

From <https://www.healthline.com/health/food-nutrition/slippery-elm-bark>

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# The Therapeutic Capabilities of Slippery Elm Bark

## What Is Slippery Elm Bark?

Slippery elm, or *Ulmus rubra*, is a tree native to the central and eastern United States and Ontario, Canada.

The tree is known for its dark brown to reddish brown bark and can reach a height of 60-80 feet. Native Americans would peel its slimy, red inner bark from twigs and branches and use it as a remedy for many common ailments, like fevers, wounds, and sore throats.

They found that when the bark is mixed with water, it generates a sticky material known as mucilage, which is therapeutic and soothing to anything it touches. The Native Americans would also wrap the inner bark of the slippery elm around their meat to keep the meat from going bad.

Slippery elm bark was later picked up by American soldiers to heal gunshot wounds during the American Revolution.

Slippery elm is also called red elm or Indian elm. The inner bark is the only part used for therapeutic purposes.

# What's It Used For?

Slippery elm can be used to soothe a number of symptoms.

## 1. Inflammatory Bowel Diseases

Slippery elm bark is a demulcent. This means that it is capable of soothing the lining of the stomach and intestines and reducing irritation. Demulcents are sometimes referred to as mucoprotective agents.

Recent studies have shown that slippery elm bark can help treat the symptoms associated with inflammatory bowel diseases like Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

One small clinical [study](#) found that a mixture containing slippery elm enhanced bowel movements in patients with constipation-predominant IBS; however, the bark was part of a mixture of ingredients, and no study to date has supported these findings. Another [study](#) found that slippery elm had an antioxidant effect in people with Crohn's disease.

More research is needed to confirm these effects.

## 2. Soothing a Cough and Sore Throat

Slippery elm contains mucilage, a sticky mixture of sugars that can't be broken down by the human digestive tract. The mucilage coats the throat, so it's no surprise that slippery elm is found commercially in many brands of throat lozenges.

Slippery elm is believed to be an antitussive, meaning it's great for coughs and for symptoms of other upper respiratory ailments like bronchitis or asthma. Again, there are no studies to support or refute these claims.

A [study](#) examining the bark's use in people with laryngitis or throat inflammation and voice problems has also shown some potential soothing effects. More research is needed.

### 3. Irritation of the Urinary Tract

Slippery elm is sometimes recommended to people who experience unexplained inflammation of the urinary tract, like those with interstitial cystitis (painful bladder syndrome). Slippery elm powder is thought to soothe the lining of the urinary tract. Therefore, it might help alleviate the painful irritating symptoms. Again, studies are needed to either support or refute these claims.

As a mild diuretic, it also helps increase the flow of urine and eliminate waste from the body.

### 4. Heartburn and GERD

Slippery elm may be helpful for treating occasional heartburn, also known as acid reflux. It's also considered an herbal remedy for gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

GERD is a chronic disease that occurs when stomach acid flows back into esophagus and irritates the lining.

The mucilage of slippery elm coats the esophagus and may help prevent the irritation and inflammation that occurs when stomach acid flows up the esophagus.

If you experience heartburn or GERD, check with your doctor. He may agree to you trying a mix of 1-2 tablespoons of slippery elm with a glass of water and drinking it after a meal as a natural remedy.

# How Do I Use Slippery Elm Bark?

The inner bark is dried and powdered. It's available in the following forms.

- lozenges
- tablets
- fine powder for making teas and extracts
- coarse powder for making a poultice

For tea, pour 2 cups of boiling water over roughly 2 tablespoons of the powder and steep for a few minutes. To make a poultice (for applying to the skin), mix coarse powder with boiling water and let cool. Apply the poultice to the affected area.

As with any supplement, be sure to read product labels and to consult with your doctor before trying a supplement.

## Safety of Slippery Elm Bark

Slippery elm is approved for over-the-counter use as a demulcent for soothing sore throats and mucus membranes. However, there have been few clinical studies done to date to test the safety and efficacy of slippery elm bark.

While there isn't enough information to determine whether or not slippery elm bark is completely safe and nontoxic, there haven't been any reports of toxicity or side effects yet. However, since slippery elm is a mucilage, it could potentially decrease how much medicine your body can absorb and decrease its effectiveness.

To be safe, take slippery elm bark at least one hour after taking another medication by mouth. As with all dietary supplements, consult your doctor before use.

# Where to Buy Slippery Elm Bark

Slippery elm bark powders can be found in health stores and online, including on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).