you have [alternating type IBS](#) (IBS-A), but this is completely speculative.

Other Digestive Symptoms

Slippery elm has also been used as a remedy for other digestive problems, including gastritis, heartburn, and reflux. In these areas as well, there is little research regarding slippery elm's effectiveness in easing the symptoms of these conditions. The FDA has not recommended it as a treatment for any particular health condition.

How to Administer

Slippery elm is available in capsule, powder, tincture, or lozenge form. Parents should check with their pediatrician for the appropriate dosage for children. For adults, most preparations will recommend:

- **Capsule:** 250 to 1000 mg, three to four times a day. Be sure to accompany each capsule with a full glass of water.
- **Powder:** Mix two cups boiling water to one tablespoon of powder (then cooled), three times a day.
- **Tincture or lozenge:** Follow dosing information.

It is often recommended that a person start with one dose a day and then slowly work up to the recommended amount in order to allow time for the body to adjust.

Drug Interactions

Although little is actually known as to how slippery elm works within your body, there are some concerns that it may interfere with the way that other medications or herbal remedies are absorbed by your body. There for in addition to checking with your doctor to make sure it is okay if you take slippery elm, you should also discuss what time of day it would be best to take it, so as not to have it affect your other medications.

The Bottom Line

Although research evidence is lacking, in general, slippery elm is considered to be a safe remedy for digestive distress for adults and children. As a supplement, it may be taken when you are experiencing acute symptoms or taken on a regular basis to manage chronic symptoms. As with any dietary or herbal supplement, be sure to check with your doctor before use.

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Article Sources

- "[Slippery Elm](#)" *University of Maryland Medical Center.*
- "[Slippery Elm](#)" *University of Michigan Health System.*