

Traditional medicines use leaves from the graviola tree, common in tropical forests, to treat conditions such as cancer and infections.

Cancer Prevention

The leaves of the graviola tree have powerful anti-cancer properties coming from phytochemicals in the plant. The journal "Cancer Letters" published a study looking at the impact of graviola on pancreatic cancer.

Supplementing with graviola stopped cancerous pancreatic tumor cells from replicating and caused them to die. Researchers suggest this natural medicine may prevent and treat cancer. The leaves may also be useful for treating skin cancer when applied topically.

Treating Viral Infections

Traditional medicines use graviola leaves as treatment for viral infections. An article published in "The Journal of Ethnopharmacology" in May of 1998 found that extracts from the leaves suppressed the herpes simplex virus. The herpes virus is spread through bodily fluids and often transmitted while kissing or through sexual contact. According to the University of Maryland Medical Center, up to 90 percent of the U.S. population has been exposed to one form of the virus and there is no cure. Some anti-viral medications can reduce the number of outbreaks or lessen symptoms. More research is needed to determine what role graviola can play in the treatment or prevention of herpes.

Pain Reduction

Supplementing with graviola leaves may reduce swelling and pain, according to a study published in May of 2010 in the "International Journal of Molecular Sciences." Researchers gave mice with burned paws extracts of graviola leaf and observed their behaviors. Those given the supplement had less swelling and demonstrated fewer indications of pain. However, more research is needed to determine the safety and efficacy of this use in humans.

Possible Side Effects

No established human dosage for graviola leaf exists yet. Long-term or high-dose supplementation may cause damage to the myelin sheath, disrupting normal nerve function. Movement disorders may also occur because of compounds called alkaloids present in the plant. Symptoms of these conditions are similar to those of Parkinson's disease. Talk with your health care provider prior to taking a graviola leaf supplement.