

The dark side of liquorice

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The thought of liquorice makes many people's hearts beat faster. However, consuming too much of it can also increase blood pressure.

In medical contexts, liquorice has long been used to alleviate stomach issues or colds. But the extract derived from the *Glycyrrhiza glabra* plant is best known for something else: it's what gives liquorice its distinct taste. What is less well-known is that consumption of larger amounts of it could increase blood pressure.

The effect is caused by glycyrrhizinic acid, an ingredient of liquorice extracts. It can alter the mineral metabolism, which may lead to oedema in tissue and muscle weakness in addition to hypertension. Therefore, the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) advises pregnant women, people with high blood pressure, and those with cardiovascular diseases and diabetes not to exaggerate consumption of liquorice.

Consumers generally can't determine how much glycyrrhizinic acid is in a given product, as this information isn't required to be listed on the packaging. For higher levels, though, the product must at least bear a warning: starting from a concentration of glycyrrhizinic acid or its ammonium salt of 100 milligrams (mg) per kilogram (kg), the packaging must say "contains liquorice." The exception is if the term "liquorice" is already in the list of ingredients or included in

the name of the food. For salty liquorice with a concentration of 4 grams per kg, there is an additional recommendation that people with hypertension should avoid excessive consumption.

LIQUORICE DURING PREGNANCY

The claim that high levels of liquorice consumption during pregnancy can impair the mental and physical development of the unborn child is not considered by the BfR as being substantiated given the data currently available. This fear was first raised by a Finnish study. For instance, it is unclear how much liquorice the women examined in the study actually consumed during pregnancy, as the amount was only determined once and in hindsight. It is also uncertain if the effects observed can be traced back to the mothers' liquorice consumption or if there might be other reasons. The BfR is of the opinion that further studies would be needed to assess the health risk in this respect. —

More information



BfR communication
"Does the consumption of liquorice by pregnant women impair the mental and physical development of children?"
(pdf)



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