

Psyllium (*Plantago afra*, *Plantago isaghula*, *Plantago ovata*)

Common Names: Blond psyllium husk, flea seed, Indian psyllium husk, ispaghula, plantago, plantain.

Location: Psyllium has been cultivated for thousands of years in Asia, Europe, and North Africa. It was one of the first medicinal plants brought to the Americas from Europe.

Description: Psyllium is a low growing annual that reaches the height of only 16 inches; psyllium bears narrow leaves and clusters of minute off-white flowers. Herbal medicine uses whole seeds and ground plantain seeds, gathered in summer and autumn when the seeds have ripened.

Properties: Psyllium is a source of soothing mucilages for the digestive and respiratory tracts.

Uses: For centuries, traditional Chinese and ayurvedic physicians have used psyllium to treat diarrhea,

constipation, hemorrhoids, and urinary problems. Psyllium mucilages are laxative and anti-diarrheal. Psyllium is known as one of the gentlest laxatives. It is a bulk-forming laxative that is safe for long-term use. This herb can lower blood levels of glucose and cholesterol by keeping the substances from being absorbed through the intestines. Eating soluble fiber from foods such as psyllium as part of the diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease. Benefits of psyllium for specific health conditions include the treatment of bronchitis and pneumonia, constipation, Crohn's disease, diarrhea, hemorrhoids, and irritable bowel syndrome.

Doses: Psyllium is available as cereal, ground seeds, and powders.

Warnings: To avoid problems with the absorption of prescription drugs, do not use psyllium seed within one hour of taking such medications. Also, if you have diabetes, using large quantity of psyllium products may cause your absorbed-sugar levels to go down to the point that you may need to reduce your insulin dosage. Psyllium tea is a milder alternative to psyllium powders, which should be avoided by people who have tendencies toward low blood sugar and by people who take oral medications several times a day. When taking psyllium as a laxative, you must drink 8 to 10 glasses of water throughout the day to prevent blockage of the intestines. Start using this herb gradually, so the body can adjust to the increased level of fiber.

## Psyllium Seed and Powder Profile

Also known as- *Plantago psyllium*, blonde psyllium, and isphagula.

### Introduction

Psyllium is a low-growing herb native to India, Iran, and Pakistan. It is in the same family as the common Plantain and seed is best used and absorbed without the husk. The variety offered by Mountain Rose Herbs is without the husk and husks may be ordered separately.

### Constituents

Ascorbic acid, aucubin, beta-carotene, beta-sitosterol, calcium, chromium, cobalt, fiber, linoleic acid, magnesium, manganese, mucilage, niacin, oleic acid, oxalic acid, phosphorous, potassium, riboflavin, selenium, sodium, stigmasterol, thiamine, tin, zinc. The seed has less fiber than the husk but a wide

range of nutrients the husks do not.

## Parts Used

Whole Seed without husk.

## Typical Preparations

Ground seed always taken with at least 1 full glass of water. If not grinding, soak in warm water for 2 to 6 hours before use. May also be taken as an extract and sometimes as a capsule, though rare. Because of its neutral flavor it may be added to most food dishes.

## Summary

The authoritative Complete German Commission E Monographs states that psyllium seed can be used to treat: "Chronic constipation; disorders in which easy bowel movements with a loose stool are desirable, e.g., in patients with anal fissures, hemorrhoids, following anal/rectal surgery; during pregnancy; as a secondary medication in the treatment of various kinds of diarrhea and in the treatment of irritable bowel."

The question most frequently asked about psyllium is, how can the same herb treat both constipation and diarrhea? The answer is that psyllium regulates the amount of time waste matter takes to transit the colon. In diarrhea, the fibers in psyllium absorb excess fluid and slow down movement through the colon. In constipation, the same fibers add volume to the stool and make it easier to pass through the colon.

Research studies show that psyllium seed is more useful than wheat bran for treating constipation caused by irritable bowel syndrome. The dosage of psyllium seed required to treat the condition is half the dosage of wheat bran, and psyllium results in less bloating and more frequent bowel movement. Psyllium seed has certain advantages over psyllium husk. It contains a range of nutrients the husk does not. Having less pectin, it degrades more slowly in the digestive tract, releasing acetates and butyrates that may protect the lining of the colon from mutations that lead to colon cancer. It does not, however, relieve constipation as quickly as psyllium husk.

## Precautions

Never take both psyllium and a stimulant laxative (senna, rhubarb, buckthorn, cascara sagrada, frangula, or an over-the-counter stimulant laxative such as Ex-Lax). The fibers in psyllium interfere with absorption of nutrients (especially vitamin B12) and medications, so take psyllium at least 2 hours before or after eating or taking supplements or medications. Always take any Psyllium product with at least 1 full glass of water.

## Psyllium Husks

Also known as- Psyllium ovata, Plantago psyllium, blonde psyllium, and isphagula.

## Introduction

Psyllium is a low-growing herb native to India, Iran, and Pakistan, in the same family as the common Plantain.

## Constituents

Fiber, The seed has less fiber than the husk but more plant nutrients.

## Parts Used

The whole husk from de-husked seeds.

## Typical Preparations

As a tea. The ground or whole husk must always be taken with at least 1 full glass of water. May also be taken as an extract or capsule form though rare. Because of its rather neutral flavor it may be added to most food dishes.

## Summary

The authoritative Complete German Commission E Monographs states that psyllium seed can be used to treat: "Chronic constipation; disorders in which easy bowel movements with a loose stool are desirable, e.g., in patients with anal fissures, hemorrhoids, following anal/rectal surgery; during pregnancy; as a secondary medication in the treatment of various kinds of diarrhea and in the treatment of irritable bowel."

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- ˆ Lower fasting blood sugars
- ˆ Lower glycosylated hemoglobin (HbA1C)
- ˆ Higher HDL ("good") cholesterol

Other studies have found that regular use of psyllium husk products lower total cholesterol in persons who do not have diabetes. The May 2005 edition of Archives of Internal Medicine reported that taking psyllium increased the effectiveness of Zocor (simvastatin) allowing a 50% reduction in the dose of the prescription drug.

Psyllium products reduce appetite. By bulking the stool, they relieve pain caused by ulcerative colitis and

reduce the frequency of fecal incontinence.

## Precautions

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**Botanical: Plantago Psyllium (LINN.)**

**Family: N.O. Plantaginaceae**

**---Synonyms---**Psyllium Seeds. Fleaseed. Psyllion. Psyllios.

(*Barguthi*) Barguthi.

**---Parts Used---**Seeds, leaves.

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In Southern Europe, as well as in Northern Africa and Southern Asia, *Plantago Psyllium* (Linn.), Fleaseed is used similarly to *P. major*. The seeds are also used for their large yield of mucilage. *Semen psyllii* is the name given to the seeds of several species of European Plantago, but the best are those of *P. Psyllium*. They are dark brown on the convex side, shiny, inodorous and nearly tasteless, but mucilaginous when chewed. They are demulcent and emollient and may be used internally and externally in the same manner as flaxseed, which they closely resemble in medicinal properties.

*P. Psyllium* has once been found on ballast hills in Jersey, but has not permanently established itself.