

herbs at a glance

Acai



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This fact sheet provides basic information about acai (pronounced ah-sigh-EE)—common names, uses, potential side effects, and resources for more information. The acai palm tree, native to tropical Central and South America, produces a reddish-purple berry that is related to the blueberry and cranberry. The acai berry's name, which comes from a language of the native people of the region, means “fruit that cries.”

Common Names—acai, açai, Amazonian palm berry

Latin Name—*Euterpe oleracea*

What It Is Used For

- Acai has become popular in the United States, where it has been promoted as a “superfood.” Acai berry products have been widely marketed for weight-loss and anti-aging purposes, but there is no definitive scientific evidence to support these claims.
- The acai berry has long been an important food source for indigenous peoples of the Amazon region, who also use acai for a variety of health-related purposes.
- Acai fruit pulp has been used experimentally as an oral contrast agent for magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the gastrointestinal tract.

How It Is Used

Acai berry products are available as juices, powders, tablets, and capsules.

What the Science Says

- There is no definitive scientific evidence based on studies in humans to support the use of acai berry for any health-related purpose.
- No independent studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals that substantiate claims that acai supplements alone promote rapid weight loss. Researchers who investigated the safety profile of an acai-fortified juice in animals observed that there were no body weight changes in rats given the juice compared with controls.
- Laboratory studies have focused on acai berry's potential antioxidant properties (antioxidants are substances that are thought to protect cells from damaging effects of chemical reactions with oxygen). Laboratory studies also have shown that acai berries demonstrate anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory activity.

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Side Effects and Cautions

- There is little reliable information about the safety of acai as a supplement. It is widely consumed as an edible fruit or as a juice.
- People who are allergic to acai or to plants in the *Arecaceae* (palm) family should not consume acai.
- Consuming acai might affect MRI test results. If you use acai products and are scheduled for an MRI, check with your health care provider.
- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary and alternative practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care. For tips about talking with your health care providers about CAM, see NCCAM's Time to Talk campaign at nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/.

Sources

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Schreckinger ME, Lotton J, Lila MA, et al. Berries from South America: a comprehensive review on chemistry, health potential, and commercialization. *Journal of Medicinal Food*. 2010;13(2):233-246.

For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at nccam.nih.gov and view *Using Dietary Supplements Wisely* (nccam.nih.gov/health/supplements/wiseuse.htm).

NCCAM Clearinghouse

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